



Continuum of Care Membership Council Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, May 30, 2023  
2:30 – 4:00 PM

*The following agenda items may only sometimes be considered in the order they appear.*

Attendance

Azhalia Ramirez, SARAH	Matthew Howard, CIU	Steve Dane, Haven for Hope	La Donna Sewell, UTSA Housing First
Dacey Werba, SARAH	Lauren Zamora, CIU	Gaylynn Schwenk, SAMM	Pete Gonzales, AGIF- NVOP
Billy Mahone, SARAH	Warren Smith, Helen's Project	Sonia Sandoval, Bexar County CSCD	Lamar Elliot, VA Hud Vash
Judge Melissa Vara, COSA	Valerie Salas, CAM	Megan Piel, UTSA Housing First	Angela Wilson, SAAF
Chris Plauche, HFCC/CWH	Anna Downey, HFCC	Terry Ortiz, ESC Region 20	Carlos Rodriguez, Endeavors
Tina Tosi, Endeavors Nikisha Baker, SAMM	Ingrid Sullivan, SAAF	Sandra Whitley, Thrive	Shelby Moreno, Thrive

**1. Call to Order – Nikisha Baker**

- a. Nikisha Baker called the meeting to order at 2:37 pm.

**2. Community Court Presentation – Judge Melissa Vara, First Assistant**

**Christian Henricksen, and CIU Director Matthew Howard**

- a. Judge Melissa Vara explained that the goal of the community court initiative was to address the issue of homelessness and prevent individuals from receiving convictions for minor offenses. Judge Vara emphasized the importance of providing support and accountability to those willing to participate in the program. She informed the attendees that the court had recently conducted its first Zoom meeting to accommodate individuals who faced difficulties in physically attending the courthouse. She mentioned the court's commitment to being flexible with appearances,

staffing, and program implementation to ensure accessibility for participants. The court was exploring alternatives to traditional penalties, such as fines and community service, and considering individualized approaches based on the unique circumstances of each case. Judge Vara noted that the court was awaiting grant funding, which would be crucial for the program's success. Despite being in the early stages, she expressed optimism and highlighted the commitment of all involved to learn and improve as they moved forward.

- b. Christian Henricksen discussed the issue of jail population and the disproportionate number of individuals experiencing homelessness detained for low-level, nonviolent misdemeanor offenses. With the cases, it was discovered that many of these individuals couldn't afford even the low bonds set, resulting in prolonged stays in jail. The lack of tools and resources within the criminal justice system to address the unique needs of this population further complicated the situation. Additionally, the unintended consequence of convictions making them ineligible for housing assistance perpetuated the cycle of homelessness and repeated arrests. A program called the "Second Chance for Success" was developed to tackle these challenges. It aimed to assist individuals with convictions in securing housing and help those seeking housing overcome convictions as barriers.
- c. Matthew Howard explained that the court's main objective is to assist individuals in obtaining housing, and the application packet will provide

further details on how this will be accomplished. If anyone has clients interested in participating, they were encouraged to contact the court, either directly or through their defense attorney, to initiate the process. He also highlighted the presence of other specialty courts, such as veterans' specialty courts, mental health specialty courts, drug courts, and DWI courts. In cases where defendants may have overlapping needs that align with these specialty courts, communication and coordination among the courts are essential to ensure that the defendant is directed to the most appropriate program based on their specific circumstances.

### **3. Welcome New Membership Council Agencies – Nikisha Baker**

- a. The Tithing Foundation
  - i. Nikisha Baker welcomed the new member and let the members know they could not attend this meeting but will give an overview at the next Membership Council Meeting.

### **4. Approve January 31, 2023, Minutes**

Motion Matt Howard Second Morris Smith Abstain None Approved Yes

### **5. Membership Council Procedure – Nikisha Baker**

- a. Nikisha Baker let the membership council members know there will be a new process. She informed the members that the process is establishing a more rigorous vetting process for organizations seeking membership. This will involve an interview or question-and-answer session for new or unfamiliar organizations operating in San Antonio. The intention behind this more formalized process is to ensure that the Council benefits from



the strength and expertise brought by its members, aligning with the overall objective of stronger governance across the organization's councils and subcommittees.

