

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from March 13th, 2024 Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:31pm, in person in the Highland Room of Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: David Bookston, Julie Stevens, Susan Patkin, Karen Mullen, Joe Brienze, Natalya Ly, William Holland

Director: Sara Shine

Staff: Alyssa Cellucci, Hannah Stein, Ellen Whirley, Kelsey Nichols

Minutes from February 14th, 2024: Mr. Bookston made a motion to approve the February 14 minutes. Ms. Stevens and Mr. Brienze seconded. The February 14 minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

NEW AND OLD BUSINESS

Clinical staff from Youth & Family Services discussed their ongoing programs and individual caseloads. Ms. Whirley discussed the continued success of the VIP (Valuable Interactions Among Peers) Program and this year's session wrapping up soon. Ms. Whirley also discussed Volunteers Around Needham, Coffee Talk, and social skills groups and the positive verbal feedback given by students, and the plan to introduce a Parent Coffee Talk program. Ms. Stein discussed the continued success of the Peer Tutor Program and the collaboration with the Needham Free Public Library with other programming such as the Family Playgroup, which is currently in session and will continue with more sessions throughout the summer. Ms. Nichols discussed the upcoming Craft and Chat group for middle schoolers facilitated with the help of our clinical intern. Ms. Cellucci discussed this year's Needham Unplugged Calendar.

CLINICAL SERVICES

Youth & Family Services provides individual and family therapy for residents and have significantly increased our capacity for this. While we typically focus on youth and their families, we are aware that there are many people in the community who need extra support. We have been able to offer crisis/urgent supportive services to all residents and have been able to help in these crisis situations.

- There are 71 active clients.
- We currently have 17 on our waitlist.
- We have provided 9 Parent/Community consultations.
- We have had 3 emergency consults this month.
- Winter Groups –
 - **Coffee Talk** is a drop-in group of HS students that staff started last year. The topics have included: active shooter drills, homework stress, NHS cellphone policies, and end-of-the-semester exams. It has been running since October and is well attended with about 8-12 participants per week.
 - **Lunch Groups**-Staff have been running lunch groups at 3 of the elementary school:, Eliot, Sunita Williams, and Newman. Each group has between 5-8 students. These groups were focused on social skills and coping.
 - **Parent Support Group/Coffee Talk** – Y&FS has started a parent drop-in group for parents to be able to get support from a clinician and peers. This group will start at the end of March.
 - **Mindfulness/Yoga Group** – Y&FS has started running a mindfulness group at Pollard Middle School. This group will work on coping and mindfulness which helps to support anxiety and depression. There is also a free yoga workshop that is being offered as part of Needham Unplugged on March 20th at 5:30PM.

Staff attended a training on IDECIDE, which is a therapeutic substance misuse treatment program. The hope is that this program will be incorporated into the Substance Awareness Program.

COMMUNITY ISSUES BEING ADDRESS:

- Highlights from the 2021 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey finds that in Needham:
 - For the middle school: reports of mental health issues increased since 2018: 12-month reports of depressive symptoms increased from 9%-13% and self-injury increased from 6%-8%. Life reports of seriously considering suicide also increased from 10%-12%. This increase in mental health concerns in increasing consistently among various genders.
 - For High School Students: depressive symptoms increased from 13%-22%, self-injury increased from 9%-16% and seriously considering suicide increased from 9%-12%. All of these areas also grew substantially in the Metro-West region.
 - 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 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%).
- We are assessing additional community needs and virtual programming.
 - Our focus is to continue group treatment to increase the number of youth accessing services
 - We are working on increased training for staff in trauma informed care

- We are working closely with a school group on helping support the school community and families on many different levels.
- We are planning some community presentations to help educate and support residents.
- We are finding nontraditional ways to address mental health such as expressive art therapy workshops and community outreach projects
- Helping to address issues of racism and inequalities and ensuring that all have access to services if needed

PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES:

Needham Unplugged: The 2024 edition is here as March is Needham Unplugged month. It is exciting to think that this program will be the 23rd year of operation. Needham Unplugged is a calendar that encourages families to spend time off their electronic devices. Needham Youth & Family Services partners with the YMCA, Needham Park and Rec, Needham Public Library and many other local organizations to offer activities for the month. This program has been copied in dozens of communities in Massachusetts and nationally.



Family Night – Y&FS is hosting another Family Night in early April 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. This event is expected to reach capacity quickly so early sign-ups are recommended.

Go With the Flow Mosaic Workshop – This is an expressive art therapy workshop for teens ages 11-18. The workshop series will engage Needham teens and community members in a collaborative art project culminating in the creation of two beautiful mosaic planters displayed in the plaza for all to enjoy. Mosaic art is a mindful and meditative art practice that is easily accessible for all ages and offers participants an opportunity to be a part of something larger than themselves which research has shown to be empowering and contributing to a happy life. The communal aspect of the creation builds connection and reinforces the idea that we all have a part to play in our community. The project has five opportunities for engagement: March – Design Workshop for Teens; April – Intergenerational Mosaic Workshop for teens and seniors; May – Outdoor Community Mosaic Workshop, May – Grout Workshop for Teens; June – Public Celebration.

