

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH UNITED WAY

Community Forum June 10, 2004

Minutes

Present: Sally Lewis, CAFY; Patty Ochoa, Minuteman ARC; Amy Donohue, BBBS; Megan Christopher, SMLS; Roberta Walsh, St Elizabeth's Parish Nurse; Ann Decker, Project Wellness; Carol Steiner, Acton COA; Kay Liebermann, PIT; Betsey Sweet, CPC; Pat Oliphant, CES; Barbara Smith, HGRM; Charlene Twente, AFIN; Shirley Ormsbee, Network for Women's Lives; Liza Cormier, Network for Women's Lives; Kathie Schwarting, Box COA; Betty McManus, AHA; Rev Ute Molitor.

ABUW Board Members Present: Joan Bauer, Julie McKinley, Ann Little, Maureen Masciola, Andrea Eisenberg, Mary Giorgio, Marilyn Peterson, Karen Smolin, and David Gerrat, Sandy Campbell, ABUW Executive Director.

After an introduction and acknowledgments from Community Outreach Chair, Joan Bauer, the meeting was called to order by Sandy Campbell. She stated that she was thankful for such diversity among the group present and that the goal for the forum would be to determine what the unmet needs are in the community. She went on to say that since the last Needs Assessment conducted by the ABUW in spring 2001, much has changed. The economy although now stabilized somewhat, has had tremendous impact on the needs of our community. Sandy made the Needs Assessment available to anyone who needed a copy. Sandy also told everyone that UW uses the needs assessment to help with the dissemination of UW funds.

Overview of the Needs Assessment (NA)

The NA was done by holding forums as well as a random sample of 2000 AB households. 259 surveys came back. It was discovered that people are not aware of services available to them. Further, they are not aware of ABUW or the agencies it supports. Outreach was created to get the word out. The NA indicated that there was a lack of services for:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Recreational Activities for youth
3. Local transportation
4. Affordable childcare
5. Non English speaking population
6. Drug abuse/child abuse/special needs adults

These are all still valid issues today.

Charlene asked for a brochure with our agency list. None is available at present. However, the AB Interfaith Laity puts out a directory with some agencies. ABIL.org has a list of all our agencies, which is also available in Portuguese and Spanish. Note from Sandy: the ABIL directory website is actually www.abilresources.org.

Agency Perspectives:

Kathie Schwarting, Boxborough Council on Aging: Kathie stated there is a transportation issue in Boxborough. She has volunteers to drive seniors but they don't always call to ask for a ride. She feels it may be an affront to their independence. No transport means they can't get to any programs that may be available to them as well as MD visits etc. Town is not seeing it as a need. Some seniors are moving

away. Has a taxi service and Starlifter, but these programs are very expensive and thus prohibitive. Kathie feels a transportation co-op would be helpful.

Megan Christopher: Has a Taxi voucher with local taxi co. in Natick that has been very successful.

Carol Steiner, Acton COA: Exploring a voucher program for Acton. Has a Roadrunner van which is to bring people to the center and to MD appointments in Acton, Concord and Maynard. Liability is an issue w/volunteer drivers so many are quitting. Going to Boston is a problem.

Shirley Ormsbee, Network: It is difficult to coordinate appointments with the pick up schedule of the vans.

Charlene Twente, AFIN: Clients want to get to food pantry. Could they do a transportation co-op with Concord/Acton/Boxborough? In other words, they would share a van on certain days of the week.

Liza Cormier, Network: A PR campaign would be a good idea to get the word out about available transportation if a co-op scheme were to work out.

Carol Steiner, Acton COA: COA has volunteers to get people to the food pantry or Community Supper. Also, their director administers the town emergency funds. People move to Acton but then can't afford to live here. Has town assistance for fuel (oil) and transport, but this is mostly younger people. Seniors ask for help less frequently.

PLAN: Work collaboratively possibly A/B/Concord to find transport solution. Also, perhaps a voucher plan for taxis would be beneficial.

Affordable Housing

Betty McManus, AHA: They have sustained a 16-18% cut in federal funding so they are now not able to issue their last 5 vouchers. There are 450 affordable housing units available in Acton. AHA has joined with other housing authorities resulting in a waiting list of 50,000 people for affordable housing in MA.

Charlene Twente, AFIN: This is a serious issue. Who do we write to? Are there Reps or Senators who perhaps may be on the fence that we could get support from by writing letters?

