

**City of Alexandria, Virginia**  
**Department of Community and Human Services**  
**Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes**  
**May 20, 2024**

**Present:** Abby Horrell (Chair), Samantha Pedrosa (Vice-Chair), Rachel Dienna, Allison Greenleaf, Ashley Caison, Michael de La Guardia (via Zoom), Ashley Caison, Shawna Gary, Joshua Barnathan, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Esperita Bullard (DCHS Staff), Katt Ashmore (DCHS Staff)

**Absent:** Ann O'Hanlon, Maura Miller, Jordan Nally, Karen Carter

**Call to Order/Welcome:** Abby Horrell (Chair) called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m., and SSAB members were welcomed to the May meeting. SSAB members welcomed new member Joshua Barnathan.

**Guest Speaker: Esperita Bullard, Benefits Program Supervisor, updates on Farmer's Markets:**

- The SNAP double dollar program provides up to \$30 additional benefit tokens to someone who receives SNAP benefits at Farmer's Markets.
  - The participant then has \$60 to use at the market, and the benefit card can only be used once during that shopping trip.
  - There are currently four markets: Old Town Market, Old Town North, Southern Towers, and Four Mile Run. DCHS wants to expand the SNAP Double-Dollar program to the Del Ray and West-End markets. There is a grant that supports the running of the program to run through this market year.

***Volunteer needs:***

- Brandon M Hare is currently coordinating a volunteer program to assist in expanding the program.
  - However, finding volunteers to support the markets in administering the program is challenging. DCHS is seeking to hire a volunteer coordinator to administer the program. The current logistics allow volunteers to sign up for as many slots as they can support.
- The market at Four-Mile Run considered closing, but they decided to do another year with DCHS staff support. The program is looking at strategies to bring in the SNAP double dollar program for all operating farmer's markets. Del Ray Farmer's Market is seeking staffing support. However, DCHS hopes to present a volunteer program that provides the necessary support to help expand the SNAP Double Dollars Program.

***Outreach:***

- Current SNAP participants are working with the Virginia SNAP Outreach to plan meetings discussing notifications.
  - DCHS created an informational brochure for the community.
- The program wants to expand outreach to seniors by partnering with the Division of Aging and Adult Services. Currently, seniors can receive \$50 for food and, in addition to the \$60 from the SNAP double dollars program, this would mean people could shop for food on a budget of \$110.

***Support needed:***

- DCHS is seeking support on strategies to engage the community, with the outcome of more people volunteering at the Farmer's Markets. The program will continue its outreach efforts and consider the suggestions of SSAB members about adding social media outreach, listing the markets on e-news communications, and possibly text message communication with participants.
- SSAB members will continue to discuss how to be involved in the SNAP Double Dollar program at the Farmer's Markets.

**Guest Speaker: Kat Ashmore, Chief of Workforce Development**

- The Workforce Development Center is on the American Job Center network and is a certified One-Stop Center serving job seekers and businesses. Participants are Alexandria City residents with barriers to employment or who are underemployed. WDC is located on the 6th floor and has a career center available between 8 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. It has computers for jobseekers and interview rooms. A free printer, fax machine, and phone support are also available.

***Programs at Workforce Development Center:***

- Career readiness programs (virtual and in-person) support individuals who enter WDC. These include resume writing workshops and networking. Eventbrite has a list of events that people can schedule. People can register for any program by clicking the link or showing the QR code.
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is run by the Department of Labor. It provides free in-demand training to individuals in in-demand fields. The top training programs are CDL, CNA, Medical Billing and Coding, and HVAC.
- There are job fairs and meet-the-employer events. Typically, 2-5 job fairs occur throughout the year, and one is upcoming with Piedmont Airlines.
- There is youth programming for 14-23-year-olds all year round and the summer youth program.
- The seasoned worker program serves individuals 50 and above. These individuals may have retired early but would like to re-enter the workforce and need support in advertising themselves in a different narrative. There is also the Workforce Innovation Network, which offers a peer-support environment.
- The work-based learning program allows participants to earn while they learn. This program came from the need that employers are seeking experience rather than just training, and it offers the opportunity to build experience.
- There are staff employment training teams, and the ESL program increases English proficiency at the WDC.
- One hundred fifty people walk into the WDC throughout the week. The WDC is currently strategizing on how to expand accessibility in terms of hours, but until then, it is accommodating and flexible for one-on-one appointments.
- Community partnerships: Virginia Employment Commission, Catholic Charities, Melwood, DARS, Edu-Futuro, Nova Community College, and Alexandria City Public Schools.

- The Youth and Young Adult training and employment program is geared towards 14–23-year-olds and provides funding for eligible adults to attend classes and get certificates. One-on-one career coaching in a procurement process virtual reality lab.
  - TRANSFR-in-demand industries do 20-minute stimulation and test the ability to be about to do it. Get to rate the experience, and the virtual program rates your technical abilities.

***Summer youth program update:***

- The summer youth program is a six-week paid free or reduced lunch for youth Alexandria residents; participants are matched based on their interests. The program received a one-time funding increase of 26% and can now serve two hundred and fifty-five youth. Last year, there were about one hundred and fifty youths. Sixty-one employers have agreed to participate in the program. The program received 515 applications.

***Support Needed:***

- WDC needs support to recruit employers to host youth for the summer youth program. SSAB members can help by helping to identify workplace learning opportunities, facilitating workshops, and hosting an individual at their place of business.

**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes from April were accepted with changes by SSAB members.

**DCHS updates:**

- The new budget was adopted on May 1st and will be effective starting July 1st.
  - The budget included funds for the food hub, ARISE program, 3 million dollars for affordable housing programs, and three hundred thousand dollars for youth safety and resiliency.
- The General Assembly has approved virtual meetings of boards and commissions meetings, which may not exceed fifty percent of meetings. DCHS is waiting for City guidance to implement changes in the board and commission meetings.
- Behavioral health services have extended service hours until 8 p.m.
- The State budget included funding for updates to the case management system and a training academy.

**Board Discussion**

- SSAB members would like to continue discussing volunteering as a board. SSAB members would like to collaborate with other Boards and Commissions
- The SSAB board discussed ways to be more forward-facing in the communities. The discussion centered around inviting other boards to attend SSAB meetings and seeing if there were opportunities for collaboration. In the past, the SSAB conducted interviews with participants to see what they would like to see in the new building and created a Visit Alexandria video that showcased the full city. Lesa will share the video.

**Upcoming meeting dates (third Monday of the month)**

- Monday, June 24th
- Monday, September 16
- SSAB will not meet in July and August.

**Meeting adjourned: 08:35 PM.**