

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from January 11, 2023, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:35 pm, in person in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: Susan Patkin, David Bookston, Julie Stevens, Will Holland, Karen Mullen, Nicole McMahon (School Resource Officer) and Joseph Brienza (School Resource Officer)

Staff in Attendance: Hannah Stein, Clinician; Ellen Whirley, Clinician; Christine Weitzel, Clinician; Sari Musmon, Youth Diversion Coordinator; Kelsey Nichols, Clinician; Alyssa Cellucci, Administrative Assistant

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Minutes December 14, 2022. Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the December 14 minutes. Ms. Patkin seconded. The December 14 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Update on Community Needs and Crisis Response

Ms. Shine noted that there continues to be a wait list. Youth of all ages are in need and there is a higher level of acuity with the Youth on the waitlist and the ones being seen. Staff all have a caseload of individual clients and are seeing that due to the acuity of current needs, the time spend on each client is higher than in the past. This is due to seeing the client multiple times per week, talking and meeting with family members more often, and an increase in collateral work.

New refugee and immigrant students have joined the high school community and Y&FS staff are partnering with guidance at the high school to assist. There are also continuing anxiety issues related to the spikes of COVID and students and teachers cycling in and out of school. The schools are stricter around attendance issues which has been difficult for some students. Some, who have been physically sick and some who have struggled with mental health challenges. There is also a continued need for support around social skills and behavioral support. Y&FS is creating several groups to help youth with this.

Ms. Musmon, the Youth Diversion Coordinator, noted that diversion is a program aimed at helping youth stay out of the court system. Youth who have been charged with a crime have the choice of participating in the Diversion Program which would combine community service, writing, and meetings with students and parents. There have been several youth involved in the program - incidents range from substance use at parties to graffiti to breaking into local businesses. There have been two graffiti incidents at the high school in the last ten days.

The group discussed the continued need for half day programming as this seems to be a problematic time when students do not have much structure. X-block was also discussed as a time that could be utilized for needed socialization, support, mental wellness activities.

Ms. Shine and her staff noted that the coffee drop in hour in X block seems to be useful.

Update on Programs, Services and Awards

The annual **Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award** is this month, thank you so much to our selection committee, Julie Stevens, David Bookston and Susan Patkin. This years' recipient is Jean Higgins. Jean Higgins is an inspirational community member who exemplifies service as the founder and administrator of "Be Kind Needham", a Facebook page dedicated to providing critical assistance to local families and individuals in need. Jean spearheaded the group in 2019 as a way to serve the people of Needham and neighboring communities who are struggling with finances, finding employment and secure housing or necessary items like clothing, electronics, housewares and children's supplies. The goals was also to help more vulnerable populations including, but not limited to, the elderly, veterans, families involved in the foster care system, as well as refugees and those seeking asylum. Jean handles hundreds of requests for specific donations and coordinates with the 1,800+ members that have joined the group in just three years, in addition to Needham-based charity organizations. She is firmly dedicated to maintaining the dignity and privacy of those receiving the donations and ensures that the items are of the highest standards, meeting exactly what is needed, often going so far as to purchase the items herself. Those involved with the group describe Jean as a master circus-performer able to simultaneously spin dozens of plates in the air, each one of those plates being a person or family in need of help. She instills all with a renewed sense of hope and encourages people to think globally and act locally, even shedding light on the work of other organizations to establish a reliable network of resources. Her persistence, compassion, and selfless undertaking of these responsibilities make Jean truly deserving of this award, exemplifying the dedication it takes to make a positive impact not only within the Be Kind group but in the community as a whole.

The group talked extensively about teen Mental Health First Aid - a 4.5 hour class that teaches 10-12th graders how to respond to peers who are experiencing a mental health challenge. Ms. Shine explained that this year is a pilot year and the hope is that next year the class will be able to be trained during a Health and Wellness class. Several Board members asked Ms. Shine to check to see if the Youth Mental Health class could count for the community service requirement. Ms. Shine noted she is going to talk to the guidance dept about this as it is such an important initiative.

Ms. Cellucci talked about the employment program and volunteer program. This program helps connect residents to students who are looking to do various residential jobs such as lawn care, shoveling, babysitting and odd jobs. She is working on recruiting new students for the various lists. In addition, she is organizing a volunteer list for similar jobs in addition to helping students organize their own volunteer projects for community service hours. Ms. Cellucci also discussed her focus on program advertising and public relations.

Ms. Weitzel said that she and Ms. Whirley run the peer mentor program VIP and have had a great experience with the VIP program; 25 pairs in all. They have been creative in bring art projects every session and various relationship building games.

Ms. Weitzel also discussed the Dr. Chris Willard presentation on November 9th (Mindful Resilience in the New Normal). The program was a huge success and was very well attended. She is working on seeking out additional presenters. Ms. Weitzel also discussed her involvement as the community advisor (along with Ms. Nichols) for the Take Back the Night group. This group is focused on building awareness around domestic violence and will hold an event on February 9th in Powers Hall.

Ms. Whirley talked about the various groups that she is running and the importance of offering more groups given the waitlist for individual work. Ms. Whirley also discussed Volunteers Around Needham and plans for both the February and April vacations.

Ms. Stein discussed her current focus on individual clients and groups. She is focused on getting together a HS group for students who have left their countries due to war. Ms. Stein explained that she has a lot of experience and training on trauma which she utilizes with her individual clients and for group planning. She also spearheaded the SHOP (Students Helping Older People - a program where students are paired with older adults for grocery shopping) program which needs some additional attention to get off the group. There are students interested but it has been more difficult to get the older adults on board.

Youth & Family Services is working with the Needham Exchange Club on hosting **Ryan's Story** for the second year. Ryan's Story is a community presentation that is focused on bullying, social media use and suicide prevention. Last year this event was very successful and well received by the community. The event will take place March 29th.

Y&FS hosted another family night on December 8th. There was a waitlist for this event and over 50 people attended. This event allowed for many people to connect with Youth & Family Services, hear about the programs offered and enjoyed a night of dinner, crafts, games and cookie decorating. This event was a huge success. Staff are planning another one for March 30th.

Needham Unplugged: The 2023 edition is not far off and it is exciting to think that this program will be our 21st year of operation. The success of "Unplugged" is directly related to the active support of the Needham Public Schools (without whom we would not have a no-homework night), the Board of Selectmen (without whom we would not have a no-meeting night), and of course Needham families who following the unplugged calendar. This program has been copied in dozens of communities in Massachusetts and nationally.

New Business

Ms. Shine is working on scheduling a meeting for Ms. Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, to attend a future Board meeting so the issues in the Board's recent letter discussing staff and funding increases can be discussed.

Old Business

Ms. Shine noted that she has met with Mr. Timothy Muir McDonald, the Director of Health and Human Services, to discuss office space. There are some temporary options available in various buildings so these are all being explored.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:29 pm

Notes by: Faith Crisley, Recording Secretary
Edited by: Sara Shine, Director

