

Minutes for Feb. 4, 2022 Zoom meeting of the Youth Advisory Council

In attendance remotely were Chairwoman Lisa Raftery, Rabbi Louis Polisson, Dr. Malcolm Astley, Wayland Youth Officer Shane Bowles, Wayland Det. Tyler Castagno, Ms. Brenda Ross, Ms. Pamela Cerne, Ms. Allison Kates, Dr. Dossie Kahn and Mr. Jason Verhoosky. The minutes were taken by Mr. Peter Bochner.

Chairwoman Raftery made a motion to call the meeting to order at 9:35. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brenda Ross. In favor by saying aye were Ms. Allison Kates, Ms. Pamela Cerne, Ms. Brenda Ross, Dr. Malcolm Astley, Rabbi Louis Polisson and Det. Tyler Castagno.

Chairperson Raftery asked if everyone had received the minutes from the previous meeting, held in December, and if so, if anyone had any edits. No edits or changes were suggested.

Chairperson Raftery made a motion to approve the December minutes. Ms. Kates seconded the motion and voted to approve the minutes. Ms. Cerne, Ms. Ross, Dr. Astley, Rabbi Polisson, Det. Castagno and Chairperson Raftery all voted to approve the minutes, in that order.

Det. Castagno informed the group and he and Youth Officer Bowles had to leave the meeting at 10:30.

For the first item on the agenda, Mr. Jason Verhoosky discussed the Jan. 13 vaping education community event, which was titled Clearing the Cloud. He said over 50 people attended in person, while others attended via Zoom. He said, "We provided an educational overview of what vaping is, how the products are made, what chemicals are inside the products to make them work, the addictive properties of nicotine and substance-based vaping, and the health impacts. One of the shining moments was when a number of SADD students present shared their first-hand perspectives as students of Wayland High School, what they are seeing on a day-to-day basis, how vapes are being used on school property, the impact on their peers. If anyone else here was there, I'd like to hear their thoughts."

Dr. Malcolm Astley said he wasn't there but still appreciated the event taking place.

Chairperson Raftery said that discussing vaping from the students' perspective was a great idea. "Parents don't believe kids are vaping. If parents knew how many students at Wayland High School are vaping, it would be even more eye-opening. And when the results from the MetroWest Youth Health survey are available, I would be even more apt to listen. Kids can order vaping material online." She then asked Mr. Verhoosky to repeat the story about the beaver.

Mr. Verhoosky said that was a fun fact. Most vape flavorings are now synthetically synthesized, but when the vape device manufacturers first started advertising the concept of natural flavors, it was learned that the anal glands of a beaver can be used to create a black cherry flavor. So they were listing black cherry as a natural flavor.

Chairperson Raftery said that the meeting was helpful to parents who attended and that she loved the fact that it was recorded.

Ms. Ross asked where the recording can be found. Mr. Verhoosky said it will be on the Wayland High School website.

In response to a question, Mr. Verhoosky said the recording could be linked to in newsletters. Det. Castagno suggested that if the event takes place again, that he and Youth Officer Bowles would like to participate. Mr. Verhoosky agreed. Det. Castagno suggested discussing the previous day's mental health meeting at Wayland High School.

The next item on the agenda was social host community education. Mr. Verhoosky said there would be several spring events around the topic, leading up to prom season and graduation. He said he would be partnering with the Wayland police department, SADD director Mr. John Berry and the SADD students. Messages about the event will start going out in late February or early March, and will include postcards and banners on town signboards. The idea is to plant the seeds of doubt in the minds of parents about whether they want to host a party.

He said there will also be a "sticker shock" campaign. The goal is to deter people from purchasing alcohol for minors by going out on a Saturday morning, reaching out to licensees that have offsite liquor and putting stickers on the products, in order to have a wall of sticker products, saying "21 is 21." He said, "This won't stop everyone but if we can stop even a few incidents or give people pause, it will be a success." He said the campaign has been done in other nearby communities (Sticker Shock is a national campaign) but this will be the first time it takes place in Wayland.

In addition to that, he said that Mr. Berry and SADD leaders are planning to do a mock car crash again, and are looking at the week in May leading up to senior prom.

Mr. Verhoosky said that Youth & Family Services is also going to be filming a series of short interviews with teens about what it's like being a youth in Wayland. He said, "We are not looking to name names, but to provide a generic viewpoint of what it's like being a youth today, in terms of parties and parents hosting parties. This will validate the social hosting issue, that 'parents who host lose the most,' because when youths say this is what's happening, it's hard to deny." The interviews will be shared via WayCam and other websites.

