



PRINCETON HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

September 21, 2022

Zoom Meeting * Princeton, NJ 08540

Board Members – Present

Veronica Olivares-Weber,
Chair
Ericka Deglau, Vice
Chair
John Heilner
Larry Spruill
Lina Genovesi, Alt.
Rebecca Balaguer
Khristina Gonzalez
Ming Kuang

Board Members Absent

Nieves, Loydes Alt.
Leticia Fraga, Council Liaison

Staff – Present

Rhodalynn Jones

Call to Order:

The Regular Meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission was called to order by Chair Veronica Olivares–Weber at 6:02 pm. Vice-chair Ericka Deglau recited the acknowledgment: *“We gather today on the land of the Lenni Lenape. As members of the Princeton Human Services Commission, we aspire to show appreciation, respect, and concern for all people and our environment. We honor the Lenape and other Indigenous caretakers of these lands and waters, the elders who lived here before, the Indigenous today, and the generations to come.”* Roll Call was completed with those present indicated. There were no members of the public present.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: July 20, 2022

Chair Olivares–Weber indicated that some members received minutes with a heading that indicated January rather than July. Director Rho Jones made note of the correction and a motion was made by John Heilner and seconded by Larry Spruill to approve the minutes. With ensuring that the correct date would be entered, the minutes of the July 20, 2022 meeting were approved by members present of the Princeton Human Services Commission, with an abstention by Larry Spruill, absent at the July meeting. Minutes so approved.

Director’s Report:

Director Jones, back from maternity leave for the past month, began by congratulating Khristina on the birth of her son and the Commission was informed that Lloydes had also given birth. Commission members congratulated all three mothers.

Director Jones informed the Commission that

- **22nd year of the Summer Youth Employment** program for students who attend Princeton Public Schools, ages 14-18, and some 19 year olds still enrolled in PPS. Lower participation this year, only 28 of 40 potential slots filled, is likely explained by increase in minimum wage to \$13/hr, which excludes seasonal workers (NJ Dept. of Labor) whose wages remained at \$11.90/hr. Some young people and their families preferred to look for employment that paid the higher hourly wage. Plans are to advocate for the higher rate for SYEP, but no guarantee that this will be possible.
- **Back-pack drive** was successful thanks to the work of the Outreach Coordinator and Melissa Mercurio (previous Human Services Director) now at Princeton University. Back packs were distributed to 341 students.
- **Holiday gift drive** under way: hoping to reach out to bigger businesses to provide students with gifts and families with gift cards. Assistance from Commissioners is welcome, including with wrapping gifts and ensuring that children’s wish lists are granted. Last year, 349 children and their families were served.
- **Basecamp** Implementation of this online platform to address better coordination and communication among service providers, an identified need in the PCNA underway, with the help of a Rutgers SSW Intern. The



department would keep it fairly simple, but provide a means to share announcements and information with community partners.

- **Housing/homelessness.** There has been an increase in requests for rental and utility assistance and homelessness. Family homelessness is generally caused by economic impacts; individual homelessness often due to mental illness and substance abuse. Recently, requests for assistance due to domestic violence have also increased. Emergency funds to assist the homeless are generally sufficient; however, hotels/motels no longer wish to serve the population or are asking for credit cards because of damages incurred during long stays during the pandemic. The latter was often precipitated by frustration of family members with long periods of isolation, and/or mental health issues. Families and individuals were often housed for long periods prior to the eviction moratorium by the state. Homefront and the Crisis Ministry are having similar issues with finding shelter through area hotels. Disappearance of Sleepy Hollow, a previously affordable (though substandard) option, is no longer available as the facility was demolished due to Hurricane Ida. The Department and Jeff Grosser will be meeting with hotel providers to explore options. The Department needs a purchase of services agreement and does not have a credit card to use for shelter purposes.

Discussion

- In response to Chair Olivares-Weber's query, Jones noted that there are adequate funds for emergency services currently and described how situations were addressed when families or individuals did not qualify for existing services: the problem right now appears to be access to shelter. She noted that Volunteers for America were a back-up source.
- Volunteers of America, a relatively new organization in the state has been helpful with both Shelter and transportation issues. VOA can sometimes help. They also help with transportation to the individual's home county, where they might qualify for services and provide back-up for individuals who resist shelter (Rescue Mission in Trenton) or who have had problems with the latter.
- Jones acknowledged the help of Commissioner Spruill in guiding individuals needing emergency shelter to her office. Per Spruill, food programs are a source of those needing help with housing. Other Princeton orgs, churches and Princeton Mutual Aid (PMA), Blair at Mr. Roger's neighborhood are helpful.
- Deglau encouraged connecting with Mercer County Continuum of Care, of which Princeton is a member. The group participates in the annual (national) homeless count in January, focusing on the unhoused, and have wanted Princeton's participation, as they don't know where to look in this community. This addresses one kind of homelessness.
- Director Jones indicated that she could try to gather information on current demand for housing and homeless services from the housing coalition, and other organizations that are confronted with homelessness.
- Spruill asked whether turkeys were being given out by the Department. Jones responded that she believed SHUPP and other organizations generally gave out turkeys and canned goods. The department does not have a specific drive, but if turkeys are donated and could be moved quickly to families, they would be accepted; otherwise, there is no refrigeration to store the poultry.
- Re Basecamp, Khristina Gonzalez expressed concern about providers challenged with internet. This was acknowledged, but the hope was to keep it simple and provide instruction and tutorials, which would also be extended to Commission members. Deglau noted that a number of organizations have already shared that they use Basecamp internally and found it helpful; perhaps they can help with getting other organizations on board.



