

Bridges Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2017

Council Members present: **Evette Bethel** (Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)), **Carlos Bing** (Ohio Department of Higher Education), **Stacia Burlingame** (Montgomery County JFS), **Fawn Gadel** (Family & Youth Law Center at Capital University), **Monica Gazarek** (Wood County JFS), **Jenny Gottfried** (The Village Network), **Danielle Green-Welch** (Cuyahoga County JFS), **Meredith Hicks** (Lighthouse Youth Services), **Mindy Hughes** (Lake County JFS), **Hon. Jim D. James** (Stark County Juvenile Court/ Judicial Workgroup on Bridges), **Arlene Jones** (COOHIO), **Holly Jones** (Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services), **Angela Lariviere** (Ohio Youth Empowerment Program), **Brian McIntosh II** (Youth Move), **Mark Mecum** (Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies), **Stephanie Nelson** (Supreme Court of Ohio), **Denise St. Clair** (Ohio Family Care Association), **Colleen Tucker** (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services), **Mary Wachtel** (Public Children Services Association of Ohio)

Also Attending from ODJFS: Betsy Bentsen, Chynna Kelley, Sarah Levels, and Jana Pearce

Welcome and introductions

All the members introduced themselves and explained what work they do with transitioning youth as there were a few new participants to the group.

Review and approve the charter

Based on a suggestion from a previous meeting, the tense of items E. 1-8 were changed to present. All suggestions from previous meeting were included in this draft of the charter. Motion for approval. Motion seconded. The charter unanimously approved.

Discussion regarding young adult that enrolls in Bridges at emancipation

Bridges staff are looking at current rules and working with the developers on any changes that may need to be made. Rules for the Bridges program will be housed in OAC 5101:2-50 (Chapter 50).

The group was asked to refer to the process maps that were included in the information packet for the meeting for the following questions:

What does a warm hand-off look like?

- 180 days prior to emancipation (custody terminated) the Bridges Program will be shared with the youth while the worker and youth are developing the Transition Plan.
- Ninety days prior to emancipation, a preliminary Bridges application will be completed by the PCSA IL worker or ongoing caseworker. Final determination will not be completed until custody is terminated. There was discussion as to whether ninety days is a realistic timeline. The point was made that at this time in a youth's life, they need the most support as possible, not less. Suggested that 180 days may be more realistic to avoid issues with paperwork that is needed (birth certificate, social security card, state ID). Some of the barriers can be time related and out of the control of the PCSA. The point was made that youth should have all these items prior to emancipating but there are times when it doesn't happen. It was suggested while the youth is helping develop their

Transition Plan, they receive a checklist with documents they should receive, and activities that should be completed, prior to emancipation. If the youth are aware, they can also advocate for themselves. There will be regular communication to ensure the list is complete prior to emancipation.

- A solution for document management was made that the documents be uploaded in the cloud. Then if the youth misplaces them, copies are available. Also the birth certificate, SSN card and other documents can be saved in the Ohio Benefits Bank (OBB) cloud. More discussion is needed on this process so that there is some semblance on uniformity in how counties are addressing this.
- The point was made that youth may originally reject Bridges but change their mind shortly before emancipation. There was some discussion of having an opt-out process like California and other states. In an opt-out process, all youth are enrolled in the program and legal status changes but their custody is not terminated. The youth are then terminated from the program when they either withdrawal or no longer meet program criteria. However, based on Ohio law, the young adult must volunteer to be in the program by signing a Voluntary Participation Agreement (VPA) and must have emancipated prior to VPA signature to be enrolled in Bridges.

Other considerations include:

- Ohio is the first state to go from county-administered to state-administered for this population
 - The funding structure was developed for an opt-in program
- There was a detailed discussion as to the purpose of the Bridges Program. The purpose of Bridges is to fill a gap where no existing system supports the needs of targeted youth. Per ORC5153.01, there is already an existing support in place for mentally or physically handicapped persons up to twenty-one years of age.

Questions posed included:

- Would adult DD eligibility be affected if a young adult was enrolled in Bridges?
- Is there anything Bridges would provide outside of what is provided under the existing system?

If youth is going to remain in agency custody past 18th birthday, is it required that custody is terminated to participate in Bridges?

