

Needham Youth & Family Services

Notes from February 12th, 2025 Board Meeting

Meeting commenced at 5:30pm in person and over Zoom in the Highland Room of Needham Town Hall.

Board in Attendance: Julie Stevens, Susan Patkin, Massiel Gallardo, Joe Brienze, Karen Mullen, Natalia Ly, Kate Black

Staff in Attendance: Alyssa Cellucci; Hannah Stein, LICSW; Ellen Whirley, LCSW; Christine Weitzel, LCSW; Kristina Kozak, MSW BCBA; Tony Serio, LCSW; Grace Burnham, Maddie DuBaldo

Director: Sara Shine, LICSW

Minutes from January 8th, 2025: Ms. Gallardo made a motion to approve the January 8th minutes. Mr. Brienze seconded. The January 8th minutes unanimously approved by voice vote.

NEW AND OLD BUSINESS

Throughout the month of February, Youth & Family Services staff continued to monitor the needs of the community as the school year continues have seen an increase in referrals for clinical services as well as inquiries about programs for youth and parents. Staff are monitoring the department's waitlist for services and have started seeing new clients for both individual and family work and have been able to offer some in-home consultation services. Referrals for groups and other YFS programs continue and staff are gearing up for events planned in the spring.

Members of YFS staff attended this month's board meeting to share program updates and general caseload updates. New programs have included: a Parent Coffee Talk in March focusing on how parents can navigate technology use and setting limits; a workshop for supporting the transition into kindergarten; a grief group for middle schoolers who have recently lost someone close to them; and a "street smarts" group to focus on teamwork skills and supporting youth in navigating the community safely.

Staff discussed general updates on their caseloads and taking on new clients for individual counseling, family counseling, parent consultations, and some in-home supports.

- Grace Burnham discussed taking on a number of new clients for individual counseling and facilitating a parent-child divorce group with her focus on the children's workshop.

- Ellen Whirley discussed the ongoing social skills groups for elementary students and supporting the families that are registering their children for groups, as well as her work with the YMCA to secure camp scholarships and supplies for youth to be able to attend summer camp.
- Christine Weitzel discussed the Mindful Community speaker series and the upcoming event with child development expert and author Deborah Farmer Kris on March 5th discussing “Emotions 101: Helping Your Child Name and Navigate Emotions”, which will take place at the Broadmeadow Elementary Performance Center from 6:30-8pm. This event is free and open to the public as part of the Mindful Community collaboration with YFS, the Needham Community Council and the Becca Schmill Foundation.
- Hannah Stein discussed taking on new clients for individual counseling as well as the ongoing family playgroup in partnership with Family ACCESS and the current session offered at the Charles River YMCA, along with the lunch group at Newman Elementary. Hannah has also been providing in-home support for families.
- Kristina Kozak discussed her ongoing office hours in the community and facilitating a Caring for the Caregivers group to support adults caring for youth with mental health challenges. She has also attended school leadership meetings and helped to facilitate Conversations with Your Middle Schooler with SPAN (Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham). The student-led group SALSA (Students Advocating for Life Without Substance Abuse) will be providing Narcan training for students.
- Tony Serio discussed his ongoing office hours in the community along with his drop-in teen and youth group held at the Needham Free Public Library on Mondays after school. He has been preparing for Volunteers Around Needham days coming up over February school break with Circle of Hope and Temple Beth Shalom. These programs have consistently filled to capacity. He is also planning to host a Job and Volunteer Expo for teens in March to offer networking, resume-building, and interview preparation for employment.
- Alyssa Cellucci discussed providing general administrative support for programming and facilitation of some groups, along with preparation for implementing Teen Mental Health First Aid at the high school. She is also preparing the Needham Unplugged Calendar for March to offer families activities and local events that don't require the use of electronics and support person-to-person interactions.

Staff also discussed the 2025 Forde Award Ceremony on January 27th recognizing Needham resident James Murphy, who has been a Scoutmaster and leader of Scouts BSA Troop 13 in Needham since 2011. James has made impressive contributions over many years to the lives of young people and their families in the community. The ceremony was very well-attended with over 50 attendees including a number of youth from various troops who have made a connection with Mr. Murphy as a mentor over the years. A full write-up of Mr. Murphy can be found as an addendum on page 16 of this document.

CLINICAL SERVICES

Youth & Family Services provides individual and family therapy for residents and the department has 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 69 active clients.
- We currently have 6 on our waitlist.
- We have provided 11 Parent/Community consultations.
- We have had 3 emergency consults this month.