SHOP (Students Helping Older People) – this is an intergeneration program where we pair students with older adults to make connections and help the older adults with their grocery shopping. This program will give students volunteer opportunities in addition to connecting with the older population and reinforce the importance of relationships, especially to more vulnerable populations during a time when many connections are lost. Y&FS has also talked to some local housing for older adults with the idea that the program could be brought directly to these communities.

Youth & Family Services has partnered with the Needham Community Council and the Becca Schmill Foundation to create a speaker series to help support the community called **Mindful Community Lecture Services – Talking About Mental Health**. Staff have organized and helped to support the following presentations for this initiative: 1/31/24 –

Navigating the Child and Teen Mental Health System presented by Riverside (postponed from 1/10 due to illness). This workshop was presentation by Kimberly Martin, Assistant Vice President of Children and Family Services at Riverside Community Care and she spoke on Navigating Mental Health Resources for Kids. On March 13th, Dr. Robert Brooks will be speaking on Nurturing Hope and Resilience in Children and Teens During Troubled Times and again this presentation will be held in person at Broadmeadow Elementary School Performance Center between 7:00-8:30. Finally, we are excited to announce that nationally recognized anxiety expert, Lynn Lyons, LICSW will be presenting a talk titled *Modeling Matters: What Parents Need to Know (and Do) to Decrease Stress, Worry, and Anxiety* on Thursday, May 9 at Broad meadow Performance Center from 7:00-8:30. A brief Description of the presentation: Current news about young people and mental health has created warranted concern, but the information can be overwhelming and hard to sort through. Parents need strategies to help their children manage their anxiety, moods, and social pressures. Based on current research and over 30 years of clinical experience, Lynn Lyons will talk about the common traps adults fall into and the key adjustments needed to prevent and help mental health challenges in our kids. She is author and contributor to many publications as well as hosting a very popular podcast, *Flusterclux*. The event is free and open to all.

Youth & Family Services staff have helped to support the **Take Back the Night club** at Needham High School. This club organizes the Take Back the Night event every year in addition to building awareness around domestic violence. This event took place last month 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.

Peer Tutor – the peer tutor program is winding down this month. Staff 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 coordinated the meetings and have helped support the pairs while meeting. Staff are discussing the dynamics this year and how to continue to make improvements to the program.

VIP (peer mentoring program) is winding down this month. This program pairs High School Students with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to offer fun and peer mentoring. Staff have hosted a fantastic year with 21 pairs of Bigs and Littles. Everything has run really smoothly this year and it has been nice to see the development of some wonderful peer mentoring relationships. This year we also have some “Big” floaters to help make sure the “Littles” can still participate when a “Big” misses a meeting.

Volunteers Around Needham is an opportunity for middle and high school students to give back to the community while also getting their needed community service hours. Staff had two successful days during February Vacation, one at Cricle of Hope to help sort clothes and donations for homeless families and one with Youth & Family Services to help prepare for future programming. Staff are also planning some days for April Vacation and reaching out to local organizations to find some new volunteer sites.

Youth & Family Services has also started a new volunteer relationship with Newbridge on the Charles. We had a second event with them where 8 students joined to get connected to complete community service hours. At this event, our volunteers learned about Newbridge on the Charles and services that are offered. We want to give Needham High School students an opportunity to earn 30 plus hours and have flexibility with their schedules.



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. Eleven people were trained on March 4th including all of the school nurses. Youth & Family Services and Public Health are working closely on a training for the Community Council, Needham Housing Authority and BID Needham to offer additional trainings over the next couple of months. There has been a huge increase in interest in this training.

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 hope is that the class will not only give skills to the students but will also help eliminate barriers to treatment (including stigma and access) and will help identify students in need. The goal this year is to teach the entire 10th grade which has required hours of planning, scheduling, and preparing. Staff are in the third cycle of training, 12 out of the 20 classes have been trained. Each class required 4.5 hours of training time over six sessions. The session contains the following information:

Session 1: Mental health, what mental health challenges are, and how common they are in teens.

Session 2: The impact of mental health challenges on teens, how people with mental health challenges can get better, professionals who can help.

Session 3: Helping a friend who is in crisis because they are suicidal, introducing the tMHFA action plan (look, ask, listen, help your friend) and how it can be used in a crisis situation. A video shows a teen helping a friend who is experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Session 4: Helping a friend who is in another type of crisis, such as threatening violence or harm to others, engaging in non-suicidal self-injury, or experiencing a traumatic event such as bullying, abuse or assault; practicing using the tMHFA Action Plan in these types of crisis situations

Session 5: How to help a friend who may be in crisis due to substance use, how to help if someone might be developing a mental health challenge. tMHFA does not teach you how to diagnose! It's information about being a supportive friend, encouraging friends to seek help and knowing when it is time to get a responsible, trusted adult involved.