Council Updates:

Veronica Olivares-Weber noted that Leticia Fraga sent her regrets at not being able to attend the meeting today but sent an update that the Council will be back in person this month, with the possibility of Zoom for attendees who prefer to remain online.

Subcommittee Reports and Updates:

Immigration, John Heilner reported that he and Lina Genovesi met with committee members, who are working on:

- Immigrant specific fliers and communications, in Spanish and English, to include information about wage theft, minimum wage, affordable and emergency housing (access for mixed status families), services provided by LALDEF and Solidaridad and will need some help from the Department in duplication and distribution.
- Heilner explained the difference in focus currently between LALDEF's work and Solidaridad. The former does SIDJ, DV and victim cases. Solidaridad focuses on asylum specifically, and has, since 2018, helped applicants for asylum gather information and prepare their cases. They are currently embarking on a fund raising effort to fund an attorney to represent cases, as research has shown that 20% of cases are granted asylum without an attorney while 75-80% of cases are successful with attorney representation.

Outreach and Needs Assessment, Ericka Deglau summarized current status of the Needs Assessment:

- Final revisions of report encompassing Listening Sessions, Provider and Follow-up Surveys will be posted to the website for partners and the community. Report is currently being checked for accuracy and clarity of findings, to facilitate moving forward with doable action steps, prepare Princeton for future crises, and look to making good use of resources and expertise of Commission members and community partners.
- Intention is presentation to council.
- Deglau noted that one area of concern, locally, as nationally, is the need for social and emotional supports, mental health, and that we need to pay attention to these needs in the context of primary needs, including among those who have least access.

Community needs

- Spruill reported that the Clay Street housing authority block party went very well, an event that he the community has been trying to do for a long time.
- He expressed appreciation for the updating of the food resource calendar, and expansion of locations to the Chestnut street firehouse and the relocation of Mr. Roger's neighborhood at 237 North Harrison Street, so that the group is no longer exposed to the elements.
- Reuseable bags are now working well.

Welcoming America

- Chair Olivares-Weber cancellation reported that several events or activities occurred, including naturalization ceremony hosted by Princeton University, recipe sharing on the Library website and other events as posted on the calendar developed by Human Services Department. Unfortunately, the Loteria was cancelled as staffing for this event was not available. This was the first in-person Welcoming Week since the pandemic, so a positive sign that several events were held to commemorate the week. A link was provided to Commission members to the calendar and can be found here: <https://www.princetonnj.gov/656/Welcoming-Week-2022>
- Heilner noted that Princeton joined the Welcoming Week organization in 2015 and noted bandwidth issues of Commissioners in lending a hand with events.



Discussion

- Heilner asked what people needed most to share, according to the Needs Assessment. Deglau responded that across all instruments in which respondents shared their views, outreach and coordination were a major concern. She noted that updated information for basic needs – e.g. food availability – as an example. Access to mental health and emotional social supports, particularly for individuals without insurance, was also a concern. The needs assessment did not ask about the availability of after-hours services, but this might be an issue that needs further exploration – just to know which providers provide this kind of assistance.
- Rebecca Balaguer brought up concerns about copays – to get mental health or health services and described accompanying a client to Zufall clinic, where the minimum co-pay was \$20 – this adds up for every supplemental service needed and individuals who are homeless or having serious financial difficulties cannot afford these amounts.
- Gonzalez noted that Princeton students in need have resources that take care of copays, which then permits students who need behavioral health or health services to follow up on these. She revisited looking into establishing a “Friends of human services” fund, separate from the Department that could collect funds for health, mental health care, and other necessities.
- Deglau noted the dental and vision care funds available, both issues that were articulated in the needs assessment, were rather slow on the uptake, suggesting that the need to build awareness and outreach seems critical.
- Olivares-Weber reiterated the need to address mental health and wellbeing in the Commission and noted the importance of taking this issue on in our committees. She suggested that Deglau and Balaguer co-chair a separate committee on this issue.
- Jones noted that Corner House, a non-profit but part of the municipality would be certified for mental health in January. They currently can do co-occurring (mental health/substance use). Deglau suggested that they be invited to the next meeting. Balaguer, who had been unable to attend the Corner House board meeting, agreed to serve as liaison for the Commission. Corner House has a sliding fee scale.
- Heilner asked about charity care for individuals needing health intervention. Commission members learned that charity care was primarily for emergency situations and did not generally cover primary care or screenings. Jones stated that the new Capital Health Clinic on Witherspoon street had a child health conference, providing vaccinations and health screening for minor children, but not ongoing care for sick-visits, etc. These would have to go to a private doctor or federal qualified community health center (FQHC) like Henry J. Austin, or the Zufall clinic. Balaguer noted the importance of understanding how health care visits and copays worked out for clients. (link was provided to Commission members in the chat <https://www.princetonnj.gov/955/Child-Health-Conferences>)
- Chair Olivares-Weber and Vice chair Deglau thanked Commission members for sharing their input and the discussion, important in moving the Commission’s agenda forward.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn at 7:39 p.m. was moved by Heilner and seconded by Deglau, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by:

Ericka Deglau

Recording for Princeton Human Services Commission