



Meeting Minutes for Advisory Board Meeting – January 22, 2024

Attendance: Mary-Carol Waters, Jan Midiri, Isaac Chen, Mary Ellen LaRose, Elizabeth Craig, Katy Colthart, Meaghan Greally, Andrew Alex, Diana Martucci, Brad Pindel, Ella Xu, Ethan Walsh, Dori Parmelee, John Loughnane

I. Call to Order: The meeting convened at Wentworth Hall at 7:08 p.m.

II. Review and Acceptance of November 23, 2023 minutes: A motion was made by Brad Pindel to accept the November minutes. Diana Martucci seconded the motion. All were in favor of approving the meeting minutes.

III. Old Business

Holiday Giving Program: Mary Ellen noted 127 children received gifts this past holiday season. This was a marked increase from years past. She thanked the board for their support of the program.

IV. Department Report:

Administrative Updates

We met with HR to discuss using ARPA funds to hire a full-time Youth Services Counselor for the calendar year 2024. We were granted permission and have extended an offer to hire Liz Craig, former intern, for this position. Liz then accepted the position and started with us on Monday, January 8th.

There has been interest in our Graduate Internship program. We have been reaching out to local graduate schools and we have begun accepting applications (3 to date). In addition, we were contacted about hosting an undergraduate Westwood resident for a summer internship. The staff are still discussing what this might look like and will be meeting with the student in the next few weeks.

The staff are gearing up for Adina's pending Maternity leave. Adina has worked wonders to organize all her programs and has planned for all her clients while she is out of the office. While waiting for her baby's arrival, she is helping to create social media posts to promote education and resources on several mental health topics that can be used on our social media accounts throughout the year.

Clinical Services

There are currently **51 counseling clients** on the WY&FS caseload, 47 individual clients; 2 family client; 2 parent consultations.

There were **5 new referrals** for counseling services in December and **3 new referrals** in January since our last report and we anticipate more referrals as school progress reports come out and the term ends soon.

There are currently **4 individuals or families on our "waitlist" for counseling services** (down from **28 last year**). Whenever there is a waitlist, we also share the William James INTERFACE Referral Service information as another option for residents and offer a one-time meeting with a Y&FS clinician so that families might have some initial resources while waiting. As always, referrals are triaged so that those residents

in the most immediate need are prioritized. And as you know we have tried to offer other services, such as groups in the schools to help mitigate our waitlist.

We have wrapped up our first round of groups and our next round started the week of January 8th. We are offering a **K/1st Social Smarts group on Thursdays, 2/3 Social Smarts on Tuesdays, and 4/5 Social Solutions on Wednesdays.** In addition, we are running a **5th Group during the day** at the **Downey Elementary School** and are in talks with Pinehill and Sheehan for in-school groups this spring. Special thanks to Adina, Shea, Liz, Arielle, Mark, and Erin as well as our Clinical Consultant Sarah for making this all happen.

Program Updates

The annual **Holiday Giving** program was a huge success! Mary Ellen spent countless hours marketing the program in the community, accepting registrations, communicating with donors, recipients, and other community partners, and matching donors with **127 children from 97 participants** who needed assistance this holiday season.

Birthday Giving is also being utilized well/more this year and we are looking for ways to attract more donors to the program. We were recently informed that we can no longer purchase gift cards with donated funds. Mary Ellen will speak more about this under new business.

Be SMARRT (Students Modeling and Advocating Respectful Relationships @ Thurston)

Is running with weekly rehearsals, and 12 mentors. Our Youth Services Counselor, Shea, is running this program, along with our Graduate Intern, Mark. Shea has been in constant communication with Thurston administration to make sure the program runs smoothly. The presentation will be held this Wednesday, January 24th and class presentations will be held this Thursday and Friday and next Thursday and Friday.

Adina and Arielle, and now, Liz are coordinating and supervising two back-to-back, in-person sessions of the **Friends Network** program each week in Wentworth Hall. The thrity (30) 1:1 pairs of high school students and 3rd, 4th and 5th grade residents are enjoying games, crafts and conversation each Thursday evening.

Teen Scene @ the Library is a partnership with the Teen Librarian at the main library coordinating volunteer shifts for Mentors on early release Wednesday and on Friday afternoons.

We finished up our fall session with 15 high school mentors and have moved into the winter season with 9 mentors.

Westwood Writes currently has 30 (up from 25 last year, 17 the year before) student/senior pairs, with more expected as we continue to market to seniors in the community so that they might be matched with interested high school volunteers.

Body Safety Theater We have started planning for our Body Safety Theater program with all 4 elementary schools this May. Rehearsals will start in February 2024.

Yoga Flow for Middle Schoolers is being offered for a second time this spring. Ellen O'Hara, Certified Yoga Instructor and Certified Trauma-Informed Yoga Instructor ran a yoga program this past fall and its popularity warrants a second showing this spring. The program is open to middle school-aged students and the class is limited to 12 participants.

