

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 6, 2024
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Imfura, Phan, Rashid, Wong

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner White

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Gonzalez

STAFF PRESENT: Toni Esparza, Donna Adair, Asma Ahmed, Ruth Blaw,
Saada Hilts, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Zahn

POLICE LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: David Downing, Youth Eastside Services; George
Gonzalez, Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center; Michael
Byun, Asian Counseling and Referral Service; Pilar Torres,
Consejo Behavioral Health

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 by Chair Singh who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Gonzalez.

Chair Singh welcomed new Commissioners Gonzalez, Phan and Wong, and everyone took a few minutes to introduce themselves.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 15, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid and the motion carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Singh took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue

government and within the powers and duties of the Human Services Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

Diedre McCormack Martin, executive director of Family Law CASA of King County, thanked the Commission for its past support through ARPA funding. The grant dollars enabled the organization to serve 14 Bellevue residents with about 713 hours so far on the five custody cases involving those families. The mission of the organization is to advocate for children in high-conflict custody cases across King County, giving the children the best chance for a safe and more secure home life, advancing equity for low-income families and significantly reducing the risk of abuse and neglect. Once assigned to family law cases where there are allegations of domestic violence, abuse, substance use issues, mental health challenges or neglect, the volunteer advocates and staff conduct interviews with parents, conduct home visits and talk to professionals to get a full picture of what is happening in the family. The advocates can write recommendations for the courts or for mediation to recommend a safe parenting plan. The advocates also work to connect the parents with resources so that they can support their own and their children's health and development. Cases take anywhere from 200 to 350 hours to complete. In most cases the judge accepts the recommendation, or the parents are able to agree in mediation. The organization has applied for human services funding from the city for 2025 and hopes to be able to continue supporting Bellevue children and families with free advocacy services.

Veronica Quinonez, current board chair of Family Law CASA and a family law attorney in King County, noted having seen the direct need for the programs the organization provides to families in contested family law cases. Prior to serving on the board of Family Law CASA, and while working on a case, the direct benefit of the Family Law CASA parenting plan recommendations were observed first hand. Family Law CASA strives to train volunteer advocates in many different areas that impact children in family law cases, specifically areas that continue to cause intergenerational trauma and barriers for people in the community, including BIPOC families. The issues include domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health challenges, issues that can have a long-lasting impact on the lives of children. Family Law CASA makes recommendations that help parents address issues that impact their parenting so that children can have a more promising future with both parents involved. The Commission was thanked for awarding the organization with ARPA funds in 2023-2024.

Irene Muller with Essentials First explained that the organization provides and advocates for essential hygiene access for families. Existing subsidy programs like EBT, SNAP and WIC provide for other basic needs, but they do not cover essential hygiene such as soap, shampoo, laundry detergent, deodorant, or baby wipes with those funds, which means cash assistance programs are the only programs folks can use to buy those products. Certain trends are emerging as the overall need is escalating. To date in 2024, the program has served 1384 Bellevue residents as determined by the addresses provided by the clients. Of that number, 543 were children, and at least 84 were disabled. Over \$2000 in cash cards have been given out in addition to essential hygiene kits and supplies. Much of the impact is happening at school and at work, and as folks are in transition. As the need increases, the program wants to scale its services to match. There has been a 250 percent increase in the number of walk-ins at the Bellevue location

between 2021 and 2023, and things are on trend for the current year to see a similar percentage increase. The agency has received both General Fund and ARPA funds in the past and hopes to continue partnering with the city given that the need is not going away. Along with the mental health of students and workers, those in need include parents, caregivers and families of all kind.

