

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 6, 2007
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Hoople, Commissioners Beighle, Farsch, Huenefeld-Gese, Seltzer, Stout, Yantis

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joy Hawkins, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Lisa Conley, Child Care Resources; Mardi Taylor, Brent Christie, Jubilee REACH Center; Harla Tumbleson, SOAR

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Huenefeld-Gese who arrived at 6:38 p.m.

3. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Tim Johnson, Bellevue Youth Link co-chair, introduced three youth to address the Commission.

Andrew Gu said the Youth Link Board established goals for 2007 that include establishing a youth court for second-time offenders of criminal offenses; offering up to ten grants with a maximum amount of \$250 each to support senior projects at the International School and private home schools in the Bellevue area; and increasing communications with the Bellevue Youth Council by attending their meetings and encouraging them to attend Youth Link Board meetings

Brenda Gurung said the Youth Link Board has also established as goals for 2007

more exposure and promotion of the organization through marketing and outreach, branding the program, touting the website, and developing a town hall forum to promote dialog regarding current events; and working to establish tutoring programs, addressing youth transportation issues, supporting healthy activities, supporting general school clubs, and home schools and prep schools.

Osbaldo Hernandez invited the Commissioners to attend the ninth annual Youth Link gumbo night on February 28 at David and Sherry Grindeland's home from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

4. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Emily Leslie, Human Services Manager, reported that King County is preparing to update and implement its framework policies that were first developed in 1999. The policies include direction for how to spend discretionary dollars. They have a draft of their human service plans, and information is available on the King County website.

Commissioner Beighle reported that she participated in the annual One Night Count. More than 100 teams participated and counted 2,140 people without housing or shelter throughout King County. She said she worked with the group that covered the area between the transit center, Downtown Park, and the trees along NE 8th Street near I-405; the group counted nine homeless persons. The total count was down five percent compared to the 2006 count.

Commissioner Beighle also reported that the recent auction to benefit the Bellevue Youth Theatre brought in about \$35,000.

Commissioner Beighle said she will be traveling soon to Olympia to talk to legislators about the Healthy Youth Act, HB-1855/SB-5297. She explained that the act is focused on providing accurate information in all sex education classes.

5. DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Early Learning and School Readiness

Alex O'Reilly, Human Services Planner, noted that there is a high level of interest on the part of the Commissioners regarding early learning and school readiness. In 2006 Governor Gregoire established a department of early learning and included funds in the state budget to address early learning and school readiness issues.

Ms. O'Reilly introduced Lisa Conley, Play and Learn Network Coordinator for Child Care Resources; Mardi Taylor, Program Coordinator, Jubilee REACH Center; Brent Christie, Executive Director, Jubilee REACH Center; and Harla Tumbleson, Director of the SOAR initiative, a community collaboration in King County.

Mr. Tumbleson explained that SOAR is actively working with several groups on the Eastside. He explained that the SOAR initiative is located at United Way but is a community wide partnership with more than 60 entities ranging from businesses, the faith community, community-based organizations, school districts and governments. The primary goal is to work toward a coordinated policy and program delivery for children ages zero to 18 to help them succeed in school and in life. The initiative has a variety of different funding sources, including United Way of King County, the City of Seattle, the King County Children and Families Commission, and the King County Developmental Disabilities Board.

Continuing, Mr. Tumbleson said the primary responsibility of the program is to facilitate the building of partnerships in the community. The issues children and youth are facing are large and they are far too large for any one entity to address; the best way to move community indicators in a positive direction is to reduce the number of homeless kids, reduce the number of kids who drop out of school, and to increase the number of kids prepared to succeed when they enter school. During 2007, the initiative will allocate about \$250,000 for partnership projects. The leveraging of those funds is critical, and the programs offered are garnering anywhere from dollar-for-dollar matches to up to seven dollars for every dollar put in.

There are two basic policies for the SOAR program: identifying what kids need, and identifying how the community can go about addressing those needs. When the program first started, a variety of different focus groups and forums were conducted in the community. The research all led to the development of the King County Action Agenda for Early Childhood and School Readiness. The Action Agenda has four specific goals: 1) nurturing the relationships of children to their parents, guardians and other significant adults in their lives; 2) prevention and early intervention; 3) early care and education; and 4) successful transitions and school readiness. Each of the goals is currently being addressed through programs offered in the community.

Mr. Christie explained that the Jubilee REACH (Resources, Education, Assistance, Community, Hospitality) Center came out of Eastside Academy and the need to expand programs for at-risk youth. The program is sponsored by Bellevue and from its inception has benefited from programs offered by the city through the Parks & Community Services Department, the school district, and others. The program is focused on loving and nurturing kids; it does not seek to duplicate services in the community but rather to integrate, advocate and collaborate with other organizations.

Mr. Christie said the program started with 20 kids and now has 40 enrolled. The kids who drop in before school participate in the walking school bus in which adults walk the kids to school when it is time. When it was learned that many kindergartners lack socialization skills and suffer from separation anxiety, and have parents that do not speak English and who do not have a relational understanding of what school is, many of whom are afraid to leave their homes because they do not speak the

language, it was decided to partner with Hopelink and various churches to offer ESL classes. The kids participate in the story time room while the parents learn English; both the kids and the parents are building relationships.

It was then learned that many kids have nothing to do after school. The doors were opened to them and on the first day 12 middle school kids arrived. Many men volunteer in the after-school program and are benefiting the children who do not have fathers in their lives.

Mr. Christie and Ms. Taylor shared with the Commission several stories of working with the children and how they have seen their relations and opportunity for success improve as a result of the Jubilee REACH Center. They said there is a focus in the after school program on finishing homework, with tutoring offered, following which the kids are invited to use the computer lab, the recording studio, and the arts studio.

