



Department of Human Services

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Family Resource Network (FRN) Regional Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, July 11, 2024

3:00-4:30pm, MS Teams

Attendance

Present

- Robin Bohannan
- Susan Caskey
- Marc Cowell
- Suzanne Crawford
- Elizabeth Crowe
- Jorge De Santiago
- Jennifer Leosz

Absent

- BVSD (Vacant Seat)
- Dr. Perla Delgado
- Kaycee Headrick
- Nancy Herbert
- Tom Mahowald
- Lexi Nolan
- Christina Pacheco
- Mandy Perera
- Simon Smith
- Karin Stayton
- Anne Tapp
- Johnny Terrell
- Julie Van Domelen

Staff Present

- Georgina Becerril
- Bill Cole
- Katrina Harms
- Liz Izaguirre
- Susana Lopez-Baker
- Joni Lynch

- Daphne McCabe
 - Gwen Mossman
 - Whitney Wilcox
 - Hilda Zamora Hursh
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Welcome and Introductions

The Family Resource Network (FRN) Regional Council Meeting was called to order by Marc Cowell at 3:02pm. Liz Izaguirre, the new FRN Coordinator with Boulder County Human Services, was introduced.

Approval of April 2024 FRN Regional Council Meeting Minutes

Due to a lack of quorum, voting to approve April 2024 meeting minutes was postponed until the next meeting.

Recap of April Meeting and Needs Buckets

Whitney provided a summary of the safety net needs analysis conducted during the April Regional Council Meeting. Overall, organizations reported a rise in assistance needs with many organizations reporting cuts (experienced and/or anticipated) in local, state, and federal funding. As a result of this challenging funding landscape, some organizations have had to make the difficult decision to reduce access to services and/or the amount of assistance provided. These needs and gaps were organized into four “buckets,” or service areas: housing and rental assistance, food security, healthcare access, and childcare. The goal is to now use this “bucket list” to explore strategies and potential partnerships across the FRN to maximize the group’s impact and avoid duplication of efforts.

Funding Landscape and Safety Net Discussion

Elizabeth provided a framework for the funding landscape and safety net discussion by affirming that the “bucket list” items developed based on the April Meeting match what service providers have been experiencing for quite a while. She affirmed that the goal of today’s meeting was not to identify problems and decide how much money would be needed to fix them but instead to encourage the group to begin thinking creatively about how these challenges might be tackled collectively. She then asked the group to provide feedback as to any new areas that have popped up since the April Meeting or any additions to existing areas so that this working list reflects the existing needs of our clients.

Regarding CCAP, Susan commented that rates are increasing while the available funds are decreasing. As a result, Boulder County has been informed by the State that they should prepare for a 22% reduction in CCAP participants or enrollment. Because we cannot disenroll individuals from the program, it is anticipated that it will take approximately 3.5 years to reach this level through participant attrition. However, Boulder County Human Services (BCHS) is working with the State as well as the Commissioners to see what additional support might be available to mitigate service-level impacts.

Daphne identified some FY25 resources with Medicaid and CHP+ that are important components of community partner education. For example, there are automatic enrollments and age-related benefits that could perhaps help members advocate for clients if someone erroneously loses Medicaid.

Jorge discussed the need for mental health services – particularly among middle and high school students, seniors, and immigrant populations. With ARPA funding ending, meeting this need will be particularly difficult.

The network agreed that the items discussed in the meeting along with those captured in the summary document reflected the existing landscape of needs and gaps across the County. Marc then asked the group to consider (keeping in mind not just funding but also creative collaboration across the network) which bucket item(s) they would like to prioritize and work to address – keeping in mind those areas for which collective efforts might provide the largest reward (i.e., low hanging fruit).

Jennifer provided some context to the Clinica/MHP merger by emphasizing that they were not looking to reduce services. Instead, they will be working to combine their structural resources in order to optimize service delivery while also researching potential whole health funding as a way of dealing with the impacts of the Medicaid unwind.

Robin affirmed the need to come together as partners during this difficult funding landscape and begin to normalize having these challenging discussions around prioritizing efforts. In unprecedented times such as these, the network must fight against the urge to turn inward and protect their own corners and instead stand firm in the commitment to explore new partnerships and collective problem-solving to address service needs.

Katrina mentioned Peak-to-Peak's current focus of having "no silos" such that different spokes of the social determinants of health wheel are connected via communication and shared resources.

