



CAN Community Council Meeting Minutes, 4/20/2015

Community Council Members in Attendance: Cathy Brandewie, Michelle Casanova, Rolando Delgado, Rhonda Douglas, Nancy Gilliam, Vincent Harding, Anne H. Harutunian, Kirsha Haverlah, Molly Latham, Ara Merjanian, Melissa Orren, Laura Poskochil, Ruthie Redmond, Ken Ripperger-Suhler, Eileen Schrandt, Gloria Souhami, Terry Wilt, Michelle Zadrozny

Community Council Members unable to attend: Christopher Auruajo, Sylvia Blanco, Crystal Crawford, Monica Guzman, Knox Kimberly, Carmen Luevanos, Stacey Mather, Stephan Molina, Blythe Plunkett, Clint Smith

Staff in Attendance: Mary Dodd, Catie Bialick, Kevin Paris

Others in Attendance: Guest Speakers: Mamdou Balbe, Sara Ramirez, Elizabeth Hartman

Call to Order and Introductions: Anne H. Harutunian called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. Announcements included: Commissioner Bridget Shea had to cancel. Staff will work to reschedule. Molly Latham announced that CASA of Travis County will host a Golf Tournament for Kids on May 4th. Currently, they are recruiting volunteer advocates- the organization serves 41% more children this year, but have less volunteer advocates. They are having an information session in their office on May 5th. Kirshna Haverlah announced that this week is National Crime Victims Awareness Week. Gloria Souhami thanked Kevin Paris for presenting information from the Ready by 21 Dashboard to the Underage Drinking Youth Task Force at their last meeting.

Citizens Communication: Yubelly Perez and others from Southwest Key Programs attended the meeting. Perez is the community engagement coordinator for the Good Neighbor Program, which focuses on community engagement, development, outreach and leadership skills development.

Approval of Minutes from March 9, 2015: Anne H. Harutunian made a motion to approve the minutes. Rhonda Douglas seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Updates from Community Council Chair: Anne Harutunian provided several announcements and updates.

- *CAN Board Meeting 4/10/15:* CAN Board Meetings are held at Austin City Hall from 1 – 3 p.m. on the second Friday of each month, and all are welcome to attend. Meetings are also available to watch live or recorded on ATXN. A few announcements shared at the last CAN Board Meeting are: Del Valle ISD is in need of more ESL classes; on April 27th the Austin Chamber will host its Education Progress Reports Luncheon where it will release progress reports for eleven area school districts; A press conference for the CAN Dashboard release will be held on May 20th; on May 1st, from 10:00 to 11:30, Houston-Tillotson University will host an academic college signing day event; the Board approved a Dashboard Steering Committee recommendation to adopt a new target of 33% by 2017 for the Housing Cost-Burdened indicator; the Board wants input from the Community Council; Board interest in efforts to assist the reentry population remains strong; Commissioner Shea mentioned efforts at Travis County to help ensure there is a continuum of medical care when people are released from jail.
- *Sub Committee Reports:* Ara Merjanian reported that, following each monthly meeting, a group convenes to debrief and to plan. All volunteers interested in the Summit Planning Committee should have received an email from Nancy Gilliam; if they did not, please let Nancy know. The July meeting of the Community Council will be dedicated to discussions about the summit. The work of the subcommittee that put together questions for speakers, chaired by Michelle Casanova, is now complete and that group is no longer meeting. Kirsha Haverlah reported that she represented the Community Council at the last Dashboard Steering Committee meeting. The full Dashboard Report will be released at a press conference on Wednesday, May 20 at 10 a.m. at Austin City Hall. Some people feel that the term vulnerable is not an empowering term, so the Dashboard Steering Committee changed the term “vulnerable populations” to “select populations.”

