

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS & YOUTH SERVICES

September 20, 2022 at 5:00 PM

Chairman Barry called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Barry, Cavanaugh, Trisciani, George-Kelly

Absent: Alderman Levasseur

Messrs.: H. Urrea, L. Drabik

1. Discussion regarding the Office of Youth Services.

Chairman Barry stated the reason I called this meeting is so that we can all get educated and talk to Hector, who is the Interim Director of the Office of Youth Services. I asked him to speak to us so we can, as a committee and as aldermen, learn exactly what OYS does on a daily basis and during the summer months. Hector, if you could introduce yourself I will then open it up to questions.

Hector Urrea, Interim Director, OYS, stated I used to be one of the youth counselors at Hillside and Parkside and since Jon Donovan resigned, I have been appointed the Interim Director.

Chairman Barry asked what is the normal...I know that I have seen you and Mario in action at West and Parkside but can you let us know exactly what not only yourself but what your staff do on a daily basis, specifically now that school is back in session.

Mr. Urrea stated I gave each of you a copy of a document to show you how the department is structured today. We have three people that are now actually working including myself in the field. I make sure that all of the schools are covered. We have a person that was in the office, Kristen Treacy, that is now covering McLaughlin and Southside. I was covering most of the first week Hillside and Parkside. I have been doing the two jobs. Today I went to Hillside to see if I could help there. I have Mario Pena who is covering West High and Central right now. I have Caroline Spiro who is covering Memorial and MST. I also have Jeff Gore who is the community outreach worker. Obviously he is not a youth counselor and being on outreach he is in the community and also helping out some other agencies. He is targeting outreach meaning anything that is identified with gangs or those kinds of groups of people that are trying to do something bad in the community he will let me know and obviously he is the intel. Having said that, anybody in the department that sees anything that is going on in the community regarding our youth and violence or something like that will report it to me and then I report it to the Police Department. Anything related to youth as far as being abused or neglected or anything like that has to be referred to DCYF.

Chairman Barry stated on the second page of your handout, you handwrote “new” for counselor/mental health specialist and also counselor/drug addiction and alcohol counseling. Are you doing that right now?

Mr. Urrea stated the reason I prepared this for you was to give you a vision of what we are looking for or what I am looking for. We used to have about 10 or 15 years ago when Marty Boldin was in office, a mental health provider and Shannon Hebert who used to be the coordinator when I started working there. She was a LADAC. What was good about that is we were having even Prime for Life...I don't know if you remember that program where we were trying to educate and be a trainer for people with drug and alcohol addiction. Why I put “new” next to those positions is because we don't have those positions any longer. As I have been trying to find out the salary for those positions, right now if I wanted to hire these two people each one will cost about \$75,000 plus there are some places in Massachusetts and Hawaii that have a \$5,000 signing bonus. We don't have those two positions but I was trying to be honest with you and dream and if somebody asked Hector what would be the real OYS for the future it would be having these two people there. Why? I just came from a meeting at the Fire Department and it is not very publicized but we know that there is a big drug and alcohol problem with the homeless and with parents of children. Judy Cooper used to go to Central High School and have groups. There are people that used to work for us that now work for the school district. We were doing anger management groups at one time and groups on drug and alcohol addiction at Central High School. I think that is a benefit for the city and the students. We can do groups and we were doing groups regarding mental health and anger management at OYS. So not having these two positions isn't good.

Alderman George-Kelly stated Hector I would love to know if you have goals or objectives for the OYS and also what outcome measures you are using to determine whether the programs and services that you are providing or the ones that you wish you were providing would be successful.

