Group Home Supportive Living Initiative

The Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse

Background

The Group Home Supportive Living Initiative (GHSLI) began in 1992 as part of the DHS/DASA ‘s Community based funding program. The initiative was the direct response to a Substance Abuse, Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grant requirement for the development of group homes for self-supporting drug free living. The program model reflected the newly emerging Oxford Home concept. In Federal year 2003 the SAPT regulations were modified, removing the requirement that the a single State authority (DHS/DASA) maintain the group home loan program as a condition of receiving the Federal SAPT block grant funds. This change prompted DHS/DASA to discontinue the funding of the group home loan program since sufficient outcome data at the time did not support its continuation.

New Housing-Related Bills in U.S. House

Biggert Bills

Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL), a member of the House Committee on Financial Services, introduced three housing bills on January 6. The first, H. R. 29, the Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2009, would expand the definition of a homeless person under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to include children and youths. The bill would include children who have been confirmed as homeless either by the family of the child or who are defined as homeless by other federal programs, including the Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services.

The definition of homelessness has long been an issue of debate during reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento program in the last two years. In a compromise of language last October, the definition of homelessness expanded to include children who are unaccompanied and living with a family member who is homeless and children who are confirmed as homeless by a federal program, including the Department of Education’s program, which defines homeless as a child who is living in substandard housing or satisfactory housing, or children who are living in an emergency shelter.

The Oxford House Model

In State Fiscal Year 2007, two studies conducted by a team of researchers (Bradley D. Olson, Leonard A. Jason, Joseph R. Ferrari, Tresza D. Hutcheson) at DePaul University’s Center for Community Research concluded that individuals in recovery from substance use disorders or alcoholism, who lived together in self-governance residential settings, obtained an abstinence rate of 65 percent to 87 percent over the 24 month period of the studies. This research has shown a positive outcome.

(Continued on page 2)
2009 Poverty Guidelines

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Room 404E, Humphrey Building, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Washington, DC 20201.

This notice provides an update, effective January 23, 2009, of the HHS poverty guidelines to account for last calendar year’s increase in prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

Section 673(2) of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981 (42 U. S. C. 9902(2)) requires the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to update, at least annually, the poverty guidelines, which shall be used as an eligibility criterion for the Community Services Block Grant program. The poverty guidelines also are used as an eligibility criterion by a number of other Federal programs. The poverty guidelines issued here are a simplified version of the poverty thresholds that the Census Bureau uses to prepare its estimates of the number of individuals and families in poverty. As required by law, this update is accomplished by increasing the latest published Census Bureau poverty thresholds by the relevant percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). The guidelines in this 2009 notice reflect the 3.8 percent price increase between calendar years 2007 and 2008. After this inflation adjustment, the guidelines are rounded and adjusted to standardize the differences between family sizes. The same calculation procedure was used this year as in previous years. (Note that these 2009 guidelines are roughly equal to the poverty thresholds for calendar year 2008 which the Census Bureau expects to publish in final form in August 2009.) The guideline figures shown represent annual income.

2009 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia
Persons in Family___Poverty Guideline

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<thead>
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<th>Persons in Family</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

For families with more than 8 persons, add $3,740 for each additional person.

For information about how the guidelines are used or how income is defined in a particular program, contact the Federal, state, or local office that is responsible for that program.

For the full notice, go to edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-1510.pdf.

GHS LI
(Continued from page 1)

The Oxford House model is a democratically run, self-supporting and drug free home setting. Entry on a limited basis may be accessible to individuals following a successful completion of a treatment episode from a DHS/DASA licensed provider and others in recovery. Oxford House is a nationally known non-profit organization whose charters/chapters assist recovering individuals in the development of independently governed community based group housing.

(Continued on page 4)
Report on Shifting to Housing First

The experience of nine organizations that shifted to a Housing First approach for families is the focus of a new report released by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) and The Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation. The nine organizations received planning grants, support, and funding from the Schwab Foundation to explore and implement a Housing First approach. The report, prepared by LaFrance Associates in San Francisco, highlights the lessons learned by the nine organizations and includes three case studies. Among the shifts adopted by the organizations as a result of the initiative were a greater focus on shortening the length of stays in shelter, increased use of prevention and activities to support rapid re-housing, support for children after re-housing, increased use of a harm reduction approach, and expansion of permanent supportive housing.


