

ST. JOHNS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL (HHSAC)
MEETING MINUTES
November 6th, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chip Cover; Leslie Barstow

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tara Haley, Chair; Howard Hitzel, Vice Chair; Deanna Jones; Shannon Nazworth; Kathleen Patneau

STAFF PRESENT: Shawna Novak, HHS Director (virtual); Joe Cone, HHS Asst. Director; Juliette Maronel, HHS Admin Coordinator; Katrina Tanner, HHS Contract Coordinator

VISITORS: Debi Redding, Nangela Pulsfus, Suzanne Clulow, Marsha Hurst
Virtual- Valeria Duquette, Kelly Franklin, Anita Daniel, Brian Robinson, Taylor Hodges, Lori Vodel, St. Gerard Representative, Judy Dembrowski, Candace Ray, Maria Pagan, Brittany Spangler, Chynequa King, Dawn Bell, Michelle Colee, Nancy Russo, Schuyler Siefker, Paige Stanton, Teresa Matheny

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL: Chip Cover called the meeting to order at 4:01pm. Quorum was not present.

MINUTES: Quorum was not present so the minutes will be reviewed and approved at the next General meeting 12/4/25.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Chip Cover opened the floor for public comment, and Suzanne Clulow, a resident and advocate for affordable housing and social services, addressed the group. She expressed interest in the commissioners' recent allocations for local food pantries and hoped this effort would be the start of expanded community services.

REPORT FROM COMMISSIONER ARNOLD: Commissioner Sarah Arnold was absent.

OLD BUSINESS: Continuum of Care (CoC) Update: Anita Daniel noted that there are currently no updates.

NEW BUSINESS: Nangy Pulsfus of EPIC Behavioral Healthcare and Debi Redding of Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHC) provided a joint presentation highlighting their collaboration to serve the community through sober living and transitional housing.

- History
 - Presenters started by explaining the partnership began in 2018 when ESHC faced challenges with a large, outdated two-story home that was costly to maintain and not well suited for housing homeless families. At the same time, EPIC was seeking space for sober living. Through discussions in collaborative meetings, the agencies identified efficiencies and solutions, leading ESHC to lease the property to EPIC. The arrangement proved successful, and ESHC later rented two additional homes to EPIC, helping to keep the houses full while generating income to support services.

- Sober Living Program
 - The presenters noted that more than half of clients entering withdrawal management are homeless. These programs offer wraparound services addressing mental health, transportation, family reunification, and employment. Residents live in a highly structured environment for 6–12 months or longer, with daily NA/AA meetings, vocational training, and assistance obtaining IDs and transportation. Weekly rent is \$175, and staff often provide bicycles or e-bikes to aid mobility. On-site house managers have proven invaluable, offering immediate support and oversight when issues arise.
- Expansion of Services - The Second Wind Village
 - Due to growing demand, EPIC Behavioral Healthcare and ESHC expanded services with support from the county, Shawna Novak, Katrina Tanner, and state appropriations. Funding was secured to develop The Second Wind Village on Masters Drive, featuring eight renovated and fully furnished units with patios, a playground, gazebo, and plans for a BBQ area. The program offers structured sober living with daily NA/AA meetings, vocational training, employment support, transportation assistance, and access to household goods and furniture through ESHC's warehouse.
 - Village Layout
 - Houses 1 & 2: Three units dedicated to men, totaling 15 beds.
 - House 3: Two units for women (10 beds), plus a community center, office, vocational trainer, and peer support manager.
 - House 4: Two units for women and children, with six rooms furnished with bunk beds, toys, and family-friendly amenities.
- Ongoing Collaboration
 - The Second Wind Village officially opens on November 7th, 2025, and residents are currently being moved in from the previous location. The original house will continue serving EPIC clients seeking long-term sober living solutions. Residents will sign 12-month leases and receive ongoing support from both ESHC and EPIC case managers to promote stability. On-site sobriety meetings will be maintained as needed, ensuring continuity of care and a pathway toward sustainable independence. The presenters emphasized that the collaboration is not over-this ongoing partnership remains a win-win for both agencies, with ESHC benefiting from reliable occupancy and income while EPIC provides structured housing and comprehensive support for clients working to maintain sobriety.

Health & Human Services/County Administration Update- Shawna Novak, Director, HHS

- Shawna Novak informed stakeholders that they will begin receiving emails from Syria Health, the consultant hired by the county to conduct a comprehensive Health and Human Services needs assessment. The assessment will identify service gaps and guide funding priorities, with focus groups and interviews being scheduled.
- She reported on the Board of County Commissioners' unanimous approval to allocate \$200,000 from emergency reserves to support food pantries in St. Johns County. This action was recommended by Joy Andrews in response to the federal government shutdown, which impacted SNAP benefits for November. Shawna and Tracy Dillon have been working with local food pantries to assess capacity and needs, issuing grant guidance that restricts funds to food purchases, packaging, and delivery only (not administrative or overhead costs). Several agencies have already executed agreements, and funds are expected to be released as soon as possible. A county press release is forthcoming, and the Board will reassess the situation as needed to determine if additional resources should be provided.
- November is National Adoption Month:
 - FIP is planning a BBQ event at the HHS building on November 7th for families who have adopted through their program.
 - A National Adoption Day ceremony will be held at the courthouse on November 21st at 10am, where at least one teen boy is scheduled to be adopted during the event. Shawna highlighted the adoption of the 16-year-old boy, commending the team's dedication and the adoptive family, while emphasizing the importance of teen adoptions, which are often more challenging to achieve.

