

Forensic Interagency Task Force
May 24, 2016
Meeting Narrative

Those attending the meeting held in the DOC Training Academy on the above date were: **Jesse Anderson** (Case Mgr); **Tricia Baffa** (Forensic Case Mgmt Supervisor); **Carol Bamford** (Director of Emergency & Court Services); **Michelle Baxter** (OMHSAS); **Daniel Beauchamp** (Regional Forensic Liaison); **Lisa Brame** (Social Worker); **Tori Bright** (Regional MH Services Coordinator); **Liz Carulyus** (Gaudenzia); **Colleen Cawley** (Housing Director); **Margaret Chapman** (NAMI PA); **Lance Couturier** (Lic. Psychology Director, annuitant); **Hazel Dacus** (Forensic Coordinator); **David Dinich** (President FTAC); **Mary Jo Dickson** (Administrator, Adult MH Services); **Carol Dunlap** (West.Co. BH&ID); **James Fouts** (Dir. Forensic System Solutions); **Heidi Fuehrer** (Psychological Services Specialist); **Julie Holtry** (Deputy Director of MH); **Janet Jones** (Gaudenzia); **Mary Jordan** (Director); **Michael Keefer** (MH Court Coordinator); **Kevin Kordzi** (RHD); **Marirosa Lamas** (Superintendent); **Ben Laudermilch** (Ex. Housing Director); **David Lopes** (MH Advocate); **Kerri Miller** (SPORE Case Mgr.); **Robert Nichols** (Prime Care); **William Price** (CMU); **Jessica Reichenbach** (OMHSAS); **Melissa Repsher** (Reentry Division Director); **Emily Scordellis** (Prime Care); **Matthew Sheaffer** (Pa Board of Prob & Parole Agent 2); **Deb Shoemaker** (Ex. Director Penna Psychiatric Soc); **Jack Sommers** (Superintendent Waymart); **Vivian Spiese** (FTAC); **Joan Steinberg** (Bd member ABIN); **S. Drew Taylor** (Spore Director); **Stacy Tekely** (Supervisor, JRS State); **Tammy Twombly** (Social Worker II); **Jack Walmer** Chief of Psychological Services); **Lloyd Wertz** (Vice President FTAC); **Nancy Wieman** (Consultant); **Jenn Williams** (C-M-P Mental Health); **Chris Wysocki** (JVBDS Administrator); **Elaine Ziegler** (Mental Health Manager); **Lisa Zook** (PA County Administrators); **Jesse Zortman** (PBPP Analyst)

This is the sixth meeting of this resumption of the Forensic Interagency Task Force (FITF) convened by FTAC/FSS with 47 in attendance.

Facilitator, Dave Dinich of FTAC, welcomed the group and asked attendees for self-introductions and to relate new things that are happening in the Commonwealth from their varied perspectives. This included a round of

celebration for Vivian Spiese with a cake and a rousing rendition of happy birthday in English and Spanish in recognition of her birthday today!!

Today's first presenter was Ben Laudermilch, recently appointed to the position of Executive Housing Director Department of Human Services. He was introduced by FTAC President, Dave Dinich. Mr. Dinich also shared the fact that housing is consistently listed among the top three issues related to the discussions of the FITF and the RE-Entry Committee as well.

Mr. Laudermilch came to discuss the recently released, as of yesterday, report on "Supporting Pennsylvanians through Housing." He noted that he has been in his position approximately 7 weeks and has spent that time getting up to speed with the issues related to Housing in PA and the context of that issue as it relates to the PA DOC. He also had experience working with the Homeless population, specifically in California near San Francisco at a time of the ramping up of Methamphetamine addiction in that area. He also shared the reality that there have been significant cutbacks in spending on the parts of the Federal and State governments which has directly impacted the issue in this and many other contexts. He currently offered the assessment that the Commonwealth is approximately "down" 270,000 units of available, affordable housing. It was characterized as the most important and crucial area of getting folk to successfully adapt to their/our communities.