Chairperson Raftery said that Wayland Middle School principal Betsy Gavron was shocked by reports of students vaping at the high school

Mr. Verhoosky said that they will start filming the videos the week before February vacation. He added, "It's been a joy to work with those individuals."

Dr. Astley said he wanted to bring up a slightly separate topic, and suggested that the group might want to table it for further down in the agenda. He suggested framing this kind of presentation -- dealing with youths using substances of various kinds -- being a response to the stress that so many youths are under. He said, "Vaping is one aspect of this, but we also need to

work on disseminating the suicide letter. We need to offer positive messages about looking after each other. This will enable us to get the most mileage out of this.”

Mr. Verhoosky said that, during the vaping event, the impact of Covid was discussed. He said, “We could talk about what students have seen in terms of substance use over the duration of the pandemic.”

Dr. Astley said, “We need to focus on stress, anxiety, depression and the quest for quick solutions. It would be good to get everyone on board.”

The next item on the agenda was Internet Safety Night. Mr. Verhoosky said, “There’s not much to report. We are trying to schedule dates in March. I have heard from Claypit, but the dates are not solidified yet.” In response to a question about whether the event was aimed at sixth graders, because that is when many students get their first cell phones, he said the event has always been primarily focused on the elementary schools.

Next Det. Tyler Castagno and Youth Officer Shane Bowles discussed the mental health event at the high school the day before. They said that the mental health services event discussed some of the struggles that speakers had had as well as some of the successes. The aim was to destigmatize the seeking of mental health services and to get the word out to a large number of students. He said it discussed struggles and coping mechanisms, for both students and teachers. A woman named Jean talked about the counseling services available. Mr. Verhoosky discussed Youth & Family Services. Youth Officer Bowles and Det. Castagno talked about how, in the event of a crisis, the police are able to help. The event was an hour-long presentation, in the high school auditorium, which was as full as it could be, given social distancing guidelines. Asked for a ballpark estimate of the attendance, Youth Officer Bowles said he estimated 75 to 100 students.

Asked if the event was worth repeating Youth Officer Bowles said that it definitely was, because mental health is such a very important issue at the high school right now. Det. Castagno said holding it again would get others to come forward.

Ms. Ross asked if any clinicians were involved. Mr. Verhoosky said that Jean is a clinician. He said, however, neither Dr. Kahn nor Y&FS clinician Kelsey Sanclemente were there. Jean did make a trigger warning statement, that if anyone needs anything, they could come see her.

Chairperson Raftery said it was a difficult time for high school counselors, who are juggling multiple jobs and tasks.

Ms. Pamela Cerne said she was seeing increased clinical capacity at the high school, but agreed that the staff there have never been as busy as they are now.

Dr. Kahn agreed, saying that guidance counselors are as busy as ever. In addition to advising on courses, they have increased clinical capacity, and they have always served as emotional support counselors.

Dr. Astley said he presumed the event was not recorded, due to the subject matter of mental health. Mr. Verhoosky confirmed that was correct. Dr. Astley said the event should be repeated, and asked if there were any regular announcements regarding mental health services. He also asked if there was a group overseeing the need for a chronic campaign.

Mr. Verhoosky said he didn't know if there are daily messages. He said he would touch base with high school staff members to see if that was possible.

Ms. Kates said it is important to have such information disseminated to everyone at the high school. "The kids who needs support the most might be the ones afraid to ask for it."

Ms. Ross asked, "Does it fall to the SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) team in terms of who owns it?" She then asked if anyone had replaced Dr. Richard Whitehead [as the head of SEL]. Ms. Kates said, "I've been told he's no longer here. But I don't know about a replacement. I've have just heard he's no longer here."

Dr. Astley asked, "How can we stay on top of this? He was so significant, if that's lost, we need to know who's going to pick it up."

Mr. Verhoosky said he would reach out to the high school to find out the status of the SEL group. Chairwoman Raftery said she would add that to the continuing list of things to do.

Youth Officer Bowles said the police department is in the midst of hiring an advocate for the town, a role that many other surrounding towns have. Asked what the role entailed, he said, "This would be someone 'like a Jason,' coming on calls with us, someone other than a police officer."

The next topic on the agenda was a recent event titled "The Power of the Youth Voice: Influence and Communication." Mr. Verhoosky said 55 students attended the session, which was held in the Wayland High School lecture hall. The event was filmed. He described it as a power exercise, which consisted of the students playing games, such as guessing how many Sour Patch Kids were contained in an algae jar.

