

Board of Directors Meeting

December 10, 2020

Approve Termination of Hope Villages of America (formerly known as Religious Community Services) Grace House Contract and Repurpose Remaining Contract Dollars to St. Vincent de Paul Family Bridge Housing

Item III.J.

Recommended Action: Approve Termination of Hope Villages of America (formerly known as RCS) Grace House Contract and Repurpose Dollars to St. Vincent de Paul Family Bridge Housing

Strategic Plan Alignment: Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Background:

Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB) of Pinellas County funds two programs operated by Hope Villages of America (HVA), formerly Religious Community Services (RCS): HVA Grace House and The Haven of HVA. This funding relationship has been in place since FY05. The JWB FY20 allocation for Grace House was \$383,393 (64%) and \$596,082 (35%) for The Haven. Grace House offers emergency shelter for families facing homelessness in Pinellas County. Grace House has 14 apartment-style units to house families with minor children for eight weeks and offers services that include financial literacy training, individualized family budgeting, and credit counseling. The Haven empowers Pinellas County women and children affected by domestic violence through its two programs. Safe House is a 36-bed shelter that provides emergency housing to women and their children. The Outreach Center helps survivors secure access to services that contribute to self-sufficiency. The Outreach Center also has a 24-hour crisis hotline, support groups for women and children, and provides community training and education.

Programmatic and Administrative Concerns:

Over the past 24 months, program monitoring activities have revealed serious deficits impacting the provision of quality services, oversight, and contract compliance. This document seeks to provide chronological details dating back to 2019 and action taken in an attempt to drive quality. While this document provides detail of efforts made to support HVA, it is not exhaustive in nature.

On December 12, 2018, JWB conducted an on-site monitoring which revealed employee and volunteer files required immediate attention regarding Level 2 background screens and staff credentialing. Level 2 screens are contractually required to ensure staff and those around youth and vulnerable populations do not have a criminal history that would be detrimental to the safety of participants. As a result of this monitoring, HVA was required to complete specific action steps to rectify their procedures and ensure compliance.

Due to the severity of the concerns, the JWB Executive Team met with HVA's leadership on January 2, 2019 to review these findings and historical agency findings dating back to 2016 regarding Level 2 screenings. As a result further technical assistance was provided.

On July 16, 2019, JWB conducted followup monitoring to ensure continued improvement and contract compliance. This monitoring revealed that, while some improvements were evident, ongoing challenges existed with regard to ensuring staff and volunteers had a completed and current Level 2 screening on file. This visit revealed that, despite prior supports and technical assistance, the program was still out of compliance with contractual requirements, including the following:

- Grace House permitted a new employee to have access to youth participants prior to a Level 2 screening being completed, after specific consultation with JWB staff who communicated the staff member could not be onsite at program until a screen was completed.
- Level 2 background screening requirements were not being met nor did files clearly document which volunteers meet the criteria for a Level 2 screening. As of the monitoring visit, five volunteers had an expired screen or were missing documentation of passing a Level 2 screening.

It is also important to note that organizationally, HVA experienced significant turnover in critical positions, which increases the need for strongly documented administrative processes to ensure compliance and oversight.

Due to the severity of the concerns and repeat findings, JWB placed HVA on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) in August 2019 which included administrative and financial concerns. The CAP allowed HVA six months to show progress on countermeasures to address the findings and demonstrate compliance.

During the process of monitoring improvement and compliance related to the initial CAP, the following supports and challenges are noteworthy:

- Twenty-three monitoring and technical assistance sessions occurred during FY19.
- HVA was observed to lack sound administrative capacity to develop and implement clear and consistent procedures that capture sound administrative and financial practices.
- During this time period, the program reported three critical incidents involving two separate participant deaths due to suspected overdose and a fire in one of the Grace House apartments.

In February 2020, the CAP was extended through May 2020 with added tasks resulting from ongoing financial concerns and the resignation of the Human Resources staff in December 2019. Between February and May the following improvements were identified:

- Program provided updates on the implementation of the required Staff Retention Plan. The Agency had set a goal of 75% retention and reported to be achieving 85% agency-wide staff retention, with lowest retention rate of 69% in Administrative Services. A followup monitoring occurred in March 2020, during which improvements had been

maintained since a December 2019 visit in regard to Level 2 backgrounds and personnel record management for past two monitoring visits, despite changes in HR staff and vacancies.

In May 2020 it was determined that minimum requirements had been met to remove the agency from the CAP Administrative Standards relative to background screening, turnover, and personnel record management. Financial concerns remained and, therefore, the CAP was extended related to financial management through August 2020.

On June 24, 2020, JWB was alerted that the program lost two significant funding sources which led to the elimination of two positions and higher reliance on donations to balance the program budget. The loss of funding represented approximately \$75,000, or 13% of the program budget.

In August 2020, the CAP was once again extended as a result of ongoing financial concerns including repeated material weakness in the FY19 Financial Audit.

On September 14, 2020, JWB received an unsolicited letter from a previous staff member expressing compelling concerns over program leadership and the quality of service delivery.

JWB conducted scheduled staff and participant interviews as a component of program monitoring on September 15, 2020. Theses related to staff interviews included:

- Job description inconsistent with actual duties
- Too frequent on-call responsibilities
- Management speaking to staff in condescending tone
- Management lacking client skills and speaking to participants in harsh and belittling manner
- Staff fear of retaliation for sharing information during interviews or filing a grievance
- Management expresses preferential treatment for certain employees
- Managers apply inconsistent rules with participants
- Perceived racism within management
- Concerns that managers only pretend to care about participants
- Staff withhold critical supplies from participants
- Staff are inconsistent with applying rules
- Staff present as unprofessional

Summary:

JWB's concerns with HVA as outlined in this document have been ongoing since 2018. Since implementation of the Corrective Action Plan, improvements have been nominal and inconsistent. In addition, JWB has received complaints when conducting staff and participant interviews, which revealed concerns that impact the overall safety and well-being of residents served. Due to the concerns expressed by participants and staff, failure to fully comply with the Corrective Action Plan(s), and a loss of revenue from other sources, JWB issued a revised Corrective Action Plan and reduced the contract to 90 days from one year.

Recommended Action:

Currently, JWB continues to experience significant concerns regarding service delivery at Grace House. As a result, JWB will extend the current Grace House contract through February 28, 2021, and then terminate the contract. JWB's planned FY21 allocation for Grace House was \$383,393. As a result of the early contract termination, this amount will be reduced to \$159,664 for services delivered October 1, 2020 through February 28, 2021.

JWB recommends utilizing the balance of the FY21 Grace House allocation, \$223,729, to fund Family Bridge Housing at St. Vincent de Paul. This recommendation is being made in order to support availability of family shelter beds in Pinellas County with expediency, given the discontinuation of Grace House. While the Family Bridge program has been selected as a sole source contract, the program was chosen following a robust procurement process conducted by the Homeless Leadership Alliance on behalf of Pinellas County. The program works to ensure homeless families can access bridge housing when the need arises. Bridge housing allows families to be safely housed on a short-term basis while they are connected with additional homeless resources and services, including but not limited to, rapid rehousing.

Staff Resource: Judith Warren
Megan Seales
Jennifer Artiaga