



COUNTY OF SOMERSET DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

27 Warren Street • P.O. Box 3000
Somerville, New Jersey 08876-1262
(908) 541-5756 • Fax (908) 575-3935
CommDev@co.somerset.nj.us
www.co.somerset.nj.us



Human Services Director
MICHAEL FROST

Community Development Director
KIMBERLY COWART

Aging & Disability Services
JOANNE FETZKO

One Stop Career Center
Juvenile Institutional Services
MONICA MULLIGAN

Richard Hall Community MHC
NICCI SPINAZZOLA

Rutgers Cooperative Extension
DARYL MINCH

Veterans Services
PETER NIEMIEC

Volunteer Services
WILLIAM F. CROSBY

Youth Services
LINDA M. PORCARO

March 13, 2025 Continuum of Care meeting minutes

The March 2025 meeting, which took place virtually, via a Zoom conference call, was called to order and began at 11:02 am. The minutes from the January meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

Kim started the meeting by letting everyone know that there is no information on the upcoming Federal Budget. The CD Office will continue to wait and react as necessary when information is released. At this point, it is likely that allocations will not be known until at least mid-May.

Kenya, from Monarch, provided an update on the Lived Experience Advisory Board. The Board held a focus group at Freedom Trail in Somerville on February 11. There were 20-25 participants, all of whom received a gift card and pizza. Feedback provided indicated that residents feel there is a lack of housing, affordable housing, and landlords that take vouchers. There was interest in filing formal grievances over some of the shelter programs, which people feel are very restrictive and institutionalized. There were also concerns about: how some of the agencies are administering medication; a lack of transportation; and a lack of supportive services, especially mental health services. Finally, the attitudes of some of the agency employees made people feel less human. Another Board focus group will be held in the future.

The guest speaker was Derek Smith, Executive Director of the Franklin Food Bank, which is celebrating 50 years of providing food in Franklin. There are 47 million Americans who are food insecure, and people of color are more likely to be food insecure. Food insecurity forces people to choose between food and other necessities. Approximately 36% of NJ residents live below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold, and in Franklin greater than 1 in 4 households (7,000 of 25,000) are food insecure. The average number of students in school districts throughout New Jersey who receive free and reduced lunch is 35%; that number rises to 44% in Franklin.

The Food Bank has a 5-Year Strategic Plan, which includes: identifying neighbors with needs; designing programs to meet their needs; ensuring that nutritious food is available; and having the infrastructure to provide all of this. They started the “Client Choice” program in 2019, when they moved into a new building. Their “Neighbor Choice” program is a grocery store that is open five (5) days a week and serves approximately 90 families a day. Families are allowed to shop up to twice a month. They also have the “Beyond the Bell” program, which provides assistance to students and their families that goes beyond the school day/year.

- Mission Statement -

The County of Somerset is committed to excellence and innovation in public service, promoting the well-being of all residents and communities by providing effective, efficient and responsive leadership.

Somerset County Is An Equal Opportunity Employer

Transportation is a big problem. The Food Bank is working on going out to meet people in the community, so they don't have to go to the Food Bank. They are working on creating a "hub and spoke" model to address food insecurity via tailored offerings across the entire Township. They are also being very intentional in expanding the "look" of the volunteer/staff pool to mirror the representation of Franklin Township, including many volunteers/staff who are bilingual.

The Food Bank holds numerous fundraisers during the year to raise both money and awareness. People who are interested in volunteering can go to the website and sign up. There are over 450 volunteers registered, with 70 signed up for at least one shift per week.

An update was provided on DCA's Rural and Suburban Outreach Grant. The grant is for agencies to assist each other to find and help people who are in need. It would help provide a "soft handoff" between agencies. It will also help identify affordable housing opportunities.

Agency announcements will be sent via e-mail after the meeting and, as such, are incorporated as part of the minutes.

The meeting adjourned at 12:08 pm.

Attendees:

Kimberly Cowart
Jeremy Hirsch
Edward Prior
Henry Giron
Tamika Levels-Hood
Linda Rapacki
Denise White
Jennifer Guyette
Marion Cooper
Alyssa Martini
Joanne Hala
Ana Diaz Lopez
Herardine Lacrete
Keisha Graham
Kenya Lamarr
Carolyn Solon
Christine Esposito
Lemon Salgado
Michelle Blanchfield
Sadikie McKenzie-Jenkins

Wes Gaynor
Jaaide Ramirez
Steve Nagel
Lisanny Mendez Castillo
Kayla Ellis
Derek Smith
Kelly McGuinness
Cynthia Ramsey
Jackie Robinson
Courtney Smith
Kim Figueroa
Leah Stine
Fresia Skoczypec
Tania Asmal
Vanessa Mercado