For further information, contact the National Alliance To End Homelessness at the address in Headlines Directory.

NAEH Interactive Homelessness Map

The National Alliance To End Homelessness (NAEH) has launched a new interactive map with state-by-state data on homelessness. Much of the data comes from the Alliance’s recent report, Homelessness Counts: Changes in Homelessness from 2005 to 2007. This map features a number of different indicators on homelessness, changes in homelessness, and other economic variables, such as poverty and housing cost burden, for each state. Additionally, the map compares the state data to the national average for each indicator.

View the Map - www.endhomelessness.org/section/data/homelessmap/

Making the Connection

Public Benefits in a New Economy

Contributor: DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform

In the past few months, agencies all around our state have seen increased numbers of people coming through their doors asking for help. The worsening economy, the layoffs and the foreclosure crisis are all impacting the need.

Because of the ever-worsening economic crisis, many people are asking for services that they never dreamed they would need. Trying to understand public benefit program rules is hard enough for those who work with it every day, but imagine what it is like when our clients’ do not have the skills needed to navigate the loosely connected social service system. They are ill prepared for the reality that the benefits they may receive are not enough to meet the mortgage payment, let alone feed and clothe a family. Because of this gap between their expectations and the reality, they may be confused, frightened, angry, ashamed, embarrassed, depressed. Mix into this the fact that they are making poor decisions based on myths they have heard about benefit programs, and you face a huge challenge.

Not only our clients facing new challenges and looking at their lives differently, we in the “business” need to take a new look at public benefit programs and become familiar with eligibility rules that we did not have to be familiar with previously. Here are a few under-advertised public benefit programs or rules you may want to tell your clients about:

Greek key: You can use more than one food benefit program.

Families that receive Food Stamps can also apply for School Lunches, WIC and services through area food pantries. Since some of our clients are seeing incomes reduce after the start of the school year, you may want to tell them to contact the school and apply for the School Lunch program. There is also a wonderful program that has

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Our Specialists monitor the homes to ensure that all of the houses comply with the rules. Each house holds a weekly business meeting to discuss the bills and issues that concern the residents of the house. All residents are officers of the house and have duties to perform with respect to finances, housekeeping duties, and are required to attend all house and chapter meetings. All Adult residents are required to pay an equal share for their rent and utilities. Monthly meetings are held on a rotating basis at houses within each Chapter around the state. Presentations from partnering organizations and the announcements of job fairs and employment opportunities are made available to all the attendees. Following the Oxford House Model rules and living in a sober environment is a way to ensure that the recovered persons sustain a self-sufficient and self-supportive lifestyle for their futures.

There are many success stories to be told about Oxford House residents. Since, residents of Oxford Houses can permanently reside the home as long as they choose. Many have done just that. Over 350 people live in the 55 houses at any given time throughout the year. Jay Adams has been a resident of the Kalimba House in Zion, Illinois for 8 years. He is employed as a Head Chef in the cafeteria at Abbott Labs in North Chicago, Illinois. Charlotte Head has been a resident of the Freeman House in Waukegan, Illinois for the past 4 years. She is employed as a pre-school teacher in the Head Start program at Community Action Partnerships in Waukegan, Illinois. Charlotte has recently received a scholarship to continue her education in this field from the YWCA protégé program. “It has been 30 years since I have been in school” She said with a chuckle. “The Oxford House model helped me get back on track, made me become more responsible, and built my self-esteem.”

The residents choose the house name when they are established. They can be named after a person, street of the residence, landlord, town, neighborhood or something symbolic as agreed upon by the group. Whatever, name is chosen it will be their home for as long as they desire and will provide a safe permanent setting for their recovery.

The Group Home Supportive Living Initiative

The Group Home Supportive Living Initiative is an effort by DHS/DASA to support the development of community based supportive group living settings modeled after the Oxford House concept. This initiative will help improve a system that often overlooks the negative impact of homelessness on the cycles of substance use disorders and recidivism. DHS/DASA will provide limited start-up funds to support the development of these new supportive group living settings. One of those settings under consideration is the establishment of Group Home Supportive Living that promotes family re-unification. Whereas, the homes will consist of several families living in an Oxford House model sharing the expenses, responsibilities, and support that is required to fulfill and unify the family unit.

