**Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Notes**

**from the CoC Full Continuum Break Out Sessions**

**By Group 04/16/21**

*Questions:*

1. *What is the piece of information that you found most meaningful from Julie’s system performance data or from Jonathon’s equity presentation?  Either it surprised you, aroused your interest, concerned you, etc. What is it and why?*
2. *Who do you think would benefit from knowing about the work of the CoC globally, the strategies and outcomes related to serving people facing and recovering from homelessness, and in terms of equity concepts?  Meaning actual people, groups, organizations, etc.*
3. *Many agencies within the CoC are involved in DEI work, both because their work addresses equity issues and because they are involved in targeted DEI work on an organizational level.  The CoC is made up of these agencies, but the CoC also carries out its own work to end homelessness which people are familiar with - organizing the collective effort, determining community-wide strategies, and evaluating outcomes.  Based on what you know about the CoC’s role in the community, what you’ve learned today, or otherwise, we are interested in the full membership’s thoughts, ideas, and suggestions on what they think should be the top priority for how DEI efforts should be pursued on a CoC level.*

Group # 1

Q1. Take away from today’s presentations.

The number of individuals/ households that returned to homelessness (although a lot of the data included pre-pandemic numbers). Approximately 25% of those served returned to homelessness. We need to do a deeper dive and drill down on those who exited programs to see what their circumstances were in an effort to better help households achieve more successful outcomes.

We all need to be having more open conversations around equity. Some organizations have built “Equity” into their strategic plans, but where is everyone at with this?

Q2. Who would benefit in the community from knowing more about the CoC (what we do and efforts towards equity).

Employers/ Corporations - Where is the “Corporate Responsibility”? There are many misconceptions around those who are unemployed or underemployed (that they are not doing enough to help themselves). Many people who work in DuPage County cannot afford to live in DuPage.
Clients we see often feel “judged” about what they do with their money/ mismanagement of funds to put them in a situation where they cannot afford their monthly housing costs.

Property Management/ Landlords/ Housing Providers – Screening criteria is ridged and screens people to work in DuPage out from being able to live in the communities that they work in. Housing Providers (Property Managers/ Landlords) should be invested in helping those who work in the community live in the community and contribute/ be involved in the local community.

Q3. Internal work around Equity.

Our group did not get too far with this question. Spent too much time on question one.

We as a CoC should revisit this question and do a deeper dive to better understand what DuPage County as a community/ and as a group of social service providers are doing to promote equity and make an impact.

Group # 2

What surprised us? Number of homeless households and high number of African American population in the homeless system vs. the population in DuPage County. Interested in how to ask questions during an interview and how to get feelings without overstepping. Guidance on how to have this conversation. Education in this area and the ability to enforce it. Lots of women lost jobs in December. Lots of them were African American. Board training on what does a job posting look like. Is there experience that could “even out” a degree. Are we harming our community by not bringing in a more diverse work force? Talking values in an interview (i.e., housing first, trauma informed care) and how we live them. Staff in the field need services offered by the organization and find ways to handle cases confidentially. How we present assistance: how can we get to those issues that are difficult to approach (i.e., finances). Designate a go to person. What is conflict of interest among staff? Is there a way to cross refer a benevolence fund to help employees and broaden support? Get comfortable with being uncomfortable to talk about equitable services. How do we determine who stays in a project when behavior issues arise with an equitable lens? Group of consumers. How do we include others? Is there an external organization out there to check intake procedures to determine if they are equitable?

Group # 3

Question 1

The expectation that people who work in this field are already open to these conversations makes them harder to have.  There’s some shame in admitting personal biases when you work in this field.

It’s easy for people who work in social services to think they’re not part of the problem.  They can stay in the background and point to other sectors as the issue.

* The beneficiaries of this work are not just BIPOC.  Doing DEI work creates and inclusive atmosphere for everyone.
* Including the board of directors is a key component of success.
* We need to really dig deeper into the people returning to homelessness.

Question 2

The people who deserve to know the most about what we are doing at the Continuum are the consumers of the resources we manage.  That would put them in a position to help guide our work for better outcomes.

Question 3

* Incentivize DEI work through the NOFA evaluation process.
* Share local best practices
* Evaluate where local organizations are in the DEI process and help facilitate education among CoC member agencies.

Group # 4

Discussed Amazon and Walmart and how insidious those employers are in perpetuating wealth inequality, also infuriating as Jonathan discussed that they donate to equity causes and promote a charitable side rather than just paying their workers a living wage, providing health insurance etc. Discussed recent anti-union efforts, the fact that these are the employers of so many of our homeless and at risk folks and such a big part of the work we do is literally just filling the needs that they create.

Tonya Latson discussed the returns to homelessness actually appearing to be pretty even across race breakdown being perhaps surprising, other measures in the continuum haven’t always been so even.

Discussed conversations happening within the continuum agencies. Tonya spoke about how now is really the time when leaders of organizations are actually open to change. We’ve HAD to change in many ways due to COVID which shows us that we CAN change, plus with funding shifts there are opportunities to change. The race equity/DEI conversation has come into focus at the same time which has created a bit of a “perfect storm” for these changes to occur. Some organizations expressed being at a conversation stage, some at a change implementing stage. All were at least having conversations within the organization. I appreciated the suggestion to do the internal organization work prior to really focusing on the work of who we serve and how, which is likely to arise more organically once we’ve done that first piece. Mary Boulos spoke to a committee that has had the authority to implement early changes and is looking at all aspects of the organization.

