

# Needham Youth Commission

Annual Town Report - Fiscal Year 2003

## **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	\$ 169,440
Purchase of Service	\$ 2,800
Expenses	\$ 1,990
Total Department Budget	\$ 174,230

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

## **FISCAL YEAR 2002 HIGHLIGHTS**

**Website:** Each month over 1000 "hits" are registered on the Youth Commission website. Residents can learn about our services, register for programs, read the Youth Commission's Annual Report, see pictures of the staff, and much more. Special thanks to the Information Technology Department for their support in establishing this vibrant website. Please visit the Youth Commission online at [www.town.needham.ma.us/youth](http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth).

**KIDS** (*Kids Involved In Divorce and Separation*): Sponsored by the Needham Education Foundation, Inc., this program was created to support and provide information for children, youth, parents, and families regarding the issues of divorce and separation. KIDS provided survival guides containing useful information designed to educate children and parents about resources that would be beneficial during such a life transition. This program also facilitated parent workshops that provided participants a better understanding of the feelings associated with divorce and separation such as anger, guilt, depression, frustration and stress, and how these feelings affect children. Lastly, the program established rotating libraries complete with books, pamphlets, resources, websites, and videotapes to give children and families the resources to learn about the divorce issues they face and feelings they experience.

**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. The centerpiece of this years "unplugged" occurred on March 13<sup>th</sup> as it was a no homework, no sports, and no meeting night for the Needham Public Schools, and there were no town meetings and virtually no civic, religious, or community meetings took place in Needham. This night of "nothing" was a welcome relief to youth, parents, adults, and families. Special thanks to partners at the Park and Recreation Department and the Charles River YMCA and to the Needham Public Schools for their support.

**NOTE:** In partnership with the Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering and the Needham Public Schools, **NOTE (Needham Olin Technology Exchange)** 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 that previously had no computers (recipients also received six months of free Internet access).

**PEEPS** (Positive Education for Experiencing Peer Stress): PEEPS is an interactive workshop for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students that 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 375 youth participated in this program.

**Picture Perfect:** Picture Perfect is a workshop for 8<sup>th</sup> 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 2003, 375 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 2003.

**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 9<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Drug and Alcohol Seminars:** In conjunction with the Needham High School Guidance Department, the Youth Commission provided seminars on Alcohol and Drugs to 9<sup>th</sup> graders at Needham High School. The seminars provided information on alcohol advertising, blood alcohol content, the effects of alcohol on the body, marijuana and other drugs, school policy, state laws, and statistics from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The seminar provided information via interactive activities, lecture, and a short video clip. 200 freshmen at Needham High School participated in this Alcohol and Drug Seminar.

**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.

**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 2003 these programs fielded 347 inquiries.

**Parenting Program:** This program was created to encourage parents to continue to develop their parenting skills. Funded by Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital --- Needham Campus, 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.

**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 2003 was the “Extreme Looks” program, a four-day mind/body/spirit group for girls. In FY 2003, 243 hours of group counseling/psycho-education services were provided.

**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 609 hours of counseling hours were provided to Needham youth and their families.

**RAY of Hope Program:** RAY (**R**ecognize **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.

**Making the Middle School Years Work:** Sponsored by the Needham Education Foundation, Inc., this program debuted in FY 2002 and completed in FY 2003. This effort 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.

**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 2003, the Youth Commission monitored 190 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.

**SADD** (*Students Against Destructive Decision*): 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 sexual assault, teen dating violence, STDs and stress.

**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. In the past year we also offered a special father/son program. Funded by Fleet Bank, in FY 2003 over 80 girls and mothers as well as 10 boys and their fathers participated in this program.

**Project VAN**: (*Volunteers Around Needham*): VAN 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 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade is a challenge that looms larger than a galaxy. The Transitions Program worked with 9<sup>th</sup> 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 2003, 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, presentations at the schools and in the community and many others. In FY 2003 the Youth Commission worked with a total of 4,356 youth, parents, and professionals in seminars and/or workshops.

**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: [Needhamyouthcommission@town.needham.ma.us](mailto:Needhamyouthcommission@town.needham.ma.us).

**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:

- Needham Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)
- Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital --- Needham Campus
- Needham Community Wellness Collaborative
- Needham Public Library
- Needham Park and Recreation
- Regional Center for Healthy Communities
- Needham After Dark
- Community Health Network Area
- YMCA --- Charles River Branch
- Needham Business Association
- Needham Clergy Association
- Needham Council on Aging
- 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, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital --- Needham Campus, Westwood Pembroke Health System; Friends of

Needham Youth; Tolman Trust Fund; and many others.

Annual Town Report - Page #5

**Publications:** The Youth Commission created and/or distributed the following original publications in FY 2003 (many of the below are available online at <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth/YCpublications.htm>):

- Needham Youth Card
- KIDS Survival Guides
- Parent Guide to Teen Parties
- Ask the Youth Commission
- Youth Source
- Parenting Literature (developed in collaboration with the Community Wellness Collaborative)
- Making the Middle School Years Work
- Networks Book

## **FISCAL YEAR 2004 GOALS**

Aside from continuing to expand the depth and breadth of the abovementioned programs and services in FY 2004, the Youth Commission will:

- We will welcome new Board members Vin Springer and Tom Tannozzini and bid farewell to departing members Tom Lambert and Joey Nowd. View a complete listing of Board members online at: <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth/YCBoard.htm>.
- The Needham Unplugged a no homework/no athletics night for the Needham Public Schools will be celebrated on March 11, 2004. Read more about this community program online at <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth/YCunplug.htm>.
- Books and Bridges: The Mother Daughter Book Club will expand to include father/son groups as well as parent/son and parent daughter groups. The program will now be called Books and Bridges.
- We will be initiating a new parenting program with Sweet Basil Restaurant entitled "Parents: Talk With Your Mouth Full."

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## ***BOARD OF DIRECTORS - FY 2003***

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John Romeo, Chairperson  
Connie Barr, Vice-Chairperson  
Katie Finesilver  
Tom Lambert  
Doug Levy  
Cathy Lunetta  
Joey Nowd  
Debbie Winnick

