

HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

Meeting January 26, 2010

Commissioners Present: Ayse Atasoylu, Christopher Hall, Kati LaBraico, Lori Likis, Khari Milner, Reverend Lorraine Thornhill, Claudia Hill*, & Nan Stone* (*new Commissioners)

Staff Present: Ellen Semonoff, Stephanie Ackert, Jackie Neel, Nicole Horton, & Jolyon Cowan (recorder)

Introduction of New Commissioners:

Ellen Semonoff welcomed all the Commissioners and introduced Claudia Hill and Nan Stone, the Department's two new Commissioners. Claudia Hill is a librarian employed by Harvard, and a former teacher of ESOL. Nan Stone, the second new Commissioner, is a member of the Cambridge Community Foundation Board and will act as a liaison between the Foundation and the Commission. She is a partner at Bridgespan Group which works with non-profit agencies and funders to help improve the impact of their work.

Presentations:

Ellen introduced Bob Hurlbut, Executive Director of the Cambridge Community Foundation (CCF). CCF was founded in 1916 and is the 6th oldest community foundation in the USA. The foundation actively raises funds for its endowment, which as of 2008/09 was close to \$25 million. Income from this endowment is then distributed to grantees in Cambridge as awards ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per annum. In total, CCF awards approximately \$900,000 worth of grants every year, of which about half are restricted by the donors to the foundation. In the recent economic downturn, CCF's assets lost only 11% of their value, which compares favorably with both the S & P 500 and Harvard's endowment. Bob feels the foundation has a good pulse on the health of local non-profits through a number of mechanisms: he conducts about 60 site visits a year to Cambridge non-profits; he has also conducted anonymous surveys, and holds "Tuesday Talks" with agencies. In their most recent survey, over 20 non-profits who responded thought they could go under because of the precarious economy. Subsequently during one of their Tuesday Talk brown bag discussions, Bob brought in consultants to help agencies think about making contingency plans. While two local agencies have merged recently (the Guidance Center with Riverside, & Centro Latino with Concilio Hispano), CCF have had private conversations with another 6 non-profits looking to merge. Bob believes that most Human Service agencies they fund are doing good jobs without any financial flexibility or endowments. He finds that lack of board development is a major problem for these agencies. Bob also noted that as foundations give based on their finances 2 years ago, the downturn in the economy will hit donations next year.

Ellen then introduced the Department's Inclusion Program through which we are working to assure that the programs we have after school and in the summer are inclusive to children with disabilities. She mentioned that the Department has been working to provide inclusive programming for several years and is improving with the leadership of Nicole Horton, the Inclusion Specialist, and Jackie Neel, the Department's Deputy Director. Jackie Neel added that there have been significant changes in the people we serve and in our staff as the Department gets more adept at this work.

Nicole Horton then began describing the program saying that when she started 3 years ago, there wasn't a large percentage of children with disabilities served. Now 18% of DHSP kids served have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which signifies special needs. The IEPs of these children range from minimal learning disabilities to autism, to significant physical disabilities. Importantly, the Department also serves children with disabilities who aren't in inclusive school programs, but it does so inclusively- helping to integrate them with typical kids and vice versa. One of Nicole's main goals is to make their programs as consistent as possible. She works towards this by providing on-site coaching to DHSP staff both internally and with 8 consultants from Judge Baker's Children's Center. Nicole also emphasizes recognizing and celebrating the DHSP staff's success in working inclusively; the openness of the staff is very important for the success of the Inclusion Program. To engage typical kids with those with disabilities, the Department has a "Respecting the Differences" curriculum designed by a teacher from Graham & Parks School.

Beyond training existing staff, the Department hires additional staff for inclusive programming. Approximately 20 additional staff were hired for the summer programs and 8 more staff for the school year programs so if need be children with disabilities can have one on one assistance in all the Department's out of school time programs. The most recent annual budget for the Inclusion Program was about \$250,000. Nicole feels DHSP's staff is now more confident and better trained in working with kids with IEPs including regular training in "positive behavior support."

Nicole has a close working relationship with the Cambridge Public Schools' (CPS) Office of Special Education, which helps to provide a relatively seamless transition for children with IEPs moving from school programs to out of school time (OST) programs. Additionally a significant number of staff with experience working with special needs children in the CPS system also work part-time in the Department's OST programs. Only very rarely when there is aggressive or violent behavior evinced by a child with disabilities is the Department unable to continue to serve that child. Beyond being able to serve all children together no matter if they are typical or if they have disabilities, one of the major impacts of the Inclusion Program is the level of acceptance shown by children towards their peers.

Schedule

The next Human Services Commission meeting will be on February 23rd, by when the Department hopes to know what level of CDBG funding the City will receive from HUD. The Department with the input of the Human Service Commission can then decide what type of hearing and/or event to hold in late March. Ellen suggested the Commission should discuss whether to have an open or a closed RFP at the February meeting.

Khari Milner asked about getting Cambridge agencies involved in the 2010 Census. Jolyon Cowan mentioned the City's participation in the Complete Count Committee. Ellen suggested that we hear more about the City's involvement in the Census at the February meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.