

Morris County Advisory Committee on Women  
May 19, 2020, 4:00pm, via Microsoft Teams

Present: Joann Bjornson, Kathy DeFillippo, Carole Harper, Karen O'Keeffee, Eileen Specchio, Sydney Ugalde, Sharon Yoo

**Call to order:** Sharon Yoo called the meeting to order at 4:07pm and welcomed participants.

**Reports**

Human Services Report – Sharon Yoo

- When COVID19 first occurred, handwashing stations were installed at Nourish NJ in Morristown and at Town Hall in Dover.
- Homeless Solutions Warming Center has agreed to keep the center open until May 31, 2020.
- Many food pantries have seen a huge increase in patrons. Community response in Morris County has been great with supporting the food pantries' efforts to provide food to those in need.
- Morris County received funding by the state for promoting the Census by providing information and snack items to community providers for their events. As a result of these events being cancelled due to COVID, we are in contact with the State to see if snacks can be donated to area food pantries. Census funding and outreach efforts has been extended through September.
- SNAP, TANF, GA benefit applications through the Office of Temporary Assistance has tripled. As a result of waivers, Morris County has been able to manage the increased caseloads.
- County Meals on Wheels, (since February) has provided an additional 11,000 meals for seniors. This increase will provide seniors with 5 meals per week.
- There has been a big push to address social isolation experienced by seniors who would normally attend congregate sites for meals and socialization. Nutrition staff contacts seniors 2-3 times a week to check on their wellbeing. Eileen Specchio asked if her students can be involved in some of this work. Ms. Yoo said it may not be doable due to the level of confidentiality. She will check with the Aging Director. Carole Harper asked if there has been an increase in Domestic Violence. Ms. Yoo was unsure and differed to Joann Bjornson who acknowledged that although she didn't have any numbers yet, there is an increase in the calls they receive. There is also an increase in substance usage.
- Morris Area Paratransit System (MAPS) provides transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. As a result of COVID, transportation has been limited to life sustaining medical appointments only. In June, we are looking to incrementally resume normal business practices (medical needs, essential employees, etc.). Historically, vehicles would transport many people in one vehicle (Ride Share). This may not be the case moving forward. Safety partitions for the vehicles have been ordered and will be installed upon receipt. In July, MAPS transportation will be available to transport riders to supermarkets.
- Human Services has been trying to coordinate delivery/pickup/transfer of donated items, which we forward to nonprofits. Freeholder DeFillippo was instrumental in coordinating with all her partners in creating cloth masks, which were donated to Family Promise, JBWS, Homeless Solutions, Community Hope, NewBridge Services, for their staff. If committee members know of anyone in need of cloth masks, reach out to Ms. Yoo. If there is anything in particular that you think is needed, we can see if there are other donations we can coordinate here.
- Ms. Yoo stated that one big need in the community she is hearing about is rental assistance. The concern is how do we provide support for individuals who were unable to pay their rent once the eviction moratorium is lifted. The County has received different Federal dollars through the CARES Act and Family First Act, and we are trying to determine, through guidance from HUD, how we are permitted to use these funds.
- Ms. Yoo updated the Committee on the status of the Ruth Davis Drive (RDD) homes. As part of our response to COVID, we understood that providers needed to provide adequate spacing for staff and clients. We are working with some of these providers to give them temporary space at RDD and at another building on W. Hanover Ave. Currently 5 of the houses are being used. Ms. Yoo stated that she is aware that the Women's Committee had planned to use RDD as a project, however, this initiative is on hold.

**Committee:** Ms. Harper asked who is overseeing COVID testing, Ms. Yoo stated that this is the responsibility of the Office of Emergency Management. In terms of the homeless population, Zufall Health Center has been working with the County.

Eileen Specchio inquired if there is any role the Committee can be involved in that would be helpful. Ms. Yoo wasn't sure. We are meeting today to get the Committee's thoughts and ideas in terms of what you might see as a need, or

where else we can address certain areas. Ms. Specchio stated that she is very concerned about the social isolation of seniors. She heard from the State that they were going to send screeners with Meals on Wheels staff for depression screening. Ms. Yoo responded that she was not familiar with what we are doing in terms of face to face depression screenings in the County. Care Managers, from the Division on Aging, are regularly checking in on seniors to see if their service needs are being met. Ms. Yoo will follow up on the depression screenings. Some of the Day Care providers have implemented virtual programs for seniors.

Freeholder DeFillippo is also concerned for our senior population, we don't know what the future is in programming for the seniors. We are in uncharted territory, there's a lot of uncertainties. Children are finishing up the school year at home, what will September bring? The County elected not to open County Parks, there's no summer programs. Municipalities are struggling with this. We don't know how we are going to provide services moving forward. Ms. Yoo stated that many providers are trying to deliver services even if it's virtual.

Ms. Harper asked if providers have come up with any needs that we can address. Ms. Yoo said that one of the things that FH DeFillippo spearheaded was with the food pantries and ensuring our food providers are provided with the support they need (funding and food), to continue to serve the community. This will be an ongoing need. The State is working towards being able to use EBT cards to purchase food online, which will provide people with more options. There are some new State approved entities that we can refer seniors to for food delivery. In the future, it is anticipated that we will not see any more re-congregating of seniors. It wouldn't be safe unless we have a vaccine. On a Federal level, this is going to be explored further because Federal funding has a piece mandating that funding be used for congregate meals. We are waiting for direction. FH DeFillippo added that towns are also providing shopping services for seniors. The Freeholder Board authorized \$28,000 to be given to the four food banks that deliver food to Morris County residents, \$7,000 each. Table of Hope has a bus and is doing food distribution all around the County.

Ms. Yoo brought FH DeFillippo up to speed on what was covered earlier in the meeting. Ms. Bjornson added we may want to organize a small food drive and identify where are the gaps are. Protective masks were an issue before, and FH DeFillippo was able to provide homemade masks. Contactless thermometers were donated to Family Promise for distribution as well as other PPE supplies. Rental arrears and rental assistance is a huge need. The Housing Authority, Family Promise and a few other nonprofits that they partner with have 25 housing vouchers that will be available in June (Family Promise is using 18 of the vouchers). In regards to advocacy, there is legislation being considered called the "Hero's Act". Some of the components are rent stabilization, legal representation, food and more. Ms. Bjornson will send the link to Ms. Kisatsky for forwarding to the committee.

Ms. Yoo offered usage of the Human Service shed for storage for small housing items and supplies related to COVID support. Space is limited. She also suggested that moving forward, Advisory Committee meetings be conducted every other month until the end of the year, Ms. Bjornson agreed. Ms. Kisatsky will contact the Committee with the revised meeting dates as well as reaching out to the County Webmaster to revise the dates on the County webpage.

### **Announcements**

Although she was unable to participate in the meeting due to technical issues, Pam Bennett-Santoro forwarded the following information to share with the Committee:

- The United Way Women United will be having a Virtual Meeting, on June 19 from 9-10 am. Fundraiser for the COVID19 ALICE recovery fund. For information contact [Michele.Dreiblatt@UnitedWayNNJ.org](mailto:Michele.Dreiblatt@UnitedWayNNJ.org) or call 973-993-1160, x128.
- Jane Kurak has retired from the Provident Bank Foundation, as of March 2020. Ms. Kurak was one of the founding members of the Morris County Advisory Committee on Women.

**Adjourned: 4:57pm**