



Human Services

Working Group
Transition Team Report

April 16, 2014

Photos: Kit Pyne





“What can Boston city government do—whether by itself or in partnership with others—to foster thorough human service efforts?”

INTRODUCTION

The Human Services Department is committed to promoting the health and well-being of Boston residents and engaging residents where they are in their lives with particular regard to race, ethnicity, gender, creed, age, language, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and station in life.

Services in every city department should be coordinated and administered in a culturally sensitive manner with an emphasis on inclusion and the goal of providing Bostonians with access to the tools and resources that support healthy, secure, and productive lives. The provision of social, recreation, health, and support services to city residents, particularly to the homeless, disabled, elderly, youth, women, immigrants, and veterans must be coordinated and made available in a customer

friendly and culturally competent manner. The Human Services Cabinet can only achieve these goals by coordinating its activities with every city department, community social service agencies, and outside advocates.

THE PROCESS

The Human Services Working Group report advances policy goals and highlights the core values and priorities that emerged from issue papers prepared for the Martin J. Walsh mayoral campaign. The Human Services Working Group convened three meetings, an Open Town Hall, and a public hearing which was attended by almost 200 people interested in the delivery of human services across the city.

This report focuses on the mission of the City of Boston Human Services Department, identifies three key values, and details initiatives that support these values and presents recommendations for initiatives that the City of Boston should “Keep” as is, outlines new initiatives that the City of Boston can “Implement” with minimal resources, and describes new initiatives that represent long range goals or “Dreams.”

As Mayor Walsh has said repeatedly, poverty and inequality are at the root of the majority of problems in society at large, and Boston in particular. Poverty can be defined as an individual’s or group’s lack of the essential tangible and intangible assets required to survive, to thrive, and to live with dignity. Poverty has many causes and manifests itself in many ways. Lack of essential assets such as wealth, working skills, shelter, food, physical and mental health,

self-respect, and awareness causes precariousness, vulnerability, insecurity, fear, distress, illness, despair, and physical and emotional suffering. These in turn foster violence, isolation, anger, aggression, resentment, and hate. Poverty is the root of human insecurity.

Mayor Walsh asked the Human Services Working Group, “What can Boston city government do—whether by itself or in partnership with others—to foster thorough human service efforts?”

Through our Working Group and community discussions, we have identified what we consider to be three crucial principles, or core values, linking Mayor Walsh’s policies in the areas of poverty and human services.

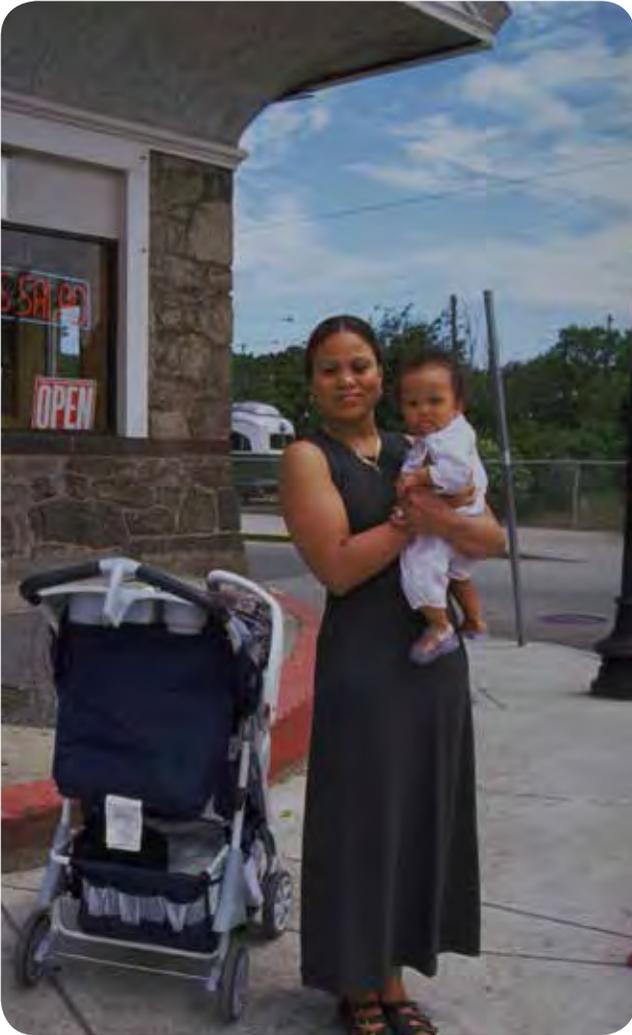
These principles are:

- Access
- Cultural Competence
- Human Security

These core values structure our recommendations. We agree with Mayor Walsh that “programs and services aimed at eradicating poverty must be integrated into a larger and more comprehensive strategy to more efficiently reduce poverty and give households the opportunity to move sequentially from poverty to stability and on toward wealth building.” We believe that the approach will require a culture change at City Hall and possibly, over time, a reformulation and restructuring of the Department of Human Services. We understand that most of the following recommendations would involve hiring new additional staff and training or retraining present staff.

