

**Allegheny County Department of Human Services**

**Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC)**

**Meeting Minutes**

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

The September 9<sup>th</sup> 2024 meeting was held virtually on Microsoft TEAMS.

**Welcome and Call to Order**

Lynn Tatala welcomed all in attendance and called the meeting to order at 12:04pm.

John Litz explained new directives still pending from PA DCED expected to be finalized shortly, but this calls for all Council Members who are in attendance to introduce themselves as record they are here, include name and affiliation or status as representative of the council, so any persons who are guests (who are persons formally invited) or any community residents who learned of the meeting and joined may hear who all is in attendance at the meeting.

**Attendance:**

- CSAC Members: Lynn Tatala, Stephanie Eson, James Ritchie, Andrea Horton-Mericli, Mary Frances Pilarski, Kaylee Schockley as an alternate for Dillon Moore, Rico Carter, Laura Zinski, and Elayne Masters.
- A quorum was achieved with 9 out of 14 CSAC members in attendance. OCS staff John Litz and Mara Schwabenbauer attended the meeting, as well as Nthando Thandiwe, ATP staff.
- Guests: Regina Scott from Duquesne Light, Universal Services department.
- Community Residents: none in attendance.

**Approval Of June 10, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Lynn Tatala asked CSAC members for any concerns, corrections, or additions to the June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, meeting minutes which were posted in Govenda. There were no updates to the minutes. Lynn Tatala asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Laura Zinski made a motion to approve the minutes. Andrea Horton-Mericli gave a second motion. The vote was unanimous by Lynn Tatala, Stephanie Eson, James Ritchie, Andrea Horton-Mericli, Mary Frances Pilarski, Kaylee Schockley as an alternate for Dillon Moore, Rico Carter, Laura Zinski, and Elayne Masters- and the minutes were approved.

**Membership Report**

Vacancy (Mike Selep Retirement- Representative Services for Low-Income)

John Litz shared about Mike Selep's retirement. Mike retired earlier this year, had served as a representative for services for people who are low income. Mike intended to join us today as this would be his last meeting, but he was traveling and unsure if could make it. He has been a member with the CSAC for quite some time, prior to John's time working with Community Action (since 2008). Mike worked at Duquesne Light leading their Customer Assistance programs. Mike's participation has always been of great value. He always showed an interest in our work and offered

support throughout his tenure as a council member. He advocated for programs that cared for and lifted vulnerable members of the community. John shared- “Mike – I am grateful for your years of service. Thank you.”

#### Update on Vacancy for Member Appointed by County Council

John Litz shared this has been a long time coming and happy to say this vacancy is scheduled to be approved at a County Council meeting tomorrow.

#### **Member Update**

Elayne Masters shared she joined (Colleen Young) from the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank last week for an interview at WTAE, about the Project Hunger program. The interview will be aired over the weekend. Colleen talked about the Neighborhood Leadership Council, inspired by some conferences for Feed America. This council consists of 8 community members who work with the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank on issues around food insecurity and advocate on these issues.

Elayne Masters also noted she is working on a personal project and looking into non-profit agencies who also provide services to their own employees. She asked if any council members know of any non-profits who do this, she would be interested in connecting as she is doing research on this topic at this time.

Laura Zinski shared if anyone is interested in knowing more about the Mon Valley Initiative, the website may be visited and there is also a monthly newsletter. Laura shared they took on not only the maintenance but property management of their full housing portfolio. They now have a property manager in house and people can find more information about their rental units throughout the Mon Valley on the website- the waiting lists are opened. It has been a long journey trying to become their own manager and maintenance provider. She also shared they have an annual community awards ceremony coming up on October 17<sup>th</sup>, and you can find details on the website. This is always a fun event and if looking for something to do that is hopeful and encouraging, this dinner is a wonderful evening.

#### **Community Residents Comments**

Lynn shared this is a new area for meetings when we do have community residents joining. We do not have any community residents in attendance today.

