



COVID-19 Response Discussion Minutes

May 28, 2020

Location: Meeting conducted via Skype

Meeting Time: 3:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

CoC Leadership Council Members:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation/Organization</u>
Brown, Heidi	Jewish Family and Children's Services of the Suncoast
Eller, Scott	Community Assisted Supportive Living (C.A.S.L)
Erozer, Adell	Turning Points
Evans, David	Sarasota Memorial Hospital
Fiory, Myra	Central Florida Behavioral Health Network
Johnson, Chris	Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness
McLaughlin, Ellen	Sarasota Family YMCA
Diegert-Mclean, Ginger	Lived Homeless Experience
Minor, Erin	Harvest House Transitional Centers
Showers, Julia	The Salvation Army, Manatee
Stiff, Kevin	The City of Sarasota
Thaxton, Jon	Gulf Coast Community Foundation
Whiten, Major Charles	The Salvation Army, Sarasota

Public Attendees: Krystal Frazier, City HOT; Cindy Emshoff, Office on Housing and Community Development; Gloria Romero, Catholic Charities

Suncoast Partnership Staff: Amiee Barth, Brandon Bellows, Lauren Davis, Taylor Neighbors

Kevin Stiff called the special meeting to order and identified the focused topics of the meeting. The discussion at hand is the special group of newly literally homeless individuals because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals are unable to receive prevention dollars and will not prioritize for RRH or PSH funds within the system because they are newly literally homeless. The individuals are able-bodied individuals who can self-resolve their housing crisis given minimal support from the system. The discussion is to focus on how we identify this group and how do we get them connected to the services they need to assist with self-resolving their crisis.

Kevin stated the first thing we need to work on is identifying these individuals who became homeless because of COVID-19. Kevin asked Chris Johnson whether he had received word from HUD on how to identify those clients; Chris responded he has not received direction from HUD, but he and Brandon Bellows are working on what could be added to CSIS assessments to identify this population. Kevin asked if we see the need to quantify those who have lost housing due to COVID-19; Chris responded we will absolutely need to identify those clients at some point soon. Kevin stated we have two homeless outreach teams and other outreach teams in the community, but we need to be able to identify those

clients. Kevin recommended outreach teams ask clients they engage with on the streets, “Is your homelessness a result of COVID-19;” outreach teams would then be directed to ask, “When did your homelessness begin,” and so long as the response is after the 04/01/2020 Stay-at-Home Order from the Governor, we can assume the client’s homelessness is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. After these questions, the outreach worker will ask, “How many times have you been homeless previously,” and based on this answer the outreach worker can gather whether the client is able to sustain housing on their own. Follow-up questions would surround disability, income, length of assistance needed, and type of assistance needed. Kevin opened the discussion up to the panel.

Erin Minor requested we continue to focus on individuals and families. Erin indicated it is highly likely we will see an uptick in the amount of literally homeless families with the ability to self-resolve as well as individuals. Ellen McLaughlin added to Erin’s sentiment stating the school district will be adding a data element to their systems to determine whether families identified as literally homeless are homeless because of the pandemic. Kevin stated families will be included in this as well, but he wants to develop the system of identifying those individuals, so it is more streamlined when we begin working on resolving families’ homelessness.

Adell Erozer stated those who need minimal assistance in the previous economy will be have more difficulty in the current state of the economy. Adell stated many who may need minimal assistance will need this assistance for a longer period because of the state of unemployment in the State.

Scott Eller indicated C.A.S.L. has taken in an 81-year-old woman and they are unable to track this data because she entered without going through Coordinated Entry. Because CASL did not have direction as to how to properly record this interaction in CSIS, the client was entered into a non-homeless bed to connect her to Medicaid and assisted living. Scott stated we will need to develop a screening tool in the system to collect client information on those homeless because of COVID-19. Kevin asked Chris if there was a screening tool in CSIS service providers can use to collect this information; Chris Johnson stated CSIS staff is currently working on developing this tool. Chris went on to state those newly homeless in the system will not complete an Access Point because it will bog down the prioritization list and they would not prioritize for RRH or PSH services.

Kevin asked if there is a need to develop a tool; Chris Johnson stated we can develop this tool, but we will need to know what questions to ask. Kevin asked the service providers on the call if creating a new project for COVID-19 screening would be cumbersome or something they want. Scott Eller stated C.A.S.L. has the capacity to enter data as a new project so they can track clients and the system can identify how many people the system has taken on due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kevin agreed with Scott stating that we need to begin identifying these clients now to be proactive. Kevin wants to ensure we are filtering out those who require a soft touch and not let them bog down or functioning referral process. Kevin asked how do we put these clients in the right group without affecting the other group who were homeless prior to COVID-19; Chris responded he agrees with Kevin in that the system will be looking at two different populations and we need to identify them as such. The population we are currently working with are the hardest to serve, and those entering newly homeless are likely to self-resolve their housing crisis with minimal assistance. Chris stated there will be additional waves of funding and we need to be able to identify those entering the system because of COVID-19 and we will need to bounce those individuals back into housing.

