

Island County Children's Commission
April 3, 2008 Meeting
Minutes

Members Present: Don Cook, Sandy Ziemer, Hillary Mellish, Peggy Dyer, Rod Merrell, Mark Brown, Colleen Bows, Janice O'Mahony, Kate Grossman, Kristina Saunsaucie, Tomi Whalen, Margie Forbes, Paty Williams, Dave White, Bess-Windecker-Nelson

Members Absent: Cynthia Shelton, Patty Page, Fran McCarthy, Kristin Lasher, Carol Stillian

Staff: Dan N. Bond

This meeting was opened by Chair, Don Cook, at approximately 4:35 PM.

The opening thought was offered by Paty Williams, who read a poem entitled Anyone Can Fly. This poem was given to Paty when she was a young girl, by an important person in her life. It is about finding and keeping one's way, despite what may happen or what anyone may say, and it has been a "touchstone" for Paty during her life. It holds important words and concepts for young people today – for us all.

Rod Merrell will provide the opening thought for the May meeting.

Dan handed out the finalized By-Laws, and Mission/Vision/Values documents. These are to replace the ones that members have in their Commission Manuals.

Chair Report

Don offered the March minutes for approval. The minutes of the March 6th meeting were approved as written.

Don then reported that the Executive Committee met via email this past month. They are working on a Teen Resource Card, which was to be discussed later in the agenda. He also reported that the concept of Community Get Togethers/Community Discussions is still alive and was discussed further by the Executive Committee as a method for interfacing with the community. More to come on this. Don spoke at the Island County Health Department's Health Heroes Award Ceremony. He delivered an update on Children's Commission activities.

Standing Committee Reports

Nomination/Development – There is no report from this Committee at this time.

Public Relations – Sandy reported that we have not had response to our initial efforts to engage youth in Logo development. The plan is to extend the due date to June 1st, and intensify efforts to engage youth in the process. Flyers will be back in the schools. Newspapers will be used again. We will utilize the upcoming, May 10th Youth Fair, and those who are working with specific groups of youth will be asked to use this as a project

with those groups of young people. We will have a Children's Commission resource table at the Youth Fair. Rod, Hillary and Sandy will be "personing" the table, and others are asked/invited to be there as well. It was also noted that we should publicize Children's Commission meetings in a "splashier" way, as opposed to, or in addition to, the public notices that are going in each month. We will find a way to do this.

Data Analysis – Paty has been in contact with Carrie McLachlan regarding data sources. The new Healthy Youth Survey is due to come out in the Fall of 2008. In addition to this, Carrie has many other data sources, and it is suggested that the Commission Study Groups utilize Carrie's expertise as they conduct their business.

Legislative Analysis/Advocacy – Don made reference to the Governor signing the Toxic Toy Bill. This Committee has not met as of yet, but will need to soon, as this is a large area of Children's Commission functioning, and we need to get it under way, assess the landscape, and find ways to become active.

Study Group Updates

0-5 Group – Bess indicated that this group has met since our last full Commission meeting in March. There are numerous issues that the group is looking at, including availability and quality of child care, infant care and respite care. This group plans to conduct a resource assessment, and connect up with the Partners in Island County for Early Learning, as this group shares many of the same areas of concern.

Primary Group (6-11) - Kristina reported that this group has met and has identified several issues of concern, including attachment, bullying, parent education/support, before and after school care, mental health and physical activity/screen time. This group will also conduct a resource assessment to help identify what the Children's Commission "niche" might be, to identify possible collaborations and to guard against duplication of efforts. Possible collaborators include Readiness To Learn, CADA (bullying), Family Resource Centers, and others. This group might seek to key off the efforts of the Secondary Group with their role being prevention of issues that often appear in adolescence.

Secondary Group (12-18) – Rod reported that this group met just prior to this full Commission meeting. They reviewed the myriad issues of concern, such as substance abuse, mental health, youthful depression, suicide, risky behaviors, etc. The issue that seems to correlate to several of the others is that of "connection", or lack of it. Youth who are, or who feel, disconnected from family, school and community are at higher risk for many of the issues referred to here. By way of assessment, and to get a handle on the scope of this issue, this group is considering holding focus groups with youth at each middle and high school in Island County and Stanwood. They have planned how to make contact with building Principals to gain entry to the schools and to arrange how to conduct the focus groups. Rod, being a building Principal, has agreed to make some initial contacts. Colleen has volunteered to draft some focus group questions, and also to formulate a draft youth survey to be used at the May 10th Youth Fair.

This gave rise to a discussion on how to formulate questions regarding "connection", so that youth will be clear about the intent of the questions. Rod spoke of the South

Whidbey Substance Abuse Coalition, which meets approximately quarterly, and which decided to include youth and to ask youth what would be helpful. The youth have developed questions that they then ask their peers – in order to get a better quality of answers than if adults asked.

There was a brief discussion about resiliency. Why are some youth better “survivors” than others with the same, or similar, issues in their lives? It was clarified that resiliency is not just the ability to avoid risky situations, but more the ability to have negative life situations happen to one, and to survive those situations in tact.

This then led to a clarifying discussion on “high risk”. Given that all youth are at risk in this society, what does “high risk” mean? This conversation included reference to the Risk and Protective Factor research of Hawkins and Catalano, clarifying that youth with multiple identifiable risk factors in their lives – and few or no protective factors to buffer against the risk – have higher likelihood of negative life outcomes. This research claims not to be correlational, but to be predictive. The conversation also included real-life anecdotes from Commission members who have worked with high risk youth in a variety of settings- demonstrating that high risk is not just a research term, but is a real depiction of actual life circumstances of too many youth.

Teen Resource Cards – The Executive Committee has been working on a Teen Resource Card for youth in trouble. This card can/will be used by police, school personnel, agencies who interact with youth, so that it can be disseminated to youth who need it. The Card will have a listing of all the “crisis” services that youth may approach for help in given situations. The cards will also be available for youth to just pick up in libraries, transit centers, etc. The Executive Committee is working to finalize the list of resources, and to get the cards produced so they can be available at the Healthy Youth Fair in May.

As time was available on the agenda, members entered into a discussion of what kids need in this county, and of this Commission’s commitment and role in helping. The need for a Crisis Residential Center (CRC), non-secure, was voiced. There are youth in trouble in this county. They are homeless, perhaps runaways (often running from something – not to something). Couch surfing is not uncommon, because there are not adequate services to help. Police do not have options for what to do when they encounter these youth. There is a need to get demographics on this from North and South County, as these areas do differ in regard to this issue. Another obvious need is for respite care for parents of young children.

This period of discussion was one in which the concern of members for the needs of children and youth became obvious – as did the tremendous amount of knowledge and expertise that exists in our membership.

Announcements

Mark spoke of the initiative that emanates from Law Enforcement across this country to invest in prevention. It is entitled “Fight Crime – Invest In Kids”. It represents a realization on the part of law enforcement that we will never solve crime in this country

by after-the-fact, reactive measures – but rather that we must pay attention to what research says about effective prevention programs and put our resources there.

There was a brief discussion of the need to educate parents about what is available to their children over the internet, and about the problems inherent in too much screen time. Couldn't schools do more, was asked. There was some reference to what is being done at Marysville-Pilchuck School District, and whether it is seen as effective. More to come on this.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:30 PM.