

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 2, 2010
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Huenefeld Gese, Commissioners Beighle, Bruels, Hoople, Plaskon, Stout, Yantis

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Terry Smith, Helena Stephens, Cynthia Sessoms, Department of Parks & Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Carol Maurer

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chair Huenefeld Gese who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 2, 2010

Chair Huenefeld Gese referred to the second sentence of the second paragraph on page 7 of the minutes and asked that it be revised to read "She thanked Commissioners Beighle and Yantis and the staff for their work on behalf of the full Commission."

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Beighle. Second was by Commissioner Stout and the motion carried unanimously.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Hoople said he is continuing to attend the Levy Oversight Board meetings and reported that the RFP approval panel he serves on is looking at some undesignated funds that became available in 2008. The funds are to be used to serve minority and women veterans.

Commissioner Yantis said he attended the Walk of Courage at the Kinderling Center along with Chair Huenefeld Gese and Commissioner Plaskon. He said he was very impressed with the presentation. He said it reaffirmed his respect for the organization.

Chair Huenefeld Gese said she sat next to Congressman Dave Reichert at the event and was able to talk with him briefly.

Chair Huenefeld Gese reported that she attended the annual Youth Link Gumbo Night and had a very good time.

Commissioner Bruels said he participated in lobby day in Olympia and had a chance to talk with the representatives from the 42nd District and meet the new senator. He said he spoke with them about preserving and expanding Basic Health to cover individuals who cannot afford coverage on their own. He said the responses he received were all noncommittal.

Commissioner Stout said she participated in the Children's Alliance conference call and got the opportunity to stand in for Healthy Start summarizing the legislation, some of which is encouraging.

Human Services Manager Emily Leslie said she would be attending the Youth Eastside Services breakfast on March 3.

Ms. Leslie said a variety of groups are tracking the work of the legislature as the session rolls on. She said many are keeping their fingers crossed that the bills they are supporting will make their way through the process successfully.

Ms. Leslie said staff have also been busy getting ready for the funding workshops to be held in Redmond and Renton.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly provided the Commissioners with some information about the concept of time banking. She said there is a national model in which people can donate time by helping in their communities and receive in return an equal amount of time in services performed by someone else. An information meeting is scheduled at the Kirkland Performance Arts Center on March 10. The Eastside Human Services Forum has received a planning grant to develop a time bank in East King County. A consultant has been hired to help work out the details. It will take time to get the program off the ground and may not ramp up until 2011.

Ms. O'Reilly reported that on March 1 she attended part of a full-day seminar that was hosted by Seattle on the topic of using census data.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Presentation by King County Children and Family Commission – “The Irreducible Needs of Children” Initiative

Carol Maurer with the King County Children and Family Commission explained that the Citizen Advisory Board members are appointed by the King County Executive and the King County Council. There are 17 members in addition to liaison members from other boards and commissions within King County. The Commission has four specific tasks: educate about prevention and early intervention programs; advocate internally and externally for prevention, early intervention, and supporting families; partner with organizations and groups to achieve its goals; and funding programs and projects, including the Home Visiting/Early Healthy Families program, the Safe Communities program, and partnerships such as SOAR and Portals to Partners.

Ms. Maurer said the Irreducible Needs project grew out of a meeting in late 2006. At the time, the Commissioners were very concerned about the cuts being made by King County. It was clear that the county wanted out of the role of being a human services provider, especially in the areas of prevention and early intervention. Even though in the late 1990s when the human services framework policies came about and defined prevention as one of the investment areas, it seemed that when it came time for budget cuts the areas that always got cut were preventive services, early childhood programs, and family support programs. The fear was that the deep cuts would cause damage that would have to be lived with for a very long time.

The notion of redefining basic needs came about at that time. The concept of irreducible needs is predicated on the list of basic needs that are absolutely necessary for children and families to survive. To tout the issue, the Children's Summit was organized with Liz Shore, a professor at Harvard University, tapped to be the keynote speaker. Some 75 persons were invited to attend representing a wide cross-section of King County, including technical experts, concerned citizens who had received services, parents, service providers, administrators and elected officials. From there small groups were formed to zero in on the needs children and families must have to survive.

