

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from December 8, 2021, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:30 pm, in the Great Plain Room Needham Town Hall

Board in Attendance: Susan Patkin, Karen Mullen, David Bookston, Julie Stevens, Kevin Keane. This is Kevin's last meeting as he was elected on 12/7 to the Selectboard to serve until April 2024.

Staff in Attendance: Christine Weitzel, part-time clinician who began in May 2021, Hannah Stein trauma care specialist who started November 1 also full-time and Ellen Whirley full-time who started November 15.

School Resource Officer: Nicole McMahon

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

All present introduced themselves to the new staff.

Motion to Approve November 10 Minutes made by Mr. Bookston seconded by Ms. Stevens. Minutes unanimously approved.

Board voted on a Vice Chair replacement for Kevin Keane. Mr. Bookston nominated Ms. Patkin who accepted the nomination. Unanimous vote to approve Ms. Patkin as the Vice Chair of the Board. Cake was cut and eaten in honor of Mr. Keane.

Kevin and Sara are working jointly on locating a new member for the Board.

Community Needs/Crisis Response

Ms. McMahon mentioned she works mostly in the elementary and middle schools and occasionally helps out at the high school but that behavioral issues have increased exponentially. Ms. Shine noted the socialization has vastly affected developmental issues was seriously impacted by COVID. It also appears that half days seem to be particularly difficult and has led to increased behavioral issues. Social media use and boundaries are also an issue. Ms. Shine is working with the new Director of Health and Wellness, Denise Domnarski, to develop programs different from the past to assist with these issues.

Ms. Shine noted there are more families in need, many moving her from out of the country and have language barriers in addition to basic needs. Y&FS is helping to support these families and connect them to resources including the Needham Community Council.

Ms. Shine also noted that the waitlist for clinical services has increased drastically and continues to grow. There are also more youth with acute needs than there have been in the past and it has been difficult to filter through the youth who need to be prioritized due to the numbers.

A discuss about the increase in mental health needs occurred. The group discussed how trauma presents in different ways and many young people are still processing the pandemic trauma. She also noted that third graders for example have missed all the late first grade and the entire second grade socialization process and that can't be remedied quickly. Also, anxiety manifests in different ways for different students. There is also a domino effect when parents and family systems are more strained – loss of income, threats of physical wellness, loss of family members and constant fear and put stress on families. Y&FS staff noted that class sizes during the pandemic were cut in half and the students not only had more physical space in the classroom they had a lot more one-on-one time with their teachers. They were not allowed to share supplies so it was very easy to get used to having everything centered on their own person and to live in a smaller world. Staff also agreed that eating disorders were on the uptick and this is really seen by the personal counselors in the schools. This is a hard issue to address because it has both physical and mental health components. There have also been a number of issues around targeted hate to various groups and bullying incidents have risen. There is also a domino effect when parents and family systems are more strained – loss of income, threats of physical wellness, loss of family members and constant fear and put stress on families.

Ms. Shine is working closely with the school system to establish ways to support students with various needs.

The group discussed LGBTQ+ needs and how there are younger students struggling with these needs. The needs of elementary aged LGBTQ+ youth are much different than those of HS students and how can we be supportive to each aged group. Possibly more programming targeted to middle schoolers, possibly younger that include strong outreach to the parents. This is especially true as middle schoolers are much more worried about their image and fitting in and social media simply exacerbates this tendency.

Ms. Shine is actively pursuing the ARPA funds for the 2-year FT clinician to help with the waitlist and acuity of the referrals. In addition, Y&FS is requesting funds for consultation for specific mental health needs and community education.

Ms. Shine also noted that Children's Hospital Needham branch which is years in the planning stages is now in the middle of community assessment. Ms. Shine has been invited to their meetings. One of their priorities is to address needs of underserved or at risk populations including some diverse racial groups, people of lower socio-economic status and the LGBTQ+ community. Ms. Shine helped to organize a focus group for the LGBTQ+ youth community during which they were able to assess some needs. The Needham site will primarily be for medical needs but this will increase the ability for behavioral health services in the Waltham site, which is more accessible than Boston. In addition, they are committed to putting money into the community in addition to the services provided directly by the hospital.

Update Programs, Services and Awards

The Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award ceremony will be January 31, 2022, at 5:30 pm. With the COVID numbers it will almost certainly be virtual. Ms. Shine

received all the applications by December 3 and will distribute to the Committee December 8 for a decision week of December 12. The committee is Mr. Bookston, Ms. Patkin, and Ms. Mullen.

