

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from April 9th, 2025 Board Meeting

Meeting commenced at 5:30pm in person in the Highland Room of Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: Julie Stevens, Susan Patkin, Joe Brienze, Karen Mullen, Natalia Ly

Staff in Attendance: Alyssa Cellucci

Director: Sara Shine, LICSW

Resident in Attendance: Danielle Shapiro

Minutes from March 12th, 2025: Ms. Patkin made a motion to approve the March 12th minutes. Ms. Mullen seconded. The March 12th minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Ms. Stevens made a motion to commence the meeting.

CLINICAL SERVICES OVERVIEW

Youth & Family Services provides individual, family, and group therapy for residents and the department has significantly increased our capacity for this. While our services typically focus on young people and their families, we are aware that there are a number of people in the community in need of extra support. We have been able to offer more crisis/urgent supportive services to all residents in response to this need.

- There are 88 active clients.
- There are 7 on our waitlist.
- We have provided 7 Parent/Community consultations.
- We have had 3 emergency consults this month.

Youth & Family Services staff continue to monitor the needs of the community as we receive an increase in referrals for services and inquiries about programs. Staff routinely manage the department's waitlist for services, intake new clients for both individual and family work, and have begun offering some in-home consultations and case management.

UPDATES

Ms. Shine discussed the ongoing efforts by staff to meet the needs of the community through outreach and clinical work. Coming up in May, she will be moderating two panels for parents and community members, one on suicide prevention around the film “Shattered Ice” based in Needham on May 14th and another discussing childhood and adolescent anxiety modeled after the book “The Anxious Generation” by Jonathan Haidt.

Ms. Shine also taught a Youth Mental Health First Aid course to the members of the second cohort of The Needham Resiliency Network.

The monthly CCIT (Community Crisis Intervention Team) meetings have seen an increase of higher needs in the community and connecting families to needed resources.

Staff are also working on implementing a summer workshop for rising kindergarteners and the transition into school with navigating emotions and peer interactions. Additionally, staff are working on starting a mentor program at the high school to pair older students with incoming first-years to help their transition in getting to know the school.

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

Five members of YFS staff are implementing Teen Mental Health First Aid at Needham High School, training the entire sophomore class how to help their peers who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis. The rollout began on March 12 and will extend through mid-April with staff scheduled to teach nearly every day of the week. The classes have been consistently successful in connecting students who are seeking in-school support with the guidance department, either immediately or within a certain timeframe as indicated by the student on their exit ticket, when they may not have been connected otherwise. At the end of April, 12 classes ranging from 15-25 students will have completed the training and received their certifications. Each class requires 4.5 hours of training during their wellness classes.

On March 14, staff hosted a number of municipal Youth & Family Services divisions for workshop facilitated by the Life is Good Playmaker Project, which focuses on trauma-informed, play-based therapy for children. Members from Medfield, Southborough, Ashland, Hopkinton, Wellesley, Holliston, Northborough, and Wayland were in attendance. Staff participated in hands-on team building activities involving beach balls and parachutes under the Playmaker Project’s framework that encourages all participants, adult and youth alike, to engage with the activities only as much as they feel comfortable so that no one is forced to participate beyond their comfort level. We received positive feedback about the workshop. Two NY&FS staff members, Ellen Whirley, LCSW and Tony Serio, LCSW completed the LIG Playmaker University Training course in October 2024 to bring this therapeutic approach to their work with clients.

Sara Shine was the moderator for the panel discussion for the film premiere of “The

Disruptors” on April 3 at Newman Elementary, as part of the “What is ‘Normal’ Anyway?” series, a Stigma-Obliterating Disability Film Series for high schoolers and adults. This film attempts to answer questions about how our schools respond to behavioral issues when they involve kids with ADHD, how the medical community’s understanding and diagnosing and treating of ADHD has changed, and what role exercise can play for kids with ADHD and what we can learn from an NHS student about how it feels to grow up in Needham with ADHD. Presented in collaboration with SEPAC, Needham Community Ed, Needham Education Foundation, SPAN, League of Women Voters, and Progressive Needham.