With a list of irreducible needs penned, a survey was conducted to determine the degree to which the items on the list resonated with people. Additionally, the respondents were asked to indicate how their individual families matched up with the stated needs and whether their needs were being met. Interestingly, most said their personal needs were being met but the needs of their neighbors were not.

In order to personalize the issues for the individual King County Councilmembers, permission was sought to seek information from the specific districts. The idea was to let Councilmembers know that there were families in their own districts whose needs were not being met rather than to focus on the region as a whole. Councilmembers Hague and Patterson volunteered their districts, so the pilot program was brought to their districts. Focus groups were conducted, and in the final phase follow-up information was provided to those two districts.

Ms. Maurer stressed the importance of having the community involved in identifying the irreducible needs. Three core findings resulted. There was widespread agreement in support of the holistic concept of family well being as proposed by the Commission. The data from a variety of sources shed light on areas where families report they are doing well, where their essential needs remain unmet, and where families themselves have sought help in meeting their needs. It was very interesting learning how families cope, adjust, and deal with the economic downturn.

Families that are ethnically and linguistically diverse are often not captured by the survey data. The Commission's focus groups with diverse families showed that their experiences differed from those families that responded to the surveys, and that the unmet needs of diverse families were different from countywide measures of family wellbeing.

Ms. Maurer said three broad categories of needs were identified at the Children's Summit. The subsequent surveys, interviews, and research advisory discussion and focus groups confirmed the categories as important to all families.

The first category is good health, defined as adequate, healthy and nutritional food, and affordable wellness care, including medical and dental care.

Commissioner Stout asked why vision care is not listed as an essential, noting that poor vision is a known factor in children who do not flourish. Ms. Maurer said the point is well taken.

The second category is supportive, social and cognitive environments as defined by stable and secure relationships with competent caring adults where children are emotionally and physically protected and nurtured; supportive culturally relevant resource networks where people feel they are understood; and learning experiences that start at birth and continue throughout the lifespan, that are high quality, developmentally and culturally appropriate and prepare children for school readiness and academic success.

The unmet needs that were mentioned most often were affordable wellness care, affordable housing, and economic opportunities. With regard to the latter need, it was found that people are really hungry for a job that pays a living wage. Many who participated in the focus groups admitted to working two or three jobs just to survive, and barely even so.

The Commission pushed further to better understand how well the needs of families from specific cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic groups were being met. Guided by input from policymakers as well as a research advisory group convened for the project, the Commission sought to gather data by interacting directly with families in culturally appropriate ways. Community leaders were hired and trained to gather the data, and the participants were all given stipends in the form of gift cards.

The families in all of the groups agreed with the comprehensive list of needs. They all reported that to some degree the needs of their families were not being met. They also indicated that the levels of unmet need of diverse families differ among themselves, and they differ from the levels of unmet need reported in indicators for the general population. They most often reported needing help with affordable housing; supportive and culturally relevant resource networks; and education and learning experiences, including quality child care. Half of the focus group families mentioned as unmet needs economic opportunities and sufficient wages, and affordable wellness care. Less than half of the focus group families mentioned adequate, healthy and nutritional food, stable and secure relationships, and safe neighborhoods as priority areas of unmet need.

The Commission was able to collate specific findings for each need. With regard to adequate, healthy and nutritional food, parents with young children reported that food stamps is not adequate and thus they must rely on food banks. A number of mothers reported leaving the food bank with only enough food for a few days. And ethnic families reported not finding the foods they prefer and are familiar with at food banks.

With regard to affordable housing, the findings were that one- and two-income families find housing prices beyond their reach; that transitional housing is not available for very young parents or couples; that rental units that are affordable are sub-standard, especially for children; and that families on the Eastside and in south King County will relocate to get “move-in rent specials” but their children have to face school transitions.

The findings relative to affordable wellness care were that older adults can't afford preventive care or supplemental insurance; the working poor go without prescribed medications and cannot afford follow-up care for chronic conditions; and immigrant parents may not know how to access a care provider for children.

