

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE, IN REGULAR MEETING OF MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024 AT 5:30 PM, MUNICIPAL CENTER I, TOWER ROOM 146, 50 E CIVIC CENTER DRIVE, GILBERT, ARIZONA

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Suzanne Lunt; Members Iya Affo, Chris Curley, Alexandra Rodriguez, and Javier Rodriguez

MEMBERS ABSENT: Chair Sean Warren and Member Heather Watts

STAFF PRESENT: Staff Liaison/Volunteer and Community Resources Manager Melanie Dykstra, Council Liaison Kathy Tilque, Assistant Town Manager Dawn Prince, Recreation Manager Lane Gram, People Strategies Manager Tameka Hartman, and Deputy Clerk Judy Martinez

GUESTS PRESENT: Kathleen Dowler of Dignity Health; Marcia Meyer, Dr. James M. Campbell, and Kayla Tomooka of Be Kind to People Project; and Dr. Vivien Lattibeaudiere of God's Secret Service Agents

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Lunt called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Lunt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Staff Liaison Dykstra called roll and declared a quorum present.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The guests and presenters introduced themselves.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Consider approval of the minutes of the February 5, 2024 meeting.

A MOTION was made by Member Affo, seconded by Member J. Rodriguez, to approve the minutes of the February 5, 2024 meeting. *Motion carried 5-0.*

2. Presentation by Community Non-Profit Groups

Marcia Meyer, Board Chair/CEO/Founder of Be Kind to People Project, discussed their program. She said the nonprofit had been active for 12 years, and had worked in 23 states, but mostly in Arizona. She reviewed their vision and mission, emphasizing their investment in kids. She discussed ways of initiating positive social change for youth including efforts to improve academic achievement, build strong interpersonal relationship skills, and provide a framework for lifelong character values. She provided a program overview and noted the Be Kind Pledge, 10 skills of kindness, which she said needed to be practiced and applied to daily lives. She discussed setting expectations for schools and using positive reinforcement. She said their three main programs were Be Fit, Be Healthy, Be Kind; Kind Character Education; and Cyberskills, teaching digital responsibility. She discussed the Be Kind Families Program, what it meant to be supportive, and how to remain positive. She also discussed Be Kind Business and how it also helped with employee retention, noting the business pledge could be posted for the public to see. She discussed the Be Kind City Program and a survey that ranked civility low in America, adding that the average American experienced incivility at least 7 times a week. She said people surveyed were willing to move if people were being treated in ways that were not civil. She discussed how cities could become a Be Kind City, including a proclamation and Be Kind Pledge.

Member Affo asked about their philosophy, if it was trauma-informed, if it was based on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or used the 5 Pillars of Casel. They discussed self-awareness and building children's confidence in other ways. Member Affo stated that Gilbert was an upper to middle class community and asked if those types of communities were managed in different ways, as they may not have as much buy-in and willingness. Marcia Meyer stated that no matter where they were, it was always the same message; they did not alter their messaging and kids and families wanted to learn it.

Vice Chair Lunt discussed schools that may not want certain things taught in their schools, such as the Arizona Superintendent not wanting Social Emotional Learning (SEL) taught. Marcia Meyer stated their program focused on character education, but did not get into SEL. Staff Liaison Dykstra asked if they were in any Arizona

schools now; Marcia Meyer stated they were in 23 east valley schools. Kathleen Dowler discussed how her granddaughter in the fourth grade attended a Be Kind School and was excited to share about it; Dowler said the program empowered kids. Dr. James M. Campbell suggested sharing information on how they already had a presence in Gilbert, then he mentioned that the program included resources for mentally and physically disabled children. Marcia Meyer spoke of the program teaching acceptance, empowering students, and having “buddy benches”.

Member Affo asked about diversity and if they had numbers on black and indigenous kids being suspended or expelled at participating schools; she said there were aspects of Casel and PBIS that contributed to that. Marcia Meyer said they did not use Casel lessons or philosophy; it was basic, pure, character education; she said she did not have numbers on suspension.

Member A. Rodriguez discussed that she was concerned about the potential “toxic positivity” with their program, adding she was looking for realistic and tangible results. Marcia Meyer stated their assemblies were not a “one and done”, that they were followed up by so many things and lessons including shopping tips, menus, booklists, and life skills; she said there were 1,000 lessons that were grade-specific with worksheets and other resources. Member J. Rodriguez said he feared it may put extra burden on teachers; Meyers said the lessons were ready to go and could be used as a 15 minute lesson or more. Kayla Tomooka, Director of Stewardship and Community Outreach, gave examples of when she worked as a crew member and discussed the lessons being relatable.

