

**CITY OF NORWALK
NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
NOVEMBER 18, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Linda Wilock, Norwalk Youth Service Director; Mary Budrawich, NPS Early Childhood Specialist, Lauriston Avery, Five Mile River Nursery School; Evelyn Balamaci, Department of Social Services; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Museum; Cathy DeCesare, Coastal Fairfield County United Way; Barbara Fitzpatrick, the Star Rubino Center; Migdalia Garcia, Norwalk Community Health Department; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; George Hensinger, Community Representative; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority; Marie-Angie Nicolas, NCC Parent Representative; Betsy Perry, Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance; Lynn Sadlon, Fox Run Family Resource Center; Jeanne Taylor-Hard, Parent Representative

STAFF: Barbara Smart, NECC; Rosalie Witt, NECC

OTHERS: Eva Thorne, Norwalk Community Health Center; Maritza Druind, Norwalk Community Health Center; Nadine Mesy, NCC Student; Victoria Schilling, NHFC; Robert Raphael, NCC Student

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 2009 MINUTES

The following corrections were noted:

Page 3, under **COMMITTEE REPORTS**, first paragraph, line 1: please change the following from: “ that the Committee retreat was” to “that the Program Committee retreat was”

Page 3, under **COMMITTEE REPORTS**, second paragraph, line 1: please change the following from: “This year there will be a” to “For the second year, there will be a”

Page 4, paragraph 9, line 1: please change the following from: “met with Mr. Rowle about” to “met with Ms. Gerri Rowell about”

Page 5, under **DISCUSSION – The Year Ahead: Opportunity and Challenges**, line 3, please change the following from “signators that have requested before” to “signators that they have requested before”

Page 7, paragraph 2, line 1: please change the following from “that Janice Quindell had send out” to “that Janice Gruendel had sent out”

**** MR. LAW MOVED TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER MEETING MINUTES AS CORRECTED.**

**** MS. BUDRAWICH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

APPROVAL OF MAY MINUTES

The following correction was made:

Page 6, paragraph 5, line 5: please delete the following: “ From ages 2-5, it appears that been 76-79% of the population June 10th the main portion will be on a collaborative assessment that the Graustein Memorial Fund will present regarding where the Early Childhood Council is in terms of their program. An electronic document will be sent to all Council members. It is Other Updates.”

**** MS. GORDON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MAY MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**** MR. LAW SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

GOOD NEWS

Ms. Bain noted that there were several new faces in attendance and requested that everyone introduce themselves.

Ms. Wilock announced that the State of Connecticut was allowing the Council to transfer some unexpended funding from unused program slots. She then requested that the Council consider transferring these unexpended funds from their current account to the account for monitoring.

**** MS. BALAMACI MOVED TO ALLOW THE LIAISON TO ACCESS THE UNEXPENDED FUNDS FROM THE UNUSED PROGRAM SLOTS AND TO TRANSFER THEM TO THE MONITORING FUNDING ACCOUNT.**

**** MR. LAW SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

UPDATES – GRANTS

Quality Enhancement - Ms. Wilock said that a letter of awards arrived from Quality Enhancement arrived in time to pay the outstanding bills.

Graustein Grant – There has been a meeting to prepare for the next round of grants and to review the new set of grant requirements.

United Way Grant – Ms. Dices are said that the Coastal Fairfield United Way fund raising campaign is underway. A copy of the campaign brochure and mailer is available for those who may be interested. Education is one of the three keys areas for Coastal Fairfield United Way. She gave a brief run down on the various projects that United Way has and the various towns that are involved in the projects for the Council.

Ms. Bain then said that Child First application would be discussed first. She said that there were numerous people who attended a technical assistance session at Graustein Memorial facility.

Ms. Schilling said that a summary had been sent out yesterday about the Bridgeport Child First program for children who are at high risk from birth to age 6. A copy of a document titled “Request for NECC Support for a Collaborative Application to Participate in the Child FIRST Replication Project” was distributed to those present. Ms. Schilling said that the program is very successful and has been carefully studied. Dr. Darcy Lowell has been working for a long time to replicate the program around the State and has been successful in getting permission to do this. An application would be due December 11, 2009. Ms. Schilling then read the text of the document to the Council.

