

Princeton Human Services Commission Minutes
Monthly Meeting
October 21st, 2015
Monument Hall - East Meeting Room
One Monument Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540

Present:

Board Members:

Ross Wishnick, Chairman
Elizabeth Bidwell Bates
Leticia Fraga
John Heilner
Thomas Parker
Laura Encinas
Robert Hackett

Staff

Elisa Neira, MSW
Michael Soto

Liaison & Guests

Jasmin Charles (Student
Board at Corner House)
Sam Husth

Absent:

Stacy Mann
Larry Spruill
Heather Howard, council member

I. Open Public Meeting Statement and Call To Order

At 7:05 PM, Chairman Ross Wishnick called the meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission (HSC) to order by reading: "This is to affirm that the regularly scheduled meeting of the Princeton Human Services Commission has been duly notified and is being conducted in compliance with all provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act." There was no response to his request for public comment.

II. Approval of September 16th, 2015 minutes

Ms. Bates motioned to approve the minutes with corrections, seconded by Mr. Parker. All eligible members voted in favor of this action.

III. Public Comments

There was no response to the Chairman's request for public comments.

IV. Director's Report

General Assistance

The caseload is fairly level month to month, ranging from 25 to 30 cases. Last month the department opened 4 new cases and closed 3 cases (one because of incarceration, one for employment and one case that had been open for a period and was due to be closed). At the end of the month there are 28 cases active.

The NJ Division of Family Development has approved the use of Home Front for temporary/emergency housing and moving forward Human Services will refer homeless

clients eligible for General Assistance to their locations and not to the motel. At the moment there is one client at the motel who will be sent to Home Front and we also hope to use this service for a new client.

Stone Hill Church and Human Services are working to develop a program to provide career counseling to the employable General Assistance clients. The program will have one-on-one sessions when they come to pick up their checks, for about five sessions per client. The sessions will include job searches, resume writing and interview skills.

The department is looking at best practices from around the country to improve the services that are provided to the GA clients (employable and unemployable). One of the ideas is to offer workshops about topics that could be interesting and useful for them. The workshops would probably be hosted every quarter at the time that they come to pick up their checks. The topics could include health insurance policy, housing or social services.

A survey will be conducted to determine if the GA clients are interested in participating in the job readiness program, and also which topics are the most popular and needed.

Holiday Gift Drive

About 120 applications were sent out and two dates were set to receive the applications. To date we have donors to provide gifts for 127 children, including gifts for 80 kids from Stone Hill Church.

Additionally, they will provide volunteers to help distribute gifts and help to deliver large items for the families that need transportation but do not have a car. We are expecting to get more than 200 applications.

The drive has been advertised through our community partners and press releases to media.

Summer Youth Employment Program

This year the program had almost the double the number of participating students as last year, and there are funds to provide jobs for 40 students next year. The Department of Human Services is looking to expand the program for next year, offering jobs to more students and also getting new employers. Human Services wants to work together with Guidance Office at the Princeton High School to ensure that the students are aware of the program.

In order to reach these goals, the Department is working on the following:

1. Writing a report about the Summer Youth Employment Program has been prepared and it will be sent to previous donors to request funds and so that the Summer Youth Employment Program can have more students and more employers.
2. Getting more municipal departments involved, in order to open new positions for the students.
3. Looking ways to incorporate local businesses where the students can be hired.

Ms. Neira announced that department applied for a grant through the African American Chamber of Commerce to expand the program through out the year.

Financial Literacy

Stone Hill Church has been working with a group of volunteers to start a financial literacy program in Princeton. Ten to fifteen volunteers have been trained and are ready to start to provide the service. Ms. Neira has referred two clients already. The meetings are flexible and set wherever is most convenient for the clients.

The Church also expanded their emergency fund to help people who are not part of their congregation but are referred by Human Services.

Other sources of Financial Literacy Services in town were discussed.

Resources Directory

An on-line resources directory has been compiled in order to provide a tool to the community where services can be searched and also the services providers can update their services. The idea is to make something simple and useful for the users to maintain. The Department will evaluate and look at different alternatives to choose the best way to build this tool.

Ms. Neira announced that Human Services applied to a Princeton Community Foundation Grant to start a program to promote the services around the community through “*Promotoras*” who are people that live in the community and want to help their neighbors to connect with services that they may need. The *promotoras* would be trained by the Human Services Department and work around 10 hours per week.

Job Readiness

Stone Hill Church wants to offer job readiness workshops to low-skill workers. Ms. Neira and Stone Hill Church met with the Princeton Public Library to talk about this initiative. One of the outcomes of the meeting was that the Library is very interested to start a new partnership to provide this service, since the population that they serve at the moment is high skilled workers. A follow up meeting will be set to see if a one-off event can be held at the Library.

Transportation to the Hospital

Twenty patients have used the taxi ride service to the hospital or from the hospital. Human Services and The Princeton Health Department has met with the new Clinic Director Ayda Tello. Ms. Neira highlighted how having built the relationship with the new director has positively impacted the way challenges are resolved. Quarterly meetings have been proposed.

Princeton Area Food Resource Flyer

Ms. Neira distributed the Princeton Area Food Resources flyer. Ms. Bates suggested explicitly putting “everyone is welcome” to clarify that no documentation is needed.

V. Human Services Committee Reports

Civil Rights

A couple weeks ago the committee met with the administration to discuss the report previously distributed.

The recommendations for starting a Civil Rights Commission were well received. It was discussed using the Montclair, NJ ordinance as a model. The administration will need to review with the municipal legal council, but it is expected an ordinance to establish a Civil Rights Commission, will be introduced by January 2016.

It was suggested that the Civil Rights Commission could potentially have a total of 15 members, of which 9 would be voting members and the rest could potentially be representatives of the police, school district and students. The members should be recruited through recommendations made by diverse groups in the community including the clergy. The municipality will consider providing support for the intake and clerical help.

As a result of our ongoing discussion with the administrator, he informed that the town would need to define an affirmative action officer.

Immigration

Three weeks ago the Princeton Human Services Commission presented to Council and to the Mayor the proclamation to join Welcoming America, the resolution to support drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants and the approval for Princeton to Join Cities United for Immigrant Action (CUA). The Council approved all of them.

The committee has been working with Unidad Latina en Acción (ULA), in order to start a worker's center/committee in Princeton.

Last month ULA gave training in health and safety issues for construction workers, with about 10 workers attending the training.

The committee had a follow up meeting with the workers and the Dream Team to discuss what the workers want to accomplish with the meetings. Next Friday there will be a potluck to break the ice and build trust among the participants. The main topics that will be discussed include what the municipality is doing, and the differences between the laws in New Jersey and their home countries.

2016 Planning

At the next meeting in November the Board will discuss planning for 2016. Ms. Fraga suggested looking at the strategic plan that was done last year, in order to see what has been accomplished and what needs more work.

VI. Adjournment

Ms. Encinas seconded Ms. Fraga's motion to adjourn. With no further business to discuss, all voted in favor of this action. The meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM.