

## **Bridges Advisory Council Minutes**

### **March 23, 2017**

**Council Members Present:** **Evette Bethel** (Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)), **Stacia Burlingame** (Montgomery County JFS), **Fawn Gadel** (Family & Youth Law Center at Capital University), **Monica Gazarek** (Wood County JFS), **Kristin Gilbert** (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services), **Jenny Gottfried** (The Village Network), **Danielle Green-Welch** (Cuyahoga County DCFS), **Meredith Hicks** (Lighthouse Youth Services), **Mindy Hughes** (Lake County JFS), **Hon. Jim D. James** (Stark County Juvenile Court/ Judicial Workgroup on Bridges), **Arlene Jones** (COHHIO), **Mark Mecum** (Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies), **Molly Moses** (Ohio Housing Finance Agency), **Dauntea Sledge** (ACTION Ohio), **Denise St. Clair** (Ohio Family Care Association), **Colleen Tucker** (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services), **Sasha Bowers** (YouthMOVE Ohio), **Veronica Burroughs** (Supreme Court of Ohio)

**Also attending from ODJFS:** Betsy Bentsen, Chynna Kelley, Sarah Levels and Jana Pearce (Bridges team)

#### **Youth Focus Groups**

Reviewed where youth focus groups have occurred and the youth groups that have participated.

##### **Common Themes**

- There is excitement for an opportunity to be empowered to be adults but with the safety net for when mistakes happen.
- A few youth stated they were looking forward to having a voice in the court process.
- Want to learn skills, not just receive financial assistance check.
- Some suspicion that this experience will be similar to being in PCSA custody.

##### **Suggestions provided**

- Want Bridges worker to be a mentor or advocate, less like a 'case worker.'
- Young adults believe they need help being aware of options for them and then being able to make their own decision.
- Peer to peer mentoring as a possibility would be beneficial; possibly former foster youth.
- Once Bridges is operational, youth suggested ODJFS emphasize success stories to assist in getting buy in/advertising to future participants. Numerous suggestions were received regarding using familiar faces to advertise....by using former foster youth the message is received better.
- Suggested utilizing social media to make former foster youth aware of Bridges – Facebook page, Instagram, Bridges webpage.

##### **Next steps in youth engagement**

- Reach out to Columbus State Community College Scholars Program to facilitate a focus group.
- Reach out to Bellefaire, In Focus and Cuyahoga Community College as possible focus group settings in Cuyahoga County.
- Look into specialized populations (e.g. residential facility for pregnant and parenting teens).
- A member of the Bridges team will reach out to members of the committee that expressed interest.

**Prior to discussion of the application, the procurement process was discussed and what can and cannot be discussed in order to maintain the integrity of the process, keep a level playing field and avoid any image of impropriety.**

## **Bridges application**

The application is the method to ascertain whether or not the young adult is program eligible. This is the first step in entering the program.

The following questions were reviewed:

- **If a PCSA is contacted for post-emancipation services and recognizes that a young adult might qualify for Bridges, how long should the PCSA have to make the referral?** There does not seem to be any precedent for this. Cuyahoga County suggested a 48 hour rule to complete the referral and then 24 hours to hear back from Bridges – this is similar to what they currently utilize. Reviewed how current post emancipation referrals are handled in the SACWIS system. The goal is for the young adult to be filling out the application with a Bridges representative.
- **On the application: What verbiage and lay-out should be used to inform the young adult that they should only complete the items pertaining to the eligibility requirements and education information they selected?**  
Reviewed the draft of the application. Suggestions on some wording that may put young adults off regarding medical or mental health diagnosis. Suggestion of using the words “Medical Conditions” with some examples listed. The trend of the suggestions was to simplify as much as possible. Discussion of not having a paper version of the application at all. Providing marketing information to homeless shelters, JFS offices etc. regarding the program and will guide the young adult to reach out to the Bridges program directly. Have the marketing be similar to those of the Benefits Bank “You appear to be eligible” Please contact..... Implementation process will be developed.
- **Once the Bridges agency receives a referral, how long should they have to provide the young adult with an application?**  
No matter the manner in which an application is received, have all the time frames be the same. Contact vs. attempted contact is important to be clear. Should attempts count?