#### **Program Report**

John Litz shared since the publication of the agenda, there has been a change. We are not going to be reviewing the Community Needs Assessment today. A lot of work goes into the needs assessment report, and it takes time to complete. Nthando Thandiwe is the DHS ATP lead working on this report. The report wasn't completed in enough time to provide to council members to review before formally taking a vote. This means we are going to be scheduling a special meeting to take your input on the report and take a vote on the acceptance of the report. The acceptance of the report is a national Organizational Standard, so it is important we give council members enough time to digest the report and take comments to determine if the report adequately reflects community needs and the priorities to be addressed as we look to new program years. The community needs assessment is required every 3 years, the findings and take a way should have an

influence and help to shape the structure and programming in the 3 subsequent years following the community needs assessment.

A poll will be issued to council members to schedule the special meeting for the week of September 23<sup>rd</sup> for 1 hour. We will send out the draft report and a document with the report that asks each council member 3 questions that have to do with the report to use as a tool to evaluate if the report is doing what is intended under the organizational standards. We do need to complete this before the end of September. If any council members are not able to attend a special meeting, those members will still be provided opportunities for written comment and to submit a vote.

#### Review of CSAC Duties and Responsibilities

John Litz commented on this item that under the Organizational Standards every 2 years this item for CSAC Duties and Responsibilities needs reviewed with the Advisory Council. This item was included in the premeeting materials. This is not something that should be unfamiliar to most council members. By reading this document and being here today, this document has been shared and reviewed. No one has comments or concerns therefore this information has been made known to everyone.

#### Availability of 2023 County Single Audit Report (No CSBG Findings)

This item is again in compliance with the Organizational Standards for Community Action, which requires letting council members know about the financial audit report. The annual report is prepared by the County Controllers office and an auditing firm. It was published in 2024. A link to the County Controllers website was provided where the report can be accessed. The full report is over 400 pages, the section referencing the CSBG information is around page 280. There were no findings under the CSBG. That means out of the testing that was done, there was nothing reported that would raise any questions or concerns about CSBG funding and expenditures. The one thing to note is the County Controller's office does have the expenses listed in the report as greater than the expended funds we report to DCED. John Litz talked with the fiscal office about this, and they had a consultation to explain the report includes accrued payables which reports out on any costs posted in the accounting system with date of 2023, (and this even includes expenses from 2022.) There was \$160k more than our financial reports due to this methodology and this is different methodology than how we report out to DCED.

#### Community Action Report

John Litz presented the community action report for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarters for 2024 which was uploaded to Govenda for review prior to the meeting. The report has been renamed the Community Action Report to more broadly capture and report out information that relates to work with individual and families to achieve stability and economic security. The report will include information about our work under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and other funding sources that are helping to lift people out of poverty to achieve economic security and ultimately economic prosperity.

Both Mara and I will comment on this report.

CSBG financial information for 2024 to date is reviewed. There was a funding increase of a little more than \$13,000 which increased total funds available in 2024 by 2.5% compared to 2023 funding.

A new initiative called Allegheny Go which offers discounted fares of 50% for Pittsburgh Regional Transit services for persons who receive SNAP benefits is off to a good start with more than 4,600 persons registered. Please let us know if you need that information about this new initiative of DHS.

Information for persons served in programming was reviewed. The number of persons served is running ahead of last year, with transportation showing the largest increase. The number of people attending financial empowerment classes and events has already reached 80% of the target and the VITA work in 2024 has surpassed its annual target.

We are seeing an increase in black people being served for transportation, largely due to expansion of this service in the Mon Valley. We are pleased we can see a more equitable distribution of this service for transportation in the county. The transportation we are talking about here shows expenses are mostly towards car repairs and bills related to car maintenance and car upkeep so people can keep their transportation functioning to take care of their daily needs. While we do see some going towards bus passes for PRT services, most of the money is going to people to help with car maintenance expenses.

