

Statewide Collaborative on Youth Homelessness

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Welcome and Tech Trouble-Shooting (Christine Gendron, TNOYS)

- TNOYS is also hosting meetings to support different types of service provider organizations, including emergency shelters and transitional living programs, in responding to COVID-19.
- This meeting focuses on how to address the larger issue of youth and young adult homelessness, by ensuring services and supports are available for young people and families.

Updates on TNOYS Resources and Activities (Ann-Charlotte Proffitt and Lauren Rose, TNOYS)

- Ann-Charlotte mentioned the TNOYS Emergency Response Resource Center, which is available on the TNOYS website at <http://tnoys.org/emergency-response-resource-center/>. This includes updates from DFPS, DSHS, HUD, ACF, and other agencies.
- The resource center also includes a document that provides guidance for provider organizations on developing emergency response plans and implementing emergency response protocols. That can be accessed directly at <http://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidance-for-Providers-1.pdf>.
- There is a working document that outlines what TNOYS has requested from regulatory agencies, as well as the guidance from these agencies, at <http://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Services-Feedback-to-Regulatory-Agencies-TNOYS-1.pdf>.
- TNOYS also has resources that dive into specific issues, including working remotely.
- Organizations can order free fabric masks (not medical-grade) from manufacturers working with TNOYS by emailing Christine at cgendron@tnoys.org.
- TNOYS will be sending an email blast out to member organizations on how to access hand sanitizer from local distilleries. (Update: this email went out on Friday.)
- Thursday's Transitional Living Services meeting will be for TLPs, SIL, and PAL.
- Friday's meeting for Services to At-Risk Youth ("STAR") providers will focus on marketing their services in the changing climate and with the re-brand.

- Eric Samuels requested that TNOYS share the following information from Texas Homeless Network:
 - The THN Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) page has resources on COVID-19. You can access it at <https://www.thn.org/statewide/covid-19/>.
 - THN is coordinating regularly with the other state CoCs to request the following from state leadership:
 - Provide urgent public health and financial support to homeless crisis response systems.
 - Devote public health resources to Texans experiencing homelessness:
 - Utilize the DSHS resources to connect public health departments in the state with homeless crisis response systems and require daily briefings to monitor virus spread and act as needed.
 - Dedicate testing kits throughout Texas for persons experiencing homelessness to ensure swift and efficient mobilization of resources if outbreaks occur.
 - Utilize outreach and telemedicine practices to engage with people experiencing homelessness in encampments.
 - Identify public health resources to provide those infected with isolation and treatment locations and medical respite care.
 - Provide critical financial support for homeless crisis response systems:
 - Provide funding to expand permanent supportive housing in Texas communities so households and programs have more options to move people out of crowded shelters.
 - Provide all emergency shelters and homeless service providers with funding to sustain adequate staffing levels and pay facility overhead costs.
 - Provide all emergency shelters and homeless service providers with the necessary sanitizers, protective gear, hygiene disinfectant supplies, and other needed materials and supplies;
 - Make all needed supplies, necessary testing, treatment, isolation/quarantine locations available to the programs and residents at no cost.
 - Provide resources to local communities so they can minimize the number of people living in homeless encampments by providing washing stations, sanitizers, securing transportation and space, including hotels, for isolation and self-quarantine.

- Mitigate the effects of coronavirus spread through Texans at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.
 - Enforce long-term Moratorium on Evictions and Foreclosures:
 - Texans are facing a loss of income as the result of businesses closing, workers being laid off, and those who are still employed are losing hours as they are forced to stay home from work for the protection of everyone's health. New data from the Texas Workforce Commission shows that unemployment claims from March 8 - 14 are up over 7,000 as compared to last year. While we commend Gov. Abbott on his actions to temporarily close dine-in establishments and gatherings of over 10 people, this number of unemployment insurance claims is expected to increase exponentially after these executive actions. Without adequate housing, the most vulnerable Texans will be unable to adequately fight COVID-19 and other deadly illnesses.
 - The moratorium should be set for 90 days after the president ceases a declaration of a national crisis, with the option to expand depending on the circumstances. In addition, issuance of writs of possession should be halted by Justice Courts around the state.
 - Enact a statewide moratorium on sweeps of homeless encampments.
 - By sweeping homeless encampments, the state will cause coronavirus to spread to new communities and disconnect vulnerable populations from services. The unintended consequences of sweeps far outweigh any perceived benefit and must be taken into account.
- Samantha Foss from THN jumped on to add that THN is working on a letter to the Governor with these requests. She also said that they'll be using social media to collect donation requests for shelters across the state.