- Yes. The youth must have been in PCSA custody and have emancipated. They will sign complete an application and sign a voluntary participation agreement to enter the program.

From the county perspective, what is a realistic number of interactions that the county can facilitate between the youth and the Bridges' worker?

- There was discussion for and against enumerating the number of visits in rule and whether rule was being developed as best practice or minimal contacts required. What if a youth decides to join later? Will county be expected to force visits to be rule compliant? Suggested that it is made clear to counties what needs to be completed prior to closing out with youth. Potential Bridges providers will be expected to have strong

youth engagement and relationship building skills and strategies. Any contact between the Bridges worker and the youth will be documented in SACWIS.

- It was recommended that there be an expectation that the Bridges worker is invited to all contacts during those last 90 days (if the youth is open to that). Council members supported this recommendation.

From the youth/young adult's perspective, would the youth feel comfortable opening up to or disclosing their needs to the Bridges' worker? If no, what would the youth need to develop rapport?

- The PCSA worker could meet with the youth prior to meeting the Bridges worker to review what is going to happen so that the youth can come up with questions for the meeting. This is a way to engage the youth. (Very similar to a youth centered permanency round table)
- Another suggestion was to create an opportunity where the Bridges worker, PCSA worker and the youth tour some sites (if housing is an area of need once custody is terminated). Or do some type of activity that is non-threatening and encourages conversation.
- Having a peer contact or peer support person to filter questions through would also be helpful.

Is there an avenue to foster the relationship with the prior Independent Living worker so this permanent connection can be supported?

- Social media is a way to continue that relationship or a way to reconnect with people who were with you when you were going through a certain life phase. The idea of peer leaders/peer mentors/peer support was raised again. Bridges participants will be encouraged to stay in contact with their local Youth Advisory Boards (YAB).

What kind of support is provided to a youth that has been denied for Bridges?

- If a young adult has been denied for Bridges, the youth will be referred to the PCSA post-emancipation worker (if they are not already engaged) or to other programs, such as the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP). The hope is through the youth's engagement with these other providers, the young adult will eventually get to a point where they are eligible and can then reapply.
- The youth can reapply or apply at any time prior to age 21.

Do we know what each county offers to emancipating youth?

- No, we do not have a formal list, just anecdotal information. 5101:2-42-19.2 requires each PCSA to provide services and supports to youth who emancipated from agency custody.
- There was a recommendation that each county is required to have an IL contact that is knowledgeable of post emancipation services.
- It was suggested that the information being shared with youth across the state needs to be consistent and accurate. If the youth are getting false information and getting passed around, the process does not start on a good foot.

Advisory Council Members provided examples how they have built collaboration and positive relationships with community housing agencies

Lighthouse Youth Services (LYS)

Worked to build a relationship with Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) to increase housing options for young people that age out of foster care. LYS continued to reach out and meet with CMHA and ultimately received vouchers for youth. CMHA has created a new local preference for youth aging out of foster care. This means they will rise to the top of the waiting list. They need to meet the eligibility screening and qualify (income standard—less than 50% area median income, and no criminal background). CMHA does not conduct a rental history check.

The exact language in the administrative plan is:

Youths aging out of foster care age 18-24: Youth who can verify that they were residents of a state-run foster care system within twelve months of the onset of adulthood or emancipation.

Lighthouse can make 30 referrals per fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) beginning on January 1, 2016. These youth are not guaranteed a voucher. Once they reach the top of the list, they come to CMHA to attend a briefing. Upon completion they receive the voucher. The next step is the RTA (Request for Tenancy Approval). This involves a background check on the owner/landlord and an inspection to meet CMHA housing standards. Rent guidelines are outlined in the RTA. These vouchers would work for parents with children and married couples. As long as the primary applicant meets the criteria. There is a 90 day voucher term between receiving the voucher and placement into an apartment. Youth can sign a form allowing Lighthouse staff to accompany them through the process and receive information from CMHA, but they are not required to.

An additional 30 vouchers can be allotted at the beginning of every fiscal year provided the previous 30 were used. If 30 are not used during the fiscal year, the remainder are simply removed from the preference group for that period.

The voucher is good anywhere in the U.S. If the youth has been in a non-Ohio system, they would have to live in Ohio for 12 months before being able to use the voucher elsewhere.

