

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from October 11, 2023, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:37 pm, in person and on Zoom in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

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

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Staff: Alyssa Cellucci

Minutes June 7, 2023. Mr. Brienze made a motion to approve the September 13 minutes. Ms. Mullen seconded. The September 13 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Update on Community Needs/Crisis Response

Ms. Shine noted the department has 56 active clients with 24 on the waitlist and 15 parent/community consultations this past month. There were also 2 emergency consultations this month. Staff provided a significant amount of case management services to residents who needed assistance in unique situations.

Ms. Shine discussed the \$400,000 that Needham will receive as part of the Children's Hospital building site. This will provide the opportunity to hire two positions: a home-based outreach clinician who will work with families and connect with the Housing Authority, and a training coordinator to further support clinical staff. Further details to follow in the coming months.

Coffee Talk is a drop-in group of high school students that staff started last year. Topics have included the emotions around returning to school after summer break, making new connections with peers, interactions with teachers and general school policies as the year is underway. It was fairly well-attended each week last year and we hope to get it back up and running in school on October 19. One clinician and one intern will oversee the group each week.

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. Two clinical staff members are scheduled to meet with the Children's Room in Arlington, an organization that provides grief support and programming to youth and families, for guidance on curriculum and how we can offer the Children's Room as a referral to those in need.

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 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. Ms. Shine noted that we are having more success with middle-school aged groups versus high school, as parents are still the ones signing children up for programs at that age.

Trail Talks is a group for 5th graders which will include mindful walking, yoga and movement, nature journaling, scavenger hunts and fostering peer connection. We will be running this group on two consecutive Tuesdays in October.

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

We are in the beginning stages of planning the annual **Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award**. We have not decided how to run the event this year, but will continue to assess based on COVID numbers, trends, and guidelines. The 2024 event is scheduled for Monday, January 29th.

Y&FS is planning on hosting another **Family Night** on November 30th. Multiple Family Nights were run last calendar year and always filled to capacity, typically around 65 people. Families engage in arts and crafts, Bingo, and enjoyed a cookie bar. The event helped connect families with each other while also connecting them to our services and programs.

Ms. Shine discussed working closely with Family Access Community Connections to run a 9-week **Circle of Security Parenting workshop** beginning October 5th. 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 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. The Needham Community Council is on board to fund the Mindful Community: Talking Mental Health Together speaker series, which is a dedicated response to the mental health crisis among youth in the community and aims to empower the community to discuss mental health openly.

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 have completed interviews for the program and are in the process of making matches.

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. All of the pairs have been identified and the program starts on October 17th. Staff had a successful orientation for the Big VIPs on October 3rd during which staff discussed rules and expectations for the program. Bigs were provided with a Mentor Training Manual which provides more information about building a relationship and understanding the behaviors of 8–10-year-olds. The Big VIPs also wrote letters to their Littles.

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 carload of personal hygiene products for homeless individuals and families. Staff are planning VAN for February and April vacation weeks.

Ms. Shine noted that staff started a new volunteer relationship with **Newbridge on the Charles** and hosted a kickoff 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 Kickoff 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. Staff taught one class on September 27th and trained six people. There is another class scheduled for October 24th. In addition, five 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 the entire sophomore class in January 2024.

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. A board discussion commenced on directly emailing students, contacting sports coaches, running an ad in the student news and framing the program as older adults needing help.

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. The program is running again this fall and will start on October 13th, running for 4 consecutive weeks.

Community Collaborations

Youth & Family Services has joined a **Needham Homelessness Prevention Coalition** that helps assess needs in the area 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.

Two Y&FS staff are currently trained in Narcan administration (aka Naloxone) through the Public Health Department. We are now more equipped to educate families on the use of Narcan to prevent

fatal overdose, how to contact emergency responders, and the existence of the Good Samaritan Law in Massachusetts. While we cannot directly provide residents with Narcan due to required licensing, we are collaborating with Public Health nurses on the best protocol to provide families in need who may be facing stigma. Narcan is a life-saving measure that works as a opioid antagonist, which means that when opioid use overwhelms our brain's receptors and begins to cause respiratory distress, slurring of speech, nodding off and other signs of overdose – Narcan is an agent that binds quicker to our receptors, effectively “knocking off” the opioids and restoring the brain back to normal functioning to reverse the symptoms of overdose in a matter of minutes.

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 organization to discuss the overall community needs and trends.

The Youth Resource Network is 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. 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. Y&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 had a table at the Harvest Fair on October 1st. This event helped to connect Y&FS to many community members and share information about programming and services. We had a temporary tattoo station, mindfulness stickers, and fidget toys that were all a huge hit for families.

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.

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 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.

Ms. Mullen made a motion to approve the ARPA funded position and the increase in funds. Mr. Brienze seconded. Unanimously approved.

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. We hope to keep these services available as it helps support residents but they continue to increase their cost significantly, so staff are monitoring this.

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 720

Instagram: 606 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices

NotifyMe (Listserve): 1137 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.

Ms. Mullen made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Notes by: Alyssa Cellucci, YFS Staff

Edited by: Sara Shine, Director