

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 9, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Aikeem Boyd, Co-chair; Jorge Cruz, Co-chair; Maria Pereira, Michelle Small

OTHERS: Council Member(s): J. Herron, T. Mack, M. McBride-Lee, E. Newton, & R. Roman-Christy; Thomas Gaudett, Mayor’s Office; Police Chief R Garcia; Alicia Feller, Chief Executive Officer, Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System; John Hamilton, President and Chief Executive Officer, Nancy Kingwood, President/Executive Director of GBAPP, Inc.; Joanne Montgomery, Chief Clinical and Outreach Officer; Iris Y. Seda, Author; Liz Torres, Volunteer Manager, CCAR Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery; Steven Valassis, MD, FACEP, Chair of Emergency Medicine, St. Vincent’s Hospital; Barbara, Brigid Belgar, 203-998-6417

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Boyd called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Approval of Committee Minutes of January 12, 2022 (Regular Meeting).

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2022 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2022 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Informational Session with Joanne Montgomery, Chief Clinical and Outreach Officer and John Hamilton, President and Chief Executive Officer, Liberation Programs; Nancy Kingwood, President/Executive Director of GBAPP, Inc.; Amanda Flick, Emergency Department Recovery Coach and Liz Torres, Volunteer Manager, CCAR Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery; Alicia Feller, Chief Executive Officer, Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System; Iris Y. Seda, Author; Ebony Shaheed Jackson, Director, Health Department; Steven Valassis, MD, FACEP, Chair of Emergency Medicine, St. Vincent’s Hospital regarding overdose on fentanyl and community resources available.

Dr. Valassis then narrated a PowerPoint presentation regarding opioid/fentanyl deaths in the area. He spoke about how there had been recent deaths of students from overdoses. He explained how fentanyl is being comingled with other substances and also now is available in patches. It is

very addictive due to the sense of euphoria and pain reduction. Once the individual is addicted, they become very ill without the drug in their system. It affects their breathing center. A tiny dose of fentanyl can kill an individual. He spoke about the use of Narcan in treating overdose victims.

Council Member Pereira asked Dr. Valassis about liquid fentanyl and the recent death of Ms. Smith-Fields. She wished to know about how the drug can be administered. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton asked if there were obvious signs for fentanyl overdoses. Dr. Valassis said that basically an overdose is an overdose, but fentanyl often requires more Narcan than heroin might.

Mr. Hamilton, the Liberation Program CEO, said they are focused on harm reduction rather than abstinence. He explained that some programs ask the clients how they can help them in their recovery, but in a harm reduction program the question is simply how can I help you. The goal is to keep the individual alive until the client is willing to enter into an abstinence program.

Council Member Cruz said that New York had just passed a recent program that focused on harm reduction. Mr. Hamilton said that the New York program had good results.

Ms. Montgomery, the Liberation Chief Clinical and Outreach Officer, explained that now there are clients who have focused on using fentanyl and have been building up a tolerance for it. She explained that they currently have a program running that is looking at the tolerance levels of some of their voluntary clients. She also spoke about a recent grant award that can fund a 24 hour opioid overdose response team. There is an MOU about this with Liberation Program, Bridgeport Police Department and the Norwalk Police Department. Not everyone is treatment ready and there are some that will never want treatment. However, it is not just the addict that needs support, but the family also.

Since there are students that are also overdosing, they have contacted the schools about hosting programs. Their vans are parked in high incident areas and the teams try to provide the clients with snacks, condoms, fentanyl test strips, water or whatever they can without judgement. She also gave a brief overview of the various resources available to the clients that want additional treatment such as primary medical care. They want to recreate the CCAR program for those who are not ready for treatment. However, they are looking for a location for those who need assistance but are not ready for abstinence treatment. They are looking to keep the clients alive.

Ms. Montgomery said that they distribute fentanyl test strips to test substances for the presence of fentanyl because now fentanyl is available in pressed pills.

Council Member Pereira asked whether the students should be taught that they should just say no. She spoke about how she worked for Loss Prevention in a department store that was focused on theft prevention.

Mr. Hamilton said that they have to tailor the strategies for those who are already involved. Different messages will resonate with different individuals at different times. Often it is about

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social determinants, so the Scared Straight program does not work. The question is what encourages people to become involved with drugs.

Council Member Pereira said that she felt that starting the discussion in middle school was too late. She added that having Narcan available in the schools was excellent. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton said that people fail to realize that there is an epidemic. Those who come from families where the parents and other relatives use drugs are more likely to use drugs. He thanked Mr. Hamilton and Ms. Montgomery for their program to support those who may not want to get clean.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she would like to commend everyone for the work that they have been doing. The program might not address the problem 100%, but they are helping people. They are committed to the community.

