

**CITY OF NORWALK
YOUTH SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD
MARCH 6, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Candice MeyerCandace Mayer, Norwalk Housing Authority,
Betty Karkut, Human Services Council; Joseph Russo,
Norwalk Public Schools, Assistant Director of Special
Education;
Lt. Ashley Gonzales, Norwalk Police Department

STAFF: Linda Wilock, Youth Services Director;
Jasen Getner, Juvenile Review Board.

GUEST: Donald Thomas, Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Wilock called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and asked Ms. Meyer Mayer to act as chairman.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
September 20, 2011 and November 15, 2011

**** MS. MEYER Mayer MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF
SEPTEMBER 20, 2011 AND NOVEMBER 15, 2011 AS SUBMITTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Ms. Meyer Mayer asked to deviate from the order of the agenda, as follows:

ART Grant Update

Ms. Wilock stated that she was able to obtain an extension for the ART (Anger Replacement Therapy) program, which is a federal grant that goes along with the Gang Prevention grant. She added that there have been some hurdles such as the contact in Washington is not approving what was formerly agreed upon, but she is

working all this out.

Ms. Meyer Mayer asked if this could be piggy-backed with the Mayor's Summer Youth Program, and Ms. Wilock replied that she would check with Darlene Young, as this is something to think about. Lt. Gonzales suggested that it could be added as an additional week to the training program.

BUDGET

Ms. Wilock gave an overview of the budget and stated that grants already in place have enabled the funding of the part-time position providing a part time assistant to work with Mr. Getner, and they are lucky to have enough in the budget to cover through December. She added that there is a possibility of a Police/ sSchool grant to apply fund the part-time position, and she is hopeful for this.

She expressed concern that Mr. Getner's position has not been approved as a full-time departmentally funded position and this will be a catastrophe for the department. She added that if the position is not funded, this is a major setback, and asked members to assist with reaching out to suggested having former clients speak at public hearings on the subject. Ms. Karkut stated that while this is a good idea, it may be too far along in the process and suggested that a meeting with the mayor be set up to help in reinstating this program budget. Lt. Gonzalez stated that he would be happy to speak in favor of the program with anyone from the Board, and Ms. Karkut added that she would also be willing to speak accompany Lt. Gonzalez to the Mayor if he has time to meet with them. Ms. Meyer added that it is so cost effective and is actual a savings to the community have this position. She suggested that surveys should be included and Lt. Gonzalez replied that parent letters with their positive feedback are also good to include. Ms. Wilock added that the Mayor continues to be very committed to be an advocate for Youth Services and the Juvenile Review Board.

Ms. Wilock noted that she took the Board's advice, and it was a good idea to include statistics from the JRB with her presentation to the Finance Department, as they were receptive and asked non-threatening questions. She added that it helped to provide budget justification and statistics to document how the budget is spent, but that due to the lower cap approval, all budgets are subject to underfunding reductions.

JRB Update:

Mr. Getner stated that there was no report other than the challenges faced with the

budget situation. Ms. Meyer Mayer added that it is a shame that in view of the outstanding job done by the JRB; this is the way the City responds.

Ms. Willock replied that the Finance Department's response is that City policy is one where formerly grant funded positions are not brought into the Department's regular budget.

Neighborhood Center at Ely

Mr. Donald Thomas introduced himself as Director of Community Services at NEON, and he gave an overview of the NEON programs and services that include the summer camp program, mentoring, tutoring and recreational programs for youth and counseling services, job development services, adult education, and family programs.

He stated that the programs funded by the Norwalk Youth Services are the Summer Camp and the after-school programs and he gave an overview of how the after-school programs are structured. He explained the enrollment and activities that go on that service 20 high school and middle school students from Roodner Court and Meadow Garden housing complexes. He stated that the case worker managers work with students in conjunction with the school guidance counselors and social workers. He stated that the staff all has college degrees and they work with volunteers who are retired educators that tutor the children.

He stated that the centers at 11 Ingalls Avenue along with South Main Street and Community Center at the Columbus Magnet School at Ely Avenue endeavor to provide activities and programs to facilitate positive development of the children, their families, and the community by providing educational, social, cultural and recreational programs. He read from their mission statement that we believe that every child can succeed in school and at work, and grow into well-rounded citizens who will have a positive impact on the community. We encourage the involvement of parents and community leaders to help motivate children to reach their fullest potential.

He then described programs that have been developed as off-shoots of Neon that include Kids Helping Kids and the Fatherhood Initiative Activities. He stated the programs include volunteering with elderly such as Meals on Wheels. He explained that the Kids Helping Kids is a leadership program, run by students, and they learn about local government and are required to perform community service hours.

