

**CITY OF NORWALK YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 3, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Shirley Sarkin, Acting Chairman; Anna Duleep; Candice Mayer;
Jessica Fogg; Betty Karkut; Tony Dadonna (4:25 p.m.)

STAFF: Linda Wilock, Director, Youth Services; Lisa Marshalko,
Youth Services Grant Coordinator

OTHER: Diane Cece

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Sarkin called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 14, 2008

**** MS. SARKIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 14, 2008.**
**** MS. KARKUT SECONDED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DEPARTMENT ISSUES

Ms. Wilock said due to the city's de-funding of her position, she has been offered an early retirement option that she has to decide upon by March 13, 2009. There has not been a decision as to whether she will be replaced by someone else in the department, but this has caused a tremendous disruption both for the department and for her personally.

Ms. Wilock then explained the details and background surrounding the defunding of her position. Recently there had been the transfer of one part time employee into a federal grant position. She went on to review the impact on the projects that she is managing and the implementation of grant programs that will suffer as a result.

The committee members expressed their disappointment at this situation and discussed the impact of losing her would have on the department. Ms. Sarkin mentioned that she had called the Mayor when she heard about the defunding to make him aware of how devastating and counterproductive this decision is to the mission of Youth Services. She is hopeful that after hearing her plea, that some alternative would be considered by the Common Council.

Ms. Sarkin said it was very important for the mayor and council members to be aware of what this department does, and that losing the Director would have such a negative impact on the many youth programs that the city has put in place. She suggested that other members should make calls or write letter to the editor as an attempt to change this decision. Ms. Wilock said that unfortunately there is not much time for a transition plan, since the retirement offer would go into effect April 5, 2009.

UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH GRANT

Ms. Marshalko, Project Coordinator with the Department of Youth Services presented the Children's Behavioral Health Planning Grant. The goal of the plan is to identify and address children's behavioral issues early on to prevent problems from escalating in the future. The two main components as identified by the CT Health Foundation are service delivery of prevention programs and early interventions. Most important is to create an integrated system of behavioral health services in the community at the public schools, housing provider agencies and within the municipality, dedicated to prevention and early intervention.

Mr. Dadonna arrived at 4:25 pm

Ms. Sarkin asked who would monitor and supervise this grant. Ms. Marshalko replied that there would be a core planning team from Family and Children's Agency, Norwalk Public Schools, Norwalk Housing Authority, Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance Services. The targeted outcome is a coordinated system of resources with integrated services designed to direct the child in a positive path with the focus of keeping the child from failing. Ms. Sarkin said the key question is who administers and manages this team; specifically whose role is it especially in view of the uncertainty of the department director position.

Ms. Marshalko reported that Wolfpit Elementary School has been selected as the location for the pilot or test program. Mr. Dadonna asked why Wolfpit and if the principal was made aware of this. Ms. Marshalko said that the diverse demographic profile along with the enthusiasm of their principal and social worker, were the primary factors in the school pilot location. Also, the stability of the staff at Wolfpit, compared to other schools that were in a state of flux, was another consideration. Ms. Sarkin said that building in a success factor for this type of program is key to successful implementation.

Ms. Karkut questioned if the services would be school based or agency based. Ms Marshalko listed that the services would include mentoring at schools, teaching positive peer-building strategies at school, support for families, enrichment activities tied to school academics, athletic activities, and monitoring the child's progress at school and home. Mr. Dadonna commented on the aspect of providing a connection with school to home, and that reaching out to the parents is such a key factor with programs like this.

Ms. Marshalko added that recent public law relative to Department of Education grants is a regulations will take place over the next decade where there will be a required shift of 10% from services such as mental health to prevention programs. She added that Norwalk is one of eleven cities competing for this grant: Stamford, Bridgeport, Milford, North Haven, Norwich, Waterbury, Hartford, Manchester, Enfield, and Derby. Our greatest asset is that the foundation recognizes Youth Services like ours, and our advantage is that Norwalk currently has more services already in place.

Report on Washington Meeting on Gang Prevention Coordination Grant

Ms. Wilock stated that she had just returned last week from this conference she had attended with Sgt. Gonzalez, Patrice Marsden-Kish, and Jasen Getner. It was a valuable opportunity to hear what was happening in other cities relative to programs, and they all came back full of ideas on how to put elements of the conference into applicable action items in Norwalk.

However, the very next day she received the news about her position, and as a result, the items have to be put on the back burner until the future of the department is determined. She hopes to have a comprehensive report at the next meeting on grants that may be available to help reach out to the community for gang prevention.

Other

Ms. Wilock reported that there will be training for the school-based mentor program. Susan Weinberger will do the training in two sessions, one morning and one evening. Just call Ms. Karkat for further information about Project Friendship.

Ms. Fogg asked for input on how to recruit student members for the committee. There are two youth members, but they do not regularly attend. Perhaps the committee should consider reaching out to school organizations such as the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon to get members. Also, the mayor's summer youth employment program or Outward Bound could be contingent upon community service requirement that may include membership in this committee.

Mr. Dadonna said that one problem is that students are already so busy with all the extra-curricular activities and athletics. He added that they need to reach out to youth organizations such as Neon or to ask school guidance counselors to identify those on a need basis rather than those who are already "high achievers". The committee should reach out to those students who could benefit from the experience of being involved with this committee and could have a potential benefit from services.

Future Meeting Dates

The next meeting will be Tuesday, April 7 at 4:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned by Ms. Sarkin at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox

Telesco Secretarial Services

