

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION  
MINUTES

January 22, 2020  
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-120

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Ma, Commissioners Amirfaiz, Jain, Mansfield, Mercer

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Kline, Piper

STAFF PRESENT: Dee Dee Catalano, Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Liz Ludwig, Claire de Leon

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Mercer who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Kline and Piper, both of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano reported that the federal government approved its budget on December 21. HUD has 60 days from that day, or February 21, to provide cities with their entitlement amounts.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland reported that she would be presenting to the City Council in regard to the Needs Update on February 3 along with Chair Ma.

## 7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION

### B. Human Services Focus Areas for 2021-2022 Application Review

Ms. Catalano commented that the Commission has typically identified focus areas in the supplemental, a document specific to each city and available to all applicants. The Commission has used the focus areas in reviewing the applications. In recent conversations about the upcoming cycle, a strong interest was expressed in tying the Needs Update more closely to the application deliberations. The term is confusing, however, to applicants and often to the staff given that the Commission in fact funds programs across the entire spectrum, not just applications that fall into the identified focus areas. She proposed substituting the term “overarching factors” for “focus areas” in the supplemental.

Commissioner Mercer asked if there were any of the focus areas/overarching factors from the previous funding cycle that did not make the list for the upcoming application cycle. Ms. Catalano said the list is unchanged.

### A. Youth Mental Health Panel

Chair Ma welcomed Liz Ludwig, Co-occurring Disorders Therapist and Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program Coordinator for Youth Eastside Services (YES), and Claire de Leon, Clinical Director for Asian Counseling and Resource Center (ACRS).

Addressing the question of why youth are experiencing more mental health and substance use disorders, Ms. Ludwig said there are risk factors that are playing a roll. At the top of the list are social and academic pressures. Academic pressures have increased over the past decade as colleges and careers have grown more competitive. Kids are feeling the pressures much earlier, as young as ten. Social media is identified by many teens as contributing to their anxiety and depression, and the evidence shows that to be true when used to excess. There is also evidence showing that when used in moderation social media can add to people’s lives. Increased access is a prime contributing factor to substance abuse disorders, as is the increased potency of THC and their delivery methods. Vaping is also very easy to hide from others, and the general acceptance of THC use on the part of adults is contributing to abuse issues among the youth.

Ms. Ludwig said educating and training parents earlier on is a key method for preventing issues. The world is far more complex than it used to be and no one has all the answers, but clearly parents need more support services. The YES early childhood behavioral health program that has been in place for a couple of years is seeing amazing results. Early screening efforts are also needed, particularly where there has been a tragedy in which a young person has lost their life to either suicide or overdose. Too often the youth involved was not flagged by anyone as being at risk. Kids need to know that there is help available and that it can be accessed in different

ways. Positive alternatives for kids after school when their parents are still working are needed to avoid boredom that can lead to depression.

In addition to the early childhood behavioral health program, YES offers a program focused on promoting first relationships for very young children, and offers parent/child interaction therapy, an effective evidence-based parenting therapy for behavior issues. More such programs are needed in the community, and parents need to be informed that they are available. YES does a good job of providing robust substance abuse treatment for youth, including groups for teenagers and groups for parents. The agency focuses on providing evidence-based treatments for anxiety and depression, including dialectical behavior therapy, a type of therapy for those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, self harm and impulsive behaviors.

Ms. Ludwig said one of the biggest barriers to families is paying for treatment, which health insurance does not always cover. Hopefully at some point that will not have to be a primary decider for families.

Ms. de Leon said ACRS struggles with many of the same issues. Currently the agency is providing direct services in only two schools, International and Interlake. The hope is that staffing will be increased to allow expanding to other schools. She said outreach is vitally important. There traditionally has been and continues to be a lack of engagement or connection in the Asian/Pacific Islander population on the topic of mental health, particularly first generation members. It has been easier to make inroads with the second generation members. It has been very helpful to collaborate with school counselors. The school-based strategy team has seen amazing results.

