

Barrier Busters Network Action Group

**October 24, 2007, LLRC
1:30pm—3:00pm**

BBN Attendees: Mary Beth Lampe, CSTS; Co-Chair
Andrea Plevak, MSU Extension; Co-Chair
Paul Sher, Legal Services of South East Mi; Co-Chair
Harriet Bakalar, Housing Bureau for Seniors
Mel Batkins, DHS
Barbara Blom, SAWC
Jennifer Brown, Salvation Army
Lisa Keefauver, Jewish Family Services
Amanda Martinez, POWER, Inc.
Christina Oliver, SOS
Pat Parker-Self, Veteran Services
Allison Polluck, Neighborhood Senior Services
Helena Prince, Friends in Deed
Sandy Reeber, ETCS
Shannon Richards, Washtenaw County Public Health
George Ridenour, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living
Nikke Smith, Neighborhood Senior Services
Peri Stone-Palmquist, Education Project for Homeless Youth
Mira Sussman, Jewish Family Services
Julie Young, Turner Geriatric Clinic Social Work

Staff Present: Emily Arents, CCWC (recorder)

Guest: Cynthia Maritato, DHS
Susan Reynolds Bunton, DHS
Alice Seifelt, DHS
Brian Shorkey, Washtenaw County Road Commission

I. Welcome/Introductions

Members and guests introduced themselves.

II. Announcements and Public Comment

The Treasurer's Office is having to events in the near future. One, Financial Fitness for Professionals, will be November 15 at Washtenaw Community College Morris Lawrence Building. The other, My Home, My Future, will be October 24 from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at Conference Room A of Mallets Creek Branch of the Ann Arbor Public Library.

Helena Prince announced that Friends in Deed still has funding available for employed, single mothers/women who need assistance with car repairs. Please contact her (office@friendsindeed.info) for more information.

III. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Mira Sussman suggested that the issue of 211 be added to New Business. Christina Oliver suggested that discussion of the transition of the Master Buster position be added to Old Business. The proposed agenda was approved unanimously with these two changes.

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Minutes from the September 26 meeting were unanimously approved without changes.

IV. New Business

A. Brian Shorkey, AICP Transportation Planner

Mr. Shorkey provided an overview of the capital improvement projects being considered by the Washtenaw County Road Commission. He shared with the group two draft lists: those projects funded under the current plan, and those projects that are being considered, but are currently unfunded. Mr. Shorkey is collecting public comments on these lists, which will be finalized in November. The goal of this process is to focus community projects, to keep the public informed about the Commission's progress, and to encourage careful planning.

Mr. Shorkey answered members' questions. A "capital improvement" includes any project costing more than \$100,000. Traffic lights, for instance, are not included in this category. Co-Chair Lampe asked if bridges and intersections near low-income housing, especially large apartment complexes, or areas where residents rely heavily on public transportation, are considered in prioritization. Mr. Sharkey reported that the plans are developed independent of social criteria, but made a note of the suggestion and will add social criteria to the prioritization process.

Mr. Sharkey welcomed any additional feedback, and asked that any more comments be directed to him within the next week. His email address is shorkeyb@wcroads.org. The distributed lists are posted on the Barrier Busters website in meeting materials. The Co-Chairs thanked Mr. Sharkey for coming.

B. DHS Updates

Mel Batkins and Cythia Maritato reported that as of October 1, State Emergency Relief (SER) funds are reinstated, and the process is the same. The only difference now is that the cap is lower. The cap for assistance for gas is \$350, and the cap for assistance for electric is \$350. As of October 24, most applicants (since October 1) have already reached the cap, meaning that they will be unable to receive SER funds until October 2008. DHS has a very small Emergency Services (ES) allocation for the month, which can be used until the month is out. The future of the fund is unknown at this point; much depends on the status of the state budget.

So far, DTE Energy has been very flexible with families, and has been willing to take SER into payment arrangements. However, structuring a payment arrangement is not always ideal, as plans are sometimes not sustainable long-term.

Harriet Bakalar asked if assistance could be requested for a back bill, if a family has had a shutoff, and electricity/gas has been turned on in another person's name. Ms. Maritato said that it would depend on the situation.

Questions about access to ES and SER were addressed. For homeless individuals with Section 8 vouchers who need assistance with the security deposit, SER should be addressed first. Then, the DHS caseworker will be able to address concerns. This kind of issue has also been resolved through a Barrier Busters request.