Tonya also discussed how at PRC they are looking at which measures taken during COVID have actually been helpful and increased access to diverse populations and keeping those things in place. Similarly at Catholic Charities, we used to make people physically come to the office for rental assistance applications, when it really isn’t necessary and can be done remotely. We both plan to continue giving people more options in accessing services to serve a people with various access issues and needs.

Bob Adams discussed how well MSHV has done at continuing to serve people during the pandemic.

Group # 5

Question 1 - Most meaningful (presentations)

* We all have opinions that need to be changed; agencies we work for and with are part of the systems that may require change
* There is a call to action for all to acknowledge there is a problem
* It’s the little details we overlook that ends up breaking things/the system. People are afraid to ask the questions; need to become and stay woke.
* Helpful to see how many people are returning to homelessness; dig in further to see why people are returning to homelessness
* Impact the pandemic has had on system change (i.e shelter model) and client outcomes
* Assess hiring processes to see how our requirements may be effect those that apply
* Sometimes we fail to recognize that people of color, disability and/or social status go through their day with pre-set barriers that requires them to work harder to achieve self sufficiency.
* It would be nice to have further breakdown on those stats.

Question 2 - Who do you think would benefit from knowing about the work of the CoC?

* Wish churches were more involved
* Decision Makers – Boards, Municipalities, etc.
* Courts, Judges – improved access allows other to be present
* Schools and community members (“I spoke at a 2nd grade class and tried to explain our services. Most kids kept talking about all the homeless people at the stoplights. One kid in particular kept saying he knew who was homeless because they weren't wearing "nice" clothes like his.”)
* Support getting people access to ways to connect to services – internet, devices, etc.

Question 3 - CoC’s role in the community, what should the top priority be for equity at the CoC level?

* Looking at data to see who are significantly impacted and not moving forward; disparities (example: White Hispanic returns to homelessness returns to homelessness)
* The community needs to know how they can help if they know someone who is going through a crisis. There's a National Runaway Hotline, is there an 800 number for homelessness?
* Build trust in the community (i.e. undocumented population)

Group # 6

**Team 6 – Allen, Paige, Jan, Joanna, Kat:**

Question 1:

Team found barriers information to be meaningful, as well as the data presented by Julie. Team discussed how data presented a two-year average and expressed interest in delving deeper to see if data is skewed as a result (are certain time periods or areas outliers?). Team discussed how disaggregated data can show inequities more readily, and how general population vs. folks using homeless services numbers differed (e.g., Black people are less than 5% of community numbers in DuPage but make up ~50% of people served by homeless services – what does this mean in terms of socioeconomic level of this population, etc.?).

Team agreed that internal equity work is a needed shift in focus, because social services agencies need to see themselves as part of the system that may be perpetuating the same issues – the needed changes go beyond any sort of programmatic adjustments. Discussed how values of social service orgs are middle-class, which likely does not meet the needs of the populations we seek to serve.

Discussed suburbanization of poverty – suburbs lack safety nets that cities more readily have. There’s a lack of a system to adequately address this “new” poverty. The identity of poverty is less obvious, more hidden now. Book recommendation: Confronting Suburban Poverty in America by Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube.

Question 3:

CoCs can provide a higher level of coordination and help agencies connect, as well as adopt similar goals/policies. Help unite everyone under similar goals/set minimum-level goals to help guide the work, encourage MOUs to make the work more seamless and ensure things don’t get siloed.

Group # 7

Question 1

* Amy LaFauce (Catholic Charities): We cover 7 counties. Liked Jonathan’s presentation – developing a shared language, implementing strategic plan, using racial equity as part of system evaluations. It isn’t in system evaluations right now but should be. There is a fear among people to actually start the conversation on this.
* Patty O’Malley (Program Manager HOS (Wheaton): We assist with Substance Use/Mental Health for Adults and Adolescents. We are in the process of discussing this topic on our end, 2 trainings being done, we are on 2nd training. Training being done by external contractors. 80 or so staff (*number here subject to* verification) currently going through the training. The trainings have prompted heated internal conversations at our various locations. The topic appears to be affecting people differently. (*Who is doing these trainings?*)
* Jen Borgognoni (Associate Exec. Director, H.O.M.E. DuPage): these conversations tend to be a bit of start and stop. Key takeaway: who has done external trainings and how did they go?
* Steve Fixler (DuPage County VAC): Who has done internal training? If so, how has it gone?

Question 2

* Steve: Realtors, realtor association, property managers, or anyone who houses people, need more direct, solid information/training on what the CoC does (for homelessness). This includes getting veterans into housing. Building relationships (in a purposeful, focused manner) is key.

Question 3

* Amy: (DEI: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)
* Amy: Getting more feedback from lived experience/people actually being served, not just at the agency level but the CoC level. Group of people with lived experience who are also involved in decision making, something akin to a board that consists of representatives to help evaluate our efforts and outcomes.

Group # 8

Laura Beard, UW; Will Moeller, Bridge Communities; Marisa Wiesman, PSLS; Suzanne Baber, Teen Parent Connection; Sergio Martinez, Wayne Township; Lisa Snipes, DuPage County CoC

Group was excited to look at additional resources, but then translating these resources, education, training and knowledge into action. Discussed the importance of being aspirational and connecting with others. Looking at this from a perspective of coordination of care for the people we serve as well as the perspective of what we as a Continuum can do. Look at the work being done by large corporations and asking local agencies where they are at in this process (i.e., are they having these discussions, using shared language, implementing this into a strategic plan, using equity as part of any internal evaluation process, including all stakeholder input, etc.), asking the difficult questions.

Quote from Jonathan “Progressive enlightenment starts with owning our internal biases, then equally owning our ability to learn and improve.”