There is no expectation for case management services from Lighthouse. CMHA cannot enforce this as a condition of the voucher. This is an area that LYS is exploring as they are fully aware of potential issues youth experience in housing both with and without case management. There are issues of staff capacity and funding for an additional staff member to provide adequate case management and life-skills for the youth. If the youth is receiving another service through LYS, that employee could act as a case manager. A contract is developed with youth, but it cannot be made as a condition of receiving the voucher.

There are some other options via a local homeless coalition that can make 85 referrals/fiscal year under the homeless preference. Youth are receiving assistance to apply for these vouchers.

Currently youth that had been in DYS or experienced a disrupted adoption after age 16 are not eligible.

Cleveland 100 Day Challenge

Cleveland was one of three cities nationwide selected to participate and the team was led by *A Place 4 Me*. Goal: house 100 homeless youth ages 18-24 within 100 days and to strengthen support systems to prevent homelessness among youth who have aged out of the foster care system.

105 were housed by the end of the 100 days via: Rapid Re-housing, living with family or friends, renting on their own, permanent supportive housing or public housing. Success was achieved through the development of:

- By-name lists of all homeless young adults (ages 18 to 24) in Cuyahoga County. By-name lists are proven to be essential in tracking and updating data on the numbers and characteristics of individuals experiencing homelessness. A by-name list is a real-time tool to facilitate ongoing, collaborative efforts to re-house each client.
- Twelve navigators who work hand-in-hand with young adults on the by-name list as they take steps to achieve stable housing. Navigators connect clients to critical resources to ensure stability, including employment education, legal assistance, tenant training and more.
- Created a comprehensive resource guide for youth to make them aware of resources available in the community. There was also a fund created to assist with the purchase of beds, lodging kits, bus tickets, etc.
- Expanded the pool of age-appropriate housing options for young adults, including rental opportunities.
- Enhanced processes by the Division of Children and Family Services to proactively identify and strengthen support for young adults most at-risk of homelessness upon leaving the foster care system. These efforts have the goal of the young adult maintaining stable housing post-foster care.

Housing First Model

The primary goal of this model is to get housing first and then get all other needs met. Landlord cannot use any other criteria, such as criminal record, eviction history or credit history to deny an applicant. Program eligibility is the only requirement. Not all landlords follow the Housing First Model but council members felt that it is vital for Bridges vendors to understand the different models and how they can incorporate these characteristics into their work assisting Bridges' young adults find stable housing.

Indiana's landlord agreements

Indiana was cosigning on all the leases. An unexpected consequence was that youth leaving the program had no credit upon leaving the program, which was problematic for the young adult moving forward. Once this issue was identified, Indiana created a letter of introduction to landlords to explain the program, including supports that will be available to young people. The result has been more landlords being willing to rent to these young adults, therefore enabling them to begin to establish their own credit history.

These questions arose during the meeting and will need to be addressed prior to implementation:

- In some counties, if the youth is going to turn 18 on a weekend, the journal entry can indicate that as of XXX date, the custody is terminated. Is this OK? Does this impact eligibility? How many counties have this practice?
- Where will the youth go on the day that the custody is terminated and Bridges takes over? IF paperwork isn't approved yet, where will the young adult go? Will there be some kind of gap?
- Does ODJFS have the staffing structure to address the approval process? What will be the approval structure at ODJFS? Could presumptive eligibility (a Medicaid process) or retroactive eligibility be implemented?
- Can Chafee funds be used if the young adult will be Bridges eligible but there will be a short gap (a few days) before the VPA is final approved?
- If a youth has been denied for not meeting qualifications and they appeal the decision and while waiting for the appeal process their circumstances change making them eligible, do they have to re-apply? How do they communicate these changes?
- What will the appeal process look like? Will the young adult have support from someone other than the Bridges worker if they file and appeal and have a hearing?

Advisory Council members suggested these agenda items for the March 23rd meeting:

- Recommendations from the Bridges Judicial Workgroup
- Information about higher education opportunities (March or May)
- Sustainable (i.e. post Bridges) housing options. Where are they in the state? How can they be accessed?
- Common themes that have come up during the youth focus groups