Elizabeth mentioned benefits enrollment (e.g., SNAP, WIC, etc.) as a possibility for where small adjustments in current practices might potentially result in large impacts for those qualifying for services – referencing SNAP and the Benefits in Action (BIA) contract. Susan agreed that since SNAP is a benefit not currently slated for funding reductions that food security might be a good next focus area for the FRN. She provided some additional historical context as to why the BIA contract was signed (i.e., lower SNAP enrollment in Boulder County compared to other areas) and how the BIA contract is intended to assist in identifying and overcoming barriers to SNAP enrollment.

General discussion followed surrounding how to fill-in gaps in data in identifying the target populations for SNAP enrollment as well as the need to incorporate community member feedback into this effort. Georgina described some of BCHS's efforts to engage with the community over SNAP and offered to bring the results of these discussions to a future FRN meeting. Network members agreed that the issue appeared to be two-fold: communication and

coordination among the various agencies involved in food security efforts to include not just SNAP but a full continuum of programs (e.g., WIC, community food pantries, etc.).

Marc mentioned the challenge that the OUR Center is experiencing as they transition away from COVID response efforts involves no longer directly funding needs/gaps but rather having staff act as navigators to connect individuals and families to existing resources from partner agencies across the County. There is a broad brushstroke need right now to focus on the prevention side of the intervention spectrum instead of responding primarily to acute needs. Suzanne agreed that Sister Carmen was experiencing a similar scenario and that with respect to SNAP benefits, it is difficult to identify the root cause for why an individual does not wish to apply for the program. General discussion followed regarding the cumbersome existing process for SNAP enrollment (e.g., applicant's perceived burden versus limited financial benefit, work requirements, etc.) and potential points for advocacy – particularly with the County Commissioners.

Discussion then transitioned to the potential for a shared goal of increasing enrollments in public assistance programs across the board whether it be direct cash assistance programs (i.e., the BCHS Nurturing Futures program and City of Boulder's Elevate Boulder program), Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, or other programs. Alongside this goal would be a desire for shared data to include items such as target enrollment numbers, percentage attained, and anecdotal stories relating the success of these efforts which would allow members to educate funders and the community at large on the positive impact(s) of increase public assistance program enrollments. Susan added that a key component of this strategy would be to work together on a coordinated approach to community education, outreach, and communication. The group agreed that having materials that are easily digestible, accessible, and distributable for anyone in the community who might be intervening in the capacity of a systems navigator (whether that is their formal job title or not) would be desirable. A brief discussion surrounding potential connections between the amount of food distributed by local food banks and willingness of clients to apply for SNAP benefits took place. Lastly, members discussed the importance of involving other collaboratives that might be addressing similar concerns (e.g., Food Safety Network, Boulder County Health Improvement Collaborative, etc.) so that efforts are amplified instead of duplicated.

Robin circled the conversation back to the initial "bucket list" of needs and asked the Family Resource Centers if the FRN list seemed representative of feedback that they were receiving from community members. Marc discussed a survey OUR Center conducted among its clients about a year ago and reported that the top four ranked concerns were accessible/affordable housing, living wages that keep pace with inflation, food security, and accessible/affordable childcare. Suzanne agreed that the listed items matched Sister Carmen's experience although they are definitely starting to see an increase in clients coming in because of medical debt or with health concerns (i.e., they are not seeking care they need because of cost concerns). Robin then expressed that she felt that the food insecurity piece was potentially an area that this group could focus on because of the more tangible impact in this area coupled with the fact that when people spend less money on food, they have funds freed up to spend on other areas of need (e.g., housing, medical care, etc.).

Suzanne and Bill both mentioned that Commissioner Loachamin has reached out desiring community input into how the County should use the affordable housing tax funding. Suzanne offered to compile everyone's feedback from this meeting (or emailed separately to her) and forward it along to the Commissioners.

Next Steps and Closing Remarks

Marc asked the group what the network's tangible takeaway should be with the goal of increasing its agility to respond to community needs during this season of rapid change. Several members discussed the importance of sharing the challenges facing human services organizations with the Commissioners and advocating for the prioritization of community needs. Robin reminded the group that at one time the Commissioners attended FRN meetings and recommended that the network re-engage with policy makers as proponents of systems level change. Elizabeth agreed and emphasized the need for common messaging among member organizations that invites others to join the effort (i.e., here's how you can join us to boost the critical work to keep community members housed, fed, and in good health). Susan also mentioned the added value of bringing organizations' communication teams into the conversation to assist in creating shared materials and messaging.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:27pm.