

Minutes for Dec. 10, 2021 Zoom meeting of the Youth Advisory Council

Chairperson Ms. Lisa Raftery made a motion to call the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. The motion was seconded by Det. Tyler Castagno. Roll call was taken. Those present were Dr. Malcolm Astley, Wayland Youth Officer Shane Bowles, Wayland Det. Tyler Castagno, Ms. Pamela Cerne, Dr. Dossie Kahn, Ms. Allison Kates, Rabbi Louis Polisson, Chairperson Lisa Raftery, and Ms. Brenda Ross. Wayland resident Peter Bochner took the minutes.

Chairperson Raftery asked if the attendees had had a chance to review the minutes for the November meeting, and if there were any edits or questions. There were none, and she made a motion to accept the minutes. The motion was seconded by Dr. Malcolm Astley. Dr. Astley, Ms. Brenda Ross, Det. Tyler Castagno, Rabbi Louis Polisson and Chairperson Raftery voted in favor of accepting the minutes.

The newest member of the YAC, Ms. Allison Kates, was introduced. Ms. Kates was unanimously approved to be a Board of Selectmen liaison. She is a Wayland resident who lives here with her husband and two sons, 14 and 8 years old. She is a school psychologist and performs special ed evaluations and counseling services to preschool and elementary schools. She is vice president of the Jewish Family Services of MetroWest, cochair of the board of engagement committee, and is active in Cradles to Crayons and the PTO.

Community Programming

Mr. Jason Verhoosky said that a program on vaping will be held in the Wayland High School theatre on January 13 at 7 pm. Parents and students are invited. The program is a response to the increase seen in vaping among young people in town, predominantly at the high school level, but also at the middle school. The curriculum for the event will focus on educating the audience on how vaping devices are made, which products are the most popular, the impacts of vaping on health, and how youths are accessing the products. The program will offer parents tips for talking to their children about vaping. He said, "I've been working with a number of students who have been caught vaping and working on preventive measures, i.e., with SADD, for the youth perspective. The event will also be filmed by WayCam so it can be livestreamed and archived." He said there is no need to reserve a seat, and adults are free to bring their children.

Dr. Malcolm Astley said it was good that the event is being recorded.

Chairperson Raftery asked who would be speaking. Mr. Verhoosky said that, at the moment, it was just him and the youths who were caught vaping. Det. Castagno and Youth Officer Shane Bowles said they would be happy to be involved as well.

Dr. Astley asked Mr. Verhoosky what the consequences were for those caught vaping. Mr. Verhoosky said that, from the school perspective, they were the same consequences as violating tobacco policy. This involves the confiscation of any product, and potential suspension for usage on school grounds, but the consequences can go up if there is potential sharing and/or distribution. Furthermore, if the person is involved in afterschool activities or athletics, then MIAA guidelines come into play, and that person could lose part of season. But, he said, "It's case by case."

Dr. Astley asked if the students who were caught had to go through counseling. Mr. Verhoosky said there were no set rules, but "when a student is caught, either WHS Principal Allyson Mizoguchi and WMS Principal Betsy Gavron are notified, and then someone in the school reaches out to me. The models for diversion cases vary according to the severity of the case. Wayland Youth & Family Services (Y&FS) has done some group classes, and there have been times when the person met with one of our clinicians."

Asked about the legal ramifications, Det. Castagno and Youth Officer Bowles said they vary case by case. For a first time offender, it won't rise to the criminal level; that is the last resort. But the punishment could be greater if there is damage involved, i.e., if a fire detector goes off, or if the case involves distribution or heavy usage. Youth Officer Bowles said, "This is a hard topic right now, and one reason we're doing this is to raise awareness of the problem. One problem we face is that the products can be obtained online. This is quite an issue right now. The policy of diversion falls under certain guidelines, and can involve sanction of sports activities or other disciplinary actions."

Youth Officer Bowles said the level of communication between the schools and the police department was good. "Most incidents the schools can handle on their own. But if it rises to where we need to be there, we will be."

