

Cambridge Human Services Commission
Minutes of Meeting 12/12/2013
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge

Commissioners present: Christine Elow, Katharine Thomas, Khari Milner, Christopher Hall, Nan Stone, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Ayse Atasoylu, Kati LaBraico

Regrets: Lori Likis

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jose Soares (recorder).

Presenter: Commissioner Katharine Thomas, Assistant Director of the Institute for Health & Recovery

Katharine Thomas has been the Assistant Director of the Institute for Health & Recovery (IHR), a statewide organization, for the last 16 years. The Institute offers services, treatment, support and training programs to meet the needs of a wide range of clients including adolescents, incarcerated women, homeless families, and parents with young children in methadone treatment. IHR was founded in 1989 by Dr. Norma Finkelstein, its current Executive Director, and has offices in Cambridge, Boston, Fall River, and Lowell with 75 employees statewide. IHR promotes gender-responsive and culturally sensitive approaches in its programs. For more detailed information, please see the attached brochures and the powerpoint presentation.

Among its many services, the Institute offers community housing in its Shelter Plus Care, a permanent tenancy program with case management. Its family programs are at 98% occupancy. 30% of families are involved with the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families. Programs are designed to address the needs of the whole family, not just specific individuals.

Staff are multicultural/multilingual with focus on Portuguese and Spanish and provide home visit services. Clients tend to be difficult to serve and non-compliant, ex-offenders, 18-24 year olds who have been referred due to substance abuse and trauma. Emergency referrals from police are steered into detox programs as Institute only works with outpatient clients. Pregnant women are given priority. Through its work with youth, staff find that it is cheaper to get heroin than prescription drugs or marijuana. The cohort of 15 to 25 year olds tend to use heroin.

IHR is CARF accredited and licensed; its outpatient services offer treatment for adults, youth and families struggling with substance use and/or mental health issues. Treatment takes place in clients' homes and other community locations, including its offices.

The Institute runs programs and drug education classes for adolescents in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS). Parents with children in DHS are urged to come to the first sessions and commit to collaborate with program guidelines.

IHR staff serve as consultants and trainers for the Massachusetts Departments of Public Health, Children and Families, Mental Health, Corrections, Youth Services, and Early Education and Care.

Ellen announced that Youth on Fire and the Philip Brooks House Association (Harvard University) would like to collaborate in opening a small shelter for homeless youth.

The next Human Services Commission meeting is scheduled for January 9th, 2014. Sasha Purpura, Executive Director of Food For Free will present on the agency initiatives.

Meeting adjourned.