Judy Faast, a director in the community services division of Hopelink, thanked the Commission for its leadership in advancing human services in Bellevue. There are a variety of needs in the community, including transportation. Solid progress has been made in addressing the transportation challenges, but there is more work to do. The speaker encouraged the city to invest in flexible and accessible micro-transit transportation services, such as making BellHop wheelchair accessible, bringing MetroFlex to Bellevue, and increasing services on evenings and weekends with Hyde Shuttle. Such investments will help community members from all walks of life more conveniently and accessibly get to where they need to go. In 2023 Hopelink's community services program served 1652 unduplicated Bellevue households, and 4008 unduplicated residents. Hopelink sees a continued and growing need for basic needs services. To date in 2024 the records show 493 unique inquiries for financial assistance from Bellevue residents, of which 98 cases were related to Covid-19 impacts, 155 reported receiving notices to pay rent or vacate, and 399 callers sought help specifically for rent assistance or the prevent eviction, with a requested assistance amount totaling nearly \$1.3 million. There is increased usage of the Bellevue food market. The number of residents served in September 2023 exceeded 2100; in February of 2024 it was nearly 2600, a 20 percent increase in six months. Hopelink's skill and resource building programs are at capacity. Programs such as case management, financial coaching, English For Work and job coaching all have people waiting for services. The city's partnership with Hopelink that makes the programs available in the community is appreciated.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi garbage rats, and Councilmember Zahn a dirty damn Nazi pig and barracuda. With regard to Ordinance 6752, it was noted that it is a fraud. If the Commission does not stop enforcing the ordinance, a lawsuit will be filed to stop it. The chair of every city commission will be brought to court one by one, and the Mayor too. Six times the first three pages are repeated. The rule is not legal, nor is the three-minute rule. It is a fascist regime. Mayor Robinson is responsible for the ordinance and signed it. It is a very big crime. Somebody needs to stand up to stop the rule.

David Haines from the Boundary of Bellevue, Redmond and Overlake said there are a bunch of junky thieving criminals who keep pushing drugs and ransacking the stores. It is time that Bellevue leadership step up and demand that the federal congressional leaders give back the \$50 billion ARPA dollars that Speaker McCarthy withheld. The communities need to money to alleviate the oppression of the immoral financial system that seems to have a dilapidated and inflated impact on the rental markets that are shaking people down with deregulated housing that is destroying the quality of the living, distracting them with noise pollution, convoluted air pollution like violations within the building codes, like a parking garage structure that is cosmetically prettified like a residential unit with paper-thin walls where one can hear the parking garage gate screeching through the clubhouse, and the jots from the doors coming and going, and the private office space. Right now there is a homeless and housing and public safety crisis. Part of it has to do with the low-level drug pushers being exempted from jail because of all

the Bellevue and Redmond jurisdictions of the cops are copycatting the George Soros-sponsored Seattle police reform where they exempt low-level drug pushers from jail. With the junky thieves there is a behavioral crisis problem that needs find a path, or the mental trauma crisis that needs to find another path to services, or the innocent houseless that deserve a better capacity of housing. Bellevue does not have the outreach resources and the Commission can demand that the King County Regional Homeless Authority step up their providing of the resources and take some lead in solving the homeless and housing crisis that's connected in part in its exacerbated form because of the public safety reality of police chiefs exempting low-level drug pushers from jail that are destroying all these people's lives. Some of the people in leadership in the government have decided that it is more important to virtue signal racist woke policies that manipulate the incarceration percentages to claim making progress, and that de-list crimes that are committed against humanity as not being a crime. The problem is they are prioritizing repeat offenders first for housing and services before an innocent houseless person, and they are having a problem in solving the crisis for the majority of those people. The data has proven it is over 50 percent. They are self-destructive behavioral crises that are awarded housing and services first so that the politicians can appease the business community and make it seem like there is some progress being made. But society as a whole is imploding because they are exempting drug pushers, and they do not have any legislation that is still needed to prioritize making the banks prioritize financing new homes, commercial buildings and schools that are 21st Century first world quality.

Travis Thompson with Bellevue LifeSpring took a moment to express thanks for the city and the Human Services Commission. Over the years, the agency's partnership with the city has been absolutely vital in powering programs for Safeway food voucher support, for rent support and for eviction prevention services. The school district has reported that there are 708 students in the district currently experiencing homelessness. In addition, LifeSpring is serving immigrant students and other students who are coming into the district unaccompanied. They face many challenges regarding food and housing. The impact of the LifeSpring services has been immediate and far reaching, and hopefully the city will continue to provide funding given that the numbers are trending upwards. The main goal of the Safeway food voucher program is to provide dignity and choice for clients, allowing them to be discrete and look just like any other shopper. Each student needs about \$50 per week for school breaks in order to be able to make up for the food they do not get from the schools during breaks. The agency has an ambitious five-plan to close the high school graduation gap between students who are registered for free and reduced lunch and those who are not.

Betsi Hummer congratulated the new Commissioners on their appointment to the Commission. The Commissioners were thanked for their service to the community and urged the Commissioners not to let rude bullies derail their work.

