

The Human Services Commission approved these minutes on February 15, 2022

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 19, 2022
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Piper, Vice Chair Amirfaiz, Ma, Mansfield, McClure, Mercer

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Phan

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

GUEST SPEAKERS: Isabelle Kalisa, Kim Rettig, Joe Henly, Hero House Bellevue Clubhouse; Vicki Isett, Community Homes; Ginger Kwan, Open Doors for Multicultural Families; Gaylene Vaden, Lisa Greenwald, Kindering Center

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Phan, who was excused.

Chair Piper stated that because in-person meetings are prohibited by the Governor's emergency order, the Commission will be holding its meetings remotely for an unknown period of time. As a result, the Commission's by-laws regarding remote participation and the order of business were suspended until such time as meetings were no longer being held remotely.

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 – None
7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION
- A. Issues and Trends for Individuals with Disabilities

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza explained that each panelist for the discussion was a provider who had been asked to address the services they provide to support residents with disabilities; what unique challenges exist for residents with disabilities, both before and during the pandemic; how their agency addresses equity in the provision of services; what gaps exist in the community for services to residents with disabilities; and what barriers disabled individuals face in accessing services.

Ms. Vicki Isett, executive director of Community Homes, said the non-profit agency was formed in 1995 specifically to develop community-based housing for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She said the homes provide 24/7 care, including all meals and all personal care support services. Most all of the residents work and the agency coordinates with their employers. The agency enjoys a good relationship with Highland Center. The residents engage in a lot of fun activities. A lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges faced by many in the community, including those with disabilities. Ways have been found to utilize public funding from the state, county and local jurisdictions to purchase homes to house residents at very affordable rents. The caregivers hired are offered live-in positions so that they have a vested interest in the residents and the community in which they live. Most residents are at or below 30 percent of area median income.

Ms. Isett said there are three homes operating in Bellevue and a total of ten homes in the program. Each home has up to five residents. For those residents with more personal care needs, a small home setting is more conducive. One new home was opened in 2020 and another in 2021 allowing for an expansion of capacity during the pandemic.

The agency's Housing Readiness Program has been offered via Zoom and has proven to be a good way to conduct outreach statewide and to reach a wide diversity of communities. Workshops have been held in Spanish, and with Somali families, and steps are being taken to expand into Snohomish County with the intention of partnering with the Tulalip tribe. The format means families that have children with disabilities do not have to go anywhere to participate in the workshops. The housing workshops were developed due to the complexity of developing housing for people with disabilities. Housing is not an entitlement in Washington State and so of the 25,000 adults with disabilities in the state, 13,000 live at home with either parents or a relative. When something happens to aging parents, the individuals lose both their homes and their caregivers. The workshops empower families with skills, tools and hope to be able to create housing on their own. In 2021 the housing workshops served 348 unduplicated individuals. A monthly networking meeting is held to allow those families who attend the workshops the opportunity to talk to each other and form solid social connections.

Ms. Isett said the agency currently has more than 160 persons on a wait list. According to DSHS, agencies are not allowed to have wait lists, so the names are simply referred to as "interested in" individuals in the database. Because Medicaid rates are low, most adult family homes are unwilling or unable to take adults with disabilities. Even those willing to accept the low daily rate are not necessarily suited to accommodating a 25-year-old person with Down Syndrome along with their mostly elderly residents. Community Homes gives its residents the opportunity to have great lives living with their peers.

During the pandemic virtually all residents saw their jobs come to a temporary halt. A residents services program was created and offered via Zoom that included dance parties, treasure hunts, trivia nights and bingo games. As things have slowly reopened, the agency has been able to rent movie theaters for attendance by residents only. There have also been a few limited outdoor activities, though those have been scaled back during the Omicron surge.

Commissioner Piper asked about the physical and mental health toll that has resulted from residents losing their jobs during the pandemic. Ms. Isett said it has been very difficult. Hiring

a mental health professional was one of the first things done when everyone learned they were not going to be able to continue going to work. That person was able to address the concerns of the residents about their wellbeing, coping strategies and wellness. Chat groups were also initiated to allow residents to talk with each other and share their concerns and how they passed their time.

Commissioner Ma asked for examples of solutions identified through the workshops relative to housing. Ms. Isett said one of the housing models Community Homes developed over the last five years or so was to have two or three families joint together in renting homes and hiring a live-in caregiver. The families use Section VIII housing vouchers making the rent affordable, and Medicaid personal care hours through First Choice In-Home Care are used to compensate the caregiver. Persons with disabilities can add a caregiver to their Section VIII housing vouchers, and they are also entitled to food benefits. The workshops include training on how to access Section VIII vouchers, how to recruit caregivers, how to get signed up with First Choice, and how to access food benefits, all of which, when taken together, create stable living situations.

Ms. Isabelle Kalisa with HERO House Bellevue Clubhouse explained that all staff and members work together.