Underlying this report is the belief that the

Photo: Kit Pyne



provision of social, recreation, health, and support services to all city residents, including the homeless, disabled, elderly, youth, women, immigrants, and veterans should and must be coordinated and made available in a customer friendly and culturally sensitive manner. We understand that the provision of services does not solve poverty. However, without effective services, the path to human security can be insurmountable.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS 1: ACCESS

Ensure that quality city services, employment, public health, and education are accessible to all of Boston's residents.

KEEP

- 1) Continued support for Summer Jobs for Youth.
- 2) Neighborhood Response Teams.
- 3) The ONEin3 Program.

IMPLEMENT

- 1) Assessment
 - a) Conduct a thorough review of all City Hall human services programs. Use outside evaluators (these can be volunteers). Assess the quality of each of the departments/ services offered.
 - b) Audit the quality and quantity of services available in each neighborhood; some areas need catch-up attention or an entirely different needs assessments and action strategy.
 - c) Assess accessibility needs for disabled residents across services in the city.
 - d) Decrease the level of red tape necessary

for small neighborhood businesses to get permitting, licenses, and access to capital.

- e) Establish and implement protocols for building partnerships between disadvantaged businesses and public and private opportunities.

2) Improve Communication

- a) Create a position of communications director in the Human Service Cabinet.
- b) Broaden communication about current affairs of the city to include all ethnic media.
- c) Re-create Little City Halls.
- d) Create benchmark for shifting the present “customer service” culture of City Hall to a culture of “we can do.” This may entail the hiring of an ombudsperson(s) or navigator(s) in City Hall.
- e) Create a position of a well-informed greeter at the entrance to City Hall.
- f) Create a significant women’s veterans presence in the Boston Veterans’ Department.
- g) Establish a Boston LGBTQ Commission.
- h) Expand programming at BCYF for 14-17 year olds.

DREAM

- 1) Establish collaboration and the integration of services through the development of a more

grounded, neighborhood-based presence in every city neighborhood.

- 2) Use the Little City Halls to audit, develop, and integrate services for the residents at the local neighborhood level. Pay special attention to homeless, disabled, elderly, and young people, immigrants, veterans, and women.
- 3) Create a service plan for each resident of public housing, integrating the delivery of services with local human services at the neighborhood level.
- 4) Expand Youth Jobs Program from a summer program to a year round program.
- 5) Rethink and significantly expand ESL and GED Programs.
- 6) Create a citywide network of mental health and substance abuse providers.
- 7) Create a citywide network of senior centers.

FOCUS 2: CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Several demographic phenomena have changed the population of our city. Increases in immigration altered the cultural background of the population and increased cultural diversity.

As we celebrate our diversity and aim to address the effects of poverty, we need to understand these changes have caught the established service



system unprepared to address a rapidly evolving population that is increasingly multi-lingual and multi-cultural, and/or whose economic situation creates increasing isolation. This manifests itself in several ways. With few exceptions, established services have not yet developed the cultural and linguistic capacity to serve new populations. Culture and language often become “barriers” to services for new linguistic and cultural groups. Cultural differences also affect the delivery of services to native, English speaking populations receiving services from newcomers working in the human services, something particularly salient in support services for the elderly. Finally, the lack of understanding of how “differences” affect the delivery of services, from identification of a

problem to the appropriateness of interventions, results in services that are often ineffective (and increasingly inefficient as well).

The Human Services Group focused on ways to make city services more culturally competent. This entails training that will build the capacity of City Hall in particular and human service organizations and staff in general to become more effective in dealing with cultures and experiences other than their own. This training will enable service workers (1) to understand the ways that differences in culture and experience affect the delivery of services (2) to know the characteristics of the clients receiving the services and (3) to develop strategies to adapt current services to the needs of vulnerable populations. For human services (or city services) to become culturally competent, there needs to be strong commitment from the leadership to the line worker in order to change the manner in which services are delivered.