He distributed the report that was released, noting that the first nine pages are, basically, "infographics." He also noted the fact that PA Homelessness is "up" compared to national averages. The average cost of housing in PA is very close to the TOTAL average monthly incomes of folks with disabilities. Renting is becoming the norm for housing, rather than home ownership, even for the more affluent. The Solutions offered in the document referred first to "Government that Works—Removing Barriers" which are unique to each individual. The strategies began on page 9 of the Plan:

Number one is "Expand Access and create new, affordable, integrated and supportive housing opportunities.

1. Partner with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to implement the US Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) Section 811 Project Rental Assistance for individuals who are low-income with disabilities, age 18 to 61.

2. Maximize housing opportunities for extremely low income populations
3. Provide tools to designated lead county-based agencies through IT Enhancements
4. Explore new and expanded funding opportunities to increase the supply of affordable integrated and supportive housing.

Strategy Number 2: Strengthen and Expand Housing and Housing Related services and supports.

1. Expand access to housing-related services and supports through Community HealthChoices.
2. Increase housing opportunities and services for individuals in the criminal justice system with serious mental illness and substance use disorder.
3. Maximize Medicaid funding for housing related services and supports.

Strategy Number 3: Assess New and Existing Programs to determine future needs and measure outcomes.

1. Assess and improve existing DHS housing-related programs
2. Complete a housing gap analysis
3. Establish and continually assess desired outcomes of DHS Housing Strategy.

Strategy Number 4: Promote teamwork and communication in both state and local government to develop housing opportunities for all populations served by DHS

1. Strengthen designated lead county-based agencies

2. Align policies and coordinate regularly with state and county agencies
3. Develop public and private partnerships
4. Provide ongoing communications to stakeholders and advocates on the progress of the DHS Housing Strategy.

One attendee noted that a change in the assessment/definition of homelessness at the federal level has negatively impacted the availability of programmatic resources and has further negatively affected the issue for those needing that support upon exiting longer term residential rehab and treatment facilities. How to address this at the federal level was lifted up for consideration and deliberated through the speaker.

There was another question about funding resources that are being created and/or sought to address the issue. There was some development of TANNF program melding funds with another agency to better address the issue. The 811 program, while it has experienced some false starts, now seems to be on better footing for progress. Another attendee noted the loss of funding for a program which had been successful in addressing homelessness in a rural area. This will result in creating homelessness for those individuals and the problems that are related to them. There was a funding scheme that resulted in these reductions in transitional housing programs which, effectively eliminated those “Tier II” programs, including the reductions of housing voucher programs over the past two years in legislatively mandated sequestration efforts.

The question of sustainability was raised as a concern about the forensic re-entry population. While some programs seem to be supportable for a few years, but will then be eliminated after the start-up funding dries up. The level of costs of housing programs in certain parts of the Commonwealth were raised as an issue, as they seem to be very high in certain areas. The presenter noted that the use of Health Choices funding reinvestment funding strategies and finding ways to reduce those costs might be addressed to create a “critical mass” of funding to allow for sustainability. Other regulatory issues, such as creating an unintended Personal Care Boarding Home, can present barriers to further, creative development in these areas of providing supportive housing efforts. The presenter related the process of getting initial funding for the “cream of the crop” of the needy population and not

having capacity to work with the remainder of those in need who might have a history of lower credit scores and histories in rental housing. The issues in these programs are further compounded in difficulty when the factors of Serious Mental Illness are considered, as many of them will refuse to provide housing opportunities to those with SMI or Substance Use problems.

There also seems to be some interest at the State Level in a reinvigoration of the Regional Housing Coordinators. In addition, there seem to be some potential for the maximization of Medicaid funding for housing related services and support to address these problems. He suggested that the need for locally designed and supported programs might be funded through these efforts.

The speaker was asked for suggestions about what local authorities could do to better serve the population of those with DOC involvement. The speaker stated that he will be educating himself to better answer those questions by involving himself with the DOC. He related the need to create the recognition of the fact that folks WILL be coming out of prisons, local and state, and WILL eventually find housing. Doing nothing will only exacerbate this issue and result in increasing the corrections population and other, less well-planned efforts that are doomed to failure.