FUNDED AGENCY UPDATES:

Early Learning Coalition (ELC): Dawn Bell from the Early Learning Coalition shared that she is awaiting updates regarding SNAP benefits and extended kudos to Joy Andrews and the team for their efforts in assisting with the issue. Brittney Spangler from ECS4Kids reported that the state has revised eligibility for the school readiness program, shifting the income threshold from 150% of the federal poverty level to 55% of the state median income, which allows families to earn more household income and still qualify for services. She noted that ECS4Kids has just exhausted its waitlist this week and encouraged partners to refer families who may qualify so they can be added to the new waitlist.

Good Samaritan/Wildflower Clinic: Chynequa King reported that Wildflower Clinic has partnered with EPIC Behavioral Health and will move into the new medical center in West Augustine. Mental health services by EPIC will be offered there, alongside Wildflower's free health clinic and paid services supported by UF Health and the YMCA. The dental clinic will remain at the original office, while medical services transition to the new facility. Operations will depend on volunteer availability, with hopes of keeping the original clinic open 4–5 days a week and the new facility up to 6 days a week. An event at the Raintree is scheduled for next Monday night to increase community exposure. The dental waitlist currently has about 515 people, but by merging lists and offering additional services such as cleanings during extractions, the clinic has streamlined care. The women's clinic remains busy with expanded specialty services and more volunteers. Wildflower also supports community events by staffing first aid tents at local 5K walks and runs.

Betty Griffin Center (BGC): Kelly Franklin reported that October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, so staff was busy conducting proclamations and community outreach. She expressed gratitude for being fully funded, noting that a nearly \$100,000 loss in federal funds was offset by county support. In October, BGC received 189 hotline calls and served 347 individuals (251 adults and 96 children), including 61 adults and 31 children in residential care. Since the start of the fiscal year in July, they have served 605 individuals and received 753 hotline calls. Franklin praised EPIC and ESHC's presentation on the village and noted BGC's practice of providing gift cards to residents at intake.

St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS): Schuyler Siefker expressed appreciation for county support and highlighted their recent open house at the new community office building north of the airport, which now houses MCT, CAT, COACHES, and care coordination teams. CAT has hired additional therapists and is fully staffed. In October, SAYS served 98 individuals who remained safe in the community, provided activities for children during school holidays, and MCT conducted over 50 assessments. The team now includes five licensed clinicians, one family advocate, and two case managers. Care coordination is working with nine families involved with DCF to keep them together, while the COACHES team is fully staffed and supporting 14 high-risk families.

Council on Aging (COA): Brian Robinson reported the completion of the Shelter and Shade project at the Marine Street location after three years of fundraising (\$1.3 million) and seven months of construction. Improvements include level bus access, covered areas to protect seniors from rain, fresh paint, and new windows and doors. Seniors began using the upgraded facilities this week. Robinson also noted the upcoming retirement of the executive director in January and the seasonal increase in activity with snowbirds returning.

St. Francis House (SFH): Judy Dembowski reported receiving increased county funding this year, allowing them to expand services. In October, they sheltered 69 people at the downtown campus, with 18 housed, achieving a 56% permanent placement exit rate. An additional 143 individuals were served through the day drop-in program, and food offerings have been increased in response to SNAP challenges. The family shelter is on track to be dried in by December, the first time since Hurricane Matthew it will be usable. A full-time therapist has been hired for the children's program, and a new therapeutic support group for adults has begun. In October, 30 youth were served at Port in the Storm and 56 through the day drop-in program, with two achieving independent housing. Academy continues to support GED completion, with 7–8 students enrolled, while therapy services include traditional and group sessions. Outreach is also working with 44 individuals experiencing homelessness.

Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHC): Debi Redding reported 21 families currently on campus (47 children and 71 adults). A major expansion phase has been completed, and an open house is scheduled for November 22nd at 62 Chapin Street. The women's house will be available for tours, and further plans include office renovations, additional housing, and a children's education center. Current initiatives include four women working toward GEDs, one mother studying for a CAM license, and strong participation in financial literacy classes.

Epic Behavioral Healthcare: Nangela Pulsfus had no additional updates.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

SMA Healthcare: Nancy Russo had no updates.

Department of Health: Shawna Novak reported on behalf of Shane Lockwood confirming WIC benefits are secure through the end of the year despite the shutdown.

UF Health St. Johns: Paige Stanton announced that planning for the 2026 Brave Summit began in October and invited participation. She also promoted the "Moon Over the Matanzas" fundraiser at the St. Augustine Lighthouse, supporting the Joseph W. Turner Critical Care Education Fund and the Joseph Gordy Employee Emergency Fund. After a year-long search, the co-responder care coordinator position in partnership with the Sheriff's Office and EPIC has been filled.

Public Safety: Shawna Novak also reported for Director Wildes, noting progress in staffing the second co-responder team. Between January and October, the team made 581 contacts, primarily with juveniles, with Alzheimer's, autism, and depression identified as the top contributing factors. Only 19 of these contacts resulted in Baker Acts. She also highlighted e-bike safety concerns, sharing that the Sheriff's Office is supporting proposed legislation to limit speed, require helmets, and establish licensing.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: The next General Meeting is scheduled for December 4th, 2025, at 4:00pm via Microsoft Teams and in person at the Health & Human Services Kingfisher Conference Room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 4:42pm