

**Community Services & Personnel Committee**  
**January 20, 2021**  
**Via Teleconference**

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting by telephone, Zoom, and/or the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at [www.norwalkct.org/meetings](http://www.norwalkct.org/meetings) Members of the public can call in and listen to a meeting.

They will not be able to speak or see any of the meeting participants. Each meeting will use a unique Meeting/Webinar ID. Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" will need to register in advance and use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting.

To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. Members of the public who wish to view the meeting, but are not participating, can view a live stream on the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. This stream is delayed by approximately 20 seconds.

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Lamond Daniels at [ldaniels@norwalkct.org](mailto:ldaniels@norwalkct.org) to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Barbara Smyth, Chair; Gregory Burnett; Dominique Johnson;  
Thomas Keegan; Diana Revolus; Nicholas Sacchinelli

STAFF: Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services

OTHERS: Maira Esclara, Human Services; Marissa Mangone,  
Gail Melanson, Clara Mesa, Mid Fairfield Child Guidance

**1. CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL**

Ms. Smyth called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and called the Roll as indicated above.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No members of the public wished to comment this evening.

### **3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON NOVEMBER 18, 2020**

The following correction was made to the minutes:

Page 3: change 1.2 visits to 1.2 million visits

**\*\* MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS CORRECTED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. KEEGAN MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADD AN ITEM TO THE AGENDA**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2021 MEETING SCHEDULE AS PRESENTED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

### **4. DISCUSSION COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

#### **a) General Updates- Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services**

Ms. Smyth said that so often the Committee passes items, but do not always see the results. She said they were lucky tonight to have presentations from the Child Guidance Center as well as a presentation on the Family Navigation program.

Mr. Daniels said the intent of the presentations is to highlight the services that are being provided. He said his goal is to share the information about the programs each month. This is an opportunity for the public to learn what the department is doing.

Norwalk, through the Connecticut Food Bank is the only community providing food for residents. This is a place of dignity. He noted that Ms. Young and Mr. Burnett participated in the Food Bank. The event requires about 45 volunteers and there is a waiting list of people who want to volunteer. Mr. Daniels recognized the Police Department, Department of Public Works and Recreation and Parks for their assistance. The food distribution event provides food for up to 1,500 cars every Wednesday at Calf Pasture Beach.

Mr. Daniels explained he had a robust discussion on equity and justice. A decision was made to re-issue the RFP. The Selection Committee was appointed by the Mayor to select and recommend a firm to the Mayor.

The Department holds a bi-weekly call with community based services organizations.

Community Services and Personnel Committee

January 20, 2021

Page 2

Via Teleconference

**b) Presentation- Connectivity Initiative/ Family Navigator Program by Maria I. Escalera, Human Services Director**

Ms. Escalera explained that the goal of the Family Navigator program is to create a more equitable experience for the students. They created a tiered level of support. Ms. Escalera said that families are struggling and need connections to various services. She noted that internet is being provided to families for free.

Ms. Escalera said the Family Navigator Program is based on a trusted relationship. There is collaboration between the Family Navigator and the family and is family focused. This is a voluntary program.

Three types of programs are provided to the families. The Family Navigators speak English, Spanish and Haitian Creole. As of Friday, they received 769 referrals of families that were identified as in need of assistance. Ms. Escalera said that 70% of the families are in need of more than one service. Over 200 families declined services.

Ms. Smyth asked about feedback from the Family Navigators. Ms. Escalera explained that it is very clear there is a need for assistance. Child care is a frequent concern and overall the access to food. Ms. Smyth said that Norwalk is very fortunate to get the funding for this initiative; the needs are so great. Ms. Escalera said they get feedback from the teachers and from the families themselves.

Ms. Smyth said that as a teacher, you never know the student's story and what they are dealing with. Mr. Burnett asked what happens when a Family Navigator disconnects from a family. Ms. Escalera said that part of the goal is to empower the families and reduce contact when they feel comfortable accessing the services.

Mr. Keegan asked if this program was driven by Covid. Mr. Daniels said this program was driven by the Dalio Foundation to support resident and give them internet access. It remains to be seen if families will need internet connections; however, families need support and they do not know where to go. He said he tends to believe there will be a need, but does not know what that will look like.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked about the capacity of the Dalio grant. Mr. Daniels said the grant allow them to serve 1,000 families. Ms. Escalera said that the Family Navigators are building trust in the community so people know this is a safe place to go to receive the help they need.

Ms. Revolus asked about connecting the families to help with issues such as rent, food and problems with the electricity. Ms. Escalera said the Family Navigators follow up with the families. Each organization has their own protocol for follow up.

Ms. Johnson asked what are some things that will stay with the families from this experience. Ms. Escalera said they are hearing from the families that they are sharing and opening up to the Family Navigator. It is not always easy for them to share their struggles. The biggest takeaway is that the residents are letting the Family Navigators in and letting them help. The job of the Family Navigator is to make this program as seamless as possible.

Ms. Revolus asked if there is any connectivity between the families who are working with the Family Navigators. Ms. Escalera explained that the Family Navigators have had conversations with the families and asked them who they trusted to come into their home. Through these conversations, they are able to identify informal support for the families. She added that they use every resource available, including the language line. Ms. Revolus asked if there are any support groups for the families. Ms. Escalera said they connect families to organizations that provide support.

**c) Presentation - ELL School-Based Initiative by Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance Clinic staff Marissa Mangone, Director of Business Development Gail Melanson, Executive Director Clara Mesa, Director of Community Based Services**

Mr. Daniels described the program and explained that a year has passed since the Common Council approved funding for this work. This initiative has become a leader across the State. He said he is the administrator of the funding. There are daily conversations to better understand how they can provide services to children. There is a high need for services.

Ms. Mangone gave a PowerPoint presentation. There has been a significant influx of English Language Learner students. In most cases these children were forced to leave their countries due to traumatic events. She presented graphs showing the number of traumatic exposures experienced by each child. Most of the families underreport their trauma and without access to support there will be a negative impact on the child and family unity.

These initiatives can help increase the graduation rate. Currently 66% of ELL students graduate high school. As they increase the number of connections, their sense of safety increases. Ms. Mangone explained that they began the initiative in the two high schools and hope to be able to grow the program.

In the pilot year, they received 60 referrals; three families declined services. This population is very vulnerable and the staff are passionate about working with this population.

Ms. Smyth said she saw first hand the work they did at Norwalk High School. Mr. Burnett commented that from a financial standpoint, he understood that the funding

Community Services and Personnel Committee

January 20, 2021

Page 4

Via Teleconference

appropriated in 2019 was an emergency appropriation. He asked where the funding was coming from to keep this program going. Mr. Daniels said that the City with the Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center is working with the philanthropic community to continue funding this program.

Ms. Revolus said there is a community who was born here and lives with trauma. She asked what they are doing for those people. Mr. Daniels said the Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center has several Haitian Creole people who work with the families. They also offer access to the language link for other families. In addition, they are trying to recruit Clinicians who speak other languages. Ms. Melanson said they have a robust internship program and they are able to build their bi-lingual services by hiring those interns.

Ms. Revolus said that there is a stigma for Black and Brown people to seek mental health services; they need someone who looks like them.

Ms. Smyth said it is important to have this information because it helps with the budget decisions.

Mr. Keegan asked Ms. Melanson if the budget was \$400,000. She said that was correct.

## 5. ADJOURN

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 17, 2021