



HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (HRC)

Thursday, July 14, 2016
Community Meeting Room
Palo Alto Civic Center
250 Hamilton Avenue
7:00 PM
REGULAR MEETING

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: Alhassani, Chen, Savage, Stinger, Stone
Absent: Gordon Gray, O’Nan

Staff: Minka van der Zwaag, Mary Constantino

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:

I. ROLL CALL

II. AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, DELETIONS

III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Members of the public are invited to address the Commission during the period reserved for Oral Communications on any subject not on the agenda. In the interest of time, the Commission requests that speakers limit the length of their remarks to five minutes.)

IV. BUSINESS

1. Presentation by Paula Wolfson, LCSW, Manager of Avenidas Care Partners and Emily Farber, MSW, Avenidas Case Management, who will discuss seniors and mental health.

As part of the HRC Learning Series on Mental Health, Ms. van der Zwaag welcomed Paula Wolfson and Emily Farber from Avenidas, a major partner with the City of Palo Alto providing a wide range of services to older adults. Ms. Wolfson stated that she has been the Manager of Avenidas Care Partners for three years and prior to working at Avenidas she worked for five years at Stanford Hospital and Emily Farber stated that she moved to California three years ago from Michigan and has experience in caregiver support, end of life planning, hoarding interventions, community organizing, advocacy, and public speaking, and she stated that Avenidas has a wide range of services that are not going to be discussed because tonight the discussion is focused on Avenidas’ Care Partners. Ms. Farber stated that they receive all different levels of calls on their Telephone Information and Assistance Line from seniors and families from across the United States needing medical care and counseling. Ms. Wolfson added that last year they spoke to 800 community members by telephone and had 300 clients for in office or home visits for counseling and consultation. The program also includes a free Case Management Program partly funded through the City of Palo Alto

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and Sourcewise and last year 50 individual people were served throughout the year. The program also includes weekly Caregiver Support Groups. The program is free and the service was expanded from twice per month to weekly. There are also Stanford Worklife Caregiver Support Groups which meet monthly and last year there were 300 participants. Stanford faculty and retired faculty can partake in the support group. They also have speaking engagements and various seminars throughout the year and last year there were 540 attendees.

Avenidas has talks like Ted Talks which “packs the building” with people and the discussions included intergenerational dialogue. A healthy way of being in the world is intergenerational. Ms. Wolfson stated that we need to live in the mix and people do better when it is a mixed age.

Ms. Wolfson explained that Avenidas tries to find the resources that are needed. They do not have the environment to help cope with someone in a crises stage, but they are a stepping stone to get people help. Most people who come to Avenidas with cognitive or functional decline have issues that escalate to other mental health problems. A lot of people come with a multi facet profile because they are older adults. They want to make sure that they have seen their physicians, and they will stay with people through their transition. The barrier they have to help seniors in need is residential placement because caregiving is very expensive and the costs are going up. A lot of people are feeling stuck which creates seniors to act out because they do not know where they can get help. Some facilities have a three month waiting list to get a cognitive exam. Many times there is denial which creates frequently rushed discharge. Avenidas helps older adults navigate what type of treatment they need; case management, therapeutic bereavement and counseling through individual sessions and group.

Ms. Farber stated that she was trained to assist people who have hoarding difficulties. She held a free lecture three years ago and had 50 people in the room because there is a huge need and request for more support. Workshops have been created called Clutter Busters which is a six- week program. They have had 75 people in the lectures and 60+ people attend on a Saturday morning. There is no specialized counseling available in the area and there is no longer a volunteer organization to help clean up. The services are costly and the barrier is seniors are not aware that there is an issue and not wanting help. Avenidas has been able to help with the need. Clutter Busters has monthly drop in groups.

Ms. Wolfson stated that many of the homeless seniors have dual diagnoses of mental illness and substance abuse and their families become burnt out. The system does not help them get to stability. Avenidas does not stigmatize them, and they help them with forms and resources but Avenidas does not have anything in Palo Alto to give homeless seniors. They are having meetings with Downtown Streets Team to assist homeless seniors in their program but do not know where they can find housing. It’s a vicious cycle. Avenidas does provide therapeutic support but the barriers are huge. Ms. Farber stated that the case management services in subsidized housing communities provides them a leg up but many seniors are on Medi-Cal and there are almost no local medical or mental health Medi-Cal providers.

Commissioner Savage stated that she had heard that women do not want to go to the Opportunity Center. Ms. Wolfson replied that there have been assaults at the Drop-in Center and there is no place for people to spend the night in Palo Alto especially women and there is no easy way to serve older adults, no place to shower and no service for clothing. There is going to be an increase in older people and housing is full and the waitlist are full. Avenidas has been linking up older adults who have been given eviction notices with information about small towns around the country for them to go. Ms. Farber stated that they get calls from people who had stabilized housing but when their rents get raised and they cannot get a job and with only their social security or pension they are 30, 60, 90 days from being homeless and many waitlists are three years long. Ms. Wolfson explained that older women sometimes act out publicly and then they are taken to the hospital and given a hotel room and sent back out or held incompetent.