Language Access Forum and Survey: Kevin Paris, CAN Research Analyst, provided an overview of the survey and forum. The presentation is available at: – The Language Access Forum brought together 50 people on March 24th to share results of a Language Access Survey that was completed by over one hundred service providers. Forum speakers included Laura DeGrush, representing Caritas of Austin, Esther Diaz, a Translator and Interpreter Trainer, and Douglas Matthews, City of Austin Public Information Office. Take-aways from the forum included: language access is a growing need; there is a lack of standardized policies and procedures, e.g. what is a good translation, how do we know we are giving a good translation; the way people recruit interpreters and translators varies greatly from organization to organization; it may be difficult to find interpreters and translators for less commonly spoken language. As a result of the forum, staff agreed set up a Google group: Language Access Austin. Presentations from the forum are posted here. The group will be place where people can share resources and ask questions. The link for the group is <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/language-access>

Discussion: Council members asked if handheld translation devices are an accurate and cost effective tool. Yes, many do use these. It is important to plan for language access- reach out early to order headsets and secure an interpreter.

A person-centered approach to serving the immigrant population: Anne Harutunian thanked Rolando Delgado for organizing the evenings' panel on immigration services in our community. Delgado introduced the panelists, who provided an overview of their services and responded to the Community Council's questionnaire.

Mamadou Balde, Programs Manager at Caritas Austin: Caritas of Austin has been in existence since 1964. They serve people who are homeless, families in crisis, veterans and refugees. Services include screening, assessment, housing assistance, employment, education and direct service volunteers. How does Caritas define a person-centered approach? They are here for families in crisis, veterans and the homeless. Few organizations in Austin deal directly with refugees. A refugee is a person who left his or her homeland because of fear of persecution based on religion, nationality, political opinion, or their belonging to a special social group. They become a refugee when they lose the protection of their local government. Right now, we have refugees coming to the United States from many different countries. Three departments are involved in bringing refugees into the United States: Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, and Department of Health and Human Services .

- The Department of State goes overseas to determine who is eligible for refugee services
- The Department of Homeland Security does background checks
- The Department of Health and Human Services coordinates benefits for refugees (food stamps, Medicaid, social security)

The federal government is not directly involved in the day-to-day services. Rather, they subcontract to nine national agencies who subcontract with organizations like Caritas. Some refugees are very highly educated compared to others who were born and raised in a refugee camp. Once they are here, all refugees start at level zero – poor. Caritas and other agencies have 30 to 90 days to work with these people (not a lot of time). This is why, when it comes to providing services to refugees, everything is designed to meet the need of the person. Pre-arrival services (determining the size of family, level of education of people involved, basic past history including medical and job history) assess how to best provide services and design a program that meets the needs, challenges, and goals of the people they serve. It is important to take into consideration the person and the family as the whole. The needs of an adult are different from the needs of a family. Caritas conducts individual and family unit assessments. Caritas meets clients where they are and designs programs and services to meet the needs of that person, taking into consideration their requests, opinions, and challenges to design a program that will help them move. They try to be flexible in helping them design the services they need. Caritas works with partner organizations to make sure they meet requirements. More than 90% of refugees speak limited English when they apply; really only refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan who have served with the military are English

proficient. Measures of success included: able to secure housing for refugees, get children into school, get adults employment and be self-sufficient by 120-180 days when they exit case management. They collaborate with other agencies – no one agency provides all services to refugees without collaborating with other agencies
Organizational needs: more affordable housing for refugees, more funding for long term case management