When we look at data related to gender- this data continues to show more women than men accessing services, except employment assistance, but the gap has narrowed.

We continue to see under client characteristics that our services primarily serve single parent female and single person households. Also, when we look at characteristics related to disability, we see by service type, people with disabilities are being served.

Outcome indicators are reviewed by category or domain. The first is Income and Asset building. When we look at these, we also do this by looking at the annual target. For the outcome related to improving financial well-being the target is 30, while results are 70 working towards and 21 achieved. The other indicators include increase in savings, maintaining basic needs for 90 days, improving credit score, receiving assistance to meet basic needs (a lot of activity) and obtaining one or more public benefits. Overall, we are doing good by almost reaching our annual targets.

For the employment domain, we report on persons who are unemployed and obtain employment up to a living wage and employment at a living wage, and then underemployed at living wage. We define living wage by using the local workforce investment board, Parter 4 Work's definition, which is earned household income at 250% of FPL. It continues to be challenging for people to achieve employment at a living wage or higher. Obtaining employment up to a living wage is lower than expected with only 13 achieving this outcome compared to the 43 working towards this. The Community Needs Assessment report does have some information in it that talks about the employment sector and some of the challenges people are having in the employment space.

The next domain is Health. Here we are tracking with clients improved physical health, improve behavioral health, improved skills as a parent, and people with disabilities maintaining independent situations. While people are working on it, progress is less than what has been targeted at 6 months. We are doing better with people with disabilities maintaining independent situations, this is something when providers are working with families on goals, they have different points in time to measure progress on outcomes.

The Education and Cognitive Domain is reviewed showing data for adults and children. With the adoption of a whole family approach this year, there are providers engaging families around other members of the households, not just the primary adult. The area of education is an area where

conversations are taking place for additional household members. We are seeing some progress, but there is opportunity to show more activity,

Housing domain is reviewed. In this domain, we report out on obtaining safe and affordable housing, affordability is a big key here. We show 10 achieved halfway through year against target of 25 so some good progress. Maintain safe and affordable housing, is about those in housing maintaining their housing as it is quite challenging if people lose housing to get it back. We are seeing some activity on preventing eviction and improving energy efficiency if people are accessing weatherization or other services that support this.

For the Civic Engagement domain, we are not seeing a lot of activity here. We continue to include this as it is expected under our organizational standards, but not a lot of activity here. Outcomes across multiple domains was also reviewed.

These are the national performance indicators (NPI's) or outcome indicators that our providers are trained in and report out on. The NPI's are embedded in the client management system so it is easy for provider staff to link this information accordingly in client records.

Elyane Masters asked what the civic engagement outcomes include. John Litz explained these outcomes include some activities around people building social networks, building leadership skills, and increased skills, knowledge and abilities. This could be through volunteer opportunities at an agency; sometimes clients are giving the opportunity to serve in a volunteer role with the organization. These opportunities can help people build skills, especially if unemployed, then the volunteer skills can be very transferable. People being served learn about the opportunities from the provider agency.

Elyane Masters also asked about how health outcomes are measured. John Litz shared this is self-reported during services with the provider. Mara Schwabenbauer added that for the self-sufficiency services where these outcomes most commonly show up for people, the service provider is utilizing a formal assessment tool which includes areas related to physical and mental health, where an initial and subsequent assessments are completed during service delivery.

The adoption of a whole family approach is reviewed. This has been a big undertaking and a learning curve for our providers. We want to report out on the activity we are seeing over 6 months, that our community partners are showing some work around embracing this concept as data is showing up for additional household members outside of just the primary enrolled client.

Mara Schwabenbauer provided an update on the Allegheny County Financial Empowerment Center services reviewing the number of people served with sessions as well as characteristics for those being served as mostly female, about half are black residents and about half are people with children, people with disabilities are being served, and a good amount of people served are working in some way (full time, part time, or self-employed). The FEC co-locations across the county were also reviewed showing 2 new locations since the last review.

