

Monmouth County Youth Services Commission
Tuesday, December 5, 2023

Minutes

Virtual Zoom Meeting

4:00 PM

Attendance:

YSC Members: Trude Arnette, Wendy DePedro, Amy Fischer, Dr. Charles Ford, Jr., Laurie Gerhardt, Ivan Kaplan, Hon. Ellen Torregrossa O'Connor, Raymond Santiago, Lynn Seaward, Yolanda Taylor, Desiree Whyte.

Staff:

Ellen Cohen

Guests:

Daniel Anthony, Peter-Donnell Boynton, Carlton Cummings, Gail Howell, Kateria McMillon, Caitlin Mejia, Sandra McDonnell, Kristina Vander

I. CALL TO ORDER: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING'S ACT

Hon. Ellen Torregrossa O'Connor called the meeting to order and read the Open Public Meetings Act statement. A welcome and introductions were given. Judge O'Connor highlighted that the holiday season is a challenge for some of the justice involved youth. She stated a need for more community partnerships, collaborations, and innovation; as well as a need to be creative in putting together services for youth. Delays in out of home placements were mentioned and some cases taking longer than others. She is looking for tools to address some of these issues. **A motion was made, seconded and carried (Arnette:Gerhardt) to approve the minutes from the October 3, 2023 Youth Services Commission Meeting.**

II. YSC ADMINISTRATOR'S UPDATE

Ellen Cohen stated that unfortunately, Geoff Perselay was unable to attend today's meeting due to another meeting conflict. Ellen welcomed several individuals to the Youth Services Commission meeting. Included were Peter Donnell-Boynton, the new Director of the Monmouth County Human Services Department; Gail Howell, the new acting Monmouth and Ocean Area Director for the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P); and Carlton Cummings, CMO Court Liaison. Ellen reported that as part of our new regulations regarding the Youth Services Commission membership, we are to include a youth representative with lived experience with the juvenile justice system. Daniel Anthony was identified as an excellent candidate, and he prepared a few remarks for the Youth Services Commission. Daniel introduced himself as a 22 year old lifetime resident of Long Branch and share some of his personal experiences and perspective. He described some of the challenges he and other youth struggle with, and a need to find a positive path forward and things they can accomplish. He noted the importance of being connected to the community and offered a positive message on the need to forgive yourself and not be too hard on yourself when you make a reckless decision or a mistake. Daniel stated that second chances are extremely vital for rehabilitation. Judge O'Connor thanked him for his remarks and important message. Ellen reported that it has been a busy year with the

development of the new 3-year Youth Services Plan for 2024-2026. We monitored our funded programs and completed a Public Announcement-RFP led through the competitive contracting process.

Katiera McMillon, Program Coordinator and Kristina Vander, LCSW, Clinical Program Manager provided an overview on the Elevate Program. Elevate is a program that serves Monmouth County youth (ages 13-20) who are at risk of or are already engaged in violence from the communities of Long Branch, Asbury Park, and Neptune Township. Elevate is 100% grant funded and free of charge. Kateria stated that the program meets with youth, one or two times a week and includes mentors for all active clients. Topics such as life skills, self-awareness, and conflict resolution are addressed, as well as trips and activities to engage the youth. A monthly parent support group is offered. Their mission is to break the cycle of violence by providing youth and families with trauma-informed services and alternatives to violence. The Elevate team is made up of social workers, nurses, faith-based community leaders and peers who have dedicated their lives to making our communities safer. The peers have grown up in the communities they serve, have personally experienced violence, and have been trained to break the pathway to cycles of youth violence. A referral form was shared. Kristina stated that youth must be a resident of Monmouth County, with no substance abuse or mental health problem that requires a higher level of care. Referrals to the program can be forwarded to Kristina Vander, LCSW Elevate Clinical Supervisor at kristina.vander@hmn.org Judge O'Connor stated that it is a challenge with the current waitlist but, finds programs with mentorship and credible messengers an invaluable tool. Carlton Cummings advocated for a priority be given to court involved youth, who are truly at risk. Strategies to address their current waitlist are being explored. It was indicated that they are currently hiring.

