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**NORTHEAST EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL**

**Monday, November 20, 2023**

**5:30–7:00 pm.**

**ZOOM Meeting**

**In Attendance:**  Sanda Assanowicz, Paul Brenton, Patty Bryant, Patty Buell, Kayla Burgess, Kristine Cicchetti, Erin Drake, Paula Graef, Ellen Jones, Melissa Kennedy, Emily Hayden, Shannon Haney, Stephanie Hynes, Cathy Lane, Courtney Langlois, Keely Mcalister, Tammy Miner, Dr. Susan Nash-Ditzel, Margaret Pearson, Laurence Prentiss, Christine Rosati Randall, Kelly Robbins, Emily Ross, Barney Senay, Sally Sherman, Melanie Smith Cerva, Samantha Soper, Austin Tanner, Aimee Terwilliger, Rene Toper, Mark Weaver, Allison Whitson

Guest Speakers: Access Agency – Emma King

**Agenda:**

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Guest Speakers
3. Spotlighted Community – Plainfield and Putnam
4. NECC Updates- Regional Director
5. Regional Programming / Community Updates
6. School Readiness Meeting

The presentation can be viewed in Google Drive; all links to documents and resources mentioned in the notes can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1c8NPPc7Hbun69UQ14a3zzAwFqXZPU-OoohKMUoimp2I/edit?usp=sharing>

**Welcome and Introductions:**

**Guest Speaker**

See the attached presentation.

Action agency has offices on Broad Street in Danielson and Main Street in Willimantic. We also maintain the emergency shelter on Reynolds Street. Families can access services in our region at the Office on Broad Street and Main Street. Access is part of a nationwide network of community action agencies, and we were founded federally. We exist as independent nonprofits guided by community support block grant guidance from federal health and human services, so we're all separate, but our missions are similar. Our mission is to build equitable Access to opportunities that empower resources, individuals, families, and communities to achieve and sustain economic stability. There are nine of us around the state.

TVCCA is our sister agency to the south. They serve New London. You may know TVCCA because they also hold grants for our county to run Headstart and other programming. We partner with them often and are all very close here in Connecticut. We try to coordinate services, especially in eastern Connecticut, because we are so rural, so we predominantly serve the 26 towns of Windham County. Still, we also have programming that spills over the border into New London County. The best part about community action is how we're nationwide and nationally governed. Still, we're all independent and are required by law to tailor our programming to the unique needs of our communities. We conduct a needs assessment every year. Housing, healthcare, and Access to Food have been pretty consistent. These areas drive our programming for individuals and families. I just wanted to highlight specific for families, but individuals as well:

**Food Security:** Our commitment is to access Food and increase food security in the region, and we have both mobile and site-based food pantries. We have a pantry in Danielson that's open on  Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we also have a mobile van that travels around Eastern Connecticut and delivers Food to areas that we've identified either being a food desert or we've had community partners reach out and say hey we keep hearing about food and security transportation issue can you bring, can you get the van to our site so if you go onto our website and click our link you'll be able to have a calendar of all the sites so in our area we're at in Danielson we go to Birchwood Terrace where Maple courts In Brooklyn at the community center I know we were at the Brooklyn cares opening a couple weeks ago in Canterbury we head to the town hall we're in we were in Brooklyn at Salem Village which is an apartment complex for seniors but it's open to anyone so if you live in any of those areas, you're interested in receiving a mobile food distribution website we're gonna be and you can get free Food so it's a great program we're actually working on expanding we're excited we're excited to be growing that program. Hopefully, April will receive a refrigerated vehicle so all our Food is safely packed. So, if you are a community partner, come to an event or a community event. Needs more consistent resources. Please reach out to me. I'd be happy to get you in touch with Louise Rodriguez, our senior director of community programming. He coordinates all of our food pantries along with the coordinator, Security. Our contract for our nutrition program WIC is Day Kimball, and we've been providing services for the past 35 years.

**Affordable Housing:** We manage and run a 40-bed shelter on Reynolds Street in Danielson. As part of that 18 individuals, we also have 22 beds in seven rooms, serving sheltered families. We work with families on other homeless solutions programs - families or individuals must be within two weeks of either eviction or foreclosure and have nowhere to go except for a place unsuitable for human habitation, meaning a car or a tent. Anything before that is considered prevention work, and we will discuss management programs. Still, I know that that is a frustrating point, especially for our families, because we, unfortunately, have to have tough conversations.

Emily Ross: Because we have a lot of people from a school system, I want to make you aware of the big difference between the definition of McKinney Vento and what the HUD sees homeless. To clarify, we might identify families as lost under McKaye Vento, but they will not be eligible under the HUD definition.

**Energy Assistance**: I think it's what Access is most known for. Encourage anybody to apply if they fall within the income guidelines for the program. This program can offset and provide financial assistance to propane, pellets, electric, or natural gas. Applications run from November to May - so it's not a year program. The Department of Social Services has launched an online application portal so you can apply online. Even if you were denied other avenues to be eligible for assistance, please get in touch with our Office and encourage us to make applying for a significant benefit as easy as possible.

