

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 3, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Hoople

GUEST: Dr. Brian Plaskon

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Leslie, Alex O'Reilly, Joseph Adriano, Warren Leyh, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Matt Hornyak, WIN211; Kathleen Southwick, Crisis Clinic; Ida Lam, Cultural Navigator Program

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Stout 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 6:37 p.m., and Commissioner Hoople, who was excused.

Chair Stout introduced new Commissioner Dr. Brian Plaskon. Dr. Plaskon said he is a general surgeon and that he and his wife serve as foster parents.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 6, 2009

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

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Nancy O'Brien-Abel, Youth Link Board member, invited the Commissioners to attend the 11th annual Youth Link Gumbo Night at the home of David and Sherry Grindeland. The event is planned for Wednesday, April 22. She said the youth always enjoy interacting with the Commissioners at the event.

Ms. Brenda Gurung, Youth Link Board co-chair, invited the Commissioners to attend the Annual Community Leadership Awards Ceremony on May 20 in the Council chambers. The reception will begin at 6:45 p.m. and the program at 7:15 p.m.

Ms. O'Brien-Abel said the Youth Link Board priorities for 2009 include promoting, educating and supporting youth environmental stewardship throughout the community, which will involve creating new alliances and utilizing existing partnerships to achieve a higher green standard in the city; completing a community assessment and evaluation of the Youth Link program, something that is done every ten years; continuing to support the three-year pilot program for the Bellevue Youth Court; and developing and implementing effective communication strategies in order to increase recognition of the Youth Link program, youth voice and community involvement.

Commissioner Beighle said her daughters' elementary school recently partnered with Youth Link on a coat drive. Helena Stephens, Teen Services Program Administrator, said a total of 1800 coats were collected, most of which have already been distributed; some are distributed monthly through the Teen Closet program.

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Beighle said she attended the Bellevue Youth Theater annual fundraiser and thoroughly enjoyed herself along with everyone else who was there. She said all three of her children have been part of the program which is very inclusive; everyone who tries out gets a part.

Commissioner Beighle said she along with Commissioner Hoople and Human Services Manager Emily Leslie and Human Services Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano participated in the One Night Count. She said they were focused on the Factoria area and counted seven homeless persons. Overall the Seattle-area count was up by two percent over the previous year. Most striking was the fact that south King County showed a 68 percent increase.

Ms. Leslie provided the Commissioners with copies of a press release from the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness. She said at the Committee to End Homelessness meeting on February 2 there was a revised summary of the One Night Count, including an outline of where the homeless were found living.

Grant Coordinator Joseph Adriano said the count areas are fairly rigid. He said it is well known that there are people living outside the count areas, so the actual number of homeless persons is always higher than the count indicates.

Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly said along with Mr. Adriano and Commissioner Hoople she attended the ARCH Community Advisory Board meeting on January 28 at which the staff of the Plymouth Housing Group made a presentation regarding the plan for services for the St. Andrew's housing project at St. Margaret's church in Factoria. The plan appears to be very strong.

Chair Stout pointed out that the packet materials included copies of an article from *Blue Avocado*, an online newsletter for non-profit managers. She said the thought-provoking article has to do with best practices.

Chair Stout called attention to the invitation to a fundraising event for Sound Mental Health in May, and reported that Healthy Start will conduct its annual luncheon on May 14.

6. DISCUSSION

A. 2-1-1 Update

Mr. Matt Hornyak, Washington Information Network 211 executive director, said he was very thankful to see both the Senate and the House of the 111th Congress call for a 2-1-1- act, the long-sought federal piece of funding for what is supposed to be a national program. Washington was first in the nation in launching a statewide system and the program serves as a model for others to follow. The national program was first introduced in 2004 and enjoyed wide support. Washington State Senator Patty Murray has signed on as the Democratic champion for the program in partnership with Republican Richard Burr of South Carolina. In the House, Representative Anna Eshoo is the primary champion. The program remains the top legislative priority for United Way of America. Everyone is optimistic that the program will at least get a fair hearing.

Mr. Hornyak said in 2008 there were an average of 30,000 calls per month statewide. About 40 percent of the volume was in King County. That translates to a daily average in excess of 1500 calls.

In the third quarter of 2008, about half of the calls were about some aspect of basic shelter. In the fourth quarter the percentage dropped to 35.

The disaster response unit was activated at Camp Murray in January to accommodate storm victims. All decisions were made in real time and is something the 2-1-1 system was involved in. Most who served in the facility have regular day jobs and are activated during emergencies.