Ms. de Leon said mental health continues to be a stigma for the Asian/Pacific Islander community. There continues to be a struggle in terms of connecting with parents, but where connections are made progress is made and goals are achieved. ACRS provides services in the Asian/Pacific Islander languages, but the need for additional staff and resources is great.

Bellevue clients list academics as a big issue in terms of getting into the best colleges and programs, which leads to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. Transportation continues to be an issue for many, which increases the need for school-based services. ACRS has experienced hits and misses relative to reserving rooms in the schools, but the strategy based services approach has proven to be very helpful. Rotating class periods are utilized to ensure that students are not always pulled from the same class, and the school counselors make sure the students have their academic needs met.

ACRS can accept private insurance only for Bellevue satellite services. There is a clear gap for students wanting services for which private insurance will not cover where the services are provided in schools.

Ms. de Leon said lack of sleep due to academic pressures and social media use are contributing factors for youths. ACRS offers support in terms of time management, study skills and sleep and how to balance things. Isolation is a contributing factor for kids who are experiencing depression, and much of that has to do with the use of social media and less time spent engaged with others in the community. The ongoing collaboration efforts with YES and other agencies, particularly for high-risk clients, has been very effective. ACRS also provides support for parents in the areas of psycho-education in the areas of mental health, behaviors and emotions. The teen peer advocate program groups continues to be a strong program offered by ACRS. The program focuses on educating young people about health relationships, sexual assault prevention, and being mentors to their peers. The program will soon incorporate mental health and social skills.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Jain, Ms. de Leon said checkups are done every six months and annually to gauge their clients' symptoms. At the same time, the youth are asked if they want to continue receiving services. Most see the benefits of ongoing counseling and chose to continue. There continues to be a need to reach out to new clients in need of the services.

Ms. Ludwig added that there has been a push to use standardized measures to track the progress of the various therapies, which avoids charting progress based on how the clients report feeling at the time. The clients can also review their charts to see how the efforts they have put into their therapy is impacting their symptoms over time. A lot of effort is put into helping kids transition to other mentors in the community and making connections to other people.

Commissioner Mercer asked about addiction issues and what programs have proved to be helpful. Ms. Ludwig said the biggest problem is kids starting earlier because they have access in middle school. The place to intervene is in the schools, which is where the most traction with kids and families has been gained. When kids are caught, usually at school, they go through an assessment with a counselor to determine the substance or substances involved. A full drug and alcohol assessment is undertaken following the initial screening after which recommendations are made. The data indicates that only half of all high schoolers have had a conversation with their parents in the past year about drugs and alcohol. That is concerning given that teens are exposed to the substances every day. The recommendations range from a four-hour class for teens and their parents to learn the basics about drugs and alcohol to outpatient therapy and a variety of group options. Kids needing more are offered more intensive outpatient programs tailored to them. There is currently no intensive outpatient program on the Eastside. Such programs are needed both for kids who need more than just outpatient care and for kids who are coming back from residential treatment programs. Partial hospitalization programs are a bit more robust than intensive outpatient programs; they are usually focused more on the mental health side of things.

Commissioner Mercer asked what blocking factors are keeping the Eastside from having an intensive outpatient program. Ms. Ludwig said the primary factors are cost and the reimbursement rates from insurance companies.

Asked about gaps in the system, Ms. de Leon said there is a need for male-identified groups, both at the middle and high school levels. She said ACRS simply does not have the staffing to support them. Ms. Ludwig said there are a number of gaps in the ways the school systems are not serving the kids. Agencies operate outside of the school system and are able to provide feedback on what they are seeing in regard to mental health and substance abuse. She said she assumed there are conversations happening at the school level that are not happening with agencies.

Chair Ma asked where resources are most needed. Ms. Ludwig said she would welcome funding for a sober-positive recreation program that is open to youth most days of the week and late into the evening. The activities offered should be adrenaline based. There is also a need to offer the youth opportunities involving music. Such programs would really support recovery programs.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked about the demographics of the kids being served, the revenue sources being tapped, and the types of trauma being experienced by kids. Ms. Ludwig said she did not have the demographic information in hand but could get it from the agency's office and share it with the Commission.