Ms. Ross asked if there a flyer about the event was available. Mr. Verhoosky said he would forward the existing blurb after the meeting, and then, after the holidays, he would send out the flyer as well as the link for the virtual meeting. He said that Ms. Meghan Wohlfarth, the new Substance Abuse Program Coordinator, will be taking that on, as well as getting the WaylandCares website back up and running.

Social host community education

Mr. Verhoosky said there would be a planning meeting the week of December 13 with students doing social host community education as project for their diversion responsibilities. SADD director Mr. John Berry is also helping with event as part of his Master's program. Also connected to this will be SADD hosting the mock car crash again in the spring. The goal of the planning committee is to get everything lined up for a meeting in February, including posters on the town billboards, mailings and an event for students and parents prior to the spring prom. "We are speaking out against the culture, not just of providing alcohol but looking away. It's a rite of passage, and the community accepts its use passively."

Internet safety

Regarding the Internet safety presentation, Mr. Verhoosky said he has been in contact with elementary school principals, they are waiting for approval from [Wayland public schools superintendent] Dr. Omar Easy. "The event will likely be in February. I will have final dates at the January YAC meeting. We will be covering traditional internet safety concepts, such as technology usage, the positives and negatives of technology, current tools, social platforms, changes we've seen during the Covid pandemic, positive practices, and boundaries around technology usage, so they know what they can access and what they can't. We will focus on expanding communication between parents and their children. The event will be open to third, fourth and fifth grade parents. It will be given in person and virtual."

Dr. Astley said, "It's terrific that remote is happening. Where remote attendance is allowed, attendance increases."

Violence Prevention

Dr. Astley provided an update for the White Ribbon Group. He said that the Sudbury-Wayland-Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable White Ribbon Group, which involves mainly men, "because it is mostly a males' issue," continues to meet monthly. He said the first event will be Tuesday, Jan. 11, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. and will consist of a panel of members of the White Ribbon group. That will serve as a warm-up to a presentation on Tuesday, March 8, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. with Ms. JAC. Patrissi, author, and founder and principal at Growing a New Heart, a consortium of leaders in the healing arts moving people towards respectful relationships, speaking about dismantling abuse by addressing the topic Transforming the Culture of "Power Over": Compassionate Accountability. Dr. Astley said, "Lots of relationships are built on an invisible "power over" structure, an artificial structure set up to give power to certain individuals and keep it away from others. We need to hold those who are responsible for enforcing artificial structures accountable in a compassionate way, by helping them see and understand."

Chairperson Raftery asked if the event would be recorded. Dr. Astley said, "I don't know that yet. I'm in favor of that, but there are privacy issues." Chairperson Raftery asked if perhaps only the presentation part of it could be recorded. Dr. Astley said, "Sometimes we run into tricky issues, because the speakers are called into other places."

Dr. Astley then broached the topic of the violence prevention subcommittee. He said, "We are still trying to figure out what's going to happen with violence prevention, because we can't establish our own subcommittee. The idea that we can't take on an issue clearly within our domain mystifies me. Is this part of agenda item?"

Dr. Verhoosky said, "It's not that we cannot form the subcommittee, it's that we need to receive approval to do it. If we want to propose a subcommittee, we need to go to the selectmen to ask for approval for, to make it official, call meetings, have minutes. So that is a possibility. The school task force on relationship violence prevention, oversee

by Ms. Jessica Tepperow of REACH, is setting policies, best practices and engaging member across the community. Right now that task force is being reenergized, and is getting meetings back on the books.

Dr. Astley said he welcomed everyone's thoughts on the matter. He said, "Not having the violence prevention subcommittee could dilute the overall efforts significantly. We need a subcommittee that has a clinical perspective. I don't think that's quite the agenda of the school taskforce. My other thought is that the subcommittee could generate more energy and involvement. Is it better to join the two committees? We are a town entity. My concern is how to make this a coordinated strong effort vs. a diluted one."

Mr. Verhoosky said, "With the similarity of faces, we are trying to make sure we are not reinventing the wheel, while being as efficient as we can be, without having the same people at two meetings discussing the same thing."

