Minutes
Work Support Strategies Grant Advisory Committee
9:00 – 11:30 AM; August 31, 2011
Louis Pasteur Building, West Wing

Present: Sandra Powell, Deborah Buffi, Peter Lee, Lissa DiMauro, Stephanie Geller, Sharon Santilli, Fred Sneesby, Kathleen Gorman, Maria Cimini, Matthew Stark, Denise Tatro, Maria Volpe, Deborah Anthes, Elizabeth Burke-Bryant, Steve Brunero, Kim Nikolaidis, Christine Ruggieri, Linda Katz, Kelley Riley, Kim Merolla-Britto, David Alves, Rep. Eileen Naughton

Director Powell welcomed the members to the meeting and, after introductions, reviewed the department's work on SNAP replacement benefits post-Hurricane Irene. That effort certainly corresponded to the work of the Ford grant, that is, delivering benefits in a more streamlined fashion. The plan for this grant year calls for a submission of our work to the grantors in February 2012. The Project team is meeting bi-weekly and the working Subgroups are meeting between the Project Team gatherings to accomplish the work of the grant.

The minutes of the June 29, 2011 meeting were reviewed and approved. Rep. Naughton noted that discussion of technology and the Affordable Care Act in the June minutes. A discussion ensued about the role of technology in the delivery of services and of concerns regarding the systems we are using. The Director noted that there is work going on with a re-procurement of the Medicaid eligibility system and that the present inRhodes system used by DHS and its future in light of this re-procurement was the topic of a presentation to the Project Team. She offered that it may be useful to the Committee to have a special meeting about these technology developments and how they mesh with the major DHS programs and the work of the Ford grant. Linda Katz observed that, while some changes in inRhodes can be contemplated over the next couple of years to reflect the improvements in the delivery of services that are anticipated through the planning we are now doing, it would not be wise to overhaul inRhodes or to make large investments in that system at this point. Lissa DiMauro informed the Committee that many people are present working on the renewal of these systems and that all this work is being coordinated.

The updated Work Plan for the Grant Year was distributed with the staff engagement work being highlighted particularly. Members were asked to send comments to Deb Buffi (DBuffi@dhs.ri.gov).

The reports from the Project Team Workgroups were presented, the first being Policy and Procedures. Kim Merolla-Britto reviewed a handout of a chart that showed how programs aligned or not. The subgroup created this chart with a view toward increasing access to and retention in the programs. The chart reveals how the programs align and suggests what needs to be addressed to make improvements. Rep. Naughton emphasized the need to align and integrate programs, for example, how the DCYF initiative with Pell grants for youngsters in DCYF care, and the WIC program can be strengthened by working in a coordinated way with other benefit programs. Integration with housing programs is also an avenue to be explored.

Kathleen Gorman suggested some corrections for the chart regarding different kinds of SNAP households and interview requirements. Linda Katz, a member of the Policy and Procedures Subgroup summarized the work of the Subgroup by saying that it aims to align eligibility across programs and streamline verification (staying consistent with program integrity), so that DHS can increase cross-enrollment and improve retention. The result should be a better system both from the customer and the worker perspectives.

The Data and Data Analysis Subgroup reported next. Deb Buffi made reference to the data collected at the beginning of the grant work as requested by the Ford Foundation, and also to the document prepared by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities that has served as part of the guidance for this Subgroup. For example, data can be collected and studied regarding "churning," that is, the significant number of cases that close and then come back into the system. Churning creates difficulties for both staff in administering the programs, and, for clients. Data can be analyzed to discover if there are administrative or eligibility obstacles that contribute to the churning. Stephanie Geller added that the role of the Data Subgroup and the function of data overall is to inform changes being considered. The group is also suggesting what kind of standard data reports might be created so that, going forward, issues such as churning can be better understood. A good example of this sort of "dashboard" report is the timeliness report developed for the SNAP program. Stephanie noted that as we investigate the problems that need to be solved in the delivery of services, the hypotheses we formulate about possible solutions can be translated into data requests. Kim Nicolaidis offered that DHS Quality Control has data and analysis that may be helpful to this process. She also raised issues about notices to customers generated by our systems that may not be helpful. Kathleen Gorman mentioned a few such notices in the SNAP program that need to be corrected; the Director asked that she forward that information to her attention. Stephanie Geller added to her thoughts on the Data Subgroup by saying that while we have data, we need to ask the right questions of the data. Part of the product of the Ford grant work will be identifying what the DHS administration and frontline staff want to know from the data that exist. Kathleen Gorman cautioned that it will be important to keep the timeframe of various data in mind because programs have changed so much in the last few years.

