

# **Bridges Advisory Council Minutes**

**May 25, 2017**

**Council Members Present:** **Evette Bethel** (Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)), **Carlos Bing** (Ohio Department of Education), **Craig Rickett** (Montgomery County JFS), **Fawn Gadel** (Family & Youth Law Center at Capital University), **Monica Gazarek** (Wood County JFS), **Jenny Gottfried** (The Village Network), **Danielle Green-Welch** (Cuyahoga County DCFS), **Meredith Hicks** (Lighthouse Youth Services), **Mindy Hughes** (Lake County JFS), **Sam Jones** (COHHIO), **Mary Wachtel** (PCSAO), **Dauntea Sledge** (ACTION Ohio), **Colleen Tucker** (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services), **Sasha Bowers** (YouthMOVE Ohio), **Veronica Burroughs** (Supreme Court of Ohio). **Tina Evans** (Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities), **Kelly Vyzral** (OACCA)

**Also attending from ODJFS:** Betsy Bentsen, Chynna Kelley, Jana Pearce

## **Introduction and general overview of the agenda**

### **Voluntary Participation Agreement- VPA:**

- The VPA functions as a contract between the young adult and ODJFS. The Bridges grantee will be responsible for explaining the VPA to the young adult but since the regional grantee will be an extension of ODJFS then they do not need to sign the document.
- The VPA identifies the roles and responsibilities of the Bridges Participant and ODJFS.
- The VPA is a standard contract that all Bridges Participants will sign.
- The VPA will be provided to the young adult when the Bridges application is completed and submitted. The young adult will sign the VPA with the understanding that the VPA is conditional upon approval of the application. Once the Bridges application is approved, the VPA will be signed by an ODJFS designee thus taking effect and starting participation in Bridges.
- The VPA contains language and terms that are based on 475(8)(B) of the Social Security Act.

### **Suggested changes to the VPA:**

- There were a few typos identified.
- Include the timeframe that the young adult has to inform the grantee that they are not able to attend their court review. This is important because the young adult will have the opportunity to include comments on the waiver form for the courts review.
- Change the reference to SSI to the term to social security benefits. This encompasses all forms of assistance offered through social security.

VPA discussion:

- Questions:
  - What impact does the best interests hearing have on the existing approved VPA?
    - Answer: As long as the court finds best interest has been met the VPA is considered extended based on the court ruling and will be active for the duration of the participant's participation in the program. The court does not need to sign the document as it is a contract between the young adult and ODJFS. The VPA remains active as long as the ruling is captured in the court record.
  - Will there be language or emphasis put on the Bridges liaison to create a line of communication for those young adults who need to reach them in an emergency situation?
    - Answer: In addition to their monthly visit, the Bridges liaison should be assessable to the young adult based on their needs.
  - Is there any responsibility on the Bridges regional grantee to do a follow up after termination of a young adult?
    - The Bridges regional grantee will be expected to inform the young adult of the termination and reentry process as well as provide a list of community resources and other services.
  - Will Bridges Regional Grantees have any responsibilities when the young adult transitions out of the program to provide after care on behalf of the Bridges agency to see how the young adult is doing and check in on them?
    - We have not finalized the transition requirements and process of young adults leaving Bridges, however, do to funding constraints it is not likely that a formal aftercare policy will be supported. The council could look into other possible funding sources for the possibility of supporting aftercare for those young adults.
  - Where does Ohio measure as compared to other states with similar programs regarding eligibility requirements and the time mandated for participation?
    - We are comparable to the states regarding the education requirements.
    - In comparison to other states Ohio is more liberal regarding the employment and removing barriers eligibility criteria. Other states have chosen to exclude these criteria and only allow young adults who are enrolled in school or have medical condition which impacts their ability to attend school to enroll in the program.
    - We are one of a few states that allow young adults to qualify based on all 5 eligibility requirements.
- Suggestions:
  - Add outcomes for not following the terms of the VPA.
    - Possibly a statement that services could be delayed or negatively impacted if the Bridges Participation is not engaged in the program.
    - Also add a statement of what occurs if ODJFS does not fulfill their responsibilities as outlined in the VPA. Explain to the young adult that

funding will not continue for the program if ODJFS does not fulfill their responsibilities.

- Include language about the unified grievance process.
  - Due to timeline constraints Bridges will look into incorporating this information after implementation. It is important to the team that the selected grantees have input on developing this process.
- Bridges grantee could possibly create their own document to supplement the VPA further outlining their responsibilities.
  - Any Bridges forms will likely have to be a standardized agreement that will be used statewide.
- It would be beneficial if the time requirements are outlined next to each eligibility criteria.

#### **Appeal rule:**

- General review of the appeals rule
- There was concern expressed with the time frames and notification process.
  - Information contained within this rule is standard for all programs that utilize the state hearing process.

#### **Denial Notice:**

- The denial notice will generate from SACWIS. As a result, the majority of the information will automatically populate.

#### **Termination:**

- If a young adult is incarcerated they will not be in a reimbursable setting so state funds will have to cover all costs incurred while the young adult remains in Bridges.

