

Monmouth County Youth Services Commission

Minutes for Tuesday February 4, 2025

4:00 PM First Floor Conference Room,

Human Services Building with Zoom Link Option Available

Attendance:

Trude Arnette, Tara Buckley, Myra Carter, Stephanie Cella, Carlton Cummings, Achille Dejean, Thomas Fichter, Dr. Charles R. Ford, Jr., Laurie Gerhardt, Jennifer Hoffer, Ivan Kaplan, Dustin Knoblauch, Honorable Lourdes Lucas, Dr. Lester W. Richens, Raymond Santiago, Lynn Seaward, Kaitlyn Silagyi, Christine Talbot, Yolanda Taylor, Elizabeth Williams.

Kaitlyn McCarthy, Natalie Martin

Ellen Cohen

I. CALL TO ORDER: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING'S ACT

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago called the meeting to order, and the open public meeting's act was read. He welcomed those in attendance, who were present on video as well as in person. Prosecutor Santiago indicated that he was joining the meeting from Washington DC where he was doing some advocacy. **A motion was made, seconded and carried (Lucas: Arnette) to approve the Youth Services Commission Minutes from December 3, 2024.**

II. YSC Co-Chairs Report

Honorable Lourdes Lucas indicated that she hoped to attend the meeting in person however, a case she was hearing was running late. Judge Lucas indicated she has seen an increase recently in cases that involved fighting in schools. She has asked Tara Buckley to see if there was further data or reports that support what she has noted as a recent increase. Tara Buckley reported that she is looking to get reports.

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago stated that he has received several phone calls from Superintendents of Schools on immigration issues. The immigration trust agreement and the Office of the Attorney General provides guidance for Law Enforcement.

Thomas Fichter indicated that the resources that were posted on the NJ Department of Education website regarding immigration that Dustin shared were very helpful. He provided an update on their efforts to implement restorative justice practices in schools to address conflict resolution. He shared that Monmouth Regional High School is one site and that Lydel Akins also recently presented to Asbury Park and Neptune Township where it is getting some traction.

III. Division of Child and Youth Services Report

Dustin Knoblauch highlighted activities within the Division of Child and Youth Services, as well as the Positive Youth Development (PYD) Hub. Various community and school speaking engagements to increase awareness of the youth crisis intervention services in Monmouth County

are being held. Included in the presentations have been representatives from Psychiatric Emergency Screening Services (P.E.S.S.) and the Child and Family Crisis Clinicians; Children's Mobile Response (M.R.S.S.); the Family Crisis Intervention Unit (F.C.I.U.); and the Division of Child Abuse Protection & Permanency (D.C.P.&P.). Information on Monmouth ACTS Navigation System is also provided. Reference card have been developed and are being distributed that highlight each entity's specific role and when appropriate to call them.

Dustin Knoblauch indicated that Monmouth ACTS PYD *focuses* on ages 9-17 years with an emphasis on upstream prevention to help divert youth from the juvenile justice system and mental health crisis; youth behavioral health and crisis is a strong focal point to drive upstream prevention efforts. Priority areas have been identified to support all youth in achieving overall wellness. The Positive Youth Development Hub priority work groups include the following: Loss Prevention and Outreach, Grief and Loss, Spanish Translation & Education Training, Youth Violence and Gang Awareness, Family Empowerment and Education, Safe and Free Places and Transition to Adulthood. The Positive Youth Development Hub is serving as the Youth Services Commission committee that focuses on education, training, and community awareness.

Strategies to gain the youth voice include various community and school speaking engagements and focus groups that have been conducted. Youth have been invited to share their perspective directly at meetings. They have emphasized the importance of family understanding and support; expressed the positive impact of school-based youth services and school counseling staff; and their desire for safe and free places. Monmouth Regional Equity Club Students recently talked at the January PYD Hub meeting about utilizing Restorative Practices – peer mediation circles as a judgement free zone lead by the students. They highlighted the challenges of accessing appropriate services, including Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and shared the challenges of language barriers and inclusion. The club provides a safe and free place for students to come together and offer support.

Dustin Knoblauch also shared information on the Fostering Youth to Independence initiative that provides housing vouchers for youth with previous out of home foster care placements. The initiative works with the Monmouth County and Asbury Park Housing Authorities and requires referrals to DCF for clearance. Please send referrals to Emma Hess - Emma.Hess@co.monmouth.nj.us; include - name, birthdate, and municipality.

Dustin Knoblauch stated that the next meeting of the Positive Youth Development Hub is scheduled for March 14th at 10:00 AM via Zoom.

IV. YSC Administrator's Update

Ellen Cohen reported that Monmouth County received its 2025 grant awards from the Juvenile Justice Commission for the State Community Partnership Grant, Family Court Services funds and FCIU as well as, the JDAI Innovations Funding. Our 2025 renewal contracts with our YSC funded programs are fully executed. Narrative and fiscal reporting has been set up for 2025.

Ellen Cohen stated that the 2024 level of service report was included with the meeting attachments. It provides an overview of the YSC funded programs based upon their submitted narrative reports.

Information highlights the number of youth and families served, as well as the number of direct and indirect service hours provided by the agency. In 2024, cumulative there were over 1,800 youth/families served. Prevention services included mentoring, after school and summer programming, use of evidenced based curriculums and positive youth development activities. Diversion services included an Adolescent Early Intervention Services & Parent Child Conflict Resolution Program, the Family Crisis Intervention Unit (FCIU) and the Keys to Innervisions Program. Juvenile Detention Alternatives included the STEADY program and Family Navigator-Partners with Families Program. Disposition services included individualized services for youth on probation, specialized treatment services for youth with sex offense specific charges, and adolescent residential alcohol and drug abuse treatment services. Most programs reached their contracted level of service, a few fell short due to staffing issues or enrollment/referrals.