As part of the Mindful Community Speaker Series, Youth & Family Services hosted a presentation from author and speaker Michelle Icard on April 2nd. Michelle presented to school guidance and special education liaison staff during professional development opportunity and hosted the presentation for parents that evening. The focus was on how setbacks (or failures) can make a child a success and how parents can support this process and other essential parenting conversations. Staff also hosted a Mindful Community Book Club with Michelle’s book, “The Fourteen Talks Before Age Fourteen” at the Needham Free Public Library on March 20, offering a midday time from 12-1pm and an evening time from 7-8pm for parents to come together to discuss Michelle’s ideas and provide insight and support to one another. About 70 people attended the event in person and another 50 will receive the recording of the event.

CURRENT PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES

- **Parent Support Group, “Coffee Talk”** – Y&FS continues to host drop-in hours for parents and caregivers to get support from a clinician and connect with peers on various parenting and mental health topics. Four dates were planned in the fall 2024 schedule centering around specific topics: “Back to School Butterflies”, “Children Love Language”, “Healthy Living”, and “Chat ‘n Chill” with 6 families participating. On March 5 and March 19, staff offered a technology-focused drop-in to discuss the use of technology and how parents can set limits as part of the Needham Unplugged campaign.
- **“Caring for the Caregiver” Support Group** – As an extension of Parent Coffee Talk, staff are facilitating a support group in the Chambers St. Community Room and the Captain Robert Cooke Community Room for caregivers of teens experiencing mental health challenges. Initially offered as an afternoon lunch hour, it has now transitioned to an evening time to accommodate parent schedules. Group runs on the first Monday of every month from 4-5pm.
- **Supportive Parenting of Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE)** - Supportive Parenting of Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE), led by Robyn Isman, LICSW, teaches parents the basics of how children experience anxiety in their brains and bodies along with the interpersonal nature of anxiety between the parent and child and how to prevent anxiety from worsening and sticking around through our own language and

behaviors. Robyn presents to parents of children aged 3 through high school even if their child does not have a diagnosed anxiety disorder. The first series was held from 11am-12pm on 2/26, 3/5, and 3/12 with over 20 participants. Staff are collaborating with Robyn to offer an evening slot for caregivers who could not attend the midday time, planned for April and May.

- **Volunteers Around Needham** – Volunteers Around Needham provides an opportunity for students in grades 7-12 to participate in single-day service projects in the community. Staff have made connections with various organizations and departments in town to offer VAN over school breaks. During February vacation week, 6 youth volunteered at Circle of Hope on Feb 19 and 7 youth volunteered at Temple Beth Shalom on Feb 20. Staff will facilitate three days over the upcoming April break with Circle of Hope, TBS, and Needham Parks and Forestry. Each service project runs from 9am-12pm and students receive CSL hours for their participation.
- **Needham Teen Summer Job & Volunteer Expo** - On Wednesday, March 19, staff hosted the first ever Needham Teen Summer Job and Community Service Expo from 12-2pm at the Needham Free Public Library during the half-day. Various local businesses and volunteer organizations ran booths for students to network and find resources. Representatives from Needham Park and Recreation, Needham Community Council, Charles River YMCA, Plugged-In Band, Needham Community Farm, and Comella's restaurant were present among others. Over 60 students dropped by throughout the event and a number have followed up with staff about certain opportunities. The department will plan to offer this Expo again in the future as a way to help connect youth to different employers and service opportunities in the Needham community.
- **Social Skills Groups** – Staff are running ongoing social skills groups for elementary and middle school youth to promote communication skills, affect management, and coping strategies while building on peer connections and managing relationships. The current session of the 2nd-3rd grade group is underway with 9 participants and will run from March 18 to April 15. The two previous sessions of the group this year had 7 participants each. The November-December series of the 4-5th grade group had 5 participants. In collaboration with the department's clinical interns, staff continue to update the group curriculum and add new activities for each session. Feedback from the community has suggested a need for groups for younger youth which staff are considering.
- **Navigating Divorce Group** – Staff offered an after-school support group for youth and families who are navigating divorce, offering a space to process the emotions around the situation and supporting parents in having transparent conversations with their children as they navigate through the transition. Staff ran parallel workshops, with parents attending their own respective workshop separate from the children to allow for age and developmentally appropriate discussions. In the two sessions in February and March, 3 families participated with 6 children, and staff offered private consultations as an option to adults who may want individualized support.
- **Community Connections Office Hours** – Outreach Clinician Tony Serio,

LCSW and Community Training Coordinator Kristina Kozak, MSW, BCBA have established office hours to strategically place themselves in the community to offer on-the-spot case management, referrals, and check-ins with community members. Additionally, both staff administer surveys to persons served in order to track and assess the needs of the community on an ongoing basis. Connections have been established at Needham Free Public Library, the Needham Community Council, the Needham Housing Authority and Needham Charles River YMCA. In the month of March:

- At the Needham Free Public Library on Tuesdays from 12pm - 4pm and Wednesdays from 10am – 2pm, 2 patrons made contact and resources / appropriate follow up were provided
- At the Needham Community Council on March 5, 12, and 22, 5 patrons made contact and resources / appropriate follow up were provided
- Kristina is facilitating in-home parent training with 1 family that has required weekly supports
- Tony has continued with case management services including financial assistance, LGBTQIA+ support, immigration information, and accessing broader mental health services
- **Drop-in Teen and Youth Groups** – Staff host weekly drop-in groups for teens and adolescents as an opportunity to congregate, snack, and develop healthy relationships while learning about mental health and wellness through interactive activities.
 - On Mondays in the Community Room at the Needham Free Public Library, Tony Serio hosts a Drop-in Teen Group. The group has seen up to 20 students each week hang out and engage in various activities like mindful meditation, DBT-based coping skills, and expanding emotional vocabulary with music, pop culture, and more. Over the month of March, a total of 93 students dropped in.
 - In February, Tony Serio and Kristina Kozak offered a similar weekly Drop-In Youth Group for younger kids from 3-4pm at the Chambers St. Community Room and 4-5pm at the Captain Robert Cook Community Room. 4 youth participated in the program.
- **Lunch Groups** – Lunch groups continue to be successful. Staff are running lunch groups at 3 of the elementary schools: Sunita Williams, Newman and Broadmeadow and are coordinating with other schools to offer groups. Approximately 5-8 students are referred to the group each cycle by school guidance staff. These groups are designed to provide a supportive and engaging environment for students, fostering social skills and friendships in a

positive space.

- **Conversations with Your Middle Schooler:** Through a partnership with SPAN, Kristina Kozak and Tony Serio facilitated the second of a 3-part workshop series on March 11 from 8:30-9:45am, based on SAMHSA framework that helps prepare and connect parents with others regarding discussions with their children about substance use. 9 parents participated in the workshop and discussion.
- **Family Playgroups** – Staff have been running a series of Family Playgroups in partnership with Family ACCESS Community Connections. Groups have been facilitated at the Needham Free Public Library and the Charles River YMCA. Family playgroups offer a space for new parents of young children to be part of a larger community, helping to make parents feel less alone amongst peers. Caregivers and their babies ages 0-1 can spend one hour at the library for literacy tip, lap time, and time for adults to share the joys and challenges of parenting. In the current cycle we have had 4 families participate.
- **Diversion Program:** Tony Serio and Kristina Kozak have continued working with Public Safety Officer, Katie McCullough, to offer Diversion Program services to youth that have been charged with minor crimes. There are currently 6 open cases with 1 new case being referred to the program during the month of March.

COMMUNITY ISSUES BEING ADDRESS:

Needham Youth & Family Services is waiting to receive data from the 2023 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey once this data is made available to the public.

- Highlights from the 2021 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey finds that in Needham:
 - For the middle school: reports of mental health issues increased since 2018: 12-month reports of depressive symptoms increased from 9%-13% and self-injury increased from 6%-8%. Life reports of seriously considering suicide also increased from 10%-12%. This increase in mental health concerns is increasing consistently among various genders.
 - For High School Students: depressive symptoms increased from 13%-22%, self-injury increased from 9%-16% and seriously considering suicide increased from 9%-12%. All of these areas also grew substantially in the Metro-West region.
 - For both middle school and high school, the proportion of youth spending 3 or more hours on screen time on the average school day increased substantially (50% for middle school and 52% in high school).
 - For both age groups: the indicators of school connectedness are lower in 2021, reports of having a friend to talk to about personal problems decreased (M:68%-62%/HS: 73%-66%), and reports of adult supports at school have also decreased (MS:72%-70%/HS:75%-72%).
- We are assessing additional community needs and virtual programming.
 - Our focus is to continue group treatment to increase the number of youth accessing services

- We are working on increased training for staff in trauma-informed care
- We are working closely with a school group on helping support the school community and families on many different levels.
- We are planning some community presentations to help educate and support residents.
- We are finding nontraditional ways to address mental health such as expressive art therapy workshops and community outreach projects.
- Helping to address issues of racism and inequalities and ensuring that all have access to services if needed.

