

Needham Youth Commission

Annual Town Report - Fiscal Year 2002

PURPOSE

The mission of the Needham Youth Commission is to provide leadership and a community focus on youth and family issues and to promote community wellness by: Identifying and addressing youth and family needs; Advocating for youth and family interests; Partnering with other youth and family serving agencies; Developing and implementing quality programs and services; and Educating and communicating with the public regarding youth and family issues.

The Needham Youth Commission operates as a mental health resource offering a wide array of confidential clinical and programmatic services to children, adolescents, and families. While the Youth Commission's services are reaching more people and having a greater impact, it is clear that the need for such services far outstrips the department's resources; thus, many in Needham are not receiving support. The Youth Commission has worked diligently to construct meaningful services designed to meet the increasing and ever-changing needs of the Needham community.

BUDGETARY DATA

Salaries	\$ 156,646
Purchase of Service	\$ 2,800
Expenses	\$ 1,990
Total Department Budget	\$ 161,436

Staffing: 3 full-time, 1 part-time, 1 intern (unpaid), volunteers

FISCAL YEAR 2002 HIGHLIGHTS

Making the Middle School Years Work: Sponsored by the Needham Education Foundation, Inc., this program focused on middle school youth and their parents and addressed the parent/child relationship, communication skills, how to form alliances, building and sustaining trust, the power of prevention and planning, developing empathy, cooperation, and discussion of issues such as stress, personal needs, and harmony. In addition to a half-day workshop for youth and their parents, more than 1,000 copies of the publication "Making the Middle School Years Work" were distributed.

NOTE: In partnership with the Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering and the Needham Public Schools, NOTE (**N**eedham **O**lin **T**echnology **E**xchange) was a community collaboration that helped to close the "digital divide." This program encouraged Needham residents to donate old computers, Olin College students refurbished these, and the computers were then installed in Needham homes which previously had none (recipients also received six months of free Internet access).

Needham Unplugged: Electronics are a wonderful part of life --- we learn, communicate, and access information from electric powered devices and we watch TV or surf the Internet as a way to relax and to relieve the stress of daily life. Unfortunately being so "plugged in" can isolate people. Instead of interacting with family and friends, people all too often become passive voyeurs. Needham Unplugged was an awareness campaign to remind families and residents to "unplug their electronics" and "plug into" each other. "Unplugged" is a reminder that there is more to life than what is on the other side of a plug. A calendar for the month of March outlined activities that did NOT require electricity and emphasized person-to-person interaction and health. Special thanks to partners at the Park and Recreation Department and the Charles River YMCA for their support in launching this program.

PEEPS (**P**ositive **E**ducation for **E**xperiencing **P**eer **S**tress): PEEPS is an interactive workshop for 6th grade students which explored the issue of friendship. The goals of the workshop were to identify qualities students would like in a friend, understand that friends and friendships change, and to share experiences and hear feedback regarding how students would like to be treated by their friends. Over 100 youth participated in this program.

Picture Perfect: Picture Perfect is a workshop for 8th graders that investigated the issue of how the media portrays gender roles and appearance, and explored how this can negatively impact how youth can feel about themselves. The goals of the workshop were to help students learn to identify gender role stereotypes, to understand how stereotypes are portrayed in the media, and to investigate how media messages impact them on a daily basis. In FY 2002, 240 youth participated in this program.

LINCS Program: The LINCS Program (Loss Information and Community Support) was designed in collaboration with the Needham Public Schools and was funded by the Tolman Trust Fund. LINCS' mission was to assist youth in addressing the frequently upsetting, overwhelming, and confusing issue of "loss." This included, for example, the death of a parent or grandparent, the separation/divorce of parents, the loss of a cherished pet or possession, or the break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend. Loss is a topic youth will be dealing with more and more as they get older, and it is critical to understand the impact loss can have upon a young person's academic, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The LINCS program engaged 375 youth in FY 2002.

Teen Dating Violence Program: In conjunction with the Needham Domestic Violence Action Committee and the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office, the Youth Commission provided seminars on Teen Dating Violence for all 9th graders at Needham High School. The seminars were designed to teach the unique aspects of Teen Dating Violence, how to recognize the warning signs, and ways to access community supports. Over the past year, 375 youth were involved in this program.