Jack Edgerton with KidVantage, formerly called Eastside Baby Corner, thanked the Commission for the many years of partnership with the organization. KidVantage is a basic needs provider serving the five central Puget Sound counties. Basic needs are things like diapers, baby wipes, car seats, clothing items, baby formula, baby food and hygiene products. In 2023 the agency served over 18,000 unduplicated kids in the service area, many of whom were in the city of Bellevue. The agency works in partnership with several organizations and sites. In Bellevue

there are 42 sites, including the Bellevue School District, the Department of Children Youth and Families, Hopelink, Imagine Housing, King County Housing Authority, Kinderling, LifeWire, Mary's Place, Public Health, Renewal Food Bank, Salvation Army and others. The focus is on making sure that kids in the community have what they need to thrive. That is becoming more and more challenging, however. Between 2021 and 2022 the agency experienced a 31 percent growth in distributions, and between 2022 and 2023 there was another 29 percent increase. More demand is being seen in the community for families, including a 17 percent increase in need for the families being served. Of particular need is clothing for school-aged children.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Councilmember Zahn welcomed the three new Commissioners.

The Sound Transit 2 Line opening celebration was very well attended. Having light rail will make it easier for people in Bellevue and Redmond to get around. In time the line will connect to Seattle.

A temporary ordinance for the construction of affordable housing was extended by the Council. The hope is that the result will be more affordable housing. The Council also moved forward with cultural arts and facilities funding. The safe parking program is open for up to 20 vehicles, starting with families.

The Eastside Human Services Forum recently held a session focused on providing services for asylum seekers and refugees. The meeting was very well attended. The group has another meeting planned for the current week with Representative Lisa Callan who will be talking about behavioral health funding from the state. On May 16 there will be another meeting of the Forum to talk about data.

Councilmember Zahn said there were recently a couple of sessions for electives and the community to learn more about affordable housing. One of the meetings was focused on ARCH and it was well attended. An Experience Bellevue session included a visit to Porchlight, the men's shelter, and there was another session with information on affordable housing in Bellevue; that meeting included a visit to the Together Center.

The Regional Transit Committee recently discussed vanpool and vanshare options. Community Flex does not currently operate in Bellevue, but there have been discussions about expanding the service to become more on-demand rather than fixed route. There have also been talks about having transit security officers in recognition of the need for safety and security for the drivers and the riders.

Two more Experience Bellevue sessions are upcoming, one on May 18 and one on June 1.

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Ruth Blaw reminded the Commissioners about the upcoming Community Leadership Awards at

which Commissioner Phan will be making a presentation. All Commissioners are welcome to attend the May 22 event.

Ruth Blaw reported that the first-ever human services dashboard has been launched. The data from 2023 was presented to the Commission in February. Included are key metrics, achievements, information about funding, the focus of investments, and details behind the numbers on the chart.

The application notebooks were presented to the new Commissioners, along with a note that the other Commissioners would be receiving their copies electronically.

The Commissioners were reminded that the May 20 meeting would be from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Crossroads Community Center. There is no remote option for the special meeting that will focus on equity in funding.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Panel Conversation: Trends and Challenges in Behavioral Health Services

Human Services Planner Saada Hilts welcomed the panelists and had them introduce themselves.

Pilar Torres, a mental health clinical supervisor at Consejo Counseling and Referral Services, said the agency offers access to mental health services and treatment for substance abuse disorder, domestic violence, sexual assault, and school-based services. The agency offers medical services as well. All services are offered in English and Spanish.

George Gonzalez, assistant director at Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center, said the agency offers prevention programs that focus on sexual assault prevention. A lot of work is done in the school districts around sexual assault prevention and building a culture of consent. Sexual assault nurse examinations are offered in seven emergency room departments in King County. Follow-up medical appointments are provided with clinical social workers to talk about available services and to provide some interventions. The trauma counseling offered is more traditional and is for people who have experienced any kind of traumatic experience. Training is also provided as a way to build capacity within the community relative to evidence-based trauma counseling.

David Downing, CEO of Youth Eastside Services, an agency that has been around for 57 years offering programs that serve those from zero to age 22. The early childhood behavioral health team provides services through evidence-based practices combined with heart and cultural understanding. The Parent/Child Interaction Therapy Program promotes first relationships and uses cognitive behavioral therapy for the early years. For older children and youth there is the Child and Youth Behavioral Health Services Program which uses cognitive behavioral therapy

and dialectical behavioral therapy. Many of the youth worked with have ongoing behavioral health and substance use issues. The Latino Heat program is housed in Bellevue. The SUCCESS mentoring program has been in place for a long time, and YES has the longest-serving programs supporting the LGBTQIA+ community in King County. All the programs are supportive of behavioral health.