ONGOING PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES:

Peer Tutor – This program pairs high school students in grades 10-12 with students in grades 3-8 in need of after-school academic support and mentoring. This program is an opportunity for high school students to receive their 30 hours of community service and complete half of the requirement for graduation. Staff host an orientation session for tutors in the fall and this year's program is underway with pairs meeting at the Needham Free Public Library during two designated time slots. The program runs until the end of April.

VIP Peer Mentoring Program - This program pairs high school students with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to offer a weekly space for socialization, games, and an opportunity to build peer mentoring relationships. It continues to be a positive experience for the mentor-mentee pairs and for staff to see the development of those mentoring relationships. A number of "Big" floating volunteers are available to help make sure the "Littles" can still participate if their mentor needed to miss a meeting. Staff held the orientation training for the Bigs on October 8 and the first session of the program was held on October 22. Staff are gathering insight into the structure of peer mentor programs run by other organizations for new ideas and considering running a program for rising 9th graders to be supported by older students. The 2024-2025 VIP session has come to a close with 20 pairs of Bigs and Littles. Staff held the Wrap up session with Bigs on March 25 to sign their community service hours forms and also to get feedback from the group about their experience with the program.

Volunteers Around Needham – Volunteers Around Needham provides an opportunity for students in grades 7-12 to participate in single-day service projects in the community. This program has been consistently popular year after year as students seek involvement in the community and to complete their school requirements. Staff have made connections with various organizations and departments in town to offer VAN during school breaks and over the summer, including the Needham Community Council, Circle of Hope, the Needham Fire Department, Temple Beth Shalom, and Needham Parks and Forestry among others. Staff have also fostered a close working relationship with NewBridge on the Charles in Dedham, a senior living facility, to help high school students connect with the volunteer program and make meaningful intergenerational connections.

Social Skills Groups / Workshops – Staff offer weekly after-school social skills groups and half-day workshops for elementary and middle school youth to focus on building

confidence and interpersonal skills through games and interactive team-building activities. Activities have included therapeutic card games, name and guessing games, and writing letters to their future selves which staff mail to them at the end of the school year. These activities promote communication skills, affect management, and coping strategies while building peer connections. The last two sessions of the 2nd-3rd grade group met with 7 participants in each cycle. The November-December series of the 4-5th grade group had 5 participants. Staff have continuously updated the group curriculum for new members and added new activities each session.

SHOP (Students Helping Older People) – SHOP is an intergenerational program pairing high school students with older adults to make connections and help with grocery shopping. This program started in response to post-pandemic challenges faced by the older and homebound community and the need prevails. This program allows students to volunteer directly within a community member, reinforcing the importance of relationships especially with more vulnerable populations during a time when many connections are lost. Y&FS has also talked to some local housing for older adults with the idea that the program could be brought directly to these communities as well. We currently have 6 students signed up to volunteer.

Mindful Community Lecture Services – Talking About Mental Health. Youth & Family Services has partnered with the Needham Community Council and the Becca Schmill Foundation to create a speaker series to help support the community. The committee is actively researching and contacting various speakers in an effort to meet the most pressing needs of families in our community. This year's events included:

March 5th, 2025 “Emotions 101” Deborah Farmer Kris: At Broadmeadow Elementary School, Deborah offered practical advice for supporting kids in navigating their feelings and building emotional awareness, social competency, and building resilience. This event was marketed as beneficial for parents and caregivers of children ages kindergarten to 6th grade. We had approximately 75 people registered and it was very well-attended.

April 2nd, 2025 “Essential Parenting Conversations” with Michelle Icard: Michelle presented to school guidance and special education liaison staff during professional development opportunity and hosted the presentation for parents that evening. The focus was on how setbacks (or failures) can make a child a success and how parents can support this process and other essential parenting conversations. Staff also hosted a Mindful Community Book Club with Michelle's book, “The Fourteen Talks Before Age Fourteen” at the Needham Free Public Library on March 20, offering a midday time from 12-1pm and an evening time from 7-8pm for parents to come together to discuss Michelle's ideas and provide insight and support to one another. About 70 people attended the event in person and another 50 will receive the recording of the event.

