

Barrier Busters Network Action Group

June 25 2008, LLRC

1:30pm—3:00pm

BBN Attendees:

Mary Beth Lampe, CSTS; Co-Chair (recorder)
Andrea Plevak, MSU Extension; Co-Chair
Paul Sher; Legal Services; Co-Chair
Harriet Bakalar, Housing Bureau for Seniors
Robin Banks, Neighborhood Senior Services
Barbara Blom, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County
Soni Buda-Thornburgh, Catholic Social Services
Karyn Boyce, Ozone House
Heather Mooney, Washtenaw County Treasurer's Office
Anne Harrell, WCHO/ACCESS
Colleen Joiner
Angela Killom, Michigan Ability Partners- MAP
Patrice LaGrand, Neighborhood Senior Services
Patricia Parker-Self, Veteran Services
Tammy Pong
Helena Prince, Friends in Deed
Sandy Reeber, ETCS
George Ridenour, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living
Anne Rogers, CSTS
Susan Sifuna, Salvation Army
Victoria Smith, POWER
Mira Sussman, Jewish Family Services
Julie Young, Turner Clinic

Staff Present: Candace Cadena (excused)

I. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting began at 1:30. Members and guests introduced themselves.

II. Announcements and Public Comment

George Ridenour from CIL reported that Mike Bell at CIL is still taking referrals for assisting people in transitioning from nursing home facilities, in conjunction with Area Agency on Agency and Ombudsman's Program.

Mary Beth Lampe reported there will be a Fair Housing Training 6/26/08 at 10:30 AM at LLRC.

Patrice LaGrand announced NSS bike-a-thon event is coming up. See www.nssweb.org/.

III. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Agenda was approved by consent. Minutes from the May meeting were approved with no changes.

IV. New Business

Harriet Bakalar from Housing Bureau for Seniors presented about the clutter versus hoarding, and the Hoarding Task Force, a group that has been meeting over the last 3-4 years. Contact info is: 734-483-9363 x 22 or clutterhelp@ewashtenaw.org. This task force does not have funding at this time but is made up of a group of individuals who have noticed the difficulty hoarding presents in preserving safe and appropriate housing, both for the individual/family and the surrounding community. Tries to use volunteers and existing service providers whenever possible.

Clutter is not the same as hoarding. Clutter can generally be discarded without much thought and does not interfere with function of the household, whereas to discard (or sometimes contemplate discarding) for someone who is hoarding increases their anxiety greatly. With hoarding, exits may be blocked, there is a larger volume of items, and the client perceives much of it to have "good value". Client may continue to add items to household, to the point of structural damage to the home. It is thought that Hoarding happens because of information process deficits (indecision, prioritization, categorization), perfectionism, capacity issues (cognitive, physical limitations, fragility: ex: when a senior can no longer reach cupboards). It also affects the family/other house hold members.

Tips for intervention were shared, including: Realize that it is hard for the helper not to do "for" the client – Remember this is not your house.

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Make a realistic contract with client – how much can the client do (at minimum) at one time?
Homework in between visits (helping all in one big swoop doesn't help in the long run)
Stop in-flow of items. DRAGS options for items: Dispose, Recycle, Archive (file), Give Away, Sell. MAIL
Files: To Do, Pay, Read, File

Helena Prince reported Friends In Deed would or could recruit volunteers for hoarding reduction efforts – perhaps congregations can help. Friends In Deed has experience matching volunteers. Harriet noted that this effort would not be successful without volunteers, especially given the magnitude of the problem and the fact that people often go unidentified for so long due to isolation and shame. The coalition has worked with some volunteers from congregations to help them train others but the availability of staff and time are the biggest barriers.

V. Old Business

Mary Beth Lampe reported that Candace Cadena was not able to attend today's meeting but that McKinley pledged \$15,000 to the County Eviction Prevention Fund and AACF and David Behen are approaching other landlords about contributing.

VI. Case Consultation

Discussion of Utilities: One person reported a concern that the City of Ypsi has assessed homeowner a surcharge for laying pipes that appeared to be as much as 80%, then owner was passing this cost on to tenant. Also, for DTE bills concern that bills can get very high yet DTE will not have them in shut-off, and shut-offs are required for most agency assistance. Shut-off is required for DHS State Emergency Relief Funding, and also for THAW funds. Helena reported that at Friends In Deed a shut-off is not always required – they will consider other situations on a case by case basis – but since their funding is small compared to the amount needed to resolve the problem, most bills that they fund are in shut-off. For these funds especially THAW and SER, if the customer has not paid a certain amount in recent months they may not be eligible. An educational approach was suggested to help people be aware of this, and also direct communication with DTE/utility company via the Barrier Buster. We would also like to know how to access the High Arrears case workers in DTE. Mary Beth Lampe is also trying to establish trainings with DTE so more agencies can have familiarity with DTE's online system and report commitment amounts & verify balances that way. Calls to DTE are taking much longer to get thru to case management, if they get thru at all.

Discussion of referring to other agencies: It was reported that agencies are continuing to refer clients to other agencies. We need to focus on the first Barrier Buster agencies managing/assessing the problem as much as possible. However, it was also reported that these are likely "new" clients who are not currently served by any agency so this is likely a capacity issue. It was also recommended that agencies communicate with 211 – to make sure that 211 has the correct understanding of what agencies do provide and when.

Catholic Social Services reported they do have food assistance available but don't have emergency money available. Others also reported an increase in gas card requests for which no resource was identified today.

Some prescriptions may be available under \$4 at some pharmacies. It is difficult to find funding for prescriptions when there is a lack of a long term plan of how to pay the next month, due to funders criteria. Work with consumer on budget. Does their housing cost or utility cost need to change? Connect to WHP, Medicaid, Medicare Assistance program if needed.

VII. BB Emergency Unmet Needs Fund Update

Funds are low, therefore some requests such as car repairs have had to be denied and requests that are reimbursable thru DHS are given higher priority.

VIII. Adjournment 3:00 pm. *Next Meeting is scheduled for August 27, 2008 at 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm (July meeting cancelled).*