Michael Byun welcomed the new Commissioners and thanked the Commission for its continued support of young adults and mental health, as well as a whole-health approach to adults in general. Asian Counseling and Referral Service celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023. It has a holistic approach to care that integrates behavioral health, mental health, and social services in recognition that mental health does not show up on its own. The agency serves more than 55,000 people annually in 50 different languages.

Saada Hilts asked the panelists, “What does the term behavioral health encompass?”.

Michael Bryn reiterated the idea that behavioral health challenges do not operate on their own; there is a whole set of factors that impact an individual, family or community. Part of the way Asian Counseling and Referral Service thinks about its work in a culturally relevant way is to recognize that someone exhibiting depression or anxieties might be experiencing things at home in terms of tension between loved one. Those are important elements so when providing mental health services, the counsellors also look beyond at things like their citizenship status and gaps in terms of employment. The mental health of the older adults who are isolated during the day when they send their grandkids off to school and the adult parents are working is equally important.

David Downing said behavioral health is defined with a wide spectrum associated with the social determinants of health. Basic needs such as housing are key and important aspects. Within behavioral health there are case managers and psychiatrists, and a partnership with Allegro Pediatrics to address overall social health and wellness. All the programs focus on what a young person needs from a social and emotional wellness standpoint. Traditional behavioral health is not something everyone wants to walk into, nor it is the right responsive way to support everyone, and from a cultural standpoint it is not at all consistent with what many people are seeking or how they are going to get help.

George Gonzalez added that when one thinks about behavioral health one thinks about the balance between the mind, the body, and the heart. Also, considering how different parts of a person’s experience in the world can cause an imbalance. Substance use can cause an imbalance, as can people who have experienced depression or a traumatic event. Those experiences all affect the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves. All the agency’s trauma counseling programs try to restore this balance.

Pilar Torres agreed with the others and added that Consejo seeks to provide individual care in regard to behavioral health and mental health issues. Cultural backgrounds are considered. The counselors seek to meet their clients where they are and focus on helping them thrive in ways they are most comfortable with. Case management begins with making sure basic needs are covered.

BREAK

Saada Hilts asked the panelists to identify common misconceptions or misunderstandings about behavioral health services.

Pilar Torres said there was a time when people would not admit to having a mental health issue, and they would just say they were okay, that everyone has bad times in their lives. A 2020 study indicated one in five American adults experience a mental health issue each year, and one in six young people. People used to say children do not experience mental health issues, but children even from early years can show signs of mental health concerns, and that is the time to address the issues as a way of preventing more problems in the future. Men generally have more of a stigma against seeking mental health services.

George Gonzalez commented that while people experience trauma and have trauma symptoms, those symptoms are curable. One of the biggest misconceptions is that people who have complex trauma need therapy for years and years. That has proven to be not true. Evidence-based trauma counseling has been able to help people heal in three to six months.

David Downing said historically supportive listening was the model used in mental health. Over time a much more science-informed approach has been utilized. When combined with heart and culture, the outcomes are very good. There are several interventions that are now possible that allow people to be treated and exit treatment much faster. It is known that there are individuals with long-term mental health issues that need to be supported over several years, even with the great new therapies. One misconception is that Covid triggered a big mental health crisis among young people. Covid certainly had an impact, but a mental health crisis with young people was already under way when Covid hit. Some believe that any kind of intervention will be helpful to kids, but that is really not true; it must be the right intervention by the right folks with the right backgrounds and the right training. The services that exist are not adequate to the need; there are wait lists at community behavioral health providers and at private providers. There is no one size fits all approach given such a diverse community. There is still a stigma associated with mental health, especially among young people. Many think having a mental health issue is a sign of weakness, or something they themselves have caused. Young people are living in a very complex world in which there is a lot of pressure on them to succeed against measures that are often unrealistic. Breaking down the stigma is vitally important given that it is pervasive in the community. Washington state ranks 41 out of 51, including Washington, DC, when it comes to youth behavioral health. In a state with so many resources, people may have the perception that things are going very well when it come to the behavioral health of young people, but that simply is not true.

