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Family Resource Network (FRN) Regional Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 12, 2024

3:00-4:30pm, MS Teams

Attendance

Present

- Robin Bohannan
- Marc Cowell
- Elizabeth Crowe
- Jorge De Santiago
- Kaycee Headrick
- Jennifer Leosz
- Tom Mahowald
- Karin Stayton
- Anne Tapp
- Julie Van Domelen

Absent

- BVSD (Vacant Seat)
- Susan Caskey
- Suzanne Crawford
- Dr. Perla Delgado
- Nancy Herbert
- Lexi Nolen
- Christina Pacheco
- Mandy Perera
- Simon Smith
- Johnny Terrell

Staff Present

- Georgina Becerril (proxy for Susan Caskey)
- Liz Izaguirre
- Susana Lopez-Baker
- Joni Lynch
- Whitney Wilcox
- Hilda Zamora Hursh

Welcome and Introductions

The Family Resource Network (FRN) Regional Council Meeting was called to order by Marc Cowell at 3:02pm. Tom Mahowald, Chair of Peak to Peak Housing and Human Services Alliance, was introduced.

FRN Workplan Updates

Whitney provided an update on the 2025 FRN strategic planning process. Usually, the entire FRN (i.e., Regional Council and Local Area Collaborative members) come together once a year for a joint session; this year's meeting would have focused on strategic planning. However, the plan is to push back this item to the first quarter of 2025 to allow the FRN time to complete current workplan items and address some recently proposed initiatives.

Next, Liz presented on the new FRN Team that LAC members were onboarded to in August and is now being launched to the Regional Council. In response to requests from FRN members for a collective space to share updates, find meeting materials, and onboard new collaborators, a FRN SharePoint site was created. All Regional Council members will be added to the team following this meeting, and although engagement is not mandatory, the team is intended to serve as a collaborative space for FRN members.

Marc asked what initial feedback LAC members had provided surrounding benefits of the FRN Team. Liz shared that LAC members found the shared document space particularly helpful. Recently, a Longmont LAC member shared that she'd been able to access some useful training materials on the site to assist with her client interactions.

Marc also asked if there was a way to get notified of activity on the FRN Channel so that members didn't miss announcements or conversations. Liz pointed to a FRN SharePoint Site Tips slide deck that is posted on the site that answers many questions related to its use. A direct link to the document will be provided in an email following this meeting. Elizabeth expressed concern that the Channel be monitored to make sure that important announcements were not missed by members who were not used to checking it for updates. Liz affirmed this concern and shared that while FRN members acclimate themselves to the new FRN Team, members are encouraged to continue to send emails in addition to posting on the Channel.

Tom asked if the "search this library" bar at the top of the screen would search the entire FRN document library. Liz explained how this feature worked and demonstrated how to search within document folders. Tom also asked what the "HH" stood for in the Team name (i.e., TEAM-HH-FRN). Liz replied that "HH" was a legacy placeholder from when the department was BC Housing and Human Services. The Team is being hosted under the BCHS Microsoft license which allows for easier collaboration with organizations for whom other spaces (such as Google or Slack) are blocked due to security concerns.

Then Liz transitioned to sharing about the Community-Wide Low-Cost Rentals webpage that is being finalized by the Rental Aggregation Workgroup. Historically, multiple low-cost housing lists were maintained and emailed to frontline staff across the County. This collaborative group

(with members representing All Roads, EFAA, OUR Center, Sister Carmen, BC Housing, and BC Human Services) is now working to convert one of the more widely known lists (i.e., “Bev’s List”) from this static format to a dynamic webpage. She demonstrated the webpage for the Regional Council while emphasizing that it was still in its final stages of development. The workgroup anticipates beta-testing the site with LAC members in late September or early October before launching the site to the public in late October or early November.

