

Cambridge Human Services Commission
Minutes of Meeting 9/13/2012
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge

Commissioners present: Ayse Atasoylu, Khari Milner, Christopher Hall, Kati LaBraico, Katharine Emilie Thomas, Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow, Claudia Hill.

Regrets: Lori Likis, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Nan Stone

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Nicole Horton, Jose Soares (recorder)

Presenters: Megan Postal, Assistant Director, Cambridge Somerville Early Intervention at the Guidance Center and Charlene Zuffante, Associate Division Director of the Child and Family Services of Riverside Community Care/ Guidance Center.

Cambridge Police Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow followed up on a request from the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) to form a focus group comprised of members of Cambridge commissions and boards. The purpose of this focus group is to pre-test a series of trainings for various neighborhoods in the City. Former Human Services Commission member Marian Darlington-Hope has worked with Police Commissioner Robert Haas and Deputy Superintendent Elow to develop this training series, which is geared to help members of the CPD and the public have positive discussions about policing and the community. The CPD hopes to have 20 Cambridge residents who are actively involved in the community attend this focus group at the Cambridge Police Academy on October 24th from 6 to 8pm. A number of Commissioners expressed interest in participating.

Ellen introduced Nicole Horton, Inclusion Specialist for the Department's Inclusion Initiative for Children, who was invited to attend the presentation. Nicole has made a number of presentations in the past to the Commission on various components of the Inclusion Initiative and working with children with a range of abilities.

Ellen then introduced the featured presenters, Charlene Zuffante LICSW, Associate Division Director of Child and Family Services, and Megan Postal LICSW, Program Coordinator of Early Intervention both of the of the Guidance Center and its parent organization, Riverside Community Care. The focus of their presentation was on the mental health needs and services for children in Cambridge.

Charlene said that after its 2009 merger with Riverside, the Guidance Center has far more resources and ability to advocate for children's mental health services. Furthermore in June, 2012, Riverside merged with Somerville Mental Health and also took over the Mystic Clinic. Since these mergers, the Guidance Center's Child and Family Services Division has effectively doubled in size increasing its staff and capacity.

Megan Postal said their knowledge of the mental health needs in Cambridge for early childhood is largely derived anecdotally from the Guidance Center's Early Intervention staff and through their professional development work in preschool settings. Early Intervention serves over 400 families in the

Cambridge and Somerville area. Their mental health professionals and occupational therapists have seen an increase in maternal depression, more grandparents caring for children where the parents are absent, more unemployment leading to financial stress and conflict, and an increase in domestic violence. Staff are also seeing more parents of autistic children with depression, which is associated with the increased diagnosis of autism.

The Guidance Center's Early Intervention program has bilingual staff with the capacity to speak approximately 12 languages, and also uses paid interpreters to better serve diverse linguistic Cambridge communities. Ellen said that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the Guidance Center is specifically directed to fund their Early Intervention program's linguistic capacity.

Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow asked if the Guidance Center works with the CPD. Charlene responded that they work closely with the police department around issues of domestic violence. Christine then mentioned that CPD has a Youth and Family Services Unit, which meets with the Cambridge School Department and other providers on Mondays to develop care and intervention for families in crisis. Christine encouraged the Guidance Center to participate in these meetings. Both Charlene and Megan were very interested in increasing the Guidance Center's collaboration with the CPD and being involved in these meetings.

Charlene Zuffante said that the Child and Family Services staff also work with pregnant teens and they have seen the numbers of teen pregnancies increase. The Early Intervention Partnership Program works with young pregnant mothers through the child's two month birthday by providing home based therapy for mothers who are experiencing depression. When Katharine Thomas asked about the prevalence of teen pregnancies in Cambridge and the need for mental health services, Charlene said that the Jewish Family and Children Services works specifically with first time parents under age 21 in their home based therapy program.

Charlene went on to describe the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI), which was established after a class action suit as children were coming out of hospital without services or treatment plans. The purpose of CBHI is to provide behavioral health care for MassHealth members under the age of 21. Currently there are multiple Community Service Agencies (CSAs) involved and coordinating a range of services to help families stay in the community. They also liaise with police departments and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. Treatment plans are followed in the home and integrated in the schools.

Another important part of CBHI is the Family Partners program, which is a peer support group led by parents who've experienced their children's mental health challenges in the past, and who understand what other parents are going through. The CBHI has advocated for families to be involved in the decision making for their children, particularly when it involves the Department of Children and Families.

The Mobile Crisis Intervention (MCI) is another program for youth under the age of 21 who experience a crisis which may risk immediate danger to self or others. Services are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and include: crisis assessment, development of a risk management/safety plan; up to 72 hours of crisis intervention and stabilization services, on site face to face therapy and psychiatric consultation. Unfortunately there are large gaps in service for both undocumented and middle class families who do not qualify for MassHealth, and private insurance does not cover these services beyond the age of 3.

Charlene spoke about an important future trend to be aware of as the State is looking to drastically reduce institutional beds for children and youth, which means kids with more significant mental health and behavioral needs will be coming back into communities and will require a great deal of support services.

There was then a general discussion around the issues of trauma and child mental health. Katharine mentioned the National Child Traumatic Stress Network as an excellent resource:

<http://www.nctsn.org/>

There was also talk of the concept of “toxic stress” developed at Harvard:

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/topics/science_of_early_childhood/toxic_stress_response/

Ellen mentioned an article in the New York Times about “Trauma Informed Schools”

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/04/us/a-place-at-school-where-students-can-unload-stress-and-worry.html?_r=1&emc=eta1

Ellen thanked the presenters and then began discussing with the Commission possible presentation topics for future meetings. Claudia Hill was interested in hearing an update from Khari Milner and Lori Likis on the Cambridge School Department’s implementation of the Innovation Agenda and the formation of its new middle schools. All the Commissioners agreed. Christopher Hall was also interested in hearing about the various after school clubs. Ellen suggested having Bucky O’Hare from the King School Open Extended Day Program which is run by DHSP to come present at a subsequent meeting. Commissioners were also interested in hearing from the Cambridge Police Department’s Youth and Family Services Unit.

Ellen will be sharing with the Commission developments around the sequestration (if Congress does not agree on the deficit reduction measures by December 31st) and its impact on federal funding for Cambridge.

Meeting adjourned.