Mr. Urrea replied if you go to the last page of the handout, those are the programs that would be new. There is one program there and this is called Promise Neighborhoods. My first goal would be to eradicate, which may be impossible but I am a dreamer, kids who are in cycles. We know that there are kids today whose father was a juvenile delinquent or addicted to drugs or alcohol and we can tell you by our experience that there are kids today that are doing the same thing that their father or grandfather did. This program is to be able to go to the elementary schools which OYS had not done before. My experience tells me that if I can detect a boy or girl in first or second grade that starts to show behavior and we can identify that the parents or previous ancestors behaved in the same way we can act right away and provide services. This is based on research and it has been proven that this works. Obviously there are some exceptions but it works where we are trying to intervene ahead of time before a child becomes delinquent or problematic for the City of Manchester. When you ask me what my goal is, it is to make sure that we try to stop as much as we can violence by youth and drug and alcohol addiction in youth. The faster we intervene and provide services and identify them by being at the schools, I think we are going to have a lot of success. How we measure it...that is a very good question and thank you for the question. At the present time we have something we call FAMCare that I inherited. On Friday I made a

phone call to the Director of Information Systems and I reported to him that we have a problem with that system. It is that we can't see who is being seen or what new clients we have using our services. Why? I don't have an answer but IT told me that they are going to try to find out if they can fix it. Why is that so important? Because if you were one of my counselors, you would be able to register the kids that you are working with and we can then see and track when you saw them and what is going on. At the present time, I cannot see that. We are paying \$7,000+ a year for that service and since I was appointed Interim Director I have been advocating for a system that simply reports like when you go to the doctor and the assistant can see the different times you visited and what for. I want something simple and then we can measure how many times we have seen that person and check with the school district on attendance, progress reports, etc. We can see through the Aspen program whether someone has an infraction and how bad their grades are. There is a way to measure it but you have to have the tools. At the present time, that FAMCare is not working and IT is working on it.

Alderman George-Kelly stated you talked about the Promise Neighborhoods Program and it says in this document that you provided that the grant competition is open right now and the applications are due on October 7. I know that in our city right now, MPAL and My Turn right now are working very hard on violence prevention and gang prevention which are very similar things to this Stop the Cycle Program. Did you partner with those organizations and write this grant and how do you as a whole in OYS work with other youth serving organizations and non-profits throughout the community?

Mr. Urrea stated right now I will be honest with you. This grant opportunity was shared with me by Anna Thomas. I am looking into it but the more I see it, the grant is like a big elephant to me. That means we need partners for it. Have I been able to talk to My Turn or any other organizations? Not yet. This is something that is very promising to be honest with you but to write a grant like this I need to have a grant writer and I don't have access to one. OYS is willing to work with other organizations towards gang prevention and violence prevention. In the last five months, I have talked to a lot of people and seen a lot of people and am willing to go the extra mile. We need to improve our outreach. There is no question that in order to identify those gang members and those kids who are committing violent acts in the community, we need to have the people. At this time as you can see, we are only a department of nine people and being three people short right now is a little less than 50%. To respond to that in reality, I will be honest with you give me the people that I need and I will work with more capacity but obviously I need the right players. Right now if you look we have had one position posted for a month and we only had three applicants. We have to open the second position but we have to fill the first one and we only had three people apply. Why? Because we opened it during the time before the schools opened.

Chairman Barry asked if you haven't applied for that grant...I mean October 7 is a few weeks ago. What are your thoughts? Are you going to reach out to the Health Department or whoever to see how you guys can work together on getting that grant or reach out to someone within our city? Our HR Director is here and maybe you can speak with her after the meeting about who is out there to help. Time is of the essence and the last thing you want to do is leave grant money out there for someone else. If we don't get it someone else will and they are going to use it. Going back to something

you said, if a child in our middle or high schools are suffering from alcohol or drug abuse or all of the above, who right now is working with them in our school district. Is it OYS or a school counselor? Is there someone within every single middle and high school that works with these kids?

Mr. Urrea answered good question. The school district has provided SAP's for every middle and high school. Those are the counselors who are specialized in drug and alcohol and mental health. We refer to them but if that is not the case, I look around at people that I know in the community and the agencies that I know and will refer to them. To be honest with you, when I was in the field and not doing the Interim Director job because I just got this on April 1 when the school year was almost finished, I always reached out to people I knew and went to the right people for referrals because I don't see many LADAC people in the school district right now but they are supposed to have LADAC's. It has been very difficult to get those. There is nothing I can do about the school district not providing those.

