

Williston Community Justice Center Meeting Minutes

November 4, 2019

Present: Cristalee McSweeney (Director), Brenna Deavitt (Restorative Specialist), Diane Kinnon (Restorative Assistant), Marti DelNevo (Chair), Lillian Colasurdo (Vice Chair), Melissa Akey, Marion Cushner, Adele Jennings, Cathy Kelley, Lorayne Lapin, Katherine Lee, Mia Marinovich, Carmella Martone, Liz Merrill, Jackson Neme, David Newton, Adina Panitch, Amanda Payne, Bill Pellechia, Beckett Pintair, Mary Reynolds-Wahl-Greer, Bob Stafford, Ashley Sutton, Katie Titterton, Alex Tucci

Absent: Stevie Allen, Josie Colt, Brant Dinkin, Hannahlei McSweeney, Avery Paquin, Laura Wainer

I. Welcome and Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

- a) Minutes from the October 7th meeting were distributed.
- b) Motion to approve minutes: Adina Panitch.
Motion seconded: Amanda Payne.
- c) Minutes approved.

II. Presenters from AALV

- a) Two staff members from AALV came to speak with the board about their organization and issues affecting new Americans.
 - i) Thato Ratsebe, Assistant Director, Programs Manager,
tratsebe@aalv-vt.org
 - ii) Rita Neopaney, Outreach Worker & Program Specialist,
rneopaney@aalv-vt.org
- b) AALV originally began in response to Congolese refugees arriving in Vermont (was formerly called the Association of Africans Living in Vermont) but later expanded to serve all refugees in Vermont, regardless of home country. AALV has 14 staff members from 12 different countries. In 2018 they served people from 67 different countries living in Vermont.
- c) They provide translation, immigration services (to almost 700 people in 2018), and case management (to around 400 people in 2018) in areas like: schools, housing, benefits access, criminal justice, and substance use & mental health screenings/referrals. They also run a youth program to help empower young

people in their communities and have worked with the WCJC on issues around safe technology use.

- d) AALV runs a 6-acre farm called New Farms for New Americans that serves as a community garden for refugees so they can grow produce from their home countries and learn more about agricultural practices in Vermont's climate. Currently over 200 families share the space.
- e) AALV hosts a Community Café for refugee survivors of sexual assault to help them share their stories and access mental health care.
- f) Recommended Suddenly You Are Nobody by Jared Gange. This is a book that tells the story of 30 different refugees in Vermont from 17 different countries and is for sale in local bookstores (Phoenix, Crow, Flying Pig, Bear Pond) or at www.bondcliffbooks.com. You can also purchase it directly through AALV for \$20 by stopping by their office. *20 Allen Street, 3rd Floor, Burlington, Vermont 05401*
- g) Thato and Rita offered support to the board on issues around understanding culture and suggested that board members learn as much as they can about a refugee's culture before meeting with them and then feel free to ask them questions about what is appropriate. It's also important to make sure you are pronouncing a person's name correctly so ask. Finally, even though they may speak English well, it does not mean they understand English perfectly, so it is important to check in and make sure they understand what is being said during a panel hearing.

III. Richmond Update

- a) Katie and Bob spoke to the Richmond Police Chief Larry Muldoon about the WCJC's work with Richmond and the need for support from the community. He ultimately plans to help bring this issue before the Richmond Selectboard.
- b) Chief Muldoon may be interested in joining the board or being involved in some other capacity. Cristalee is exploring this option with DOC to see what is possible.

IV. DOC Summit

- a) Several Announcements came out of the recent DOC Summit for the reparative boards.
 - i) State's Attorney Sarah George will no longer prosecute juvenile cases unless they are particularly heinous in nature. Instead, juvenile cases are

being rerouted to the CJs and to Court Diversion. This has already increased the caseload for reparative boards/panels.

- ii) DOC has said that as of July 1st, they will no longer fund 5 CJs in Chittenden. No indication of what that landscape might look like at this time. DOC proposed the idea of consolidation, which Williston expressed it was not interested in doing.
 - iii) Currently DOC spends more than \$1,000,000 funding this work in Chittenden County but says this is unsustainable because of budget cuts within the Department. Williston remains one of the lowest funded CJs in the state, while handling the highest caseload.
 - iv) Alternative or supplemental funding has not been offered by the Judiciary or State's Attorney.
- b) Williston is presenting different financial scenarios to the Selectboard in order to keep the WCJC running. One option may be to move the CJC fully within the WPD budget. This would allow the town to have stable funding and no longer rely on grants. In this scenario, it is possible the WCJC may only accept direct referral cases from law enforcement in supporting towns.
 - c) If anyone would like to communicate their support for moving the WCJC into the police department or alternative ideas to the town, please provide written comments to Cristalee as soon as possible.

V. Brenna gave an update on upcoming hearing nights and individuals signed up for fill-in slots.

VI. Adjournment

Marti DelNevo, Chair, adjourned the meeting at 7:56 pm

Minutes submitted by: Lillian Colasurdo, Vice Chair