



Cambridge Human Services Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2015
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Commissioners present: Christine Elow, Christopher R. Hall, Lori Likis

Regrets: Dr. Ayse Atasoylu, Khari Milner, Nan Stone, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill

DHSP staff: Mike Payack (recorder), Ellen Semonoff

Presenter: Liz Speakman, Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Coordinator for the City of Cambridge

Ellen Semonoff welcomed attendees and introduced Liz Speakman, Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Coordinator for the City of Cambridge. Liz began by defining domestic violence (DV) as “a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviors and tactics used by one person over another to gain power and control.” Liz stressed the importance of the word “pattern” in her definition because individual actions can sometimes seem small, but when viewed in the larger context can add up to DV. Coercive and controlling tactics used may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and financial abuse (creating financial dependence).

Liz provided a historical overview of how her role of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Coordinator came to be. In 1994, the City Council passed a resolution declaring the City of Cambridge a Domestic Violence-Free Zone (DVFZ). Liz added that you may have noticed street signs indicating this around the city. The resolution directed all City departments and City-affiliated agencies to work collaboratively to reduce DV. This led to multiple trainings on Domestic Violence across the city, as well as the creation of the Cambridge Police Department’s Domestic Violence Unit and Domestic Violence Liaison position.

In 2011, then-Cambridge City Councilor Marjorie Decker hosted a domestic violence summit intended to revitalize the efforts that were begun with the DVFZ. A steering committee on domestic violence was formed as a result. The steering committee organized a campaign called “21 Days of Questions/365 Days of Action.” This was an opportunity for members of the Cambridge community to ask questions about domestic violence in a safe environment. Over one thousand questions were collected through this campaign. These questions revealed four prevailing themes:

1. Defining and understanding domestic violence
2. Support to stop and recover from domestic violence
3. Preventing and eradicating domestic violence
4. Children and youth

In order to maintain the momentum generated with the 21 Days of Questions/365 Days of Action Campaign and coordinate efforts to address the four themes identified, the City of Cambridge created the position of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Coordinator, for which Liz was subsequently hired. In this capacity, Liz undertook a needs assessment process to further explore the findings of the 21 Days of Questions/365 Days of Action Campaign. A report on this needs assessment will be released at the end of this month. The report will provide ten “insight statements.” Each insight statement will be accompanied by a set recommendations. The insight statements are as follows:

1. In order to support the health and safety of individuals and families in transition, the severe shortage of immediate and long-term housing must be addressed.
2. There is a need for a comprehensive, stream-lined network of culturally aware services for survivors. Providers and others need to be able to call someone they know and trust who will quickly respond.
3. Cultural competency, with language capacity as an example, is essential and challenging for service providers.
4. Service providers and citizens identified that they each lack the basic knowledge of what is domestic and sexual abuse (“What do I do when I hear about it?” “How do I help my parishioner?”); many feel they don’t know how to help.
5. Due to stigma, lack of information, and/or from negative repercussions, providers and survivors are hesitant and fearful about getting systems involved.
6. Everyone is or has been touched by domestic and/or sexual abuse.
7. Prevention is key. It must start early and be consistent (School, Out of School Time, Adult Education).
8. People in violent relationships also face other pressing issues such as homelessness, joblessness, mental illness and/or addiction. Providers need to be aware of the competing and conflicting needs many people experience in their lives and bring a trauma informed approach to any assistance that is offered.
9. There is a need for materials and information that is easily accessible.
10. Health care systems in Cambridge (Cambridge Health Alliance, Mt Auburn Hospital) need organizational resources to address DV.

Liz announced that a launch event for the Cambridge Domestic & Gender-Based Violence Prevention Initiative will be held at City Hall on Wednesday, October 28. Liz invited members of the Human Services Commission to attend.

Ellen announced that the Commissioners have also been invited by Mayor David Maher to the Boards & Commissions Reception. This event is intended to honor and thank Cambridge citizens for donating

their time to the City's Boards and Commissions. The reception will be held at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in East Cambridge, also on Wednesday, October 28.

Ellen announced that Centro Latino declared bankruptcy and ceased operations. The CDBG-funded Adelante Program operated through September 21, 2015. Clients have been referred to other agencies to receive services.

Mike Payack announced that the next Human Services Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 12, 2015.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Payack
Planner/Contracts Manager
DHSP/Planning & Development