

RI Coalition for the Homeless
Learning Group II: Strengthening the Coalition and its Members
Meeting Minutes June 23, 2010

Date: June 23, 2010, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Peace Dale Library, Peace Dale, Rhode Island

Present: Diana Burdett, Lenny Chen, Laura Jaworski, Taylor Ellowitz, Russ Partridge, Tom Miller, Lee Ann Byrne, Kamila Barzykowski, Janice Lavalley Fisher, Rev. Don Anderson, Rev. Mary Margaret Earl and Amy Rainone.

Absent: Anne Nolan, Meg Kerr, Andrew Shiff, Diana Dumin, Eileen Hayes, and Brenda Clement

Consultant Facilitator: M.J. Kaplan **Staff Liaison:** Jim Ryczek **Notes:** Connie Vergowven

Check in: M.J. Kaplan, welcome, introductions and reviewed the two guidelines for working together. The first guideline is candor: communicate constructively and seek shared understanding and the second guideline is to take a learning posture - be open to new possibilities.

M.J. Kaplan explained the importance of attending LG meetings. If unable to attend any meeting in the future M.J. Kaplan asked participants to use the "buddy up" system with another LG participant to get updates. J. Ryczek offered to be a point person for the LG if anyone needs information.

J. Ryczek, agenda review and notes that this meeting is the fourth meeting of LGII and is grateful for the participation of members and for the frank and honest discussion coming from the members of the group. J. Ryczek reviewed the questions on the agenda today:

Question 1: In what ways can RICH support agencies to improve capacity (staffing relative to client needs) and best practices for case management? What role should RICH play? What would support/hinder this work from improving case management quality and capacity?

How can the Coalition build capacity within the Coalition and how can it build capacity with member organizations? With regard to case management, J. Ryczek would like to find out what RICH can be most helpful with, what is most important to member agencies and what RICH can do to promote case management capacities.

Question 2: How can RICH support all members and stakeholders to take an active role in advocacy in order for the sector to be more successful at securing needed resources and helpful policies?

Question 3: Are Coalition member agencies willing/committed to take on cases and other activities in situations when there is an unmet need? What role can RICH play to support this collaborative approach to create a statewide safety net?

J. Ryczek raised a recent concern by a representative from Crossroads who felt challenged to get help for families that they needed to place into shelter in an overflow situation at Crossroads. J. Ryczek felt that this issue could be discussed here; this learning group is a place where members can talk about these issues, working together, better. What can RICH and member agencies do to make improvements within the systems for the families, and adults who need shelter?

Members of the group brought the group to question #3. One member stated that often there are beds offered and available but that no one calls them. Members feels that there may be a breakdown in communication among/between some organizations and that perhaps there may be a missing step to

getting the information to the person(s) who need it.

Some members felt that some people who are in need of shelter are making the choice *not* to go to other areas of the state and feel that geography plays a big role in this. One member noted that agencies have to respect the rights of the client and another member notes that when open beds are offered but the client doesn't want to go, agencies cannot make them.

J. Ryczek mentioned that building capacities in other locations may be something that this group looks at, if people want to stay in their geographical locations.

A member asked the group if everyone gets the 211 system fax each day to find out bed availability throughout RI when a bed is needed. That member also commented that 211 calls every shelter, twice a day for updates on open beds. Some members of the group were unaware of this offering from 211 and are willing to use it.

