



City of San Marcos  
Human Services Advisory Board (HSAB)

September 15, 2022 at 7:00 PM  
Virtual and San Marcos Public Library

### **Regular Meeting – Minutes**

**Members Present:** JoAnn Parsons, Board Chair  
Ruben Garza, Voting Member  
Mary Earls, Voting Member  
Monica Gonzales, Voting Member  
Alison Duplechin, Voting Member  
Mariana Zamora, Non-Voting Advisory Member

**Member(s) Absent:** Gloria Quinn, Voting Member

**Staff Liaison:** Carol Griffith, Planning & Development Services, Community Development Manager

**Recording Secretary:** Lorena Escobar, Planning & Development Services, Housing Coordinator

**Staff Present:** Brandon Johnson, Planning & Development Services, Intern

- I. **Call to order:** The meeting was called to order by Chair JoAnn Parsons at 7:03 PM.
- II. **Roll Call:** Parsons called the roll. At the time that roll was conducted five voting members were present, forming a quorum.
- III. **30 Minute Citizen Comment Period:** No comments were received.
- IV. **Consideration of Minutes for September 1, 2022, Human Services Advisory Board Meeting.** Ruben Garza moved for approval of minutes. Mary Earls seconded the motion. Carol Griffith stated that a correction was needed to show Monica Gonzales as absent at the September 1, 2022, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.
- V. **Action Items**
  1. **Discuss and take action on Resolution 2022-03R to elect the Vice-Chair for the Human Services Advisory Board.** Joann Parsons opened the discussion asking board members for any nominations to elect the Vice-Chair for the Human Services Advisory Board. Parsons pointed out the nominee must be able to be present at the library every other Thursday. Mary Earls nominated Ruben Garza, and a unanimous vote in favor of his selection was taken by roll call. .
- VI. **Presentations:**
  1. **Agency: Minorities for Equality in Economy, Education, Liberty, and Justice; Program: Iron Sharpens Iron**

Agency representative Latreese Cooke started the presentation by stating she is the executive director and founder of MELJ Center. MELJ was partially funded this past fiscal year and it was the first time they offered their services in San Marcos. They have requested a corrected budget amount that would allow MELJ to operate in a full-time capacity. They are an organization that was founded to work specifically for people who have gone to prison and their families. They provide a myriad of services that are tailored specifically to individuals. The program encompasses a holistic approach to assist people to successfully reacclimate into the community. Their level of services require a certain amount of funding because it takes a lot of individualized work. People are being returned back into the community not only with the felonious background, but some are also now coming back drug addicted. One of the issues encountered since funding was received was trying to secure an office space. They finally acquired a 6-month lease on July 7<sup>th</sup> that was very restrictive. The lease does not allow program participants to come to the office located at the Hays County Family Justice Center and MELJ does not have access to the space after 5:00 pm. There have been many barriers in trying to acquire space because there is still a fear of this population. MELJ has attended multiple community events surrounding criminal justice issues locally and have developed additional relationships. There were a couple of delays in getting started but are confident that they will be able to start attending more events.

Garza asked about the high-risk youth population that MELJ works with. Cooke's response was they work with high-risk youth in general but they do not have to be in the juvenile system - such as a child of someone who has previously been incarcerated. Cooke has done this for at least ten years and has direct experience in teaching and working with the juvenile probation departments. She has a personal interest working with youth regardless of whether they are actually in the system or out because she recognizes that the cycle must stop. Garza also asked if they have plans to expand their board since some board members are not from the San Marcos area. Cooke stated she is not against expanding the board and has reviewed their bylaws and there is not a requirement to have someone from a specific county. Zamora asked what the cost is needed to run the program and if the funding request covers it. Cooke stated the majority of the funding is used for direct program services. They have a need for paid internships and operational costs such as rent and internet service. They also provide some assistance to the program participants depending on what they need, whether it's a cell phone or housing assistance. Zamora asked what percentage of the request covers the overall funding for this program. Cooke's response was that it costs \$200,000 to operate in Hays County.

## **2. Agency: San Marcos Public Housing Authority; Program: SMHA Resident Services - Service Coordination**

Agency representative Gene Martin started by saying he is the resident services director for the Housing Authority. The program works with low-income families, including a lot of single moms, and it offers children a safe place to go after school. The program offers case management for families and elderly. Bonnie Pacina is one of the service coordinators who works at CM Allen Homes works with the youth on a daily basis. Pacina stated that they have an after-school program that provides meals every afternoon with the assistance of university students. She gave an example given of a student who participated in the program and just went to A&M on a scholarship.

