

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from January 12, 2022, Board Meeting

Meeting Commenced at 5:30 pm, via Zoom per Governor's Order of Spring 2021 allowing virtual public meetings

Board in Attendance: Susan Patkin, Karen Mullen, David Bookston, Julie Stevens, Jill Mullaney, Student Representative,

Director: Ms. Sara Shine

Community Needs/Crisis Response

- Significant increase in mental health symptoms including anxiety and depression. The American Academy of Pediatrics joined with the Children's Hospital Association and recently [declared](#) a national state of emergency in children's mental health.
- According to the [CDC](#), suicide attempts have risen – 51% for 12-17 year old girls from early 2019-early 2021
- Behavioral problems have increased significantly across the country – we have seen this in Needham

The Board discussed the change in school policy if students are boosted they do not have to quarantine when they are a close contact. This seems to have increased students' desire to get boosted.

Staff Updates Ms. Shine mentioned mental health needs continue to escalate due to ongoing COVID. She noted she is using ARPA funds to get the full-time clinician position posted. Ms. Shine discussed space difficulties within the office and needing to share space with this new clinician. Ms. Shine also indicated that she is looking at the budget and whether another PT position could be posted. Ms. Shine also discussed the possibility of only having 1 intern next year mostly due to spacing issues with the new staffing.

Ms. Shine noted that since she distributed the Board packet last week the waiting list has increased from 25 to 35.

Ms. Shine explained that Y&FS tries to prioritize very acute referrals or youth who may struggle to get services elsewhere for various reasons. The team has worked hard to refer people to other outpatient providers who may be accepting referrals.

Ms. Shine also noted there is a national state of emergency in children's mental health. Behavioral problems in schools are a result of the mental health challenges. The lack of socialization over the two years of COVID has played a huge role.

Ms. Shine is working with a group of community partners to identify youth mental health needs and develop services for these specific needs. This group started with 2 parents who organized some community information sharing sessions with stakeholders and community members. Out of this initial meeting, there will be ongoing meetings to develop the specific services.

Ms. Shine also discussed trying to push out more group programming as it will allow for more youth to be served. Y&FS is focusing on coping skills groups, programming for the LGBTQ+ community, and parent supports.

Ms. Shine explained that as part of the ARPA funds Y&FS has the ability to organize some community presentations. Currently being planned are parent presentations on anxiety and social media in addition to Ryan's Story which focuses on bullying and suicide prevention. This presentation was made possible by the Needham Exchange Club (this is also discussed more in detail later).

Needham Exchange Club and the Needham Flag football donations are being used for the staff to receive complex trauma training and the equipment needed for the model.

Ms. Shine asked for Board input on what they are hearing in the community. A general discussion occurred on a vandalism incident at the high school and behavioral/safety issues that students see. The Board also discussed the lockdown drills currently taking place and how this can be triggering for some students at a time of already heightened anxiety.

Motion to Approve December 8 Minutes made by Mr. Bookston seconded by Ms. Mullen. Minutes unanimously approved.

Update Programs, Services and Awards

The annual **Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award** is scheduled for Monday, January 31st. Lisa Tedeschi Vergara won the award and many people know her extensive work in the community on literacy and other issues. Lisa is an inspirational community member who has dedicated her life to promote literacy through inspiring art,



spreading kindness, and involving the community. Lisa grew up in Needham, MA and has a BFA in Graphic Design from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Lisa started her community service work 10 years ago when she was inspired to create fun furniture out of children's books to promote literacy. These chairs were donated to various schools, libraries, doctors' offices and other community areas to help make the stories come to life. This led Lisa to collect books to donate to various schools and organizations that don't have libraries, to creating free little libraries for people to always have access to books, to developing her non-

profit organization in 2019, Storytime Crafts. She also has a strong focus on ensuring there are books for every child, focusing on inclusion and diversity. This organization is now expanding beyond what it was initially designed to do, helping the community in so many ways and now, during the pandemic, also provides free books to children and families in need, in addition to masks, hygiene products, bikes, games and baby formula. To date the organization has collected 47 Storytime crafted chairs/tables, 67, 089 books, 6, 012 games, 623 bikes, has donated to 107 community partners and created 12 little free libraries. Lisa is truly deserving of this award as she has a dedicated work ethic and generous personality

which are consistently reflected in her commitment to inclusiveness, empathy, generosity, and a willingness to help others in need in Needham and the greater Boston Community.

Ms. Shine and the Board discussed the importance of positive recognition. There was a discussion on ways Y&FS can continue this focus on positives and will start promoting the **Ray of Hope** award more often.

Ms. Shine is about to have the meeting to finalize the design with the high school team for the **Mural Project**. Y&FS is currently recruiting students, local artists and interested adults to help plan the project and had our first meeting last month. The next step in the process will be to get specific design ideas from students and community members to pull together the final design. The project is going to be in the tunnel connecting Defazio Park and Pollard Middle School, which has also been the target of graffiti. There have been multiple applications with the MBTA and are waiting for approval to move forward. The first mural project done on the fence near Red Wing Bay was a huge success. Youth & Family Services got the community involved in creating and painting a mural that would focus on unity. There were over 100 people participate in this project ranging in ages from 3 to 76.