Sarah Ramirez, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of Central Texas: Catholic Charities of Central Texas is an organization dedicated to helping people of all ages, faiths, ethnic backgrounds and economic circumstances. They work to address the needs of residents in the Diocese of Austin. They have been in the community for 16 years and cover a 25 county service region. The majority of services they provide are in Travis, Williamson counties and the Bryan/College Station area. They care for children, strengthen families, and welcome the stranger. Their service region ranks 13th of 194 nationwide in the size of the immigrant community. They offer 5 programs to serve families: general case management and information referral - case workers provide information and referrals to appropriate agencies providing benefits enrollment, job training, child care, counseling, financial assistance and disaster response to help families become self-sufficient; Gabriel Project Life Centers - The Gabriel Project Life Centers offer a variety of services to women and men in crisis pregnancies and through the first year after a child's birth. All services are free to clients; Immigration Legal Services - Immigration Legal Services (ILS) of Catholic Charities of Central Texas provides affordable legal consultations, representation and assistance in Central Texas to low-income immigrants of all cultural and religious backgrounds; Disaster Relief Services - In the event of a disaster, Catholic Charities of Central Texas, with the direction of the Bishop of the Diocese of Austin, may engage in a coordinated, cooperative response to disaster-affected areas. The population they serve is 53% Hispanic and 25% African American. They serve the working poor who typically make a combined household income of under \$35,000. A family of four needs to make \$50,000-\$58,000 to meet their basic needs, equivalent to 5 full time jobs between two adults, not considering the fact that someone has to take care of the kids. The organization always involves the whole family. Their goal is to end poverty across the 25 county region, with a service focus defined as financial, social, educational and spiritual poverty. Generational poverty and situational poverty both require a different view and service strategy. It is necessary to assess who is in the household, who are the support systems, what are their kids' needs. Most families come in with a financial need but there are typically many other issues- everyone needs a home, food and clothing. It is also necessary to take into account educational poverty – if you get at a minimum a GED, you decrease chances of living in poverty by 7%. Many of these families aspire to do greater things but they have to work. The organization also addresses spiritual poverty – they don't evangelize; they simply want to make sure that if an individual is Buddhist, Muslim, etc. they can reconnect with their spiritual needs. The entire family goes through the assessment process. The organization determines if they qualify for other services through community partners. Boundaries and restrictions by funders can be an impediment because many have little idea of the actual needs within the community. The organization turns no one away due to the eligibility of clients. Major Funding Sources: 11% from federal, state and local funding, 11% client fees, 78% individuals, foundations and corporations- not a sustainable budget. Three Wishes include: 1. People in the community would get out and get to know their nonprofits 2. More volunteers – not enough resources, but there is enough time and manpower to go around in the community and engage in the mission 3. Look at nonprofit arena and sector (Greenlight report: 6,000 in community, increased by 36% since 2004) Having that many nonprofits is poor stewardship of the community's resources of time, money and funders.

Elizabeth Hartman, President and CEO, American Gateways: Legal services have been an afterthought of social services for way too long. American Gateways provides immigration legal services to impoverished immigrants to help navigate a very complex immigration system. Clients are asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking and violence, and DREAMers. American Gateways was formed in 1987 by a group of community leaders and attorneys in

response to a refugee crisis. Many of their clients are coming to the U.S. from El Salvador, Guatemala and other areas of Central America. They don't provide the same kind of social services as other organizations, but have pulled in a variety of professionals to provide what their clients need- legal services. They embrace the ideal that all people have a right to equal access to justice, which is not a reality for many documented and undocumented immigrants. Central Texas immigrants are guaranteed access to immigration and legal services, regardless of whether they can afford a private attorney. The organization seeks to dispel the myths and misconceptions about immigrants and immigration, by helping people to recognize the gifts the immigrant community has given us. The organization also seeks to meet the challenges of immigration reform: deferred action means clients won't get deported. This is a very exciting time for the immigrant community but scary too- immigrants who become documented are taking the risk that the next set of politicians in place won't dismantle the program and deport them all. American Gateways represents refugees from around the world who are seeking asylum in the US - many who are unnecessarily detained. American Gateways offers legal counsel to battered immigrants and their children in self-petitioning for residency under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). American Gateways provides legal counsel to low-income immigrants who are filing for family-based visa petitions, applications for adjustment of status and US citizenship. American Gateways also conducts outreach, education and training to immigrants, the public, governmental agencies, other non-profits and community groups, private attorneys and law enforcement on immigrant legal issues. Three wishes include: Immigration is a polarizing topic in Texas. Finding funding and talking about it can be difficult. The organization required funding pay attorneys: 73% from grants, 17% fundraising, and 7% fee based services.

