

Human Services Commission
Meeting May 25, 2010
5:30 – 7:30

Commissioners Present: Claudia Hill, Christopher Hall, Ayse Atasoylu, Nan Stone, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Khari Milner, Kati LaBraico

DHSP Staff: Jackie Neel, Deputy Director, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Guest: John Gatto, Executive Director of Cambridge Cares About AIDS

John Gatto talked about the imminent merger between Cambridge Cares About Aids (CCAA) and the AIDS Action Committee to take place July 1, 2010. He thanked the Human Services Commission and the DHSP for their commitment and their work done in the city.

CCAA was founded over 20 years ago and experienced the initial stigma that went with AIDS work. Much progress has been made since then both in terms of medical treatment and the public's perception the disease. John Gatto stated the improvements in health care mean a new direction and consolidation of HIV/ AIDS services are needed. But service delivery has not kept up with health care delivery. As money for services has dwindled, the capacity to take on new clients has been reduced since people with HIV/AIDS live longer.

Two years ago a group of 5 Executive Directors started talking about the possibility of merging agencies. The 5 narrowed down to two who were ready to merge within the year. After many discussions, it was agreed that CCAA would merge with AIDS Action.

They pulled together staff from both agencies into teams: public policy, administration, and prevention to brainstorm and come back with some ideas. These ideas were taken to the community and both board of directors for feedback. In March, it was agreed that a merger was best for long term sustainability of programs. Both agencies' staff have spent a lot of time together and have developed a trusting relationship over the years. Both executive Directors were clear from the start as to what they wanted from the new agency and the strengths of each agency. AIDS Action has a \$9 million budget while CCAA has a budget of \$3 million.

CCAA currently runs housing programs, case management programs, nutrition workshops, a drop in center, prevention programs, a needle exchange program, an outreach program for people on the margins of society, and Youth On Fire. The current focus is to get people more self sufficient and healthier. It is more effective to help people achieve long term change with prevention and education. Funding for these initiatives has been challenging.

There is a need to create a database system to free up a lot of staff time bogged down with intakes and follow up to provide integrated service delivery. A database will free up 1,200 hours of staff time. Infrastructure will be shared. There has been a need to re-invent the services to get both federal and state funding.

Massachusetts has about 700-800 new HIV cases per year, and the growth rate in cases from more traditionally hard to reach, populations such as the homeless or those on the verge of homelessness, people from sub-Saharan African countries, and women of color. Transgender and bisexual people are at highest risk for HIV. Because of breakthroughs in AIDS medications, people are dying of hepatitis before they die of AIDS.

There have already been benefits to the imminent merger, as CCAA serves a lot of clients from Haiti and AIDS Action has a legal department which has been helping clients apply for protective status.

Jolyon Cowan spoke briefly about all of this year's CDBG applicants and fielded questions from the Commissioners. Both he and Jose Soares reported that there were no concerns with either the applications or the CDBG funded programs. Nan Stone mentioned that only a few agencies detailed outcomes and not outputs in their applications. She went on to say they may need help with outcome evaluation in order to secure private funding from foundations. Ayse mentioned that she had similar concerns with last year's batch of CDBG applications.

Commissioners unanimously agreed to fund the 15 agencies and the 17 programs at the same level of last year's.

Jolyon then spoke about the two \$10,000 CDBG-funded mini-RFPs that the Commission had decided to award at the last HSC meeting. He reported back on his conversation with David Lesley, Executive Director of Food For Free, who told him that the Red Cross had stopped delivering food to the pantries and the Cambridge emergency food pantry network asked him to pick up the service. But at such short notice, he was not sure where he would get adequate funding for this. He thought a one \$10,000 grant would allow his agency to get the program running, and then he would be able to find funds for future years elsewhere.

As it was discussed at the last meeting, Commissioners agreed to divide the \$20,000 into two grants of \$10,000 each to fund Food For Free's food delivery to the pantries and feeding sites and \$10,000 to fund legal services to specifically address issues of domestic violence and link up with a domestic violence agency in Cambridge. Two mini-RFPs will be sent out this week to the three agencies selected: Food For Free, Greater Boston Legal Services, and Community Legal Services and Counseling Center for a one to two page response. At the June 22nd Human Services Commission meeting, Commissioners will decide which legal services agency to fund. If not enough Commissioners are present to conduct a meeting, it was agreed that there will follow an email poll.