



COUNTY OF HUNTERDON NEW JERSEY

HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION MENTAL HEALTH BOARD



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REFERENCE:

- ☒ Council
- ☐ Mental Health
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Disability Services
- ☐ Substance
- ☐ Use Disorder
- ☐ Transportation

Approved April 27, 2022

HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, March 23, 2022, 3:30 p.m.

Call In and Webex Only

DRAFT

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

L. Haynes	R. Horoschak
B. Renkens	R. Cooper
S. Elliott	F. Leddy
J. Cassano	M. Bartelli
J. Gorman	J. Acosta

EX- OFFICIO

M. Scherer

SUPPORT STAFF

M. O'Reilly
E. Neukum
L. Nauman
S. Becker

GUESTS

D. Schappert
L. Zimmermann
B. Mastrianni
T. Shepherd
C. Watson
R. Lewis
S. Ellis
S. Lax
S. Freedman
K. Seppelt

COUNTY DIV. REPS.

S. Nekola
K. Burghardt

***Designees**

I. CONVENE: OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT:

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21. Notice of this meeting has been published in the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Courier News. A public notice announcing this meeting has also been placed in the lobbies of the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services, the first floor of the Main Street County Complex, 71 Main Street Building #1, Flemington, NJ; the first floor of the Route 12 County Complex, Building #3, 314 State Route 12, Flemington, NJ and County Clerk's Office."

The Council allows time for comments from the public at the end of each meeting. Public comments are limited to three (3) minutes per person per meeting, in order to ensure that all attendees have an opportunity to be heard. Brief written comments may also be submitted for distribution during the meeting.

J. Gorman opened the regular monthly meeting of the Council at 3:33 p.m. with a quorum present.

J. Gorman read HSAC's Statement of Purpose.

Due to the recent public health crisis, COVID-19, this meeting was call in and Webex ONLY

II. ***APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** J. Gorman asked for a motion to approve the February 23, 2022 minutes. A motion was made by S. Elliott and J. Acosta seconded to approve the meeting minutes. There were no abstentions. All members were in favor. The motion passed and the minutes were approved.

III. **PRESENTATION:** Ride Free Transportation – Shaun Ellis introduced himself as one of the co-founders of Free Bridge Mutual Aid. One of the projects that E. Neukum asked him to talk about is Ride Free. He started to give an overview of who they are, what they are about, what they are doing and what their goals are.

Free Bridge is a free mutual aid project; their only project so far. They started providing rides over a year ago; in November/December 2020. Why is it called Free Bridge? There is a local significance to the free bridge name. A lot of people in Lambertville, which is the general region they primarily serve, refer to the bridge across the river as the free bridge because there is no toll and most of the Delaware River towns have their own free bridge. It works as a metaphor to build a path to a collective liberation; a bridge to freedom for many people who do not have access to resources such as transportation. Ride Free really wants to meet the needs of their community members and they want to recognize that they are all interconnected, deserving of care and to live with dignity whether there is a vehicle or not.

Mutual Aid is about supporting each other's survival needs. It is based on shared understanding that the crises that people are facing are usually caused by a system we are currently living under and are often made worse by those systems. Mutual Aid focuses on helping people get what they need right now directly as they collectively get to the root causes of the problems.

Free Bridge operates under a set of community agreements so that everyone is on the same page in terms of decision-making, feeling comfortable and being able to work well together. The organization is completely Democratic in decision-making, therefore, there isn't any hierarchy in their organization. It may take a little longer then if the executives are making the calls, but there are a lot of benefits from a total Democratic consensus-based decision-making process.

Upon focusing on transportation, the agency did not want to overlap with any other agency that is already providing the same services. The city has two food pantries that are already well-trafficked. The organization reached out to the food pantries and asked if the leadership and community were aware of any real need in the area and they were told that the one major area of need is transportation. S. Ellis conveyed that with Lambertville being a river town, often times it is difficult to cross the bridge to Pennsylvania to get to a grocery store or bank and in cases, people work over in Pennsylvania and have struggles taking transportation from Hunterdon County. The agency wanted to see how they could help support the community in that way. He shared their first flyer which displayed their centralized phone number and email. There is an operator on duty 7 days a week who answers the phone, checks messages/emails and coordinates with drivers and passengers to fulfill transportation needs. Drivers are on duty and have various schedules. Every week the team reviews the driver's board which lists the rides for the week. If there is a need that has not been claimed within 48 hours of departure, they send out another notice to the

drivers.

The agency serves the greater Lambertville area which includes New Hope and surrounding areas. Most of the people live in Lambertville or Stockton and usually travel to Flemington, maybe Princeton or New Hope.