- i. A concern was raised about the potential exclusivity of the vetting process, with a participant sharing their experience of initially needing more knowledge and connections when they joined the organization. In response, it was clarified that the process is not designed to be exclusive. Instead, it aims to foster inclusivity by ensuring that organizations joining the membership council are genuinely interested in assisting the clients being served, rather than viewing it as an opportunity for business or referrals. The intention is to create a collaborative environment rather than a chamber of commerce-like atmosphere. Additionally, it was mentioned that there have been instances where organizations without 501(c)(3) status or small-scale operations have submitted applications. The purpose of the vetting process is to ensure a level of professionalism in the services provided and to establish standards for the work being done to benefit the homeless population. The primary objective is to ensure the right fit and have organizations aligned with the membership council's goals.

## **6. Membership Council Agencies & Orientation – Azhalia Ramirez**

- a. Azhalia Ramirez informed the members of the current membership council agencies, which can be accessed on our website and will be regularly



updated. She let the members know that there are agencies that will need to renew their membership in the coming months. She informed the council members that the Membership Council applications are currently on a 90-day hold. Agencies can apply but will only be reviewed at the end of August once the processes have been established. The orientation has recently been revamped to address agency turnover and ensure effective training. If there are individuals in current agencies who should attend the membership Council orientation, please refer them to SARA. The orientation covers key topics, including the continuum of care, Sarah's role, our collaborative approach, the Notice of Funding Opportunity, and our alliances and coalitions. Please provide advance notice to arrange an orientation session or notify us of new staff members or proxies attending.

- b. As a benefit of membership, we have community collaboration calls. The next call is scheduled for June 21. If you have agenda items to include, please email [azhaliaramirez@sarahomeless.org](mailto:azhaliaramirez@sarahomeless.org).

## **7. 2023 Point-in-Time Count Key Findings – Billy Mahone**

- a. Billy Mahone gave an overview of the PIT count findings and explained what data they sought during the count. He let the members know that the community dashboard tracks the data. Billy explained each finding and why it is important.
- b. Billy Mahone gave an overview of The PIT count data release state of homelessness event that was recently held, and the key findings were presented. The full report and key findings are available in PDF format on



the SARA website under reports and data. To track homelessness more comprehensively, SARA provides quarterly updates on our website and Community dashboard. If you have any questions or would like to delve deeper into the report, feel free to contact us.

- c. Nikisha Baker updated the members on Homeless Heroes and celebrated the front-line staff. She thanked the members and SARA team.

## **8. CoC Committee Updates – Dacey Werba**

- a. Dacey Werba reminded the council members that the governance charter could be found on the SARA website under About Us. It provides information on meetings and who to contact for inquiries or agenda items. If you're interested in joining a committee meeting, you can click on the governance charter to access the relevant information and reach out to the appropriate contact. There is also implementing a new practice of presenting committee seat openings to you all, seeking your input on the best fit for these positions. She informed them of the recent committee information.
- b. The Youth Homelessness Steering Committee recently discussed foster care youth, with 70% of the youth at the center have come from the foster care system. This has sparked conversations about collecting data and understanding their needs and preferences. The committee and the YABB (Youth Advisory Board) will conduct listening sessions with youth who have aged out of foster care to gather data and determine necessary resources.



- c. The HMIs and Data Advisory Committee will meet tomorrow to continue discussing data definitions, including chronic or unsheltered chronic homelessness. They have three additional definitions on the agenda. If you're interested in these updates, please let us know, as we will also share them with the Homeless Response System Advisory Committee, given their correlation. The committee is also working on coordinating DSPs (Data Sharing Plans) and planning a domestic violence case conferencing initiative. They are also addressing the standardization of documenting the housing status of youth and young adults during intake with rapid rehousing caseworkers.
- d. The Homeless Strategic Planning Oversight Committee will meet next Thursday to discuss the priorities further guiding the committee-level work. Additionally, the Community Collaboration Call will take place in the months when the Membership Council still needs to meet. These virtual calls provide an opportunity for information sharing and community outreach. Please note that the meeting schedule for these calls has been adjusted to align with other meetings, streamlining the process.

## **9. Funding Opportunities – Open Discussion**

*This is an opportunity to share any funding available for agencies to apply to.*

- Family and Youth Services Bureau Grant ([Linked here](#))
- Federal Runaway & Homeless Youth Programs: Developing Competitive Applications - Basic Center Program Grant ([Register here](#))

## **10. Agency Updates – Open Discussion**



- a. Sandy Whitley announced that she is retiring at the end of August.
- b. Ingrid Sullivan let the members know that there is still funding for tenant-based renting.

**11. Next Membership Council Meeting: September 26, 2023**

**12. Adjournment – Nikisha Baker**

- a. Nikisha Baker Adjourned the meeting at 3:26 pm

**13. Optional Tour**

- a. Council Members joined Matt Howard to tour the County Court building.