

AUTISM COUNCIL MINUTES

JANUARY 22, 2007 – 3:30 P.M.

Present: Chairman Daly; Supervisor Veitch; Cathi Duncan, Public Health; Mary Beth Hynes, Town of Ballston; Wes Carr, Youth Bureau; Mike Russo, District Director for Congresswoman Guilibrand's office; George Hargrave, Chairman BOS; Press.

Chairman Daly called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

Ms. Daly distributed copies of the mission statement that was established last year with the help of the Social Programs Committee and Public Health committee members.

The Mission Statement reads as follows:

The Autism Council of Saratoga County serves as a collaborative resource center designed to promote the development of services and resources for individuals with Pervasive Developmental Disorders or Autism throughout their lifetime. The Autism Council of Saratoga County will strive to provide knowledge and understanding of individuals with Autism and related disabilities and serve as a critical resource to help families and caregivers find trained professionals, service providers and resources in their community. The Saratoga Council will also advocate with state and federal governments on behalf of individuals with autism and to promote public awareness.

Ms. Daly said a meaningful learning experience could best be accomplished when it is sensible, and systematic, empowering individuals to participate more fully in their families, schools and communities.

Ms. Duncan, said the Early Intervention Program for children ages birth to three years has strict guidelines and regulations that must be met. Referrals can be made by anyone; i.e. doctors' offices, grandparents, babysitter, daycare etc. Once information is gathered, the family is contacted immediately and given the opportunity to decide whether or not they would like to participate in the program. If there is a suspect of delay, an evaluation is offered at no cost to the family. If a child does not qualify for an eligible diagnosis, they will have to perform in such a way that will show that they have a delay of at least 33% in one of the five domains of development or a 25% delay in two domains or more.

If the child does qualify for the program there is a meeting with them to offer the range of services that are available, i.e. special education, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work, nutrition, nursing etc. Services are provided until the child is eligible to leave the service and go to the next level of service, which is the preschool program age 3 to 5 years.

Mr. Carr said the Youth Bureau manages the Preschool Special Education Program for children ages 3 through 5. The program works closely with the school districts and the county in administering the program. When the children reach this program, the lead is the school district, through the school of special education. Each school district has a committee, of which the youth bureau is a member attending the meeting and reviewing the cases on a case by case basis, determining what services would be most appropriate for the child. This program is mandated through the New York State Education Department, and provides a center base, as well as itinerant related services and transportation to preschoolers with special needs.

Mr. Carr said in 2007 there were 753 children in the program in Saratoga County, costing \$10 million. Of the 753 children in the program, approximately 128 children have a diagnosis within the Autism spectrum.

Mrs. Hynes said parents find themselves reaching out to other parents, but if there were something at the county level that could be established, there would be a very frequent inquiry by parents.

Ms. Daly discussed ways in which to reach out with information regarding Autism, suggesting the County Website and the Community Handbook.

Ms. Daly announced that Assemblyman McDonald has come forward with a \$10,000 state grant for Saratoga County. This money is going to help underwrite the costs of the Autism Council and help with the creation of a new community handbook brochure. She said it was requested that the grant be written as open ended, in the event all the money isn't spent for one project, it could be used to offset other costs incurred to further take the committees efforts forward.

Ms. Daly said she would like to schedule a follow up meeting in February to discuss, in more detail, the opportunity to promote Autism awareness in April.

Ms. Daly said each year the Board of Supervisors sets aside a day to go to Albany to meet with state officials, and in the past couple of years we have met with federal officials as well. Once the Legislative and Research committee sets the date, she would like to have representation from the Autism Council to discuss the initiatives, i.e. establishing a 24-hour hot line for parents to call, training for EMS, Police and Firefighters, etc. It is extremely important for volunteers to have the proper training so that they can serve all the people of Saratoga County, she said.

Mr. Russo said Congresswoman Guillibrand has identified Autism as one of the areas that she really wants to broach. In looking at what to do, the Congresswoman has tapped a private foundation for funding, the Anderson Foundation, as a model to address the wide range of needs in rural communities. The approach that is being taken is to reach out to the community, by hosting meetings and giving families the opportunity to come forward and identify their needs.

Mr. Russo said the Congresswoman looks at her role as working with others to create a high level of awareness. Helping to facilitate and reach out to private money, as well as State and Federal funding.

Mr. Russo said Congresswoman Guillibrand would like to learn more about what the committee is doing and share, from a larger prospective, some of the other things that are going on and looking at how to, as a group, really address the overall need.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom