

# HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS BOARD REPORT JANUARY 2021

Submitted by Cara Coleman, MA, LPC, Housing Supervisor  
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COVID-19 has presented some challenges for the Housing Department in supporting client needs using telehealth options. We quickly learned that the high acuity and vulnerability along with multiple barriers of the populations we serve, that face-to-face meetings were necessary and sought management approval to provide direct services when necessary. While clients are literally homeless, living outdoors in their cars, campers, tents, park or other locations staff are still regularly meeting with clients in person to help with connections to housing resources, recovery and treatment resources, and help with completing documentation necessary to obtain housing and benefit programs. Many of our clients have a difficult time with understanding government forms and completing housing applications completely and accurately. The direct services are essential to ensure clients are completing housing applications and benefit applications to ensure their applications are not denied for missed questions, signatures, or dates. We are grateful to the agency for helping to provide necessary and adequate PPE so that Housing Staff can continue to support those who are experiencing homelessness with direct person to person services. Staff continue to work through HAP Line phone issues using the Jabber application which forwards the HAP Line to the staff's cell when they are logged into Jabber. Jason Wilkey and County IS have been tremendously helpful to staff in navigating solutions to Jabber issues.

While COVID-19 has brought some challenges, the Housing Department has been overwhelmed by the responses from our State and Federal governments to prioritized housing in the form of increased rental assistance to help those who have lost their jobs and are facing eviction to remain in their homes through the Eviction Diversion Program. Emily Berning has performed above expectations by working with CAAC, Legal Aid, and the Allegan Courts in setting up Allegan County's first Eviction Diversion Program. This program was made possible by a grant from the State in the amount of \$232,788 with \$195,507 for direct financial assistance for rent. Emily set up and facilitated the county workgroup required for this state grant and develop an effective and efficient process with the support of the courts, legal aid, and CAAC. Due to the volume of the work, John Mills was "loaned" to the Housing Department to provide peer supports by assisting households in gathering and submitting grant required documents to Emily in order to accelerate the process. Most families were able to complete the process with a check issued within 2 weeks of an application. Towards the end of November, Emily noticed we were going to run out of funds without being to help everyone who submitted applications. In response to the need Cara directed Emily to request additional funding to support these households. MSHDA responded by allocating an additional allotment of \$150,000. Emily and John were like the "dynamic duo" in collaboration with legal aid, court, and CAAC to assist 113 families in preventing their evictions.

ACCMHS received an additional Emergency Solutions Grant allocation from the CARES Act. ACCMHS has received 2 rounds of funding totaling \$344,356 which has added 54 staff hours and an additional \$89,560 in rental assistance. In response to CARES ESG Round 1 along with the MSDHSA COC SSO Grant, we hired Tehry Smith and were able to give her a full-time position in December. With CARES 2, we moved Emily and John from the Eviction Diversion Program that ended 12/30/2020 over to CARES ESG starting 1/1/2021.

Allegan County, via ACCMHS, received communication last week that another Eviction Diversion Grant has been allocated in the amount of \$2,730,000 through the end of 2021. This grant provides \$187,000 for administration and staffing with \$2,443,000 in rental assistance dollars. The grant does require the hiring of 4 additional staff to ensure adequate services and complete drawdown of funding by the end of 2021. This new grant allocation brings the Housing Budget for 2020-2021 to \$4,323,842.

With the training and consultant work provided by OrgCode and IBHA, the Allegan County Local Planning Body (formerly ACCOC) now has a dashboard that shows system-wide performance in ending homelessness. The dashboard shows the inflow and outflow of homeless persons, who is currently or remains homeless, the primary program providing services, and destinations where people are permanently housed. This will help the AC LPB address barriers and identify key issues in the process and brainstorm solutions to decrease homelessness.