It was decided that Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance would be the sponsoring agency. There will be a meeting on November 24th to discuss the local partner funding matching requirement.

In order to run the program there are costs that are not included in the budget, such as administrative time for data collection, data reporting and staff recruitment.

Ms. Schilling said that the council would play a major role in this type of program

**** MS. SCHILLING THEN MOVED THAT THE NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL AUTHORIZE BETSY BAIN TO SIGN A LETTER SUPPORTING MFCGC’S APPLICATION TO REPLICATE THE CHILD FIRST PROGRAM IN NORWALK.**

**** MS. BAIN SECONDED.**

Ms. Sadlon asked if the public schools would be included because the program went up to age 6. She was told that this program would include kindergarten children in the public schools. Ms. Bain said that this was why it was important to have a collaborative. Ms. Budrawich commented that the current Norwalk Public School Health director was retiring in December and that she was looking forward to working with the new Health Director.

The discussion then moved to the matching fund amounts required. Ms. Bain said that Mr. Greenbaum had pointed out that it was very important to recognize the fact that there are costs associated with accepting the grant. Fairfield Child Guidance is a very good agency for being the lead agency because they can receive Medicaid funding. Mr. Hensinger asked if it was expected that the City would have a commitment to all three years. Ms. Schilling said that it was expected that Medicaid would contribute to the matching funds.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL AUTHORIZING BETSY BAIN TO SIGN A LETTER SUPPORTING MFCGC'S APPLICATION TO REPLICATE THE CHILD FIRST PROGRAM IN NORWALK PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Monitoring Update - Ms. Budrawich said that monitoring program was underway and that the conference on November 7th was a great success. Ms. Budrawich went on to describe the various aspects of the conference, including the emphasis on intentional teaching. This is the focus of the monitoring at this time. The monitors are assessing the various levels of all the aspects of intentional teaching of the various groups and to evaluate the need for technical assistance. This will be done with State permission. The State felt that this was an innovative idea for the program.

Discussion – Follow-up to Strategic Planning Session

Ms. Budrawich then distributed two items, "Notes of NECC Strategic Planning Session" and "NECC Strategic Planning Discussion" dated 11/18/09. Ms. Budrawich stressed that nothing was omitted from the summaries. She directed everyone's attention to page 4 of the NECC Strategic Planning Discussion where the Priorities for the next 5 years were listed. She then indicated that the priorities seem to fall in line with the goals for the Early Childhood Committee goals, which is Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Health and engaging the parents.

Ms. Budrawich said that she was looking for a consensus from the Council as to whether or not they felt the Council should continue to focus on these items. It is important to establish what the top priorities for the Council with the acknowledgment of the economic situation.

Ms. Bain spoke about the recent conference at Graustein and said that only Norwalk and Hartford actually had developed plans. Because priorities have to be chosen, there are number of factors that have to be considered in terms of resources, and criteria used to select these goals.

Dr. Grose asked if Ms. Wilock felt that she could manage her work load in light of the fact that she was now part time. Ms. Budrawich said that the answer to that question was not available right now. Ms. Bain suggested that the group decide what they wanted to do first and then figure out the support system. Ms. Wilock reminded everyone that budgets were being developed and grant applications were being submitted even as the group met.

Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the NECC Strategic Planning Discussion document with the council members. Ms. Budrawich said that the items that were listed under Next Steps and Sample TimeLine were just suggestions.

Ms. Sadlon said that it would be helpful to review the management structure and the paid staff.

There is an unpaid chair. There is a paid staff member for the Early Childhood Specialist position. Ms. Budrawich said that she would be leaving in June and that someone else would be filling the position, which is funded by the District. Ms. Wilock was full time Director of the Youth Services position. She then listed the various grants and areas that she oversees. Currently, Ms. Wilock said that she was now working 17 hours and is paid through the City Budget. Ms. Witt was hired through the Department in Sept. for a full time position. This position is partially paid through the City and the remaining portion comes from a variety of grants. Both Ms. Wilock's position and Ms. Witt's position will have to be submitted in the Youth Services budget. Ms. Smart's position is funding through the administrative portion of the School Readiness Administrative grant. The recent announcement indicated that there would be an increase for that section of the grant. Ms. Bain explained that the monitoring program was a contract and funded from a number of various accounts. Ms. Budrawich pointed out that Ms. Peniston, whose position was cut from the current budget, wrote a large number of grants and did a large amount of work towards this issue. Ms. Budrawich reminded everyone that the Council could write the best plan possible, but if there was no funding, nothing would get done. Ms. Budrawich said that there had been numerous conversations with the Interim Superintendent, the Mayor and other authorities about these issues.