Peter Lee raised the question of where advocacy comes in to the process of improving DHS service delivery. He noted that even if we streamline our systems and meet many of the goals we are framing in this grant planning year and find that we are doing the work more efficiently and effectively, there will still be people who are not served. We may achieve a well-functioning system but we may still need to change policies that will increase eligibility. Is there a role for advocating for changes beyond improvements in the system by which we can ask about increasing the "width" of policies to include more people? Director Powell indicated that these important questions must be asked cognizant of the budget and fiscal environment in which we live.

Rep. Naughton added to the thoughts about notices and communications saying that connecting to the DMV may help in maintaining current addresses. Again, the need is for "interoperability." This need will increase when new groups come on board through the Affordable Care Act; new people may be found eligible for other programs.

Matt Stark reiterated Peter Lee's point that while we can measure whether or not we have streamlined the service delivery processes, can we measure if and how the programs are reaching the bigger objectives of improving people's lives? Can we measure whether or not we are impacting people's lives, for example, are we helping people move toward financial self-sufficiency?

Director Powell amplified this point by saying that assessing impact means linkages with many, many other programs. We have to ask ourselves if the end is just to ease access, or, is that a step toward a larger goal: a combination of some cost avoidance and some positive impact? Matt Stark noted that our assumption is that if families access all these programs their lives will improve. Can we measure if they have made a difference?

Deb Buffi reported for the Business Process Mapping Subgroup. This subgroup has been establishing an "as is" for the four programs with detailed descriptions of their business processes and organizing those descriptions onto flow charts. This enables the Project Team to look at duplications and inefficiencies. She also reported that, through the grant, a team from the Southern Institute on Children and Families came to study business processes with teams of DHS workers in Providence for the SNAP and Family Medical programs.

Questions were asked about the "data warehousing" initiative in DHS. Sharon Santilli reported that this effort is progressing and that it seems that we will be able to create queries of the data we have through a web-based system. She is hopeful that this will be of great assistance for staff.

The Committee next heard reports about site visits made by members of the Project Team. Maria Volpe reported on the visits to New Mexico and Idaho. Although these states had very different approaches, the takeaway message for us was the same: they are on the road to improvements, there were both large and small changes taking place, and that this is possible for Rhode Island. This was very reassuring and motivating for us to hear. Idaho was using tools that would be useful to us. They made changes from the top down, setting goals and making up front investments in IT. New Mexico took a low-tech, staff-intensive route to changing service delivery. Both states engaged staff in different ways. New Mexico's situation resembled Rhode Island's more than Idaho's, but the visiting team was able to see two states that are doing well with change and to take away lessons from both that we can adapt for Rhode Island.

Deb Buffi pointed out that New Mexico and Idaho are two of the nine states that received a Ford grant, each one in a different place on the spectrum of change. Our visits were hands-on and comprehensive. Two other observations that are worth noting were the strong link maintained between the field and the policy division as improvements were vetted and executed, and, the tremendous outreach that was part of the change effort, particularly in New Mexico because of secluded populations. Rep. Naughton expressed how important partners like the CAP agencies would be in this work.

A handout was distributed about the visit of the Southern Institute to the Providence office on Elmwood Avenue. A two-person team spent two days doing "value stream mapping," working with our team and teaching us how we can engage staff in the work of streamlining

service delivery. They promote a method called "PDSA: Plan, Do, Study, Act" by which innovation and problem-solving are generated and tested but on a smaller scale, more quickly done that traditional "pilot" programs, but leading to large scale change. The staff was highly enthusiastic and really saw the value of the visit.

A chart was then distributed outlining six "quick wins" for improvement that are being considered. Feedback from the Committee is needed. The Advisory Committee members are asked to forward their reactions and thoughts to Deb Buffi. More study and investigation needs to be done before any of "quick wins" is put into operation and they do not solve all the business process problems, but they are a good beginning. Besides the work of the Project Team and Advisory Committee, DHS is also engaging clients to get their input.

Next Meeting: **October 26, 2011, 9:00 – 11:30 AM;**
Louis Pasteur Building, West Wing

Respectfully submitted,

Fred Sneesby
DHS

DRAFT