Session 6: Recovery, resiliency and all final activities to complete the tMHFA course.

Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) training– 2 staff members, Ms. Whirley and Ms. Weitzel, completed QPR training and have started to provide training. Staff are working on developing a training schedule for this. “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 slowly recruiting more students for these lists that have helped to support older adults and other residents in need. Staff have also started 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. Stein 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 started this past summer and has continued as there is such a high interest in this group. This program provides a space for parents to connect and have the support of clinical staff to discuss stressors and coping. It also creates a social environment for very young children.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

Youth & Family Services has joined a group led by the Needham Housing Authority called **Family Self Sufficiency Program Coordinating Committee**. The purpose of this program is to provide a comprehensive range of services including education, job training, financial literacy and homeownership assistance which will equip participants with the tools and resources necessary to achieve self-sufficiency and break the cycle of poverty. The first meeting is March 12th.

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. This meeting is a meeting to address homelessness on a larger scale and discuss patterns and solutions for individuals and families, many of the attendees in this group help with specific incidents on a day-to-day basis.

Youth & Family Services has joined 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. The coalition will provide parents with reliable information about various online safety topics. The group is working on a newsletter to be distributed regularly. This month the Coalition was able to sponsor a cellphone and parenting class for parents free of charge. In addition, there was an event on February 29th titled **Navigating a Digitally Demanding World**, which including a showing of the multi award winning documentary “Celling your Soul” and a discussion with the filmmaker, Joni Siani.

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. Staff are also involved in strategic planning initiatives with the group.

Narcan - We have two staff who 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 to families in need who may be facing stigma. Narcan is a life-saving measure that works as an 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, restoring the brain back to normal functioning and reversing the symptoms of overdose in a matter of minutes.

The **Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)** meets regularly. Youth & Family Services has a representative at these meetings. Some of the staff have attended various training courses to help support their committee work around domestic violence. In addition, 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 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. Quarterly this team meets with larger community providers (including local mental health agencies, BID, NWH, Walker) 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. These meetings have been very popular this year as there are so many families in crisis. Youth & Family Services chairs this meeting monthly.

Staff are attending the quarterly **Youth Commission/Youth Services meeting**. Represented at the meeting are directors from towns such as Medfield, Hopkinton, Holliston, Wayland, Wellesley, Southborough, and several more. We have 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. There have also

been conversations about working together on therapeutic groups and community presentations. We hosted an all staff meeting on October 26th – staff from 8 towns participated and staff were able to collaborate and share resources.

Youth & Family Services is 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.

Youth & Family Services is working closely with the Needham Resiliency Network to help support the mental health needs of the community as it relates to their work. There is possible collaboration on some grant funded initiatives and supporting community training on a larger scale.

Youth & Family Services staff are developing and implementing a training for staff at the Needham Public Library around mental health, recognizing signs and symptoms, and self-care. This program is being implemented on March 22nd.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

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. In addition, staff have been able to connect families with some specific mental health supports and wrap around services.

Youth & Family Services has submitted the budget for FY25. There is a modest request for increased funds for expenditure. Youth & Family Services will also advocate to 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. This position is very important as it has helped us support 26 families with clinical services, helped to support the addition of one intern (which has helped to support an additional 7 families), helped to keep the waitlist down, and helped to support important groups and programming.

Youth & Family Services has made a proposal for the use of funds that have come in from Children's Hospital. The recommendation is for two full time positions, one a community base clinician and the second is a training coordinator. This proposal was approved at Town Meeting on 10/30/23 and Youth & Family Services has submitted job postings to the HR department for review. One of these positions has been posted and hoping to have the other position posted in the next couple of weeks.

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. Youth & Family Services has received a number of donations this holiday season.

Interface Referral Service is a service that helps connect residents to therapeutic services when needed. Funds for this service were secured last year but the contract ends in June.

BID-Needham and Needham Public Schools have generously offered to help fund the program as they have in the past. The hope is to keep these services as they help 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 two 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. Two interns have been secured for next year as well.

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. Some of the trainings staff have attended include topics around play therapy interventions, trauma informed care, documentation, grief, the impact of screentime and social media, Neuroscience, Evidence based Practices for Multi- Cultural Populations, and suicide prevention.

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 731

Instagram: 623 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices

NotifyMe (Listserve): 1135 signed-up

Below are the voted upon meeting dates for FY 2024:

Wednesday, September 13 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, October 11 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, November 8 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, December 13 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, January 10 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, February 14 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, March 13th	Town Hall
Wednesday, April 10 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, May 8 th	Center at the Heights
Wednesday, June 12 th	Town Hall

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Stevens seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:20pm.

Notes written by: Alyssa Cellucci

Edited by: Sara Shine, Director