

**YOUTH COMMISSION MINUTES
March 17, 2022**

Attendance:

Board Members: Joan Clementi (phone), Sandy Scott, Sherry Clark, Gretchen Bean and Gily Schneider-Nachum

Staff Members: June David-Fors, Director and Doreen Genna, Office Assistant

1. Call Meeting to Order: Motion Made by, Gily Schneider-Nachum, Seconded by Sherry Clark.
2. Date of Next Meeting: April 7, 2022
3. Review of Minutes: 06/17/2021, 10/21/2021, 02/08/2022 minutes to be reviewed at the next meeting.
4. Director's Report:

Follow-up discussion in regard to the February 8, 2021 visit from John Coderre, Town Administrator:

Board Members discussed the February 8, 2022, meeting with John Coderre, Town Administrator. The purpose of that meeting was to give Board Members the opportunity to meet John to follow up with questions, request for additional information and address concerns raised at the October 21, 2021 Meeting. More specifically, their concerns in regard to staffing levels and the use of money available from the CARES Act and ARPA Funds.

Members discussed their perceptions about some aspects of John's presentation in this meeting. An observation was made that there appears to be differing views concerning with John's perspective of the human service needs in Town, versus the general public's view of these needs. They have heard some of the public's sentiment that does not agree with the level and extent of human service needs in Town.

During the February 8, 2022 meeting, John explained that he consistently asks the staff about the needs in town during COVID-Task Force Meetings and the Be Well Northborough Meetings. This has consistently been a priority for him.

Board members stated they have a different perspective about the needs in Town. They also hear from many residents who view the needs in Town as being very significant. They also see that many needs are not always met. This is evidenced by:

- The Food Pantry: they state that the numbers are the highest they have ever been. Although the Scouts did a food drive, the pantry is still not flush right now. They also have food that has expired.
- Helping Hands: The sheds that hold the Medical Equipment are empty of certain equipment now that elective surgeries are occurring. These surgeries were being delayed due to the impact of COVID-19 on health care. Now that COVID-19 cases are decreasing, the elective surgeries are now being performed.
- Many residents recognize the increased need for Family & Youth Services staffing levels. June stated that it has been very helpful to have a contract with INTERFACE who provides referrals to outpatient clinicians.
- However, the Department has experienced the significant impact of COVID-19 on all aspects of people's lives. For instance, there is a significant increased need for case management, basic needs and referral services. Many of the families' situations present with multiple problems that are very involved and complex.

- For instance, housing insecurity and risk of homelessness is prominent. This includes the loss of housing due to the moratorium being lifted on paying rent, evictions, natural disasters, loss of employment, serious health issues and financial hardships
- Joan inquired about the status of the eight families we are working with who are facing homelessness. June reported that only one of them thus far has found permanent housing.
- June stated that there are also many barriers that interfere with residents receiving needed services. These barriers include untreated mental health issues and residents just missing the eligibility criteria for State housing (for example, one family is \$200.00 over the income level for state programs).
- Although the Governor has budgeted additional money for risk of homelessness, many families do not meet the criteria for these funds. In fact, ASCENSIA Care Alliance is the social service agency designated to receive government funding to help refugees and residents find housing. At this time, they are no longer taking new referrals as they are at capacity. In addition, the waitlist for state housing is several years long.
- There is also the need for support groups and educational workshops to support residents such as:
 - A program designated to support teenagers
 - Teaching coping skills to residents with anxiety and depression that is 3x more prevalent due to COVID
 - A group to support parents and families
 - Other community-wide programs as needed

Family & Youth Services currently does not have the staffing level to provide these important programs.

June discussed the challenge of recruiting part-time, non-benefited positions. For instance, it took 1 year and 8 months to hire the counselor 5 years ago. It has now been 6 months since the counselor has been vacant, and we have not received one resume.

Sandy asked for more specific information about what is involved in providing case management services. June and Doreen described several families we work with who have multiple problems that are very complex. They are dealing with housing insecurity, eviction, untreated mental health issues, unemployment and financial hardship. Doreen also pointed out that we have worked with some families for up to one year due to the barriers mentioned above.

Sherry stated she is very aware of what is involved in case management services. She is part of a volunteer group working to support a refugee family in town. She stated that it takes 24 volunteers to help just one family.

Members also expressed concern in regard to the process around the CARES Act and ARPA Funds. They discussed the list of approved expenses and proposed expenses from the ARPA Funds. Aside from supporting the “Be Well Northborough” initiative, they wondered why more funds are not being dispersed for human services. They also expressed concern about the fact that there has not been citizen input.

The Board was inquisitive about John’s vision for the department and his interest in contracting out the services provided by the Department. Although the Town’s Contract with INTERFACE is a good decision, there are many services that you cannot contract out such as Case Management.

5. Board Members: No Report

6. Other Business: None

7. Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Gretchen Bean, Seconded by Gily Schneider-Nachum.