Mural Project: Y&FS is in the beginning stages of planning for the next mural project. They are currently recruiting students, local artists and interested adults to help plan the project and have our first meeting set up for 12/13. The project is going to be in the tunnel connecting Defazio Park and Pollard Middle School, which has also been the target of graffiti. There are applications in to the MBTA to get approval for the project. The first mural project done on the fence near Red Wing Bay was a huge success. Youth & Family Services got the community involved in creating and painting a mural that would focus on unity. There were over 100 people who participated in this project ranging in ages from 3 to 76.



Y&FS is working with a community member on helping to host a **Needham Paintfest Project** through the Foundation for Hospital Art. The Foundation for Hospital Art was established in 1984 and is dedicated to involving patients and volunteers worldwide to create colorful, soothing artwork donated to hospitals to help soften the often stressful hospital experience. The event would include youth and families who may have some special needs to come together and create a piece of art that will then be donated to a local hospital. This project is being supported by BID Needham in terms of funding and accepting the work of art – ***thank you BID Needham!!!***

Y&FS is in the beginning stages of working on an anti-bullying seminar in collaboration with the Needham Exchange Club. The plan is host a seminar with a speaker, John Halligan, who lost his 13 year old son to suicide after a number of bullying incidents. The seminar will be aimed at middle school students (6th, 7th and 8th) and then a parallel program for parents and caregivers. We are hoping to run this event on March 16th. Y&FS is working closely with the middle school principles to ensure the program is done thoughtfully given the mental health challenges that are elevated due to the pandemic.

The Peer Tutoring Program is well into the 2021-2022 school year. Hannah Stein is taking over this program from Carolyn Tracey. There are 43 pairs of students matched together over the course of the year and they are meeting at the library. Y&FS is constantly monitoring state guidelines and will make adjustments as needed to ensure all students safety.

VIP – Ms. Whirley and Ms. Weitzel are working on it jointly on Tuesday evenings. They have 19 pairs of bigs and littles and a long wait list of interested high school students. They really enjoy being with each other. Ms. Weitzel noted that some of the littles do not want to leave at the end of sessions. Some of the Bigs (grades 9-12) have been with their Littles for three years and there is a strong bond. The Littles are between grades 3-5. One change this year is that there are multiple check in sessions with the Bigs during the year for extra support and guidance.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

There is a huge need and every program fills, some even before they are advertised. Members of the Health and Human Services team have been trained to teach Youth Mental Health First Aid virtually. There is a training on 12/15/21 and most recently Y&FS partnered with the Health and Wellness Department to train the wellness teachers. This training was successful and added 12 people to our list of Youth Mental Health First Aiders. 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.

The **Employer/Volunteer** lists are being maintained. There remains a strong need for young people who can shovel for adults/the elderly in town and there needs to be more publicity as the need is ahead of volunteers.

The **Jog for Joy** was December 5th. This has become an annual event; it was a beautiful early winter day and some of the funding comes to Youth and Family Services. Ms. Shine noted it was a success as usual and a nice partnership to have.

Y&FS 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 a staff member chairs one of these action teams. Staff are also represented on the steering committee. There are several initiatives coming out of this group including creating online substance use supports, peer support, community activities and educational webinars. There was a recent PSA on driving while intoxicated featuring Officer Rocket that was put together by the Community Action Team.

Ms. Shine continues to be involved with the **Youth Resource Network** and the roundtable discussions are helpful. **The Youth Resource Network**, a roundtable including representatives from multiple youth-serving organizations that meets during the academic year to address specific needs of school-age youth and families that reside and/or attend public school in Needham, is starting back up this fall.

The **Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)** has started meeting. Youth & Family Services has a representative at these meetings.

Y&FS has 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, town social workers from various divisions, the health department, a SPAN representative, and Riverside Crisis Team. They discuss 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.

Youth & Family Services is working closely with the Director of Guidance and Counseling and a group of school personnel to ensure that all students are being assessed for additional supports as they return to school during this uncertain time. They are helping to put additional supports in place for students who may need it.

The budgeting process is underway. It is going to be a difficult year and it is still unclear the extent the pandemic is going to have on future budgets, so Y&FS was very careful in budgeting requests. Y&FS has made requests of the APPA Funds (The American Rescue Plan 2021) towards mental health support for 2 years. There is a request for a FT position to help with the need for Mental Health Services and some additional specialized consultation services.

New/Old Business

Mr. Keane thanked everyone he has worked with since he started on the Board and was invited to the March potluck dinner if it is possible to hold it.

The Board agreed to meet virtually in January.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion.

Unanimous vote to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.

Notes by: Faith Crisley, Recording Secretary

Edited by: Sara Shine, Director