Since last April, they had provided hundreds of rides since the initiative started. Some locations the passengers are taken to include grocery stores, vaccine appointments, doctor's appointments, food pantries, clothing shopping, mailing packages, as well as additional basic needs. In terms of number of rides served, the agency provided a little over 300 rides thus far. All of the promotional material is also available in Spanish. About less than half of the riders are Spanish speaking.

S. Ellis shared the Ride Free Transportation goals. First, building solidarity within the community to address long-term needs even beyond transportation. He further explained that how needs are learned about in the community is by sharing space and being a driver and being a passenger; at their monthly meetings they make time to discuss the needs and concerns outside of transportation as well. Speaking for a short-term goal is to direct mutual aid for immediate transportation needs within the community.

Ride Free is also looking to organize for people who are calling for rides. They are seeking ways to make their meetings more accessible and involve everyone in the decision-making. COVID was difficult because all participants were not able to convene in person. Now, they are making a concerted effort to host in-person meetings to help build those relationships outside of the one-on-one driver/passenger relationships.

Ongoing mobilizations of people to become drivers and schedule rides to build their power and sustain the work they are doing. S. Ellis conveyed there had been a number of concerns throughout with a number of drivers who were working from home during the pandemic and had to return to the office. He noted there are a few vacancies to fill, as well as they are always welcoming new drivers. Because most of the rides needed are within the main business hours, it is challenging to find people for those hours, so one of their strategies is to reach-out to the retired community.

S. Ellis concluded his presentation and thanked everyone for their time, as well as he provided his contact information and conveyed the email for the agency: freebridgemutualaid@gmail.com. The phone number is: 609-310-1454.

L. Zimmermann with Tri-County Continuum of Care Organization thanked S. Ellis for his informational presentation as she was not aware of Ride Free. She questioned the long-term goal of extending the needs of the community beyond transportation and asked if S. Ellis could provide some insight from the community members who had been assisted in that capacity. What were the categories or range of needs that he is seeing and also, is this data being collected? Further, what is done with that data? Are there other entities that this data is being shared with? S. Ellis clarified that they have provided over rides to community members. He continued to provide a few of the larger issues that have been discussed by their team. One is general accessibility. For example, a community member does not have a car and has mobility issues. Specifically, the community member had experienced an issue with a cable box, therefore, S. Ellis helped this community member contact and drive to the provider to replace the box. The local office in Lambertville is no longer open so, they had to travel to Lawrenceville. S. Ellis provided a second example which emphasizes on people having concerns with arriving for their medical

appointments. As a result, one gentleman had been threatened to be dropped by his doctor because he had missed or had been late too many times. Ride Free came in at the right time to help and were able to get him to his appointments, therefore, the concerns were resolved. S. Ellis conveyed they are involved with other agencies but had not shared explicit data with them at this time. He expressed great interest in moving forward with presentations for other committees, agencies and organizations.

J. Acosta inquired where the funding is coming from to support this effort. S. Ellis replied it is all voluntary; there is no funding.

S. Elliott inquired about wheelchair bound riders. Are there any vans equipped to assist with these passengers? S. Ellis replied they do not have a vehicle that can assist with wheelchair bound riders and is one of their challenges. They are developing an app similar to a free Uber app where the passenger can enter special requests for special needs such as a car seat requiring installation, a low sedan because of difficulty getting in and out a vehicle, etc. S. Ellis regretted to state at this time, they cannot help someone with needed requirements.

S. Elliott asked if the drivers must pass all background checks and are screened. S. Ellis replied that all drivers must attend a meeting and sign a waiver (prepared by a pro bono attorney). All passengers must sign a waiver as well. Usually, people are referred to the service by friends that are already working within the group. Those referrals are taken seriously, and they also ensure the drivers are onboard with their philosophy. The drivers are also responsible to provide a copy of their driver's license and registration for their personal vehicle.

Additionally, S. Elliott inquired if a passenger has an accessible vehicle, is it possible for the driver to use the passenger's vehicle for the trip. S. Ellis replied that is most definitely possible with the driver(s) and could depend on the comfort level of the driver(s). S. Ellis continued to offer further details about the design and extending to other communities regarding the app they are developing. S. Elliott will speak with S. Ellis offline regarding transportation.

R. Horoschak inquired if any of the drivers have experience and training in assisting and helping the passengers with disabilities in and out of the vehicles. S. Ellis stated he is a trained certified accessibility specialist. The passenger is asked about their need for accommodations. They help guide the driver with what works best for them concerning their comfort level. S. Ellis asked if any information can be shared with his agency to help with the driver's onboarding process. R. Horoschak spoke of how Lyft proposed their services years prior. He added he feels how Ride Free is trying to work with disabled people is commendable. Discussion ensued regarding Lyft and their services coupled with Free Ride.

