Hunger Council of Washington County

Hunger Council of Washington County Meeting Minutes
Meeting Date: April 12, 2019
Met via conference call

Present:
Marisa Parent (Vermont Department of Health), Vin Livoti (Vermont Department of Libraries), Rita Durgin (Family Assistance - Vermont Army National Guard), Karen Nelson (Vermont Department of Health), Beth Burgess (Vermont 2-1-1), Whitney Shields (Vermont Law School)

Co-Chairs: Tawnya Kristen (Green Mountain United Way) and Eileen Peltier (Downstreet Housing and Community Development)
Hunger Free Vermont Staff: Faye Mack

**Welcome & Introductions**
Tawnya and Eileen welcomed everyone to the Hunger Council’s quarterly meeting, and the group introduced itself.

**The Governor’s Opioid Coordination Council 2019 Report**
Eileen Peltier shared background information about the Governor’s Opioid Coordination Council. This is the 2nd year of the Council and Eileen serves as the housing representative. She is focusing on the recovery part of the work. This year’s report recognized a major gap in supporting recovery, and so that part of the work is ramping up.

The Council also commissioned a recent report that identifies a very strong need for housing and recovery residences in addressing substance use disorder. Some key highlights from the report are:

- 1 in 10 individuals over the age of 12 are struggling with substance use disorder.
- Vermont has the 2nd highest rate of substance use disorder in the nation, after the District of Columbia.
- 75% of people in treatment are Medicaid-eligible, meaning the majoring of those in treatment are very low-income.
- Substance use disorder is greatest among Vermonters aged 18-25.
- Vermont has about 200 beds in recovery residences, but needs about 1,200. The need for residences is highest for mothers with children.

Vin Livoti shared that the Department of Libraries has been a member of the Council since its inception. They have developed “healing kits” for families with a person in recovery. They are distributed in public libraries. The kits include books and activities that help families with someone in recovery talk about the experience. This is one program in the wrap-around services identified in the Council’s 2019 report for Vermonters who are moving out of treatment and into the phase of their journey.

Faye Mack highlighted that afterschool programs were identified in the report as an important tool to serve youth. The after school hours are the most dangerous for youth, and strong programming (and meal programs) provide a safe and healthy place for youth to go. Thanks, in part, to the findings of this report, there is a new grant program being launched for afterschool programs.
Tawnya Kristen shared about the partnership Green Mountain United Way is in with Central VT Substance Abuse and national group called The Phoenix. The Phoenix seeks to help individuals establish sober community through fitness. They are providing free crossfit classes for people in recovery in Vermont - starting in Berlin and Hyde Park. The “fee” is 48 hours of sobriety before entering a class. People are on a journey of recovery, but that is not their sole source of identity - they are building a new community and a new life. The program launched in December 2018, and already there are 25-30 people coming to each class, and they have expanded to add a class in Barre and a yoga class, and two gyms in Burlington are getting ready to launch programs. This program has already had such a positive impact on those participating and is growing quickly.

Tawnya shared that those who attend the Phoenix classes are ready to make positive changes in their lives, but face barriers to food access. It is expensive to eat like an athlete and to eat healthy. The Hunger Council discussed that it is a very real challenge to afford healthy food on a 3SquaresVT budget, and that can be even harder for those with a special diet, from living with diabetes or celiac disease, trying to afford healthy or organic foods, or trying to follow a medically tailored diet. The Vermont Farm Bill Nutrition Coalition advocated for pilots to supplement 3SquaresVT benefits for medically tailored diets and to increase the food benefit for all participants in the 2018 Farm Bill, but were not successful.

The Phoenix program is exploring a possible scholarship program to help people attend more crossfit classes, as well as scholarships to help pay for healthy food. Faye shared that Hunger Free Vermont is launching a new Nutrition Education Hub online that will have The Learning Kitchen curriculum and other nutrition and cooking education resources that could help people explore how to eat healthy foods on a low budget.

**Universal School Meals Campaign - Updates and Next Steps**

In the December 2018 Hunger Council meeting, Council members discussed the growth of universal school meal programs in Vermont and next steps to move toward a statewide model. In this meeting, Faye Mack shared an update on Hunger Free Vermont’s work to increase understanding and excitement about the model in the State House. Hunger Free Vermont has had great opportunities this session to connect with lawmakers and share information about universal school meals and its benefits. Universal School Meals is also connected to advocacy in support of Farm to School funding and in support of raising the minimum wage. This year’s School Nutrition Day, hosted by HFVT, VT FEED, and the School Nutrition Association of Vermont, was bigger than in years’ past. About 30 Hunger Council members, school nutrition program staff, and school representatives joined the three organizations to talk with legislators and testify in key committees. The day was well-received.

