

Needham Youth Commission
Annual Town Report - Fiscal Year 2004

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.

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FISCAL YEAR 2004 Accomplishments and Activities

Website: Over the past year 28,440 "hits" were registered on the Youth Commission website. Residents learned about our services, registered for programs, read the Youth Commission's Annual Report, viewed 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.

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 used these counseling services? They were neighbors, cousins, children, and friends; they were people with no health insurance or expired health insurance; they were people grappling with either a short or long-term problem; and mostly, they were people who had the hope and determination that life can bring greater satisfaction and reward. Perhaps the most frightening area of concern is that young people were encountering more complex issues at a younger age. It was 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 663 hours of counseling hours were provided to Needham youth and their families.

Counseling/Psycho-Education Groups: Group counseling/psycho-education was a practical and effective mode of treatment and allowed the staff the opportunity to interact with greater numbers of people over the past year. Group intervention offered a unique opportunity for young people to learn about issues which affect 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 2004 was the “Extreme Looks” program, a four-day mind/body/spirit group for girls. In FY 2004, 222 hours of group counseling/psycho-education services were provided.

Parents Please Talk With Your Mouth Full: “Parents” was a unique collaboration between the Youth Commission and Sweet Basil restaurant. During these one evening workshops parents enjoyed a terrific meal and had the opportunity to share, learn, laugh, and talk about the joys and challenges of parenting (prior to the workshop parents are assigned a book about parenting). The workshops were offered to parents of middle and high school age youth. During the “pilot year” 40 parents participated in this new program.

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 provided 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 attended 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.

Active Parenting of Teens: 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 400 parents since 1998. In addition to this workshop, follow-up Parent Dialogue Groups continued to meet to discuss issues related to raising healthy children and promoting wellness.

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. Lastly, the program established a library housed at the Needham Public Library 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.

PEEPS (Positive Education for Experiencing Peer Stress): PEEPS was an interactive workshop for 6th 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 the past year 100 youth participated in this program.

Picture Perfect: Picture Perfect was 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 2004, 225 youth participated in this program.

LINCS Program: The LINCS Program (**L**oss **I**nformation and **C**ommunity **S**upport) 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 325 youth in FY 2004.

Teen Dating Violence Program: In conjunction with the Needham Domestic Violence Action Committee, 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, 325 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 9th 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. In FY 2004, 120 freshmen at Needham High School participated in Alcohol and Drug Seminars.

Needham Unplugged: Electronics are a wonderful part of life --- people learn, communicate, and access information from electric powered devices and 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" was 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 year's "unplugged" occurred on March 11th 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. Many area communities such as Newton and Belmont were impressed enough to replicate this program in their communities. Special thanks to partners at the Park and Recreation Department and the Charles River YMCA and to the Needham Public Schools for their support.

Employment and Volunteer Programs: The Employment Program consisted of two primary services: 1) Youth were linked with residents and provide 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 2004 these programs fielded 326 inquiries.

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 that previously had no computers.

Peer Tutor Program: The Youth Commission's Peer Tutor Program represented a progressive youth-to-youth collaboration. This program matched 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 1,203 hours of support to younger students.

RAY of Hope Program: RAY (**R**ecognize **A** **Y**outh) 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 was selected as the RAY of Hope recipient and was awarded a certificate from the Youth Commission and a check from a member of the Needham Business Association. The RAY of Hope program validated youth and recognized their role in making the Needham community a special place to live.

SADD (**S**tudents **A**gainst **D**estructive **D**ecision): SADD's mission was 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 embraced 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.

FFLIX **F**ilms for **F**emales **L**iving **I**n the **N**e**X**t Generation): This exciting "pilot" program offered to high school teens provided an opportunity to watch a "women's issues" movie, discuss the messages in the movie, talk about the challenges of being a female, share free food, laugh, learn, and be with friends (the premiere film was "Real Women Have Curves").

Books and Bridges - The Parent/Child Book Club: Using literature as a bridge between generations, this program consisted of an Interactive two-session program for mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and parent and sons, and parent and daughters to explore issues of mutual interest and concern. In FY 2004, 60 youth and their parents participated in this program.

Project VAN (**V**olunteers **A**round **N**eedham): VAN offered 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, Needham Park and Recreation Department, Needham Community Council, Needham Public Library, and Wingate at Needham. Project VAN is generously supported by the Needham Community Council. VAN participants provided more than 350 person hours of free volunteers services over the past summer.

Diversion/Restitution Program: In conjunction with the Needham Police Department and the Dedham District Court, the Youth Commission continued to offer youth who have committed minor violations of the law the opportunity to participate in community service work in lieu of further court action and/or fines. The Youth Commission's role was 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 completed assignments at the following sites: Needham Public Library, Needham Police Department, Needham Fire Department, and Needham Council on Aging. In fiscal year 2004, the Youth Commission monitored 423 hours of community service to the Town of Needham.

Graduate/Undergraduate Internship Program: In FY 2004, 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 Peer Tutor 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 2004 the Youth Commission worked with a total of 1,846 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 was sent regarding programs. By the end of FY 04 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.

Partnerships: The Youth Commission devoted considerable time working with the larger community and over the past year collaborated with groups such as:

- Needham Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)
- YMCA --- Charles River Branch
- Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital --- Needham Campus
- Needham Business Association
- Needham Community Wellness Collaborative
- Needham Clergy Association
- Needham Public Library
- Needham Council on Aging
- Needham Park and Recreation
- Riverside Community Care
- Regional Center for Healthy Communities
- Needham Community Council
- Needham After Dark
- Needham Public Schools
- Community Health Network Area
- Olin College

The Youth Commission received grants and/or donations from the following organizations: Needham Community Council, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital --- Needham Campus, Needham Community Council; Tolman Trust Fund; local businesses, private citizens, and many others.

Publications: The Youth Commission created and/or distributed the following original publications in FY 2004 (many of the below are available online at <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth/YCpublications.htm>):

- Needham Youth Card
- KIDS Survival Guide
- Parent Guide to Teen Parties
- Ask the Youth Commission

- Youth Source
- Parenting Literature
- Making the Middle School Years Work
- Networks Book