Tom asked how the webpage’s list was sourced – were volunteers searching for listings or were property managers and landlords sending listings to the workgroup for posting? Liz explained that the current process involved searching for housing units among properties that are known to meet affordability criteria as well as a general search on Zillow. Volunteers update the lists each week in a parent file that is then used to populate the tables on the webpage. However, low-cost housing unit owners/managers who would like to send their listings directly to the workgroup would be welcome to do so. Tom also asked if County-owned properties (such as Tungsten Village) were listed on the site. Liz replied that this list contained only independent property management and landlord units; the [Housing Helpline webpage](#) provides information regarding other types of listings. Lastly, Tom asked if the Regional Council members would have access to this webpage in addition to the FRN SharePoint site. Liz shared that this webpage was currently not accessible outside of the workgroup but that any members interested in participating in beta-testing should email her (mizaguirre@bouldercounty.gov), and she could bring that request back to the workgroup when they convene next week. Several Regional Council members expressed excitement over the webpage and felt that it would be a useful resource to community members looking for housing.

During the final portion of this agenda item, Liz provided a brief update on the FRN’s efforts to use Findhelp as an online resource directory. Previously the FRN identified Findhelp as the preferred resource navigation tool. In response, LAC members have been working to claim and update their program cards over the last year. However, LAC members identified a need for focused training in the system beyond what is available at no-cost on the Findhelp website. Due to collaborations across FRN member organizations, we now anticipate executing a contract with Findhelp by the end of September for a forward-facing community webpage as well as additional training for FRN members. We hope to be able to provide additional updates to LAC members during the next Quarterly All LAC Meeting in October.

Benefits in Action and Nurturing Futures Program Updates

Georgina provided some updates on the Benefits in Action (BIA) contract. In response to partner feedback, BIA is working on a calendar of events to share with agencies that will provide information on where they are co-locating, days and times of services, and any planned community outreach events. BIA also engaged in a text campaign that reached approximately 7,000 Boulder County residents and is connecting with local media to advertise events – including targeted outreach to Spanish-speaking communities. Members can reach out to Amy Pulley (apulley@benefitsinaction.org) or Clarence Low (clow@benefitsinaction.org) directly if you would like to partner with BIA in these efforts; feedback or concerns regarding the partnership in general can be directed to Emily Darrell (edarrell@bouldercounty.gov).

Elizabeth asked about the boundaries of what BIA could do or if there were types of events they were focused on hosting (so that members can be strategic in partnering with BIA). Georgina shared that apart from some staffing limitations, BIA was eager to engage in any activities of interest with community organizations.

Next, Georgina provided an update on the Nurturing Futures Pilot Program. BCHS received around 800 total applications with slightly more than 720 of these applications presenting as baseline eligible. Staff are now reviewing these applications to confirm eligibility with the first distribution of funds expected in October. Among those who submitted applications, over half identified as Hispanic and almost 30 percent of applications were completed in Spanish. Although the program did not hit the application numbers that were originally anticipated, BCHS has learned valuable lessons during this phase of the pilot to inform future efforts.

Marc asked if it was possible to share the geographic breakdown of applicants. Georgina shared the program dashboard which showed that the largest number of applications lived in Longmont zip codes. When asked if these numbers represented the needs observed in the community, Regional Council members were mixed in their response. Some members felt that applications were Longmont-heavy while others pointed out that when you combined zip codes for other cities, there appeared to be a fairly even distribution of residency. Information related to the demographics of residents actually served by the program can be provided once application review is complete (anticipated by September 20th).

Karin asked if additional explanation could be provided regarding possible confusion among applicants regarding the impact of the program on their current receipt of public benefits. Georgina shared that this question was challenging to grapple with because each applicant's situation was highly individualized. A lesson learned from this pilot is the need for eligibility workers out in the community during registration so that questions regarding the program could be more directly answered and to provide more one-on-one support to community members who encountered difficulties in completing sections of the application.

At Marc's request, Elizabeth also shared updates on the City of Boulder's direct cash assistance program, Elevate Boulder. They began distributing \$500 per month to 200 city of Boulder households in January; to date, only one household has withdrawn from the program due to moving outside of the city limits. As part of the enrollment process, participants were invited to participate in a formal evaluation of the program. Around 150 participants agreed to this additional portion of the program. One survey was conducted at baseline and then a second survey administered at the program's eighth month (just wrapped this portion up in August/September). She anticipates being able to present the results of this second evaluation in December. Additionally, Elizabeth mentioned that they will be able to provide information regarding the Thriving Providers Project, a direct cash assistance program for family, friend, and neighbor childcare providers across the city, in early 2025.

