

## **The Consumer Participation Task Force**

The Consumer Participation Task Force formed in June 2012 to address the participation of homeless and formerly homeless persons in homeless services system. The task force was guided by the Emergency Solutions Grant written standards submitted as part of the second amendment to the 2011 Action Plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development on May 15, 2012. These written standards state that those agencies receiving Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds in Louisville can participate in this task force to fulfill the regulatory requirement that a homeless or formerly homeless person sit on the Board of Directors of an ESG funded agency or act in an equivalent policy-making role. The task force would hold client participation meetings and the information from those meetings would be used to inform policies and procedures.

## **Consumer Task Force Members:**

- Merritt Gill, St. Vincent de Paul
- Jennifer Clark, Family and Children's Place
- Kristi Jo Jedlicki, St. John Center
- Mary Frances Schafer, Coalition for the Homeless (Continuum of Care Coordinator)
- Katie Receveur, Volunteers of America
- Johanna Wint, Salvation Army
- Jean Manganaro, Fed with Faith (Community Advocate)
- Joe Hamilton, Louisville Metro Government – Department of Community Services
- Ajeenah Sharif, Louisville Metro Government – Department of Community Services
- Elizabeth Fick, Louisville Metro Government - Department of Community Services
- Kathryn Tillett, Louisville Metro Government – Department of Community Services
- Barbara Motley, Louisville Metro Government – Department of Community Services
- Dr. Greg Leichty, University of Louisville

## **Fall 2014 Process**

University of Louisville Professor, Dr. Greg Leichty, three (3) graduate students from the U of L Department of Communication - Sarah Wright, Corey Goodlett, and Kyle Pfaff, and U of L Kent School of Social Work graduate student, Barbara Motley, conducted interviews with 78 individuals at Stand Down/Project Homeless Connect on October 8, 2014. Of those interviewed, four (4) interviewees reported not being currently nor were they ever homeless; those four surveys were not counted in the overall data presented in this report.

Only five (5) interview participants reported taking this survey during Stand Down/Project Homeless Connect in 2013.

The Coalition for the Homeless provided TARC tickets as an incentive for participating in the interviews.

## **Demographics**

- 57% identified as African American/Black
- 38% identified as Caucasian/White
- 1% identified as Hispanic/Latino
- 4% identified as Multiracial/Other
- 69% identified as male/men
- 21% identified as female/women
- 2% identified their gender as “other”

## Shelter Representation

- 29% indicated their location as Wayside
- 24% indicated they were not currently homeless but experienced prior episodes
- 17% indicated their current location as Salvation Army
- 14% indicated their current location as St. Vincent de Paul
- 9% indicated their current location as “on the streets” or “camps”
- 3% indicated their current location as Jefferson Street/Louisville Rescue Mission
- 3% indicated their current location as Interlink
- 1% indicated their current location as The Healing Place

## Interview Questions

All respondents were asked the same series of questions:

- What are your primary health and safety concerns in shelter?
- How much crime have you experienced in the shelter?
- What do you think could be done to make you feel safer in shelter?
- What services are you not receiving?
- What keeps you from receiving the services you need?
- What services do you like?
- What is working well?
- What changes would you like to see in the community?
- Do shelter staff treat you with respect and dignity?
- Have you heard of the Coalition for the Homeless and do you know what it does?
- Have you heard about Single Point of Entry?
- Did Single Point of Entry help you?
- Have you heard of the Common Assessment Team?
- Did the Common Assessment experience help you?
- Did you take this survey last year?
- If you took this survey last year, has anything specific improved from your experiences in shelter?

## Homeless Consumer Feedback

An overwhelming number of respondents indicated they had no specific concerns about general **health and safety** in shelters. Of those who reported concerns, overcrowding and/or lack of privacy

and general attention to hygiene/sanitation on the parts of other homeless consumers and staff were the primary problems. Several participants suggested that shelters provide easy access to hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations.

On the issue of crime in shelters, most interviewees indicated they experience none during shelter stays. Those participants who reported experiencing or witnessing crime during their shelter stays relayed that theft and fighting were the overwhelming issues. Several interviewees suggested that lockers be available in shelters to minimize the potential for losses of personal belongings. Finally, some respondents mentioned concerns about drug and/or alcohol use in shelters – both on the parts of other homeless consumers and staff. Respondents noted that shifting to professional (i.e. non-shelter resident) security and front-line staff would curtail criminal activity and offer the opportunity to screen those entering the shelters.

Most participants reported **overall satisfaction** with the shelter system. Nearly a third of respondents indicated that medical needs are being fully met through “Obamacare” and Family Health Centers Phoenix. Most participants also noted that access to meals in shelter or through SNAP benefits is going well. Those interviewees who noted dissatisfaction with the shelter system indicated that obtaining affordable long-term housing, eligible benefits (SSI/SSDI and social security were most often noted), and assistance from shelter staff with applications for benefits and housing were areas of concern. Also of note, several participants indicated that reasonable accommodations for pregnant women and individuals with other mobility issues should be made so that homeless consumers may easily access showers and beds.

**Over 50% of respondents reported respectful treatment by shelter staff.** Those participants who did not experience respect and dignity on the part of shelter staff relayed that this was often due to “staff” being fellow homeless consumers who had been in shelter longer, pedantic treatment by staff, and lack of professional training. Again, participants suggested that increasing the pool of professional employed in shelters might lead to more respectful treatment and follow-through to meet homeless consumers’ needs.

Unlike the responses from the Stand Down/Project Homeless connect surveys in 2013, 59% of the individuals surveyed this year had not heard of **Single Point of Entry (SPE)** though 85% reported familiarity with the Coalition for the Homeless. Of those consumers who had heard of Single Point of Entry, 61% reported that the SPE phone line was helpful. Those who reported that SPE was not helpful indicated this was due to no shelter beds being available.

The overwhelming majority of participants in the survey indicated they had not heard of the **Common Assessment Team (CAT)** nor were they familiar with what it does. Only 19% of interviewees reported knowing about the Common Assessment Team by name. Of those who were familiar with the CAT, more than half reported that the assessment was helpful – most indicating that it got them into housing.

Several participants noted that Stand Down/Project Homeless Connect is a helpful event because it affords access to a multitude of services in one location. Many of the same consumers reported that

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## Stand Down/Project Homeless Connect Report

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events like Stand Down should be better publicized so that more individuals in the homeless system are aware of what is going on in our community.

### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

This report reflects the feedback regarding the shelter system as a whole. All emergency shelters will receive a letter regarding consumer comments specific to their agency. Based on the feedback from the 2014 survey, the CoC Homeless Consumer Participation Task Force will make the following recommendations to the Louisville/Jefferson County Continuum of Care:

1. Add hand sanitizer stations in shelters that are easily accessible to consumers.
2. Review and develop procedures related to facilities maintenance to ensure overall cleanliness and sanitation in each shelter.
3. Coalition for the Homeless will create fliers that explain both Single Point of Entry and Common Assessment and disseminate fliers to all shelters/other homeless service providers.
4. All shelters should establish internal policies for the implementation of reasonable accommodations when possible – especially for protected class. For example, when possible, shelter staff should allow pregnant participants access to lower bunk beds when requested. Reasonable accommodations will keep shelters compliant with local and federal fair housing statutory regulations.
5. Respectful and professional treatment toward shelter guests is an on-going concern. Training around trauma-informed care, confidentiality, cultural competency and communication should be provided to staff on a regular, consistent basis. The CoC as a whole should consider what steps can be taken to inform a culture of respectful treatment toward the people we serve.