

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
September 18th, 2023

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Ann O’Hanlon, Samantha Pedrosa, Stephanie Kanwit, Paul Almeida, Phillip Caldwell (DCHS), Esperita Bullard (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Matthew Walsh (Vice-Chair), Shawna Gary, Rachel Dienna, Allison Greenleaf

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:08p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the September meeting.

Phil Caldwell, Center for Adult Services, updates on Opioid Epidemic:

- Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA) is celebrating its 15th year of prevention through private/public partnership on September 27th.
 - The annual Alexandria Youth Leadership Conference just finished and was a week-long event that provided training and networking opportunities for emerging young leaders.
 - During the summit, students attended a series of interactive workshops and networked with 34 Alexandria community leaders, including the City Council.
 - Communication of SAPCA events and efforts is through email listserv, and social media platforms, i.e., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- The Adult Opioid Treatment program will also have an open house on September 27th between 1p-3p.
 - The Adult Opioid Treatment program provides medicated assisted treatment for opioid users and outpatient therapy.
 - Adult services use the City’s Public Information Office, and City email alerts as its primary form of communication for events and efforts.
- There is an Opioid Work Group that began in 2015, currently led by Emily Bentley.
 - It is a multi-agency partnership with representatives from school, police, public defender’s office, fire, and community partners to coordinate response to the crisis.
 - Efforts include:
 - In March 2023 a youth only 12-step program started.
 - A Spanish-speaking support group started for families to address the disproportionality of Latinx population affected by opioid use.
 - Providing training in schools on how and when to use Narcan.

- Providing recovery bags in schools and outpatient intakes that include Fentanyl strips, Narcan, and a card that provides information on who to call in case of an emergency.
- In July '23, two youth ambassadors were hired to work in schools with lived experience of addiction.
 - This approach has been found to be more effective for youth to speak to their peers than adults.

Challenges of tracking the youth opioid epidemic:

- It is hard to measure success because of the past year because of an unknown number of overdoses.
 - Currently, measuring interventions is how success is tracked.
- Data from past screenings has shown most of the youth have mentioned they have tried some kind of substance.
 - The concern today is that someone could try it and accidentally overdose because of fentanyl.
- When youth participate in outpatient intake, DCHS partners with the school's treatment team along with behavioral health support in schools.
 - For adult intakes, it is easier to find a bed for a male than it is for a female.
 - No residential support for youth.

Challenges in creating a youth medical detoxification inpatient program:

- Loudon County, Fairfax County, Prince William County, Alexandria City regionally attempted an opioid abatement and tried to get funding for a residential program specific to youth opioid use.
 - Encountered difficulty in finding vendor due to liability exposure.
 - RFP announced once and received limited responses. Those that responded wanted the facility to be attached to a hospital.
 - Additionally, the costs would be about 6.4-6.5 million dollars a year.
- The Juvenile Detention Center's current solution is using a shelter for youth involved in the legal system.
 - The challenge is that this is not a solution for all youth.
 - Most programs are monolingual and do not reach the most impacted community which speaks Spanish.

Data on Suspected overdoses:

- People under the 18th in the month of January-Feb-0, March 4, June-July 0
 - One juvenile overdose this calendar year out of the 13 fatal this calendar year, and 54 non-fatal.
 - The trend in data on nonfatal overdoses shows that it has remained steady.
 - 51 in '22, 54 in '23,
 - The same for fatal overdoses.

- 12 in '22, 13 in '23

Challenges with data:

- The data only captures emergency calls where Emergency Medical Services, and/or the Fire Department respond.
- The increased Narcan training allows people to self-treat without calling 911 and prevents accurate tracking of overdoses.

Ways to address Opioid Epidemic:

- Asking the community to be open source for our own family by continuing to normalize conversations about opioid use rather than stigmatizing it.
 - Support initiatives by the Opioid Work Group, and DCHS services.
 - Passing SAPCA's email blasts
 - When events happen in the community, continue to share the information with the neighborhood.

Approval of minutes: The minutes from June 26th, 2023, were approved by present SSAB members.