January 16th, 2025 “Screenagers” Documentary Premiere: The department partnered with St. Joseph School to premiere the documentary “Screenagers”, an award-winning film that probes into the vulnerable corners of family life and depicts messy struggles over social media, video games, and academics.” The film offers

solutions on how we can help our kids navigate the digital world. There were over 40 people in attendance and staff facilitated group discussion after the film. Surveys were conducted and had overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Cuerd@s- Staff are collaborating with a local non-profit, Cuerd@s, to host a parent and teen workshop. Cuerd@s is an organization that teaches embroidery to groups to create tactile patches for sensory seeking people to use on their everyday clothing. This workshop will be a space for parents to make clothing for their children while processing the stressors or parents and share strategies.



Members of the Health and Human Services team have been trained to teach **Youth Mental Health First Aid virtually**.

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. Youth & Family Services and Public Health have trained all big groups of staff at the Needham Housing Authority and the Needham Community Council. Thank you to the Needham Community Council for sponsoring these trainings. The Needham Resiliency Network is now in the process of being trained. There has been a huge increase in interest in this training. In addition, the department now has a total of 6 staff who have been trained to be **teen Mental Health First Aid** trainers, which teaches teens how to help their peers experiencing a mental health challenge. The hope is that the class will not only give skills to the students but will also help eliminate barriers to treatment (including stigma and access) and will help identify students in need. Staff trained the 10th graders at Needham High School last year and are in the process of planning this again this year.

Each class required 4.5 hours of training time over six sessions. The session contains the following information:

Session 1: Mental health, what mental health challenges are, and how common they are in teens.

Session 2: The impact of mental health challenges on teens, how people with mental health challenges can get better, professionals who can help.

Session 3: Helping a friend who is in crisis because they are suicidal, introducing the tMHFA action plan (look, ask, listen, help your friend) and how it can be used in a crisis situation. A video shows a teen helping a friend who is experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Session 4: Helping a friend who is in another type of crisis, such as threatening violence or harm to others, engaging in non-suicidal self-injury, or experiencing a traumatic event such as bullying, abuse or assault; practicing using the tMHFA Action Plan in these types of crisis situations

Session 5: How to help a friend who may be in crisis due to substance use, how to help if someone might be developing a mental health challenge. tMHFA does not teach you how to diagnose! It's information about being a supportive friend, encouraging friends to seek help and knowing when it is time to get a responsible, trusted adult involved.

Session 6: Recovery, resiliency and all final activities to complete the tMHFA course.

Additionally, staff are currently being trained to offer **Adult Mental Health First Aid** to the community. This training trains adults how to respond to other adults experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis and will help the department implement this training more broadly across the community to make sure all needs can be effectively met.

Family Night – Family Nights help families connect with each other, meet new faces, and relax with pizza dinner and a Bingo tournament. Kids and their adults of all ages can enjoy crafts, cookie decorating, photobooths, and more. Staff host Family Nights twice yearly, usually in the winter or spring, most recently on December 12 at the Center at the Heights from 5:30-7pm. Each event is highly successful and maxes out at 75 attendees with a waitlist. Staff are planning another Family Night for May 2025.

Employment Program Update: Youth & Family Services help connect residents to students who are looking to do various residential jobs such as lawn care, shoveling, babysitting and odd jobs. Staff are recruiting more students for these lists that have helped to support older adults and other residents in need. Staff have also started a volunteer list as well so that people who need assistance but may not be able to afford to hire someone can still receive the services. We have shared those lists with multiple residents who have reached out especially in the winter months for snow shoveling services.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

Pollard Middle School Student Appreciation Day - Staff presented at Student Teacher Appreciation Day on October 23 where over 80 students learned about programs offered by Needham Youth Services including Volunteers Around Needham and created appreciation cards for each of the VAN community partners. Staff have also attended several meetings to discuss services and community-based initiatives with the Superintendent Leadership Meeting, the PTC presidents' meetings, a leadership meeting at Pollard Middle School and a PTC meeting at Broadmeadow. Sara Shine has also presented at a Pollard Middle School parent coffee talk organized by the school principal.

Needham Harvest Fair – Youth & Family Services hosts tables at each annual Harvest Fair on Greene's Field in Needham. Staff make connections with residents and members of the community to discuss programming and clinical services. The department's "swag" and goodies seem to be popular with the young people including sensory fidgets, textured mindfulness stickers, and a temporary "tattoo" station.

Jog for Joy- Highrock Church Metrowest hosts their annual Jog for Joy, an annual 5k which started in 2019 in support of mental health resources for the community and to build awareness around mental health, decreasing stigma. A portion of the proceeds continues to support Youth & Family Services. The 2024 run was hosted on June 9 at 10AM.