The Paint Fest Project sponsored by BID Needham is on hold. COVID numbers need to decline before the paint kits can be distributed. The Foundation for Hospital Art was established in 1984 and is dedicated to involving patients and volunteers worldwide to create colorful, soothing artwork donated to hospitals to help soften the often stressful hospital experience. The event would include youth and families who may have some special needs to come together and create a piece of art that will then be donated to a local hospital.

Needham Unplugged has started the planning process. **Needham Unplugged:** The 2022 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 Select Board (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. Ms. Shine is reaching out to the schools to promote no homework night.



Ms. Shine is working with Mr. McDonald Director of Health and Human Services to obtain K95 masks and air purifiers for the office space so more students can be safely seen in person though some students still prefer virtual.

Y&FS is in the beginning stages of working on an anti-bullying seminar in collaboration with the Needham Exchange Club. The plan is host a seminar with a speaker, John Halligan, who lost his 13 year old son to suicide after a number of bullying incidents. The seminar will be aimed at middle school students (6th, 7th and 8th) and then a parallel program for parents

and caregivers. We are hoping to run this event on March 16th. This program is being supported by Needham Park and Recreation in addition to the Needham Public Library. presentations on Wednesday half days, and one presentation with parents/students together and only those who wish to participate will be registering.

Y&FS is working closely with Park and Rec on a **Spring Fair Wellness day**. This will be aimed at Middle School students and will take place on a half-day in May. The goal will be to keep the free part of this half day more structured in addition to having some wellness activities and resources. The Board mentioned that the MYCA could be included in this as they are a strong community support for youth and wellness.



Teen Mental Health First Aid Ms. Shine is working on the different required levels of approval to get this program into the high school. This would teach youth how to respond to their peers who may be experiencing a mental health challenge. Members of the Health and Human Services team have been trained to teach **Youth Mental Health First Aid virtually**. The YMHA classes have continued. 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.

Community Collaborations remain the same:

Get Connected Needham is a resource list that can direct residents to find needed services. Youth & Family Services was part of a larger town group to put this list together and update the list regularly. This list can be found on the COVID-19 website in addition to the Public Health website.

Youth & Family Services is working closely with the Director of Guidance and Counseling and a group of school personnel to ensure that all students are being assessed for additional supports as they return to school during this uncertain time. They are helping to put addition supports in place for students who may need it.

Y&FS has pulled together a group of community members who were previously part of the Suicide Coalition. This group is meeting regularly and have expanded the focus and involve a wider range of topics. The group is renamed to the **Alliance for Safety and Wellness of the greater Needham Community**. The group has met to discuss what initiatives are already in place and which ones they would like to see in the community. Members of this group include school personnel, Riverside Trauma Center staff, community mental health representatives, Public Health and Police. Topics of focus include the increased need for mental health support, racial inequalities and addressing issues around racism and ensuring physical safety.

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. One of the members is part of the 84 Leadership Team and has taken the lead on many initiatives. Most recently, our group

participate in “Kick Butt Day: Take Down Tobacco” which is a national day that raises awareness of the importance of preventing tobacco use among teens. It is typically held at the Massachusetts Statehouse but this year it was virtual. The Needham Chapter helped to lead the workshop and met with Representative Denise Garlick and Senator Michael Rush to discuss the importance of legislation, mental health and addiction. There was an article in Hometown Weekly and the Needham Times. <https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/needham-times/2021/04/23/needham-students-advocate-flavored-tobacco-products-ban/7354623002/>

Y&FS 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 a staff member chairs one of these action teams. They are also represented on the steering committee. There are several initiatives coming out of this group including creating online substance use supports, peer support, community activities and educational webinars.

The **Internship Collaborative** with the Dedham Youth Commission, Medfield Youth Outreach and Westwood Youth and Family Services are planning for what this year. Various trainings and presentations are being scheduled.

The **Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC)** has started meeting. Youth & Family Services has a representative at these meetings. Please contact the office if you would like more information.

Y&FS has 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 group 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**, 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. This meeting has been very popular this year and has been utilized frequently.

Ms. Shine is attending the quarterly **Youth Commission/Youth Services meeting**. Represented at the meeting are directors from towns such as Northborough, Bedford, Burlington, Westborough, Winchester, and several more. We have also joined a smaller group of Directors from the Metro-West region to increase collaboration.

Ms. Shine has joined a **Community Health Resource Group** which gets local agencies/departments together for information sharing/support. This meeting is attended on a regular basis.

MetroWest Health Data Survey scheduled for a May release. Ms. Shine explained that this data will be very useful in determining community needs.

New/Old Business

No Board member replacement yet for Kevin Keane. Ms. Shine explained the process of how people can inquire about joining the Board. This information will be shared with Board members and the community.

Board agreed to a February virtual meeting. Board agreed to be flexible on meeting time because of the need to achieve quorum until a new Board member is on board.

Mr. Bookston made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Patkin seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Notes by: Faith Crisley, Recording Secretary

Edited by: Sara Shine, Director of Youth & Family Services