Parenting Program: This program was created to encourage parents to continue to develop their parenting skills. Funded by Deaconess Glover Hospital, the 12-hour Active Parenting of Teens workshops have "graduated" over 300 parents since 1998. In addition, Parent Dialogue Groups continue to meet to discuss issues related to raising healthy children and promoting wellness.

Employment and Volunteer Programs: The Employment Program consists of two primary services: 1) Youth were linked with residents and provided around-the-home support in the form of babysitting, yard-work, and snow removal; and 2) Youth investigated employment opportunities in local businesses such as offices and restaurants. Additionally, the Volunteer Resource Directory was created to inform youth of area volunteer opportunities. In FY 2002 these programs fielded 362 inquiries.

Individual/Family Counseling: The Masters level clinicians on staff are skilled at working with youth and their families experiencing difficulties with issues such as family discord, loss, drugs, alcohol, stress, and other mental health concerns. Who uses these counseling services? They are neighbors, cousins, children, and friends; they are people with no health insurance or expired health insurance; they are people who are grappling with either a short or long-term problem; and mostly, they are people who have the hope and determination that life can bring greater satisfaction and reward. Perhaps the most frightening area of concern is that young people are encountering more complex issues at a younger age. It is not unusual to work with an elementary age youth coping with a significant loss, a middle school student coping with parental alcohol use, or a high school student with a serious drug problem. In the past year 565 hours of counseling hours were provided to Needham youth and their families.

Counseling/Psycho-Education Groups: Group counseling/psycho-education is a practical and effective mode of treatment and allows the staff the opportunity to interact with greater numbers of people. Group interventions offers a unique opportunity for young people to learn about issues which effect their peers and to receive feedback from their peers regarding issues such as: divorce, stress, self-esteem, abuse, depression, social skills, loss, drugs/alcohol, and violence/anger. Of special note in FY 2002 was the "Extreme Looks" program, a four-day mind/body/spirit group for girls. In FY 2002, 240 hours of group counseling/psycho-education services were provided.

Substance Abuse Awareness Program: The Youth Commission continued to offer a structured 15-hour Substance Abuse Awareness Program (SAAP) for drug/alcohol-involved youth. This service provides an assessment of current substance use, intervention, education for youth and their families, and counseling services to support healthy lifestyles. All participants and their parents must attend an Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting to assist in transmitting the message that drugs and alcohol can impact any person without regard to age, gender, or status.

RAY of Hope Program: RAY (Recognize A Youth) was established by the Needham Youth Commission in an effort to acknowledge the outstanding service and positive contributions that young people are making to the Needham community. Working in collaboration with the Needham Business Association, each month a young person is selected as the RAY of Hope recipient and is awarded a certificate from the Youth Commission and a check from a member of the Needham Business Association. The RAY of Hope program validates youth and recognizes their role in making the Needham community a special place to live.

Diversion/Restitution Program: In conjunction with the Needham Police Department and the Dedham District Court, the Youth Commission continued to offer those who have committed minor violations of the law the opportunity to participate in community service work in lieu of further court action. The Youth Commission's role is to work with offenders and their families to identify the motivations for their behavior, to provide support as required, and to oversee the placement and completion of community service. In the past year, participating youth have completed assignments at the following sites: Needham Public Library, Needham Police Department, Needham Fire Department, and Council on Aging. In fiscal year 2002, the Youth Commission monitored 260 hours of community service to the Town of Needham.

Peer Tutor Program: The Youth Commission's Peer Tutor Program represents a progressive youth-to-youth collaboration. This program matches high school students with middle and elementary school students in need of academic or organizational/study skills assistance. The Youth Commission's role consisted of outreach to potential participants, training of high school volunteers, monitoring weekly tutoring sessions, providing support if problems occur, and facilitating communication between volunteers and participant families. Over the past year, Peer Tutor Program volunteers provided 964 hours of support to younger students.

Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD): SADD's mission is to support students in providing the school and community with information, facts, and food for thought on topics of concern to young people. The new, expanded philosophy embraces the notion that each individual benefits from making informed choices about his or her behavior and beliefs. This past year, SADD provided a variety of awareness campaigns to the students at Needham High School on topics such as reckless driving, suicide awareness, eating disorders/healthy body image and binge drinking. Activities surrounding these campaigns included informational posters, fact quizzes with prizes and after school discussion groups.

Books and Bridges - The Mother/Daughter Book Club: Using literature as a bridge between generations, this program was created to provide girls and their mothers an opportunity to share a common experience and to address issues of mutual concern. Funded by Fleet Bank, in FY 2002 close to 70 girls and mothers participated in this program.

