

Minutes of Board Meeting of March 11, 2013

Board Members Present: William Cobham, President, Yaw O. Adjei-Koranteng, Elizabeth Cadigan
Lois Carra, Maureen Harty, Miranda E. Heibel, Ismail Laher,

Staff Present: Lisa Castagna; Susan Pacheco; Liz Seelman

Minutes from January 14, 2013 meeting were accepted.

Directors update: Susan welcomed Miranda E. Heibel from SCES. The solicitation of new board members received an overwhelming response in just 3 weeks, with packets going over to the City Manager's office for appointment.

Emma is on medical leave through May. The Director of Client Services job posting closes on March 27th. The expectation is the position will be filled in May. Vincent is here on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to provide a senior staff presence as Susan is out of the office for much of Wednesday. Jackie Neel will cover 2050 from 10 – 2pm.

The COA has received a \$5000 grant from the Cambridge Community Foundation. Last year we received a similar grant to use toward mental health programming. This one will support programming at 2050, 806 and the COA. It can also help with instructors and SCM transportation.

Citywide: last December the staff received training on Staff Client Boundary Policy. Susan, Vincent and Emma were on the committee which developed the policy, simplifying it from 15 pages down to 3. The Staff Client Boundary Policy covers: What can never be done, what should be discussed with a supervisor first and what can be done with a staff member's discretion. Lois suggested sensitivity training for staff. Maureen noted how hard it is to hold a professional demeanor without support and patience for staff.

An ambassador program was suggested as a way to reach out to new participants and to participants who no longer come. In the past it was made up of seniors who were natural leaders and took pride in showing newcomers around.

Client Services Liz Seelman: In 2007 I took a class on Hoarding at the BU School of Social Work. Gail Steketee, head of the department, has become a worldwide authority on hoarding and hoarders. Both Susan and I have long been interested in this topic. We both worked at SCES and even back in the day hoarders presented a huge problem as far as trying to accomplish clean outs. And in those days that was the primary goal – often to avoid eviction. The idea of hoarding as a mental health issue was just starting to be an acceptable line of research. In the past decade there has been much progress. It is an accepted truth that cleaning out an apartment does not begin to address the underlying disorder. Sensational reality TV shows, while publicizing the problem rarely present a well-balanced picture.

With the help of Christiana Bratiotis, one of the instructors at BU, as our consultant, in 2008 we started a Cambridge Hoarding Task Force. We received an enthusiastic response from other providers. The problem was much larger than had been suspected. It crosses lines of age, income, and gender. The costs of clean outs were huge and rarely easily available.

Our first community training was very well attended and gained the support of some city council members. It also helped to derail our progress as many people wanted to be involved and did not understand the strict confidentiality necessary nor did they understand that this was not a job for an "organizer". It took a while to regroup but we managed to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and start all over again.

Our next attempt began in 2011. The response was great again – we had police, fire, inspectional services plus the usual providers in attendance. After several meetings someone raised questions about the legal ramifications of the task force. No city had actually come up with a legal agreement that protected both the client and the task force members. A challenge!! Susan arranged to have a city attorney meet with us to go over our ideas. We came up with a very detailed, and we thought, excellent plan for our group. Alas, after many months of waiting we met with the lawyer and had the wind taken out of our sails. The main obstacles to a task force were that 1) the city manager had to appoint the members and 2) it could not be limited to one age group. Our work seemed to have been in vain. We took a few months to digest all of this – it really had come as a shock. I got in touch with Jesse Edsell Vetter, the Hoarding Intervention Coordinator at Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership. He had worked with Christiana who had since moved out of state, and had gone from being an inspector (or "stick") to being more of a social worker (or "carrot"). We discussed many

possibilities but came up with a kind of a stealth mission: a Hoarding Coalition! We started meeting again in early summer of 2012 and have been trying hard ever since. Jesse did a presentation especially for our inspectional services department and recently did one for hands on workers. As a result, Susan and I are now also part of the Statewide Hoarding Coalition and receiving a lot of exciting information.

This year for the first time, hoarding will have its own mention or category as part of the “obsessive compulsive and related disorders” in the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders. The DSM 5 which will be out in May of this year. Because of this, therapist will be able to bill insurance to work with clients – we anticipate that this will lead to real progress in the treatment of individuals with this disorder. It is a serious mental health issue – people have been known to commit suicide if they return to a cleaned out home. Others will immediately replace the contents and be even less willing to work on their problem. The issue affects the individual and those living in close proximity. It breaks families apart and costs a huge amount in service. The health issues include fire, vermin, and falls. Often people with this disorder have suffered traumatic experiences in the past and hoarding gives them the illusion of safety.

We hope to come up with a response system to distribute so that we will all be on the same page as far as receiving the call, rounding up a team of 2 or 3 to go out initially and then to hopefully work on both the sanitary issues and the mental and physical health of the clients.

North Cambridge: Our monthly birthday tea is scheduled for Wednesday, March 13th 2:30pm. We will make our annual visit to Andy's Diner for Corned Beef & Cabbage on Thursday, March 14th. We will have a Day Trip to The North Shore Mall on Thursday, March 28th.

Paintings from The North Cambridge Senior Center's Watercolor Class were on display at The O'Neill Library for the month of February with an opening reception held on the afternoon of Thursday, February 7th. The art work was very impressive and we thank all those that participated.

Over the past several months our knitting group made 80 winter hats to donate to those in need. These hats were included in care packages that were distributed on the evening of January 30th during the city's annual census of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The knitting group plans to participate in this program again next year. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the group and are very thankful for their generous donation. Vincent also participated in the overnight homeless census.

New Business: Staff sensitivity, Prices for YMCA services.

Respectfully Submitted
Lisa Castagna

Next Meeting: Monday, April 8, 2013 11:00 am