



Needham Health and Human Services



Memorandum

To: Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager
From: Sara Shine, Director, Youth & Family Services
Date: September 21, 2023
Re: Children's Hospital Funds

I am writing to request the use of the Children's Hospital funds, outlined in the Host Community Agreement with the Town dated May 27, 2020 intended for the "Town's youth health initiatives," to help support the Town of Needham in the current mental health crisis that we are experiencing. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in the community's mental health needs including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. As the community continues to recover, there are lingering effects of the loss of loved ones, increased anxiety, and long periods of isolation. Youth & Family Services is currently seeing a significant increase in the acuity of mental health challenges in addition to an increase in need. Despite the continued lifting of pandemic restrictions, we are expecting the need for mental health services, particularly among youth, will only continue to grow. Past research indicates that suicide rates remain stable or decline during infrastructure disruption (e.g., natural disasters), only to rise afterwards as the longer-term sequelae unfold in persons, families, and communities. (*Kessler RC, Galea S, Gruber MJ, Sampson NA, Ursano RJ, Wessely S. Trends in mental illness and suicidality after Hurricane Katrina. Mol Psychiatry 2008;13:374-84.*) Youth & Family Services is preparing for this continued increase in need while ensuring that the current services offered are best to support the community.

In Needham we are seeing these trends unfold. 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 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%).

Not only is it evident that there is an increase in mental health concerns, but these alarming statistics also show that some protective factors have decreased for youth in Needham. In addition, this decrease in connection has also led to more youth living with mental health challenges or abuse/neglect because the issues were not recognized by others. Typically, close contacts such as friends, teachers, coaches,

etc. are the ones who can recognize these symptoms and encourage treatment. This lag in awareness of these challenges has delayed treatment for these youth which can increase symptoms and acuity. In addition to this increase in need, the waitlists for services have also increased. Residents are waiting at least 2-3 months to be connected to a provider and, many times, these providers are located in areas that are not easily accessible.

The following positions would be helpful in supporting the community through these difficult times.

Outreach Clinician – 1FTE

- This mental health professional would be a staff with Youth & Family Services but would be mostly community based and time would be split the time between Y&FS, the Needham Free Public Library, Needham Park and Recreation and other community locations as needed.
- Provide crisis management when necessary.
- Work directly with Library and Park and Rec staff members to identify and address mental health challenges in the community.
- Make appropriate community referrals to providers when necessary – this could be emergency services, police response, family in home supports, etc.
- Provide case management services to residents in need.

Community Training Coordinator- 1FTE

- This person would be a mental health professional with experience in training and community needs assessments.
- Asses the needs of the community and various town divisions.
- Provide staff trainings/consultation. These trainings would help prepare staff to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health and manage these mental health and behavioral challenges.
 - This includes assistance with the larger implementation of Mental Health First Aid which is going to require over 100 hours of in person training time.
- Serve as a case manager to help consult with families and town staff.
- Organize larger community presentations.
- Provide community outreach and collaboration.

Th proposed budget for these positions:

Outreach Clinician Salary – Grade 7, Year 1:	\$87,068 (this is FY24 salary max)
Outreach Clinician Salary – Grade 7, Year 2:	\$89,244 (assumes a 2.5% increase over year 1)
Training Coordinator – Grade 7, Year 1:	\$87,068
Training Coordinator – Grade 7, Year 2:	\$89,244

Position related expenses for:

Outreach Clinician Y1:	\$3,750 (laptop, phone, professional development)
Outreach Clinician Y2:	\$2,500 (phone, professional development)
Training Coordinator Y1:	\$3,750 (laptop, phone, professional development)
Training Coordinator Y2:	\$2,500 (phone, professional development)

Total = \$365,124

Youth & Family Services currently has 2 full time clinicians and 25 part time hours that are part of the operating budget. There is also a full time ARPA funded clinician position that has allowed the division to significantly increase the direct clinical work with residents, increase programming and community outreach. Youth & Family Services has also partnered with the Needham Public Schools in many areas as staff are seeing students in therapy and running groups in the school setting, in addition to providing extra support. This year staff are rolling out teen Mental Health First Aid to the 10th grade which entails providing 4.5 hours of training to all students (4.5 hours per class – 20 classes) so students can recognize signs and symptoms of mental health challenges and helping their peers connect to services. This partnership with Needham Public Schools has been pivotal in helping support the needs in the community but it has created some gaps due to current staff capacity. There are other town departments and community organizations that are seeing and managing more mental health challenges and staff are struggling to perform their job expectations with this increase in mental health concerns. Needham Park and Recreation and the Needham Public Library are in need of additional support as they often manage various situations that have been challenging. These positions would help build a partnership for these departments to have mental health support.

In addition, despite all efforts to decrease the stigma around mental health, it still very much exists. This decrease in stigma would allow people to reach out for help when needed, allow for treatment to begin sooner which only increases the effectiveness of treatment. After ongoing assessments, it is clear that this stigma among youth in Needham is a huge barrier than needs to be addressed. Additional staffing will allow the Division to provide more community outreach, training, workshops and in embedding services in the schools and community. The goal is that, over time, this will also help decrease stigma and help youth to connect to mental health professionals.

Also indicated by the Surgeon General, needed action includes ensuring that every child has access to high quality, affordable, and culturally competent mental health care, and supporting the mental health of children and youth in educational, community and childcare settings. This is the work that Youth & Family Services can support. In addition, the Youth Commission is extremely invested in helping to support the mental health needs of the community. The Board voted to write a letter of support of keeping this temporary position as part of the budget in FY 25. In addition, this position is in alignment with Select Board goal #4 – Healthy and Socially Thriving.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns regarding this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara Shine".

Sara Shine, LICSW
Director, Youth & Family Services