



Cambridge Human Services Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
November 13, 2014  
5:30 – 7:30pm  
Citywide Senior Center  
806 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Commissioners present: Christine Elow, Christopher R. Hall, Khari Milner, Nan Stone

Regrets: Dr. Ayse Atasoylu, Kati LaBraico, Lori Likis, Katharine Emilie Thomas, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill

DHSP staff: Janice Alger, Mike Payack (recorder), Ellen Semonoff

Presenters: Betsy Abrams, Parenting Education Program Coordinator, DHSP/Baby U; Shawn Proctor, Father Facilitator, DHSP/Baby U

Guests: Jen Bailey, Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative; Commissioner Robert Haas, Cambridge Police Department

Ellen Semonoff introduced Cambridge Police Commissioner Robert Haas. Commissioner Haas announced that the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) is using the Focused Deterrence crime-reduction strategy. Commissioner Haas described Focused Deterrence as a way of efficiently allocating police resources by focusing on high-risk/repeat criminal offenders and attempting to deter them from committing future crimes by connecting them with various social service providers. Commissioner Haas further stated that CPD is having a community meeting later this evening with individuals who have been identified by the Focused Deterrence program. The meeting is being held on the first floor of the Citywide Senior Center. Commissioner Haas invited members of the HSC to join CPD's community meeting after the HSC meeting adjourns. Christine Elow mentioned that Lieutenant Daniel Wagner, from the Crime Analysis Unit of the CPD, will also be presenting on Focused Deterrence at the next scheduled HSC meeting.

Ellen Semonoff congratulated Commissioner Christine Elow for being honored at the YWCA's Tribute to Outstanding Women last month.

Ellen reminded the Commissioners that the Mayor hosted the Boards and Commissions Reception in Harvard Square last week. For those who were unable to attend the reception, Ellen passed along the Mayor's thanks, the City Manager's thanks, and indeed DHSP's thanks to the members of the HSC for their service.

Ellen shared the sad news that Commissioner Katherine Emilie Thomas' son Carlos A. Thomas passed away at the young age of 34. Mike Payack has also shared via email a touching tribute that Katherine had written to Carlos.

Ellen introduced Betsy Abrams and Shawn Proctor of Baby U. Betsy is the Parenting Education Program Coordinator and Shawn is the Father Facilitator.

Betsy and Shawn introduced themselves. Betsy has been working with Baby U for 5 years; Shawn has been working with Baby U for 4 years. Betsy provided some background on the Baby U program. In 2008, the City of Cambridge sent a delegation to the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York City in order to observe their Baby College Program. The delegation included the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, and representatives of the Department of Public Health and DHSP, among others. HCZ's Baby College is a parenting program founded in 1997. HCZ's mission is to break the cycle of poverty by supporting children and families from the time a child is born through college graduation.

The City of Cambridge made the decision to create Baby University (Baby U). The Baby U Steering Committee was formed. Members include: Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, Cambridge Housing Authority, Cambridge Public Library, Cambridge Public Schools Title I Program, Center for Families, Community Learning Center, Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant (CFCE), DHSP, Families First, Fletcher Maynard Academy, Guidance Center/Riverside Community Care, Men's Health League (Cambridge Public Health Department), and Phillip Brooks House Association. Betsy said, "They say it takes a village to raise a child; it takes a village to run Baby U."

One hundred forty-three families (169 people) have graduated from Baby U. Only 28 of these 169 graduates are dads (less than 17%). Twenty-six of the 28 participating dads came with their co-parent. The majority of Baby U participants have low-income, but the program is open to everyone. Fifty-five percent of Baby U graduates live in subsidized housing; 58% report annual incomes of less than \$20,000. Forty-five percent of program graduates are immigrants; 55% are American-born.

Baby U staff start by acknowledging that parenting is hard work. It is even harder with little support. The program is research-based. Research shows that relationships matter: The quality of the relationship between parent and child is the single most important predictor of a child's developmental outcomes. Baby U supports parents to raise healthy children, build strong families, and form positive relationships in the Cambridge Community and beyond.

Baby U provides information, while promoting connection to other parents (breaking isolation), reflective capacity, and skill development. The Baby U curriculum consists of fourteen 3-hour sessions over a 4-month period. Baby U sessions include workshops and playgroups. Baby U also arranges home visits, family fun events, and provides case management and advocacy (connecting participants to resources).

Weekly Baby U workshop include: Babies Brains, Play is the Way!, Let's Talk...It Makes a Difference!, TV and Screens, Reading Party, Understanding Your Growing Child, Babies Cry...Have a Plan!, Positive Discipline I, II, and III, and Manage Your Stress.

Baby U provides many incentives for participation. Baby U provides participants with transportation to and from sessions. Baby U also has 17 on-site childcare staff who take care of participants' children while the parents are taking part in workshops. Baby U gives away books throughout the program.

After graduation from Baby U, participants enter the Alumni Association. Baby U has committed to supporting graduate families until the youngest child in the family has successfully transitioned into kindergarten. Baby U develops new or repeat activities for the Alumni Association based on family feedback.

Nan Stone asked what percentage of participants continue on to the Alumni Association. Jen Bailey answered that most people stay connected in some way. Betsy added that Alumni have a menu of services to choose from. Often people reconnect after having their second child. Shawn added that many Alumni families have moved out of Cambridge due to housing affordability issues.

After observing an initial low-turnout among fathers, Baby U began intentionally engaging and recruiting fathers, hiring Shawn as the Father Facilitator to spearhead this effort. Baby U created father-specific outreach materials. Shawn attends community events to meet and recruit fathers in the communities. Potential participant fathers are invited to Baby U Alumni events to get a feel for the program. In the first 3 program cycles, a total of 6 fathers graduated; in the most recent 3 program cycles, 22 fathers graduated.

Betsy and Shawn introduced a [short video on Baby U](#). The video provides an overview of the history of Baby U and also includes testimonials from members of the Baby U Alumni Association.

Baby U asks participants to complete an Outcomes Survey, based on the Strengthening Families Outcomes Survey, during the thirteenth week of the program. The results show statistically significant positive changes in all four domains surveyed: knowledge gain, relationships, confidence/competence, and behavioral change.

Mike Payack shared that, at last count, more than 1250 people completed the Kids' Council's "Finding Activities & Services in Cambridge" survey. Mike thanked the Commissioners for taking the time to take the survey and share it with their respective networks. Mike reminded the HSC that the Kids' Council, with support from Code For Boston, will use information gathered from the survey to determine the next steps in their effort to make it easier for Cambridge families to connect to information on activities, services, and resources in Cambridge. DHSP staff will keep the HSC informed on the Kids' Council's progress in this endeavor.

Mike reminded the Commissioners that the Community Art Center has extended an invitation to their monthly Creative Community Voices tour. The tour includes seeing the space, learning about current Community Art Center projects, and meeting youth, staff, board members, and alumni. Mike will be attending the tour on Wednesday, December 17, from 4:30-5:30 PM and invited members of the HSC to join him. Mike will send further details about the tour to members of the HSC via email.

The next Human Services Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 11, 2014, and will feature a presentation on Focused Deterrence by Lieutenant Daniel Wagner, from the Crime Analysis Unit of the Cambridge Police Department.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Payack  
Planner/Contracts Manager  
DHSP/Planning & Development