



CHIP Health Equity Data Working Group

Meeting Notes: 11-30-2021

Our Task:

Telling the story of COVID in Franklin County/North Quabbin. How and where was the impact of COVID19 felt in our region, and what strengths and challenges did our region have in managing the pandemic? How can we use this data to improve life in our region?

Present:

- Elizabeth Quirk, Working Group Member
- Josh Nugent, UMass Biostats PhD student
- Amanda Watson, HRA Housing Consumer Education Center
- Alison Proctor, Opioid Task Force
- Gina Govoni, HRA Executive Director
- Kim Croce, Greenfield Housing Authority
- Phoebe Walker, FRCOG CHIP

Regrets: Jen Audley, Becky Himlin

Housing Assistance Data – Gina Govoni and Amanda Watson, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority presented on the use of RAFT in our region from April 2020 through October 2021. The HRA is one of ten agencies that give out RAFT funds in the state. Gina described the different funding sources for helping people avoid homelessness.

- One major impact was the COVID seriously expanded the list of who was eligible – people could earn more, and could own homes.
HRA is spending 400K per month now instead of pre-pandemic 40K per month, though they have been slowed by the national hiring challenges. This is because the RAFT cap was \$4K before, then \$10K, now cap for renters is 18 months of costs, no financial limit.
- We reviewed the town by town usage and discussed how people learned about it. It seems towns where people used RAFT already spread the word more quickly (a strength for those towns, but a weakness in towns with mostly homeowners and mostly those not currently relying on housing support).
- Josh – is the number of applications more or just the resources? Gina: Many people who used RAFT really need public housing or section 8, they need a longtime subsidy to match their income. The region could use 1000 housing choice vouchers!
- Wait time: currently 6.5 weeks processing time (worst time was 11) – state average. Fastest is 3.5 weeks.
- Who is being served (approved for funding). Note the HRA has no control over the gender/race/ethnicity options in the state application system. 70% identify as women, 85% as White, 17% as Hispanic.

- Who could not get the help?
 - Amanda: For many people there is too much documentation – birth certificates, SSN, and many people cannot find all of that. Some progress made by a new rule allowing HRA to consider a household based on someone there having existing qualification for MassHealth or DTA help. Alison shared that Allegheny County in PA has been working on this: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/News-Events/Accomplishments/DHS-Data-Warehouse.aspx>
 - Gina: also for a while landlords would not work with RAFT -- Now we pay tenants directly.
 - Amanda: now some people are reaching cap of 18 months and are being turned away.
 - Phoebe: Need the bill for one-stop application for WIC/SNAP/Housing Assistance/MassHealth/Heating Assistance to pass the Legislature!

- Strengths of the local service: collaborate with other agencies – CAPV, not as true elsewhere. Help with applications to other programs. They pick up the phone.

Timeline, format and use of final report : Group agreed to be done at the end of January, and to make the report available as both a PDF/report and slides with a script.

List the strengths we saw as a region in managing the pandemic (to be continued at the next meeting)

- Real strength in increasing food access during COVID
- Social networks spread the word about new resources well

Other reports from Working Group members

- a. Phoebe: Local Public Health Survey Data (posted on website – ran out of time to review at this meeting)
- b. Josh: Child Care and Mobility Data – data on people ‘s time outside the home. Leaving the home less results in less connection, closed child care seats pose a burden on parents (especially mothers).
Question: how many slots did the Y, Girls Club, JaDuke, Master Nam lose?
Lots of people are settling, or dropped out of labor market
- c. PVPC COVID dashboard Food Data – big increases in emergency food.
Discussion of free food vs. P-EBT – less waste, more dignified, but it was not possible for a lot of the pandemic to choose your own food pantry food.
TANF – lower now than before, perhaps due to stimulus check, unemployment (cliff effect)

2. **Set next meeting date:** We will meet in mid-December to gather strengths, and again in January after new American Community Survey Data is out to see if there is anything we need to learn from that before wrapping up the project.