Ms. Kingwood, the GBAPP CEO, spoke about the syringe exchange program and how they provide fentanyl strips and other services. They collect data from parents and youth. During the last data collection, the data indicated that the youth did not feel at risk from marijuana and some parents were providing alcohol to minors if they drank at home. GBAPP now offers behavioral health services and trauma counselling and some of the dealers are coming in for counseling. These individuals are in a state of trauma and some of them are looking to break away from the lifestyle.

This year, GBAPP is focused on vaping and fentanyl. Last year, they were working on vaping and alcohol. They are working on starting up the night outreach. GBAPP is open 7 days a week and there is a group for Black Men in Trauma. The staff try to keep their finger on the pulse of the communities. The question is getting the services out of the building and meeting the clients where they are since they are working on a harm reduction model.

Council Member Cruz noted that Ms. Kingwood also works with the HIV/AIDS population. Ms. Kingwood said that this was so. They do on site testing and provide test kits for at home testing. They also support those who have HIV with a variety of services such as rent assistance through the Ryan White program.

Council Member Pereira said that she could never find any excuses for drug dealers because they are harming their community. She said that she was very judgmental against drug dealers because of her strict upbringing. Ms. Kingwood said that some of the clients that were coming in were involved in gangs. At GBAPP, they want to help the clients and provide services to the community. They meet the clients where they are and many of the traumas are often generational.

Ms. Montgomery said that Ms. Feller was not able to stay on the call due to a prior commitment.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that they had been collaborating with Liberation for over two years. She said that they have been discussing the first steps with the children. Children are easily taken in and easily swayed. Now the children don't have the same kind of role models that

many adults had in the past. It is very important to be able to educate one another in terms of what everyone is doing.

Ms. Seda greeted the Committee and said that she was the founder of COPE. When she lost her daughter through a fentanyl overdose, she realized it is important to reach out to the parents. Her daughter was hit by a car and became addicted to Percocet. Her daughter purchased a street version of Percocet but it was actually fentanyl and alcohol. Ms. Seda said that she wanted to thank Ms. Kingwood for the education program that will be held at Hall Neighborhood House.

Ms. Seda said that she was looking to work with agencies like the ones at the meeting so that they can provide resources to people. There is a stigma attached to addiction. When the addicts are out on the street looking for Percocet but end up with a counterfeit product, the dealer is an accessory to murder. Addiction can be to a variety of things like food or shopping or sex. She said that everyone is human and those who are involved in addiction deserve help. She thanked those who had provided assistance to her program.

Both Council Member Boyd and Council Member Cruz expressed their condolences to Ms. Seda.

Council Member Cruz noted that Acting Police Chief Garcia had found time in her schedule to join the meeting. Council Member Cruz gave the details for the upcoming meeting at Hall Neighborhood House. When people become addicted, they become victims of their addiction.

Ms. Amanda Flick, the CCAR Emergency Department Recovery Coach and Ms. Liz Torres, CCAR Volunteer Manager (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery) then addressed the Committee.

Ms. Flick explained that their program works on a schedule and clients cannot just stroll into the building for services. They are judgement free and believe in multiple roads to recovery.

Ms. Torres said that she is a volunteer manager and helps clients start volunteering at the center. The volunteers man the front desk and make phone calls to the various clients to check in and talk to them about what is going on in their lives. The volunteers are working in many different areas as they progress through their recoveries. Addiction is a disease. Ms. Torres thanked CCAR for helping her during her own recovery. There are classes on professionalism and spirituality and a variety of other topics that support the clients in their recovery.

Council Member Cruz said that everyone is welcomed at CCAR. Those who need support but aren't addicted can go to CCAR.

Ms. Torres spoke about the death of her son in a car accident due to DWI. She said that in her family, there was three generations of deaths due to alcohol. Now it is fentanyl that is killing the children.

Ms. Torres introduced two volunteers to speak about their recovery.

Council Member Cruz said that he was passionate about this since he has been in recovery for 18 years. It is important for the City to help these residents. There is a lot of work to do and there needs to be collaboration with the providers. He asked to be included in meetings so they can all cooperate with one another.

Mr. Hamilton said that it would be really good to have a building where all the agencies who are working on harm reduction could all work together.

Acting Police Chief Garcia said that it would be important to share more information about what they have been doing with the schools and other entities.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services