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that she was at a meeting and it was mentioned an organization that provided physical help for clutter, and she will look into that. Ms. Farber stated that there is a San Francisco task force on hoarding and the task force had the ability to make progress because they had the city and county supporting them. Agencies in San Mateo County made some progress meeting 1.5 hours during the month discussing how to serve residents with hoarding issues but because there was no city/county support and staff felt that they were spending time away from their jobs and not receiving the support, the task force was abandoned.

Commissioner Stinger asked the presenters if they were doing a plan is there something they would really like to work on? Ms. Wolfson replied that the problem is that we live in a beautiful place and most people are doing well but it is a challenge for the ones who are experiencing the problems. The number one issue is affordable senior housing. The mental health providers such as Stanford have rushed discharge which places a burden on the community. There is a need for more discharge planners and psychologists for people who need management. Some seniors go to tiny board and care facilities but do not stay.

Ms. Wolfson stated that the City of San Jose had a meeting on senior housing and it was bleak because there were a lot of issues pertaining to older adults and housing. There was a 70-unit building available and there were 7600 senior applicants. They are calling upon cities to think more creatively. Avenidas is looking at what is going on around the country regarding alternative housing. Intergenerational housing where you have older and younger people living and working together works and it is beneficial for all ages. We have an opportunity to come up with something very unique.

Commissioner Stinger asked if there any models of intergenerational housing developments. Ms. Wolfson replied that there is a housing community on one acre plot where there is one big house on the property and a community of renters with an interesting organizational structure. It is happening Ms. Farber added that the housing median area income is \$76,000 in Santa Clara County.

Commissioner Alhassani asked if there are any new technologies helping seniors. Ms. Wolfson replied that Stanford is offering caregiving seminars regarding modern

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technologies for seniors and Stanford students are trying to begin startups. There are also phone apps for linking transportation and with all of the aging boomers there are many things happening. There is also a voice activated system that can be installed in any room where you ask things like what day and time is it. The Uber and Lift App both have options for seniors that are different than the options of using the phone. The Lifeline GPS for active older adults can be used anywhere in the US.

Commissioner Alhassani stated that some people may not think they are hoarders but they are. Ms. Farber replied that there are workshops available for people who are willing to take the next steps. A person cannot sign up their family member. They have a form for the person to fill out asking your possessions, why do you have it and what does it mean to you.

The greatest numbers of people who are looking for resources in the community refer to Avenidas because they are at a transition point. There are people who are getting older and do not want to stay in their home and are proactive in a way and then there are people who are in the beginning of a crisis.

Chair Stone asked if they find that there is reluctance when seniors need help. Ms. Wolfson replied that the common problem is that men who have been the heads of corporations do not want to plan for the future and women call Avenidas for a strategy to get the man in the room to talk. Ms. Farber added that they work with many people with different cultural backgrounds and some cultures plan more and many are very hesitant to take advantage of mental health.

2. Discussion on the landlord outreach event in regards to homeless veterans held on June 15, 2015

Commissioner Alhassani stated that the event was targeted for landlords to participate in the All the Way Home campaign. They advertised on Palo Alto Online, two mailings and an email blast to the list of Palo Alto landlords. They had a small showing but the good news is that there was a high quality showing. Paul Hebert from Project Sentinel attended, and Mr. Hebert speaks with landlords daily and he believes that the program is very good for landlords who want to protect themselves. Palo Alto Housing may be adding a former hotel to their list of locations and it may be able to provide units for the homeless. Commissioner Alhassani added that the speakers were excellent. The committee is working with Destination Home to see what next steps are to have another event later this year.

Chair Stone asked what was the takeaway for the lack of turnout. Commissioner Alhassani replied that it was targeted only to landlords so that limited the attendees. Destination Home had an event and they had 18 people show up but got 10 units of housing for the program.

3. Planning of HRC Retreat held on Thursday, August 11, 2016

Commissioner Stone stated that the HRC has a retreat once per year to get the HRC on track and to get all members clear on the goals. Ms. van der Zwaag added that Ann Noel a CAHRO (California Association of Human Rights Organizations) board member would like to hear what local HRCs are up to. She would like to talk 5-10 minutes about the statewide

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organization and then sit as a listener to see what the HRC is doing and also for Palo Alto to find out what resources are available from the state level or how the state HRC can help Palo Alto.

Commissioner Savage stated that the HRC mission statement should be looked at and perhaps make updates the statement.

VI. REPORTS FROM OFFICIALS

1. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Stinger stated that she went to La Comida for a site visit and it was great. She was invited for lunch service. There were 168 lunches served. La Comida has an average of 100 lunches per day. La Comida addresses nutrition and stimulation concerns for the elderly. They are looking into ways to recruit volunteers and people for the board. When Avenidas is remodeled the large dining room will be reduced in capacity and will become too small to provide the lunches each week.

Commissioner Stinger stated that it has been hard during these difficult times for all of us so Pastor Smith held a service at the University AME Zion Church to help the community heal which she attended.

2. Staff Liaison Report

Ms. van der Zwaag stated that the HRC can pay for three commissioners to attend the CAHRO conference.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:17pm

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

Our Mission: To address human relations issues, including promotion of awareness, understanding and resolution of actual or potential conflicts, discrimination, or injustice while encouraging community building and civic engagement