

## **Agency Forum Minutes**

### **September 24, 2004**

**Present:** Betsy Thiel, Minuteman ARC; Alice Shaffer, Acton resident & senior citizen; Darlene Dowdy, EMLC; Susan Lasante, resident w/interest in Immigrant population; Betsey Sweet, CPC; Roberta Walsh, Parish Nurse at St. Elizabeth's; Maureen McHugh, St. Vincent DePaul; Betty McManus, Housing Authority; Kiersten Warning & Allison Gilbert, DVAAP; Barbara Smith, HGRM; Carol Steiner, Acton COA; Joan Butler, Minuteman Senior Services; Lynn Osborn, Friends of Acton COA & SMLS; Gladys Foreman, A Friend in Need; Rev. Katrina Wuensch, South Acton Congregational Church; Megan Christopher, SMLS; Heather Marceau, Acton Board of Health.

**Board Members Present:** Ann Little, Sandy Campbell, Mary Corke, Maureen Masciola, Julie McKinley, Karen Smolin.

Sandy Campbell, moderator of the group, called the meeting to order at 9:30. Sandy passed around a sign up sheet that will be used to distribute contact information. Sandy stated that the purpose of the meeting was to get our agencies to make connections with each other. She further stated that there is a lack of awareness of services available. People just don't know what's available. The new ABUW agency contact card was distributed to all that attended.

Maureen McHugh of the St. Vincent DePaul Society was new to the forum. The Catholic Church refers its members to St. Vincent DePaul if they are in need of counseling, food, housing, or clothing. They are then scheduled for a home visit to assess their need. They overlap with the St. Elizabeth's parish nurse, Roberta Walsh. Sandy will get them a copy of the Interfaith Laity Directory.

Since the last forum, DVAAP has partnered with MAL for their "Lawyer for a Day" program. Betty McManus reported that the Acton Housing Authority crisis has been resolved. They have been awarded \$322,000 retroactive from Jan 2004. However, they are not sure what will happen after that. Also, Betty reported that people wrote letters as discussed at the last forum, to advocate for the necessary funding.

There will be a Community Education forum on October 14<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn, Boxborough, to address school related issues. ABUW is hoping to host a November forum to address promoting awareness and visibility among our agencies. David Gerratt will organize with Sandy. The group should reply to Sandy if they have a preference for a time. The next ABUW agency forum will be January 21<sup>st</sup>. Location TBD. Sandy stated that in our last forum we discussed youth related issues, Local transport, and Bullying. In this forum we'd like to discuss community issues or issues our agencies need help with, such as Issues relating to the undocumented population, mental health/minimum wage, and Coordination of Services.

Lynn Osborn, Friends of Acton COA, stated that the Friends raised funds and does PR for the Acton COA. The Friends has an informal local aid fund for emergencies available to anyone in the community as well as an emergency fuel assistance fund. What is the best way to make it simpler and coordinated administratively? Fuel assistance fund has only \$80. So they've sent request letters to churches. The Friends of Acton COA gave \$1000 from their own account. Rates are up and there is concern over the predicted potentially cold winter.

Joan Butler of Minuteman Senior Services reports seeing an increase in the Indian and Asian Population of seniors. Their kids are bringing them over here and the seniors are very isolated in their role in the extended family as caregivers. Their new Indian meals through Minuteman have been very popular and they will be doing more outreach to this seemingly hidden population. Some senior centers have been reluctant to bring this population in. Sandy stated that part of the purpose of the school forum I to address some of the cultural issues.

Barbara Smith of Household Goods Recycling Ministry stated that transportation is a very big issue for many of her clients. Joan replied that they have funded transport through private donations; now there is a problem getting seniors to appointments outside of Acton. Would like to see MD's use more local hospitals for care.

Carol Steiner of Acton COA stated that they have a town van which is slightly underutilized but is being used a lot for ESL classes. Timing makes using the van difficult. Is there a possibility of a van partly funded by Friends groups and then private donations? If they reach out to Stow or Maynard they could perhaps work with the Friends in each town. Maybe a subsidized taxi service would work? Acton COA states only one driver knew where Acton was and volunteers are tapped out. Further, Littleton Limo and Starlifter can be very expensive. Healthcare providers should be coming to the community. Sandy will check into the Community Needs Assessment done at Emerson and find out where we can start making connections.

Another population that needs review is the immigrant and/or one-car families. Mass Health sometimes pays for transport under certain circumstances but you must have prior approval.

Ann Little suggested that we have a forum on transportation issues in our community. Present should be: people who need transport, representatives from a successful transport plan, adjoining Community Chests, United Ways, Selectmen, and town managers.

Megan stated that their Needs Assessment shows that the biggest problem is a money shortage on behalf of their clients that leads to an inability to secure a loan, then debt collection, etc. Their clients need an infusion of cash and skills to learn to juggle the ball better. Also, she noted that they are seeing many seniors purchasing prescription drugs on credit cards, incurring debt and becoming depressed and anxious.

Kiersten suggested that there is a “need to know” information gap. She suggested a chat room where our agencies can go to ask a question about available services. You can set up secured groups within Yahoo and the service is free. Reminders to check the chat room would be sent.

Future forums will become focus and issue driven so there’s no “spinning our wheels”. The evening of January 20th will be the planned date for the transportation forum. Early March will be the language issue forum. The language forum will include invitations to the Chinese Language School, Russian Family Network, Russian Math School, Hispanic Family Network, Jewish Family Services and School reps.. How can we raise awareness and break through cultural barriers to set up an inter-referral system for families in need when they need info. If we can identify 10 resources for language translation, it would be helpful.

The meeting was adjourned at 11am.

Respectfully submitted,  
Julie McKinley