Mr. Verhoosky said that the WaylandCares website is in the process of being updated. He said that all the Winter Week videos will be on high school website.

He said that in talking with youth, they said they are using social media in specific formats, depending on the activity, i.e., arts, athletics, and so "we are looking into doing some text-based campaigns. They tend to only look at established groups. We are looking at something like a reverse 911 format, where kids can sign up to receive text alerts, be it positive messages or mental health messaging."

Dr. Astley asked Mr. Verhoosky if he needed a consultation with someone who is fluent in social media, and whether he had adequate support. Mr. Verhoosky said, "We have Meghan [Wohlfarth] onboard. We can get her up and running on this."

Violence Prevention

Dr. Astley said that on Feb. 8 at 3 p.m., there would be a Zoom event titled “If I’d Known Then What I Know Now,” on the Sudbury-Lincoln-Wayland Domestic Violence Roundtable website. Then, on Tuesday, March 8, at 7 p.m., the White Ribbon committee will sponsor a presentation on the topic Transforming the Culture of “Power Over”: Compassionate Accountability, 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. He said that compassionate accountability means that where there is often rough abusive history, the parties need to be held accountable but with a sense of compassion.

He said, however, that “as another part of violence prevention, we had to cancel the last meeting, meaning that we lost another month in terms of headway of recognizing youth at risk. I need to be insistent about this. What is our plan?”

Mr. Verhoosky said he had reconnected with Ms. Jessica Tepperow of REACH, and had started working with Allyson [Mizoguchi] and Betsy [Gavron] to breathe new life into the violence prevention taskforce. He said the taskforce had met twice since the fall, in order to determine what they can achieve. He said, “The general feeling is that it’s incredibly important, but the general feel of the school/community is basically one of hanging on, with the spikes in Covid, and the sense that everything is day to day. Again, it is a top priority, no one is shirking it, but we need to find the time to reformulate it, for determining the resources and referrals and tools that we need.”

Dr. Astley asked, “Where is the component we’ve been working on for 2-1/2 years?” Mr. Verhoosky asked if he meant the app, the overall plan or the referral system. Dr. Astley said, “How can we set the priority? Where’s the urgency to keep things from dying on the vine? What is the status of the suicide letter? The stepdaughter of a close college friend committed suicide over this weekend. But that 2-1/2 years of momentum will dissolve away if we don’t keep it going.”

Dr. Dossie Kahn said, “Along these lines, we are hanging on. The school systems and advocates are providing direct emergency services through the psychiatric emergency services (PES) program. We are devoting more clinicians to public safety programs, at the school level. What they describe as hanging on is a lot of proactive services for reaching out to students and families at risk -- it’s not just keeping the lights on. In my communications with school staff, they are doing a really good job of identifying students at need. Hanging on is doing a lot when we are talking about Wayland schools. What we need to do now to sustain each other is to put your oxygen mask on first; we will have more breathing room in the future. It is a very hard time for the larger community, including school staff and public safety staff.”

Dr. Astley said he was very grateful to hear that and to hear of the tremendous work taking place. He said, “But I don’t hear of an organized coherent plan. Mr. Whitehead’s departure contributes to that. So the question is, who is steering the ongoing mental health situation and priorities. It is our job to raise that question.”

Ms. Ross said that it seemed that this was a question for [Wayland Public Schools Superintendent] Dr. [Omar] Easy.

Dr. Kahn said that self-care was just as important as caring for others. She said, “It’s easy to appreciate giving attention to kids who present at need, but I am more worried about kids who don’t present -- kids who don’t seem to be at need but who are. Like the [recent suicide of former] Miss USA [Cheslie Kryst]. Once a family is impacted, everyone is impacted. So the question is: What can we do for the community at large?”

Ms. Cerne said that finding information and resources is not easy right now. “She said, “The WaylandCares and Wayland town websites are not easily navigated, and the WaylandCares Facebook page is old. I think that’s our job, to push that information out.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “I can make that a priority. Keeping the Youth & Family Services page updated, with the meeting minutes and agenda. We have been working with schools to keep their websites up to date, but updating the home pages is still clunky. WaylandCares is trying to get its host server up and running. Everything is archived and ready. We do not have anything budgeted to pay for outside hosting. As far as social media, when Jane Purser left, we got locked out of the WaylandCares Facebook page, and tried to rebuild it. We have reached out to Facebook, but have gotten no response. Once you’re locked out, you’re locked out. Fortunately, fewer people are using Facebook.”