Discussion: Questions and comments from Community Council members included:

- How do you get people to your services? The American Gateways office is located right by ACC at Highland Mall, centrally located with lots of bus stops nearby. The organization also works with the rural immigrant community and has a program where they go to the clients' home to meet. Attorneys will go to Killeen, Bastrop, Marble Falls, etc. Catholic Charities is located on the East Side of town, there are nearby bus lines, but they are looking for a space with better access to public transportation. They also offer mobile sites. Caritas of Austin, is located at Neches and 7th. Clients come to the Central Office, and most are placed in apartments with transportation access. The organization also provides clients with bus passes. On April 30th Caritas will open a satellite campus in North Austin on Rundberg Lane. Approximately 50% of clients live north.
- What percentages of immigrants have experienced human trafficking? Have you, or will you, collaborate with each other to provide immigration services? Nine voluntary agencies that contract with the Federal government to provide immigration services. These agencies then contract with local agencies like Caritas. Estimates of the number of victims of human trafficking are hard to come by. Too often victims of trafficking are sent to a detention center or sent home. It is hard to know what the real total is, as they go to four detention centers. One detention center, located in Hutto, holds 500 women at all times, most of whom are asylum seekers. Organizations do partner together regularly.
- How can we overcome this disconnect in our community? Large companies pay 70% of market value for low skill jobs, people don't know what poverty looks like. We don't always invest a lot in marketing and public relations, so they community doesn't always understand what the needs are. Expertise from corporations exists and should be utilized on non-profit tasks to help develop strategic plans, manage quality control, etc. We need to seek partnerships beyond funding- there are other ways to get involved with companies and their employees. We need to help companies understand their role as a corporate citizen. Common questions people have regarding the immigrant population include: Why do they stay? Why don't

they work? People need to understand. Refugees stay indefinitely and are authorized to live and work. We really need to emphasize the importance of incorporating legal services into the social services network.

- Help us to understand the nature of the problem in Central America, Syria and North Africa. We put families into detention centers (250, most of which are in Texas). The policy is to detain as a means of deterring families from coming here. Political speak says its working but that isn't correct, every single Spring and Summer the immigrant flow starts again.
- Have we had much success in granting refugee status for kids? Many have places to go, we just have a policy that is not very helpful. Unaccompanied minors are not considered refugees, and there are an average of 50 kids and mothers crossing the border each day. Immigrants aren't terrorists, they are fleeing incredible violence. Only 10 to 14% stay in Texas- the rest have sponsors or families in another state. Right now, the highest number of refugees are coming from Iraq, Central Africa, Somalia, Burma, and Bhutan.
- As far as policy goes, what would you want to see at the city or county level? How can we influence a process here? Increase funding-when refugees enter the US, they have \$1,125 per person, a one-time payment (apartment, furniture and household item) You can't learn a language in 30-90 days. It takes 7 days to apply for social security- if you don't get your work authorization document correct it will take a minimum of 3 to 4 months to get a job. Local policies should facilitate agencies to help immigrants secure affordable housing. The City of Austin has social service programs. To go through the immigration process, clients need a physical exam conducted by a chief physician. Let the County and City provide those on a sliding scale. Allow more immigrants to access existing programs, for example mental health programs. Forensic, physical and psychological reports are required for court cases. It would be great if clients had access to all those other services.
- Small things count too. For example, volunteers from a Junior League program cook food from immigrants' homeland for their first night in the country. We need to collaborate with different community partners to help immigrants forge connections, access food, and find companionship.

Adjournment: Anne H. Harutunian, Chair, adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Next month, the Community Council will hear from organizations that serve the veteran community. All future meetings will be held in Multipurpose Room B at 700 Lavaca. Future 2015 meeting dates are: May 18, June 15, July 20, August 17, September 21, October 19, November 16, no December meeting.