

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from September 13, 2023, Board Meeting

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

Board in Attendance: Julie Stevens, Susan Patkin, Joe Brienze, Nicole McMahon, David Bookston, Karen Mullen, Massiel Gallardo, Natalya Ly (student representative)

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Staff: Alyssa Cellucci

School Resource Officer: Joseph Brienze, Nicole McMahon

Guest: Emily Turnbull, Riverside Clinician

Minutes June 7, 2023. Ms. Stevens made a motion to approve the June 7 minutes. Ms. Patkin seconded. The June 7 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Update on Community Needs/Crisis Response

Ms. Shine noted the department has 50 active clients with 35 on the waitlist and 23 parent/community consultations this past month. There were also 4 emergency consultations. Staff provided a significant amount of case management services to residents who needed assistance in unique situations. Ms. Shine also noted that she has been working with Dana Plunkett, the new Director of Guidance and will plan to meet with her on a monthly basis about the role of Y&FS in the schools.

Ms. Shine asked Mr. Brienze and Ms. McMahon to report on what they are noticing with students as School Resource Officers now that school is back in session. There were no real changes noted from years prior; anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed with academic demands continue to be significant. Students feel overwhelmed with work expectations.

Ms. Shine noted there seemed to be less stigma and resistance towards treatment and the roll-out of Youth Mental Health First Aid training will be very helpful. Ms. Shine also welcome Ms. Turnbull as a social worker from Riverside Community Care that will be working full-time Monday thru Friday for the Needham Police Department. Ms. Turnbull will help to serve as a dual response of social work and law enforcement in the community.

Ms. Shine discussed that planning for spring groups is underway. The department continues to place a larger focus on group work since this helps more students access necessary mental health support.

Coffee Talk is a drop-in group of high school students that staff started last year. Topics have included active shooter drills, homework stress, NHS cellphone policies, and end-of-semester exams. It was fairly well-attended each week and we hope to get it back up and running this academic year.

Grief Group – the school system has asked Youth & Family Services to put together a group for students who have lost family members as there are several students who have experienced this, where youth could provide mutual support, learn skills to manage grief and connect with a clinician. Staff ran a couple of these groups last school year and the hope is that they will continue this year. A board discussion commenced on seeing a need at the high school and Ms. Shine will connect with Dana Plunkett on that.

Lunch Groups – staff are working to run lunch groups in 3 schools this year. Last year included Eliot and Sunita Williams, and staff are hoping to run groups at Newman this year as well. These groups were focused on elementary-level social skills.

Staff are planning on running another **Candid Conversations** group starting at the end of September. This is a group for 4th and 5th graders and is focused on social skills, daily life stressors and coping.

Staff are planning a 3-hour Saturday workshop for 6th graders called **Connecting with Confidence**. This workshop is scheduled on November 4th and is focused on self-esteem building and healthy socialization skills. Staff are in the process of creating the curriculum.

Discussion of Community Issues Being Addressed

Ms. Shine discussed the highlights from the 2021 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey that finds that in Needham, mental health issues increased in middle and high school students across genders including depressive symptoms, self-injury, and reports of seriously considering suicide. For both middle school and high school, the proportion of youth spending 3 or more hours on screen time on the average school day increased substantially (50% for middle school and 52% in high school). For both age groups, the indicators of school connectedness are lower than 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%).

Ms. Shine noted that staff are assessing additional community needs and virtual programming. The focus is to continue group treatment to increase the number of youth accessing services, working on increased training for staff in trauma informed care, and working closely with a school group on helping support the school community and families on many different levels. Community presentations are being planned to help educate and support residents. Ms. Shine commented that staff are finding nontraditional ways to address mental health such as expressive art therapy workshops and community outreach projects. Staff continue to help address issues of racism and inequalities and ensuring that all have access to services if needed.

Update on Programs, Services and Awards

Ms. Shine discussed charging fees for two programs, Peer Tutor and Engaging Minds. Peer Tutor tutees must pay a fee of \$55 after having no fee associated with the program throughout the pandemic. The fee for tutees prior to the pandemic was \$45. The fee for Engaging Minds, an executive functioning workshop for high school students, is \$229 per participant. This fee is typically what the organization charges for their own services. Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the new program fees. Ms. Patkin seconded. The new program fees unanimously approved by voice vote.