Kevin asked what Erin and Adell's thoughts were regarding families and individuals. Erin stated we do not know what the future holds and that we are talking about two different populations. We have to continue serving the long-term homeless already existing in our system, but we will have those that only need a light touch to get back on their feet, but that touch may be extended because of the state of the economy. Erin is concerned with becoming overwhelmed with choosing the exact person to the exact program, because it becomes ineffective. Erin said if providers can adapt their programs to fit today's need, and once that is done switch back to normal operating procedures. Erin indicated Harvest House is discussing using the Home Again apartments as transitional housing from PSH; Prevention and RRH will look different today because clients do not have access to stability like they did a few months ago.

Kevin asked again how we identify this group of newly homeless because of COVID-19 and how do we minimize the impact of homelessness on families and individuals as well as the system. Kevin stated the system must adapt to these newly homeless and requested Major Whitten's input regarding this. Major Whitten stated that adding interview questions to assessments and recommends boots on the ground provide insight on what would be implementable. He states there is capacity in the system to determine who is newly homeless and adapt parts of the system to meet the needs of the community; it would be very constructive to manage the prioritization to make the biggest impact and be most effective.

Kevin agreed frontline employees would have valuable input regarding what would benefit staff and clients to determine necessary assistance. Kevin asked what the cost is to provide bridge housing for these individuals; Major Whitten stated the \$35/night figure is what is most used and for a family it would be closer to \$50/night.

Scott Eller explained he wants to coordinate the system to meet the needs of the community and ensure the data is being collected. Chris Johnson thanked Scott for continuing to emphasize the need to collect this data and when funding does become available, we will be able to have an actual count of those homeless in the system because of COVID-19. Chris stated we need to be able to identify newly homeless filter from rest of the population, where do they connect through the system, and who has space to meet the need of these clients. Over the last few months we have been tracking the newly homeless from this year and last year; In April 2019 we identified 229 newly homeless compared to April 2020 there were 53, and in May 2019 there were 195 newly homeless and May 2020 there were 79 newly homeless clients. The volume has decreased, but so has capacity. Chris questioned whether our system even the capacity must meet the needs and, if not, where can we find the capacity (i.e. shelter or transitional housing). Creative solutions may need to occur to meet the needs of the community.

Ginger Diegert-McClean agrees utilizing hotels for bridge housing for families to keep them from entering the shelters. She recommended a point person be assigned to identify those hotels who may work with the system and provide rooms at a discounted rate. Ginger indicated we are reducing the trauma on families newly entering the system by placing them in hotels as opposed to emergency shelter, but someone should be the point person on this.

Kevin requested Krystal Frazier's input on those individuals the City HOT team is working with who may be able to self-resolve. Krystal stated City HOT is seeing an extreme uptick from out of town residents because there are no available resources in the areas they are from. While many of the housing programs are still accessible, these clients would not prioritize within our system. Self-resolving clients are not currently progressing due to operation issues related to COVID-19. Because these clients must quarantine for 2 weeks at the shelter, it creates a standstill in the process of self-resolving. Trying to

prioritize these clients is difficult because we cannot confirm when these clients lost their housing. Krystal stated 50% of the clients she is getting are from out of town and she is unsure as to how to redirect them from our system. Krystal stated she can no longer accept out of town clients because there isn't anything she can do with them now.

Kevin asked Jon Thaxton's insight on the response for these individuals. Jon stated

Adell Erozer stated there is funding specific for COVID-19 to fit the needs of the people we are discussing, but she is concerned with the capacity of the system. The only shelter in Manatee County is under quarantine and they are not taking in new clients. Adell stated the testing process also holds up the housing process. Adell requested we take inventory of the system capacity for all areas of the response, stating a million dollars with five case managers does not work. Chris agreed with Adell asking again what the capacity is and how do we fill the need.

Kevin asked again what we can do to identify these individuals homeless because of COVID-19 when the money does come. Adell stated the funding Turning Points gets will have basic requirements for funding will be related to residency requirements and proof housing was lost due to COVID-19. Chris stated we can tweak any assessment to fit the need of the funding source.

Ellen suggested to collect documentation at the screening process so there is not a holdup of obtaining this information to provide services.

Kevin asked if newly homeless individuals would be put in CSIS; Chris indicated we will need to add these clients and whether this is an additional EDA or project for service providers will be determined by the service providers. Chris stated any service providers who would like an additional EDA project specific to COVID-19 will need to request this from Suncoast Partnership.

Brandon Bellows added this current response to homelessness of newly homeless clients is like the days of HPRP in 2010. The purpose of this funding was to provide services to the population of people who received services due to the Great Recession. Brandon stated we could learn a lot from the service delivery of this funding source. Kevin asked for additional materials on what Brandon was referring to. Brandon indicated this fund was used to assist those affected by the recession much like how we will be providing services to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cindy Emshoff stated she doesn't disagree HPRP was salient now, but the system has become better since this time. She stated we have moved on from how we were operating during the HPRP days. Kevin asked Cindy whether she had any idea of when and what funds would become available. Cindy indicated we need more granular data to assist in receiving funds; Cindy stated OHCD is getting CDBG and ESG funding, but we need to plan how to get these funds to the clients. Cindy stated there is pressure to extend the moratorium and allow people to stay housed.

Kevin summarized the meeting by stating Chris and Brandon will look at assessments to identify newly homeless, check the inventory of the system on availability of funds in the system, and connecting with hotels to provide bridge housing.