Betty McManus, AHA: Senators Kennedy, Kerry and Meehan could use letters, but are all on board. She will email a letter to Sandy similar to the one that just went to Romney, as well as the names of those on the Housing Authority. She urged us to use the letter as a template but to personalize our letters before sending them.

Megan Christopher, SMLS: People who wait in a shelter until a home is found can wait up to one year. Many leave before one is found because the shelter environment is so difficult.

Roberta Walsh, Parish Nurse St. Elizabeth's: The increased cost of meds makes for tough choices. Do they pay for housing or meds?

Kathie Schwarting, Box COA: COA gets grant from Executive Eldercare. When the money ran out last year, they launched a letter writing campaign and the funds were brought back available again. Letter writing is very powerful when done with a large number of people.

YOUTH NEEDS

Patty Ochoa, Minuteman ARC: Their family service program supports ages 6-22. It attracts developmental disabilities and now many autism kids who need afterschool activities. They don't fit into traditional programs. Their program filled, they doubled it, and it filled again. They are drawing from as far away as Worcester and Somerville. The need is great and they would like to expand. They did a

survey to see what people know about Minuteman ARC. A family member using EI (one of Minuteman's programs) did not know who Minuteman was. They have similar visibility issues to ABUW. Many people describe their initial contact as coming from ABUW or a local community chest. UW has a critical role and a community forum is a good way to get info from agency to agency and help with referrals.

Sally Lewis, CAFY: The parent's role changes when kids move to adolescents. It becomes difficult to reach the population of parents. Trying to get the word out about their mission is hard. They have speakers come and only 30 people show up. ABRHS administration is very supportive. They are learning that parents don't know how to parent kids at the teen years. Risky behaviors result from so many behaviors and they want parents to have the resources they need to help kids make the right choices. They are hoping to collaborate with Concord, Groton, Westford, in order to be able to offer more service/information to parents.

Ann Decker, Project Wellness: Jr Hi counselors say there are unmet needs in the non-English speaking population. Some integrate socially but their parents are not able to. They need to create a system to help Portuguese, Spanish and Russian population. Asian families integrate more easily but don't "get" the cultural norms. There is a lack of transportation for these kids so extracurricular activities are not a possibility. They would like to broaden the base for kids that are "more on the fringe" (i.e. not jocks, band kids, etc.) - kids that need a social pull. Harassment and bullying issues are increasing. Some of it is sexual, some is just plain nasty. Some kids are really badly emotionally hurt.

Liza Cormier, Network for Women's Lives: The Brazilians and the Latin race at the High School have big ethnic and racial issues. Now that there is an increasing number of students of color, racial tension has increased. Parents need to be educated. Bullying is not addressed adequately.

Roberta Walsh, Parish Nurse St.Elizabeth's: Do parents turn a blind eye? If so, it's difficult to reach parents who don't realize there is a problem.

Sandy Campbell, Executive Director ABUW: Has bullying increased across the board? Everyone agreed, yes!

Megan Christopher, SMLS: Kids living with domestic violence are traumatized by what they've seen in the home. ALATEEN or individual therapy is very helpful but difficult to address as a community.

Betty McManus, AHA: Has had many calls from parents of kids 14-17 asking for funds for baseball and soccer camps.

David Gerratt: Has a real "outsider" kid who has done really well in the Junior high. Also, the forum is a wonderful way to learn about community resources. Would be happy to organize meetings to leverage community needs. For example if all of the agencies went to the Beacon together asking for free advertising, we would be able to have it because of the strength in numbers of the community group.

Betsey Sweet, CPC: They are trying to get info to families about themselves. First Connections is a good resource guide for parents of kids birth to age 8 but it needs to be updated.

Sandy Campbell: Volunteers make a difference. UW will update Caring Community database. People can go to the self-driven database to find volunteer opportunities. Sandy asked if there were any volunteer needs from our agencies and stated that it was also good exposure for our agencies. Go to: www.abuw.org and click on Caring Community to go straight to the database.

Issues for Future Meeting:

1. Minimum Wage-Charlene Twente, AFIN
2. Issues related to the undocumented population-Megan Christopher, SMLS
3. Affordable Daycare-Betty McManus, AHA
4. What are we doing as a community to prevent the onset of mental illness/emotional difficulties? Kay Liebeman, PIT

Betty McManus asked for a list of invitees so that perhaps each person could bring a friend next time in order to get more people to the forum.

Ann Little, President ABUW: We need a space for future meetings. Please get in touch with Sandy if you have an appropriate space to hold a forum.