

**Darien Human Services Commission  
Special Meeting Minutes  
November 16 , 2023**

Zoom

Time: 12:00pm

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Commission Members Attending: Kate Durocher, Janet King, Michael LeMoult, Byrne Pozzi

Staff Attending: Ali Ramsteck, Cynthia Hall, Michelle Varrone  
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Chairman Durocher called the meeting to order at 12:06pm.

Review of Minutes of July 13, 2023 meeting

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

Revised 2024 Schedule of Meetings

Upon a motion by Janet King, seconded by Kate Durocher, the 2024 meeting schedule was revised to have all meetings start at 9:30am. The meeting schedule will be re-filed with Town Clerk and electronic meeting invites will be updated.

Mental Health Task Force & Mental Health First Aid Training Updates

The Task Force co-hosted Hope Day with The Depot on November 5, an event to crush stigma of mental health. Hopefully this will become an annual event.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) hosted the “Out of the Darkness” walk in October in Westport.

November 19 is Survivor’s Day, which is an international event for those that have lost someone to suicide. This was the second year at Noroton Presbyterian.

Mental Health First Aid Training

So far there have been 3 sessions this calendar year. A fourth session was scheduled for early November but the attendance dropped down to 7 attendees, which would too small. This session will be rescheduled to January 2024 and hopefully have an attendance of at least 10 people. Ali reminded everyone that these training sessions are funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Mental Health funds.

### Staff Update

Amy Warnock joined the Human Services Department in early September as a Program Assistant.

### OpFuel Update

Ali reported that Darien is no longer a fuel bank. All Darien residents will need to go to CAAWC in Stamford. Ali and Cynthia will continue to help any seniors who need assistance submitting papers. Janet asked how many clients are served; Ali responded that it varies but maybe 30-40 clients.

### Protective Services Case

Ali reported that there is one open case, which has been very time consuming. The case is going through Probate Court to conserve the client. At Home In Darien has been very involved with this individual as well.

### Current Programs:

#### ✓ Filing in the Blanks Updates

There are currently about 18 families participating in the program. At Christmas, each child will receive a backpack with small gifts inside.

#### ✓ Energy Assistance

This program is underway for clients that heat with oil or other (electric, propane) heat. This is a very busy application time. Letters were mailed to all residents of The Heights and The Royle, so that has brought in new clients. There will not be as much federal money as last year which has been a disappointment to many. There might be clients that will still need other additional financial assistance.

#### ✓ Medicare Open Enrollment

The Open Enrollment period started October 15 and will close December 7. This is for changes to the drug plan and/or advantage plans. Almost all appointments have changed and saved money. Ali stated that it is so important to review plans and options. Once again there is a SWAACA/CHOICES volunteer at the Senior Center, which is extremely helpful.

#### ✓ Thanksgiving Program

Once again this year, gift cards were distributed to seniors and families. For this year, ARPA Food Insecurity Funds were used to supplement and provide a substantial increase to the amount for each family and senior.

Recently Completed Programs:

- ✓ Back to School  
This year, 84 students received \$50 Target gift cards to help start off the school year. For this year, ARPA Food Insecurity Funds were used to also provide a Stop & Shop gift card to each child for food, lunch or snacks.
  
- ✓ Tokeneke Pumpkin Carnival Ticket Distribution  
Once again this year, tickets were donated and distributed to local families. A total of 19 families (21 adults and 34 children) were able to attend the Carnival. The Department and the families are so incredibly appreciative to Tokeneke School.
  
- ✓ Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program  
This year, there were 30 seniors that participated. New this year with the program, the funds were distributed on cards, similar to an EBT card. If anyone had used all the money by the end of September, an additional \$24 was loaded onto each card.
  
- ✓ Renters Rebate  
Cynthia reported that 41 applications were submitted, 37 were approved totaling \$20,320 in rebates. Once again there was a small (2%) reduction to the rebate amount. All the checks have been received by the clients. One of the perks of the program is that the refund goes directly to the client.

Upcoming Programs:

- ✓ Holiday Program  
The Department is just starting to get ready for the Adopt-a-Senior and Adopt-a-Family programs. Hopefully emails will go out to all the donors before Thanksgiving. This year, like past years, will be gift cards and there are two local girls that volunteer to deliver to the homebound seniors.

**Any Other Business cannot be considered since this is a Special Meeting**

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Michelle Varrone  
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