Staff have partnered with the **Charles River YMCA** to provide scholarships to youth to attend YMCA sleepaway camps throughout the summer months, for families with limited financial means. Youth report having a significantly positive experience, most having never

attended camp before, and expressed a desire to return next summer. Staff will continue to work with the YMCA to make this a reality for youth in the community.

Youth & Family Services has joined a group led by the Needham Housing Authority called **Family Self Sufficiency Program Coordinating Committee**. The purpose of this program is to provide a comprehensive range of services including education, job training, financial literacy and homeownership assistance which will equip participants with the tools and resources necessary to achieve self-sufficiency and break the cycle of poverty. The first meeting occurred March 12 and staff will continue to be involved in this initiative.

Youth & Family Services has joined a **Needham Homelessness Prevention Coalition** that helps assess needs in the areas and helps to prevent homelessness. This meeting occurs monthly. This meeting is a meeting to address homelessness on a larger scale and discuss patterns and solutions for individuals and families, many of the attendees in this group help with specific incidents on a day-to-day basis.

Youth & Family Services has joined the **Online Safety Coalition**. This is a group that has gotten together to help caregivers navigate the always changing online environment that children spend so many hours engaging in. The Coalition includes representation from the Needham Board of Health, Youth and Family Services, Community Council, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Walker School, Needham High School, Becca Schmill Foundation and community members. The coalition will provide parents with reliable information about various online safety topics. The group is working on a newsletter to be distributed regularly. Mrs. Shine has also joined the School Wellness Advisory Committee, facilitated by Needham Public Schools. This committee is working on guidance specific to cell phone use. Recommendations to the School Committee will likely emerge from this group.

Youth & Family Services continues to work closely with the students involved in our **Chapter 84**, which is a peer-to-peer led nicotine prevention group. Students are involved in various trainings and advocacy initiatives.

Youth & Family Services' staff regularly attend the meetings of **SPAN** --- Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham (formerly known as the Needham Coalition for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention). Youth & Family Services is represented on all 3 action teams and are also represented on the steering committee. There are several initiatives coming out of this group including creating online substance use support, peer support, community activities and educational webinars. Director, Sara Shine, was part of a SPAN community event titled "Edibles, Vapes & Spiked Seltzers: Tips for talking with your teens about drugs & alcohol in today's world." The event hosted Dr. Safdar Medina as he spoke about tips for talking with teens about drugs and alcohol, followed by a panel with Pollard Middle School Principal, Tamatha Bibbo, Sara Shine and a SALSA student.

Naloxone (Narcan) Administration - We have two staff who are currently trained in Naloxone administration (aka Narcan) through the Public Health Department. We are now more equipped to educate families on the use of Narcan to prevent fatal overdose, how to contact emergency responders, and the existence of the Good Samaritan Law in

Massachusetts. While we cannot directly provide residents with Narcan due to required licensing, we are collaborating with public health nurses on the best protocol to provide to families in need who may be facing stigma or want to be trained for their own general knowledge. Narcan is a life-saving measure that works to reverse symptoms of overdose including respiratory distress in a matter of minutes.

The **Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)** meets regularly. Youth & Family Services has a representative at these meetings. Some of the staff have attended various training courses to help support their committee's work around domestic violence. In addition, staff have joined a DVAC sub-committee that is working on a cable channel series to be aired in October 2024 for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is a 6-part series and staff will be participating in the episode exploring Healthy Relationships. Ms. Kozak will participate in "Take Back the Night" to help support the Take Back the Night Club at Needham High School. This event will take place on February 6, 6pm-8pm.

Staff have continued to be involved in the **Community Crisis Intervention Team (CCIT)** and attend these meetings regularly. This meeting is attended by the police department, fire, and town social workers from various divisions, the health department, a SPAN representative, and other community leaders.

Riverside Crisis Team discusses community members in crisis who may need additional supports. Quarterly, there is a larger meeting that includes other community partners including the hospitals, Walker, local mental health, and substance use organizations. Quarterly this team meets with larger community providers (including local mental health agencies, BID, NWH, Walker) to discuss the overall community needs and trends.

The Youth Resource Network is a roundtable including representatives from multiple youth-serving organizations that meet during the academic year to address specific needs of school-age youth and families that reside and/or attend public school in Needham. These meetings have been very popular this year as there are so many families in crisis. Youth & Family Services chairs this meeting monthly.