Updates from Federal Agencies (Darla Bardine, National Network for Youth)

- NN4Y works at the national level to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness and human trafficking. They're a non-partisan organization engaged in policy advocacy as well as disseminating best practice information across the country.

- NN4Y has been talking with Congress and federal partners to share the issues that TNOYS already shared on the call – these are the issues we’re hearing about from service providers and young people they serve.
- NN4Y is pushing federal agencies to increase flexibility on how funds can be used, to allow grant agreements to be amended, etc.
- NN4Y co-hosted a call w/ the US ICH, ACF, and CDC on Friday. Over 130 youth-service providers from across the country participated. The following information was shared on that call and/or is what Darla is hearing from others:
 - The ACF had already been working to allow increased flexibility in how federal funds are used and how programming is administered. ACF had already been trying to get approval from the Office of General Counsel and other layers of bureaucracy to get out some guidance. They were hoping to be able to get this out by the end of the week. (Update: we have not seen it yet.)
 - They did share information on RHY already that was helpful. In particular, they shared that there is already more flexibility than these grantees realize, but grantees should be in contact with their grants manager. Not everyone is having the same level of disruption so grants managers will provide customized support.
 - NN4Y is hoping to see an infusion of at least \$80,000 for RHY programs but they asked for a lot more than that.
 - NN4Y has had ongoing conversations with HUD. They’ve been less open to flexibility and conversation. A lot of the CoC focus and dollars that they get won’t go to young people or to young families.
 - NN4Y is hearing stories of young people who are losing jobs and can’t pay rent.
 - Youth service providers really are on the front lines but aren’t necessarily prepared with information that medical professionals have on how to operate during a pandemic. Many of them have questions about PPE, etc.
 - The CDC is encouraging all service providers to increase “infection control practices.” This includes screening people who enter the facility for cough or fever so that they can be isolated (but not denied services).
 - Beds for those who have any type of illness should be at least six feet apart.
 - A lot of communities didn’t have a coordinated plan in place pre-COVID-19. This is something we’ve learned is needed. The CDC encourages all organizations to be in close communication with local public health departments to build those relationships and respond based on their guidance. This guidance can’t all come from the Feds because an organization in Seattle needs to respond differently than an organization in a community that is not a hot spot yet.
 - The CDC plans to release an FAQ soon on how to continue to accept donations but safely. This will include making sure that the donor and the family of the donor are not sick. If it’s clothing, you can wash it on high heat. If it has hard

surfaces, you can clean it using the CDC recommended cleaning products, including bleach.

- NN4Y works closely with the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. They just released four videos geared towards providing front-line works and youth homelessness service providers with information on how to protect themselves and clients. The videos discuss washing hands, using gloves, etc. They are available at <https://nn4youth.org/learn/covid-19/>.

Updates from Child Protective Services (Valinda Bolton)

- Valinda checked in with Gaye Vopat, the lead on transitional services. IF anyone knows of a young adult who was formerly in foster care and needs assistance with housing or otherwise, related to COVID-19, they can contact the PAL staff or the regional office staff. Contact info for PAL coordinators is available at https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp.
- This is for any young adult who was formerly in foster care. They do not need to have aged out.
- DFPS is working on a formalized way to track COVID-19 support being provided in the region.
- Public institutions of higher learning are working to assist young adults who were formerly in foster care who are on their campuses. DFPS has been sending information about COVID-19 and response to those institutions. Those institutions and the foster care liaisons have been asked to notify DFPS if they are aware of former foster youth who need assistance with housing or any other form of assistance.
- If you have questions or need more information you can contact Valinda and she can connect you with Gaye or other state office staff. Valinda's email is valinda.bolton@dfps.state.tx.us.

Updates from the Office of the Governor, CST Team (Alan Schonborn)

- On yesterday's shelter call hosted by TNOYS information was shared that they are having difficulty accessing food. OOG has begun an initiative to try to find ways to get community support for meeting this need, as well as for encouraging those who have needs to use available resources through the TEA website, food banks, etc.
- OOG is directing, wherever possible, those who have specific needs and reach out to their office, whether they are CST grantees or not, to go to the local resources that are available as provided by TNOYS, TACFS, and others.