FRN Community Alert Event

Marc introduced this event by reminding members that the group wanted to continue the discussion from July's meeting regarding how they could help the community understand that there are real, unmet needs while at the same time funding resources are starting to dwindle.

Elizabeth affirmed that the goal of this event was to empower the community to join with FRN partner organizations in meeting these needs. During this portion of the agenda, members were asked to affirm if the tentative plan developed is something that they would like to move forward with and then begin to map out what the FRN's next steps on this effort would be.

Elizabeth pointed out that it was important to think of this project through the lens of collaborative organizing and acknowledged that members may have had both positive and negative experiences in engaging in this type of activity in the past. She then provided an overview of the purpose of this community call to action along with tangible outcomes that the Regional Council could use to determine whether this attempt at engaging the community was successful. In the end, the FRN's goal is to share with the community a collective vision – that despite a scarcity of resources the community can come together to work for a thriving environment for all. This call doesn't seek to take away from any single organization's effort but rather amplify our collective impact. The current plan requires identifying 3-4 spokespersons for the call to action press event with a target date of September or October (so as to not coincide with end-of-year fundraising efforts among partner organizations). Elizabeth then sought feedback from Regional Council members to see if such an event felt appropriate, effective, and/or inspiring as well as evaluate the proposed timing and assess what items the FRN should keep in mind as we prepare and launch this event.

Marc shared that he felt the event held a lot of promise, if it was possible to hold it in October. This opportunity could be seen as a test for future collaborative communication campaigns while enabling the FRN to establish a collective voice in advocating for community needs.

Tom asked about who the target audience was for the press event. Marc shared that the intent was to get our message out as broadly as possible which included traditional press outlets as well as social media campaigns. Tom encouraged the group to consider leaving plenty of time between this event and the December 10th Colorado Gives campaign and also advocated for including business press (in addition to local press) in the event since many companies still had time to create matching grants. He also offered the Nederland Community Center as a potential site for the event while acknowledging that the distance from other Boulder County cities might be prohibitive.

Robin asked whether members considered press events to still be effective forms of communication. Elizabeth shared that she thought they were although such events might look different now. For example, the goal of this event is to keep the messaging short and clear as the FRN works to level-set with the community about what is going on with service providers; it would most likely be a 20 minute (rather than 90 minute) event.

Julie stated that she liked how this idea gave a community voice to the collective ask to make a meaningful contribution because the impacts of inflation on the community seems more invisible than those experienced during the pandemic; many people may not really appreciate the crisis levels our organizations find themselves in right now. While she agreed with being mindful of the November/December giving season, she felt that an October event could queue the conversation up really well.

Several members asked additional questions regarding the specific call to action and target audience. Kaycee asked if the call to action was meant to engage elected officials, private donors or philanthropists, or for the general community to join a larger movement. Elizabeth shared that the call to action was really focused on encouraging individuals to reach out to the community service organization of their choice and find out what needs you could help meet – whether that was volunteer, promote, or financially give. In general, the goal is to provide a message of “join us in our work – however you can.” Kaycee agreed that this was effective messaging and shared that using something along the lines of “link arms with us and take action” could provide a nice visual to the effort. Marc added that this opportunity could also be used to educate the community about crises that might not impact their daily lives (i.e., if you don’t have children, then you may not be aware of the childcare crisis) while also letting the community know that organizations are doing everything that they can to bridge the gap but now they need the community’s help.

Elizabeth encouraged anyone who hadn’t yet provided feedback to provide insight into their general take on the event idea – whether positive or negative. Several additional members agreed that it was a promising idea. Some members expressed concerns regarding limited capacity for planning the event, and Elizabeth assured members that there would be various levels of support that members could provide this effort.

Marc then asked for volunteers to begin the next phases of planning for the event. Kaycee and Tom both volunteered so Elizabeth will be connecting with them following the meeting.

Approval of April 2024 and July 2024 FRN Regional Council Meeting Minutes

Marc asked for a motion to approve or amend the April 2024 Meeting Minutes. Julie motioned to approve with Anne seconding the motion. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

Next, Marc asked for a motion to approve or amend the July 2024 Meeting Minutes. Georgina (filling in as Susan’s proxy) motioned to approve with Julie seconding the motion. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31pm.