Dukes County Health Council

Minutes

Via zoom conference

Thursday, March 18, 2021 7:30 - 9:00 AM

Members present: Ellie Beth, Victor Capoccia, Leslie Clapp, Louise Clough, Cynthia Doyle, Betsy Edge, Beka ElDeiry, Beth Folcarelli, Alan Ganapol, Bruce Golden, Tom Hallahan, Alan Hirshberg, Michael Joyce, Sarah Kuh, Robert Laskowski, Paddy Moore, Dan Pesch, Myra Stark, Joyce Styles-Tucker, Martina Thornton, Christine Todd, Cindy Trish, Mary Jane Williams. Guests present: Karen Tewhey, Chantale Patterson, Noli Taylor,

**Meeting Called to Order** at 7:30 AM**:** Mary Jane Williams ~ Welcome to all. Request for approval of February minutes, moved, seconded, and unanimously approved.

**Rural Health Scholars report** Dan Pesch described the rural scholars program. U Mass Medical School medical students and nurse practitioners are in a track developed to encourage work in rural health. He said that the students did an incredible job, primarily because the program Noli Taylor set up was so complete. He also said that a lot of the information learned from the program could be used in other health efforts such as the COVID vaccination process. Anybody that wants to be considered fo the 2021 program just needs to contact him – email is fine.

Noli Taylor, the senior director of programs at IGI, then talked about the 2020 program, the main goal of which was to identify food access and food security issues within specific communities: the chronically ill, elders, and Brazilians. These groups were identified by the Vineyard’s Food Equity Network. She noted that the pandemic made the issues even more widespread and visible. For the Brazilian population barriers to food security included documentation, time, transportation, communication, financial and cultural. For elders, barriers accessing food included stigma of receiving food support, transportation, substance abuse, mental disability/depression, and ability to prepare food. For the chronically ill population barriers include financial, transportation, homelessness and/or lack of cooking facilities, stigma of using food resources, connection between individual and resources, and nutrition education and lack of options for medically tailored meals. Noli also said that she had approached the Martha’s Vineyard Commission about determining how many Brazilians live on the Island, since there is no good data and a wide range of estimates. The Commission did not agree to do this, but Noli still thinks that they are probably in the best position to do so.

The students made recommendations for each population group. For the Brazilians, these included strategies to improve food literacy and food access, and to celebrate Brazilian culture through food. For the elderly, recommendations include increase affordable housing options and increase caretakers for homebound elders, distribute pamphlets though the COAs and MVH to those who do not have access to proper technology, and public campaigns to combat stigma. For the chronically ill, collaboration between IGI, Harbor Homes and MVH to provide meals at the winter shelter, incorporate a request system for IGI meals to go on the IGI website, and create a volunteer network to assist in the delivery of pre-made meals and food pantry goods. Noli said that they have already started talking with the hospital about prescriptions for medically tailored meals.

Noli’s entire presentation is being made available to all Council members and will be posted on the Council’s website, and she will also provide progress updates at appropriate times.

**Oral Health Committee update** Bruce Golden said that a lot of progress had been made. The committee met with Cynthia Mitchell of Island Health Care and they are, in principle, open to owning a dental practice on the Vineyard as part of the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). There is a dental office in Edgartown for sale, which with some modification could become a clinic. IHI needs to take the lead on fundraising and getting the practice up and going. Paddy Moore commented that under the new Federal Rescue Act there are millions of dollars available for FQHC’s. Sarah Kuh announced that the Vineyard Smiles program will be offering free dental hygiene appointments for adults in April and May.

**Homelessness Prevention update** Karen Tewhey said that the winter shelter is closing March 31. In addition to the shelter, people are in two hotels. Two will have to leave soon, as the hotels are getting ready for the summer season. Another hotel has 5 people with medical needs and Karen hopes they can stay there longer. Harbor Homes is purchasing a new house in Oak Bluffs, with a priority for women. There are 6 bedrooms with bathrooms and two tiny bedrooms with a kitchenette which could be used by a couple or parent and child. They might be able to add 3 more bedrooms. The basement has a full kitchen and dining room, and since it has a separate entrance it could be used for a meals program. Offices will be on the first floor. The new residence will probably be ready in June. Eligibility includes being at least 18 years old, having a very low income ($20,000 – $22,000), and being homeless or facing homelessness. Individuals will be evaluated on a case by case basis, including things like suitability for someone in recovery. The County has gone out to the Towns requesting funding for a housing coordinator who would work out of the new residence.

Karen also said that there are about 2 dozen people who are chronically homeless – longer than 12 months and with disabilities including mental health issues. The Federal Rescue Act includes $5,000,000 for efforts like putting people in individual rooms, such as purchasing a motel for this purpose. Harbor Homes is proposing to develop 20 units like this over the next five years. A winter shelter will be needed for the next two years. They will be able to rent space again next winter but are hoping the pandemic will be over and the churches will be open again. The churches did not charge rent in the past and relied on volunteers to be there at night. Karen said that they would need a paid coordinator (they have one now at the Whaling Church shelter), and not just volunteers.

**Intelligence for the Upcoming Town Meetings** Bob Laskowski said we are coming into Town Meeting season. Five will be in May and the last in mid-June. He will send the dates to Louise to circulate to Council members, so that they can attend as representatives of DCHC. One issue that seems to be going along well is the County social service position for the housing coordinator. Christine Todd noted that there are many organizations which will be seeking funding (such as MVCS, HAMV) and that we should be supporting those too. Perhaps Council members would sign up to be at specific meetings to support identified requests. She said that public input is extremely important and very powerful. Martina also asked that people sign up to speak up for the County social services position. She also said that sometimes there is no need to speak, for example when the selectmen and finance committee already have approved the request. She asked that this item be on next month’s Council agenda. Paddy Moore suggested that any organization seeking Town funding come to the next Council meeting and tell us what they are asking for and what we need to know prior to going to the Town meetings.

**Follow-up to February SUD presentation** Bob Laskowski said that the purpose of this discussion is to bring up questions or thoughts that might be useful to the SUD Coalition that may have arisen after last month’s presentation. He started by saying he had questions about messaging – what would it look like? Complicated messages are often difficult to communicate. Christine asked what is being done to expand the recovery community. And she said that there’s a gap – with people 25 and older, but younger that 60 or 65. They may be raising children but are largely not being educated about substance use. Mike Joyce said that the Youth Task Force has been primarily with school age children, but if you look at the group age 18 to 35 or 30 with SUD it is very hard to reach them. It’s an amorphous group and they are the ones buying for underage kids. Victor Capoccia said that the comments and questions raised today sort of tie together, and the process of developing messages is not simple. One really encouraging thing that has emerged is the focus on the 18 to 25 or 30 age group. They now have 5 people in the age group who are meeting together to see how they can reach out to their peers. He invited anyone who want to learn more and get involved to attend SUD Coalition meetings. The Coalition itself meets on the second Wednesday of the month, with the next meeting on April 14. The prevention workgroup meetings every other Tuesday at 12:45, with the next meeting tomorrow March 23. Mary Korba can add you to that invite list.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:00**

The next regular Health Council meeting will be held via zoom on April 15, 2021.

Respectfully submitted, Louise Clough, secretary