C. JET – Jobs, Education & Training

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Alice Seifelt of DHS delivered a presentation about the new policies under JET. The presentation is posted on the Barrier Busters website (http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/community_collaborative/BB/2007/October/agenda.html). As of October 1, the program is no longer a pilot program, but is in full implementation.

Questions

1. Could someone get Short-Term Family Support and then find they need to apply for regular support?

A: Yes. If that happens, the individual will have to give back the short-term support, but will not otherwise be prevented from seeking regular support.

2. If an individual receives Short-Term Family Support, is s/he then ineligible for other assistance?

A: No, the only support s/he would be ineligible for is regular support.

3. Are car purchases included in "post-employment" support?

A: Yes. This support would be provided by DHS or Michigan Works! System (MWS)

4. Does everyone in the household have to complete self-sufficiency time?

A: All adults over 18 must complete the time, excluding those 18 or 19 who are in high school and who will graduate before the age of 20.

5. Any disabled person, even if that person is in inevitable decline, is eligible for assistance, along with their spouse/caregiver(s).

D. Questions about the Referral Process

Members present raised questions about the current referral process among Barrier Busters, including 211. No members representing 211 were present at the meeting. Concerns were raised about accuracy of information about agencies, and appropriateness of referrals. Co-Chair Andrea Plevak said that it is the responsibility of individual agencies to ensure that the information 211 has to share is accurate. Without agencies' help in bolstering 211's information, such problems are unavoidable.

Members also had questions about the role of 211 in making requests. There was some confusion about the request policy. Some members had concerns that requests include incorrect information about particular cases, due to the structure of the agency. Members asked what documentation 211 is required to submit. 211 has the same membership agreement as other agencies.

Cynthia Maritato said that 211 is aware of the issues with the current system, and steps are being taken to alleviate these, and other, concerns about work completed so far. Meetings including 211 will occur in the next 2 months to address these very issues. For instance, when a caller speaks with 211, the call-takers have no way of knowing whether the individual has an open case at a particular agency. In effect, call-takers are forced to be case managers with very limited information. The initial plan was that 211 would make requests in very simple cases, to lighten the load on agencies, and drawing from the 211 Eviction Prevention fund. This might have to be revisited.

Ms. Maritato also reported that later in the week the Barrier Busters funders will meet to talk about how funds flow, how the system is working, and if any refinement or tweaking is necessary. The objective will be a fiscally sound process, no more complicated than it needs to be. Included in this meeting will be Maritato from DHS,

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211, representatives from the County and City governments, and Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation.

There was general agreement that all Barrier Busters members would be reminded that regular attendance at Network Group meetings is a membership requirement.

Members raised concerns about the best ways for all Barrier Busters agencies to communicate. Christina Oliver suggested that the request system, Encompass (or any system that might replace it), could act more as a means to communicate.

In the interest of time, the discussion was tabled for the November meeting.

E. Future Meetings

Emily Arents distributed a list of the proposed dates for Barrier Busters Network Group meetings for 2008. None of the scheduled meetings interfere with national holidays. The list was approved without objection.

Co-Chair Andrea Plevak asked which Network Group members had already seen the presentation about the housing study recently completed by the Office of Community Development. Since very few people had seen it, the Co-Chairs will explore the possibility of inviting a representative from the Office, or acquiring a copy of the report for distribution, depending on availability.

V. Old Business

Report on File Review

Emily Arents provided a brief report about the audit she completed during the late summer. Upon reviewing the 25 agencies that filed requests between May 2006 and August 2007, she concluded that a checklist or guideline of the documentation that should be kept for Barrier Busters requests. She distributed a draft checklist for Network Group members to review. Discussion of the proposed checklist was tabled for the November meeting.

Ms. Arents has prepared individual reports for the audited agencies. She will wait to distribute these reports until the checklist has been developed further and approved by the Network Group.

Transition Update

There was discussion about the transition in staff, as Master Buster Mike Scholl has moved to the Office of Planning and Environment. The Co-Chairs will meet with Deputy County Administrator David Behen in the coming weeks to talk about a permanent replacement for Mr. Scholl's position. For the time being, Mr. Scholl will continue as the Master Buster, so that funding is not interrupted.

There was general agreement that Mr. Scholl will be missed, and consensus that a staffperson who is not involved in casework is vital.

VI. Case Consultation

In the interest of time, no case consultation was presented.

VII. BB Emergency Unmet Needs Fund Update

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Cynthia Maritato announced that the ES contract is not currently available. Barrier Busters funds will come from the community for the time being.

IX. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 3:12 pm

***The Next Meeting is scheduled for
Wednesday, November 28, 2007 –
1:30 pm – 3:00 pm***