Programming –

- **Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award** – The Forde Good Person Memorial Award recognizes an adult in the Needham community who has significantly contributed to the lives of youth and their families through their volunteer work, in memory of Needham residents Patrick and Patricia Forde who dedicated their lives to supporting youth and their wellbeing. Each year there is a public award ceremony in January to honor the recipient. This year on January 27th, the award was given to James Murphy, a Scoutmaster and leader of BSA Troop 13 in Needham since 2011. The public ceremony had over 50 people in attendance to celebrate Mr. Murphy's contributions. A write-up of Mr. Murphy and his volunteer work is listed on page 15 of this document.
- **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. Four dates were planned for the fall 2024 schedule which centered around specific topics: "Back to School Butterflies", "Children Love Language", "Healthy Living", and "Chat 'n Chill". Groups were held in the morning on the third Wednesday of each month from September to December. 6 families participated and staff are working on the logistics of offering these open office hours on a continuous basis for the community to utilize. Staff have planned another session on Wednesday, March 5 and March 19 discussing the use of technology and how parents can set limits as part of the Unplugged campaign.
- **Caring for the Caregiver Support Group** – Staff have facilitated a lunch group for caregiver support at the Chambers St. Community Room and at the Captain Robert Cooke Drive Community Room. The group is being transitioned to a later time in the day to accommodate parents. Group runs on the first Monday of every month from 4-5pm. Hannah Stein and Kristina Kozak facilitated an afternoon group caregiver support group on February 3rd at the Chambers St. Community Room and at the Captain Robert Cook Drive Community Room.
- **Volunteers Around Needham, NewBridge on the Charles** – Volunteers Around Needham provides an opportunity for students in grades 7-12 to participate in single-day service projects in the community. Staff have been

closely working with NewBridge on the Charles in Dedham, a senior living facility, to help high school students connect with the volunteer program and earn hours towards their graduation requirement, while making meaningful intergenerational connections. Staff are in the midst of planning volunteer days for February school break.

- **6th Grade Workshop** – Following the success of the workshop hosted on September 18th, staff are in the process of planning another half-day workshop to offer in the new year to focus on building confidence and social skills as students rise to middle school through interactive games and team-building activities. Students learn communication skills through name games and write a letter to their future selves which staff will mail to them at the end of the school year.
- **Social Skills Groups** – Staff have offered ongoing social skills groups to promote communication skills, affect management, and coping strategies while building on peer connections in elementary and middle school students. The last two sessions of the 2nd-3rd grade group met with 7 participants in each cycle. The November-December series of the 4-5th grade group had 5 participants. Staff have continuously updated the group curriculum for new members and added new activities each session. New cycles are planned and registration is opened for March and April.
- **Family Night** – Y&FS hosted another Family Night on December 12th at the Center at the Heights from 5:30-7pm. The purpose of this event is to help families connect with each other and the Y&FS staff through dinner, games, arts and crafts, and cookie decorating. Staff also added a photobooth which families enjoyed. The event was very successful and maxed out at 70 attendees with a waitlist. Staff are planning to host another Family Night later in the spring.
- **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.
- In the month of February, at Needham Free Public Library on Tuesdays from 12pm - 4pm and Wednesdays from 10am – 2pm:
 - 2 patrons made contact. Program information was shared, and case management services were provided.
- In the month of February, at Needham Community Council, a Community Connections table was set up on February 5th, February 8th, February 26th, for a total of 5 hours:
 - 2 patrons made contact. Program information was shared, and case management services were provided
- In the month of February, a Community Connections table was set up at Jr. Celtics on February 1st and February 8th at Sunita Williams Elementary School and Pollard Middle School. Many families interacted with Youth and Family Service staff.

In addition, Kristina has been providing weekly in-home support to facilitate parent training for families who require more intensive needs.

Mr. Serio has continued with case management services including financial assistance, LGBTQIA+ support, immigration information, and accessing other mental health services.

Since the start of the new year, connections were established at Needham Housing Authority and Needham Charles River YMCA. Staff are planning to offer Community Connections hours in these locations.