Ms. Kim Rettig explained that the Clubhouse is an evidence-based rehabilitation program for adults living with mental illness. The Bellevue clubhouse is located in Factoria and there are more than 800 community members served. The program has been accredited for 16 years. Everyone who comes to the clubhouse has the opportunity to participate in the function of the clubhouse. Meaningful relationships are established by the model. The non-clinical environment does not include psychotherapy or medications. Members are connected with community resources, including housing, education and employment. The agency is currently seeking more support in regard to housing. Membership is free and is regardless of insurance. Members are members for life and can visit any clubhouse and participate.

Ms. Kalisa said there are only two accredited clubhouses operating in Washington State. There are some new clubhouses operating under HERO House operating in other parts of the state that are not yet accredited. The standards under which the program operates are set out by the International Clubhouse. Reaccreditation occurs every three years.

Mr. Joe Henly said a day at the Clubhouse involves members and staff working side-by-side. There are no areas that are off-limits to participation. The normal hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the members enjoy gaining real-work experiences like cashiering, bookkeeping, answer the phone, running a snack bar and doing dishes. There are also meetings and there is a definite schedule involved with aides learning to meet deadlines.

Ms. Kalisa said because the weekdays are basically for work, the members and staff do not get involved in playing games. However, every Thursday from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. is social time, with the people able to select what they want to do. What they choose runs from playing games to watching movies, making art and baking. Socials are also held every Saturday, and most of them are held outside. Major holidays are also social days.

Ms. Rettig explained that having a mental illness does not mean someone cannot work or at least participate part time. Having a job increases self-confidence and self-care. The model helps members avoid isolation and gives them purpose and is very rewarding.

Ms. Kalisa said there are three different types of employment. First is transition employment where a position belongs to the Clubhouse. It is for members who have not worked for a long time or who have never worked and are not ready to be interviewed for a job. Two staff

members take on the job and train the member while doing the job. Even while being trained, the member is being paid for the work. The training continues until the member is ready to do the work on their own. Should a member become ill and unable to attend the Clubhouse, the staff covers the position so that the employer does not lose out. The employer does not have to pay for work done by staff. Second is supportive employment which involves members who are qualified to do jobs but who need accommodation. The Clubhouse advocates for whatever accommodation those members need. Last, independent employment involves members who find jobs on their own but who still need the support of the Clubhouse. The Clubhouse has benefit planners who work with members to make sure they do not lose their benefits by going to work.

Ms. Rettig said education is offered at the Clubhouse. Opportunities are given for people to work with DVR interviewing for scholarships to go Bellevue College or the University of Washington. Members are also assisted in getting their GEDs.

Ms. Kalisa said housing is an issue the program deals with. The agency works with the agencies that do housing, but members do not always find the housing they need. Owing to their mental illnesses, some members cannot stay in shelters.

With regard to enrollment, Mr. Henley said typically someone who is interested in joining will come for a tour. One of the members will facilitate the tour. The tours offer a good way for prospective members to meet everyone and gain an understanding of how the clubhouse functions.

Ms. Kalisa noted that while some members have not graduated from high school, others have master's and PhD degrees. The Clubhouse is happy to welcome them all and put them all to work.

Chair Piper asked about the external employment opportunities. He said he was curious to know what challenges are involved in finding open positions. Ms. Kalisa said there are many opportunities available for supported employment. Where there are challenges being faced are with transition employment.

Vice Chair Amirfaiz asked about the range of diagnoses of the members. Ms. Kalisa said the members have a wide range of mental illnesses, but the only thing required to become a member is to have a mental illness. One in the Clubhouse, there is no focus on the mental illness diagnosis.

Open Doors for Multicultural Families executive director Ginger Kwan explained that the organization is a grassroots community organization serving families with members who have developmental or intellectual disabilities, particularly families with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. She said her own child has autism and as an immigrant she experienced the challenges of navigating the developmental disability system and trying to find needed resources. Low-income families face even more challenges. The organization was started in 2009 to help families face those issues. With federal funding, the agency became a community resource center. The development of a youth program and an early learning program followed. More recently the state's legislation regarding language access provides opportunities for parents that have limited English proficiency in school settings to have meaningful conversations with the schools. The legislation is continuing to move forward and many government agencies and schools are engaging in conversations with language experts. Open Doors envisions all people thriving in the community regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Ms. Kwan said Open Doors accomplishes its work by using a cultural brokerage model.

Simply put, people are hired who reflect and understand the population served. The family support specialists provide families with one-on-one support in navigating systems, connecting them with healthcare resources, and to education. The specialists even accompany the parents at IEP meetings. Specific programs are developed to meet the specific needs of the families. The agency also advocates for changes in the system because if the system does not understand the challenges and barriers faced by families, those challenges will continue to exist for the families.