Michael Byun said there is a prevailing challenge that involves the western thinking that there must first be a mental health diagnosis. In communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, mental health is still a major stigma. The idea of pressing for a diagnosis prior to providing treatment is one of the key things that must be navigated thoughtfully and in full understanding of where people are in terms of their readiness to accept traditional western approaches. There must also be an acknowledgement of the importance of integrating cultural

practices. One group support group for women uses quilting as a way of communicating and healing. Acupuncture is another way clinicians use complementary medicine in the delivery of care. Asian Counseling and Referral Service has an urban farm a few blocks away from its main office and part of the treatment plan is to spend time at that site; for many immigrant and refugee communities, agriculture is a healing and connected part of their journey toward wellbeing. There is also a need for focus on an asset-based approach to families and individuals; many in the Muslim community will go to their mother first in seeking care and guidance, and clinicians need to recognize the importance of that.

The panelists were next asked “What the most significant behavioral health service needs and barriers impacting those seeking and providing services?”

David Downing said there have been specific growing needs around anxiety, depression, suicidality, drug use, real risk of fentanyl use and overdose. Unfortunately, when the legalization of marijuana occurred, some programs that were housed regionally ended. There are many young people with substance use issues that do not engage in treatment because the structure is not there. There has been a big increase in those presenting as neurodivergent, and there has been an increase in disruptive behaviors starting with elementary age kids. In middle school and high school, there is also a lot more aggression among the kids. Gender dysphoria is being seen at more increased levels. There is a clear need to make sure there are no closed doors when it comes to working with kids; that means having staff teams on site at the schools, community centers and teen centers that reflect the community. Youth Eastside Services has invested in visas, green cards and DACA costs, all key and important aspects of the work to take down barriers. Many people think that all services are billable, but they are not. When working with kids, things are a lot more complicated than with adults. Working with kids involves working with an entire sphere and much of the work done cannot be billed, including working with parents, teachers, and coaches. Even the things that do get billed are undercompensated by Medicaid and insurance. Many believe the behavioral health system is better integrated than it really is. Bellevue has a school-based strategy team that involves Asian Counseling and Referral Service, Consejo, Sound and Seamar that meets monthly to talk about how the services are placed throughout the Bellevue and Lake Washington school districts.

George Gonzalez noted not having always been sold on evidence-based practices given concerns about how they could be culturally adapted to different populations. Harborview Abuse & Trauma center talks a lot about how to adapt services to meet the specific needs of different populations. Everyone must come in with their own humility, which is a challenge for some of the newer clinicians. There is a high turnover of clinicians in community mental health and the relatively new phenomenon is something all agencies are struggling with.

Pilar Torres said there is a need for more integrated mental health services given physical conditions, communication issues, social isolation, and cultural differences. There is a clear need to help overcome the stigma of seeking mental health services, yet outreach to the Latino population is difficult due to working hours and family issues, making it difficult to build trust in the community. There is also a clear need for much more case management, which of course costs money.

Michael Byun said Asian Counseling and Referral Service was started in the 70s following the Vietnam War and the impact on the communities that were fleeing war and violence. The wave of clinicians that began the work are now retiring, thus there is a generational shift going on in terms of clinicians. The new workforce of clinicians are certainly inspired, but the challenge is that while they have access to innovative approaches, they do not have high levels of experience. Clinical supervision is an important conversation being held internally. On the client side, one emerging trend is second and third generation refugees seeking care. The clinicians who are immigrants and refugees face a bit of a mismatch in striving to develop new tools. More and more folks are showing up with intersectional identities and they present a need for the workforce to retool itself.

Saaeda Hilts asked the panelists to provide a brief overview of their programs and the services provided that address the needs and barriers.

Pilar Torres said Consejo Behavioral Health offers mental health services and also works with sexual assault and domestic violence clients, and offers case management, care team coordination and housing assistance. In the domestic violence program, the agency assesses crisis and works with protective orders, and provides relocation assistance to transitional housing for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children. While in transitional housing the clients have access to information, job training, and language training.

George Gonzalez said one of the programs offered by Harborview Abuse and Trauma Center is mobile advocacy. It is sometimes difficult for people to come in for services so the program allows for meeting people where they are at in the community.