The discussion then moved to possible funding sources and the history of how the Early Childhood Instructional Specialist budget developed.

Ms. Bain said that the current action plan was coming to an end and that she needed the sense of the Council. While she wanted to be open and inclusive of all thoughts and ideas, but reminded everyone that it would be important not to get tangled up in the details of the program. She then asked how to move the item forward properly while allowing for discussion of issues. Discussion then followed about the means of determining the strategy and the goals.

Regarding the capacity for the community, Ms. Budrawich said that it would be important to gather data and discuss the hypotheses that are being drawn. Ms. Sadlon expressed concerns about the cutting of preschool slots and also about the fact that the focus on why parents don't enroll their children in preschool was limited to low income families. She felt that it should include moderate income families also.

Ms. Balamaci said that she would like to have small writing teams working on the various aspects. Ms. Avery said it would be good to have a small committee to look at the overall plan. Rosalie then asked if the writing team could be identified. Ms. Hard asked if it could be a research team first and then evolve into the writing team.

Ms. Bain asked if the Council was comfortable with a small research/writing team that would bring a report back to the Council. Ms. Bain pointed out that the Council members had the information available and bringing a consultant in would be pointless because the Council would have to supply all the information.

Ms. Schilling said she had been on the previous writing team that it was an intensive task. Ms. Budrawich agreed. Ms. Avery pointed out that a major portion of the meeting on the 14th was devoted to developing the plan and that they were not starting with a blank page. Ms. Gordon asked about the updates for HUSKY providers. Ms. Schilling said that there was a new HUSKY provider in Norwalk since the last list was issued.

Ms. Budrawich suggested that a five year plan be done since it was a time intensive project. Ms. Sadlon suggested a tiered approach with priorities ranked as "A", "B" and so on.

Mr. Law said that he would be happy to serve on the writing team. He then asked for a definition of the term "low income" families. Ms. Budrawich directed him to where it was indicated in the plan. Mr. Law pointed out that flyers and other items don't work in terms of getting people out, but direct contact does.

Ms. Sadlon said that there were other factors to consider regarding quality care, because a family may not have a car, or be able to pay for the program, which would affect the choices that a family would make. Ms. Budrawich pointed out that the Council would have to decide which goals they would pursue. Mr. Law said that regarding preschool

programs, he was concerned that parents not be made to feel inadequate. Ms. Budrawich agreed.

Ms. Budrawich directed people's attention back to the Next Steps section of the memo and the sample timeline. She asked if the Council was ready to establish a writing team. Ms. Bain said that the invitation should go out to all the members of the Council saying that a small writing/research committee was being developed. Anyone who is interested could contact Ms. Bain and the Steering Committee.

Ms. Bain said that usually there is no meeting in December, so the conversations would be held via email.

OTHER UPDATES

Ms. Gordon said that she was aware that Stamford and Danbury DSS had a major increase in the number of families in need.

Ms. Avery said that Five Mile River Nursery will be sponsoring a discussion about "Little children, Big Questions" dealing with death and the afterlife.

Ms. Garcia said that there has been a major change in the HUSKY plan. All residents who have been in the U.S. less than five years were being terminated from the program. When the adults are removed from the program, their children will be moved from one tier of HUSKY to another one.

Ms. Sadlon said that because Family Resource Centers are part of the three strategies, their funding has been reduced.

Mr. Hensinger said that Mr. Duncan was present recently along with Dr. Jackie Jones for an Educational Forum in Middletown. He added that the "Raise to the Top" grant was released. It will be important to have a plan in place so that when opportunities

Ms. Bain announced that there was some good news – the Early Childhood Cabinet is being reformed and Ms. Ditrio has been appointed to the Cabinet by Rep. Cafero.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bain adjourned the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

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