

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE APRIL 21, 2009

Community Services

Members

In Attendance: Lois Bronz, Chair, Ken Jenkins, Vito Pinto, Judy Myers, Bernice Spreckman, Jose Alvarado and Bill Burton.

In Attendance: DSS: Diane Atkins, Don Wiede BOL: Harry Spreckman and Melanie Montalto Guests: Cora Greenberg, Liz Mark, Allison Lake, Ashley Gephart, Katherine Lobach, Barbara Holland, Myrna Forney, Anthony Zambito, Byron Reid.

Items Discussed: WCA Presentation on their report: "The Toughest Job"

Minutes

Chairwoman Bronz called the Community Services Committee meeting to order at 3:13 P.M.

Moved by Legislator Myers and seconded by Legislator Jenkins the minutes of the April 7th meeting were approved with a vote of 4-0.

Cora Greenburgh, Executive Director of the Westchester Children's Association, Allison Lake, and Liz Mark also of the WCA, gave a presentation on their recently released report: "The Toughest Job: Improving Parenting Programs for Westchester Families in Need". The recommendations of the report were discussed, including: increasing the number of evidence based contracted agencies; more thorough evaluations; a lack of communication between the family court and the Department of Social Services; and not enough services in Northern Westchester.

A copy of the report is on file and available for review.

Since the report was published the WCA has met with First Deputy Commissioner Diane Atkins, who updated them on the progress DSS has already made in these areas. Ms. Atkins discussed the recommendations from the report which are already in place in DSS with the Committee.

Ms. Atkins stated that she has a good working relationship with Judge Davidson of family court. She stated that every agency that DSS contracts with services Northern Westchester. She also said that in terms of transportation, DSS provides metro-cards to any customer that needs one in order to get to their appointments at service agencies. Ms. Atkins said that all of the contractors that they have do in home services so that the worker can see the entire family interact and the child is properly provided for while the parents are receiving services. Therefore child care is provided.

Ms. Atkins stated that DSS provides reports and information to the family court when a family is mandated to parenting services. She said that if a judge requests a written report or testimony

they will receive it. She said she has spoken to Judge Davidson after reading the report to find out how they can communicate better and have the court ask for the documentation that it needs.

Ms. Atkins said that going forward she hopes that she can work more closely with the WCA to keep each other informed and make improvements together prior to issuing a report.

Ms. Atkins stated that the County has already made the change to gather results from their contracting agencies through performance based measurement requirements.

Legislator Jenkins stated that Judge Davidson was at the Board yesterday on another issue and she discussed some problems that she identifies in the way the family court is structured and not a problem with communication with Social Services. He said that Judge Davidson and Judge Niccholi stated that they are looking to make improvements that seem to coincide with the recommendations of the report.

Legislator Myers asked what led to the statement that communication was lacking between Family Court and DSS. Allison Lake explained that based on several conversations with Judge Davidson and others, it was determined that the information received is not consistent, it is based on what the court requests, and they do not always know to ask for more specific data. Cora Greenberg also explained that many of the suggestions came from researching the process that other jurisdictions use that could possibly improve our system in Westchester.

Barbara Holland of the WCA asked how it is determined that our programs are excellent. Ms. Atkins stated by the outcome reports. Ms. Holland asked if those reports are compared to others in order to determine true success. Don Wiede, Deputy Commissioner of Social Services, stated that DSS does agree with using evidence based programs and are doing that now by requesting performance based outcomes. Allison Lake stated that when the research was being done for the report two years ago DSS was not using evidence based methods and they were not aware that it had begun, but they are pleased to have learned that they are using an evidence based model now.

Katherine Lobad, the Chair of the WCA Board, asked if the performance based measurements are compiled into a report and available to the public. Mr. Wiede stated that the information is available for the past two years. Legislator Jenkins stated that the Board requests such reports, especially during the budget process, and when those reports are presented to the Board they become public.

Moved by Legislator Pinto and seconded by Legislator Burton the Committee on Community Services adjourned at 411 p.m.

A complete audio recording of the meeting is available for review upon request.