Community Connections

Y&FS staff is participating in the following local groups, boards and committees this fiscal year:

-Community Chest

-Deerfield Site Council

-Human Services Function Group

-MMA Human Services Council

-Community Crisis Intervention Team

-Early Childhood Council

-BIDMC-Needham Community Meeting

-Regional Youth Commission Meetings

-Regional Internship Collaborative
-Westwood Cares
-WHS Legislative Council
-WPS Wellness Review Committee

-WHS Child Study Team
-WHS Site Council
-WPS Incident Management Team
-WPS Wellness Committee

Not only has Mary Ellen coordinated another wonderfully successful and streamlined **Holiday Giving** this year, but it is worth noting that every year she engages in hours of community collaboration to make this program such a success. Outside of all of the marketing and communication with donors and recipients, Mary Ellen worked with groups like **Dedham Savings** where Y&FS staff picked up multiple gifts, and with the **various schools and local groups** who wanted to host gift drives. We're thankful to all of our community partners who help to make Holiday Giving happen!

We have partnered with **Early Childhood Council** and the **Westwood Library** to offer a Parent Café series this winter. These will run on Tuesdays January 10th, February 7th, March 7th and April 4 from 7-8:30 at the Westwood Library. This program is geared towards parents of young children who wish to discuss the joys and challenges of parenting. Youth & Family Services staff will be there to help facilitate table discussions. The first group was a success with 9 parents participating. Everyone was engaged and seemed to gain something from the evening.

Katy is in talks with members of WPS central administration to help with a program called Conversations with Caregivers which is sponsored by the School Engagement Committee. This particular program will focus on Youth Mental Health and mental health resources and will be held on May 14th.

V. New Business

Program Spotlight: Meet Liz Craig – Youth Services Counselor: Liz introduced herself to the board and shared that she previously served as a graduate intern at both WY&FS and Westwood High School while completing her Masters in Social Work. She has been onboarded and is building her WY&FS caseload and leading clinical groups.

Birthday Giving Program Brainstorm: Mary Ellen shared information on changes to the gift card policy for Town Departments and the effect that will have on the department's birthday giving program. The Town will no longer allow the purchase or reimbursement of gift cards for use in the program. All monetary donations to the program will need to be used towards purchasing supplies for the birthday party in a bag given to each recipient. All gift cards will need to be purchased and donated by donors. Mary Ellen asked board members to share their feedback and ideas on how to proceed with the program given this change. Board members made suggestions including having recipients provide links to gift items that can be purchased by the department and perhaps having a standing list of gifts to choose from rather than a \$50 gift card per child. Board members gave feedback on a new flyer and how to spread the word about donations. Katy explained the department is exploring the idea of developing a Friends of WY&FS 501c3 similar to what the Library and Council on Aging now have in place.

Recognize A Youth Award: Mary Ellen explained that nominations for the RAY award will be accepted until March 31st.

FY25 Budget Submission: Katy gave an overview of the WY&FS proposed budget submission for FY25. She explained that she is asking for the addition of a .5 youth services counselor to keep Liz Craig with the department through June of 2025. Liz is currently paid through the ARPA grant that ends in December of 2024. At this time that request has been denied by the Town but the finance department is looking for ways to fund this request. The Fin Com will host public hearings about the FY25 budget in February and March.

Community Liaisons:

Westwood Police: Brad mentioned there has been an uptick of thefts of wallets from shopping carts at Wegmans and shared safety tips/suggestions.

Westwood Food Pantry: Mary Ellen shared an update on the increase of residents accessing the pantry.

Early Childhood Council: Katy mentioned the Parent Café Series has begun. WY&FS, the library and ECC will collaborate again the series.

Schools Update:

Westwood High School: Andrew mentioned motivational speaker and youth resilience expert, Kate Gladdin spoke at a school assembly. He noted that students found the presentation valuable. Ella noted that the PTO recently handed out candy to students at lunches to celebrate the end of the second term. Isaac reported that J-Term assignments will be announced soon. The Jr/Sr prom is slated for Friday, May 10th and will be held at the State Room in Boston. Ethan talked about college application process deadlines. Brad shared the football team recently won the TVL and player received jackets at their banquet.

Thurston Middle School: Dori shared the recent 8th grade dance was a success and that auditions were held for the 7th/8th grade performance of James and the Giant Peach.

Elementary Schools: Diana mentioned that the Sheehan students will be performing the musical, Frozen later this year. Dori reported that the Pine Hill School is on track to open the Tuesday after February vacation. A number of compressors at the new school needed to be replaced due to electrical damage from a recent storm. Dori expressed her appreciation for the permanent building committee members who quickly assisted in ordering new compressors and worked to make sure they were installed in a timely fashion.

Dori shared updates on the proposed school committee budget including a request for a Human Resources Director on the school side along with additional school psychologists and .4 adjustment counselors at the elementary level.

Open Discussion of Potential Community Needs: There was no discussion this meeting. Katy reiterated this item remains on the agenda as a placeholder for discussions as needed.

VI. **Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

VII. **Adjournment** - The meeting was called to adjournment at 8:23 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mary Ellen LaRose