Ms. Kwan said as of January 2022, the Open Doors Equity in Action team had 57 staff and interns, which collectively speak 19 different languages. Nine-three percent of the staff are persons of color, and 61 percent are immigrants and refugees. Additionally, 38 percent are parents of a child with disabilities or have a disability themselves.

The agency's early learning program works with families in their own languages, allowing the parents to fully participate. The agency collaborates with early intervention programs, including CTC in Kent, and conducts home visits to work with infants and toddlers. By way of family support services, in addition to one-on-one system navigation services, there is a homelessness prevention program and there are parent support groups and parent education workshops. The youth program has been focusing on how to prepare young people to feel comfortable about themselves through a friendship circle, and supports youth who are at risk of dropping out of school, including those already engaged with the juvenile justice system. In the adult learning and senior caregiver support program, the agency offers case management, information and referral, and day learning programs for adults with disabilities, as well as respite care for caregivers.

Ms. Kwan noted that in 2021 the agency served a total of 2,307 individuals. The total number of persons with disabilities served was 941, of which 342 were youth. There were 764 total households served in which there were individuals with a disability. In terms of Covid relief, during 2021 the agency was able to provide close to \$9 million in rent assistance; more than \$26,000 in food and gas support; over \$10,000 in utilities assistance; and more than \$28,000 in other services.

Ms. Esparza asked for information about the agency's various funding sources. Ms. Kwan said the agency receives funding from federal, state, county and local sources, as well as from various foundations and individual donors. In addition the agency generates income through fees for services.

Dr. Lisa Greenwald, CEO for Kinderling, said she has been associated with the agency for more than 20 years. She said she is a speech therapist and also the parent of a Kinderling alum who has disabilities. She thanked the Commission for its support over the years. Philanthropic revenue is critical to ensuring that Kinderling can provide services in the community. The collective investment in 2021 from Bellevue community partners totaled over \$855,000.

Kinderling's programs embrace children of diverse abilities and their families by providing the finest education and therapies to nurture hope, courage and the skills to soar. Kinderling is enjoying its 60th anniversary year. The agency provides direct serves to children up to the age of 11, and beyond that influences the care of thousands more through advocating for systems change. The programs offered fall into the categories of communities, families and children. The early support program has also been called the early intervention program and the birth to three program and is Kinderling's best known and largest program. The clinic programs offer occupation, physical and speech therapies along with special education and family resource coordination. Kinderling is a special education system for kids under age three.

The list of programs currently funded by the City of Bellevue includes Child Care and

Preschool Consultation, which provides onsite observation, training and consultations to preschools and childcare providers to better equip them to support children in their care who have developmental challenges or challenging behaviors. The Families in Transition program is for families experiencing homelessness and is offered by partnering with housing-focused agencies to support the families in their care, specifically to support the development of children. The Parent Education program has grown significantly during the pandemic but continues to be a great need.

Kindering serves a diverse group of families. Collectively, the families served speak between 50 and 80 languages at any given time. There is an overarching focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. Kindering embeds equity across the organization in the areas of overcoming barriers to services, data analysis and staff training and hiring.

Dr. Greenwald shared with the Commission a short video of one family's experience with Kindering.

The pandemic caused Kindering to shift all of its programs and services to the virtual realm in the beginning. Currently there is a more of a hybrid model in place. There have been challenges associated with teletherapy both for the families and the staff. Technology has been shared with the families as needed along with resources on how to use it. At the beginning of the pandemic kids stopped coming to Kindering because they were not receiving developmental screening, and now the agency is seeing kids with much greater needs and at higher levels. Recent research published in *Nature* about the impacts of the pandemic on young children highlights some significant concerns in terms of delays in development. The concerns are not due to Covid but rather to the ways in which society has responded to the pandemic.

Ms. Greenwald said Kindering has 2,000 square feet of outdoor therapy and education space. The desire of the agency is to see that space covered and have a heat source added to it. The agency would also like to see additional support for the costs associated with contact tracing and the like. The agency is well positioned to support the needs of parent education and caregivers. There is a clear need to expand supports for families living in Bellevue area transitional housing and shelters.

Commissioner McClure asked how families traditionally find their way to Kindering. Dr. Greenwald said any pathway and any door is the right way. The most common way has been through family doctors and pediatricians. Word of mouth has also been and continues to be very effective.

Chair Piper thanked the panelists for their time and insightful presentations.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Human services planner Christy Stangland reported that on January 24 she and Chair Piper would be presenting the findings of the Human Services Needs Update to the City Council. She encouraged the Commissioners to attend to hear the presentation and to hear the Council's comments.

Ms. Stangland also reported that Dr. Megan Farwell has given her notice and will no longer be working for the city. Additionally, grants coordinator Dee Dee Catalano will also be leaving the city.

10. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ma. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Amirfaiz and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Piper adjourned the meeting at 7:18 p.m.