KEEP

- 1) Keep the Office of New Bostonians.
- 2) Emulate the medical model of cultural competency implemented at Boston Medical Center.

IMPLEMENT

- 1) Create a position of diversity officer. Each city department would set concrete benchmarks in collaboration with the diversity office. These benchmarks would be especially targeted to providing quality service to members of under-represented communities. It is important to include the Civil Rights Commission in this process.

- 2) Support and expand the current Office of New Bostonians to increase access to City Hall services. The office will help ensure that immigrants have full opportunity to community programs ranging from home foreclosure prevention, youth development, ESL, after-school programs, and other essential supportive services throughout Boston.
- 3) Direct the ONB to lead the process for the City for Boston to become a “Welcoming City.”
- 4) Support a safe driving bill for immigrants.
- 5) Inventory community-based programs and publicize that information in culturally and linguistically effective ways.

DREAM

- 1) Ensure that immigrants and all residents of Boston obtain equal access to resources and support for full participation in the economic vitality of the city.

- 2) Create an anti-bullying campaign for Bostonians of all ages, including the elderly.
- 3) Work collaboratively with other city agencies to bring together immigrant business leaders, community leaders, students, and local residents to develop a collaborative agenda with specific benchmarks in public health, business, development, housing, education, and social services.
- 4) Create culturally competent substance abuse and mental health services in the city.

FOCUS 3: HUMAN SECURITY

Poverty is not simply a matter of lack of services. The lack of a job, or skills, cannot be remedied by any particular service. To avoid the current compartmentalization, and its consequences (confusion, gaps, redundancies, and problems of access) we recommend that the city’s division of Human Services be re-structured around the (global) concept of human security.

A solid pathway out of poverty must be built on secure terrain. A comprehensive approach to human security will serve to empower Boston’s most vulnerable residents: women, elders, youth, communities of color, veterans, and immigrants. Such a comprehensive approach should include food security, shelter security, economic security,

Photo: Department of Neighborhood Development



Photo: Kit Pyne



personal security and health (physical and mental) security.

KEEP

- 1) Keep the Domestic Violence Program at BPD, and integrate it more directly with the work of other human services departments.
- 2) Keep and revisit the City of Boston's current employment initiative for residents with Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI).

IMPLEMENT

- 1) Create an environment where schools, police, fire, and human services officials meet together regularly to create and implement policy. Use comprehensive wrap-around initiatives in which all of these groups will operate and

participate.

- 2) Focus on building stable families by providing assistance to the grandparents raising grandchildren in Boston who are the primary guardians for the children in their care. This would include training for Boston Public School staff and all city departments regarding access and communication with kin who are not the children's biological parents.
- 3) Create a training program for all mandated reporters in city government to address the issue of elder abuse.
- 4) Expand veteran's services representatives' training to include working with vets on job placement, PTSD, women veteran's issues, and homelessness.
- 5) Create a Re-entry Prisoner Program for Boston residents (E.g., Fedcap).
- 6) Conduct an in-depth audit of all proposals and existing contracts to vendors that deliver human services and support the economic self-sufficiency of poor residents.
- 7) Create a citywide network of mental health and substance abuse providers.

DREAM

- 1) Create a viable community response to neighborhood trauma/terrorism creating a city in which each life has the same value.
- 2) Assess the advantage of establishing neighborhood response teams for all neighborhoods.

- 3) Develop a strong position on CORI reform, especially as it relates to veterans and offenders now living in the community.

Human Services Working Group

Co-chairs

- Sandra Albright, Former Executive Director, Kit Clark Senior Services
- Marie St. Fleur, Former State Representative

Members

- Fr. Jack Ahern, Priest, Social Justice Activist
- Felix Arroyo, Chief of Health and Human Services, City of Boston
- Vernell Baker, Veterans Advocate
- Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Professor, UMass Boston
- Catherine D'Amato, President and CEO, The Greater Boston Food Bank
- Suzan El-Rayess, Development Director, Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center
- Stephanie Everett, Community Organizer
- Samuel Hurtado, Executive Director, South Boston En Acción
- Arline Isaacson, Co-Chair, Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus; President, Isaacson Political Consultants
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- Alyce Lee, Trustee of University of Massachusetts
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- Larry Mayes, VP for Programs, Catholic Charities
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- Louis Oswald Neptune, Program Director, Haitian Adult Day Health Center
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- Maicharia Weir Lytle, Executive Director, LIFT-Boston
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Staff Support

- Rory Cuddy, South Boston resident

Organizational titles and affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.