

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from May 10, 2023, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:30 pm, in person at the Center at the Heights.

Board in Attendance: Susan Patkin, David Bookston, Will Holland, Karen Mullen, Jill Mullaney, Massiel Gallardo

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Staff: Hannah Stein, Ellen Whirley, Christine Weitzel, Alyssa Cellucci

Police Diversion Coordinator: Sari Musmon

Guest: Kevin Keane

Minutes April 12, 2023. Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the March minutes. Ms. Mullen seconded. The April 12 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Dinner

General discussion and introductions

Update on Programs, Services and Awards

Ms. Shine had the various staff members update the Board.

She noted that there has recently been a bigger focus on group work since this helps more students access mental health support.

Ms. Whirley also discussed the groups she was currently co-leading including:

Coffee Talk – a group open to any High School student. This group occurs during x-block once a week and will run through May. The topics have included: active shooter drills, homework stress, NHS cellphone policies, and end-of-the-semester exams.

Pollard Lunch Group – this group is being run with Ms. Stein. This group is working on building social skills, maintaining health friendships, and providing an alternative lunch space for those attending the groups.

Ms. Whirley also explained that Y&FS has started to plan a number of therapeutic groups for the summer in addition to some Saturday workshops.

Ms. Whirley discussed helping to get **Volunteers Around Needham** set up for the summer. This program is an opportunity for middle and high school students to give back to the community while also getting their needed community service hours. There were over 15 volunteers who joined Y&FS at the Needham Fire Station and the Charles River Center. Ms. Whirley explained staff are looking to host 6 days this summer.

Ms. Weitzel has been co-leading a **Grief Group** with Ms. Stein. The school system has asked Y&FS to put together a group for students who have lost family members as there are a number of students who have experienced this. The plan is to run a couple of workshops this year with a more formal group over the summer.

Ms. Weitzel also discussed the work she did in helping organize the Y&FS community presentation: **The Mindful Path to Unwinding Anxiety for Kids and Teens** presented by Mitch Abblett. Dr. Abblett is a Wellesley-based psychologist, who addressed the epidemic of anxiety impact youth and offered specific hands-on, mindfulness-based tools for breaking the brain-based habits of anxiety that limit peer and family relationships, academic outcomes and overall well-being. There are 58 attendees already signed up for this presentation. This event occurred May 9th and about 40 people attended. Ms. Weitzel is going to continue to work on the community presentation so that Y&FS offers at least 2 per year.

Both Ms. Weitzel and Ms. Whirley are working on wrapping up **VIP (peer mentoring program)** which had ended for the year. Staff are meeting with mentors to process the year. This year was a huge success with 25 pairs meeting regularly. The pairs did an amazing job working on social skills and building that mentoring relationship. Staff are already talking about the next school year and how the program will be run.

Ms. Stein reiterated the groups that she is co-leading including the Grief Group and the Pollard Lunch Group.

Ms. Stein is also working with the Needham Public Library and Family Access Community Connections on a **Family Playgroup** for caregivers and their babies (ages 0-1). This playgroup will run over the summer and will provide a space for parents to connect and have the support of clinical staff to discuss stressors and coping. It also creates a social environment for very young children.

Ms. Stein also discussed the Peer Tutor program, which she runs with Ms. Nichols (who was not able to attend the meeting). There were 28 matches this past year and overall the program was a huge success. Staff are in the process of assessing this program for the next school year to determine if some changes need to be made. Staff will spend some of the summer assessing this.

All staff discussed the individual and family clinical work that they are spending their time on. In addition, all staff are working on various consultations and supportive services for residents.

Ms. Cellucci noted she supports all the staff with programming, registration assistance and marketing. She noted she is trying to ramp up the employment list after COVID as pre pandemic there were more students available. The biggest need right now is with seniors for lawn mowing and furniture moving. She has worked with guidance to get flyers up in their offices to try to recruit more students. Ms. Cellucci also noted she is partnering with Ms. Stein to try to get a district wide community service listing so that more youth could be partnered with seniors who need their services. There is a meeting with the district wide community service school staff member who manages community service for the district. Ms. Cellucci also noted that her undergraduate degree is in social work, she wants to pursue her MSW in the clinical track so has been working with the clinical staff and attending school

groups to learn more. She has also provided some case management/advocacy for residents with various urgent needs.

Ms. Shine noted that another workshop occurred with local Expressive Art Therapist, Tova Speter, LMHC. The **Rain Art Workshop** for Teens and families was a 2-part series. The first part we gathered a group of teens to brainstorm and create designs for the sidewalk art in Needham that will magically appear when it rains. This workshop took place over April vacation and was full to capacity. Artwork was inspired by themes of how we refresh and renew ourselves and find joy. Every participant was also able to create their own magical art to take home. The second part will be a scavenger hunt on May 5th for families once the art is live on the sidewalks. Y&FS was excited to host this event with Ms. Speter.

Y&FS is working with Engaging Minds to run 2 workshops over the summer helping students learn skills for the return to school. These workshops will be aimed at transitional ages for Middle School students. The details are still being discussed.

Y&FS is still focused on Mental Health First Aid. Youth Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that teaches participants how to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms that suggest a potential mental health challenge, how to listen nonjudgmentally and give reassurance to a youth who may be experiencing a mental health challenge, and how to refer a person to appropriate professional support and services. We are planning to run a couple of classes in the fall. In addition, 5 staff have been trained to be teen Mental Health First Aid trainers which teaches teens how to help their peers experiencing a mental health challenge. Staff are working closely with the school department on training this to students in the schools.

Ms. Shine also noted that Diversion is being revamped. Ms. Musmon noted she is looking into adding more to the program along with the community service piece. She is trying to create a meaningful connection to the transgression. Reflection pieces might provide more meaning. Since none of her caseload has involved violent crime most students/parents choose diversion she is trying to make it more of a learning experience for those in the program. She also noted there is no specific trend to her caseload. In the winter there are parties but, in the spring, sometimes more issues around the good weather.

Ms. Shine reiterated that all Committee work is going very well including the homelessness committee, the Online Safety Committee, the Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham, Chapter 84, The Domestic Violence Action Committee, the Community Crisis Intervention Team, the Youth Resource Network, The Community Health Resource Group, and the Youth Services Meetings. Staff sit on all of the committees and are very engaged with the groups.

Old Business

The group discussed meeting with Mrs. Fitzpatrick during an upcoming meeting to discuss mental health needs of the community and how Youth & Family Service could support.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:20 pm

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