Our Community Coordinator, Hadlee Robinson left the agency on 12.30/2020 after being offered a position at a DV shelter in Battle Creek area which is a "dream job" for her. During her time at ACCMHS, Hadlee coordinated with the Allegan County LPB, bringing this committee of the Michigan Balance of State Continuum of Care in alignment with the Governance Charter, re-establishing the Inter-agency Services Team workgroup and the Supportive Housing Advocates Promoting Empowerment workgroup with monthly meeting structures using the

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Zoom Platform. Hadlee created a binder that will be transferred to each Community Coordinator to continue to support the Allegan Count LPB to improve its system of care.

Overall, the Housing Department team has done a better job in spending down grant dollars from 2019 to 2020 grant years by supporting clients to remain housed, despite COVID-19 complications. However, without units opening up with families moving or evictions, those who are literally homeless are facing increased difficulty in locating open units for rent. This means that people are remaining homeless outdoors, in shelters, or at the hotel with ACCMHS Emergency Shelter-Hotel Program funding. Last year, due to increased use of hotel dollars, ACCMHS received an increased allocation from \$8000 in 2019-2020 to \$20,250 for 2020-2021. Even with the increase funding, our current ESP grant has \$1800 remaining. This is only enough to hotel one family for 3.5 weeks. ACCMHS-Housing will need to contact Salvation Army to request additional funding.

The SAMHSA Grant to Benefit Homeless Individuals continues to trek forward with integration of homeless and behavioral health services. ACCMHS Housing collaborated with our SAMHSA GPO and MISSION developer David Smelson to re-invent MISSION as a 24-month program model in response to barriers faced by rural communities without emergency shelters. Data outcomes have shown us that the first 6 months in MISSION is heavily focused on housing, putting treatment on the back-burner. In several cases, it has taken at least a year to help MISSION clients obtain housing. In response, the MISSION team with support from IBHA brainstormed for solutions coming up with the 24-month model. This will enable MISSION staff to focus on housing first with supports and treatment when appropriate in the first 12 months, then placing an increased focus on therapy treatment and peer counseling sessions in year 2 after MISSION clients are housed. MISSION staff will increase frequency of reassessments from every 6 months to every 90 days to better track outcomes and program effectiveness.

In year 2, MISSION staff have moved from paper documents to utilizing Streamline and HMIS. MISSION staff input program entry/exits and the SPDAT assessments along with service transactions into HMIS. The SPDAT assessments help the grant track program inputs, outputs, and outcomes across several life domain areas while the GPRA (required by SAMHSA) tracks SUD severity and frequency of use along with treatment effectiveness. In Streamline, MISSION clients are activated with services via a document email to Lynn Yetman and staff are now inputting service notes for Therapy, Case Management, and Peer Supports via a grant-funded code. The additional drop-down in the IPOS that was necessary to enable MISSION Staff to input an IPOS for MISSION clients was completed with staff beginning to use the IPOS last Wednesday (1/6). The use of the IPOS by MISSION Staff will support coordination of care throughout the agency for MISSION clients. The MISSION Service Note was drafted and sent to Streamline for development and is in the final stages of rework with hopes of going live by February 2021, which will fully integrate MISSION into Streamline as a grant-funded program. The big next step will be credentialing MISSION staff and treatment practices in order to be reimbursed by Medicaid funding while also seeking out other funding streams to support this Evidenced-based treatment program.

The Housing Department Team is an amazing group of professionals who are compassionate in their service to those who are experiencing homelessness. The team is incredibly supportive of one-another sharing resources and helping each other out when needed to support self-care during the pandemic. Due to the higher than normal volume of requests for services, staff have been supporting each other to complete verifications of homelessness and making sure clients have food while sleeping in tents in area campgrounds and in the hotel. It is in difficult times when we have an opportunity to shine. I believe the Housing Department shines brightly in bringing hope and help to those who are experiencing homelessness in Allegan County. It has been an honor to serve alongside these outstanding professionals and be a part of leading the efforts to end homelessness in Allegan County.

Respectfully Submitted By:

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