He added, “Hopefully we can get the WaylandCares website up and running by the March meeting.”

At 10:30 a.m., Youth Officer Shane Bowles and Det. Tyler Castagno left the meeting.

Dr. Astley said regarding the question of contacting Dr. Easy, what structures will be in place with Dr. Whitehead’s departure -- if indeed he is departing – and what can we put in place with our leadership and our nudging?”

Mr. Verhoosky said he would reach out to Dr. Easy and get clarification as to “where we’re at [with SEL].” Dr. Astley said, “That shouldn’t just fall on you.” Mr. Verhoosky said, “It will initially be a one-on-one conversation. Then maybe follow that with a meeting with the YAC.”

Clinical update

Dr. Kahn said, “Not much has changed from my last update. Kelsey and I continue to be really busy, to get new referrals, to get intakes for new therapy cases with kids at the high school level, and family consultations. Plus there’s collaboration with school guidance and mental health staff at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. This is a difficult time. A lot of families are feeling a lot of strain, as well as uncertainty and fear of what the pandemic brings long term.”

Dr. Astley asked Dr. Kahn if she could identify any other resources or support the YAC should be providing.

Dr. Kahn replied, “Thank you, I can’t. One good thing to know is the psychiatric emergency service is a 24/7 service, so someone can access it in the middle of night if they are facing a crisis and don’t know where to go. It has excellent clinicians to help a family figure out what to do next. Their number is featured on our website. They are a great resource for everyone in the MetroWest area.”

Ms. Ross asked, “Are you able to keep up with demand?”

Dr. Kahn said, “Yes. We are doing more short-term consultations and telling people where to find services elsewhere. We don’t want to be so full that we can’t add a student at the high school level. But, will this be the year that we won’t be able to response to first calls? A lot of people are having trouble finding therapists, especially in Wayland. Behavioral Health Partners of MetroWest, a separate nonprofit based in Framingham, provides free referral consultation services. For many of our surrounding communities, there is the William James College INTERFACE Referral Service. People who are residents in a subscribing town can get a free referral consultation, on substance use or outpatient behavioral. It would be good to have in Wayland.”

Dr. Astley suggested adding the INTERFACE service to the agenda.

At 10:43, Ms. Allison Kates had to leave the meeting.

Chairperson Raftery said she was at that moment on the Wayland High school home page, and was being denied access to some of the links. She wondered if that was because she was not a WHS student. She said she tried to access the suicide links but was denied access. She said she doesn’t know who manages WHS mental health services, and asked who did.

Mr. Verhoosky said he would reach out and find out who’s in charge of that at the high school.

At 10:46, Dr. Kahn exited the meeting for a client meeting.

WaylandCares

Mr. Verhoosky said that getting the WaylandCares website back up is in process. He said he is working to clarify the coalition’s mission statement, and how it is differentiated from and compares with Youth & Family Services. He said WaylandCares is a subsegment of Y&FS that was originally created to address substance abuse issues.

At 10:52 Rabbi Louis Polisson said he had to leave the meeting. His update on Wayland interfaith leadership is that they are addressing the rise of hatred, including anti-Semitism, anti-Asian and anti-black. Discussions have started on taking a step beyond the “hate has no home” signs.

Dr. Astley said if WaylandCares could be restructured into the action planning arm of Y&FS, that might be worth bringing up with Dr. Easy. That way, it could pull in groups from the high school initiative, the clinical side and the substance use side.

Mr. Verhoosky said he had no other major updates. He said there had been a successful trivia night at the high school, with 60 people donating to play some trivia and learn about SADD activities. At the middle school level, Meghan is still working with the school on recruitment. She is reaching out to get some more announcements and some fliers out. He said, "The hope is that we will have two in-person meetings prior to February break."

Chairperson Raftery asked if there were any board updates from the community. There were none.

She then asked if there were any public comments? There were none.

Dr. Astley said the 20-minute documentary video being created by the Lauren Dunne Astley Foundation is in the first round of completion, with final completion expected in May or June. [This video will feature interviews with 12 to 15 specialists/activists in violence prevention, in which they will discuss the causes of men's and boys' violence against women and girls and prevention.]

The date for the next YAC meeting was set for Friday, March 11, because there was a PTO meeting scheduled for Friday, March 4.

Chairperson Raftery made a motion to conclude the meeting. Dr. Astley seconded the motion. Ms. Ross said yes, Ms. Cerne said yes, Dr. Astley said yes, Chairperson Raftery said yes. The meeting was adjourned at 10:57 a.m.