**Case Management:** Case management is centered on resolving barriers that create economic stability. We are a support program for folks who need guidance in getting through a challenge, whether that's losing a job, the death of a spouse, the death of a parent, or a variety of different things. This is Office; it's through the state human service infrastructure model. It is a mechanism to ensure that individuals and families understand all the social safety benefits they may be eligible for. We can refer to other agencies that provide mental health and behavioral health services.

**Questions:**

* Is there a waitlist for case management case management? Yes, currently, it's a few weeks. We are 1 case manager short right now.
* Eligibility for case management? There's no income requirement, but long-term enrollment is 300% of poverty.
* Could you briefly talk about the no-freeze shelter opening? One of the community collaborative efforts is establishing an overnight no-freeze shelter at Church Albian. They let us rent for winter, and we offer those services between 8 pm and 8 am. The facility is for individuals only; for families, you go to 51 Reynolds St, which has Access to items kids need.

For any questions, please connect with Emma.

**Staff Updates:**

* Social Emotional Learning (SEL) & Support Project, we held In-Person SEL Workshops:
* October 17 @ Plainfield Early Childhood Center
  + 11 Parents attended 12 Children
* November 13 @ Virtual via Zoom
  + 16 parents attended
* Upcoming: January in person at Killingly Early Childhood Center
* Received a $1000. Donation from Centreville Bank to support the SEL Kit project
* Received a donation of 150 stress balls from Centreville Bank to include in the SEL Kits

Sparkler Grant Accomplishments October & November

* We attended the annual Sparkler Learning event at CT Science Center in Hartford. The NECC SEL Kit Project was featured in the state presentation.
* We printed 2,000 newly revised Resources for Families in NE Guide and began distribution to community agencies and programs focusing on healthcare.
* Incorporated Sparkler information in our SEL Workshops and Early Learning Kit project

Community Cafe - $5,00 Grant

* We received the mini-grant for $5,000 to hold a community café focused on SEL.
* On November 2, we partnered with Putnam Family Resource Center and TEEG to host a community café in Putnam;  we had 16 parents attend with their children.  We provided free hot dinner and free childcare during the cafe.

**Parent Ambassadors Update:**

Kelly updated the group on Pas's work; Rene and Kelly attended and helped host the parent café. They have been working on regional guide distribution. Kelly has been helping Chris build SEL kits, and PAs have been helping drop off SEL Kits. Continued social media outreach with posting on Facebook; please get in touch with Kelly if you have something you want posted.

**Community Programs Sharing:**

NDDH: Will be running a flu clinic; visit the website for more details

Emily Haden: Eastconn Headstart – enrollment update: They are fully enrolled at center-based sites but have few openings in Windham county-based home services.

Sandra: NFN is working on fathering home visiting and will release the new flyer. These programs service the entire family as a whole. I will get NECC the new brochure as it is completed. Q: What are the ages of families served? It's pre-natal through age 5.

Alison – Killingly Library reminds everyone of the annual craft night on December 5. This is a fabulous full-length newsletter now; you can get a copy of all programs happening over the next three months on the website.

**School Readiness & Highlighted Communities:**

September Meeting Notes: They were attached to the agenda for review before the meeting. Sally motions to accept minutes as presented, Courtney seconds, no discussion, all in favor.

Program Updates: Mary Ellen presents: Programs update the spreadsheet for every meeting with updates on their program. They are available to look at in our Google Drive; each program has a tab at the bottom and updates their information for each meeting. The OEC asks us to publish the cost of care per pupil annually with the school readiness council so that people know how much it costs to provide care for preschool children. That information for each district is listed (or will be by the next meeting). <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HXx5aMaZID6Sa7WBwaPoqppqfWIj4mtttdHq50JBtT4/edit?usp=sharing>

Highlighted Communities - Putnam

Patty Bryant highlights the Town of Putnam and introduces Mayor Barney Senay to present what's happening in the Town of Putnam. The Town and the Putnam Business Association collaborate to support and host annual community events such as outdoor concerts, river fires, parades, and fireworks, to name a few. Barney talks a bit about Putnam and the connection with the Putnam Business Association, WINY, and the Putnam Public Schools. They have come a long way in the last few years: a new municipal complex with a community playground. He spoke about the great relationship with the school and the superintendent, sitting down with the superintendents going over Budget, going over what they need everything else and it's been very eye-opening for me to see different programs are available. I would recommend that leaders in communities sit down with the superintendents and go over their Budget and have an opportunity to  Interact with the general government budget, a much more straightforward process in the future. We are very fortunate for the partnership and thank the group for the opportunity to highlight Putnam.

Putnam School Readiness Child Care Program: Patty Bryant updates: Our preschool program is fully enrolled with 103 students. We have two full-day classes, two school-day classes, and three half-day classes. We are a fully integrated preschool program, and our children are engaged in learning through play throughout the day. We use a sliding fee scale to determine tuition. We provide transportation and complimentary breakfast, lunch, and dinner for children in the program.

