

**ST. JOHNS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL
(HHSAC)
MEETING MINUTES
January 14, 2021**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Charles Daly, Chair; Tara Haley, Vice Chair; Shannon Nazworth; Thomas Nielson;

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kelly Battell; Chip Cover; Tina D'Alessandro

STAFF PRESENT: Shawna Novak, HHS Director; Mary Garcia, Social Services Support Staff

BCC LIASON: Jeb S. Smith, County Commissioner – sent regrets
Brad Bradley, Deputy County Administrator – sent regrets

VISITORS: Betty Rehrer; 17 Zoom attendees

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL: Chair called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. Quorum was present.

REPORT FROM COMMISSIONER JEB SMITH: No report.

MINUTES – October, 2020: (no November or December, 2020 meetings) Tara Haley **motioned** to approve the October 28, 2020 minutes. Shannon Nazworth seconded the motion; minutes were **approved unanimously** by the Council.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Homeless Workgroup Update:

- a. **Continuum of Care (CoC) Update:** Brittany Coronado was not in attendance but she did provide a handout to the Council regarding the Point in Time Count, which will occur on January 28, 2021.
- b. **Update - HHS Response to Covid:** Shawna Novak reported the residential assistance program funded by the CARES Act and SHIP CRF closed on October 31, 2020. Ms. Novak explained payments continued to be made through December 30, 2020, and as of this date, 502 households have been assisted and approximately \$1.8 million has been expended. Ms. Novak went on to say the newest stimulus bill provided a potential \$7.9 million in rental assistance for the County and that allocation will be coming directly from the Treasury

Department. Ms. Novak said the acceptance window provided for the funds was quite short and Joseph Cone, Assistant Director of Health & Human Services, received permission to accept this funding on behalf of the County, from the Board of County Commissioners at their regular meeting on January 12th. Ms. Novak went on to say the County does not yet know when those funds will be released, or what the parameters of the assistance program will be. Ms. Novak did say that the program will not include mortgage payments but it will provide for rent and renters' utilities. Ms. Novak also stated it is the County's understanding that these funds must be encumbered by September 30, 2021 and the U.S. Treasury will take back any funds unencumbered at that time. Ms. Nazworth asked about restrictions on these funds and Ms. Novak explained the parameters outside of those set by the U.S. Treasury are being discussed and will ultimately be set by the Board of County Commissioners. Ms. Novak stated this program requires that household income be at, or below, 80% of the area median income.

NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Betty Griffin Center – Joyce Mahr:** Ms. Mahr stated that as an essential service provider, Betty Griffin Center immediately went into emergency disaster mode at the onset of Covid-19 in March, 2020. Ms. Mahr said it was necessary to reduce capacity at their emergency shelter as they could allow just family per room. Ms. Mahr said they used funding earmarked for lodging in order to house other individuals and families in area hotels and this increased their direct client assistance approximately 25% from 2019. Ms. Mahr went on to say they provided financial assistance for residents for many things, including child care, car repair and medical care and there was a 53% increase in overall services provided last year as compared to 2019. Ms. Mahr attributed this sharp increase to the rise in domestic violence as the global pandemic forced lockdowns and restrictions, and caused stressors such as virtual and home schooling for children, and household financial instability.. Ms. Mahr said there was also a 32% increase in requests for legal services in 2020 as compared to 2019, and she said their attorney provided remote consultations but was also able to represent clients in person, in the courtroom, for injunctions. Ms. Mahr said they have seen a 30% decrease in donations this year as their annual fundraisers could not be held due to Covid-19. Ms. Mahr said their thrift stores, which are a vital source of income for programs with no grant funding, were also closed for approximately 6 weeks, causing a loss of approximately \$150,000. Ms. Mahr said their December "Adopt a Family" program did see an increase of approximately 25% this year, with more than 100 families "adopted". Ms. Mahr said they continue to provide therapy and outreach services remotely and she said this seems to be working well for all concerned. Ms. Mahr said she was extremely proud of staff for their response to the pandemic and all of the ensuing

changes that were necessary for day to day operations to continue. Finally, Ms. Mahr suggested other non-profit operators might want to look at the report just issued by the Florida Nonprofit Alliance which she said addressed the overall impact of Covid-19 on Florida nonprofit agencies.

REPORT FROM BRAD BRADLEY, DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR: Shawna Novak shared Mr. Bradley's regrets.

FUNDED AGENCY UPDATES:

Alpha Omega Miracle Home: Tonorey Callins reported they are currently at capacity but said they have acquired more units with CDBG funding and they are renovating them at this time.

Council on Aging: Sharon Gesek reported their transportation service, door to door and fixed route, is 100% operational and while it did not stop during the pandemic, it was down about 25%. Ms. Gesek said they do have reopening plans outlined for their senior center, memory care unit and adult daycare but they do not yet have implementation dates. Ms. Gesek said their staff and volunteers have all received at least their first dose of the vaccine and are awaiting their second dose. Ms. Gesek also shared that their Nocatee Center has opened at Flagler Health+ and they hope to kick off services, including care giver support groups and memory enhancement programs, in mid-February.