Closing notes on the report reviewed we did provide input for NPI's for the proposed changes to the CSBG annual report to the Community Action Association of PA, as they were gathering the input for the proposed changes to share further with federal Office of Community Services. There is support amongst us and others across the state for outcomes and measurements of the NPI's, opposed to proposed change that are more focused on services. We felt that is a step backwards,

why would we want to dilute that- this work is really about measuring change and impact and hope, and we want to see that preserved.

It was noted we attended the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion summit held in May sponsored by the Community Action Association of PA.

It was also noted that onboarding activities have been taking place. Mara Schwabenbauer primarily does this when new provider staff come on. This is really important to make new staff aware of certain information about the work of Community Action in addition to the onboarding the new staff receive from their organization.

### **Other**

Lynn Tatala asked if there was any other business from Council Members to report on.

Regina Scott shared she is here not as a replacement for Mike Selep because no one can replace him, he is a wonderful person, not only at Duquesne Light but prior to that with his work at Holy Family. Under her role is responsibility to oversee their Universal Services - think CAP, think Dollar Energy, think LIHEAP, as well as things under energy efficiency like weatherization. She is looking to inform the future state of those programs, but for all of you to continue to have the updated information available and distributed among the people you serve.

John Litz shared we appreciate your interest and will have some follow up with you.

### **Transition Plans**

John Litz shared on his transition plans. He stated -there comes a time in one's life, when you know it is time to turn the page, and that time has come for him. December will be his last meeting as he will retire on Jan 17<sup>th</sup>. He shared he has been working with Mara for several years and will continue to do so to ensure a smooth transition. A lot of things have already happened and more is planned in the coming months. John will have been with county for 17 years in January but adding a few more years of service with the County before his work in Community Action, it will be 19 years. John expressed the work he has been doing has meant a lot to him as he has seen how this work has changed lives of individuals and families.

Jim Ritchie stated he wants to say that government needs people like you, John. We need people who care to do these jobs to get things done and really care about the work that goes through these offices and we know what that means. Jim said he really wants to thank you John for inviting me to be part of this.

Elayne Masters shared it is so reassuring we have people like you that really do care, John. It is easy to see the system as a heartless void, so knowing people who really care this way really matters.

John shared that working with each of us has shaped him a great deal on his journey which will cover 45 years when he retires. Many of his peers have already moved to retirement, they will ask him when are you going to retire, John? And he will say I don't know, I like what I do, I was put in this place and I'm not ready to leave yet. He said he never wanted to have the decision put upon him but wanted the decision to come to him from within. John shared the bike ride he took this summer with a few friends on the GAP and C&O Canal trails, from Pittsburgh to DC, which was amazing, and during that time, it struck him, now is the time.

Laura Zinski said for the December meeting- let's have an in person meeting to celebrate together and she has all kinds of opportunities for you to volunteer on, John, so you don't have to go far.

Rico Carter stated to John- you are a large part of why he is on the committee and a large reason I'm a better man today, you treat me like I served on the board for 23 years instead of in prison for 23 years. I appreciate you. John shared that means a lot and loved the breakfast we had together and getting to know each other.

Stephanie Eson says there is a space at HSCMV to hold a December meeting there in person. It was agreed we will work on some specifics with her for planning details.

Lynn Tatala says thank you John, for everything you have done. Rico said it well, you always treat everyone with all the respect anyone could want, and I appreciate you so much and thank you.

### **Next Meeting- December 9, 2024**

Lynn Tatala reviewed we have our December meeting but will have a special meeting before that. The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Monday December 9, 2024, beginning at 12 noon.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Lynn Tatala asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Elayne Masters motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Laura Zinski second the motion. The vote was unanimous (Lynn Tatala, Stephanie Eson, James Ritchie, Andrea Horton-Mericli, Mary Frances Pilarski, Kaylee Schockley as an alternate for Dillon Moore, Rico Carter, Laura Zinski, and Elayne Masters.) The meeting was adjourned at 1:18p.