Chairman Barry stated well that is something we will have to work on. Lastly, and this is more of a comment and a thought and I appreciate the fact that you actually have it in your document is my vision for OYS would be not only to work with kids throughout the school year but throughout the summer. You guys deal with the kids during the school year but then you lose touch with them during the summer. I want, and I am hoping it happens, to see you guys go into the community even if you are dealing with the same kids or other kids to see how they are doing and see if they need a job or see if they need extra help with reading or arithmetic or any subjects that they are falling behind on. Make sure that they get the credits they need the following year so if they have to catch up they have to work hard to do it. I think it is important for you guys to stay in touch with the kids. There are plenty of jobs out there and I know that myself as well as anyone on this committee or in the city would help to get these kids jobs either in the city or in one of the businesses out there that will hire kids, especially kids that are in need of assistance.

Alderman Trisciani stated you mentioned working with a student that might have an alcohol or drug or mental health issue. You mentioned that you work with people you know. Do you have a list of specific partners? Do you reach out to Greater Manchester Mental Health and say I have this issue with a child who needs counseling?

Mr. Urrea replied as I just mentioned to you we have one person who is still very dear to us and very cooperative to us and that is Matt who is at McLaughlin Middle School now. He is a very good human being and excellent in mental health. He is licensed and has his own practice as a matter of fact. When we refer someone to mental health...you know mental health is not something that you can just have one visit and then it is fixed. Mental health unfortunately goes months and possibly years to help the child. When we refer to him, there were parents that came to us and said do you have a person that knows somebody that is a good counselor so we have Matt. We had a dilemma about referring people to him because he was working with us but he has his own practice so yes I know a lot of people in that field and I refer people to them. There are some free consultations. As we know, there is not much that we offer here in Manchester and for mental health it would be the Greater Manchester Mental Health. As for drug and alcohol, the school district has those services but it has been hard for them because it

has been difficult to identify somebody like that. I went to Southern NH University and UNH and talked to the right people to get the students who are finishing their degree and have to do internships. They told me no problem and I was like thank you so much but they said I needed to have someone in the office that was licensed because that person needs supervision. I don't like to give up on anything and am a fighter and passionate about what I do and found a solution but we need to have the right people there and in this case you need to have a licensed mental health provider or someone with a LADAC license. If have those two, we can have the college students come like we used to have. Matt was an intern from UNH who ended up working for us. It is a way to get some of those people. Do I refer to other agencies? Yes, I refer to the right people that I know.

Chairman Barry stated I know that a few years ago I think through the Fire Department maybe when Safe Station was still alive that we were looking for a LADAC. They are expensive. Back a few years ago it was \$75,000. I don't know if there is room but I think that is something we need to explore and when we call Lisa up maybe we can talk about what the structure of OYS is and what it should be going forward. I think, and again this is my opinion, that we should have someone that is a LADAC to deal with these issues. I think that is very important.

Alderman Trisciani asked how many students are you currently dealing with.

Mr. Urrea answered well as you know when you start in September we start at zero meaning from that time on we are going to start building our cases. How we build our cases is when someone at the school refers a kid to us. We take their name and call the student and pull the student information and begin services.

Alderman Trisciani asked just on average then. If we start from zero in September what is the average?

Mr. Urrea responded that is what I am trying to give you. Why I have to explain it to you is that at the present time the students don't act out as much as we wish. For instance, the first week at Hillside I got five and why? Because those were kids that were getting into altercations with the principal and referred to me and that was it. Other students were just getting acclimated to the classrooms and stuff. When do we get students? When they act out and misbehave and start to stop going to school. The school then talks to us and says Hector by the way we have this student that barely comes to school so we start to call and then we go to the house with a social worker. That is when we start to build that. By the end of September, that is when we start to get those numbers.

Alderman Trisciani stated I assume that you are also following up with kids you had last year because I assume that over the summer they didn't miraculously...

Mr. Urrea interjected during the summer we reach out by doing basketball in the gym at West High and soccer. We also go to the parks and help refereeing and doing stuff like three on three basketball. We reach out.

