

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from September 11th, 2024 Board Meeting

Meeting commenced at 5:34pm, in person in the Highland Room of Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: Julie Stevens, Susan Patkin, Massiel Gallardo, Natalya Ly, Kate Black

Director: Sara Shine

Staff: Alyssa Cellucci

Ms. Stevens made a motion to commence the meeting.

Minutes from June 12th, 2024: Ms. Patkin made a motion to approve the June 12th minutes. Ms. Gallardo seconded. The June 12th minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

Ms. Shine welcomed Board members back from summer recess. The Board welcomed Kate Black, a new student representative alongside Natayla Ly. The representatives reported current trends and events occurring at the high school during the start of the new year.

Ms. Shine discussed how summer programming went for the department and the onboarding of new staff. Grace Burnham joined the team as a full-time clinician, along with two graduate interns, Madelena DuBaldo and Yin Teng, both from Boston College School of Social Work. The interns will complete their supervised clinical hours over the course of their academic year. Tony Serio, LCSW and Kristina Kozak, MSW, BCBA joined the department with Mr. Serio fulfilling the role of Outreach Clinician and Ms. Kozak fulfilling the role of Community Training Coordinator. Y&FS is excited to welcome all new staff to the team as they bring a wealth of experience and passion towards meeting the needs of the community.

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 61 active clients.
- We currently have 10 on our waitlist.
- We have provided 19 Parent/Community consultations.
- We have had 3 emergency consults this month.

PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES

- Summer and Fall Programming –
 - **Parent Support Group/Coffee Talk** – Y&FS has continued to host a drop-in group for parents and caregivers to be able to get support from a clinician and peers. A group was held on July 17th, 2024 and four more dates have been added to the fall schedule which will center around specific topics: “Back to School Butterflies”, “Children Love Language”, “Healthy Living”, and “Chat ‘n Chill”. Groups will be held in the morning on the third Wednesday of each month from September to December. So far we have had 4 families participate.
 - **Drop-in Art Group** – Staff ran a drop-in art club for students in grades 3-8 to have a casual space for artmaking in any way they choose. This was a space intended for students to be creative, de-stress, and build new peer connections. Staff hosted a handful of sessions in Town Hall and also at one of the local apartment complexes to connect with families there. Staff hope to continue this drop-in style for the future.
 - **Volunteers Around Needham** – Volunteers Around Needham provides an opportunity for students in grades 7-12 to participate in single-day service projects in the community. There were 7 sessions throughout the month of July and a total of 74 students volunteered at Circle of Hope, Temple Beth Shalom, Needham Fire Station, Needham Community Council, and Needham Parks and Forestry. Students receive community service credit for their participation that counts towards their requirements for graduation.
 - **6th Grade Workshop** – Staff hosted a 3-hour workshop for 6th graders on July 24th, 2024 to focus on building confidence and social skills as they rise to middle school through interactive games and team-building activities. Students learned communication skills through name games and wrote a letter to their future selves which staff will mail to them at the end of the school year. We had 7 participants for the first session and staff have two more workshops planned for the half-day on Wednesday, September 18 and a Saturday option on October 26.
 - **Social Skills Groups** – Staff have solidified dates and are planning for social skills groups for youth in elementary school, offering “Giggles, Games, and Friendships” for grades 2-3 and “Candid Conversations” for grades 4-5 throughout the months of September to December. Both of these groups will work on social skills, affect management, and coping strategies while building on peer connection.
 - **Community Connections Office Hours** – Mr. Serio and Ms. Kozak have established office hours to strategically place themselves in the community to offer on-the-spot case management, referrals, and check-ins with community members. Additionally, both staff will administer surveys to persons served in

order to track and assess the needs of the community on an ongoing basis. At this time, Community Connection office hours will be at the Needham Free Public Library on Tuesdays from 12pm - 4pm and Wednesdays from 10am - 2pm; and the Needham Community Council on Wednesdays from 4pm - 6pm and every other Saturday 10am - 12pm.

- **Coffee Talk for High Schoolers** – Coffee Talk is a drop-in group of high school students that will continue this school year. Topics will continue to include: peer pressure, homework stress, socialization, and NHS Cellphone policies. This past year the group had 10-14 students that attended on a regular basis and we hope to engage the same amount of students or more this year.
- **Lunch Groups** - Staff will run lunch groups at 4 of the elementary schools, Eliot, Sunita Williams, Newman and Broadmeadow during the academic year. Each group will have between 5-8 students in each and students will have been identified and referred to the group by school guidance staff. These groups are designed to provide a supportive and engaging environment for students, fostering social skills and friendships.