Additional Discussion:

- It was suggested that if the young adult is going to be expected to provide ongoing documentation of maintained eligibility, they should be informed of this at the beginning of the process so they will be able to have the documents.
- ODJFS is starting early discussions regarding the development of a website. Staff have reviewed Nebraska’s program and their site and there are pieces that Ohio might want to replicate as their site is youth friendly.  
([http://dhhs.ne.gov/children\\_family\\_services/BridgeToIndependence/Pages/Home.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/BridgeToIndependence/Pages/Home.aspx) )
- Recommendation to provide clear guidance to the mainstream homeless system on the program and how to handle young adults who may express an interest

## **Chapter 50 Rules (See Attachments)**

### **Program Eligibility**

Council members provided suggestions for various areas of the rule for clarification purposes. Suggestion to look at documentation requirements for FMLA to guide the process for stating a medical or mental health concern is severe enough to keep a young adult from completing any eligibility criteria. Additional research will need to be conducted regarding documentation from a qualified practitioner.

### **Termination and Denials**

Reviewed rule and received some suggestions for language clarifications throughout the rule. Specifically adding an opening paragraph making the intention clear that the program can be exited and entered until the date of the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The ICPC process was also discussed.

### **Judicial Workgroup**

An update on workgroup discussions and decisions was presented by Judge James and Fawn Gadel.

Court Venue:

- The juvenile court that had jurisdiction when young adult was in care will continue with that jurisdiction.
- The Juvenile can voluntarily decide to transfer venue if needed.

Education about the process:

- A toolkit is being created for the courts to assist with the process of this program.
- A suggestion was made regarding the possibility of toolkits for Bridges participants and Regional Vendors

Right to Counsel:

- Bridges participants will have right to counsel during proceedings.
- Not automatically appointed; this will need to be requested by the young adult.
- If necessary, they will be instructed on this process and it will not be at any cost to the young adult.

Court Appearance:

- The preference is for the Bridges participant to be present at court hearings.
- If not able to participate in-person, recommend using other methods of participation such as: skype, video conference or telephone. The young adult will also have the opportunity to complete a waiver explaining why they can't participate and anything they would like the judge or magistrate to know in their absence.
- The Bridges Representative or their legal counsel will be expected to attend court hearings
- ODJFS is researching whether ODJFS will need representation during specific court hearings

Notification to the court:

- Bridges Representative will notify the court that the VPA has been approved, so the court is aware the Best Interest and Reasonable Efforts hearings need to be scheduled,
- Bridges Representative will also notify the court if the young adult withdrawals or is terminated from the program due to no longer meeting program eligibility requirements.

Additional Discussion:

- Discussed whether or not courts can make the young adult ineligible for Bridges. Court would not terminate the young adult but would make a finding that reasonable efforts were not being met. The court will review the Bridges Plan to ensure that the Bridges Representative has worked with the young adult to identify activities to assist the young adult with gaining self-sufficiency.
- If the young adult has a concern about the services or supports they are receiving, there will be an established grievance process that they can follow to try to get the issue rectified.

### **Bridges Assessment**

- Reviewed the current topics that have been identified to be assessed. Went over specific areas that could be expanded on (i.e. interests/hobbies/extracurricular activities, establishing a line of credit). The assessment will be in SACWIS and will be required for all young adults. The resulting plan will also be in SACWIS. Due to a stringent timeline, there is not the flexibility to test the assessment and revise it prior to SACWIS design sessions.

### **Future Agenda Items: May 25, 2017 10am-2pm**

- Update on whether applicants/participants with specific offenses will still be eligible for the programs
- Vendor information (if RFGA has been released)
- VPA
- Appeals rule
- Definitions rule
- What is an adequate amount of time to have the assessment completed after VPA is final?
- Presentation by ODE/ Office of Higher Learning