Staff are attending the quarterly municipal **Youth Commission/Youth Services meeting**. Represented at the meeting are directors from towns such as Medfield, Hopkinton, Holliston, Wayland, Wellesley, Southborough, and several more. We have also joined a smaller group of Directors from the Metro-West region to increase collaboration. There has been an effort to bridge gaps between programs so that staff have more co-workers to collaborate with. There have also been conversations about working together on therapeutic groups and community presentations. Two breakout groups have recently been formed with municipal staff, one for case management and prevention and another for clinical consultation, and these groups meet monthly. Staff hosted the most recent all-staff meeting on Friday, March 14 in Needham with the Life is Good Playmaker Project.

Youth & Family Services is part of the **Community Health Resource Group** which gets local agencies/departments together for information sharing/support. This meeting is attended on a

regular basis.

Youth & Family Services staff attend meetings and collaborate on town initiatives with the **Needham Resiliency Network (NRN)**, which brings together local leaders (e.g., community "hubs" from every identity and stakeholder group in town) to establish relationships across silos, equip them with skills for communicating across differences, anchor in the framing and language of belonging, and co-create a solution to a local challenge. The first cohort of NRN leaders created a community response committee to counter a rise in hate incidents and increase social cohesion. From 2024-2025, its second cohort is working to increase community awareness and education around mental health, to address a steep rise in mental health challenges throughout the Needham community. Throughout the spring, hub leaders will be enacting programming throughout their communities; in fall 2025, the NRN will host a family-friendly "Needham Thrives" festival.

STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Staff members are continuing to work on Post-Graduate Certificate in Advanced Clinical Practice for Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) through trainings at Boston College School of Social Work. The Certificate in Advanced Clinical Practice for Children, Youth, and Families provides a deep exploration of theoretical perspectives of attachment, trauma informed care, and neuroscience, as they relate to the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of these groups.

Ms. Shine, Ms. Kozak, and Mr. Serio participated in 4 professional development opportunities to discuss YFS current programming. On February 3 they met with the PTC presidents; on February 4 they met with Broadmeadow Elementary School and the Pollard middle school guidance staff; and on February 25 they met with high school guidance staff.

Mr. Serio attended the Baker Center Child Mental Health Forum on February 5, and the BIDMC Needham Community Listening Session on February 25.

Ms. Weitzel attended the first session of a 4-part series titled "Equip Yourself to Save a Life: Suicide Prevention Training Series" offered by Massachusetts Department of Public Health on March 25.

De-escalation, Diffusion and Self-Care for Library Staff: Christine Weitzel and Kristina Kozak participated in the Needham Public Library's professional development day to present techniques on how to de-escalate and diffuse difficult situations and then how to engage in self-care. The presentation included whole-group techniques, and then small group break out scenarios and ended with meditation. The presentation lasted 90 minutes and was presented to approximately 30 staff members.

On September 12, Christine Weitzel attended a training titled "Trauma Informed De-Escalation: Calming the "I" of the Storm" that was hosted by the MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services & AdCare Educational Institute.

Playmaker University: Two clinical staff members attended Playmaker University hosted by Life is Good in October of this year. This training is a two day in-person training in Beverly, MA. “Life is Good Playmakers” is national movement started in 1989 to heal and strengthen children – especially those whose lives have been deeply impacted by trauma.” Playmakers Life is Good Training is a program that focuses on enhancing both physical and mental well-being through running and walking. It is designed to promote a positive mindset, personal growth, and community engagement. The training usually involves structured workouts, group sessions, and motivational elements, all aimed at helping participants improve their fitness levels while fostering a "Life is Good" philosophy. This philosophy emphasizes optimism, gratitude, and resilience, encouraging participants to find joy and purpose in their physical activities and daily lives.

Mr. Serio attended an in-person **DBT** training through the Boston Child Study Center in September 2024. This immersive, introductory in-person four-day workshop introduced clinicians to the foundational principles and techniques essential to provide Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to fidelity with an emphasis on working with adolescents and families, providing our clinical staff with further professional development to deliver the utmost quality of care to our families.

Mr. Serio was trained as an instructor for teen Mental Health First Aid on December 10-12.

Ms. Kozak was trained to be certified in Mental Health First Aid and trained as an instructor for Teen Mental Health First Aid from November 12-14. She also attended at Serv Safe Alcohol Instructor program from November 19-20 and was trained in “Supportive Parent of Anxious Childhood Emotion (SPACE) from November 24-25.