Parsons asked where the meals come from. Pacina responded that they come from San Marcos School District and the Austin Food Bank. Parsons asked if they have to pay for the meals. The response was no. Parsons asked how many students participate in the program. Pacina responded that 25 participate in the program. Garza asked about the DARE program. Martin stated the program is called Kids Against Drugs and they partner with Cenikor for this. Garza asked how the program can afford to take kids to Fiesta Texas and SeaWorld. Martin stated they receive money from the Lions Club and United Way. Garza commended them for their service. Parsons asked what assistance is provided to the elderly and how often. Pacina responded they provide food and receive donations from several restaurants. They pick up food on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and distribute it among the elderly. They partner with Olive Garden and Cheddars. They also have a program called Hope which includes a monthly food bag delivery. Martin stated their program also helps with socialization when the elderly come to the centers to congregate.

### **3. Agency: Hays County Child Protective Services; Program: Hays County Child Protective Board**

Agency representative Mary Cauble started the presentation by stating many decades ago the state of Texas realized that more local involvement was required in order to provide for emergency and other unmet needs of abused and neglected children who are in state care. As a result, in 1978, the Hays County Child Protective Board was established by a contract between the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and Hays County. The board is made up of 14 citizen volunteers from across the county. They are appointed by the Hays County Commissioners Court. The Child Protective Board is mandated to work directly with the Texas Department of Child Protective Services (CPS) to serve all abused and neglected children in the county who are in CPS care. They work directly with CPS liaisons to help meet emergency needs and to help provide children in their care with a more stable environment. They do this in two ways. They operate the Hays County Remme Rainbow Room which consists of a distribution area where caseworkers are able to get emergency items like diapers, formulas, hygiene supplies, car seats, and clothing for infants and toddlers. In addition to the distribution area, the Rainbow Room has an office area for case workers who try to find placements for newly removed children. CPS workers have 24/7 access to this facility which was opened in December of 2020. Additionally, the board meets monthly to review specific requests from CPS for individual children and their care family. Approximately 65% of these children are in relative care, often with grandparents on fixed income. Unlike foster care, relative care families receive almost no support from the state, and special consideration is given to those requests. They receive a lot of requests for safe bedding and back to school clothing vouchers. They also assist with day care, athletic and summer camps and unmet medical needs. From 2011 to 2021 the number of children in Hays County increased by 36%, but the number of children in CPS care increased by 172%.

Duplechin asked about the partnership with Texas Department of Child Services and if they would be providing services only to Hays County. Cauble stated they work directly with the Department of Family and Protective Services and under this department is CPS. They work directly with them because the caseworkers know the specific needs of the children and they bring those requests to them at the monthly meeting. Garza asked about the discussions held regarding the disbursement of funds for clothing and medicine. Cauble stated if a caseworker brings a request for lice treatment, it's pretty much a done deal and they will fund that request. In the Rainbow Room they have items such as lice kits and hygiene

products which come from in-kind gifts and donations. They also have some allocation guidelines that have been developed over the years like for clothing vouchers.

#### **4. Agency: San Marcos CISD; Program: Post Pandemic At-Risk Recovery**

Agency representative Jennifer Vogel stated their program has been in existence for 35 years and are one of the few remaining teen parenting programs in Texas. They serve a very at-risk population and have seen a decrease of at-risk populations returning to the school setting. They had about 30 students last year that stuck out high school which was a big drop from previous years. They have also seen a huge increase in teen pregnancy and are up to about 70 teen parents in school this year to date. They have one social worker and offer a stipend for interns from Texas State in social work who develop individual plans with teen parents to become self-sufficient. They have partnerships with Community Action and church groups, and have group meetings with teen moms to offer parenting support and other resources. They work in collaboration with Legal Aid out of Austin and Travis County. They promote high school graduation but also look for other alternatives that might be beneficial to them. They work with Texas State Department of Social Work who audit their records every year to ensure that the data is accurate. Currently they serve about 140 students with about 27 of them out of Guadalupe County. Last year they served 113 students. Students make individual parent plans with their social worker or their social worker intern, and then that plan is reviewed daily, weekly, or monthly, depending on those goals and what they're trying to achieve. About 48% of teen parents are currently involved in an active Child Protective Service case and about 49% are identified as homeless. That means that they don't live with a biological parent and that they travel from different home to home.

Garza asked if they ever thought about putting clients served on the board to get a different perspective. Vogel responded that they have three former students who are mentor advisors. Garza asked if they have presented to the SMCISD board for funding. The response was yes, they have been supportive of the program. The funding received allowed for some of the cost associated with remodeling their \$1.2 million dollar building. They have been proactive in trying to prevent teen pregnancies and one of the unique things to their program is maintaining a less than 1% average of repeat pregnancy. The national average is about 65%.