#### **Ohio Higher Department of Education (Carlos):**

- Gear UP Program- Inside 4 districts
  - Crooksville
  - Marion
  - Norwood
  - Parma
- Gear up provides the following activities and services:
  - Information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education;
  - Encouraging student enrollment in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework, in order to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level;
  - Improving the number of participating students who -
    - obtain a secondary school diploma; and
    - Complete application for and enroll in a program of postsecondary education.
  - Tutoring
  - Mentoring

- Scholarships
  - The college signing day program
  - Ohio college application month- every district in Ohio is to try and have each student apply to at least 1 college.
- The council was asked to help brainstorm ways to identify foster youth within school districts so that they can begin to receive services through the program.
    - Maybe arrange for mobile presentations. If there were a group of students that wanted to learn about Gear UP have someone come out and speak with the students and walk them through the websites and give tutorials.
  - This initiative is set to end in 2021. Gear up is looking for measures that will assist in proving effectiveness prior to 2021.
  - For more information please visit <https://www.ohiohighered.org/gearup>

#### **Update on Prohibitive Offenses-**

- Bridges is not able to exclude an otherwise qualified youth based on adult criminal offenses. However there are other restrictions that Bridges will need to be mindful of specifically regarding housing:
  - Licensed foster and adoptive homes
  - Approved Kinship Homes (approved for minors)
  - Restriction from certain residential settings and apartments based on the young adults background involving criminal offenses.
- Questions:
  - What would happen and who is responsible if the young adult cannot find housing based on the criminal offense?
    - Bridges would still be responsible for finding suitable housing for all young adults in the program.
    - If they are on a registered sex offender list as a result of a juvenile offense then that would be reported and taken into account for housing purposes.
- Juvenile offenses are not automatically sealed. The young adult is able to apply to have the offenses sealed and then after certain conditions are met, they can apply to have them expunged.
- Juvenile offenses are not considered for eligibility determination and approval to participate in Bridges.

#### **Discussion on programs/resources to assist young adults who are in unsafe living situations:**

- Monica provided an overview and examples of how Wood County transitions their young adults:
  - Prior to youth receiving IL services staff explain the services and the process so the youth is aware of what is expected of them.

- If any services are funded with Chaffee or IL funds, the youth are required to complete a budget form with the IL worker. The budget form is used as a tool to demonstrate what is affordable for that youth.
  - The agency will not approve the apartment if the youth will not be able to afford it based on the budget assessment.
  - The IL worker assists the youth in looking for available apartments. They have the youth compile a list of questions for them to ask when viewing the apartments and they are expected to take the lead in the search. The IL worker is there to assist if needed.
  - They have not placed kids in living situations where they share and both are on the lease but they have put in shared housing where there are individual leases and they share common areas.
  - Wood County has placed youth within TIP housing.
    - This has been an option for youth with sexual offenses on their record.
  - The Wood County Board of DD plans to open a short term stabilization setting. Previously young adults with sex offenses who were traditionally hard to find housing for were placed in hotels until stable housing was available.
- Fawn provided an overview and examples of supports the Family & Youth Law Center at Capital University provides:
  - Majority of the issues seen within the FYLaw clinic are landlord tenant issues.
- Discussion
  - Suggested that the Bridges Regional Grantees should be able to keep the young adult safe. They should also know the appropriate person to contact in order for the young adult to have any legal matters addressed derived from housing concerns (ex. Evictions).
  - The Regional Grantees have a responsibility not to recommend and or place a young adult in housing with known issues or lack of repair.
  - It was suggested that a mechanism be developed that supports the sharing of information with Bridges providers to make them aware of housing providers that have a history of taking advantage of young people living in their housing.
  - Legal aid located in Columbus keeps a running list of landlords that are notorious for unethical practices and properties that are in disrepair.
  - Regional Grantees should be more proactive at the outset of implementation and build a relationship with the potential landlords first. This will assist the grantee in assessing which properties could be an option for the young adults in Bridges. They will also be able to build relationships with the property owners that will ultimately create more options for those young adults.
  - The Purple Umbrella assists young adults in crises situations. The network not only can address housing concerns for those young adults but they are able to access other services and resources that are essential in times of crises.

- Regional Grantees should know of various community resources and the point of contact for those resources and services.

**Updates:**

- Carla Carpenter will attend the July meeting and provide an update on the budget during the July meeting.
- As a result of the council's feedback, the Bridges application will now be completely housed in SACWIS. The grantee will walk the young adult through each step of the application process.
- Discuss the possibility of having youth (peer to peer) ambassadors in each county or region that will be trained and able to help answer questions about Bridges. A lot of times the message is better received from a peer.
- Motion to approve minutes from last meeting. Meredith seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Future agenda items:**

- Provide document list for the eligibility criteria and activities.
- Provide the amended Adoption Assistance rules to the council to better understand the extension process.
- Talk about Medicaid (changes at the federal and state level- how to navigate and make sure the young adult will keep Medicaid until the age of 26). If they are classified under the expansion category there is proposed legislation that would add work requirements as opposed to going in under the emancipated youth category?
- Discuss promotional material and other advertising.