

Cambridge Human Services Commission
Minutes of Meeting 1/12/2012
5:30 – 7:30pm
3rd Floor Resource Room
51 Inman Street

Commissioners present: Ayse Atasoylu, Nan Stone, Khari Milner, Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow, Claudia Hill, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill.

Regrets: Lori Likis, Kati LaBraico, Christopher Hall

Presenter: Carole Sousa, Community Engagement Team

DHSP staff: Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Jolyon introduced Police Department Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow who will be attending the Human Services Commission meetings as a liaison to the Police Department.

Carole Sousa, an English as a Second Language teacher at the Community Learning Center, began her presentation by saying the Community Engagement Team (CET) started as a multi-agency collaborative funded by a federal grant. At the expiration of the grant, the City of Cambridge continued to fund the program. Although Cambridge has many services, some residents do not know about or access the services due to cultural, linguistic or educational barriers.

Through its 9 bilingual, bicultural outreach workers and leadership development program, the Community Engagement Team has made inroads into the various low income and immigrant communities focusing its efforts in the African American, Haitian, Bangladeshi, Brazilian, Dominican, Ethiopian, Somali, and Nepali communities.

CET hired and trained 9 community members from the respective target communities to do outreach door to door and by placing flyers in area ethnic small businesses, laundromats, and religious institutions. CET collaborated with local service providers, such as the Cambridge Health Alliance, Childcare Resource Center, The Women's Commission, Center for Families, Agenda for Children, and the Cambridge Police Department, and together agencies share information and learn about the diverse communities and their cultural nuances in order to provide better access to resources. Community outreach workers pass on information about services and resources available to communities and in turn provide feedback on culturally appropriate practices and assist Cambridge agencies with outreach. The American Born Black Outreach Team form partnerships with the African-American families that have young children in order to help them connect to local resources.

Through its leadership development training, outreach workers are trained in a number of skills including how to talk to parents about services, how to make cold phone calls, and maintain contact lists and follow up. For most outreach workers this is their first job in the United States and it provides both a career ladder and professional contacts.

CET organizes Networking Events three times a year to bring together communities and service providers in an effort to encourage programs to be more cognizant of the cultural practices of the various communities and be more welcoming. Over 600 people have attended these events and 67 Cambridge programs participated last year.

CET runs a series of 6 workshops for parents in their native languages on storytelling, reading to children, family fun, and a series of literacy events. In FY11, 335 families attended the parenting workshops. In addition, CET also runs a homebase visiting program where outreach workers go door to door and talk to families about early childhood education programs available and CET's work. In February 2012, CET, in collaboration with the Women's Commission, will address the status of immigrant families in Cambridge. In the spring, CET is planning an event for the Portuguese speaking community.

CET also participated in outreach and education for the 2010 census.

The next Human Services Commission meeting will be on February 9th. Mina Reddy, the Director of the Community Learning Center (CLC), will present on the various adult education programs available to the linguistic communities and the changes in adult education and how they will affect the CLC.

As a tentative date for the annual CDBG event March 29th worked for all Commissioners present. The discussion generated several possibilities for the event: popular ideas included CCTV youth video program or a presentation from the Community Arts Center, Do It Your Damn Self! Youth Film Festival.

Meeting adjourned.