Mr. Hornyak said everyone is cautiously optimistic that the program, for the first time ever, has been included in the Governor's budget. That is evidence of the growing credibility of the organization. Unfortunately, because of the budget shortfall, the

allocation proposed is quite small. When graphed, the call volumes and the funding levels appear on opposite trajectories. He added that the number of callers who say they have never had to ask for help before is growing at an astounding rate.

Ms. Kathleen Southwick with Crisis Clinic explained that calls to 2-1-1 are directly connected to one of the six call centers that serve the state. A database of programs and services offered by social service agencies, along with their accessibility requirements, is readily available to the operators. The callers are given the number of the agency best able to help and are coached on how to present their situations in calling the agency. The database is available online as well.

Ms. Southwick said the 2-1-1 system went live in 2006 in King County. That year there were 100,000 calls, of which 88,000 were answered. In 2007 there were 120,000 calls, of which 100,000 were handled. The number grew to 160,000 calls in 2008, of which 108,000 were handled. The projection for 2009 is for 180,000 calls, with 112,000 of them handled.

Overall, the number of annual calls from Bellevue has remained consistent, but the number of calls for basic needs and financial assistance jumped between 2006 and 2007. Calls during the last two quarters have increasingly been from people with multiple needs and with situations that are far more complex. It is taking much longer to field each call. Some two percent of the callers are contacted two weeks later in an attempt to track the degree to which they were able to access services; about a third say they got help, a third indicate that their cases are in process and they are optimistic, and a third say they were not able to find help. Crisis Clinic uses the feedback in determining how to route the callers.

Those who call in are informed as to how long the queue is. They are also offered a directory assistance option they can access to get specific information, such as phone number and hours of operation for specific agencies; about 25,000 of the annual calls utilize that option. Callers are also given the option of entering their phone numbers and having an operator call them back according to the queue.

Ms. Southwick said use of the teleinterpreter language service has skyrocketed for the Crisis Clinic over the last two years. In 2006 the agency was spending about \$14,000 per year on the service; in 2008 the total was more than \$36,000. There are a lot of specialists available to help in King County: there is a disability specialist, a caregiver specialist, a rental assistance specialist, and through a contract with Northwest Justice 2-1-1 serves as the front door to those in need of low-cost or free civil legal assistance.

The 2-1-1 system in King County has an annual budget of more than \$1 million. Of that, \$100,000 comes from King County; the current funding is guaranteed only through June 2009. In December, the Medina Foundation elected to contribute \$50,000. The program receives \$120,000 annually from WIN211, and loss of those funds would be devastating.

Ms. Southwick asked the Commission to help in putting the 2-1-1 system on the city's legislative advocacy list.

Mr. Hornyak said WIN211 has an amazing board of directors, including Marilyn Mason-Plunkett of Hopelink who has gone out of her way to talk about the value of the system. Ms. Mason-Plunkett sees every day the capacity that is created for Hopelink by having staff direct people to 2-1-1.

The system breaks tasks into natural divisions, which creates efficiencies for everyone involved. The system was designed to have many different funding sources to increase the level of buy-in. Nationwide, between 20 and 30 percent of the calls are from professionals seeking help for their clients. The support offered by Bellevue in the past has been greatly appreciated, and hopefully it will continue into the future.

Commissioner Huenefeld Gese asked if 2-1-1 can be called from home phones only. Ms. Southwick said it can be called from cell phones as well.

Commissioner Huenefeld Gese said during the process of conducting community conversations for the Needs Update two years ago, one of the groups interviewed was fire and police. They had to be informed about the 2-1-1 system as many of them did not know about it. She stressed the need for the 2-1-1 system to reach out to them to let them know what services are available. Ms. Southwick said over the years there have been meetings with the regional fire chiefs, but allowed that the information has not necessarily flowed down to the rank and file.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Huenefeld Gese, Ms. Southwick said it takes real skill to talk to people who believe that whatever their needs are there will be someone or some agency that can meet them. Nearly every call requires a reality check about how the systems work, what is or is not available, and requires some problem solving. The operators are straightforward in telling people about the waiting lists, and in telling those who call at the end of the month for utility assistance to call back near the first of the month instead because of how the allocation periods work.

Ms. O'Reilly asked if calls to 2-1-1 outside the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. are routed to the Crisis Clinic. Ms. Southwick said the caller receives a recording informing them that if they are in emotional crisis they should hang up and call the crisis line directly, and the number is included. Ms. O'Reilly said she was aware of a case in which a public health nurse who encountered a homeless person at a grocery store and recommended that she call 2-1-1 for housing support. The person called and got the recording and decided she could not call the crisis line because she was not in fact in emotional crisis. Had the recording been different, the person may have made the call and gotten information about a homeless shelter. Ms. Southwick said anyone can choose to call the crisis line at any time of day, but they should not expect to receive the full range of services outside of the regular operating hours.