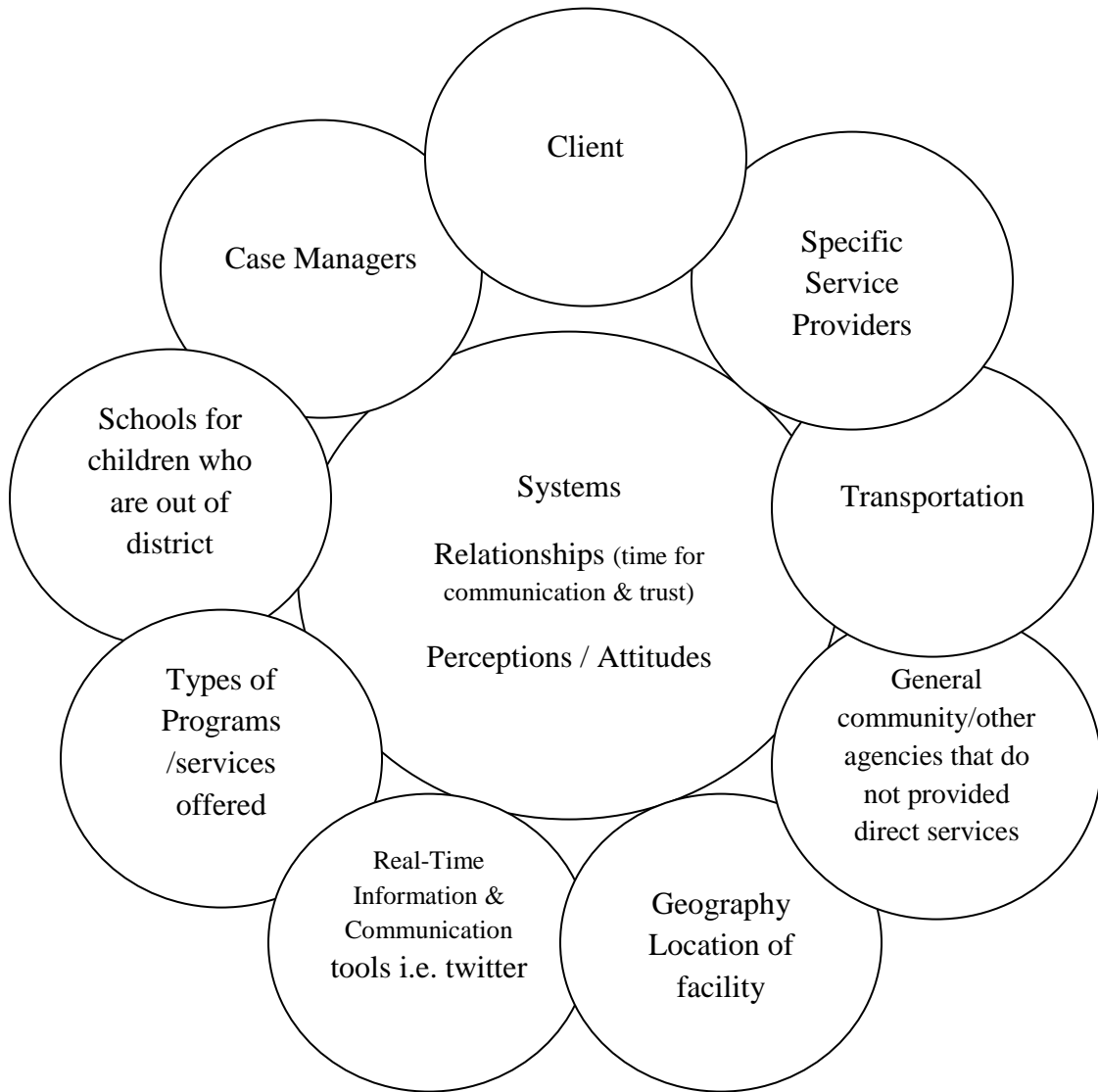
Some members feel that transportation is an issue within the state making note that rural homelessness is much more difficult when faced with transportation issues. Another member of the group suggests that RICH could provide descriptions of the different case management services at different agencies provide a shelter guide and post bed openings on the RICH website. J. Ryczek commented that RICH has a Shelter Resource Guide already on the website, but RICH can look at revising it to be a more usable document. Another group member asked why couldn't there be a website designed for individuals who are homeless, specific to them and the same site could have password protected information for case managers.

J. Ryczek: Housinglocatorri.net, and 211 are both doing real-time updates and feels that they are the best sources at this time, although there is room for improvement/more coordination. On the RICH website there are descriptions of services provided by member agencies, it is located under the Resources tab: Shelter Guide and there is also a link to Home Locator. Another member thought that HMIS should be used for real-time bed updates. J. Ryczek notes that originally HMIS was supposed to provide the open bed/real-time but delays in input make the HMIS an unreliable source at this time.

M.J. Kaplan asked the group to think about a goal and posed the questions: when you have a person who needs shelter and is willing to go to a different location, what do you need to do to get them into shelter? Is there a real-time match; person in need to a shelter issue?