T. Shepherd stated she would like to connect with S. Ellis offline and to clarify about the background checks for the volunteers. She continued that he has a committed group of volunteers that are using their own vehicles, signing off on a waiver, but there are not actually any background checks that are being done for the volunteers. She also had a question about the insurance coverage. This is the individual's personal insurance that is covering any liability associated with these rides. S. Ellis confirmed that the way they see it is neighbors are giving neighbors/friends rides. It is more of a rideshare or carpool style setup. S. Ellis will forward a copy of the waiver along with the flyer.

J. Gorman added she feels this is a great amenity to address the issue that is really important to the community. If you impact one person's life or 30 lives, good for you!

S. Lax stated this effort is extremely commendable and hope it flourishes into a great endeavor. She continued to open further discussion about the services offered by Lyft. She asked if there is any accessibility training available, the practice of the neighbor-to-neighbor support and how that will all work out in the future, as well as are there any statistics about the ride times, i.e. how long it takes to get a ride, how in advance to ask for a ride, and addressing disability issues. S. Ellis replied he would like to make a brief accessibility training course part of the onboarding process as this is not done at the moment and believes it is a great idea. He will take this idea back to discuss further. As far as getting the advanced notice for booking a ride, they suggest making a request within 48-hours in advance, but they had filled rides within a 24-hour window. He noted again that even if their app will look similar to a Lyft or Uber app, this does not mean that drivers are driving around waiting for a ride. It is based on people going about their everyday lives and may have a few hours to spare within their day. S. Elliott added his agency can assist with training and some accessibility to disability vehicles but only need a driver.

E. Neukum inquired if Ride Free has people calling for rides that are using a wheelchair during the daytime hours when the LINK is operating. S. Ellis replied they do not. They do not have any riders who use wheelchairs since they started. He continued they have people who have some severe accessibility issues; they have walkers or canes, and they cannot lift their leg up into a vehicle that is very high. S. Ellis informed E. Neukum they would not be able to accommodate wheelchair usage at this time. E. Neukum asked if the agency is asking if the passengers had spoken to LINK; are they having mobility issues even though they have a walker or a cane. All of the LINK buses are accessible. There is a lift outside of the vehicle as she explained almost like an outside elevator where the passenger can be a standing person, someone who is sitting or is someone who does not want to walk up the steps. She stressed the LINK wants to help as many people as possible and if there is something that really needs to be addressed, she reinforced to please forward those requests directly to her. S. Ellis agreed with E. Neukum and believes that one of things they do not want to do is duplicate efforts especially if they are funded where the community is already paying to support. He continued he has a list he would like to share about the different options offered in the community. While they are working on the app, they are also developing a website that will offer many options. Discussion ensued.

M. O'Reilly thanked S. Ellis for attending and presenting at this meeting. The group really appreciated it. S. Ellis thanked the group for having him.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

E. Neukum stated the LINK is now using the new Ecolane Mobile App for smart devices. The purpose for downloading the app would be to see what time the bus will arrive approximately, if the bus is on its way or if the ride needs to be cancelled. This all can be accomplished through the smart phone as opposed to calling into the LINK and waiting on hold or being given a window of time to expect transportation to arrive. The app on the smart phone will be a little more accurate than calling dispatch as you can see the information in real time. In order to download the app, the passenger would have to go to their play store either for the Android or for the Apple iPhone and look for the app, Ecolane Mobile App. Directions about how to use this app will be forwarded via email at the end of this meeting. E. Neuman stated once the app has been downloaded, a call will have to be made into the LINK and they will have to get their end setup. The user must have a profile with the LINK. E. Neukum conveyed there are over 900 people registered in the Ecolane system and reported that around 30 people have begun to use the mobile application.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

VI. REPORTS:

A. County Department of Human Services (CDHS): M. O'Reilly reported that since the last HSAC meeting, the proposed state budget had been released. The state Department of Human Services sent out a newsletter. She will share the newsletter after the meeting. One item of interest for Hunterdon County Department of Human Services is an increase in the hotel/motel rates. The hotel/motel rates are proposed to increase by \$10.00 per person per night. She noted this is something that had been a struggle in working with some of the local motels in the area. Generally, looking at the budget regarding Human Services, it doesn't include many reductions in funding for most programs; it seems like it is level-funding or increases in most areas.