- They're also looking to the philanthropic community to try to get some immediate support to meet needs.
- OOG is hearing from all partners that they're eager to learn as much as they can from the field so that they can work to address challenges and smooth out wrinkles in implementation of protocols.
- OOG is meeting with regularity, almost daily, with most state agency partners and with others in OOG to drive attention to where it can be most helpful.
- More info on the OOG CST Team is available at <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/cjd/childsextrafficking>. If you have a need or challenge that's not being addressed, you can contact the regional administrators on the OOG CST Team. You can also contact Alan directly at alan.schonborn@gov.texas.gov.
- Many OOG CST Team grantees are continuing to be in contact with youth who are on the street. OOG wants to ensure for others who also have some kind of brick-and-mortar operation that is still willing to see youth, that they've thought in advance about how to allow access. If organizations represent themselves as specialized CSEY advocates, OOG hopes they've thought through how to provide services safely.

Updates from Texas Education Agency (Cal Lopez)

- TEA continues to work with OOG, DSHS, and the Texas Division of Energy Management, to coordinate a response to COVID-19. TEA's role is to disseminate information to school districts to aid them in decision-making and to help address any barriers they are facing.
- The TEA Commissioner is having regular calls with Superintendents.
- Cal encourages everyone to visit the TEA website. The TEA website has a wealth of resources and is updated almost daily. www.tea.texas.gov.
- There are resources for school districts on providing educational continuity. School buildings are closed but districts are hard at work to find high and low-tech opportunities to ensure kids will have opportunities to continue and complete their coursework. <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/instructional-continuity-planning-framework>
- There is also a page specific to special populations, including those who receive special education services and those who are English learners. <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/special-education-and-special-populations>
 - Next week TEA will release FAQs on highly mobile populations on this page. These will include McKinney Vento, foster care, and military connected students.
 - There will also be FAQs added on services for pregnant students and resources for behavioral health.
 - These will be living documents with resources embedded.

- Any questions for TEA about COVID-19 need to go to the official COVID-19 email address: disasterinfo@tea.texas.gov.
- You can send specific questions related to McKinney Vento questions to the Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) Technical Support Center at 1-800-446-3142. The number is for anyone in the state, not just school districts. There will be COVID-19 resources posted on their webpage soon: <https://www.theotx.org/>.
- Under federal law all LEAs are required to designate a homeless liaison and those liaisons are the best resources to speak to specific school districts.
- You can access TEA's Texas Meal Finder at <https://txschools.gov/> to find information on accessing meals for students in need. You can enter your school or district meal and you will be directed to meal pick-up locations in your area.
- If you have resources that might be helpful for TEA to distribute, you can send them to Cal at cal.lopez@tea.texas.gov. Or you can send to the homeless education mailbox at homelesseducation@tea.texas.gov.
- TEA is working closely with school districts and providing guidance to look at the best way to provide coursework to students. The TEA website has information at <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Guidance%20to%20Districts%20on%20Providin%20Internet%20to%20Students.pdf> on cable companies and internet providers offering free hotspots and wifi due to COVID-19.
- Districts are looking at developing packets and other materials for student who don't have internet access to complete their coursework.

Updates from Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (Naomi Cantu)

- TDHCA is having a number of items regarding homelessness and general resources for COVID-19 response go its board meeting, which will be held on Thursday. A lot of what will happen depends on the board meeting, where there will be discussions about redirecting certain resources.
- They got permission from the Comptroller to re-program some of the HHSP funds for the largest cities in Texas – it's about \$200,000 they're looking at.
- TDHCA is working to identify ways to help with rental assistance through the HOME program.
- They are in communication with HUD for a number of waiver requests. They're working to see what is possible and if/when HUD will release waiver options for all sub-grantees without a specific ask. That may be in the works.
- Things are changing daily.

Open Discussion

- There was a question about whether there is a list of higher education institutions and how they are responding to COVID-19 in regard to students experiencing homelessness. TNOYS has not been able to locate such a list, despite numerous attempts.
- There was also a question about contact info for homeless liaisons. Cal Lopez reported that the TEA website has a directory called “ask TED” with the most up to date contact information for homeless liaisons. Neither TEA nor the TEHCY Technical Support Center is able to correct the information, as it is the responsibility of the district to update it. TEA and/or TEHCY TSC can reach out to the district to let them know the current email address is not valid.