- **Drop-in Teen and Youth Groups** – Staff are offering weekly drop-in style groups for teens and adolescents that offer a free opportunity to congregate and develop healthy relationships, while having snack and learning about mental health and wellness related information through fun activities.
- Mr. Serio has offered a weekly Drop-in Teen group in the Community Room of Needham Free Public Library. The group has had up to 20 students in attendance each week with themes varying from expanding their emotional vocabulary, practicing mindful meditation, and practicing various DBT activities like opposite action to cope with emotional distress. In February, the teen group met on 2/3, with 16 participants, on 2/10 with 8 participants, and plan to meet on 2/23. The themes for this month included lessons about heart health and developing wellness routines, assertiveness and improving interpersonal effectiveness, and overcoming obstacles through self-determination and self-discipline.
- Tony Serio and Kristina Kozak facilitated a Drop-In Youth group weekly: 3-4pm at the Chambers Street Community Room, and from 4pm-5pm at the Captain Robert Cook Community Room. This group is a free drop-in opportunity for students to congregate and develop healthy relationships, while having snack and learning about mental health and wellness related topics through fun interactive activities. Since the onset on February 4th, 4 youth have participated in the program.
- **Lunch Groups** – Lunch groups continue to be successful. Staff are running lunch groups at 3 of the elementary schools: Sunita Williams, Newman and Broadmeadow during the academic year and are coordinating with other schools to offer groups. Each group has 5-8 students who have been 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.
- **Family Playgroups** – Staff have been running a series of Family Playgroups in partnership with Family ACCESS Community Connections. Groups have been facilitated at the Needham Free Public Library and the Charles River YMCA. Family playgroups offer a space for new parents of young children to be part of a larger community, helping to make parents feel less alone amongst peers.

Caregivers and their babies ages 0-1 can spend one hour at the library for literacy tip, lap time, and time for adults to share the joys and challenges of parenting. So far we have had four families participate.

- **Diversion Program:** Mr. Serio and Ms. Kozak have continued working with Public Safety Officer, Katie McCullough, to offer Diversion program services to youth that have committed minor crimes. There are currently 5 open cases, with 2 new cases being referred to the program during the month of February.

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:

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. Ms. Stein hosted an orientation session for tutors and this year's program is already underway with tutor and tutee pairs meeting at the Needham Free Public Library, as we coordinate adding another 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 for socialization, a space to play games, and peer mentoring. The 2024-2025 program is underway with 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. Staff held an orientation training for the BIGS on October 8th where participants reviewed guidelines of the program. The first session of VIP was held on October 22nd at 6:30pm and staff and participants are very excited to kick off another year. At this time, staff are also gathering information about peer mentoring programs run by other municipalities and organizations for insight into other possible structures of mentor programs. Staff are considering the possibility of running a peer mentor program for rising 9th graders and older students.

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. We currently have 6 students signed up to volunteer.

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. Upcoming events include:

March 5th, 2025 at Broadmeadow Elementary School: "Emotions 101" with Deborah Farmer Kris. Deborah will provide practical advice for parents supporting children in building emotional awareness, social competency, and resilience.

April 2nd, 2025 in Powers Hall: "Essential Parenting Conversations" with Michelle Icard who will be presenting to school guidance and special education liaison staff during professional

development and host the presentation for parents that evening. Staff recently met with the guidance department and representatives from Mindful Community to review the plans to present the training.

On **January 16th, 2025** the department partnered with St. Joseph School to premiere the documentary “Screenagers”, an award-winning film that probes into the vulnerable corners of family life and depicts messy struggles over social media, video games, and academics.” The film offers solutions on how we can help our kids navigate the digital world. There were over 40 people in attendance and staff facilitated group discussion after the film. Surveys were conducted and had overwhelmingly positive feedback.

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 are in the midst of planning for February break – two locations have been secured, one at Circle of Hope and one at Temple Beth Shalom.

Cuerd@s- Staff are collaborating with a local non-profit, Cued@s, to host a parent and teen workshop. Cued@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.



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. 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. The Needham Resiliency Network is now in the process of being trained. There has been a huge increase in interest in this training. In addition, the department now has a total of 6 staff who 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. Staff trained the 10th graders at Needham High School last year and are in the process of planning this again this 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.

Staff will begin implementing tMHFA at Needham High School to the sophomore classes on March 12th, 2025 and continue through mid-April. There are 5 staff members from YFS who are scheduled to train students.

Additionally, staff are currently being trained to offer **Adult Mental Health First Aid** to the community. Ms. Kozak was trained on Adult Mental Health First Aid on October 29th, 2024. This will allow the department to implement this training more broadly across the community to make sure all needs can be effectively met.

Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) training— 2 staff members, Mrs. Whirley and Mrs. Weitzel, completed QPR training and 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 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. We have shared those lists with multiple residents who have reached out especially as the winter months approach for snow shoveling services.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

Pollard Middle School Student Appreciation Day - Mr. Serio and Social Work Intern, Yin Teng, presented at for Student Teacher Appreciation Day on October 23rd. During these workshops, staff informed over 80 Pollard students about programs offered by Needham Youth Services, including the Volunteers Around Needham (VAN) program. Students then completed appreciation cards for each of the VAN community partner agencies.