Alderman Trisciani asked as the school year progresses and we are identifying children that need outreach help, how many of the other partner organizations in the city...I am

coming at this from an angle where I know Manchester Proud has been doing a lot of work with the school district on partnerships for different programs. We have so many groups in the city that are there to serve the children in our community and help them. It feels to me like OYS would be a great...rather than trying to take everything on and build everything into a city department to partner more closely with a lot of these organizations that have the experts and are already doing the work and almost work in an advisory capacity of keeping an eye on the kids while they are in school and making sure they are getting into these programs. I know that come October 1 the diversion programs are going to come in full force and I know that at that point you will have kids that you might be overseeing from a school perspective but then they are going to be at MPAL for other activities and other work. I think I would like to see that liaison and those partnerships strengthen so that rather than try to reinvent the wheel in a city department let's utilize some of these great tried and true organizations that are out there doing the work already.

Mr. Urrea stated well we have been in partnership with MPAL and we have been helping them. Last year they provided us with 43 students for the year. We worked with them and went to My Turn. For instance, Mario and Chantal Champagne that used to work for us who is now working for the school district used to go to My Turn and meet with the students. Yes, we don't want to reinvent the wheel but I want to emphasize that there are a lot of things we can do differently but at the same time one of the things that OYS has been strong at is we have built our relationships easier than other people in the community. I don't want to say that we are the only ones that do that but it is just the reality is that it depends on the workers you have. They really create those connections.

Alderman Trisciani stated you would still have the connection because you would be with those students at OYS. I am just saying that getting them involved in some of these other programs in the community could really help them thrive and we could take advantage of...we talked about elementary and I do believe that there is a case once we figure this out to get into elementary because I think if you can catch students when they are younger you stand a better chance of a successful future in helping them but in that case we have the Boys & Girls Club that has very successful programs. We should be leveraging...if we have a student identified we should be leveraging those resources that exist. We have WayPoint for example and we have students I am assuming on the drug and alcohol front. There are other organizations that I feel strongly we need to evaluate and look at as part of the whole. There is the organizational structure of OYS but then there is this added structure of all of the community partnerships that we have that we can leverage as well.

Mr. Urrea responded the only thing I have to say on that is that the organization is working with kids. I don't want to put a number out but I remember it used to be 14,000 students years ago. Today maybe we have 12,000 students there. The Boys & Girls Club capacity...I was there for five years and you cannot have more than 300 or 400 kids in the youth center because it is too small and very unsafe. That means that only 300 or 400 kids could be in the Boys & Girls Club. YMCA is the same amount more or less and so forth. When you look at the organizations that we have here in the City of Manchester, they don't have the capability to cover everybody. I would think that we have enough room there to work with kids. There are some kids that have not been

successful because it happens. A counselor goes and talks a kid and they don't have a good reaction but then the kid comes to us and has a good reaction and we work well with them. That is something that we have to consider. We are not trying to reinvent something that has already been done. We are working one-on-one with kids. I have seen kids in my last 15 years working for the school district that not even guidance counselors...the program they had there weren't a lot. There were non-profit organizations that were not successful and then suddenly I was successful with that kid. You know what I mean? Why? Why was I successful? It is simply because you had the right person there at the moment. I am fortunate talking about myself but it is not just myself. It is my co-workers and my colleagues. They have a touch and a passion and kids identify with them. There are a lot of kids that reject people or adults not because they don't like adults but it is simply that they are not a good fit. That is something that has to be considered. Yes, there are a lot of people who are almost doing the same thing. YMCA almost does the same thing as the Boys & Girls Club. The Boys & Girls Club has been losing a lot of members lately. Why is that? To be honest with you, they don't have the right personnel. It is simple. Nothing else. They have everything – a beautiful club and I love the Boys & Girls Club but if you don't have the right person, the kids don't react to them and don't connect well with them. I would like to say something else but it is what it is.