David Downing voiced respect for the work being done by all of the agencies. It takes a full collective to address all the needs. Youth Eastside Services offers programs that are very much formalized behavioral health combining heart, culture and science. Coming out of Covid there were extreme levels of mental health need and the agency decided to invest in the countywide WISE program and expand it. The program involves teams consisting of a case manager, a therapist, a parent mentor and a young adult mentor going into the homes of families to provide 12 to 15 hours of intensive mental health services per month. The team has access to psychiatric services as well. The program is key to helping keep kids out of the hospital. The agency is also moving back to its open access model which involves treatment on demand and without an appointment. The program is effective largely because when people are at their main pain point is when they seek help.

Michael Byun said the services offered by Asian Counseling and Referral Service mirror those offered by Consejo. In addition, the agency offers a broad range of human service work ranging from employment, citizenship and naturalization services, congregate meal and socialization programs for older adults, and home health services. The agency is deeply engaged in the community in social justice work.

Saada Hilts asked what challenges the agencies are experiencing that the Commission should be aware of.

Michael Byun encouraged the Commissioners to consider taking the mental health first aid course available online. It equips the lay person with some basic understanding around mental health first aid. Asian Counseling and Referral Service as an organization focused on behavioral health and as such offers opportunities to learn more about how to take care of people.

David Downing agreed with the importance of mental health first aid. One does not need to be a clinician to participate. Smart Recovery also has a course for substance use. The opportunities afforded are great for giving people a way to connect and learn how to support others. It used to be possible to tell when kids were not well when they demonstrated obvious behaviors. While that is still true to some extent, more often the kids lost to suicide or drug overdose looked like they were doing well, and that is very frightening to those who work with young people. It is also important for governments to know that private philanthropy across the nation is decreasing. During Covid there was a big upward spike, but that has fallen off and agencies that do fundraising are facing the challenge. Staff burnout and fatigue continues to be a pressing issue for agencies; staff with years of knowledge and experience are retiring, and new staff coming out of universities are not well trained and are not all that diverse.

George Gonzalez added that there are people coming in the door and people who are not coming in the door. Those who come in are being served very well, but that leaves open questions about who is not being served. They are people with complex traumas, and those who face housing insecurity, and the last thing they want to do is sit down for an hour once a week and talk with a therapist. The ways in which those folks are engaged need to be adjusted. Mobile advocacy is one answer. In some ways the approach goes back to the roots of social work by seeking to engage folks in a different way.

Pilar Torres brought up the need for more secure online information on social media channels about how to get the best help possible. The different populations have different needs, and accordingly need services delivered in different ways. Agencies need to be flexible in providing services in different locations using different methods.

Chair Singh thanked the panelists for sharing their information.

Commissioner White praised the panelists for demonstrating the degree to which the agencies collaborate with each other. The idea of addressing mental health with mind, body and heart is very holistic. People really do not think about mental health until it impacts them personally or someone they care about. The panelists were asked for advice to share with individuals seeking mental health support for the first time.

George Gonzalez stressed the need for patience because it sometimes can feel like a slow process. It also can feel like a roller coaster ride.

Pilar Torres said those seeking help should be ready to find the right help. It can take time to find the right fit.

David Downing stressed the need to ask people they trust and to avoid just randomly seeking a therapist. There are a lot of great people working in the field, many of whom come from

wounded backgrounds. The best help comes from those who are centered and willing to recognize when the match is less than perfect. Seeking help early is better than waiting until there is a crisis. Mental and behavioral health is a journey. Relapses occur but that does not mean the process should end. People who find the right help will get better.

Michael Byun said when exploring mental health services and looking for a clinician to work with should start out just with informational sessions. That takes the pressure off and allows the space to evaluate the rapport between the clinician and the client, all without obligation or commitment on the front end.

Councilmember Zahn asked if there are any barriers in the way the city's grant application process works, and asked what level of self-care is offered to clinicians. Other providers have shared that due to factors like low pay and burnout, turnover is a clear issue.

Michael Byun explained that Medicaid reimbursement is set at a certain level that does not really speak to the number of times needed to reach out to young persons for sessions. In addition, connecting with family members and teachers are not fully understood in terms of the time and energy required, so reimbursement falls short. One thing Asian Counseling and Referral Service has done is adjust the case loads of less experienced staff and provide more intense supervision, along with setting goals in terms of number of clients. Organizationally, the agency emphasizes wellness care, including chair massages on a monthly basis.