Project VAN: Project VAN (Volunteers Around Needham) offers youth ages 13 to 17 the opportunity to work as part of a team providing valuable community service to non-profit organizations in Needham. Sites included Charles River ARC, Avery Crossings, Needham Public Library, and Wingate at Needham. VAN participants provided more than 370 person hours of free volunteers services over the past summer.

Transitions Program: The distance between Pollard Middle School and Needham High School is less than a mile, but for the majority of students the leap from 8th grade to 9th grade is a challenge that looms larger than a galaxy. The Transitions Program worked with 9th graders in the fall to better acclimate them to their new building and to the social, academic, and emotional road ahead. Funded by the Tolman Trust Fund, Transitions worked with over 375 students in the past year.

Graduate/Undergraduate Internship Program: In FY 2002, the Youth Commission welcomed a clinical Graduate School Intern from Boston College to provide individual, family, and group counseling services as well as extensive work on the Substance Abuse Awareness Program. Over the course of the academic year, this intern provided over 600 hours of free service to the Needham community.

Seminars/Workshops/Presentations: The Youth Commission designed and facilitated numerous trainings in the past year including a training for new Needham Public School Staff, Babysitter Training Seminars, Bully and Harassment Workshops, and many others. In FY 2002 the Youth Commission worked with a total of 2,102 youth, parents, and professionals in seminars and/or workshops.

Networks Book: Funded by the Tolman Trust and the Exchange Club, the Youth Commission continued to distribute "Networks: A Directory of Mental Health Supports and Services." This document lists twenty categories of services (over 300 pages in length) and was given at no cost to professionals within the Needham Public Schools, town departments, and local non-profit organizations.

E-Mail Sign Up: In an effort to inform youth and families of the services of the Needham Youth Commission, e-mail addresses from residents were accepted and information sent regarding programs. By the end of FY 02 hundreds had registered for this free service. To register, residents may send an e-mail complete with their name and the age(s) of their children to:

Website: In partnership with the Information-Technology Department, an extensive website was developed with detailed information about programs, services, and the staff. The Internet address of this site is <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/Youth>.

Partnerships: The Youth Commission devotes considerable time to assisting youth and family-related groups advance their message and impact. In the past year the Youth Commission collaborated with groups such as:

- Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)
- Deaconess Glover Hospital
- Needham Community Wellness Collaborative
- Needham Public Library
- Needham Park and Recreation
- Massachusetts Prevention Center
- Needham After Dark
- Community Health Network Area
- YMCA
- Needham Business Association
- School Crisis Response Protocol
 - Needham Board of Health
- Riverside Community Care
 - Needham Community Council
- Needham Public Schools
- Olin College

The Youth Commission received grants and/or donations from the following organizations: Needham Community Council, Westwood Pembroke Health System; Deaconess Glover Hospital; Exchange Club of Needham; Friends of Needham Youth; Tolman Trust Fund; and many others.

Publications: The Youth Commission created and/or distributed the following original publications in FY 2002:

- Needham Youth Card
- Suicide Education Kit
- Parent Guide to Teen Parties
- Ask the Youth Commission (bimonthly newspaper column)
- Youth Source (biyearly newsletter newsletter)
- Parenting Literature (developed in collaboration with the Community Wellness Collaborative)
- Making the Middle School Years Work

FISCAL YEAR 2003 FORECAST

The coming year holds enormous promise and challenge for the Youth Commission:

- In the coming year the Youth Commission will welcome John Romeo as Chairperson and Connie Barr as Vice-Chairperson. In addition, new Board members Katie Finesilver, Doug Levy, and Cathy Lunetta join returning members Tom Lambert, Joey Nowd, and Debbie Winnick.
- Deaconess Glover Hospital will again underwrite Active Parenting of Teens seminars.
- The Youth Commission was a recipient of a new grant from the Needham Education Foundation, Inc. to establish KIDS (**Kids Involvement in Divorce and Separation).**
- Expansion of Needham Unplugged to include a no homework/no athletics night for the Needham Public Schools in March.
- A new Seminar for freshmen at Needham High School focusing upon drugs and alcohol.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS - FY 2002

Debbie Winnick, Chairperson
Lori Whyte, Vice-Chairperson
Connie Barr
Tom Lambert
Joey Nowd
Barbara Popper
John Romeo
Becca Sherman