

**Darien Human Services Commission
Minutes
July 13, 2023**

Room 206

Time: 8:30 AM

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Commission Members Attending: Kate Durocher, Gina Gromelski (arrived at 8:35), Janet King, Michael LeMoult, Byrne Pozzi

Staff Attending: Ali Ramsteck, Cynthia Hall, Michelle Varrone

Absent: Christina Fay
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Chairman Durocher called the meeting to order at 8:32am.

Review of Minutes of January 12, 2023 & March 9, 2023 meetings

Upon a motion by Janet King, second by Byrne Pozzi, the minutes from March were approved of a vote of 4-0.

Upon a motion by Michael LeMoult, seconded by Byrne Pozzi, the minutes from January were approved by a vote of 4-0.

Mental Health Task Force & Mental Health First Aid Training Updates

Ali reported the “Out of the Darkness” walk took place in April at Darien High School. This was the first walk to ever take place at a high school. Over \$30,000 was raised for American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

In May there was also the “Demystifying Resilience in Children and Adolescents” panel.

Mental Health First Aid Training

Ali and Paula Sutcliffe have offered two Mental Health First Aid Training sessions so far and there is another scheduled for the beginning of August. There are still spaces available, anyone interested can contact Ali to sign up.

Quarterly Report

The Quarterly Report was distributed prior to the meeting. Ali also gave updates to the Commission. There have been 20 new clients in the last quarter.

APRA Funds: Funds are continuing to be used to offer Mental Health First Aid Trainings to Darien residents or those that serve the Darien community. There have also been several rental assistance payments from APRA funds.

Loan Closet: This continues to be a valuable asset to the community. Due to the demand in usage, the word is spreading that the service exists.

Homegoods Closet: This service is always in demand for seniors and families. The program relies heavily on donations from community groups or individuals.

Emergency Call List: there were no calls made in the last quarter for winter related events but there might be a few calls coming, depending on the summer heat, possible hurricanes or flooding.

Staffing

Beth Luongo resigned from the department so there is an employment vacancy at the moment. The job posting and application is online under the Human Resources page.

Protective Services Case

There is currently one case that will be going to Probate for conservatorship. These cases are very time consuming and require close working relationships with State social workers. There were a couple others in the past quarter but those individuals had family members to help them.

2024 Calendar of Meetings

Upon a motion by Kate Durocher, seconded by Byrne Pozzi, the calendar was approved by a vote of 5-0. The calendar will be filed with the Town Clerk and Parks & Recreation.

Current Programs:

✓ Filing in the Blanks Updates

This program continues to run through the summer even though school is not in session. There are 18 households, totaling 33 students currently participating.

✓ Renters Rebate

Cynthia reported that the program opened in May and will run until September. There have been a lot of new applicants due to the Royle. While the program runs from May to September, all rebate checks are mailed at the same time in the Fall.

Recently Completed Programs:

✓ Energy Assistance

There has been an increase to 85 applications this year verse 71 last year. There has been a decrease in the amount of grants allotted due to COVID money running out.

✓ OpFuel

This program was inundated this year! They paused application acceptance in the beginning of April, opened for a few days on April 11 stating they program would close for the season on April 14. Not all applications that were submitted/pending were approved either. There are already appointment scheduled in August when the program opens again. The maximum credit for this program is \$500.

Upcoming Programs:

- ✓ Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program
We are currently waiting for the vouchers to arrive. There has been a lot of interest as the Farmer's Market has already started in town. Each qualifying person gets \$24 in vouchers for fruits, vegetables or honey.

- ✓ Back to School
In August the Back to School program will start. Each child will receive a \$50 Target gift card for school supplies. Ali anticipates around 100 kids participating.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Ali reported that Cynthia has begun weekly "Ask a Social Worker" sessions at the Mather Center.

Cynthia recently hosted an information session at The Royle for new residents to learn about services and programs. Cynthia would like a similar session at the Heights as well.

Janet King, as part of the Food Collaborative, shared that they have a Guide (in English and Spanish) of local food pantry info. She also shared that Wednesday in the summer Food Rescue US will have free food at Fairgate Farm in Stamford. She also explained that Fairgate Farm is a "pay what you wish" farm. Janet will send information to Ali and Cynthia on these programs.

Adjourn

Upon a motion by Kate Durocher, seconded by Janet King, the meeting was adjourned at 8:58am.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Varrone
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