

**CITY OF NORWALK
NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 11, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Mary Budrawich, Early Childhood Specialist/ Norwalk Public Schools; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Director of Education; Crissy Spillane, Tumble Bugs Director; Cathy DeCesare, United Way Norwalk-Wilton; Dona Ditrio, Community Representative; Christine Dudek-Ratushnik, R.N., Norwalk Health Department; Migdalia Garcia, Norwalk Community Health Department; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; Sherelle Harris, South Norwalk Children's Branch Librarian; George Hensinger, Community Representative; Patricia Kierecki, N.E.O.N. Head Start Child Development Director; Shari Konn-Andrade, 211 Early Childhood Specialist; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority; Ligia Masilamani, Director of Maternal Child Program; Mary Oster, Naramake Family Resource Center Director; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program Director; Rovitta Paul, The Children's Playhouse Director; Lynn Sadlon, Fox Run Family Resource Center; Jeanne Taylor-Hard, Parent Representative; Paula Trujillo, Parent Representative

STAFF: Barbara Smart

OTHERS: Rosalie Witt, NECC; Dana Sarnak, NCHC, Mary Peniston, NPS; Victoria Schilling, NHFC

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY MINUTES

**** DR. GROSE MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 14, 2009.**

The following corrections were noted:

Page 4, under **ANNOUNCEMENTS**, paragraph 2, please change the following from:

“Ms. Balamaci said that the NCC” to “Ms. Parris said that the NCC”

Page 4, under **ANNOUNCEMENTS**, paragraph 4, line 1: please change “Norwalk Family Resources and others” to “Norwalk Family Resource Centers and others”

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 14, 2009 AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

GOOD NEWS

Ms. Bain then announced that Ben Franklin recently received their accreditation. Ms. Dudek-Ratushnuk announced that Norwalk Health Center received approval for federal grant funding. Ms. Oster announced that Naramake had received its DPH licensing. Ms. Spillane announced that the EPIC training would be brought into the high schools.

UPDATES – GRANTS

Ms. Bain said that the School Readiness Grant was currently in RFP process for this upcoming year. Discussion then followed about how the process had changed along with the increased level of detailed reporting required for the providers.

DISCUSSION ITEM – THE EARLY CHILDHOOD BUDGET PICTURE

Ms. Bain said that the Governor’s proposed budget had been released and that the stimulus package had been ratified. There will be a number of budgetary changes that will have a major impact on the School Readiness Program. Two key issues are the proposed elimination of Ms. Wilock’s position as Director of Youth Services Department and the proposed elimination of Ms. Dudek-Ratushnuk’s position at the Health Department.

Ms. Bain then reviewed each of the various School Readiness goals and the impact of the budget situation on them. Ms. Budrawich said that there had been indications from some of the former grant sources that continued funding would not be available. Ms. Peniston then gave a quick overview of the current matching funding situation.

The discussion then briefly moved to the situation regarding expansions of various programs. It was noted that the registration for upcoming conference had doubled during the last week. Ms. Bain said that the efforts towards collaboration were helping everyone. Ms. Budrawich pointed out that the required credentials for the providers were being increased to include academic degrees. She said that there was a strong advocacy for having the requirements for accreditation and providers to be on hold. Having accredited providers insures the quality of care for the children. Discussion then followed about the overall accreditation situation.

Ms. Bain said that there had been significant improvement in regards to expanding the pediatricians accepting HUSKY insurance, along with the Health Center receiving their grant.

The discussion then moved to the Behavior Health program and the impact that the changes in the funding had on the program. Dr. Grose asked about the services available to those providers who had students who had behavioral issues. Ms. Budrawich reviewed the various resources available.

Ms. DeCesare then gave a brief update on the United Way support for Early Childhood program and informed the Council that recently three United Ways had combined into one agency.

Ms. Bain said that there were concerns about how the Early Childhood Council would respond to all the issues regarding the financial situation and the impact of the elimination of the two key positions. Ms. Peniston said that the City of Hartford had created an Office of Early Childhood to prevent the position from budget cuts. Ms. Bain said that it would be critical to analyze what needs to be done, build an effective and efficient management structure and then facilitating it. It will also be important to align the Council with other organizations.

There is an Early Care and Education Advocacy Day planned for March 18th in the Old Judiciary Room at the State Capital in Hartford between 9:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Ms. Ditrio said that it would be critical for the State representatives to see the actual people who need childcare in order to keep their jobs. Ms. Ditrio then suggested that the Council watch the Childcare Block Grant funding. Discussion followed.

Ms. Paul expressed concern about the current providers who will not be able to achieve accreditation. Ms. Budrawich explained that there was a staff member who has a Master's Degree but would not have the accreditations required. Ms. Bain suggested that the providers draft of a position for the Council. It was suggested that a task force be formed to work on this issue. Discussion then followed.

**** MR. LAW MOVED TO HAVE THE CHAIR RECEIVE THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND TO AUTHORIZE MS. BAIN TO USE HER DISCRETION TO REPRESENT THE COUNCIL.**

**** MS. BUDRAWICH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** MS. BUDRAWICH MOVED TO ALLOW MS. BAIN TO USE THE ALLIANCE POSITIONS TO BUILD A GENERAL POSITION FOR THE COUNCIL.**

Mr. Hensinger said that there was a Parent Power bill making its way through the legislature regarding those people who have children enrolled in Care for Kids would not have time if they lose their jobs to find another one or unemployment runs out before the child is removed from the program. The discussion then moved to how information like this would be disseminated.

Ms. Bain said that the Advocacy group would be meeting on March 19th at 1:30 p.m.

**** MS. BUDRAWICH WITHDREW HER MOTION.**

Ms. Crane announced that Stepping Stones was celebrating its 9th anniversary and that the ground breaking for the building expansion would occur soon.

Ms. Hard announced that the top 25 schools of the country had been published in the paper and there were no schools from Connecticut listed.

Mr. Law announced that the Housing Authorities would be receiving federal aid from the stimulus package.

Ms. Schilling said that pediatric care at Norwalk Community Health Care had a grant to continue the program. It will be eventually adjusted to replicate the Bridgeport program.

Mr. Hensinger said that there would be funding for the State from the stimulus program. He said that the State of Vermont had returned their check to the government because it cannot supplant operating funds.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bain adjourned the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services