The group agreed that trying to map out what existing information is available, helping all to become acquainted with it, and improving that information would be the best place to start toward gaining more complete information within the coalition.

M.J. Kaplan asked group members to name a few of the issues that are of concern to members. MJ drew the following graphic based on group input:



J. Ryczek: In looking at the cluster we think if we fix the real-time information everything will fall into place, but we need to focus on the issues in the middle circle. If there is on-going relationship building, the better the relationships among agencies become, the more effectively agencies can work together on behalf of clients.

A group member stated that competitive funding is also an issue. Some agencies are struggling to make ends meet, while other larger agencies are not.

J. Ryczek: There is an assumption that some agencies are not struggling financially and with their capacity to do the work, but that is not an accurate assumption. In J. Ryczek's assessment all organizations are working hard to make ends meet, and struggling to do the work with less capacity.

M.J. Kaplan: the next step should be to create time to build relationships and to find a space to have healthy conversations with agencies around assumptions/misconceptions and ways to improve the systemic response to overcrowding and scarce resources.

Some members felt that the biggest issue is transportation. There is a "RI mentality" that prevents people from travelling from one town to another, even though distances are minimal. Another group member stated that this has been the same topic/issue (transportation) 26-27 years, and it is time to step back and take a look at it differently. One member noted that it is a very real issue for clients who live in Providence and that the group should keep this in mind.

A group member stated that many agencies work well together, and have built relationships over the years.

M.J. Kaplan: Building interpersonal relationships with people at all agencies is critical to the work that all agencies are trying to do. Relationship building is a vital part of working together, successfully. What would make this the best system possible? A member suggested that working on a solution to the issues would be good but that face-to-face meetings are not always possible but sees the possibility of communication being more instant because of the internet.

J. Ryczek: SHPN meetings will be starting in the fall, and this could be a place to build relationships. It was felt by a group member that many agencies need to work on relationship building and that RICH could work on a covenant with this group – creating it together. Rotating SHPN meetings is a possibility and could help with relationship building or having an orientation week/time with new case managers, to visit other case managers at their agencies so that new case managers can call it to mind when making referrals to their client's.

One member validated building relationships but felt that "business is business and work is work, and no miscommunications or lack of communication should be taken personally." They also noted that they do not think of other agencies in a negative light.

M.J. Kaplan: when everyone is so busy the biggest challenge does become how to create the space and energy to build better relationships. Action step: M.J. Kaplan asked for a commitment from everyone in the group to connect proactively with 1 or 2 agencies to work on learning more about them and building better relationships.

M.J. Kaplan: what would it take to make changes?

Member(s):

- Shed organizational identity, knowing you are here working on client issues;
- Keep it professional;
- Leave out personal issues;
- Focus on providing best practices regarding services to people who need them.

M.J. Kaplan: to make changes one could use this formula:

Dissatisfaction x Vision x First Steps > Resistance to Change

The first thing to work on could be a covenant or agreement on how to relate to one another and work to keep a client-centered approach.

M.J. Kaplan asks that members look at the clusters, break them down and work on them one at a time, for example:

Case managers: What are their needs in order to help clients?

- Building relationships;
- Getting support;
- Accessing resources;
- Skills to be effective;
- Knowledge-base for best practice.

Closing: M.J. Kaplan: we didn't look at questions 1 and 2, would like to do this at the next meeting. M.J. Kaplan asked members for final thoughts.

Member(s):

- The message has to get out that we are all willing to work together;
- Willing to get out and meet/greet others;
- Commitment to be open to others;
- Gain a deeper understanding of what others go through on a day-today basis and as a group knowing that we can improve on this;
- Focus on moving forward and turning away from "scapegoat" issues

M.J. Kaplan: Next Steps

- all group members commit to meet/greet again, two or three people each over the next month and at the next meeting members report on reconnecting
- Review agenda for SHPN to address some of these issues, and investigate other ways to discuss coordination/collaboration issues;
- Determine better ways to utilize 211, HousingLocatorRI.net and other existing informational sources;
- Create a covenant/agreement to guide how agencies work together;
- Review orientation and training for new case workers including visits to each facility to learn about programs and build relationships;
- Next meeting look at case management and what would it look like to improve case management and advocacy work and to be more engaged with RICH around advocacy work.

End: 12:45

Respectfully submitted by: C. Vergowven