Mr. Hornyak said the recording actually gives the callers three options: calling the crisis line for those in emotional distress, calling back during regular business hours, and calling 9-1-1 in cases of actual emergency.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Cultural Navigator Program Update

Ms. Ida Lam with the Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC) explained that the Cultural Navigator Program began two years ago as a pilot program. The original idea was to create a program for immigrants and refugees who do not speak English as their primary language and who may have difficulty in accessing services, how to apply for a job, how to take the bus, and in learning about everyday norms in their adopted country. The program uses “navigators” who speak languages such as Russian, Spanish and the languages of India to assist clients in their native tongues.

Ms. Lam said limited program funding does not allow for having a single language offered for a full eight hours per week. Help in some languages is only available four hours per week, split into two sites. Agencies thought the navigators would be stationed in one place rather than having to run around, so there have been some difficulties in that respect; it took nearly a year to figure out the staffing issues. Currently the program is hiring its own staff, and all of the navigators are operating under CISC; that has made the program easier to manage and has resulted in staff stability. The number of unduplicated clients has increased by 150 percent.

Ms. Lam said the navigators assist the clients to connect with the right service provider. Follow-up calls are often made to make sure the clients received the help they needed. Sometimes it is easiest for the navigator to take the clients to the providers.

A monthly meeting with CISC staff and representatives from the Eastside Refugee and Immigrant Coalition and the city is held to identify issues and needs. The information shared helps in developing programs.

Ms. Lam said with the program fully staffed, the determination has been made to spend more time on marketing and outreach strategies, not only to clients but also to service providers. More time will also be spent on staff development to better serve the clients. Efforts will be put into recruiting more volunteers to make it possible to offer more language hours and services per week. Ultimately, the goal is to expand the program to a family center in Bellevue where both new and existing residents can seek services and exchange information, similar to the family centers operating in Seattle and Kent.

CISC wants to offer more ESL and Talk Time classes. Those who take the classes build trust in the program and then often they seek to have other needs addressed.

Informational workshops will also be conducted during 2009 in conjunction with Work Source in which the focus will be on unemployment issues.

Commissioner Plaskon asked how service volumes are measured and if the volumes are increasing. Ms. Lam explained that a case file is opened for every client served so they can be tracked. The program also attempts to collect information from those just calling for information, but no one is forced to give information. Through February 3, the program has already received 10 calls.

Commissioner Plaskon asked how many navigators are currently on staff. He was told by Ms. Lam that there is one Spanish, one Russian, two East Indians, and one Chinese. None of them are full time.

Chair Stout asked what key factor helped reduce staff turnovers. Ms. Lam said in the beginning CISC supplied the Chinese navigator, and through contracts with other agencies navigators with other language skills were brought on board. That approach did not work so well for various reasons. CISC now hires all of the staff, and that has slowed the turnover rate.

Ms. Lam said recently there has been an increase in the number of persons speaking Farsi coming in to the Redmond center. There is a Hmong group in Kirkland that is difficult to serve because of the cultural differences. As the needs in the community continue to change, the Cultural Navigator program will adjust in order to meet their needs to the extent possible.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. O'Reilly noted that the past two Needs Updates have called out certain areas. For the next update, the Commission has mentioned a couple of areas: basic services and integrated services. She suggested integrated services likely would be a funding area rather than a focus area. She asked the Commissioners to provide some clarity on how integrated services could be a special chapter in the Needs Update.

Commissioner Huenefeld Gese said if the Bel-Red corridor or somewhere else were to have a number of agencies clustered together, they could work better together. She said she did not know if that could be flushed out specifically in the Needs Update, but there are a lot of groups currently working together and no one knows they are working together. Additionally, there may be holes that could be patched by having some agency integration. Agencies will say they work with other agencies, or at least talk to others, but that cannot really be said to be an integration of services.

Ms. O'Reilly asked if calling out the significant collaborations that are going on would be the same as focusing on integrated services. She allowed that staff may know about some collaborations that others may not know about, and they could be highlighted. Commissioner Huenefeld Gese said if the system holes were made

known, the agencies could more seamlessly work together to fill those holes. She said the focus should be more on service system needs rather than client needs.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Stout adjourned the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

Secretary to the Human Services Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

Date