Chairman Barry asked Lisa Drabik to come forward. What I would like to know is the way that OYS is structured right now as far as the amount of employees that it has, specifically do we need a LADAC or is there room for OYS, like Alderman Trisciani mentioned, to refer or divert someone to an organization like My Turn or MPAL? I know one of the things you mentioned to me in the past Hector was Salvation Army and the Teen Nights. Some of these things that you do outside the school system. I think that is important but what do you think Lisa.

Lisa Drabik, HR Director, stated if you look at the authorized positions as of September 1, there is a Director and Hector is the Interim. There is an Admin. Assistant II. There are six youth counselor positions and one outreach worker. The vacancies appear right now in the youth counselor position.

Chairman Barry asked there are two.

Ms. Drabik replied two but three if you count Hector since he is serving as the Interim Director. I would defer to OYS in terms of what they think their best organizational efficiencies would be but if we wanted to make use of a LADAC and what we might have to pay for a LADAC then I think we would have to forfeit a couple of youth counselor positions and I don't know if that would be the best use of resources given that we need them in the schools.

Alderman Long stated I have a couple of questions. I know some organizations contract with LADACs because they can't find them or clinicians because they can't find them and they come up with an MOU to oversee interns. That is another alternative. With respect to referrals, are there any youth from outside of the Manchester school district.

Mr. Urrea responded we get referrals from the Salvation Army and the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA.

Alderman Long asked are they students of the Manchester school district.

Mr. Urrea answered yes.

Alderman Long asked so you don't see anybody that is in a charter school or home schooled.

Mr. Urrea replied no.

Alderman Long stated you said that in September you start fresh. What about the kids that you saw the year prior? Is there a follow-up with them?

Mr. Urrea answered yes. I don't know if you remember but on the website it used to have our mission statement and that said it was short-term. Actually we see kids from 6th, 7th or 8th grade through high school. It is a continuation. Not all of the time but when they already know us and we identify them because they are doing something wrong we check the software. In the past we were able to find out if that kid was being seen by us. It happens. The Wire Program worked where you saw a kid for three months...let's say I had 20 kids for three months. The next three months we would see different kids in that program.

Alderman Long stated the grant that you were talking about, what are the grades it covers. Does it cover specific grades or is it K-12? The Promise Neighborhood grant.

Mr. Urrea responded to be honest, the only way that we can have access to that money is if we work in collaboration with a few other organizations. I just got that information through Ms. Thomas.

Alderman Long asked Alderman George-Kelly did you mention that MPAL was going after that grant.

Alderman George-Kelly responded no I said that MPAL and My Turn are already doing work focused on gang and violence prevention in the city so if it has similar objectives, there should be official partnerships between OYS and those other organizations because we don't need to be duplicating services throughout the community. We need to be collaborating to be able to provide effective and efficient services throughout the community.

Alderman Long asked so they may want to collaborate with them to go after this grant.

Alderman George-Kelly stated I will just say that in looking at this my opinion is that nobody pulls off a federal grant in 17 days. I think that if we don't have a grant writer that has already outlined the RFP and developed a writing plan, I am not sure how we get a grant submitted by October 7.

Alderman Long asked what is the IT issue you talked about. It is Form Care?

Mr. Urrea answered FAMCare. That is the software that was purchased 18 or 20 years ago.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated I think there are some great ideas but I think we really have to build up the department. There is no way you can...no offense to you but you are the acting director and taking on Hillside and Parkside. That is just too much. How many kids in each school? 1,400? I think what we have to really look at...I am just curious do we have all of these positions budgeted currently?

Mr. Urrea responded yes.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated so I would really like to see us go after the new counselor for Central, two community outreach workers and to replace you at Hillside and Parkside. I think we need to sure up the department. I am kind of curious as to how long the positions have been open and if we have active job openings out there for people to apply?

Ms. Drabik replied we do. Right now the only one that is posted is one Youth Services Counselor. There were three applicants as Hector mentioned. I believe that Hector has spoken with all three at this point but no offers have been made. I think we were waiting until we had this meeting and deciding if we were going to have any change to the structure or go in a different direction. We haven't had an overwhelming number of applicants so far and we need to post another one for the same position.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated I know it is a problem everywhere but I would like to try to sure that up first and then get the other organizations to help.

