

St. Mary's County  
Department of Social Services Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

The regular scheduled meeting of the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services Advisory Board was held Tuesday June 26, 2020 via teleconference.

Member's Present:

Michael Blackwell, Chair  
Annette Wood  
Tom Hedderich  
Alycia Stack  
Adam Dyson  
Terry Prochnow

Also Present:

Alexis Zoss, Director  
Jennifer Neff, Assistant Director for Family Investment  
Charles Wood, Assistant Director for LGA

- I. Call to Order
  - a. The meeting was called to order 5:30pm
- II. Establish Quorum
  - a. A quorum was established
- III. Approval of Minutes
  - a. A motion was made to accept the May 2020 meeting minutes. Second. Minutes accepted

**Director Report**

Assistant Director, Jennifer Neff, reported to the board on the Homeless Action Team and the Passive Park Encampment project:

Since March 25th, as a part of preventing and containing COVID among the street homeless, a Homeless Action Team was created, using County resources, in conjunction with Three Oaks Center (TOC) the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Department, St. Mary's County Health Department, the Housing Authority of St. Mary's County and other non-profit resources. These agencies came together to support a self contained encampment at the Lexington Manor/Passive Park site. The Goal of this program is to create a space in which those experiencing homelessness could live temporarily and we could work with them, providing case management, in an effort to keep them safe, while also assisting them with obtain permanent housing. Daily activities and monitoring of the homeless at this site have been anchored by the nearby Three Oaks Center, who also transitioned a part of its shelter facility to an 8 bed quarantine facility if someone was confirmed positive for the virus.

Specific components of the Park site include:

- Control of where tents are placed to effect social distancing
- 24 hour sanitation facilities to include toilets and running water
- Enhanced trash management through placement of a dumpster on site
- Daily contact from a member of the Homeless Action Team for health screening and temperature checks, monitoring of activities and distribution of two meals a day
- Daily transportation to and monitoring of showers, off site
- Safety features include placement of a light and a webcam for surveillance.

The St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office/ COPs unit has provided periodic checks of the area and general contact with the participants. COPs contact with the participants has been primarily 'community' oriented. SMCDSS contracted with

Maria Scott, who is well known to our homeless population in St. Mary's County through the winter Wrapping Arms Around Many (WARM) sheltering program to provide case management services. In addition, we dedicated one of our Adult Services caseworkers to this project and the local health department provided a Licensed Clinical Social Worker volunteer through the Maryland Medical Reserve Corps to support our case management.

Case management functions include daily observation of individual health status which has enabled the team to quickly access and effect appropriate levels of medical care if needed, which may include self isolation and support for monitoring of symptoms in a tent; contact with a medical professional to consult on symptoms, testing and placement in quarantine; or arrangement for transport to the Emergency Department. In addition, case managers work with the Housing Authority to connect homeless individuals to permanent or other housing resources, to get them off the street.

In collaboration with two local organizations, Walden Pyramid and Pathways, participants have been linked to and receive behavioral health services on site through tele-health. At admission, upon assessment - 38 individuals were identified as needing behavioral health services, 13% of Passive Park Participants were already receiving behavioral health services at admission. To date, 32 of the 38 participants identified as needing behavioral health services are receiving the service, equating to 84% of participants receiving behavioral health services post admission.

In addition, those eligible for expedited social security disability services are working with a SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery case manager, which we have in house to assist with gaining income through this process. Through our Family Investment division, we have assisted participants with applying for medical assistance, SNAP, and Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP) benefits. For other benefits, such as medical assistance, TDAP and SNAP, we were able to support 19 of 43 participants with additional benefits that they did not have prior to working with our Family Investment Staff. At admission, we had 20 residents of 43 without income, which was 47% of the population. As of today, all residents have income through TDAP or another source. Income was critical to the person experiencing homelessness to be able to qualify for housing. At discharge 100% of the participants will receive continuing case management services to ensure sustainability with housing.

Throughout this initiative we have had one participant quarantined through the Weinberg building. The eight bed quarantine capacity at TOC is used in collaboration with a medical consult to prevent need for higher levels of medical placement whenever possible. If hospitalization is necessary, then the quarantine can be used for step-down. The St. Mary's County Health Officer has made specific recommendations that prepared the TOC Weinberg Building for quarantine, which included removal of carpet and replacement with a tile floor, and to equip the building with high-efficiency particulate air filters.

Our numbers today reflect that we have served through this project a total of 43 adults. Of those 43 served we have 11 remaining. Of those 11, 9 have permanent housing vouchers in hand, one has a planned move to transitional housing in Charles County and one will be rapidly rehoused through Three Oaks. While criminal history of participants, poor rental history, reduced hours with apartment offices and difficulty reaching landlords have contributed to an overall process slowdown, moving as many people as possible into their own residences by July 1st will help when the pandemic has passed, and we work to break down the encampment.

Based on the success of this model, partners have submitted a Community Development Block Grant which will continue to support those experiencing homelessness in SMC post July 1. This block grant will support emergency housing and rental assistance funding with wrap around services. The grant we have applied for totals \$850,000. The Award of this grant would enable us to establish shelter housing units in which we would shelter those experiencing homelessness while wrapping participants with services, and rapidly housing them permanently. The Goal of this project is to work towards having no one literally homeless in St. Mary's County.

#### **Chair Report**

- The board now has a PO Box for receiving donations sent via US Mail. Michael will be checking the box periodically
- The board has reviewed a letter to be sent to local media to solicit funds for "A Better St. Mary's/MASSB". The letter has been approved
- The board has reviewed the newer guidelines for how to deposit funds which may be received

Motion to adjourn; Second – Meeting adjourned at 6:30pm