



Contra Costa County
Family Economic Security Partnership
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ADVOCACY for EQUITY!

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

Highlights

Dear FESP members,

We had a great meeting on Tuesday, October 26, 2021 on Advocacy for Equity - the focus was on promoting the importance for direct service agencies to engage in advocacy. We were treated to examples from four diverse organizations and what they have done – very inspiring! Here are some highlights:

SparkPoint Contra Costa: Betty Geishirt Cantrell, Senior Director, shared how the drive to engage more in advocacy stemmed in part from seeing clients struggling time and time again with little relief from the broader system. After engaging in a “deeper dive” project with FESP and the Building Movement Project a number of years ago, they have incorporated advocacy in a few ways: developed a mission statement that reflects an advocacy focus in addition to direct service, identified skills needed to further engage staff in advocacy and then worked with different organizations to enhance staff capacity, learned more about policy making and how to speak to policy makers (and then doing so!), created an opportunity for their constituents to share issues of most concern to them (in addition to why they may have sought SparkPoint services), and overall, they were ready to engage in advocacy. The deeper dive white paper can be found at:

<http://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Deeper-Dive-into-Advocacy-Case-Study-1-26-2018.pdf>.

Opportunity Junction: Alissa Friedman, President and CEO, shared Opportunity Junction’s journey to become a certified polling site in Contra Costa County. After connecting with the county elections department, they learned what it would take -- accessible and large room, good parking/disabled parking, staff to staff the polling booths --and they signed up and in 2020 accepted delivery of election materials and were open for business! This provided an opportunity for not just Opportunity Junction constituents but any local community members to have a local, friendly, and secure place to vote. Anyone interested in becoming a polling site can contact Erin Mendez, at eren.mendez@vote.cccounty.us in the elections department. Voting is the essence of our democracy and this is a nonpartisan but incredibly valuable service to offer the community.

Rubicon Programs: DC Carole Dorham-Kelly, CEO, and Kelly Dunn, Director of Legal Services, shared how Rubicon, over the last few years, was moving out from behind the scenes into a more visible and intentional role in advocacy using a multi-pronged approach. Rubicon is involved in many different aspects of policy – legislative advocacy (supported or opposed over 30-40 pieces of legislation a year), issue-specific advocacy (e.g. fines and fees) working in partnership with other advocacy agencies, developing an internal committee to vet legislation, and creating a voter guide with input from staff and constituents. While many of these activities did not require additional dedicated staff, they also recognize that to do more and to increase staff and constituent capacity, having resources to support dedicated advocacy staff would be helpful.

Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano: Kim Castaneda, Vice President of Development and Communications, talked about the Food Bank's leadership development program, recruiting and training community members with lived experience (or very passionate) to become food justice advocates. For their past Speaker Series, they had 50 applications for just 12 slots! The Food Bank has paid advocacy staff and works with relevant organizations (e.g. Toastmasters on public speaking) to teach cohort participants advocacy skills, how to speak to policy makers, and how to tell their personal stories. Participants then advocate with policy makers and attend Hunger Action Day at the CA state capitol. The Food Bank has a dual agenda: direct service provision to provide food to address immediate food insecurity and building a movement through advocacy to ensure that no one goes hungry.

Following the presentations, FESP members had a chance to meet in small groups to reflect on what they heard and to think about what their own agencies could do. Some of the thoughts shared included: the need to increase staff capacity, changing an agency Board's mindset (goal is to work yourself out of a job), the difficulty to engage and mobilize when providing services in a crisis, the importance of creating a welcoming space and agency culture, incorporating constituents into more efforts, mobilizing participants to meet 1:1 with elected officials, encouraging people to vote, making candidates more aware of community issues, creating a speakers bureau to uplift certain issues, leveraging relationships/collaborating more, and always sharing information and exploring ways to engage community.

FESP members then participated in a poll to select topics for 2022. The top topics were policies to promote racial equity, guaranteed basic income, quality jobs and compensation (minimum vs living wages), and budget justice.

We ended with a few updates on rental assistance resources, next steps for Measure X (November 16 Board of Supervisor meeting) and CAPP progress. Information/calls to action have been or will be sent as relevant.

Last but not least, we said goodbye to Hector Malvido who had been with Ensuring Opportunity and has left to take a job with Policy Link, and we welcomed the new ERAP coordinator Roxana.

Thanks to all who attended this FESP meeting!

Best,

Fran Biderman, Coordinator
First 5 Contra Costa/FESP