For the category of economic opportunities that provide livable wages, the findings were that young parents make choices between buying medicine or diapers and food for their infant; hourly wage earners in single-income households cannot afford rent and food; two-parent households are not making a sufficient wage to pay for health insurance; and immigrant parents perceive differential treatment and communication on the job and fear losing their jobs.

Ms. Maurer said the findings for education and learning experiences through life were affordable, high quality, culturally competent child care is a high-priority need for many groups; parents focus on obtaining English Language Learner help for their students; immigrant and refugee parents may not be aware of school district interpretation and translation services and remain uninformed of what the schools expect from parents; and parents find that English as a Second Language classes do not fit their work schedules, so their employment opportunities remain limited.

Relative to safe neighborhoods, the findings were that low-income parents in rental units seek neighborhoods free of gang activity; and families that have met basic needs place a high priority in living in safe neighborhoods.

The findings for the stable and secure relationships area were that young parents are seeking legal aid to resolve child custody after histories of domestic violence; young parents want parenting classes and counseling to improve mental health and strengthen relationships; and ethnic communities seek to build up stable friendships to support newcomers.

Finally, the findings for the supportive and culturally relevant resource networks category were that Eastside ethnic group members request cultural centers and social service agencies to provide programs and services for all family members; parents with limited English proficiency desire resource networks that are staffed by bi-lingual, bi-cultural personnel; and parents request improved translation and interpretation services in city and county customer service offices.

Ms. Maurer said the Commission concluded that many needs, such as income and access to affordable housing, are deeply interrelated, and that support in one area often permits families to be more successful meeting other needs. A number of suggestions were made by the families about changes that would help families meet their needs, including increasing awareness of what services are available to families and what families need to do to access them; increasing the awareness of specific needs of different families and their children; increasing the acceptable stock of housing; and increasing specific assistance for poor and immigrant families in the workplace.

Ms. O'Reilly pointed out that much of the same information is included in the Needs Update. Honest and deep information was also drawn from the Cultural Navigator program, though it is not often pretty with regard to how folks are being served in the community, especially in the area of discrimination. She suggested the Eastside Refugee and Immigrant Coalition would benefit from having a presentation on the Irreducible Needs report.

Commissioner Bruels commented that substandard housing has been connected to the levels of stress and discrimination people experience on the job. Asthma rates for children are also impacted by substandard housing because of mold, dust and other contaminants. It is penny wise and pound foolish to be spending so much

money on emergency care for children when going upstream to address some of the inequalities could better tackle the problems.

Commissioner Plaskon said a landmark study conducted several years ago by Kaiser in California was triggered by the finding that a large number of clients were being prescribed antidepressants. The study found that children who had been subjected to abuse, the loss of a parent, divorce, homelessness or poverty before the age of 15 went on as adults to develop psychiatric issues, including depression and similar stress-related issues. The study found that those same children had higher rates of heart disease as adults, as well as diabetes, cancer and other maladies. The conclusion can be reached that providing for basic needs during childhood can prevent a number of problems later in life.

Commissioner Hoople pointed out that much of the findings in the report harken back to the 40 developmental assets model that was one predicated factor for developing the 24-Hour Relay. Ms. Maurer said the report is intended to serve as a baseline. The findings represent the minimum of what should be done for children and families; it is the bottom line that should never be breached. There certainly is much more that could be done.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Update on Wraparound Services Program

Assistant Director Terry Smith said the Wraparound Services Program began several years ago based on the concept of a holistic approach aimed at ensuring kids will succeed academically. The focus has been on the issues that keep kids from succeeding and goes far beyond reading, writing and arithmetic to include their home lives and before and after school activities. Helena Stephens, Youth, Family and Teen Services Manager, was tapped to lead a group of representatives from the school district, United Way, the city and other organizations charged with conducting the research upon which to base the Wraparound Services Program.

The program was first launched at Lake Hills Elementary, a Title I school that had a number of different needs. At the time, many of the families living in the district for the school were applying to schools outside the district. The Wraparound Program is predicated on the notion of drawing stakeholders together and having meaningful discussions with them and work through the process of identifying strengths and weaknesses, assets and resources, and of course what was needed in order to improve academic success. From those talks a Strategy and Implementation Plan was developed, and with that in hand funding was sought.