Mr. Thomas stated that in addition to the youth programs. NEON has currently, a small fatherhood group of mentors who act as “surrogate” fathers to our client -population as a result of the present economic conditions, particularly those related to work, education, and family that places more stress on the relationships between themselves and their children. He added that 99% of these youth have no father, and the program provides positive adult male relationship for these youth to identify with. Specific fathermentor-child events and activities are ongoing and being implemented, and there will be at least two events related to literacy-skill development for fathers, and at least to events related to employment readiness. He stated that he hopes to include college visits and tours and is working on small grant and fundraisers to assist with the expenses of going to U-Conn Stamford or West Conn in Danbury.

For the Summer Camps he gave an overview of the program where there are approximately 125 kids at each location and daily events include not only creative playground games but literacy. He described this year’s theme is Super Heroes in Literacy that encourages reading and programs that help youth to identify with the superheroes in their lives as those they can look up to and aspire.

He explained the involvement through the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment initiative, and in-house programs, that NEON has sponsored close to 45 summer youth employment opportunities during the past several summers . He explained that returning camp participants are given first chance and the pay cost is \$200 for the first child of the family and \$95 for each additional child, which averages out to \$11 per day. Ms. Wilock asked if they have more applications that available jobsslots, and he replied yes.

Mr. Thomas reviewed the entrepreneurial activities are designed to assist in developing training work sites for NEON clients and for assisting low-income individuals to develop employment skills to move toward self-sufficiency. He described that they have a Thrift Store at NEON that also functions as a work experience site with internships and part time employment.

He then fielded questions from the members, and Ms. Meyer Mayer asked about the case workers and how the mix of students is determined. Mr. Thomas replied that the program director, coordinator and assistants serve as the case managers and he referred to the budget sheet provided by Ms. Wilock.

Mr. Getner asked if any teens were included in the Summer Camp and Mr. Thomas

replied no, that the program is currently set up for youth ages 8-12. Mr. Thomas added that they are working on mentoring programs and he collaborates with Reverend Dancy with the New Canaan Youth Center.

Lt. Gonzales asked how the group is identified and Mr. Thomas explained that the students are referred by the schools and they service 10 high school –9 girls and 1 boys and middle school students –7 boys and 3 girls which is an interesting mix. He stated that some are eager to learn and are ready for the homework help, while others need to work through anger management issues. He described the case worker managers identify students working in conjunction with the school guidance counselors and social workers.

Ms. Wilock suggested stressed the importance of having that background checks be done as part of the volunteer process, and Ms. Karkut stated that she can assist with information and that the \$36 cost is well worth the potential of a future liability.

Ms. Meyer Mayer stated that the Housing Authority offers scholarships and suggested that Mr. Thomas distribute the applications to eligible students. Mr. Russo asked if students with disabilities are included in any of the programs, and Mr. Thomas replied no. Ms. Meyer Mayer added that colleges have offices for students with disabilities and information can be obtained with the signed disclosures on the services that are available.

Mr. Thomas thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak on the programs and added that left his contact information, and stated that he is always available to answer questions as needed, and he invited members to visit one of the centers.

Norwalk Housing Authority Truancy Policy

Ms. Meyer Mayer stated that in line with K-8 mandatory school attendance, they have instituted a policy that three unexcused absences require attendance in an after school program. She added that parents are also required to volunteer at the learning center, and attendance is good. She hopes that this policy works, as the alternative is eviction for non-compliance.

Mr. Getner asked if this was available for high school, as there are on-going truancy issues. Ms. Meyer Mayer replied that she will look into this for high school

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She added that perhaps there was a way to have this as an extension for middle
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school students for one year as part of a transition plan to remain in the program.

Update on Mayor's Summer Youth Employment

Ms. Wilock stated that she would give a report on Ms. Young's behalf, as she could not be here. She reported that Personnel has confirmed by e-mail that the application is posted on the City's website for positions for youth ages 14-18 and they are hoping to achieve the goal to have over 200 summer jobs for 2012. She added that they are working on the 501c3 designation, which should help with corporate sponsorships with more job opportunities.

Update on Mentoring Program - There was no report.

Other

Officer Gonzales stated that the Explorer's Program meets once a week on Mondays from 7-9 and they currently have between 20-25 students in the program. He added that they are looking at volunteer opportunities with the Oyster Festival and that program is a great addition to the needs of Norwalk's youth. Ms. Karkut replied that it is great to give the youth an activity to get involved in.

Mr. Getner Ms. Karkut stated that they are working with Mr. Hurwitz from Brien McMahon along with Representative Larry Cafero and the School Expulsion Board to establish a Liberation Program in conjunction with the School Based Health Centers to avoid expulsions. Ms. Karkut added that mandates do help and they are hoping for a good response to this program.

Ms. Wilock stated that the next meeting would be in mid-April, and Mr. Ms. Karkut suggested that the week of the April break is one that should be avoided, as it may affect attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox,
Telesco Secretarial Services