M. O'Reilly mentioned the utility moratorium for shutoffs has ended. An email had been distributed from the Department of Community of Affairs low-income water assistance program. This is for water and sewer arrears. The eligibility requirements can be located on the DCA website. She will add this information to the Chat Box.

She added if someone is not able to apply online for these programs, they can call 1-800-510-3102 to be referred to a local agency to help apply for that assistance.

M. O'Reilly also reminded the group that the county still has vaccine clinics weekly, as well as a COVID testing site offering a free rapid or PCR tests. She advised to check the website for their hours of operation. Her understanding is the testing site will remain open until the end of March and she is unsure if it will remain open past that date. Vaccines will be ongoing if anyone is in need. Information had been forwarded within the past few months regarding the state Department of Health is able to go to agencies to offer onsite vaccine clinics. If anyone is interested, M. O'Reilly can send out that information.

The eviction moratorium has ended as well. According to Legal Services of Northwest Jersey, they have a lot of clients being evicted. There is about a six month wait to have a scheduled court date.

B. NJ Department of Human Services (DHS): No report at this time.

C. NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P): M. Scherer reported for the month of February, the Hunterdon local office is currently working with 223 children with 15 youth in placement and received 31 referrals in this month. This number reflects 10 referrals less than January and 16 less children that DCP&P is working with than last month.

D. HSAC Committee Reports:

By-Laws Committee – R. Horoschak stated the committee is expected to have the By-Laws completed by April.

Housing Committee – R. Horoschak stated the posters are ready to print and the questionnaire that K. Burghardt did a lot of work on with input from C. Dey and others including E. Neukum and S. Nekola is just about set. They had a lot of progress. R. Cooper thanks all that were involved to help with this endeavor. She continued the posters will be on all of the LINK buses, as well as throughout the county.

Planning & Integration Committee – No updates at this time.

Outreach & Communication Committee – This committee is scheduled to meet next week.

Nominations Committee – R. Horoschak reminded the committee needs to submit their nominations in April and vote on them in May. M. O'Reilly stated she will remind L. Long Piazza.

E. CDHS Committee Reports: No Report at this time.

VII. GOALS & ACTION: None at this time.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT AND QUESTIONS PERIOD:

Public comments are limited to a maximum of three (3) minutes per person. Brief written comments may be submitted prior to the meeting for distribution during the meeting.

J. Acosta-Hobschaidt shared that March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. There will be three virtual presentations that will be hosted by doctors. Anyone interested can register online and share with their consumers as well. She noted she will forward the flyer as well.

K. Burghardt conveyed he is targeting to host a housing event next month. He emailed the Parks Department to utilize the space behind the old county courthouse. Once he gains permission and more information, he will share. If anyone is interested in helping with the event to please notify him.

J. Cassano, a job developer with the Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board conveyed the agency had received funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program for the third year. If anyone is interested, the application is located online on their website. She also noted funding had been received for the Pathways to Recovery Program and more information will follow. A Life After High School Career Paths for Youth in-person event will be held on April 28, 2022 at Raritan Valley Community College Conference Center. They are inviting high school, middle school and college students to learn about some career paths they can take. Business representation will be present and guest speakers as well. The GRWDB will be hosting this event on April 28, 2022 from 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm. J. Cassano reported the Employment Services Office and the One Stop Career Center are open by appointments both in Somerville and in Flemington. Workforce New Jersey Program will begin on April 4, 2022 at the ESC location on Bartles Corner Road, Flemington.

S. Elliott stated the Progressive Center still has CARES Act funding through the end of September and is using this funding to help people in so many different ways. If an agency is in need, please contact the Hunterdon office at 908-782-1055 ask about the CARES Act funding.

D. Schappert reported Norwescap had been awarded one of the regional ACE's collaborative HUBs. They will be releasing more information at the next meeting. There is a series of micro grants that will be available and by micro grants, it could be as small as \$500.00 to \$1,000.00 for one family and as large as \$20,000.00 to \$25,000.00 to \$100,000.00. Each HUB has been awarded \$1 million in funding. Norwescap has the central part of the state which includes Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Ocean and a few other counties as well. More information about the HUB's including contact information will be included soon. Right now, there are no restrictions or strict guidelines to applying for the grant funds except for meeting milestones along

the way; they do have to provide evidence of how the monies are being spent, in what way and outcomes over the course of the grant funding period. She will continue to forward the information as it becomes available.

IX.* MOTION TO ADJOURN:

J. Cassano made a motion and S. Elliott seconded. The motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:36 p.m. The next meeting will be held April 27, 2022.

***= Item Requires Action**

Note to Council Members: If members are unable to attend the meeting, please notify the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services.