Ms. Shine discussed working closely with Family Access Community Connections about the possibility of running a 9-week **Circle of Security Parenting workshop** in the fall. This workshop is for parents and caregivers based on decades of research about how secure parent-child relationships can be supported and strengthened. Facilitators work with parents and caregivers to help them to understand their child's emotional world by learning to read emotional needs, support their child's ability to successfully manage emotions, enhance the development of their child's self-esteem, honor their innate wisdom and desire for their child to be secure.

Ms. Shine discussed a workshop planned with **Dr. Lisa Damour** on Wednesday, November 8th and staff secured funding from the Becca Schmill Foundation to bring Dr. Damour virtually to Needham to present on her newest book, *The Emotional Lives of Teenagers*. The workshop will focus on helping parents understand their teenagers' intense emotional lives and how to support them through this developmental stage.

Staff are in the process of coordinating **Peer Tutor** this school year at the library. They have collaborated with the librarians to provide two times weekly for tutors and tutors to meet. The program will operate from October through April, and tutors (high schoolers) will earn 30 hours of community service for their participation. Mrs. Stein and Mrs. Nichols are currently interviewing tutors for the program.

VIP (peer mentoring program) is starting up again for this school year. This program pairs High School Students with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to offer fun and peer mentoring. Staff are currently interviewing all of the mentors and mentees to create the pairs. This program continues to be very popular and fills up quickly – we will have 20 pairs this year. The program starts October 17th .

Volunteers Around Needham was a huge success 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. Ms. Shine noted Y&FS offered 6 different volunteer opportunities during the month of July including: Circle of Hope, Needham Community Farm, Needham Parks and Forestry, Needham Community Council, Youth and Family, and Needham Fire Station. Over 40 volunteers attended this summer. Staff also had a dignity drive in multiple town buildings to donate to Circle of Hope and collected a full car load of personal hygiene products for homeless individuals and families.

Ms. Shine noted that staff started a new volunteer relationship with **Newbridge on the Charles** and hosted a kick off event which included 6 student volunteers who are interested in earning community service, learning about Newbridge on the Charles and services that are offered. Ms. Shine stated that staff want to give Needham High School students an opportunity to earn 30 plus hours and have flexibility with their schedules, and hope to do another Kick Off to engage more high school students who were not available for the first.

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. The department is 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. Staff are working closely with the school department on training this to students in the schools.

QPR – 2 staff members, Mrs. Whirley and Mrs. Weitzel, completed QPR training and will begin to teach QPR in the upcoming months. QPR is a suicide training for participants to be able to recognize warning signs of suicide and question, persuade and refer people at risk for suicide for help.

Employment Program Update: Youth & Family Services help connect residents to students who are looking to do various residential jobs such as lawn care, shoveling, babysitting and odd jobs. Staff are in the process of recruiting new students. Staff are also hoping to start a volunteer list as well so that people who need assistance but may not be able to afford to hire someone can still receive the services. Ms. Cellucci shared a success story of finding a group of high school students to volunteer their time to help a high-needs resident with a garage cleanout.

Staff worked with the Needham Public Library and Family Access Community Connections on a Family Playgroup for caregivers and their babies (ages 0-1). This playgroup ran over the summer and provided a space for parents to connect and have the support of clinical staff to discuss stressors and coping skills. It also creates a social environment for very young children. Staff hope to continue this into the fall.

Staff also worked closely with **Engaging Minds** to run a workshop to help prepare early High School students return to school. This workshop ran the week before school started and taught the students executive functioning skills needed to be academically successful. 4 students participated in this program.

Community Collaborations

Youth & Family Services has joined a **Needham Homelessness Prevention Coalition** that helps assess needs in the areas and helps to prevent homelessness. This meeting occurs monthly.

Youth & Family Services has gotten involved with the **Online Safety Coalition**. This is a group that has gotten together to help caregivers navigate the always changing online environment that children spend so many hours engaging in. The Coalition includes representation from the Needham Board of Health, Youth and Family Services, Community Council, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Walker School, Needham High School, Becca Schmill Foundation and community members.

Youth & Family Services has joined a group dedicated to planning and implementing **International Overdose Awareness Day** which was a huge success this year. The vigil occurred on August 31st and there was a flag display at Memorial Field.

Youth & Family Services continues to work closely with the students involved in our **Chapter 84**, which is a peer-to-peer led nicotine prevention group. Students are involved in various trainings and advocacy initiatives.