DCHS updates and report:

Summer youth employment program

- There were 202 participants.
- The average income per participant for the six weeks of employment was \$2,200.
- There were 217 job opportunities, and 55 employers (Healthcare, food services, professional, legal, and various more)
- Comcast donated laptops for seniors and rising juniors.

July Eviction Prevention:

- There are 366 new submissions and 145 evictions.
 - The average rent owed was \$7,000.
- To address people who are homeless due to the eviction, DCHS is working with Lutheran Social Services.
 - DC is doing lease training to help households understand maintaining the responsibility of a lease structured as a general know your rights program. DCHS will seek to do a similar program.
- There were 61 new households seeking rental assistance, with a total of 57 shelter intakes (40 singles, 17 families).

ARISE:

- The program is six months in and will host an event on September 20th from 6-7:30pm to provide updates.
 - The event will include a dinner, a movie, and the ARISE update.

- Abby Horrell (Chair) will resend information to SSAB members.

Medicaid Unwinding:

- The eligibility redetermination period began in April of 2023.
 - 2800 people have lost coverage because they have not completed renewal in time.
 - To address the surge and protect people from losing coverage, DCHS will host Medicaid Renewal events, from October-April 2024.
 - DCHS is attempting to reserve a Kaiser health van to hold an event to sign people up.
 - The only date available is December 16th and, due to the holidays, may not be the best time to get community engagement.
 - Currently there is a range of 3000-8000 cases due for renewal monthly.
 - There are currently 20,000 people on Medicaid in Alexandria and with the vacant positions, the caseloads are extensive, and it is a challenge to meet the demand.

Customer Relations:

- Currently receiving about 4,000 calls per month and lobby customer service is seeing 500+ people walk-in a week.
 - People primarily seek public benefits, homeless services, and rental assistance.
 - This amount is more than at the last location, but staffing is limited and challenging to meet with everyone who has a need.
 - People are placed in a call back queue and, the average wait for a call back is 8 hours.
- Previously requested from City Council additional positions but denied.
 - SSAB can help by sending an advocacy letter.

Budget updates:

- The City is currently entering the budget cycle with September 7th as the official kickoff date.
- The City Council will have their Budget Retreat during the first week of November.
- On November 14th the City council will sign off on City Council priorities.
- DCHS will get directions on what the target is for budget reductions.
 - This usually means that there will have to be cuts to a program.

Zoning For Housing/Housing for All Update and Discussion:

Discussion:

- There are people in the community providing feedback and opposing the proposal.
- The City's presentation needs to be easier for the lay audience to understand.
- The City plan has a minimal short-term effect and long-term effect on more affordable housing.

Action Steps:

- SSAB will express concern about communication to the lay audience and how Zoning for Housing does not address the affordable housing problem.
 - SSAB will be asking the City Council for more to be done regarding this.
 - Abby Horrell (Chair) will follow up with Lesa Gilbert to see if there is a broader housing package/response with other boards that the SSAB can sign on to.
- SSAB will continue to seek some more information from Housing related to the initiative instead of being ambassadors of the proposal.

Legislative package recommendations and discussion:

- The public and boards/commissions submission for budget priorities is due by the middle of October.
 - It is a part of the City's legislative package, and it is sent to Richmond.
 - There is a broad variety of approaches to submit requests.
 - Abby Horrell (Chair) will send options to SSAB members to complete on their own time to present.
 - Members can fill out a form.
 - Members can make it formal with a letter of request.
 - Examples from last year will be sent out.
- Abby Horrell (Chair) will follow up with Lesa Gilbert for information on regional human services of Fairfax and Arlington to see if SSAB can submit similar information.

Future Speaker:

- Shawna Gary, working with Sarah Taylor, Office of Communications & Public Information, about coming to the next SSAB meeting in October, but it may not be possible.

Update on SSAB member recruitment:

- SSAB member recruitment is still ongoing.
 - Matthew Walsch (Vice Chair) will be in touch with Volunteer Alexandria about the previous posting for member recruitment.
 - Abby Horrell (Chair) will continue to spread the word and encouraged the rest of SSAB members to continue spreading the word as well.

2023 meeting dates:

- October 16th, 2023
- The November date moved to November 27th due to Thanksgiving.
- The meeting date for December is to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 8:38p.m.