

Barrier Busters Network Action Group

March 26, 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
Lisa Anderson, University of Michigan
Alex Bailey, Michigan Ability Partners
Harriet Bakalar & Amanda Chingman, Housing Bureau for Seniors
Mel Batkins, DHS
Barbara Blom, SAWC
Bonnie Guest, ETCS
Anne Harrell, ACCESS/WCHO
Edwina Jarrett, WCC
Marcie Kerr – Child Care Network
Stephanie Kiser, MAP
Michelle Leaphart, SOS
Pat Love, HARC
Beth Manuel, Ann Arbor District Library
Kelly Martin, Peace Neighborhood
John Miley, Red Cross
Heather Mooney Washtenaw County Treasurer's Office
Angela Moore, Women's Center
Jody O'Bryan
Allison Pollock, Neighborhood Senior Services
Helena Prince, Friends in Deed
Shannon Richards, Public Health
George Ridenour, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living
Susan Sifuna, Salvation Army
Kelly Stupple
Mira Sussman, Jewish Family Services
Therese Taylor, DHS
Anna Tolis, St. Joe's Senior Health
Naomi Williams, Hope
Julie Young, Turner Geriatric Clinic

Staff Present: Candace Cadena, Office of Community Development

I. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting began at 1:35. Members and guests introduced themselves.

II. Announcements and Public Comment

Candace Cadena requested that if at all possible, financial requestors choose the "Mail" Check option on Encompass. B & B sends out the payment the same or the next day, if it cannot be paid electronically. Some checks when requested to be "picked up by Barrier Busters" have not been picked up promptly, and when that check later is cancelled or changed there are fees associated. Please do not have the client pick up a check from B & B's office. If you need a confirmation that Barrier Buster Fund intends to pay please contact Candace (contact info below).

Naomi Williams from HOPE Clinic reported that they will be issuing a moratorium on awarding new commitments for funds after April 1st, due to lack of funding.

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Mira Sussman requested agencies or Barrier Busters be in contact with her if you are receiving requests on behalf of Iraqi refugees.

Mary Beth Lampe reported that Ann Arbor Public Housing Waitlist is open on 3/31/08 for an unknown limited period of time.

Heather Mooney distributed money smart flyers, and info is also available on website <http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/treasurer/>.

Andrea Plevak noted that Emily Arents' assistance as intern has ended as Emily will not be able to continue thru the summer as previously hoped. The group expressed appreciation for Emily's dedication, particularly with the recent request reviews.

III. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Agenda was approved by consent. Minutes from the February meeting were approved as motioned by John Miley and seconded by Beth Manuel.

IV. New Business

a. Department of Human Services/DHS Updates: Mel Batkins distributed a detailed handout about SER- State Emergency Relief, a copy of a blank SER application, and a copy of the DHS 1171 ("long form" revised 12-2007). Both the full DHS 1171 Assistance Application and the SER application are needed and an interview is needed if the person is not active in a DHS program. The "old" DHS 1171 is being phased out and by July of 2008 everyone should use the blue and white version, which has pictures to indicate which sections to fill.

Walk-in hours are 8 AM to 11 AM Monday thru Friday (except Wednesdays).

Applications may be downloaded or printed from www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Some items not covered by any SER funding any more include: beds, appliances, furniture, household items.

SER requests fall into two categories: Energy (Heat, Electricity, Furnace Repair, etc.) and Non-Energy (rent/back rent/security deposits, home repairs, mobile home lot rent, required security deposit, taxes, utility/water, burials)

Consider Need: Must have verified need, such as shut-off notice or court summons or judgment or be on the streets homeless or living in a shelter. A "Demand for Possession or Non Payment of Rent Notice" (often first written notice a tenant will receive) does not suffice per DHS guidelines but a Summons or Judgment would. It was clarified that living with friends or family is not homeless for SER purposes. Moving to use a Section 8 voucher or housing subsidy or to switch schools also does not qualify for SER per DHS, even if current lease is expiring.

Consider limits: There are limits of help for Non-Energy based on household size, and housing must be affordable. Affordable is defined per DHS as shelter cost must not exceed 75% of total net income, adding percentages for specific utilities included. It was noted that this is an easier affordability standard to meet than other agencies, and people who meet it may still have a very hard time maintaining bills. Authorization up to the "cap" amount if qualifies. Lifetime Cap of \$2,000 for mortgage and tax payments (for homeowners).

Assets & Income: Must be verified, for all people in the household including adult children who may be living with family members in the same household. Anything above \$50 cash assets must be used toward the emergency. Assets that are not cash have a higher exclusion amount. Mandatory child support, taxes, health insurance, gets deducted from income. Some applicants have automatic non-cash asset eligibility (if only in one program such as SSI or food assistance).

Client Caused: There are amounts that a client(s) must have paid toward their housing in the past 6 months to be eligible for non-energy funds. For energy funds, must have paid at least a set amount

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per month on the utility. If the household had income at or below the amount listed in the “good cause” table then an exception could be made, or unexpected employment expenses that exceed the amount for their shelter.

Utility requests have a cap within the fiscal year (Sept until Oct of the next year). Non-Energy requests are per event or incident (does not have a max # of times per year – however need must still exist, such as eviction process or homeless, and there is a max \$\$ amount per request).