Epic Behavioral Healthcare: Patti Greenough reported on Epic's County funded jail-based transition program, JET, and said they have been seeing a big increase in referrals of complex cases lately. Ms. Greenough stated the Sheriff's Office has asked if they might expand their eligibility criteria in order to serve individuals with more serious mental health conditions and Epic has agreed. Ms. Greenough said they are also seeing an increase in referrals for their drug court program. Ms. Greenough said they are continuing to function with a hybrid of in-person services and tele-health, and she said they will probably continue with telehealth post-pandemic, where appropriate. Ms. Greenough also reported their office in the northwest sector of the County is now fully staffed and she said that office is shared with St. Augustine Youth Services. Finally, Ms. Greenough reported the expansion to the Epic Recovery Center is going well and when completed it will add twelve residential treatment beds – six for women and six for men – as well as an isolation room.

Good Samaritan/Wildflower Clinic: Chris Mastroidis reported they celebrated their 25 year anniversary in 2020 and said their annual year-end fundraiser had to be held virtually due to Covid-19. Mr. Mastroidis reported that in spite of this, the event was the most successful fundraiser held in their history. Mr. Mastroidis reported that through their "Fund a Smile" program they were able to assist fifteen individuals with dentures between the months of June and December, 2020. Mr. Mastroidis stated they were not able to meet their 2020 goals for dental services due to the pandemic, but said there was still an increase in dental patients serviced. Finally, Mr. Mastroidis talked about their collaboration with Flagler Health + on the Plus Bus and said the bus went to Hastings yesterday and eight patients were seen between 1pm and 4pm. Mr. Mastroidis said

patients can see a provider at the Plus Bus, have lab services performed, and prescriptions written, which are then subsequently delivered by Publix Pharmacy.

St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS): Emma Hayes with Mobile Response Team reported their therapist is using the new County Road 210 location to see and screen families. Ms. Hayes said they are using a blend of telehealth and in-person services but she stated screenings are typically done in person, which is not a problem as they have plenty of PPE equipment for staff and for clients. Ms. Hayes said they are continuing to divert Baker Acts by 87%. Ms. Hayes said they were able to hold some of their fundraisers but they had to be managed a bit differently than they were in the past due to the pandemic.

St. Johns Welfare Federation: Mr. Norman reported none of their 65 residents at The Pavilion have tested positive for Covid-19 and he said they have had extensive testing for all staff members in order to keep everyone safe. Mr. Norman said they are allowing visitors to come in to The Pavilion by appointment and after being screened. Mr. Norman stated their biggest challenge has been at Bayview, on the nursing facility side, with 80 out of 120 beds occupied. Mr. Norman said they are seeing an increase in patients with Covid-19 on that side of the building and they do have a separate unit set up for those individuals. Mr. Norman said they've also had Covid-19 positive staff members and it has been necessary to hire agency personnel, which is costly, but he said they have received funding through PPP loans and that has been helpful.

Betty Griffin Center (BGC): No further report.

Early Learning Coalition: Dawn Bell was present but did not have anything new to report this month.

Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHC): Betty Rehrer reported they have seen an increase in tenants able to begin paying their own rent this month. Ms. Rehrer also reported they have had some success stories with tenants finding new and better employment since losing their positions during the pandemic. Ms. Rehrer also reported they had generous donors for Christmas and the children and their families had very nice holidays.

St. Francis House: Judy Dembowski did attend meeting but had to leave before making her report.

St. Johns Housing Partnership (SJHP): Bill Lazar was in attendance but did not give report.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Florida Department of Health St. Johns: No representative in attendance.

Homeless Advocacy Council: No representative in attendance.

SMA Healthcare: No representative in attendance.

Flagler Health +: Victoria Long reported they received approximately 2,000 doses of vaccine just before Christmas and they immediately began to vaccinate their staff and then the moved on to their medical partners. Ms. Long said today and tomorrow they will be vaccinating SJSO deputies and staff ages 65 and older, and school district staff in that same age demographic.

Health & Human Services Department (HHS): Ms. Novak reported the leadership team has been meeting with the consultants on the HHS strategic plan and she stated it will be completed in the spring in time for the COA reaccreditation in June. Ms. Novak also reported there has been a reorganization and the Veterans Services Department has been moved out from under the Health and Human Services umbrella and will report directly to County administration. Ms. Novak went on to say there will be a proclamation for Human Trafficking Awareness month at the January 19th meeting of the Board of County Commissioners. Ms. Novak said she sent invitations for an “Act of Good Faith” to community partners and encouraged them to share with their contacts. Ms. Novak explained this is Governor DeSantis’ faith based initiative and the goal is to get the faith based community onboard with child welfare initiatives and support of foster parents. Ms. Novak also reported the County has taken over vaccination efforts and have assigned staff members from every department to work at the Emergency Operations Center to assist the public with scheduling appointments to be vaccinated. Finally, Ms. Novak reported the County is in the early stages of working toward an agreement to use CDBG-CV funds to assist Legal Aid with hiring additional staff attorneys to help combat increased evictions and foreclosures, which are expected to be a result of the pandemic.

Faith Based Community: No representative in attendance.

Public Safety: No representative in attendance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Executive Meeting: Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 3:30 p.m. at the St. Johns County Health and Human Services Building, Mallard Conference Room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

Regular Meeting: Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. at the St. Johns County Administration Building, County Commission Auditorium, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

ADJOURNMENT - Meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.