

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from March 8, 2023, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:30 pm, in person and on Zoom in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

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

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Minutes February 8, 2023. Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the February minutes. Mr. Holland seconded. The February 8 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Update on Community Needs and Crisis Response

Ms. Shine noted that there continues to be a wait list. There are 67 active clients and 37 on the waitlist. There have also been 15 community consultations and 2 emergency consultations this month. She also noted that there are some trends of improved mental health as the weather gets warmer and people are able to be more social, but Y&FS does not expect this trend as significant this year as there are so many mental health needs at this time. Y&FS is also providing a tremendous amount of case management and consult support with individuals and families who are in need. Part of this work includes reaching out to local organizations and supports to provide lists to residents in need. Alyssa Cellucci, Y&FS Administrative Assistant, is focused on getting these resources together for people.

Ms. Shine noted that Interface Referral Services is a resource that can help connect people to therapy but the feedback from people who have used it recently is that the waitlists are still long, especially for local providers. MetroWest Care Connection is another referral agency that has been helpful at connecting people to resources. Ms. Shine noted there is a new group practice that just opened in Needham specializing in autism and that has been a good place for referrals.

Ms. Shine noted that referrals are still coming in consistently from the schools as they always have and there are more community members who have reached out directly as well. This is a good sign as it shows that community members are aware of Youth & Family Services and are willing to reach out directly. Ms. Shine explained that there have been a decent amount of calls for substance misuse support recently.

In answer to a Board question Ms. Shine noted that more private practices are not accepting insurance and moving to private pay only. Insurance is a burdensome paperwork system and with the need practices have a full slate of clients able to privately pay. This model has prevented many families in need who cannot afford private pay which makes a match more difficult. These are the families that Youth & Family Services are attempting to support more, since resources are much more limited for these families.

The group discussed social media/internet use and the negative impact this has had on students. The group discussed the Online Safety Coalition that has been started which is currently focused on creating strategy and goals. The hope is that the group will be able to help decrease online use and the harmful impacts of social media. Young people had to rely on it overall during COVID and relied on technology for interactions during this time. Now that there is more in person interactions, some students are struggling to make this transition. Members noted that lots of gaming and other online use seems to increase both mood swings and aggressive behavior. Ms. Shine explained that this may be contributing to some of the mental health needs.

Update on Programs, Services and Awards

Group Programming:

- Ellen and Christine are putting together a 6 week group for 4th and 5th graders which starts March 7th. This group will focus on social skills, problem solving and coping skills. We already have 10 youth signed up for this group.
- Kelsey and Hannah have started a group with ELL students to support them with social emotional learning. Many of the students arrived from war-torn countries and/or escaping gang violence. Their levels of comfortability with English vary but they are becoming more open with staff about their families and losses. This past week was the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine/Russian war and much of the group time was spent reflecting that.
- Kelsey and Grace have started **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.
- Ellen and Grace have started **lunch groups** 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.
- **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.
- Kelsey and Hannah are working on a group for 7th and 8th graders that will take place at Pollard starting March 13th. This group will focus on coping and social skills in addition to anxiety and depression support.
- Y&FS is also exploring a group for students who have lost family members as guidance staff have indicated a need for this.

Ms. Shine circulated the March calendar highlighting Needham Unplugged. This is its 21st year. The goal of Unplugged is to encourage families to unplug from technology and engage with one another without these distractions. This program has been copied in dozens of communities in Massachusetts and nationally. The Board commented on how great the calendar looks. The events include a scavenger hunt and a jar of M & M's in the office for a guessing game of how many are in the jar with a prize attached. There are several partnered events with the YMCA, the Library, and other local businesses. Ms. Shine noted that no meeting night/no homework night was not included this year as many schools did not follow

this request. Y&FS is going to assess whether the community wanted to bring this back for next year.

Ms. Shine continues to work with the high school on the community service requirement and how that might be met by some of the recent refugee and immigrant students as well as students who work and have trouble meeting the requirement.