Karen Nelson attended School Nutrition Day and shared that it was a great opportunity to connect with legislators and she was impressed with their engagement on the topic.

This past Monday, April 8th, about 30 legislators visited a local school to eat a school breakfast or lunch, to further expose legislators to the good work happening in school meal programs. Many schools and legislators have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect in the school.

Faye also shared a document with key talking points and messages about universal school meals. Hunger Council members are encouraged to try using them when talking about hunger or school meals, and to share with Faye any feedback on how it goes to use these points. The Hunger Council reflected on the talking points, and asked about how to respond to questions about cost.
Faye shared some tips about bringing the conversation to the big picture, and also shared that as HFVT determines what the cost would be, the Hunger Council will have the opportunity to talk about related messaging. The group will spend more time on this in a future meeting.

Tawnya Kristen shared that when the Hunger Council first saw the universal school meals video a few years ago, it seemed like a great idea, but kind of impossible. Now, after years of groundwork has been laid, it does feel possible.

**Legislative and Advocacy Update**

Vin Livoti shared that the Department of Libraries holds a monthly speaker series for state employees and for the general public called Tuesday Talks. The group is interested in holding a session on food insecurity and hunger in Vermont on November 19th and would like some folks from the Hunger Council to speak.

Faye Mack gave an update on legislative initiatives related to food insecurity and economic security, including funding Farm to School and Early Childhood, raising the minimum wage, establishing a paid family & medical leave insurance program, addressing access to childcare, and addressing gaps in Reach Up. A brief update is below - contact Faye (fmack@hungerfreevt.org) for more details.

The Farm to School Network continues to advocate for the state to fully fund Farm to School and Early Childhood at $500,000/year. This year the Governor proposed a $50,000 reduction in funding for the program. The group is advocating for restoring that cut and continuing to increase funding. The budget passed by the House restored that cut. The group is also working with legislators to explore additional ways to increase local food in school meal programs. Right now, the Senate is considering the budget and needs to hear from constituents in support of Farm to School funding - if anyone would like to share their support, reach out to Faye.

Both increasing the minimum wage and establishing a paid family and medical leave insurance program are important levers in helping more Vermonters maintain good paying jobs and reach stable economic security. Bills similar to this years’ bills on both issues were vetoed by the Governor last year, but are making their way through the legislature this year.

Hunger Free Vermont supports other key advocacy this year, including a comprehensive approach to supporting access to high quality affordable childcare and better funding Reach Up to meet the program’s mission.

Tawnya Kristen shared that Hunger Free Vermont led a powerful training with childcare providers through a Working Bridges program that helped providers learn more about nutrition, cooking well on a budget, and how to bring this knowledge into their childcare settings, their children’s home lives, and their own personal lives.

**Mapping Food Retailers Project Update**

The subcommittee working with Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission to develop an interactive map to help the Hunger Council identify gaps in access to nutritious food at the retailer level in the region have continued to meet throughout the winter. Faye Mack shared that the group met recently to further refine the data incorporated in the map, and is meeting again to review the next draft on April 18th, 9:45-11:15. The group plans to bring a final draft to the
Hunger Council in May to share with the Hunger Council and discuss how to use the map. Anyone is welcome to attend the next meeting; fresh eyes are helpful!

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<th>Family SASH Pilot</th>
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<td>Eileen Peltier shared information with the Hunger Council about the SASH program and the plans to pilot an expanded program that supports families with children.</td>
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SASH - Support and Services at Home originally launched seven years ago in Vermont to serve Medicare-eligible people (people aged 60+ and/or with a disability). The long term goal of the program program is to shift healthcare costs through prevention work. The program has been highly successful and has resulted in savings in both Medicaid and Medicare spending. The model is being replicated across the country.

Eileen is part of a group working to plan and design a pilot to expand SASH to serve families as well. The goal is to launch in central Vermont, likely in early 2020. Right now they are getting input from potential community partners and potential participants. The program could help support families’ food security. Through surveying, the group has seen that many families experience food insecurity. When surveyed about their interest in a variety of activities and services, an on-site food shelf and community meals/potluck meals ranked the highest.

Faye Mack asked about the Governor’s budget proposal to cut funding for SASH. Eileen shared that the Governor would like SASH to be funded through One Care, not the state budget, because of its impact on health care costs. The House has restored funding, and it’s likely to be restored by the Senate as well. They are optimistic the program will maintain its funding.

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<th>Announcements &amp; Group Discussion</th>
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