David Downing said Youth Eastside Services has tripled the EAP opportunities the staff have. In terms of benefits, they have all been reevaluated, and the number of days off have been increased. There have been three recent paylifts, and trauma informed work has been initiated within the organization that mixes with diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging work. A behavioral health service rider has been added as well, giving the clinicians easy access to behavioral health for themselves.

George Gonzalez said staff retention and support has been addressed by Harborview as a result of Covid. Clinicians were coming into the office during Covid even though nearly all of the patients were calling in, and the determination was made to facilitate having the clinicians work from home. They are also now allowed to work alternative work schedules. Competitive benefits and salaries are offered, and that has been helpful. The most helpful thing has been to increase supervision, going from one supervisor to two.

A motion to extend the meeting to 8:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid and the motion was carried unanimously.

Pilar Torres said Consejo the clinicians are allowed to weigh in on their clients that are not the easiest to work with. The agency also is flexible in allowing clinicians to take care of personal needs in terms of days off or working from home. The supervisors all lead by example and offer help to the staff. Supervisors are also always available for venting when needed.

B. Public Hearing on Housing and Human Services Needs in Bellevue

Community Development Block Grant Administrator/Housing Repair Specialist Donna Adair explained that every year the city of Bellevue receives funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for housing and community development activities that address priority needs locally identified by the city. To receive federal funds, the city must every five years submit a strategic plan, called the Consolidated Plan. The plan identifies local needs and how the needs will be addressed. The purpose of the Consolidated Plan is to guide funding decisions for the city's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

In addition, the city annually creates an Annual Action Plan that is submitted to HUD once the annual allocation has been determined. The action plan sets the goals for the year and guides funding decisions that align with the five-year Consolidated Plan.

Part of the process in developing the Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan involves engaging the community as part of the citizen participation process. The public hearing is intended to receive input on housing and human service needs, funding decisions, goals and priorities for the 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan. The notice of available funding and application for the 2025 program year will be available on May 15, and applications will remain open through June 17. In July the human services staff will review the applications and will present them to the Commission in September for another public hearing and preliminary funding recommendations.

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid and the motion was carried unanimously.

Kajan Kapour with Indian American Community Services welcomed the new Commissioners and voiced appreciation for all the funding the agency has received in the past, especially the funding received in 2023 for domestic violence services through ARPA. The speaker noted working with domestic violence and crisis services where clients face barriers to work visas, abusive relationships, financial instability, and a reluctance to leave their homes due to social and emotional reasons. Domestic violence survivors often find themselves trapped in a cycle of abuse due to lack of safe housing options. Victims who have nowhere else to go often continue living with their abusive partners, enduring emotional and physical harm. The crisis clients require intensive case management services to ensure they are empowered with listening skills, coping strategies, culturally relevant approaches to access to jobs, childcare and mental health support. Funding is needed for case management and crisis services, along with housing rental assistance. Many domestic violence survivors do not get the kind of support they could otherwise expect from their parents because of the taboo associated with divorce back in India. The agency tries to fill that void for them and helps them find temporary housing in a safe environment while seeking more permanent options are sought. Vocational training is offered to help them find suitable jobs. As they rebuild their lives, survivors become role models for others facing similar challenges. Their stories of survival and empowerment inspire hope and encourage fellow residents to seek help and healing. Case management capacity support, affordable rental assistance and housing is needed for domestic violence survivors.

Talika Tagar, lead small business services navigator at Indian American Community Services, noted the opportunity to work through the Bellevue microenterprise small business community.

Over 60 women were involved, of which 20 were from crisis and domestic violence situations. They received stipends to jump start or stabilize their businesses. Those funds came from CDBG dollars. Case management provides microenterprise owners the opportunity to build trust, gain confidence and create a connected network that can support, inform, and educate one another. The training involves a year-long series of workshops. The Commission was asked to consider microenterprise support funding for community organizations that provide direct services with a cultural lens. There are needs that the agency jumps right in to serve through wrap-around services for the overall wellbeing of each client. Providing assistance goes beyond just the client to the entire family. As they follow and pursue their passions with their own skillsets, they become self-reliant and sustainable. With rising prices in real estate and job cuts, it has been more and more difficult to afford to live and run a business in Bellevue. Challenges are faced as people are forced to move further away due to affordability. The goal is to empower more microenterprise owners as residents and businesses operating in Bellevue to create a thriving intercultural small business community. That can only be achieved by having enough capacity on the team.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Rashid. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Imfura and the motion was carried unanimously.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.