Mr. Christie said the program offers a place of life in the community. The kids are being engaged in healthy lifestyles. Computers are made available for purchase at very low cost. The chess program encourages kids to think about the good and bad consequences of each move and equates that to making choices in life. Bellevue Youth Theatre is a partner in the program, and all of the kids who try out for a part are given one.

The Community Care Fest program that is being developed will focus on how to improve and benefit the community. There are many in the community not able to take care of their homes; many only need assistance with clean-up and fix-up. Northwest Medical Teams will serve as a partner in operating a dental van. Sunday Dinners @ 5 is a program aimed at building community. There is a garden at the school that helps the students and their parents learn about health and nutrition. The young and sober program is focused on keeping youth away from drugs and alcohol.

Commissioner Stout asked how many total kids have been served by the program. Mr. Christie said the program was started on October 5, 2006, and to date it has impacted some 300 people, including kids and their parents. Efforts are under way to build a better database program to track how many family units are being benefited and other empirical data.

Ms. Conley told the Commissioners that seven or eight years ago Child Care Resources and other referral organizations around the country were beginning to understand that in order to meet the mission of supporting all children it would necessary to broaden their focus to include those who are not involved in licensed childcare. Accordingly, Child Care Resources started looking at ways to support family, friend and neighbor care, which is in fact the most prevalent form of childcare, and the primary source of childcare for infants and toddlers. Most children spend at least part of each week with a grandmother or grandfather, aunt or uncle, older

brother or sister, a friend or a neighbor. It is estimated that in King County some 60,000 children are in family, friend and neighbor care for some part of each week. Over 50 percent of refugee and immigrant parents rely on family, friend and neighbor care for children aged birth to five.

Many children start school a little behind the curve because of language or cultural barriers. In talking with family, friend and neighbor caregivers locally and throughout the country, it has been learned that they want support, not institutional classes aimed at telling them how to raise kids. One of the models of support that has emerged is play and learn groups. Play and learn groups meet a couple of times a week and are facilitated by a person with training or experience in early childhood education and child development. Caregivers bring children to the groups and participate with them in planned activities.

Each group is somewhat different in that they serve diverse communities, but most follow a similar format. During the free play time the facilitator moves around the room to check in with all the caregivers, provide gentle guidance for how to interact with children, what to observe, and how to provide support. There is usually some song singing and finger plays, and a story is generally read. There are always group activities.

Ms. Conley said there are currently 45 play and learn groups in nine different languages operating in the Seattle/King County area. The number of groups continues to grow; three more will be online very soon, one of which will be in a private apartment building for Russian and Turkish immigrants. The various groups are conducted by 16 different community organizations, all of which partner with Child Care Resources.

There is a lot of learning going on in the play and learn groups. The kids are offered the opportunity to interact with other children, and equally important the caregivers are given the chance to talk with other caregivers, to learn new approaches, and to learn about available support services. Most of the groups are offered at no cost.

There are two play and learn groups operating in Bellevue: one at the Jubilee REACH Center and one at Crossroads Community Center; the latter is facilitated by the Chinese Information and Service Center. In all groups, the common denominator is the best interest of the child.

Ms. O'Reilly said recently she along with Terry Smith, Assistant Director, and Bellevue Aging Services Director Cathy VonWald attended a group run by the Chinese Information and Service Center and Jefferson Community Center on Beacon Hill in Seattle to observe a play and learn group. She said staff is interested in ways to integrate some of the play and learn concepts at the city's community centers.

Ms. Conley said Child Care Resources provides training and consultation with organizations wanting to start play and learn groups. The organization is also conducting evaluations in concert with a group called Organizational Research Services. In the first report, 72.7 percent of the caregivers contacted indicated that they have changed what they do with the children in their care as a result of what they learned at the play and learn group; for those who indicated they speak a language other than English, the number was 95 percent.

Commissioner Stout said one tool for success in school is being able to speak and communicate in English; for one thing, the WASL is administered in English. She stressed the need for children to learn English, noting that children without good English skills enter school with a vocabulary deficit. At the same time, they need to retain their native language. Ms. Conley agreed and suggested community organizations have a role to play in that arena. Groups like Child Care Resources can provide information, but local communities are best at determining how and at what age that should be done.

Ms. O'Reilly said the play and learn group she observed at Jefferson Community Center was conducted bilingually. Ms. Conley pointed out that most of the groups are multilingual and English is the common denominator. It is not, however, an issue that has been directly addressed by the play and learn groups generally.

Commissioner Huenefeld-Gese said she has found in her work as a psychologist that teens from non-English speaking families must serve as translators for their parents; often they feel the responsibility is a burden, and in fact in some cases it is in fact a terrible burden. She highlighted the need to bring the families in along with the kids to learn English together, benefiting everyone. Mr. Christie agreed and said the play and learn program is a good model of that principle in action.

Mr. Tumbleson said broadening the whole notion of family support in the community will get to that issue. Kids are often the only ones who can translate for their parents in conversations with medical professionals.

From the audience, Deanna Houck with Public Health of Seattle/King County said she has been very encouraged by programs such as SOAR, Jubilee REACH, and play and learn. She said the families that are participating in those programs are public health families. Connections in the community are of prime importance, and when groups of people are brought together there is always positive learning that occurs.

Ms. O'Reilly added that there are four networking groups of which Families and Children Early Support (FACES) is one. The program began in South King County with a focus on bringing people together to focus on the King County Action Agenda. Each community has different needs; the Eastside FACES group has been focused

in part on parenting workshops, and during 2007 another series of the workshops will be conducted but in languages other than English.

- 6. OLD BUSINESS – None
- 7. NEW BUSINESS – None
- 8. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None
- 9. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Hoople adjourned the meeting at 8:14 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date