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:

Needham Youth & Family Services is awaiting to receive data from the 2023 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey once this data is made available to the public.

- 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

FURTHER PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES:

Cuerd@s- staff are working with a local non-profit, Cuerd@s, to host a parent workshop. Cuerd@s is an organization that teaches embroidery to groups to create tactile patches for sensory seeking people to use on their everyday clothing. This workshop will be a space for parents to make clothing for their children while processing the stressors or parents and share strategies.

SHOP (Students Helping Older People) – SHOP is an intergenerational program where we pair students with older adults to make connections and help with grocery shopping. This need started as a response to the post-pandemic challenges faced by the older community in public but the need continues to prevail. This program will give students an opportunity to volunteer directly within the community in addition to connecting with the older population, 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 as well.

Mindful Community Lecture Services – Talking About Mental Health. 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. The committee is actively researching and contacting various speakers in an effort to meet the most pressing needs of families in our community. Currently, we have two presentations scheduled for the fall.

On October 24th at the Center at the Heights, Ms. Elizabeth Warner, a founding member of the SMARTmoves treatment modality and seasoned clinician will be presenting information and techniques related to how caregivers can help their children manage themselves during times of dysregulation. Ms. Warner has extensive knowledge of helping kids regulate themselves utilizing her full body multi-sensory modality of SMARTmoves. We are also hoping to have 2-3 small group discussions with caregivers who are interested to help them reinforce the techniques discussed and answer any questions that arise from utilizing the various techniques and strategies discussed in the presentation.

On November 7th in Powers Hall, Deborah Kris will present on helping parents of children create and teach an emotional vocabulary to their children in an effort to establish kindness as an underlying principle of their behavior. Ms. Kris is a parent educator, educational journalist, children's book author and founder of Parenthood 365 and she has presented to thousands of parents across the country. She has written about education for NPR's Mindshift and has helped create a soon to be launched PBS series.

Peer Tutor – This program pairs high school students in grades 10-12 with younger students in grades 3-8 in need of academic support and mentoring after-school. This program is an opportunity for high school students to receive their 30 hours of community service, completing half of their requirement for graduation in one academic year. This year's Peer Tutor Program is underway with registration open and staff preparing for the application and interview process. Staff plan to have 16 tutors and 16 tutees meeting at the Needham Free Public Library. There is also an option for tutors to attend the Extended Day Program at Eliot Elementary. The program will run from October 2024 to April 2025.

VIP Peer Mentoring Program - This program pairs high school students with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to offer a weekly space to offer a social space, a space to play games, and peer mentoring. The 2024-2025 program is underway and Ms. Whirley and Ms. Weitzel have begun the application and interview process for participants. Staff plan to host 20 pairs of Bigs and Littles. It continues to be a positive experience for the mentor-mentee pairs and to see the development of some wonderful peer mentoring relationships. This year staff also have some "big" floaters to help make sure the "littles" can still participate when a "big" missed a meeting.

As part of **Volunteers Around Needham**, Youth & Family Services has also started a new volunteer relationship with Newbridge on the Charles. Staff have helped to offer multiple sessions for students to get connected to this organization. At these events, our volunteers learned about Newbridge on the Charles and services that are offered. The goal is to give Needham High School students an opportunity to earn 30 plus hours and have flexibility with their schedules. The next orientation is scheduled for September 25th.



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 have trained all big groups of staff at the Needham Housing Authority and the Needham Community Council. Thank you to the Needham Community Council for sponsoring these trainings. 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 have completed training the entire 10th grade and plan to continue the work next school year.

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, Mrs. Whirley and Mrs. 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.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

Jog for Joy- Highrock Church Metrowest is hosting their annual Jog for Joy. The Jog for Joy is an annual 5k which started in 2019. The fun run is in support of mental health resources for the community and build awareness around mental health, decreasing stigma. A portion of the proceeds continues to support Youth & Family Services. This run was hosted on June 9th at 10AM.

Staff have partnered with the **Charles River YMCA** to provide scholarships to youth to attend YMCA sleepaway camps in New Hampshire throughout the summer months, for families who have limited financial means. All youth reported having a significantly positive experience, most having never attended camp before, and expressed a desire to return next summer. Staff will continue to work with the YMCA to make this a reality for youth in the community.