Staff have attended several meetings to discuss services and community-based initiatives. Included in these meetings are the public-school Superintendent Leadership Meeting, the PTC presidents' meetings, a leadership meeting at Pollard Middle School and a PTC meeting at

Broadmeadow.

Needham Harvest Fair – Youth & Family Services hosted a table at this year's Harvest Fair on Greene's Field in Needham on Sunday, September 29th. Staff were able to make connections with residents and members of the community to discuss programming and clinical services. This year the department's "swag" and goodies seemed to be popular with the young people, including sensory fidgets and textured mindfulness stickers as well as a temporary "tattoo" station.

Jog for Joy- Highrock Church Metrowest hosts 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.

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. Mrs. Shine has also joined the School Wellness Advisory Committee, facilitated by Needham Public Schools. This committee is working on guidance specific to cell phone use. Recommendations to the School Committee will likely emerge from this group.

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 title "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. Staff have also helped to facilitate "Conversations with Your Middle Schooler" with SPAN to offer parents a space to discuss how to navigate conversations around substance youth with their children.

Additionally through a partnership with SPAN, Ms. Kozak and Mr. Serio facilitated the second of a 3-part workshop series, "Conversations with Your Middle Schoolers", based on SAMHSA framework that helps prepare and connect parents with others regarding discussions with their children about substance use on February 11th, 10 parents participated in the workshop and discussion.

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 or want to be trained for their own general knowledge. Narcan is a life-saving measure that works to reverse symptoms of overdose including respiratory distress 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's work around domestic violence. In addition, staff have joined a DVAC sub-committee that is working on a cable channel series to be aired in October 2024 for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is a 6-part series and staff will be participating in the episode exploring Healthy Relationships. Ms. Kozak will participate in "Take Back the Night" to help support the Take Back the Night Club at Needham High School. This event will take place on February 6th, 6pm-8pm.

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 other community leaders.

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. Needham will host the next All-Staff meeting on March 11th, 2025 in Powers Hall.

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 TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Staff members are continuing to work on Post-Graduate Certificate in Advanced Clinical Practice for Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) through trainings at Boston College School of Social Work. The Certificate in Advanced Clinical Practice for Children, Youth, and Families provides a deep exploration of theoretical perspectives of attachment, trauma informed care, and neuroscience, as they relate to the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of these groups.

Recently, Mr. Serio attended the Baker Center Child Mental Health Forum on February 5th, and is registered to attend the BIDMC Needham Community Listening Session on February 25th.

Ms. Shine, Ms. Kozak, and Mr. Serio participated in 4 professional development opportunities to discuss YFS current programming. On February 3rd they met with the PTC presidents. On February 4th they met with the Broadmeadow PTC and the Pollard Middle

School guidance staff, and on February 25th, plan to meet with NHS guidance staff.

De-escalation, Diffusion and Self-Care for Library Staff: Christine Weitzel and Kristina Kozak participated in the Needham Public Library's professional development day to present techniques on how to de-escalate and diffuse difficult situations and then how to engage in self-care. The presentation included whole-group techniques, and then small group break out scenarios and ended with meditation. The presentation lasted 90 minutes and was presented to approximately 30 staff members.

On September 12th, Christine Weitzel attended a training titled "Trauma Informed De-Escalation: Calming the "I" of the Storm that was hosted by the MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services & AdCare Educational Institute.

Playmaker University: Two clinical staff members attended 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.

Mr. Serio attended an in-person **DBT** training through the Boston Child Study Center in September 2024. This immersive, introductory in-person four-day workshop introduced 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, providing our clinical staff with further professional development to deliver the utmost quality of care to our families.

Mr. Serio was trained as an instructor for teen Mental Health First Aid on December 10-12th.

Ms. Kozak was trained to be certified in Mental Health First Aid and trained as an instructor for Teen Mental Health First Aid from November 12-14th. She also attended at Serv Safe Alcohol Instructor program from November 19-20th and was trained in "Supportive Parent of Anxious Childhood Emotion (SPACE) from November 24-25th.

Ms. Weitzel attended the Growing Up Mindful course, which involved practice and discussion of the best practices for teaching mindfulness to kids and teens. A few of the weekly themes included introductions to each other and mindful awareness, understanding the research and neuroscience behind mindfulness, how to get kids engaged and willing to buy in to practice, the adaptation of mindfulness to specific populations and various diagnostic disorders or symptoms, and the importance of one's own practice of mindfulness and understanding its role in treatment.