III. Prosecutor's Office

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago commented to Daniel that turning one's life around is excellent. He reported that outreach was conducted to the Superintendents of Schools regarding their program on cyberbullying being a resource for schools as well as police departments, who can make referrals. Judge O'Connor indicated that she appreciates the Prosecutor's Office focus and program on cyberbullying offenses and harassment intimidation and bullying and referenced the Surgeon General's warning regarding social media and youth misuse. The Prosecutor indicated that Strategies for Youth and the Juvenile Justice Jeopardy program was observed, and their efforts to promote positive interactions by law enforcement with youth continue. Discussion with Pastors in Asbury Park has been initiated.

IV. Court & Probation Updates

Amy Fischer reported that docket FJ ranked 2nd in the state for the reduction of backlog of cases. She noted that this achievement has been led by Judge O'Connor and Katie Wardlow. Amy Fischer reported that training for P.O.s regarding the on-call responsibilities and protocols is underway. Juvenile Conference Committee program facilitation has been assigned to Kathleen. She shared she is proud of her team.

Caitlin Mejia reported that after 30 years of service, Nancy Herman will be retiring at the end of the year. Caitlin highlighted the support provided by the Assignment Judge in speaking to clients and attending their job fair. Caitlin stated that they are making great connections for individuals

on probation and have had good attendance at their events. Caitlin indicated that using graduate recovery speakers has been valuable. The Gun Violence Reduction Task Force meets regularly.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. YSC Proposal Review Committee

Yolanda Taylor reported on the process of the Public Announcement Request for Proposals led through the Competitive Contracting Process # CC-9-2024. She stated that a Legal Notice of the Request for Proposals #CC-9-2024 for Youth Services was advertised in the Star Ledger on 10/10/23 and was posted on the Monmouth County Purchasing Division's website for download with the application package. Seventeen (17) proposals from nine (9) different organizations were delivered to the Monmouth County Purchasing Division by the November 14, 2023, at 10:30 AM deadline for submission that were open and read in public. Questions concerning the RFP were received through October 24, 2023, and the clarification to those questions was posted on the Purchasing Division's website. There was a total of \$965,394.00 in anticipated available funds announced in #CC-9-2024. The total funding amount requested in response to the Request for Proposals was \$1,267,811.00. The RFP #CC-9-2024 Proposal Evaluation Committee list was approved and authorized by Helen Fiore, Director, Monmouth County Purchasing Division and a "No conflict of interest by Evaluator, Advisor to Evaluator or Recommender(s) for award" form was signed by those serving on the Proposal Evaluation Committee. The Proposal Evaluation Committee met on November 27, 2023, to develop the 2024 funding recommendations for Youth Services Commission approval to be forwarded to the Monmouth County Purchasing Division and Board of County Commissioners for award. The funding recommendations were for 14 separate programs from 8 different organizations. The Proposal Evaluation Committee's recommendations were e-mailed to the YSC membership and an electronic e-mail vote was taken that approved the YSC Proposal Evaluation Committee's Report to be forwarded to the Monmouth County Purchasing Division for award at the December 14th Board of County Commissioners meeting. The electronic vote taken had 12 yes votes and 4 votes to abstain. A motion was made and seconded (Taylor:Arnette) to ratify the electronic vote for the YSC minutes. YSC members who are ineligible to vote on funding matters abstained from the vote. Trude Arnette and Yolanda Taylor commented on the high-quality nature of the proposals received.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

VII. OLD BUSINESS

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Best wishes for a Happy Holiday were expressed.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM

The next scheduled meeting of the Youth Services Commission is Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 4:00 PM in the Monmouth County Human Services Building, First Floor Conference Room.