Ms. de Leon said between 90 and 93 percent of ACRS clients are Asian/Pacific Islanders, though she stressed that everyone is welcomed. There is a clear need for funding for more staffing. For 2019, ACRS had 75 unduplicated clients in the schools funded with Medicaid funds and funds from the city of Bellevue. The clients speak a variety of languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Hmong and Japanese. About 65 percent are females. Most of the kids have experienced trauma ranging from sexual assault to parental abuse and domestic violence.

Ms. de Leon she would like to see funding to cover additional staffing and a safe space in which to provide social support for male clients. Male counselors can make a big difference when working with male clients. More Cantonese and Mandarin speakers are also needed to continue engagement activities in the community.

Chair Ma asked if the agencies have transition programs that are focused on moving clients out and on their own. Ms. Ludwig said as clients make improvements, the level of services is decreased from every week to every other week to once a month to every couple of months. YES also has the SUCCESS mentoring program that matches adults with kids in the community and referrals are made to that program as kids begin to step away from therapy services. Ms. de Leon said ACRS also transitions its clients by paring down their sessions. The main goal is to be intentional about having an attachment period during which clients find a safe space in which to better understand themselves before transitioning to their natural support systems of school counselors and parents.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked what happens when a client loses their Medicaid coverage. Ms. de Leon said the hope is to at a minimum have the involvement of their parents in using Washington Health Finder to get them back on track. Funding from the city is used in part to help kids continue receiving services even without Medicaid.

Commissioner Mercer asked if there are sources of funding beyond Medicaid and the city of Bellevue the agencies can tap into. Ms. Ludwig said YES has a robust fundraising team and that makes the agency stand out above similar agencies. YES also receives a number of grants, including from family foundations.

A. Human Services Focus Areas for 2021-2022 Application Review  
(continued)

Ms. Catalano reminded the Commissioners that the overarching themes are directly connected to what the most recent Needs Update discovered.

Assistant Director of the Department of Parks and Community Services Toni Esparza noted staff had received from the Commission specific direction to make sure the applications are accessible to the community, and to not make them overly burdensome for applicants. One question the staff pondered was how applicants would understand the overarching themes, and what their perceptions might be of how the Commission will use the information. An agency should not see the overarching themes as limiting and should not believe their application will be discounted if their program does not fit within one of the themes.

Commissioner Mercer stated that while the point was to identify issues that stood out in the Needs Update, the proposed overarching themes do not necessarily achieve the goal. She said it would help for the Commission to discuss how the themes are to be addressed in the applications.

Chair Ma said he favored decreasing repetition. In the previous applications, answers were given to the same questions over and over. It will be important to highlight broad overarching themes to allow the applicants to write their own stories without having to tie them to anything overly specific. The challenge lies in having enough specificity to make it helpful for the Commission without being so specific the agencies are not able to tell their own stories.

Commissioner Mercer suggested the proposed overarching themes could be sorted by goal areas. She said she wanted to see an outline that indicates the Commission will be thinking about how all programs play out across all the different populations in the city, and making sure there is access to those programs. It should be clear that where there is a choice, the Commission will divert money to those things that exist outside of the main goal areas. Ms. Stangland said some of those concerns are addressed in the questions, especially those related to access, language and culture.

Ms. Esparza said the themes are used for multiple purposes, including in the presentations to the Council. One way to view them is as an executive summary of the Needs Update. One approach would be for the Commissioners to all agree on a series of questions to be used in guiding the decision-making process. The questions would serve more as internal guides and would not be included in the applications.

Chair Ma said it should be incumbent on the Commission to pull from the applications each agency's story. All organizations, especially the smaller ones, should be free to simply spell out what it is they do. The Commission should pull from that information the pertinent data. That approach would decrease the barriers, though it would increase the Commission's workload. He agreed with Ms. Esparza that there should be an internal questionnaire developed for the Commission to use in reaching decisions, rather than changing the overarching themes.