#### **5. Agency: Bobcat Pride; Program: Jeremy O. Torres Emergency Stabilization Fund (JOTESF)**

Heather Aidala presented that the Bobcat Scholarship fund has been in existence for 12 years as a 501(c)3. In 2019 they expanded their mission to not only support Texas state students, but to support any 18- to 25-year-old individual who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual, or any other diverse identity, who is facing an unexpected financial emergency. The aspiration is to be able to help them contribute to society by achieving stability and addressing unforeseen financial barriers as they are navigating that transition from childhood into adulthood. The reason why this is so important, especially here in Texas, is because there are no nondiscrimination laws at the state level for the LGBTQ community. It's up to either cities or organizations to provide that protection. In the application some statistics were provided from the American Civil Liberties Union and Equality Texas about how discrimination impacts this community and this age population. This past fiscal year, Bobcat Pride was able to provide 60 recipients with an average of \$198 each with the upper limit being a \$200 one-time award. All of them lived

within San Marcos city limits, 68% were attending a university, mostly at Texas State, but 32% were not enrolled in college. The reported average monthly income was \$714 which is 70% below the federal poverty guidelines for 2022, demonstrating that in this community there is a dire financial need. Karen Gordon presented a breakdown of the funding, almost all of it coming from donors. They work to have fundraisers and silent auctions, and rely on direct donations. They have an all-volunteer board and have very little overhead.

Garza asked how a \$200 stipend given to a recipient would help with housing. The response was Bobcat Pride's program manager reaches out to the HOME Center and helps recipients connect with other resources to coordinate care. So, the stipend helps them have access to food and necessary items during this transition time. Parsons pointed out they are giving them a safe place to get help with food or with any type of assistance that they need. Aidala stated that there are amazing nonprofits in the community but there isn't always an explicit invitation to the LGBTQ community to use their services as a safe environment, for example due to religious affiliation. This can be a huge barrier for participants in feeling safe and reaching out. Therefore the program director works to identify which of those nonprofits have had positive experiences with serving this community to make valuable connections. They have partnered with the Hays County Food Bank and continue to build relationships with other agencies as well. Aidala stated they have asked for \$5000 which would allow them to provide 25 additional stipends of up to \$200 emergency funds, increasing the number of recipients to 85.

**VII. Discussion Items:** This discussion was facilitated by Carol Griffith who asked board members if any agencies stood out as remarkable or memorable as they consider who gets funding. Parsons stated she likes that Public Housing serves the youth and was surprised at how much they do for the elderly. She stated that Child Protective Services really speaks for themselves and are there for kids who need that service. She also liked the Post Pandemic At Risk Recovery program but was really surprised to see how many student are teen parents. She thought the Bobcat Pride presentation was clear this year and is thankful they are providing a safe haven for those who might otherwise be turned away from religious affiliated organizations. Regarding Iron Sharpens Iron, she is glad they are here in San Marcos to offer their services.

Duplechin found the testimonials that Ruben shared with the board are pretty powerful, for example when a participant recognized the Public Housing Authority programs as being beneficial. She found these testimonials to be really important as a supplement to the presentations and would be using them as a determining factor on what programs would be supported. Gonzales stated all the programs are great and it will be a hard decision to make but what stood out to her was how low the overhead was for Bobcat Pride. The funds that they would receive would be going directly to the students or the young adults that actually need this help and is a safe haven for them, which is really important. The other program that stood out to her was the teen pregnancy program and she didn't realize they are one of very few programs that currently exist in Texas.

Garza stated he is concerned that the board received a lot of applications for new programs but no money to fund them. He sees a scenario where board recommends funding and those who don't get funded are running to city council. He feels that this year if anyone has a new program the board should not consider it. For example, the HOME program is asking for \$150,000 this year and last year asked for \$85,000. So he is asking if it is possible to put a

moratorium in place that says board is going to give them same funding they received last year. Griffith responded a moratorium would not work because there was more funding last year than this year and currently are down to \$500,000. Garza stated they can do it by scoring agencies, but somebody will be very unhappy. He felt the teenage pregnancy program could be funded through the school and Bobcat Pride offering \$160 scholarships isn't a scholarship but giving somebody a \$5,000 scholarship to pay for tuition is. He thinks giving someone \$168 to cover the expense of rent and food is just a band aid approach especially when money is so tight. Earls is hoping the board can give every agency some funding and did not agree with Garza's idea of a moratorium. Garza talked about duplication of services and said that at one time five different agencies provided the same services. Duplechin agreed with Ruben and thinks there is a lot of duplicative services across these different programs. She thinks this could provide the board an opportunity to ask if there is other funding already provided through some other forum that maybe can supplement some of the funding needed by these smaller programs. Garza pointed out to keep in mind, some of these groups are not even in San Marcos.. Garza asked how many applications were received. Griffith responded 36. He brought up the idea of dividing the funding by 36.

**VIII. Reports:** No reports were provided.

**IX. Future Agenda Items:** No Items were received.

**X. Question and Answer Session with Press and Public**

Joe Castillo asked what time his presentation is scheduled for next week. Griffith stated he can look at the agenda which will be posted on 9/16/2022 to find where he has been placed on the agenda or email staff if he has any further questions.

**XI. Adjournment:**

Duplechin moved to adjourn meeting. Gonzales seconded. Motion carried. There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:34 pm.

The minutes for the September 15, 2022, meeting of City of San Marcos, TX; Human Services Advisory Board are respectfully submitted September 29, 2022 by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carol Griffith, Staff Liaison

*Approved By:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
JoAnn Parsons, Chair