

Highland Community Collaboration Council  
Meeting Minutes  
August 14, 2017

The Highlands Community Collaboration Council had a meeting on August 14, 2017 at the Smyth County DSS conference room.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Kim opened the meeting at 9:30 and members introduced themselves. A sign-in sheet was passed around the room. He asked for additions or corrections to the agenda.

**Review and approval of Minutes of June 12, 2017 meeting**

Matt motioned and Emma seconded the minutes. All in favor. The minutes are approved

**New Business**

- **Matt Sackwitz: Update on AEP grant/discussion of future grants**

AEP grant is still in the works. They are reviewing the grant. The grant request was for over \$900,000 for 20 customers. It is for tangible items: rent, BLR, transportation vouchers, work clothes, etc. This is an estimate of what would be needed.

In regard to other grants, the opioid crisis has resulted in some additional grant opportunities. We will keep an eye out for that. The re-entry grant may come back around next year. We have taken the needed action to be able to apply for Federal grants.

- **Manuel Street: Update and status of HCCC website**

Website is receiving about 200 hits. We also have a Facebook page.

- **HCCC: Next steps/Action Plan**

Kim began a discussion in regard to the direction of the council. Emma discussed the committees and getting others involved. Mike agreed to become a member of the Employment Committee. Matt added that the council is currently taking referrals and those referrals will be served by existing organizations.

Kim suggested that we consider a resource fair for the council. Linda added that some educational information is needed for our communities. Organizations are aware of the issues but the public could benefit from more knowledge. If those who are struggling simply have someone to speak with who cares about them, it can go a long way. Felisha says the speaker at one of BLR's events was an excellent speaker. He educated people about the things many addicts struggle with. Linda says he would be willing to travel here. Matt received an email titled: Governors Take Action to Launch National Initiative Promoting Connections with People Closest to

Correctional System that he requests is forwarded to the group. He recommends that we invite the Governor to a local event.

Linda says corrections is overwhelmed and it is recommended that we start with a presentation of the re-entry efforts currently underway in Virginia. Virginia currently has the lowest recidivism rate in the country. Corrections is limited to what they can do because they have strict guidelines they are to adhere to. Davon Simmons at the AG office stated in Abingdon last spring that there were new things happening throughout the state. It may be good to follow up with him to see what has occurred since that time. Bland is experiencing a disconnect when an offender is released and faces the same challenges that led to their incarceration. Inmates are not willing to fully discuss issues with DOC staff and are more open to speak with outside entities. Felisha says she would like to see us focus on developing a team of mentors. Matt says he is impressed by what is being accomplished within the DOC. The second chance grant we recently applied for has the family component attached. Mike adds that it continues to be difficult for an ex-offender to gain employment that can sustain a family. Employers ask questions about the nature of the offense and how long the person has been released. The gap that exists is that we need new faces of outside organizations within the DOC. The outside resources are lacking and need to come in. The DOC's role is to help the offender prepare for re-entry and there are difficulties with assisting them obtain driver license, transportation, paying fines, etc. Mike says it is difficult to get employers to speak with offenders who are newly released. Also difficult for veterans because many employers think veterans have PTSD.

Kim asked for what the group thinks about a plan for dealing with these issues. Tommy suggests that we allow our committees to focus on two major issues: re-entry and drug abuse. The committees can work to create some goals and objectives. Shaquita with Bland DOC offers to bring some incarcerated level 1 offenders to a meeting and get some firsthand information. Matt recommends that the inmate who has been incarcerated for over two years may be more relevant to the discussion. Look at the difference in cell phones in the last 5 years. Those who have been incarcerated for 17-years will be entering a new world. Even pumping gas is very different than the way they remember it. The group thinks this is a great idea. Linda recommends that we take the meeting to the inmates. The group is supportive of this. This would allow access to more inmates. Matt recommends that we help to change the perception of the VEC. Many see it as the "unemployment office" yet there are many more services provided. Kim says we are looking at an education component as well as restructuring committees and having the next meeting at DOC-Bland.

It is recommended that the Mentoring Committee/Substance Abuse Committee be broken into two groups to allow more focus on substance abuse. We will discuss this at the next meeting.

Kim re-opens the possibility of having an event in the spring, maybe at the Higher Ed Center. Spring is job fair season so we may want to have the event in March.

It is recommended that a community with a drug court have a presentation to those counties who do not have one. Ruth says Wythe and Galax/Carroll areas do not currently have a drug court.

- **Sub -Committee Reports:**

*Housing Committee/ Service Integration Committee/ Grants/Finance Committee (Matt, Emma, Andy, Felisha, Andy and Linda)*

*Employment Committee: (Jimmy with DARS, Mike)*

*Mentoring Committee/ Substance Abuse Committee: (Ruth, Teresa, Chris, Chuck)*

*Public Relations Committee: (Kim, Manuel)*

*Executive Committee: (Chris, Kim, Felisha and Chris).*

None

### **Re-entry Updates**

*None*

### **Local Coalition Updates**

Linda says the educational meetings to rally churches will continue. There were 87-people at a ribbon cutting in July.

There is a rapid re-housing effort with People, Inc. to apply for grant funds. A farm-to-table restaurant is also in the works. State Farm Neighborhood Assist is conducting an online contest for a \$25,000 award. Flyers were passed around the room.

Ruth distributed a flyer for "Trauma and Resilience Collaborative Training" hosted by Mount Rogers CSB on Thursday October 12 from 8:30-12:30 at the Wytheville Meeting Center. There is a recent grant received that will assist with recovery from opiate abuse.

Felisha announced that OEI's AmeriCorps program will end August 31<sup>st</sup>. It will not be re-funded this year. There are 3 members who are currently seeking employment.

Howard says the community health centers applied for some funding. They received \$150,000.

Matt stated that we went around the table and recommended goals. He suggests that we do that again. Howard recommends a half-day or full day for planning and conduct some strategic planning.

Virginia Veteran and Family Support distributed some literature. Please refer any military-connected persons to them.

Community Corrections is interested in going toward family reunification. Knowing the signs of criminogenic thinking is very important. Linda adds that sometimes, family reunification is not the best option. Locating other families or mentors needs to be an option for these individuals.

Matt recommends that law enforcement be encouraged to participate in this council. They have valuable information for the group. DARE officers are in the schools on Monday mornings so they will be unable to attend these meetings.

**Questions/Concerns/Comments/Announcements:**

**Next meeting –September 11, 2017 at 9:30 at Smyth County DSS Second Floor Conference Room.**

<http://www.highlandsgccc.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/Highlands-Community-Collaboration-Council-292297421224552/>

**The meeting adjourned at 11:10am.**

If there is someone you would like for us to invite to a future meeting as either a guest or member, please let one of us know.

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Respectfully submitted,

Chris Austin  
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