Shortfall means amount that DHS subtracts from the amount need to resolve the emergency – usually the amount subtracted is approximately equal to income the client had available to them. Just because shortfall is listed does not mean DHS can’t assist on the bill, but the shortfall must be paid by the client or a different community fund/agency before SER would be approved.

How do we know if a client is currently active at DHS? Mel Batkins requested to check with her if there is a question. She can check electronically.

Utility bills must have name on bill of applicant or spouse. Addresses must match. (Sometimes people have more than 1 address linked to their account – DHS can only pay @ one address.)

Q. How do we educate consumers that “vendoring” usually does not pay the entire bill? ETCS and other agencies have noticed that some customers with very large bills of (\$2000 or more) seem to have accumulated this balance over time and the customers always report that they thought DHS was covering their bill. Mel Batkins will educate DHS staff about need to clarify.

Q. What about timing of SER and accessing other agencies/Barrier Busters? Mel Batkins stated you can always ask the DHS worker to give a decision prior to the 10 day standard but it is likely that the worker has just as many other cases for which exceptions have been requested. It was noted that we can assist customers in determining whether they might be eligible for SER prior to referring to DHS (for instance a “client caused” situation will not be paid unless there was good cause.) If your agency or fund can contribute toward a specific SER need, it is always a good idea to fax that information to the DHS worker.

b. Eviction: Paul Sher, Legal Services, provided a review of elements of the Eviction process and lead discussion about associated resources. If clients go to court prior to having a legal consult, they can always ask the judge for time to get legal counsel and usually the proceedings will be postponed.

Paul provided example copies and explanations of paperwork involved in eviction.

1. Demand for Possession or Non Payment of Rent (sometimes called 7 Day Notice to Quit) : the first step. The landlord issues this to tenant. Does not have to be this form but must clearly designate amount of rent owed and that landlord could take tenant to court if the tenant does not pay or move. This does not mean the client has to move out immediately though. The tenant can “ignore” this
2. SUMMONS– this needs to have a case number, signature, and date and the COMPLAINT/NON PAYMENT OF RENT should be attached. Can’t be issued until at least 7 days after Demand for Possession (#1). Will have court date and time listed. Client may have as little as 3 business days warning prior to court date. Will list amount of rent owed (this amount may be different than in the Demand for Possession since it may now be a new month). Client should go to court even if hasn’t gotten legal counsel yet – if client does not attend a “default judgment” could be issued. Client can ask judge for time to consult legal counsel even if client does not plan to bring legal counsel to court with them. (Note: Summons and Complaint is sufficient for SER at DHS purposes but you should also get an updated ledger from landlord as soon as possible so you can determine what is owed to date, which payments were made, where client should apply, etc.)
3. Judgment – try to avoid this because by this point 150-200 would be added on for filing plus 75 for attorney fees to what is owed. Also, the whole amount must be paid to clear a

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- judgment. (No payment arrangements). Judgments hurt credit record. Sometimes representatives for landlords try to get clients to sign agreements in the hallway of the courts—typically this should be avoided.
4. Writ/Order of Eviction – Landlord can apply for this on or after the 11th day up to the 56th day after the judgment was issued, without a hearing. To be valid a Writ must be signed by the judge.
 5. Then Sheriff's Dept (possibly Jimmy Moore?) posts the order of eviction, notifying the person that they must leave within 24 hours or be removed.

Request can be filed to set aside judgments (especially if there is a complaint against the landlord such as the notification was improper, landlord did not keep up repairs, or if the client/community sources now have the money needed to catch the rent up). The timeline can occur slower than above if landlord waits to file or if court dates are already full.

Subsidized housing residents should consult Legal Services early, at "Notice to Quit" stage. Legal Services will try to advise callers of next step even if case isn't taken on for representation. Much information from Michigan Tenants Counseling is also available "self-serve" online or via email at **michigantenants.org**. Many customers also access Legal Services via phone, or via appointment on the Tuesday afternoon clinic. Fair Housing Center is available for cases of discrimination.

Military service personnel may have rights to longer notice periods. (It was noted by the group that some local military personnel are still active and are not receiving military checks in a timely manner, resulting in utility and housing payment problems.)

V. Old Business

Agency agreements are due – please submit if yours are outstanding.

VI. Case Consultation

Case consultation update was presented by Helena Price concerning a homeless woman who had been staying near churches in a car. PORT is now trying to connect her to a new program thru Avalon Housing for chronically homeless persons.

Mira Sussman reported about a request Jewish Family Services received for tuition assistance for a college student who has a rare medical condition that can only be treated by UM Hospitals. Family had relocated here due to Hurricane Katrina. Ann Arbor News had written article about 2 years ago and St. Andrews also assisted greatly. Student visas do not allow work. Mira would like suggestions. Minsu Longiaru noted that she has a list of private foundations that may cover tuition regardless of citizenship.

VII. BB Emergency Unmet Needs Fund Update

The accounting audit is completed. The Tri-Chairs and Candace Cadena will report as results become available.

Please continue to submit appropriate requests for funding. Funds are currently low for general use but funds are sufficient for seniors 60+ and City of Ann Arbor utilities. Candace will continue to approve requests which are absolute emergencies but asks the group to remember to use the "Network" of Barrier Buster contacts to access resources from other agencies whenever possible so that that the general funds are available for those who don't meet other agency requirements.

VIII. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:55 pm.

***The Next Meeting is scheduled for
April 23, 2008 –
1:30 pm – 3:00 pm***