V. Education Update

Dr. Lester W. Richens indicated that Monmouth County is diverse in area hubs such as Freehold Borough, Red Bank, Asbury Park, and Long Branch. Dr. Richens indicated information has been provided on how to help schools with immigration related issues.

Dr. Richens stated that there is a Wellness Symposium on Thursday evening at 5:30 PM at Brookdale Community College in the Navesink Room that will include mental health experts. There are 440 people registered to attend. He welcomed the Judge to attend.

Dr. Richens also reported that banning cell phone use by students while in school has gained momentum and some districts are now collecting cellphones at the door.

VI. Overview Presentations

Probation Division -Gun Violence Reduction Initiative

Myra Carter, Chief Probation Officer and Natalie Martin, Senior Probation Officer gave a presentation on the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative. The Gun Violence Reduction Initiative in New Jersey's Probation Division connects probationers with resources and services to help reduce gun violence. The initiative is a collaboration between the courts, community leaders, and service providers. Through the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative, the Judiciary works with community leaders, third-party agencies, and service providers to connect individuals placed on probation for gun-related and other weapons offenses with appropriate resources and services. Myra Carter, Chief of Probation indicated that this is a relatively new caseload in Monmouth. Monmouth Vicinage began the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative in August 2023. She read the mission statement of the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative and emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of the community, to be inclusive and promote positive behavioral change while utilizing evidence-based practices. The initiative focuses on collaboration, building trust, teamwork, inspiration, and support. There are ten Vicinages in New Jersey participating in the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative as well as, JISP. Myra Carter reported that as of January 2025, there has been 37 clients referred to the Advisory Board (30 adult clients and 7 juvenile clients). 5 out of the 7 youth were in school or a GED program. 4 youth-maintained employment. Natalie Martin, Senior Probation Officer indicated that she currently has 27 on her caseload. Myra Carter

expressed her appreciation to Natalie Martin, who has a passionate commitment to the program. Myra indicated that it is great to see the collaboration. The Advisory Board receives anonymous information on the clients such as demographics, offenses, risk factors, protective factors (strengths and hobbies) and reason for the referral, efforts to engage and barriers experienced. Referral types have included mental health counseling (33%); substance abuse counseling (20%); employment (22%) and other (25%). There have been 7 successful completions thus far, and 3 that were unsuccessful.

Prevention First- Life Skills Training/ Internet Safety and Character Counts

Kaitlin McCarthy, Director, Prevention First gave a presentation on their two delinquency prevention programs funded through the Youth Services Commission -State Community Partnership Grant. Character Counts is being implemented at the Neptune Township Middle School. Students who participate in the Character Counts program meet twice a week, in school, for a total of 15 sessions. Students help select the topics to be discussed and they participate in fun, informative hands-on activities to build skills. Topics to be discussed may include self-esteem, decision making skills, substance drug use/misuse, advertising/media, managing stress, communication, peer pressure, social skills, assertiveness, healthy relationships, dealing with anger, problem solving/coping skills and achieving short- and long-term goals. To enhance the program, Kait McCarthy indicated that Prevention First has integrated outside speakers such as New Hope IBHC or 180 Turning Lives Around to the program to talk with the teens on topics such as substance abuse and healthy relationships. An overview of the Botvin Life Skills Training (LST) program was also given. LST is being implemented by Prevention First in Long Branch and Neptune Township. The program follows the children from 3rd grade through 5th grade. This year they are serving the 4th graders. There are nine classroom sessions on topics such as self-esteem, decision making skills, smoking/vaping, advertising, Internet Safety, stress, communication, social skills, and assertiveness. Kaitlin McCarthy indicated that Prevention First has served a total of 640 children, through the three YSC funded programs. Kaitlin distributed additional information in folders that included the following resources: “Prevention Starts in the Home-A Parent’s Guide to the Prevention of Substance Use & Mental Health”, a brochure entitled, “Guardian Guide to Social Media-Navigating Parental Controls”, the Good Samaritan Law with resources listed; and flyers on the Prevention Coalition of Monmouth County, Character Counts, and Life Skills Training.

VII. YSC Planning Committee

Trude Arnette reported that the YSC Planning Committee has established our 2025 meeting dates for the third Tuesday of the month at 10:00 AM. The first three meetings will be scheduled through Zoom and the last three meetings will be in person. The dates are as follows: February 18, 2025; March 18, 2025; April 15, 2025; May 20, 2025; June 17, 2025; and July 15, 2025. Requests for 2024 data on detention admissions, detention alternatives and court processing (docketed, diverted, and adjudicated delinquent) has been made. Trude indicated that once made available it will be shared with the full Youth Services Commission and reviewed in the YSC Planning Committee. We will be reaching out to those who have participated in the YSC Planning Committee in the past as well as looking for new members to join.

VIII. New Business

Prosecutor Santiago shared that Joshua Hood has been named the new Deputy Public Defender.

IX. Old Business

X. Public Comment

XI. Adjournment-

A motion was made, seconded and carried (Richens: Arnette) to adjourn the meeting at 5:05 PM.

The next meeting of the Monmouth County Youth Services Commission is scheduled for Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 4:00 PM.