International Overdose Awareness Day - Youth & Family Services joined a group last year dedicated to planning and implementing the Annual International Overdose Awareness Day and continued the collaboration again this year. The 3rd Annual vigil occurred on Thursday August 29th with the annual flag display commemorating those affected by overdose. Y&FS

was able to coordinate two student volunteers to assist with the flag display in front of Memorial Park.

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 occurred March 12th and staff will continue to be involved in this initiative.

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.

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. Director, Sara Shine, was part of a SPAN community event titled "Edibles, Vapes & Spiked Seltzers: Tips for talking with your teens about drugs & alcohol in today's world." The event hosted Dr. Safdar Medina as he spoke about tips for talking with teens about drugs and alcohol, followed by a panel with Pollard Middle School Principal, Tamatha Bibbo, Sara Shine and a SALSA student.

Narcan Administration - 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 municipal **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. Two breakout groups have recently formed with municipal staff, one for case management and prevention and another for clinical consultation, and these groups meet monthly. Towns are coordinating when to host the next All-Staff Meeting.

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.

Staff Trainings

Youth & Family Services staff, Christine Weitzel, developed and implemented a training for staff at the Needham Public Library around mental health, recognizing signs and symptoms, and self-care. This program was a huge success. Ms. Weitzel presented to the Town of Needham Leadership Team on June 20th to discuss similar topics but and included a piece about managing others who may be experiencing mental health challenges or crises.

Two clinical staff members are registered to attend Playmaker University hosted by Life is Good in October of this year. This training is a two day in-person training in Beverly, MA. "Life

is good Playmakers is national movement, started in 1989, to heal and strengthen children – especially those whose lives have been deeply impacted by trauma.” Playmakers Life is Good Training is a program that focuses on enhancing both physical and mental well-being through running and walking. It is designed to promote a positive mindset, personal growth, and community engagement. The training usually involves structured workouts, group sessions, and motivational elements, all aimed at helping participants improve their fitness levels while fostering a "Life is Good" philosophy. This philosophy emphasizes optimism, gratitude, and resilience, encouraging participants to find joy and purpose in their physical activities and daily lives.

Staff are also registered to attend a DBT training through the Boston Child Study Center in September. This immersive, introductory in-person four-day workshop in Boston will introduce clinicians to the foundational principles and techniques essential to provide Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to fidelity with an emphasis on working with adolescents and families. This will provide our clinical staff with further professional development to deliver the utmost quality of care to our families.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

Staffing Update: The two new positions funded by money from Children’s Hospital have been filled. Youth & Family Services is excited to welcome Anthony Serio as the Outreach Clinician and Kristina Kozak as the Community Training Coordinator. Both new employees started in June. We also have Grace Burnham joining the team as a full-time clinician in September. In addition, we have two graduate-level interns beginning in the fall.

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 Resource Guide: A resource guide has been established, both in electronic and in paper form for the community to be aware of different resources and trainings that are available in Needham and surrounding communities. The following topics are explored: neurodiversity, disabilities, special education, school avoidance, mental health support, LGBTQIA+, substance use, domestic and/or interpersonal violence, suicide and self-harm, basic needs, eating disorders, and bullying. In each section, there is information about the topic, available trainings by the Department of Youth and Family Services, and available resources that take referrals.

Curriculum: As part of the new community training coordinator position, Ms. Kozak has been establishing new short-term curricula that are available for families in need. A restorative justice training is being established as a program for students who have bullied others. This 6-session course is designed to explore relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration and how they impact bullying. A school avoidance training is being established. This will be a short-term program that occurs in-home and include counseling and parent training to increase a child’s willingness to attend school.

A de-escalation program is also being established. This will be a short-term program to teach family members how to de-escalate a dysregulated family member. This program can occur in-home or at any private site.

Youth & Family Services’ budget for FY25 has been approved by the finance committee and Town Meeting. There is a modest request for increased funds for expenditure in addition to keeping the FT ARPA funded position, moving this position to the operating budget.

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. Most recently the Needham Community Council has donated \$5,000 and we continue to receive donations and support from residents towards this fund.

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 – HHS is working on the contract for FY25. 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.

Staff 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 751
Instagram: 640 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices
NotifyMe (Listserv): 1139 signed-up

Proposed schedule for FY 2025:

Wednesday, September 11th	Town Hall
Wednesday, October 9 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, November 13 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, December 11 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, January 8 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, February 12 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, March 12 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, April 9 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, May 14 th	Center at the Heights
Wednesday, June 11 th	Town Hall

Ms. Gallardo made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Black seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:30pm.

Notes Written By: Alyssa Cellucci
Reviewed By: Sara Shine, Director