Youth & Family Services' staff 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 are also represented on the steering committee. There are several initiatives coming out of this group including creating online substance use support, peer support, community activities and educational webinars. Youth & Family Services staff have been trained on the use of Narcan and fentanyl test strips which we now keep in the office. Staff worked closely with Public Health to learn about the use of these, preventative measures that can be taken and how to help residents in need access this.

Youth & Family Services has a representative at the meetings of **The Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)**. Some of the staff have attended various training courses to help support their committee work around domestic violence. Staff have joined a DVAC has a sub-committee that is working on a cable channel series to be aired in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is a 6-part series and staff will be participating in the 4th episode called Healthy relationships. Staff are also working closely with REACH and NHS to help plan for next year's Take Back the Night.

Staff have 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. The team discusses 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.

The Youth Resource Network is a roundtable including representatives from multiple youthserving 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. Youth & Family Services chairs this meeting monthly. Staff are attending the quarterly Youth Commission/Youth Services meeting. Represented at the meeting are directors from several towns in MA. NY&FS has also joined a smaller group of Directors from the Metro-West region to increase collaboration. There has been an effort to bridge gaps between programs so that staff have more co-workers to collaborate with and conversations about working together on therapeutic groups and community presentations. We have organized an all staff meeting for October 26th .

Youth & Family Services is now part of the **Community Health Resource Group** which gets local agencies/departments together for information sharing/support. This meeting is attended on a regular basis.

Administrative Updates

Harvest Fair – Youth & Family Services will have a table at the Harvest Fair so that services and needs around mental health can be publicized. This event is taking place October 1st .

Case Management Services - Youth & Family Services staff helped many families in need with various support such as camps, gym. YMCA memberships, after school programs, childcare and transportation. Most recently the Administrative Assistant, Ms. Cellucci, helped an older adult with higher needs who needed help finding youth to clean out his garage. She were able to assemble a group of 3 youth who were able to help this person.

Ms. Shine discussed that the department has started to work on the budget for FY25. Staff are reviewing the BVAs from last fiscal year and determining what areas need an increase in funds. Youth & Family Services will advocate for move the FT ARPA funded position as well into the operating budget – it will be a request of a half year position this year (ARPA funds the position until January) and then for a full year in FY26. Staff are also making a proposal to the Town Manager, Select Board and the Finance Committee for the use of funds that have come in from Children's Hospital. The recommendation is for two full time positions, the details are still being discussed.

Youth & Family Services is building a relationship with the Needham Community Council to help create and fund a speaker series. This would help support the community need for educational opportunities around mental health. Staff would help consult on topics, speakers and help to coordinate the events.

Youth & Family Services continues to raise money for family in need by promoting the Crisis Donation Fund. There is now the ability to donate to this fund online electronically, making it easier for people to donate.

Ms. Shine noted that Y&FS was able to secure funds for Interface Referral Service and residents can now reach out directly to Interface for support. BID-Needham and Needham Public Schools have generously offered to help fund the program. The hope is to keep this services as it helps support residents but they continue to increase their cost significantly so staff are monitoring this. Youth & Family Services worked with the COA on a grant through the Metro West Health Foundation for \$4,000 to go towards increased clinical supervision and consultation. Given the increased needs of the community and the newer staff coming into the division, we thought this was an important plan to help train staff and keep skills current.

Youth & Family Services has increased our intern program this year, we have 2 interns who have started. Kirstin Wilcox is from Boston College School of Social Work and Alexandra Nagle is from Smith College. Both interns will meet with clients, run groups, create programs, and sit on various committees.

Youth & Family Services has been very focused on training staff to make sure that staff have the clinical skills necessary to manage the current mental health crisis. Staff have attended multiple trainings this past month including the National Conference for Mental Wellbeing, the Suicide Prevention Conference and trainings for trauma informed care.

We have been building our social media platforms in hope of reaching more community members with the information, programs, and events our department has to offer.

Facebook: [Facebook.com/needhamyouthservices](https://www.facebook.com/needhamyouthservices) 715

Instagram: 606 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices

NotifyMe (Listserve): 1138 signed-up

FY24 Meeting Schedule

September 13, October 11, November 8, December 13, January 10, February 14, March 13, April 10, May 8, June 12. All meetings held at Town Hall except for May 8, which will be at the Center at the Heights.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Notes by: Alyssa Cellucci, YFS Staff

Edited by: Sara Shine, Director