Dr. Dossie Kahn said, "The top priority for all communities is prevention of violence. Providing services to students is vital. Trying to finetune who is a potential threat is not the way I do that. We need a unified community approach, with a larger community based on school participation. The two models could work equally well, as long as we need to always focus on access to services for as many community members as possible. We need to identify students who exhibit some potential threat as well as those at high risk. Committee-wise, I think it depends on which committee vehicles will allow school personnel to be as involved as possible. I don't know which one works better."

Clinical update

Dr. Kahn said "There have been a lot of new intake requests this fall and into early winter, from all age groups. We are fairly full, we still do a brief consultation with families contacting us, but it has been harder than usual this past month. [Clinician] Kelsey Sanclemente has middle school and high school groups, a combination of in-person and video remote. I tend to work in remote mode, while Kelsey works both remote and in person. Both of us are very concerned about the increasing number of individuals of all ages suffering with anxiety, depression and distress. People are afraid of the future, and children no exception. They worry about how to be happy successful adults and move forward in life. All these things were happening before the pandemic, but the pandemic has added to it. We just keep at it."

Ms. Raftery noted that Kelsey has a wonderful presence, and is very calm. Dr. Kahn agreed, and said, "She is an absolute delight to have as part of our team."

Ms. Ross asked, "With an increase in anxiety and depression, are we doing more about educating parents about suicide?"

Dr. Kahn said, "Y&FS has brought in outside speakers to talk to parents about suicide prevention, about when to worry, and about how you can help your kids. Maybe it's time for some more presentations by professional school psychologists. We have a lot of expertise to tap. We will look at early 2022."

Dr. Kahn said she prefers collaborative programs, in Zoom or in hybrid, for finding out from parents what their questions and concerns are about youth safety and mental health. When suicide is the only topic of a talk, it scares people away and doesn't get to larger issues. People aren't hearing what their loved ones are saying. Not caring if you're alive is close to wishing you were dead. It's a combination of despair, hopelessness and not knowing how to make the pain go away. The vast majority of people are relieved to find another way to get rid of pain. So that's the way to go."

Chairperson Raftery said to Dr. Kahn, "The letter on suicide that you sent out years ago was mentioned at the last meeting, as well as the possibility of getting it out again. It would be great if we could reissue the letter or communicate to parents about tactics."

Dr. Kahn said there will be a short series of community conversations when more data is available from the MetroWest Adolescent Health survey. A February and March series aimed at all grade levels to talk about improving mental health support.

Chairperson Raftery said the focus at the January meeting can be about programming regarding mental health and pain, resulting from the survey data. Then she asked, “What are the communications between Y&FS and school guidance counselors?”

Dr. Kahn said, “It varies case by case. In the past, we would have a meeting in the fall to just get together and touch base. There is less of that now. Principals and guidance counselors readily contact me and Kelsey [Sanclemente] and Jason [Verhoosky]. We are in communication very often, but are not doing a lot of planning right now. Because we are essentially separate, we are not part of staff meetings. But collaboration is very important.”

She continued, “The schools and Y&FS are mindful of the permission to communicate, and respecting family and individual privacy. But that is separate from an emergency situation. Communications are private except when there is a danger we need to respond to. That can mean having a specific counselor to a child that we can talk to. (At this point, she had to leave the meeting for a client consultation.)

Update on WaylandCares

Mr. Verhoosky said, “Now that Meghan [Wohlfarth] is on board, she will be taking the reins on getting WaylandCares back up and running. There will be emails after the holidays. She is getting up to speed on the things we’ve done. We are also updating our mission statement to clarify why we have WaylandCares and Y&FS, and how WaylandCares lives within Y&FS as its community outreach and prevention arm. Currently the website is down.”