Alderman Trisciani stated I am going to add one more thought around the partnerships. I think it is true that we are kind of premature on trying to say yes this is what the new organization looks like because we don't have the data and I think every organization should be leveraging, whether it is to Erin's point or an MOU with somebody that handles these services...it is not the right term but the easiest way to explain it is OYS then kind of becomes that concierge that follows the child all way through the plan but has other support networks to help where the child needs it most so that we are not trying to duplicate activities. I know that every program has limitations on numbers but there are a lot of programs in this city that are out there and willing to partner and I think looking at some of the existing partnerships that the school district has so that we are not trying to put too much on one person's plate for such a lean department.

Chairman Barry stated the other thing that we all have to keep in mind is that there is a committee that oversees OYS and it is important for them to meet sooner rather than later. The school year started and I think it is important because the last thing, and I have a certain place in my heart for kids because I have coached sports, as have Kevin and Pat, for a long time and we have dealt with kids and know how important it is to get them at this age and keep with them. One of the things that Alderman Trisciani brought up is the fact that when you go through this school year or even the last school year, there have to be some kids that are coming back; the same kids. Maybe in the future you can keep them on the list and keep them going. I know you are going to get some

new people this year. Continue with them too because that is important. You can't leave them behind and you can't assume that they are okay.

Mr. Urrea stated no but something you may have misunderstood is that we have been working with youth for many years. That is why I didn't like the "short-term" phrase that was on our web page when I got to the position I am in right now. We have been friendly and continue with these youths. It is not just that we see them once and then don't see them anymore. We build the relationships and we keep them. We keep them because there is a reality. Kids will never forgive you if you only see them once or twice. When you impact a kid and they attach to you, they stay with you as long as you see them everywhere you go. That is the reality. That is what youth do. That is what I do when I see somebody who is friendly to me and has been a person that provided me good advice. We give kids clothing and shoes. Kids in the community have been asking me for soccer shoes and I give them to them if we have them. There are people who donate stuff to us and we give it back to the kiddos. They don't forget that and they keep those relationships longer than you can imagine. Today there are kids who are already married that I met before and they come to me in the park or downtown. Abenago used to be a person that was supposedly a gang member and he changed. Today he is an adult with a kid and a CDL license. He drives trucks and came to me one day and said hey Coach Hector I remember you as a coach but also as a friend. You know I never forgot that you told me to be careful with alcohol. Why? Because he had issues with alcohol and was getting to the age of drinking. He said I never forgot that and look at him today. He said I am driving a truck and I can't drink because I will lose my license and the income I need for my family. He didn't forget that. I told him because he used to be part of the soccer program that we were doing the soccer program like other agencies have or any other school would have but with us we gave them what we called Smart Moves. That was a program that we intentionally delivered to the kids. We were talking to them and teaching them what not to do with drugs. We said don't do that and don't drink and teaching that and in order for them to play, they had to finish that course. When they did it guess what? That kid never forgot it and some years later he came and told me that. He was impacted by something that we did. There are kids like that in the community and they don't forget who you are. About replicating other programs, I want to mention to you that OYS, since I have been there, has been working against gangs. My Turn wasn't doing that program back then. They weren't even assisting in Manchester. I can tell you 15 or 16 years ago My Turn wasn't here and we were already working with gangs. We were working to prevent gang fights in Manchester and downtown. We are not duplicating but maybe other people are duplicating our programs. I just wanted to emphasize that as well.

Chairman Barry stated just so you know we didn't call this meeting for any reason but to educate ourselves and get familiar with the Office of Youth Services so that we can work together as a city and get you what you need or what you think you need or whatever Lisa and we as a committee think you need to move forward and improve and make sure that the kids get the best help that they can get from us. Thank you Hector and Lisa for coming tonight.

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Cavanaugh**, duly seconded by **Alderman Trisciani**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Clerk of Committee