Ms. Weitzel also attended a webinar on January 21st entitled “Clinical Instincts: The Art and Science of Listening to Your Gut”, sponsored by the Children’s Mental Health Resource Center.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

Staffing Update: The two new positions funded by money from Children’s Hospital have been filled. Youth & Family Services has welcomed Anthony Serio as the Community Outreach Clinician and Kristina Kozak as the Community Training Coordinator. Both new employees started in June 2024. We also had Grace Burnham join the team as a full-time clinician in September. In addition, we have two graduate-level interns, Maddie DuBaldo and Yin Teng from Boston College School of Social Work. Staff are in the process of securing interns for next year.

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 support 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:

Our 6-session restorative justice course is designed to explore relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration and how they impact bullying. In the month of February 1 client has been participating in this program in-home.

Our short-term school avoidance program occurs in-home and includes counseling and parent training to increase a child’s willingness to attend school. No referrals were made for this particular program this month.

Our short-term de-escalation program teaches family members how to de-escalate a dysregulated family member. This program can occur in-home or at any private site. In the month of February, 1 family has been referred to this program.

IDecide, a substance use curriculum is used as a short-term program to assist youth who are using substances. During the month of February, 1 client was referred to this program.

Through a partnership with SPAN, Ms. Kozak and Mr. Serio facilitated the first of a 3-part

workshop series “Conversations with Your Middle Schoolers”, based on SAMHSA framework that helps prepare and connect parents with others regarding discussions with their children about substance use on January 14th. 10 parents participated in the discussion. The upcoming dates are February 11 and March 11.

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: Town of Needham Youth & Family Services 766 Followers
Instagram: 653 Followers @NeedhamYouthServices
NotifyMe (Listserv): 1128 signed-up

Proposed schedule for FY 2025:

Wednesday, September 11 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, October 9 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, November 13 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, December 11 th meeting)	Town Hall (Voted to postpone to January
Wednesday, January 8 th	Town Hall
Wednesday, February 12th	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

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

**Notes written by: Alyssa Cellucci
Reviewed by: Sara Shine**

Addendum

**2025 Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award Recipient
*James Murphy***

James Murphy has been the Scoutmaster of Scouts BSA Troop 13 in Needham since 2011, providing exceptional leadership and mentorship to Scouts and their families. James first took on a leadership role in Newton after the unexpected passing of a previous Scoutmaster, when he and three friends decided to step up and lead that troop for the next 10 years. After starting a family and raising three kids in Needham, now fully grown adults, James became assistant Scoutmaster in 2009 after his oldest child joined the program and quickly ascended to Scoutmaster in 2011. James empowers youth with patient and supportive guidance, allowing them to independently tackle challenges and make decisions that foster teamwork and help Scouts develop essential life skills from planning meals to organizing campouts. Under his leadership, the troop has seen hundreds of youth benefit from opportunities for personal growth, with over 20 Scouts earning their Eagle Scout rank since 2011.

James's commitment is unwavering; he rarely misses an overnight trip and takes vacation time to attend week-long camps. His extensive knowledge of outdoor activities reassures parents who are encouraged to volunteer and become more involved. Through his efforts, many families have extended the camaraderie built into scouting into regular hiking and camping trips, further strengthening the bonds within the community. Beyond troop activities, James is deeply committed to giving back to the community, engaging Troop 13 in numerous service projects including food drives, Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies, and the creation of outdoor classroom spaces at local schools. James plays a key role in providing guidance to Eagle Scouts and their families on the logistics, finances, and planning of complex service initiatives. His influence extends far beyond the program, as he mentors Scouts and adults alike, instilling values of leadership, public service, and community involvement.

James is a model of the values that scouting strives to instill in its members. His nominators say his leadership is characterized by trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, and responsibility, all while he holds Scouts to the highest standards of achievement and conduct. He has navigated the troop through challenging times including the COVID-19 pandemic and even helped establish Needham's first female-linked Troop 13G, expanding scouting opportunities to more youth. His selfless dedication and positive impact on the lives of youth and the broader Needham community make him a well-deserving recipient of the Patrick and Patricia Forde Good Person Memorial Award.

On January 27th, 2025, a public award ceremony was held in Powers Hall in Needham Town Hall to honor Mr. Murphy. Over 50 people were in attendance including a number of Scouts and adults who have worked with Mr. Murphy over the years and consider him a mentor. Mr. Murphy's nominators spoke to the audience about their personal connections with him and the impact he has made on the lives of youth in Scouts and the greater community through his volunteering.