A discussion commenced about the efforts of the DOC in preparing for the eventual re-entry of folks with SMI and Substance Use issues. There was a position stated from a county perspective and a response from that of the DOC system. The responder noted that there must be some give-and-take on both parts if any success is to be gained. The DOC can only progress with the assistance of involved counties without dealing with categorical denial of assistance and willingness to work with the individuals in question. Another area of communication that needs to be addressed is that of those coming out on Parole, of which counties claim they are uninformed until the time of the release to the Parole system. The issues of communication seem, to the presenter, to be “low hanging fruit.” The funding issues, on the other hand, are different and could be harder to address.

The speaker addressed the topic of Regional Housing Coordinators and noted that there could be additional efforts in providing insight and hands on cooperation

being the local lead agency in smaller, more rural counties to help forward the discussion in those areas.

There was a discussion of the apparent lack of awareness or, perhaps, concern on the part of legislative decision-makers in the context of a budget that is being forwarded to reduce spending in areas that will, ultimately, result in increased spending in areas like Corrections or other higher cost services which become the fall back for those who cannot get into better, supportive housing methods. It was agreed that there needs to be more effort directed toward raising the awareness of these folks about the projects and their benefits.

The next part of the Agenda was dedicated to the Re-Entry Committee and its progress by Tori Bright. She noted that she, Marirosa Lamas, and Chris Wysocki co-chair that Committee. She noted that the discussions in that context have been edifying and, at times, passionate. The initial focus was on “who are the inmates and what are their characteristics as they prepare to re-enter our communities.”

She noted the creation of a survey as an initial part of this effort. This afforded a great deal of rich responses with information and other topical awareness. She noted communication, and the need to address that issue, both at the content and timing levels, between the DOC and the counties as one of those topics.

Additionally, Housing was established as a topic area for the population in general and those with specific problems to be addressed in that planned re-entry. Finally, the topic of benefits and their continuation, suspension, and reinstatement is an issue that has received additional, directed attention. There was a question raised about the format for communication between the DOC and the local prisons in their respective areas. Tori noted a previous discussion, at a national level, about that topic and a format for those communications and the data that needs to be included in those. It was shared that there might be 6 to 8 counties which have consistent communication with the SCI's, while the remaining 59 do not. Tori summarized the discussion as to whether there is a model that can be created and used for this purpose. In the Southeast, there are larger numbers of re-entries for which there has been an effective method of communication that has been developed. However, there is less of an apparent will on the part of the more rural county which has far lower volume of folks re-entering their communities. These discussions continue to address only those re-entering at the completion of

sentences, leaving those coming out with parole stipulations to be yet another area of discussion. Tori expects that there will be a set of recommendations will be forthcoming from the RE-Entry Committee and its sub-committees to be referenced to the Task Force for final discussions and recommendations to be made, perhaps to the DOC and perhaps to the counties for consideration and, hopefully, approval and implementation.

Tori brought the created format that has come from the documentation Subcommittee. An attendee with ties to the Commissioners' Association noted that the work and discussions within the Re-Entry Committee have been shared with membership.

As to benefits, there have been discussions within the Re-Entry Committee about the possible, positive effects of the Commonwealth's pursuit of a State Plan Amendment to allow for suspension of MA benefits or the presumptive eligibility for MA benefits for at least two months after release from a long term period of incarceration. Additionally, there was a discussion about why inmates, prior to being convicted and awaiting trial are terminated from MA benefits then ensued. Tori related some efforts at certain SCI's in which there are arrangements made to effect the initiation of MA benefits and the fact that those seem to be effective and successful. There were discussions of some practices in certain counties that have been successful, albeit varied, across the Commonwealth. There is a plan to meet with the Office of Income Maintenance Deputy Secretary, Lourdes Padilla, to further these discussions and determine if there are current plans in place to address this issue, or if there is a need for information and suggestion from the FITF.

There was a clarification offered by an OMHSAS Staff member noting that there is a listing of individuals in each county who are responsible for communicating with the DOC in cases of planned release of individuals with SMI. It was related that, at times, there is an unwillingness on the part of some of these individuals to work with institutions beyond the county jail at the DOC.

The next meeting of the Forensic Interagency Task Force is scheduled for Tuesday, July 26, 2016 from 10:00 to 12:00 at the DOC Training Academy in Elizabethtown. Respectfully Submitted, by Lloyd G. Wertz, FTAC