

# Hilltop Health & Wellness Commission Meeting

Somersworth High School, CTC Center, Mulligan's Grill

9/15/2021

Meeting called to order by Todd Marsh at 6:02PM

Minutes taken by Suzanne Weete

## Recap of previous meeting & approval of minutes

- Todd Marsh called for a motion to approve the minutes from the Aug 25 meeting.
- Don Austin motioned to approve the minutes.
- Ken Vincent 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion.
- All were in favor to approve these minutes.

## Introductions & Review of Mission & Vision- Todd Marsh

Introduction of Arielle Marquis – SMS 6/7<sup>th</sup> grade counselor - a new appointee

Attendees: Ashley Wright, Suzanne Weete, Todd Marsh, Maggie Larson, Nancy Michaud, Ken Vincent, Don Austin, Arielle Marquis

Suz Weete reiterated the first two parts of the mission. This group is a small ambassador-group of the greater city. We are here to examine and study mental health, substance use disorders, recovery and suicide prevention and response in Somersworth. The greater Somersworth community will be part of the implementation of what we feel is needed in the community. This work will take time after this commission sunsets.

## Discussion:

*Where are we now & where we want to be?*

Ashley talked about the feedback from the group at previous meeting about 'what a perfect Somersworth would look like', for children and families at schools, in businesses and for people who have been directly or indirectly impacted by mental health, substance use disorders and suicide.

Todd: No wrong door, no wrong room. I shared the hot potato analogy at the school board meeting. Sometimes we are hesitant to ask the question, because we may not have the answer. It would be great to have universal knowledge of where to refer to, what to say.

Suz: we won't be able to change big systems, so what can we do locally to help our community? What steps can each individual do, realistically, to make a difference, even if small?

Don: We often talk about these issues as a school issue and we lose sight that this is a broader community issue. I think we need to sometimes step back and not immediately assume, that if a person is acting “strange”, and in my backyard, that they are criminal. I don’t think that calling the police and then getting them into the criminal justice system is the right way to deal with this type of situation. So then, what is the alternative action?

Ashley- But I also think that it should be OK to call the police and know that you can say, someone is not acting right, but I think this person needs to have almost a welfare check and the police can take that information and respond accordingly. A lot to do with perception and the response that people have.

Don: If we knew we had a resource to handle this - to do a welfare check - people can grow to accept the fact sometimes people need help (with mental health or substance use).

Maggie: The homeless population is an area that we know exists. If we encountered a homeless person near this area, we knew that we could call the police if needed, and then talk to the kids who discovered this homeless person about what they may be going through, and no one felt threatened.

Todd: If the police are called from a community member about someone who may be acting in a way that makes us feel uncomfortable, what do they then do? Our officers are not social workers, so how do they handle this? A mental health community outreach person, not in a uniform, could potentially be brought on if a grant is received in Somersworth, to be a non-threatening resource to help folks who may need some mental health supports. We’ve seen a similar model in other communities.

Ashley: We can’t change overarching systems, but there are resources that we can use to help police and fire become more experienced and trained in handling those experiencing mental health crisis and substance use disorders.

Nancy: There are trauma teams in Somersworth who I am very impressed with. Our families go through a lot- and these trauma teams do a fantastic job. We need more education for families that mental health crisis and substance use disorders should not be feared. Folks experiencing these challenges are human and they may just need help. We should start this type of education in middle school and have community outreach to educate kids and families so people have more awareness of these issues and maybe even feel empowered to help, if needed.

Ashley: We talked about internal biases at our last meeting. Education and awareness can help us so much with how we act and react in the community.

Maggie: Kudos for Somersworth for inclusivity and diversity in our community and schools. To be around people who are different from you, especially at the young ages, is so important. Somersworth is a diverse community and I think our younger grade levels are really being exposed to this diversity in a positive light – which will make diversity not even a “thing”.

Todd: People tend to be harsh when they fear. There are lots of groups out there that most people are not familiar with... but work is being done. It would be fantastic to intertwine with these other groups and committees.

Ashley: we want community groups to complement each other and find where we can fill gaps. What exists and is going well and what is not so great? We do not want to duplicate efforts, we want to find ways to support good work and fill in gaps where work isn't currently being done.

Ken: Where is this commission going? Do our facilitators know what the end all be all be from this work or are we just going to talk about it?

(In response to Ken) We know processes and frameworks that lead to effective results. We are using those things in our planning and approach that will help guide us to where we need to be. What exactly the end results will be is completely up to this group, the discussions we have, the priorities that we lay out and what this group feels is best to do. We are facilitating you using tools we know, but the decisions and outcomes are really up to you. With all our input and going through a framework, we will develop a report, a path, strategies and next steps for this commission.

### **Review of Data**

SHS Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) – last done in 2019. Typically this survey is done every other year and asks about risky behavior, and is administered in SHS and SMS. This is intentional vs. doing it at the beginning of the year because the data could be skewed due to a lot of free time for kids during summer. In 2021, the survey will be done in fall, which is an anomaly. This is due to COVID, it wasn't done in the spring of 2021.

Discussion ensued with Ken asking the question of WHY is Somersworth leading the charge so to speak with higher survey results (more risky behavior) for adverse behaviors.

Why is depression 10% higher from 2017-2019. Ken thinks that youth have unsupervised time, and maybe they are bored? Do then substances come into play?

Todd: (In response to Ken) If we had more people who took the survey at any other point, would the results be similar or different? Perhaps the change was when Rollinsford kids moved to Marshwood, so numbers were lower?

Discussion regarding finding ways to ask these questions will help guide our work even further. Possible contributing issues and solutions discussed.

SMS YRBS 2019- the numbers per category align similarly to the SHS survey, but only have data up to 2017. SMS did not participate in 2019 YRBS.

With regard to messaging, substance use prevention should not be based on fear. While we are looking at the data to understand problems and identifying issues, when we put out prevention messaging, we do not often highlight the negatives, but look to highlight positive trends and social norms that "most students do not use alcohol" or similar —to show the positive —so that we can accentuate that there are some glimmers of light.

### **Review of Data from Community Partners-**

We reviewed data of groups based on (behavioral health) diagnosis in Strafford county, and then in Somersworth for both adult and youth.

- How does socio-economic differences come into play with substance misuse and youth?
- Does everyone who has a substance use disorder also live with some sort of mental health challenge?

If we understand the ACE/background challenges, we may then be able to counter these by building resilience, setting up early intervention strategies, and other resources that may be directed to the specifics within the community.

**Next steps:**

Think about: THIS IS WHERE WE ARE. Think about WHY ARE WE WHERE WE ARE? What are some of the barriers we can address? What are those small things that we think are changeable?

Identify at least three people who we want to bring to this group. We will list out specific sectors within the community—in which we need to think about representatives from for either this commission or the latter coalition.

- Todd Marsh called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:33 p.m.
  - Maggie Larson motioned to adjourn the meeting
  - Don Austin 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion
  - All were in favor to adjourn the meeting.
- Meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m

Next Meeting - OCT 20 at 6:30pm