

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE AUGUST 6, 2009

Members

In Attendance: Lois Bronz, Chair, Ken Jenkins, Vito Pinto, Jose Alvarado, Judy Myers and Tom Abinanti.

In Attendance: CE: Bill Randolph DCMH: Grant Mitchell, Leslie Cattan BOL: Mary Jackson, Rick Pezzullo, Sally Swift, Alyssa Jacobs, Herman Geist, Christina Giliberti, Ian and Melanie Montalto Guests: Alfreda Williams, Susan Sonkin, Pat Grossman, Betty Crea Davidson, Bonnie Graham, Sasha Rabasca, Katie Weisman

Items Discussed: Presentation of the Autism Advisory Committee Report

Minutes

Chairwoman Bronz called the Community Services Committee meeting to order at 10:44 A.M.

Dr. Grant Mitchell, Commissioner of the Department of Community Mental Health, presented the Autism Advisory Committee for 2009. The report makes several suggestions, including creating an Autism Resource Center, a one stop shop to find resources for those with Autism, in order to make Westchester an "Autism Friendly" County. A copy of the report is on file and available for review.

Dr. Mitchell stated that his department will work with the Office for the Disabled to help reach the goal of training local businesses to be friendly and accepting to employing persons with Autism.

Dr. Mitchell stated that a liaison for Autism will be designated in the Department of Community Mental Health to solely work on implementing the recommendations of this report and handle all Autism related issues and concerns.

Legislator Pinto asked what would need to be done to support creating identification cards for people with Autism.

Legislator Jenkins suggested that the County have a voluntary registration with the police, so that when they are called to a home with a person with Autism that it is automatically noted on the 911 dispatcher's screen as well as the police responding to the call so they understand that a person with special needs is in the home.

Legislator Abinanti discussed the bracelet identification program for those with Autism that tend to walk off. He stated that the program is excellent but thinks it would be helpful to have identification on the bracelet so that when someone finds this roaming person, they can easily identify the problem, because people will not look in their pocket for an identification card.

Legislator Abinanti continued by saying that the Health Department needs to be involved to help get the hospitals and county physicians on board and trained to deal with patients with Autism. Chairwoman Bronz stated that the Committee is here for oversight and to identify areas where collaboration is needed.

Legislator Myers suggested that the Report be presented to the County Board of Health in order to reach out to the medical community. Dr. Mitchell agreed and stated he would give the presentation to the Board of Health.

Susan Sonkin, Director of the Westchester Center for Educational and Emotional Development, spoke about protecting the system for younger children, as it is struggling for funding and resources, and if there are resources for the younger people with Autism they may need less resources as adults. She also stated that expanding health insurance coverage to those with Autism to cover autistic therapies and treatments. She stated that the rate of children diagnosed with Autism is leveling off, currently at 1 in 155 children born, however now these children are being born sicker than previous years, with much more severe disabilities. She continued to state that there is not a place for autistic people to die, as in a trained hospice setting for them to go peacefully in an understanding environment. She stated that her dream is to see an Autism Institute, to really provide all of the services in one place and be a national model.

Katie Weisman, a mother with three autistic children, stated that we need a census of the number of people with autism, their ages, and the spectrum of their disorders.

Moved by Legislator Pinto and seconded by Legislator Abinanti the minutes of the meetings of June 9th and July 14th, 2009 were approved with a vote of 5-0.

Moved by Legislator Pinto and seconded by Legislator Jenkins the minutes of February 24, 2009 were approved with a vote of 5-0.

Moved by Legislator Pinto and seconded by Legislator Jenkins agenda items 8, 35, and 46 were received and filed with a vote of 5-0.

Moved by Legislator Pinto and seconded by Legislator Myers the Committee on Community Services adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

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