Mr. Smith said the program at Lake Hills kicked off in 2005. The first three years the program was operated as a pilot project, following which an evaluation was done to determine how successful it had been and whether or not it should be continued. At the conclusion of the evaluation process the decision was made to continue the

program at Lake Hills and to expand it to other schools. For a variety of reasons it was determined the program should be expanded to a middle school, and Odle middle school was selected. The choice was made based on the fact that the city had an afterschool program in operation there, the school has a direct connection for a lot of Lake Hills kids, and the school serves the Cherry Crest neighborhood. The assessment process for Odle began early in 2009 and implementation of the program is under way.

Ms. Stephens said everyone wants children to be academically successful, but the truth is they will not find success if there are issues going on in the households that preclude it. One of the reasons United Way came to the table for the project was because of their interest in the early learning component. Through the program, teachers, staff and volunteers visit and interview students in their home settings, and in so doing they are able to determine the services needed by the student and the student's siblings. The greater role for the city has been to harness resources in the community to address those needs.

Jubilee Reach is one of the strongest partners at the Lake Hills site; they have been instrumental in addressing ESL timing issues, food issues, and cultural issues. Where a home visit determines that a student does not have a desk or table on which to do their homework, and the child is not turning in homework at school, it is no large reach to determine that the child will not do well in school. Jubilee Reach has helped families by providing furniture, which is not something traditionally thought of in regard to giving a family assistance. Transportation, basic needs and financial guidance are all issues that affect school children and keep them from succeeding.

Ms. Stephens said the Wraparound Program was specifically designed to not be personality driven. Throughout the country there have been community schools that were popular because of the principal or a specific teacher. That approach does not work in fostering systemic change. The Wraparound Program is a new way of doing business regardless of who is at the table. The fact that there have been three principals at Lake Hills since the Wraparound Program was initiated is a good indicator that the model works.

Through the Wraparound Program, if a student is known to be homeless and known to attend after school programs at Crossroads Community Center, the staff there can continue the level of support given the child at school. Youth Eastside Services and Jubilee Reach can step in with family support, all while the child continues to go to school. With young people, stable relationships are critical. The need for stability in school is of paramount importance because the school takes up fully six hours of their day; it is both their learning realm and their social realm. The whole point of the program is to have in place a systemic mechanism that will keep children from falling through the cracks.

Ms. Stephens said that in 2004 the work leading up to initiating the Wraparound Services Program included conducting surveys and talking with agencies and

community members. The finding was that while the city offered great services, they were not connected. Too often kids in need of services fell through the cracks before they could be helped. One focus of the program was to make sure the umbrella was turned upside down so those who needed help the most would be captured and not lost.

The process also highlighted the fact that adults and families need services too. To help meet some of those needs the medical/dental van is available to family members on Saturdays; Jubilee Reach is helping to make that possible. With the right parental permissions in place, staff persons can walk children over to obtain dental services. Children cannot study and learn well if their teeth hurt; parents often cannot take off work to see to their children's dental health needs, or they may not have the insurance they need to cover those services.

Broadening the level of support to families has paid real dividends. Family nights at Lake Hills now have between 300 and 500 people showing up, which is a tremendous increase. A community open house at the school will see as many as 700 people attending. The school has become a community hub, a place where people want to come and interact.

The Boys and Girls Club has been contracted to provide after-school services at Lake Hills. The first 50 children receive free after-school services based on need, including mentorship, homework tutoring, and recreation. The after-school coordinator has an office on-site and regularly receives emails from the teachers with information about what students are not getting their homework done and why. The collaborative effort results in making sure the homework issue is handled during the after-school program.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Beighle, Ms. Stephens said when the Wraparound Program was started at Lake Hills the PTA was essentially nonexistent. That picture has changed and the PTA is currently full and active.

When the leadership team agreed that the program should be expanded to Odle Middle School, the coordinator was placed there to conduct research. She spent a little over six months conducting surveys and conversations with the school staff, parents, the students, business leaders, the faith community, local community organizations, and local residents. Out of that work came six specific areas of focus: more academic help, including tutoring, homework help and mentoring; more before- and after-school options; family support and counseling, including finding a way to connect parents, teachers and students; translation and interpretation assistance; health services; and helping families and students with basic needs, such as food.