In addition, DHS/DASA will focus on enhancing the collaboration between DHS/DASA funded treatment providers and new, or existing Illinois based Oxford House group homes. This collaboration includes organizations that provide education, training, and employment opportunities to Oxford House residents. Those organizations are the CARA Program in Chicago that provides for classroom skill building, training, and job placement. Higher Learning institutions that include the College of Lake County, Southwestern Illinois, Lincoln Land Community College, Rock Valley Community College, and Joliet Junior College that provide GED programs and Adult Basic Education classes free of charge.

Representatives from these institutions have given presentations at Oxford House Chapter meetings held throughout the State of Illinois for the purpose of informing residents about the programs and resources that are available to them.

There are a total of (55) Oxford Houses that have been established in Illinois. Fifteen (15) provide permanent housing for women and children and forty (40) house men, which includes the only chartered men and children’s house in the system.

New Illinois Oxford Houses

In the last year, DASA has opened nine (9) new houses in cities across Illinois. New houses have been established in Joliet, Granite City, Springfield, Decatur, Rockford, (3) and in Chicago (2). DASA plans to open seven (7) new Oxford Houses this year. One of the seven proposed housing sites will be established in the Belmont/Cragin neighborhood of Chicago to serve the Hispanic community. We are working with the Hispanic organization (HAS) Health Care Alternative Systems for referrals in locating a site and placing recovered individuals to reside in the house once it has been established. Another site opened on February 1, 2009 in the Austin neighborhood on the west side of Chicago. Many of the new residents of the house will come from nearby treatment programs that are provided by Loretto Hospital, the Stroger Hospital Core Center and recovery homes such as Sister House.

For further information on GHSILI, contact Program Manager Fran Basset of the Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse at (312) 814-2311 or (312)814-6425.
Benefits
(Continued from page 3)

sites throughout Illinois called Angel Food Ministries (www.angelfoodministries.com/) that permits individuals to use Food Stamps to purchase affordable healthy food.

**Children may qualify for All Kids even when insured in the prior 12 months.** Parents pay expensive COBRA premiums to maintain health care coverage so their children are not without insurance. We know All Kids provides health care coverage at a reasonable cost to children who have not been insured for the past 12 months. Loss of insurance coverage due to loss of employment waives this 12 month criteria and the parent is able to choose to drop the COBRA coverage. Be aware though, that the application completed at the local IDHS office does not ask about the COBRA coverage issue, and it is not routinely part of the interview and could result in the IDHS office not opening an All Kids premium case. I would recommend the application be made through the All Kids website www.allkids.com/

**Health Care Resources.** There are other health care resources. Many women are not aware of or informed about the Illinois Healthy Women or the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer programs. These programs will help qualified women with obtaining birth control, annual pap smears and mammograms. Be aware that when a woman applies for Medicaid at an IDHS office, and does not qualify, there is no formalized mechanism to tell the woman about these programs or even how to apply. If you don’t know where to apply, check out health.illinois.gov/. Also let clients know about hospital Financial Assistance programs, reduced cost medication programs such as Illinois Carex, Rx buying clubs, Pharmaceutical Assistance Programs, public health services and where free or reduced income clinics are located. Another little known program operated by the state is the Health Insurance Premium Payment (HIPP) Program which pays health insurance premiums for persons who receive cash or medical assistance from the state and have high medical expenses and are able to obtain private health insurance. Persons with high cost medical conditions can be enrolled in HIPP if they have insurance, or are able to obtain insurance through loss of employment due to layoff, or retirement (COBRA or conversion policy). HIPP is limited to clients who have high cost medical conditions, such as: severe arthritis; cancer; heart ailment or defect; liver disease; kidney disease; brain disease or disorder; neurological disease or disorder; diabetes; AIDS; organ transplant; any other medical condition that requires high cost ongoing medical treatment, such as pregnancy. You can ask about this benefit at the local IDHS office that handles your clients benefits. The state assesses the cost effectiveness of enrolling in this program, and if cost effective, will approve payment of the premium.