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 on securing a speaker to discuss the increase in mental health challenges. Dr. Mitch Ablett, a Wellesley-based psychologist, will come to Needham for a workshop on Tuesday, May 9th at the CATH titled "**The Mindful Path to Unwinding Anxiety for Kids and Teens**".

Y&FS is working with a local expressive art therapist, Tova Speter, on providing workshops for the community. These workshops center around mindfulness and expressive arts. The most recent workshop occurred on February 28th and was a self-care workshop for parents. This workshop was at capacity with 13 attendees. Y&FS hopes to run ongoing workshops with Tova throughout the year.

Y&FS is hosting another Family Night on March 30th at the Center at the Heights. The purpose of this event is to help families connect to each other and to Y&FS through dinner, games, arts and crafts and cookie decorating. The last event in December was at capacity with over 50 attendees. This event is expected to reach capacity quickly so early sign ups are recommended.

Youth & Family Services staff have taken on the role of the adult advisors in for the Take Back the Night club. This club organizes the Take Back the Night event every year in addition to building awareness around domestic violence. This event took place on February 9th and was very well attended. Speakers at the event included people with lived experience, State Representative Denise Garlick, 2 members of the Needham Police Department and a number of club members. The program also included a remembrance for the many victims of domestic violence.

The group discussed seasonal trends for programming and how it is hard sometimes to get people to attend workshops when the weather is nicer – members discussed using outdoor space such as the new town common renovation when open.

Ms. Shine noted that the Peer Tutor Program is winding down and this year overall has been doing really well with 28 peers. Ms. Shine explained that the length of the program seems to make it difficult for everyone to engage every week because it is such a long commitment. She and the staff will review the Peer Tutor program this summer. One idea is to have multiple sessions and set tutor days/times. Y&FS is going to also get feedback from students about their experiences.

The VIP (peer mentoring program) is also coming to an end next month. This program is bigger this year than it has ever been with 25 pairs. Y&FS staff are going to talk to the group

about this program as well since there is a big time commitment. Right now, it runs October-May and this conflicts with sports and activities which can cause meetings cancellations. Ms. Shine noted there may be even more volunteers with a split commitment and since the 3rd-5th graders enjoy it so much it is important to avoid cancellation whenever possible.

Volunteers Around Needham will continue this year. This program is an opportunity for middle and high school students to give back to the community while also getting their needed community service hours. There were 2 days planned for February vacation – one at the Charles River Center where the volunteers assisted program staff during the vacation program for kids with special needs and one at the Center at the Heights where students engaged in intergenerational programming. We had over 20 middle and high school volunteers participate. The hope is that there will be 2 additional days for April vacation and summer as usual.

Y&FS staff continue to help youth find employment opportunities and volunteer opportunities. The division has had a couple of Youth who have completed individual requests for community service projects and these have gone well.

Community Collaboration:

Ms. Shine has been involved with local groups interested in the possibility of request grant funds from Children's Hospital. With the current mental health need, the hope is that some of these funds can help support initiatives around this.

Ms. Shine also noted all the committees are doing well including the Substance Prevention Alliance, the Domestic Violence Action Team, Youth Recourse Network, CCIT, and Homelessness Prevention committee.

The group discussed the possibility of offering babysitting for programming as this may increase attendance. Ms. Shine explained some of the complications of this if the babysitting involved exchanging funds but Y&FS could manage it for people who want to volunteer their time to help. The Board mentioned both the Dance Team and Habitat for Humanity run similar programming. Ms. Shine will investigate.

Ms. Shine noted she has hired two interns for 2023-2024. She is exploring options for expanded space as this will be necessary with 2 interns.

New/Old Business

Ms. Shine noted that Ms. Jill Mullaney is graduating this year so she is looking for a rising junior to serve on the Board. If any of the Board knows students who would be interested, please email her.

Mr. Brienze noted that there is a new service dog in training to help Rocket with his workload. The new puppy is called Ghost and will be trained to help locate lost young people or elders. He is a white shepherd.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Mullen seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm

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