

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from February 8, 2023, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:35 pm, in person in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: Susan Patkin, David Bookston, Julie Stevens, Will Holland, Karen Mullen, Jill Mullaney, Joseph Brienze (School Resource Officer)

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Minutes January 11, 2023. Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the January 11 minutes. Ms. Stevens seconded. The January 11 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Update on Community Needs and Crisis Response

Ms. Shine noted that there continues to be a wait list - currently 35 youth. Staff are not only providing individual services but also more consults, community connections and advocacy.

Ms. Shine discussed the relationship with the guidance staff and how it varies depending on how much the school utilizes our services. Since Mr. Denton retired last June, the new interim Guidance Director is only overseeing the HS staff, so it is more difficult to communicate regularly with the whole group. Ms. Shine is working closely with Mary Lammi, who is overseeing all the Guidance Dept, to ensure that communication occurs and student needs are being met. Ms. Shine noted that the department works to support the guidance staff as much as possible within the schools as they are stretched thin.

The group discussed behavioral trends and how in the winter the police have less complaints and vandalism and complaints increase with good weather. This is not necessarily correlated with mental health that seems to be worse in the winter.

Ms. Shine discussed some increased anxieties that upper classman are feeling with the pressures of applying and going to college. The group discussed the possibility of doing some workshops in this area so that students feel more prepared. Another possible helpful workshop is teaching students how to get a job/life skills maybe in conjunction with the Human Resources Department.

Update on Programs, Services and Awards:

Group treatment is going well:

- o **Friendship Files** is a group of 6th graders. The focus of the group is to engage members in learning how to make and keep friends, develop confidence and build social skills, practice how to cope with anxiety and change, and plan for middle

school success. This group is going very well with only 1 week left and 6 attendees. The plan is to run another group for this age group over the summer when the now 5th graders are getting ready to transition to 6th.

- o Ellen and Christine are putting together a 6 week group for 4th and 5th graders. This group will focus on social skills, problem solving and coping skills.

- o Kelsey and Grace are starting to plan **lunch groups** at Eliot for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders. The guidance counselors select the participants based on their needs. Students meet with their lunch, and we check in, do an activity and check out. The activities are focused on a therapeutic conversation or game.

- o Ellen and Grace are getting **lunch groups** started again at Sunita Williams for 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders. Similar to the groups at Eliot, students eat their lunch and engage in therapeutic games and activities.

- o **Coffee Talk** - Coffee Talk meets at Needham High School every Thursday morning during the x block. It is open to all high schoolers. It is a program that began at the end of last year and recently started again. The program is designed for students to drop in for a donut and a cup of coffee and discuss anything on their minds. So far, the topics have included: active shooter drills, homework stress, NHS cellphone policies, and end-of-the-semester exams. We plan on continuing to offer Coffee Talk indefinitely.

- o Kelsey and Ellen are working on a group for 7th and 8th graders that will take place at Pollard. This group will focus on coping and social skills in addition to anxiety and depression support.

- o Kelsey and Hannah have started working with students who are new to Needham and have left their home countries due to trauma/war. We are working with the Guidance and ELL departments to facilitate these groups. A suggestion was made to consider getting a translator from one of the universities in Ukrainian which could help with other support efforts.

A discussion ensued on the difficulty of some students meeting the 60-hour community service graduation requirement. Some transfer students from other countries who are only in Needham for a couple of years or students who are struggling significantly with Mental health. A waiver system was discussed as well as mindfulness training and/or other academic support within X block or after school. The group also discussed various ways that X-black could be used to help support mental wellbeing.

Ms. Shine mentioned she met this week with the Rotary Club about the Crisis Donation Fund. The group discussed ways that this fund could be promoted since it has been depleted due to various families at risk of homelessness.

The Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person award on January 30th was a great success. Approximately seventy-five people attended and Representative Garlick was also in attendance. The winner is Jean Higgins, founder and administrator of the Facebook group "Be Kind Needham".

The Engaging Minds seminar had a 150 person registration but a 50 person attendance. Ms. Shine noted the speaker had to change the date which affected families ability to attend. Youth will poll the attendees to get suggestions for the fall 2023 speaker as Engaging Minds will rotate with another themed program.

Take Back the Night is scheduled for February 9 at Powers Hall. Two of the Youth staff are acting as leaders for the program as the long serving staff member at the high school in this role retired in June 2022.

Youth & Family Services is working with the Needham Exchange Club on hosting **Ryan's Story** for the second year. Ryan's Story is a community presentation that is focused on bullying, social media use and suicide prevention. Last year this event was very successful and well received by the community. The event will take place March 29th.

Y&FS is working with a local expressive art therapist, Tova Speter, on providing workshops for the community. These workshops will center around mindfulness and expressive arts. The first one occurred November 29th and had 15 participants. During this event, teenagers helped to be part of an interactive, super-sized art exhibit the encouraged people to engage, connect and play. The exhibit will travel all of the greater Boston area. A second event is scheduled for the end of March and will be a self care work shop for parents. Family Night is March 30 at the CATH. The hours are 5:30-7:30 pm including arts & crafts, Bingo and cookie decorating.

Y&FS hosted another family night on December 8th. There was a waitlist for this event and over 50 people attended. This event allowed for many people to connect with Youth & Family Services, hear about the programs offered and enjoyed a night of dinner, crafts, games and cookie decorating. This event was a huge success. Staff are planning another one for March 30th.

Needham Unplugged: The 2023 edition is not far off and it is exciting to think that this program will be our 21st year of operation. The success of "Unplugged" is directly related to the active support of the Needham Public Schools (without whom we would not have a no-homework night), the Board of Selectmen (without whom we would not have a no-meeting night), and of course Needham families who following the unplugged calendar. This program has been copied in dozens of communities in Massachusetts and nationally.

Peer Tutor and VIP are both going well. Ms. Shine mentioned that for 2023-2024 the staff is considering breaking peer tutor into two separate smaller sections to accommodate the changing sports schedules for the tutors over the course of the academic year.

Volunteers around Needham has two days scheduled for February vacation. The first day is assisting seniors at the Center for the Heights and the second is at the Charles River Center assisting young people with special needs.

Members of the Health and Human Services team have been trained to teach **Youth Mental Health First Aid virtually**. 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. We are planning to run a couple of classes in the fall. In addition, 5 staff have been trained to be teen Mental Health First Aid trainers which teaches teens how to help their peers experiencing a mental health challenge. The plan is to start to teach this class in March.

Y&FS continues to provide community-based work on various committees including a homelessness prevention group, Chapter 84, the Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham, the Domestic Violence Action Committee, Community Crisis Intervention Team, the Youth Resource Network, the Community Health Resource Group, and the Youth Commission Directors Meeting. All of this work is important in prevention, community assessment and outreach.

New/Old Business

None.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Mullen seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:05 pm

Notes by: Faith Crisley, Recording Secretary
Edited by: Sara Shine, Director