Ms. Weitzel attended the Growing Up Mindful course, which involved practice and discussion of the best practices for teaching mindfulness to kids and teens. A few of the weekly themes included introductions to each other and mindful awareness, understanding the research and neuroscience behind mindfulness, how to get kids engaged and willing to buy in to practice, the adaptation of mindfulness to specific populations and various diagnostic disorders or symptoms, and the importance of one's own practice of mindfulness and understanding its role in treatment.

Ms. Weitzel also attended a webinar on January 21 entitled “Clinical Instincts: The Art and Science of Listening to Your Gut”, sponsored by the Children’s Mental Health Resource Center.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

Staffing Update: The graduate level interns, Maddie DuBaldo and Yin Teng are winding down for the year and are in the process of terminating with clients. Two interns have been secured for September, one for Boston College Mental Health Counseling Program and one from Boston College School of Social Work.

Case Management Services: Youth & Family Services staff helped many families in need with various support such as camps, gym, YMCA memberships, after school programs, childcare and transportation. In addition, staff have been able to connect families with some specific mental health supports and wrap around services.

Youth & Family Services Resource Guide: A resource guide has been established, both in electronic and in paper form for the community to be aware of different resources and trainings that are available in Needham and surrounding communities. The following topics are explored: neurodiversity, disabilities, special education, school avoidance, mental health support, LGBTQIA+, substance use, domestic and/or interpersonal violence, suicide and self-harm, basic needs, eating disorders, and bullying. In each section, there is information about the topic, available trainings by the Department of Youth and Family Services, and available resources that take referrals.

Curriculum: As part of the new community training coordinator position, Kristina Kozak has been establishing new short-term curricula that are available for families in need. The following curriculums are available:

- **Restorative Justice:** Our 6-session restorative justice course is designed to explore relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration and how they impact bullying. In the month of March, 1 client has been participating in this program.
- **School Avoidance:** Our short-term school avoidance program occurs in-home and includes counseling and parent training to increase a child's willingness to attend school. No referrals were made for this particular program this month.
- **De-Escalation:** Our short-term de-escalation program teaches family members how to de-escalate a dysregulated family member. This program can occur in-home or at any private site.
- **iDECIDE:** Kristina Kozak received training on iDECIDE, a therapeutic substance misuse treatment program used as a short-term program to assist youth who are using substances, on October 23. She has already begun incorporating this training into the substance use awareness program with clients.

Youth & Family Services has presented the FY26 budget to the finance committee with a hope that there will be approval for the proposal. There is a modest request for increased funds for expenditure due to an increase in cost for services and materials.

Youth & Family Services continues to raise money for family in need by promoting the **Crisis Donation Fund**. There is now the ability to donate to this fund online electronically, making it easier for people to donate. Youth & Family Services has received a number of donations this holiday season. Most recently the Needham Community Council has donated \$5,000 and we continue to receive donations and

support from residents towards this fund.

Interface Referral Service is a service that helps connect residents to therapeutic services when needed. Funds for this service were secured last year but the contract ends in June – HHS is working on the contract for FY25. BID-Needham and Needham Public Schools have generously offered to help fund the program as they have in the past. The hope is to keep these services as they help support residents, but they continue to increase their cost significantly, so staff are monitoring this.

Staff have been building our social media platforms in hope of reaching more community members with the information, programs, and events our department has to offer.

Facebook: Town of Needham Youth & Family Services,
785 Followers
Instagram: 665 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices
NotifyMe (Listserv): 1128 signed-up

Proposed schedule for FY 2025:

Wednesday, September 11 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, October 9 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, November 13 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, December 11 th meeting)	Town Hall (Voted to postpone to January
Wednesday, January 8 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, February 12 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, March 12 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, April 9th	Town Hall
Wednesday, May 14 th	Center at the Heights
Wednesday, June 11 th	Town Hall

A board discussion commenced to make slight changes to the upcoming May board meeting. Due to the showing and panel discussion of “Shattered Ice” on May 14th, the meeting time is updated to commence at 4:30pm instead of 5:30pm at the Center at the Heights.

Ms. Mullen made a motion to revise the start time of the May 14th meeting to 4:30pm. Mr. Brienze seconded. The start time revision is unanimously approved by voice vote.

Mr. Brienze made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Patkin seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:10pm.

Notes written by: Alyssa Cellucci
Reviewed by: Sara Shine