Commissioner Mansfield said in his experience in writing grant applications he found overarching themes to be easier to write to. The approach allows agencies to be specific about what their specialties are. He also agreed with the need to have internal guidelines in the form of questions to be answered in the review process. He said he fully supported making things easier for the grant writers.

Ms. Catalano said the thinking of staff is that the overarching themes would be included in the supplemental under the paragraph stating the 2019-2020 Needs Update has been published. Applicants would not need to read the entire Needs Update before writing their applications because the overarching themes outline what rose to the surface in the Needs Update. A separate document could be drafted with a list of questions to ask when reviewing each application.

In reviewing the proposed overarching themes, Chair Ma said he would change "cost and availability of child care" to read "high cost and lack of availability of child care." Commissioner Mercer suggested a similar wording approach could be used with all of the themes.

Commissioner Mercer pointed out that the overarching themes did not include specific mention of rental assistance. Ms. Catalano said the category of homelessness is intended to be fairly broad. Commissioner Mercer said one approach would be to call out the lack of affordable housing and the need for services that help people stay in their homes. Ms. Stangland said it could be added under affordable housing or under homelessness and homelessness prevention.

Commissioner Mercer said she would specifically call out affordable housing and including with it the need for support services to keep people in their houses. Prevention of homelessness is important but keeping people in their houses fits with the idea of addressing issues upstream. Chair Ma concurred.

Commissioner Mercer suggested some language should be used to indicate the Commission is looking for more diversity in just about everything related to the

process. Chair Ma said that would be accomplished by highlighting the fact the Commission is targeting certain populations or areas that need specific things. Ms. Stangland agreed there is a need for culturally responsive services that are language based.

Chair Ma said he would like to see the overarching themes prioritized relative to the order in which they appear. He said he did not want to have any indication that one theme is more important than another. He said he would have the first four themes at the top of the list, but would move up child care. The themes should be strategically ordered so that those who just skim through it will see the things the Commission feels are the most important.

Commissioner Mercer said she would pull up the culturally responsive theme and transportation.

Ms. Catalano said the supplemental and the updated version of the overarching themes would be back before the Commission at its next meeting for final approval. She said the applications will go live on March 3 and remain live until April 7.

Ms. Stangland said staff are in the process of scheduling joint training sessions with the other human services commissions.

## 8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Esparza reminded the Commissioners that the Youth Link board had expressed an interest in partnering in the work of the Commission. She said she would bring their proposal before the Commission at an upcoming meeting. At one time Youth Link was a granting board. While that is no longer the case, they are wanting to make sure there is a youth voice in the funding process. They have developed some focus areas and have asked the staff to highlight for them the applications related to youth with the intent of reviewing them and share with the Commission their observations.

Commissioner Amirfaiz asked if going that route will include letting the applicants know. She said it should be done by way of being fully transparent. Ms. Esparza clarified that Youth Link was not asking to be given a vote in the final decision, only to be allowed the opportunity to provide their general observations.

Commissioner Mansfield said he would welcome having in hand their overarching themes to be used as another lens for the Commission to use in viewing the applications. Ms. Esparza said she would do that, stressing that Youth Link will be asked to develop its list based on the Needs Update.

Noting that there had been some concerns voiced by applicants when King County allowed participation in their review process by a youth organization, Commissioner Mercer asked what the concerns of the applicants were. Commissioner Amirfaiz said what she heard was that a lot of weight was given to the observations of the youth



group. The applicants provided feedback that they had not been made aware of the full review process.

Commissioner Mansfield added that grant writers like to know who their audience is.

Ms. Esparza said the applicants did not say having involvement by the youth group was positive or negative, only that it was not known up front.

There was agreement to invite Youth Link to attend a Commission meeting to provide their observations.

Ms. Stangland reiterated that staff and Chair Ma would be presenting the Human Services Needs Update to the Council on February 3.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. MaryEllen Hundley said she appreciated the work of the Commission, which she said is the most altruistic and focused body in the city.

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Mercer. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mansfield and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Ma adjourned the meeting at 7:41 p.m.

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Secretary to the Human Services Commission

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Date

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Chairperson of the Human Services Commission

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Date