

Meeting of the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), Friday, Feb. 1

In attendance were (in alphabetical order): Dr. Malcolm Astley, Det. Tyler Castagno, Ms. Sarah Greenaway, Ms. Lisa Raftery, Ms. Brenda Ross and Mr. Jason Verhoosky.

The meeting was called to order at 9:20 a.m.

The minutes from the Jan. 11 meeting were reviewed and accepted.

The first item was a community update from Dr. Malcolm Astley. He cited the June 2018 presentation by Ms. Rebecca Mooney, executive director of the Melrose Alliance Against Violence, on the three tiers of domestic violence prevention: identifying those youths who are definitely involved in risky behavior; identifying those who are at risk around a certain behavior or who have indicators that they might get involved; and identifying those at risk in the general population. Dr. Astley said that he and Mr. Jason Verhoosky had discussed the overlap that exists in groups such as the Sudbury-Wayland-Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable, WaylandCares, the Youth Advisory Committee and the Wayland police in order to determine how the groups could maintain contact with each other, or form a coalition to work together.

Dr. Astley also said that he and Mr. Verhoosky had discussed the Sandy Hook Promise, a non-profit organization formed to prevent gun violence by training students and adults to recognize the signs of gun violence. The group is supporting a bill currently before the Massachusetts State Senate that is aimed at combating the crisis of violence, bullying and suicide that is devastating our nation's schools.

[The bill, called the Safety and Violence Education for Students (SAVE Students) Act, was filed by State Senator Barry Finegold and, if passed, would set a new national standard for statewide school safety programming. The legislation would require that all middle school and high school students in the state have access to evidence-based programming that teaches how to combat social isolation and build inclusive community, how to identify the signs and signals of interpersonal violence and suicide, and how to reach out for help. It would also establish a statewide anonymous reporting system to collect tips and information about potential threats to the safety of Massachusetts students.]

Dr. Astley said that this bill includes many of the same things that he and the YAC have been saying about dating breakup violence and suicide -- that people need to know what signs to look for. Suicide, he said, is an area where the town of Wayland is ahead of other towns, in terms of having potential victims learn how to reach out for help. He said that the Wayland schools' administrators and staff are involved in the type of threat assessment model that he and Mr. Verhoosky have talked about, with the goal of figuring out what is already taking place and where the YAC could supplement it.

Ms. Brenda Ross said that the SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Group that was recently started in Wayland by Richard Whitehead, director of student services, might be considered a silo program that could be involved in this coalition.

Ms. Sarah Greenaway questioned how much responsibility in identifying youths at risk belongs to the schools vs. the community.

Dr. Astley said that the Wayland police are already doing work in identifying kids at risk.

Ms. Greenaway suggested that in order to identify kids at risk it would be helpful to have a checklist, i.e., “if your child is showing six or seven of these checklist items, then he or she is at risk.”

Det. Tyler Castagno asked if such a screening checklist already exists.

Dr. Astley said that he knew of an online assessment tool called the Campbell Domestic Violence Risk Measurement Tool. He said in its current form it was not appropriate for high school or middle school students, but said it could possibly be adapted to them.

Ms. Brenda Ross said that preventive messaging, rather than reactive messaging, is what’s needed to get and keep kids on the right track.

Dr. Astley said that relationship breakups have the highest potential for violence. He said that skills in grieving, including non-death grieving, need to be taught. He said that he and Mr. Verhoosky had discussed the fact that anything disappearing or fading away in one’s personal environment can result in the need to grieve. Learning to grieve helps one move away from pain and the risk of harming one’s self or someone else.

Ms. Lisa Raftery posed a question about schools and violence prevention. She said she knew of a few younger kids who are being monitored for at-risk behaviors, and asked at what point do kids like these get on someone’s radar for being at-risk for violent behavior, vs. it being assumed that that’s just the way that kid is, that they have always been on the edge.

Dr. Astley said there will be a review of what’s already in place and whether it is sufficient. He noted that kids with disabilities, or those on the autism spectrum, are more prone to being sexually assaulted, particularly should they drink to excess. When that happens, even if they have seen a training film such as Escalation, they may be more susceptible to falsehoods being told by the assailant about being taken somewhere, and being taken advantage of.

Det. Castagno said that town-offered Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) class for adult women who live or work in Wayland will be taught on March 12, 14, 19 and 21 at the Loker School gym. It is a free three-hour course (6 pm to 9 pm), but the course is capped at 25 entrants and it is almost filled. The adult class is offered to women only. RAD is also taught at the high school level. Originally it was offered only to females, but now

there is a RAD class for males, taught by Det. Shane Bowles. Det. Castagno noted that male students are not allowed into the training classes for female students.

Det. Castagno said that the RAD training is not all about fighting; it also teaches disengagement, de-escalation and common sense. For example, he said that the trainers don't tell students to never drink at college, but said that "if you're a woman going to drink in a bar, then be sure to cover your drink, so nothing gets slipped into it." The trainers will also remind girls that dress can be an important factor, and that wearing high heels or a skintight dress will prevent them from running should they need to. Or that if a girl is planning to go out with three other female friends, and then her three friends change their plans, that girl might be well-advised to rethink her plans, rather than going out alone. After receiving advice like that, the class will begin learning simple self-defense for many scenarios. Det. Castagno said that one student, who had escaped a dangerous situation, had offered the testimonial that if it wasn't for RAD, something very bad might have happened. He said that it is hard to get some girls engaged, and that he can't make a student listen. But he said that if the class only saves one kid out of 100, it's a success. He said the focus is on hand-to-hand defense; no weapons training is offered.

Mr. Verhoosky offered a recap of what was said earlier. He said an evaluation was being conducted of the services that are provided in the community, such as schools, police, town boards, WaylandCares, the wellness committee, student services within the schools, guidance, and the domestic violence roundtable, to see where there is overlap.

Ms. Ross asked Dr. Astley about a book he had in front of him. He said it was *The Empathy Effect* by Wayland resident Helen Reiss. He said that the message of the book is that empathy can be taught, and noted that the author claimed to have worked with physicians who improved their empathy and then achieved better results with their patients.

Mr. Verhoosky then passed around a document that inventories what services are available through the YAC. The purpose was to reach out to all groups that the YAC has presence in so that they might perform a baseline evaluation. He said that the YAC is requested to do this recap of who it is and what it does on an annual basis. He said he had taken the 2017 report, added information such as new business, and updated the list of committee members. He noted that Rev. Ted Crass would remain a member of the YAC until June, at which point his place would be taken by Rabbi Louis Pollison of Congregation Or Atid. The revised description of YAC was reviewed and approved by a vote of 5-0.

There was a brief discussion of homework load in Wayland schools. The elementary school Catch Up and Breathe program, in which Wednesdays were homework-free days, was mentioned. Mr. Verhoosky noted that the high school had once tried a similar program, but that the SADD students complained because they were high achievers and wanted the homework. It was also pointed out that it was self-defeating to have a homework-free day if the next day there was twice as much homework.

It was then said that some Wayland High School students find college less taxing than high school. However, one YAC member cited a statistic that only 20% of students finish college in four years.

The next meeting was scheduled to be held March 1, which is the first Friday of the month, but because Mr. Verhoosky had a schedule conflict, it was decided to hold the meeting on March 8 instead.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 am.