**Child Support and Food Stamps.** If a parent is paying child support to children not living with him, the child support payments made will reduce the household’s gross income for food stamp eligibility determination dollar for dollar. For example Joe has a monthly income of $2500 a month and a child support order of $500 a month. Joe has remarried and he, his second wife and another child share an apartment with a rent of $800 a month. Joe does not qualify for Food Stamps since his gross income is $2000 (after the child support is deducted) and is over the $1907 allowed by Federal standards for a family of three. Joe sees his work hours decline, and his income is reduced to $2000 a month. Since child support is deducted from his income before the comparison to the gross income standard, Joe’s new gross income for determining Food Stamp eligibility would now be able to receive about $310 a month, almost offsetting the amount of child support paid. Hopefully this would be enough to keep Joe paying the support and not creating a second financial crisis for his other family.

**Earned Income Tax Credit.** Make sure to tell clients about this valuable resource. As hours at work are reduced, individuals may be able to qualify for the Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit, and thus boost their weekly income. Make sure they check on this and apply through the employer. Also make sure when taxes are completed this year that the
Benefits
(Continued from page 3)

person knows to claim this credit. Remember the Federal and State EITC are not counted as income for Food Stamps or cash assistance.

* Unemployment Compensation. Individuals may be able to receive unemployment benefits even if they are not laid off but just have the hours reduced. In instances someone works less than full time in a calendar week for the regular employer, the employer is required to provide a Low Earnings Report if the earnings are less than the weekly Unemployment benefit amount. A UI claim for reduced benefits for the week can be filed at any time up to five weeks from the end of the week in which the Low Earnings Report was received. If the employer does not give a Low Earnings Report, individuals can still file a claim and the Illinois Department of Employment Security will request the Low Earnings Report from the employer (source: www.ides.state.il.us/uidocs/bis/handbook.pdf).

Many individuals also have to accept part-time employment at lower wages. I have heard people say they won’t accept the job since the income is less than Unemployment. Encourage them to accept the job. Unemployment benefits are able to continue if the part time work generates income less than the weekly UI benefit. Not only can UI supplement the earned income, this will also extend the eligibility period for benefits.

* Get the word out that it is okay to have assets and still receive public benefits. I still remember my in-laws selling their fully paid for home and using the money to pay my mother-in-laws medical bills. After they had exhausted all of this money they applied for Medicaid to help pay for her medical expenses. They thought this is what they had to do to qualify for Medicaid. I cannot describe the devastation they felt when they learned that they did not have to sell the house to qualify for Medicaid. We all hear stories like this, and wish clients had good information before poor decisions are made. Individuals are able to own a home or a car, have bank and retirement accounts and still be able to qualify for many benefits. In fact retirement and education accounts are not counted as assets for Food Stamps, so the money in a 401K or IRA or the child’s education account does not have to be withdrawn early.

* Township or Veterans assistance. Make sure clients apply for help at the Local Township or county office if they reside outside Chicago. Many of the townships (county) have emergency assistance funds that could help cover an emergency expense. If the individual is a veteran, and your area has a Veteran’s Assistance Commission, they may be able to receive emergency assistance through this program.

* TANF Crisis Assistance. When a family that is TANF eligible becomes homeless they may be able to receive additional help through IDHS to help with the security deposit. If eligible and applying for TANF, this also eliminates the 30 day waiting period to receive TANF cash benefits. Encourage families to also apply at the local township office for emergency assistance. To obtain a brochure about this benefit go to www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32273

As you work with your new clients also consider the following:

* Be patient and listen – People arrive at our offices panicked since they are seeing their entire way of life and their assets vanish.

* Try not to use jargon – This is hard, since those of us in the field throw around the alphabet soup of program names so easily. We will tell clients to apply for TANF, MANG, WIC or LIHEAP. We need to take a little more time to explain these programs and what each one does, since we are now working with individuals who know very little about these benefits.

* Don’t assume – Many of our clients don’t always know what else is available, so always ask.

* Anticipate the needs. This may forestall our clients making poor decisions that can affect them for a long time.

* Reassess program rules – Many of the rules and strategies are developed to address the needs of the long term unemployed. For example strategies for
Benefits
(Continued from page 6)

Welfare-to-Work clients are based on helping prepare welfare clients for the work world with activities based on developing skills such as reporting to work on time. Many of the clients seen today already have the skills, they just need the job.

The DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization focused on advocacy and planning in DuPage County, Illinois and designer and trainer of Making the Connection: A Guide to Accessing Public Benefits. The DuPage Federation is affiliated with Northern Illinois University, Regional Development Institute. Questions can be directed to knelson@dupagefederation.org or cking@dupagefederation.org.

Housing Bills
(Continued from page 1)

H. R. 7221, which would have reauthorized the McKinney-Vento program, included as being homeless “unaccompanied youth and homeless families with children who have experienced a long-term period without living independently in permanent housing, have frequently moved, and can be expected to remain in unstable living situations.”

H. R. 7221 passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 355 to 61 last October; however, the Senate failed to act before the 110th Congress adjourned. Legislation to reauthorize McKinney-Vento must be reintroduced during the 111th Congress.

A number of housing-related bills that stalled in the last session of Congress have been reintroduced in the 111th Congress, including two from Ms. Biggert. H. R. 46, The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Act of 2009, expands the availability of FSS programs offered in connection with HUD’s Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. FSS programs provide low income families in public housing and Section 8 the ability to build assets, achieve homeownership, and to access counseling, job training, child care, education, and other services to help them reduce their dependence on public assistance.

Ms. Biggert also introduced H. R. 47, The Expand and Preserve Home Ownership Through Counseling Act. The bill would establish an Office of Housing Counseling to carry out and coordinate the responsibilities of HUD regarding counseling on homeownership and rental housing issues, to make grants to entities for providing such counseling and to launch a national housing counseling advertising campaign.

Although legislation similar to H. R. 46 and H. R. 47 passed the House of Representatives by voice vote in September of 2008, the Senate failed to move either bill. Both bills have been referred to the House Financial Services Committee.

No One Strike Eviction Act

Representative Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX) introduced H. R. 69, The No One Strike Eviction Act of 2009, on January 6. Ms. Jackson-Lee had introduced the bill last Congress. The bill would amend HUD’s “one strike” policy in public housing. The legislation states that a tenant will not be evicted, be denied tenancy when applying for a unit, or have their tenancy terminated if they have a family member that has been convicted of a crime. Furthermore, the bill would require public housing agencies that are deciding on whether to evict, terminate or deny the application of a tenant to consider all mitigating circumstances and the effects the decision may have on the tenants and their families. H. R. 69 has been referred to the House Committee on Financial Services.

Housing Opportunities Made Easier (HOME) Act

Representative Steven Rothman (D-NJ), a member of the House Committee on Appropriations, introduced H. R. 168, the Housing Opportunities Made Easier (HOME) Act, on January 6. Mr. Rothman introduced similar legislation in the 110th Congress. The bill would authorize funding for 150,000 new Section 8 tenant-based vouchers in FY2009, in addition to providing enough funding to renew the vouchers in subsequent years. H. R. 168 was referred to the House Financial Services Committee.

Housing Fairness Act of 2009

Representative Al Green (D-TX) introduced H. R. 476, the Housing Fairness Act of 2009 on January 13. This bill would provide $20 million for each fiscal year from 2010 to 2014 for HUD to test for discrimination in home buying, renting, or financing. The bill would also authorize $52 million for each of these years for the fair housing initiatives programs. Finally, the bill would provide another $5 million each year for private entities to study housing discrimination. The bill has 16 Democratic cosponsors and has been referred to the Committee on Financial Services.

Public And Assisted Housing Drug Elimination Program

On January 15, Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced H. R. 582, a bill to reauthorize the public and assisted housing drug elimination program of HUD. The bill is similar to a bill introduced Ms. Lee in the last session of Congress and was referred to the House Committee on Financial Services.

For further information, contact the National Low Income Housing Coalition at the address in Headlines Directory.
Headlines Directory

Center for Community Change
1536 U Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
Telephone: (202) 339-9300
http://www.communitychange.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
820 First Street, NE, Suite 530
Washington, DC 20002
Ph: (202) 408-1080
Fax: (202) 408-1056
http://www.cbpp.org

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
1325 S. Wabash, Suite 205
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1075 Connecticut Avenue, NW, # 540
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