Update on Youth Leadership program

Mr. Verhoosky said, “SADD is working on getting out vaping prevention information, presenting the mock car crash, and social host liability. John Berry is meeting with SADD on a weekly basis. Meghan will join in January to let them know she is a resource. At the middle school, I met with Betsy [Principal Gavron] to get the Youth Leadership program back up and running. Meghan is meeting with students this week, with a focus on substance prevention, but at the middle school we are also talking about leadership skills and communication skills, as they pertain to wellness. We will be meeting this upcoming Wednesday [Dec. 15].

Dr. Astley said to Mr. Verhoosky, “I sent you a Boston Globe article on the pervasive meanness out there right now, with people rubbed raw and irritable, and now there is this extra layer of contending with anger.” He asked Mr. Verhoosky to forward it to the members of YAC so they will have as resource.” Mr. Verhoosky said he would.

Board updates

Dr. Astley said the Laura Dunne Astley Foundation is continuing to work on a 20-minute documentary video in which 12 to 15 specialists/activists in violence prevention will be interviewed to discuss the causes of men’s and boys’ violence against women and girls, as well as issues such as the violence that ensues after intimate partners break up. He said the video, which is expected to be completed toward the end of May, will serve as a useful tool to initiate discussion about the issues.

Chairperson Raftery said she had received an email from the Board of Health that Wayland was tied for first place in youth vaccinations for age 5 and up. She said she didn’t know who Wayland was tied with.

Going back to the subject of the violence prevention subcommittee, Chairperson Raftery said she would rather see a concentrated effort from fewer committees. She asked if the issues could be tabled so we can see who from the task force can discuss the matter.

Dr. Astley said, “I’m afraid if we go into separate committees it will continue to flounder. But the major question is how to meet needs of kids at risk?”

Chairperson Raftery said, “Ideally, we should identify who is on both committees, determine the mission of each committee, and figure out if they could be combined.”

Ms. Ross said, “For me, the question is not about another committee, but whether the information is being shared? As long as we have someone from committee who could report back to YAC, we can keep the information flow going.”

Dr. Astley said, “I agree with that in principle, but the fact is, it’s been a three-year effort and it’s still not off the ground.”

Ms. Ross asked, “Is there anyone who owns the work?” Mr. Verhoosky said the school task force is a combination of the task force members, Richard Whitehead and Jess Tepperow. There would be a lot of crossover between the task force participants and the subcommittee, including myself, Brenda [Ross], Pamela [Cerne], Tyler [Castagno], Malcolm [Astley] and, on occasion, Allyson [Mizoguchi] and Betsy [Gavron].

Dr. Astley said, “Richard [Whitehead] was involved with us long ago. But now he’s not.” He added, “It’s a tricky issue if we’re not linked, because then we’re not going to collaborate. The task force is not necessarily interested in the same issues as the violence prevention subcommittee is, such as identifying youths at risk. I don’t think separate will work in long run. We haven’t been able to make it work, partly due to Covid. When bodies meet on a regular basis and are well-coordinated, that will ensure the best results over the long run.”

At this point, Chairperson Raftery suggested continuing the discussion at the January meeting. Mr. Verhoosky said he would follow up on the matter and report back in January.

Chairperson Raftery suggested setting the next meeting date as January 14 at 9:30. Ms. Allison Kates said that there was a high school PTO meeting that morning. Ms. Cerne also said that Jan. 14 would not work for her. Chairperson Raftery asked for an alternate date. Mr. Verhoosky suggested January 7, because January 21 would not work. Ms. Raftery asked if Friday was still the best day for everyone. Rabbi Polisson said it was the least good for him. Det. Castagno asked if we will ever go back to in-person meetings. Mr. Verhoosky asked if everyone wants to return to in-person. Det. Castagno suggested addressing this after the new year. Mr. Verhoosky said the date would be conditionally changed to January 7.

Chairperson Raftery asked if there was any public comment, and was told there was none. She then made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Astley seconded the motion. The vote to adjourn took place. Dr. Astley said yes to adjourn, Ms. Ross said yes, Det. Castagno said yes, Ms. Kates said yes, Rabbi Polisson said yes, and Ms. Cerne said yes. The meeting was adjourned at 10:51 a.m.