Highlighted Communities - Plainfield

Courtney Langois mentions that Selectman Kevin Cunninhgam could not be present due to swearing in newly elected officials members at their meeting tonight. Superintendent Paul Brenton presents on Plainfield. Plainfield has many vibrant programs to support the community, such as a Senior center, food bank, and early childhood center. Offer full pre-K classrooms with transportation. We committed extra resources this year to the preschool program. We have outstanding staff in our early childhood/family resource center, where anyone in the community can come to gain resources and get help. Tree lighting is on December 1 at 5:15 pm. I am proud of the students who collected items for Project Pin food panty.

Courtney talks about school readiness: We have up to 85 slots for SR programming through funding. We have 89 preschools enrolled in the program. We continue to enroll students as we move throughout the school year. We do not charge fees for families; we have an inclusive, play-based model in our preschool program. Our FRC offers music and movement programs and CARS "children arriving ready for school" program.

Superintendent Bull mentions Plainfield received the state "School of Distinction" award for two schools in Plainfield this year. Mr. Brenton confirmed Shepard Hill and Plainfield Memorial Elementary and spoke to that.

School Readiness Component Report: Liasion Chris Rosati shares Pre-K & Kindergarten Transition results. Chris will present a PowerPoint on the survey results. The number one response was a positive transition overall. Open houses were well attended, and K orientations were positive. Back-to-school programs received positive feedback (all the ones across our seven communities). There were 36 open-ended comments. This data will be shared with the school readiness subcommittee and Leadership team. The individual towns each do their specific survey – so we will compare all results and bring any suggestions to Leadership.

Expenditure Reports: Each November, each program prepares a report to show where expenditures are and, for that program that collects fees, where those funds are being spent. This report is on Google Drive for members to review in the expenditure folder. Melanie reviews a few communities to see how the information is displayed. These will be uploaded to Google Drive.

OEC Updates: School Readiness Programs can now convert their preschool spaces to Infant/Toddler spaces – none of our programs will do this.

Monitoring Updates: All programs had initial SR Monitoring visits, and all reports are in Google Drive. Melanie updates for her four towns (Brooklyn, Plainfield, Sterling, and Putnam). Overall, everything looks good; all programs are working on PD and getting staff up and running. I have until June to complete all those requirements. Emily reports on Killingly – they just had it, and everything is good. PD is ahead of this year's game. Almost all staff is at 13 hours this year. Ellen reports that the Thompson monitor visit went well; the only suggestion is to update the language on the form to be more inclusive. Thompson did receive NEYAC accreditation. Canterbury Liasion by Chris Rosati – The first monitoring visits were completed, and all was good. The only thing is that one staff member's record of partial PD needs to be updated. All SR monitoring visits are available for the NECC SR Council to review in the shared Google folder.

Bylaws Reviewed

Liaisons and SR Programs have reviewed the NECC Bylaws (annual review). They will bring suggestions to Leadership Team - NECC SR Council will receive a copy of the updated bylaws before the January meeting for discussion/voting.

Collaboration Agreements:

One agreement highlighted this month is with Headstart and Killingly. Sally discussed that staff was available to do onsite visits with Headstart. Once a week, a team from Goodyear visits each site. It strengthens relationships, getting to know kids, and sharing resources and information. We are excited to bring that back.

Family Input Question: How will the new age entry into kindergarten affect your family next year?

Kris shared the council survey results last week for families to get input. Within a week, we received over 116 responses. This is the start of the conversation, as this subject will be ongoing over the next several months. 75% of the respondents were aware of the change coming, and about half of their respondents said this change would affect the following year. 20% said it would affect their return to work, as they won't be able to; 45% have a child who has to repeat pre-k but feels ready for K; 40% are worried about paying for another year of preschool. A percentage said it would affect them with childcare, as preschool programs in their towns are half-day (vs. full day of K). We captured open-ended comments as well.

CT Project – Advocacy group looking into the K age change affecting families across the state. The NECC was asked to participate on their steering committee to give NE CT a voice, knowing our region has a childcare dessert. They are concerned about the impact on programs and families and asked the council if we want to be on the steering committee to represent northeast Connecticut, knowing that we do a lot of work in our region. Three members from our council will be part of that steering committee, so as we progress with that, we will bring back information to everybody on what we're learning. We felt it essential for Northeast Connecticut to have a voice in any advocacy they'll be doing at the state level to help support the transition of this new change in any funding that might come out of it to help either the programs or parents around that.

Melanie mentions that EASTCONN has a group for administrators to get together to discuss issues around this issue. They will continue to facilitate this process.

The next meeting is January 22, 2024, and the highlighted committees will be Killingly and Sterling. We will need to add a bylaw vote to this agenda—update on K entry as a standing agenda item in the future.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:55 pm.