There are a number of apartment complexes surrounding the fields near Odle Middle School, and the residents use the fields as their front lawns on weekends. Odle is clearly a part of their community, but the connection had to be made. A number of local organizations, including homeowners associations and businesses, said they

may be willing to contribute more time and money to the school, but had not been asked.

One of the things the school did to help launch the Wraparound Program was a project called Hello Neighbor. The PTSA was the driving force behind the program which brought in professional artists to work with the Odle community. The students were trained in how to take photographs and how to write poetry, and a huge photo display was put together featuring works of people telling their stories about being connected to the Odle community. Nearly every student in the school participated in the project, and 43 different languages were engaged. Odle was the first middle school in the state to participate in the national Hello Neighbor project.

Odle has increased its Homework Club to three to four times per week. Volunteers have signed on to become mentors. Homework stations have been created at the school to assist in providing students with support. Jubilee Reach has expanded its furniture ministry to the school. A Latino Girl Scout troop has been started at the school, and a number of faith communities are participating to make sure food needs are taken care of. There is a long list of things parents would still like to see at Odle, including ESL for adults, adult education classes in the evenings, and programs for students during the summer months.

Senator Murray and Congressman Reichert have worked together in securing some federal funding to help expand the Wraparound Program to other locations. It is not yet known when those dollars will be in hand.

Mr. Smith said the question of sustainability has always been at the forefront of the Wraparound Services Program. He said the topic has been broken down into two elements: organizational sustainability, and fiscal sustainability. The Council did not allocate new dollars to create the Wraparound Program, so it has been necessary to reprioritize services the city has provided over the years to free up dollars for it. At some point the community will have to decide what sustainable funding for the program should look like.

Ms. Stephens said the Wraparound Program is one of the few community projects that United Way has stayed on board with.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Smith, Mr. Smith said the issue of politics has received a great deal of discussion from the start of the Wraparound Program. He said it has been possible to demonstrate how the support system that is being provided to the school district is enabling them to focus more clearly on its primary goal, which is academics. Initially there is far more work for a school when the program starts up, but over time the benefits outweigh the initial startup concerns.

Ms. Stephens pointed out that before wraparound came about, the schools were having to deal with human services issues anyway, and they were having to do it

themselves. With a coordinator and counselor on-site working as a team, the teachers are able to go back and focus on the academic issues with the children.

Commissioner Yantis asked if the turnover of principals at Lake Hills has been related specifically to the Wraparound Program. Ms. Stephens said the turnovers have all been related to other issues. The fact that turnover can be considered a given is the most powerful argument in favor of a program that is not personality driven.

Commissioner Plaskon asked if any consideration has been given to publishing given the successes the program has yielded. Ms. Stephens said United Way brought in an evaluator who does research on how government partners with businesses; that person conducted the evaluation of the program. The University of Washington has not been approached; most feel that a second evaluation validating the first one will be needed first. The Harvard University Family Project lays much of the foundation for the type of work the Wraparound Program takes on. Ms. Stephens said three years ago she had the opportunity to go to Harvard and learn from them details about the concept of community school building; the folks from the Sun model in Portland were also in attendance.

Commissioner Yantis asked if any other local communities have expressed an interest in launching their own versions of the Wraparound Program. Ms. Stephens said the mayor of Kent has come to observe the program, as have representatives from the Seattle mayor's office.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Leslie reminded the Commissioners that at the March 16 meeting the Commission is set to conduct a public hearing to gain information regarding needs and trends ahead of the funding process. She said the practice in the past has been to prime agencies with specific questions to help focus their responses. She asked the Commissioners to email her suggested questions.

Ms. Leslie passed along to the Commission copies of information received from an individual who has expressed concerns about the city funding domestic violence treatment programs. She noted that earlier in the day she received a phone call from a different person who expressed the same concerns. Both parties have made references to specific legal cases, so the city attorney has been consulted with. The concern of the individuals appears to be research showing that batterers treatment programs are ineffective.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Huenefeld Gese adjourned the meeting at 8:39 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date