Vice Chair Lunt said hearing about the Be Kind City program was more relevant to their group, as they did not have any control over schools. Marcia Meyer stated it was started at the request of east valley cities. She said it included the Be Kind Pledge, a proclamation, training for the city council, and other resources. She said it was very actionable on what could be done among the councilmembers, as well as with community projects, recognition, and the honoring of citizens. She said it was a template if a city wanted to use it, then she discussed Wellness Wednesdays with tips, recipes, and opportunities.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about mitigating bias that may exist in cities. Marcia Meyer discussed working with Scottsdale and acknowledged a program from a national publication on 12 biases that they used. Member J. Rodriguez asked how they made it a sustainable program. Marcia Meyer said that each city had to make it sustainable; they were there to create that expectation, facilitate thinking, and to set a foundation. Meyer asked the group to come see them in action at the new Be Kind Community Education Center in downtown Phoenix.

Member Affo asked if they had a mechanism in place to follow up on the reaction from services or a survey. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated that nonprofits that were receiving funding did have to file quarterly reports that included documenting what their impact was, adding it may include long-term measurable things.

3. Presentation by Town of Gilbert

Recreation Manager Lane Gram discussed the water tower lighting and presented information on approved lighting causes including autism awareness and domestic violence prevention. She said the longest the water tower was lit for a cause was typically three days. She said those interested had to submit an application as part of a once per year process; the applications were reviewed and approved by the Town Manager's Office. She noted the current construction at Water Tower Park in 2024 paused the lighting, but said they hoped to begin it again in fall 2024. Member J. Rodriguez asked about the process, criteria, and availability. Recreation Manager Gram said it was typically not lit more than 15 days per month, so they tried to spread out causes. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated they tried not to duplicate causes.

Recreation Manager Gram discussed Gilbert becoming a certified autism center with well-trained staff and features such as sensory bags and low-sensory awareness. She discussed inclusive parks and playgrounds, including doing sensory audits at five locations and an upcoming effort to add sensory guides and signage with communication boards that would also assist with non-verbal communication. She discussed how they could help people be educated on what was at each park, including maps, so that attendees could prepare ahead of the visit.

Council Liaison Tilque discussed cultural events, noting the Parks and Recreation Department was waiting to hear of the possible recommendation to include more cultural events. Recreation Manager Gram agreed the department was looking into more cultural events, as well as making their current events more inclusive.

Member J. Rodriguez discussed safety, stating that children often played in areas that were not designed for their ages. Recreation Manager Gram discussed different teen and adolescent places and efforts, so they did not end up using areas for smaller children; she also discussed signage.

Member A. Rodriguez identified disability efforts with Valley Metro in downtown Phoenix that included the use of a bus and light rail stop for training. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated those efforts were to help qualify people for para transit.

Member J. Rodriguez spoke of elderly individuals using Gilbert Regional Park, asking about having certain zones for bikes, walking paths, etc. Recreation Manager Gram stated those were great ideas and they had something similar at a different facility.

Assistant Town Manager Prince discussed providing a list of activities and events that the Town hosted, including Viva and Juneteenth.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about programs to hire individuals with autism. Assistant Town Manager Prince discussed a current program with the Town partnering with the University of Arizona to hire students with disabilities, adding they were looking to expand on that. Assistant Town Manager Prince also noted the desire to work with others, including Lauren's Institute for Education. Staff Liaison Dykstra added that students had worked with the senior meal program and they were looking for other partners. Assistant Town Manager Prince and Staff Liaison Dykstra also discussed the Native American Management Intern (NAMI) program with the Town of Gilbert that started 10 years ago with grant funding through a tribal gaming grant and generally included two students per semester.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed the information in the members' packets, asking them to look at what community resources were available, including those currently funded and those that were applying for funding. She discussed some of the organizations including Bloom365, Gathering Humanity, and Gilbert Talks.

4. Review and discussion of priority area of Welcoming and Kind Gilbert

Staff Liaison Dykstra asked the group to let her know if there was anything they wanted captured or if they needed more presentations before the next meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Dr. Vivien Lattibeaudiere of God's Secret Service Agents discussed a program of doing secret acts of kindness that people could register to participate in. She said they also developed Operation Family Kindness, for parents and families to do secret acts of kindness, which would help to develop a culture in that family for kindness and compassion. She also discussed the Kindness Coalition and the Honey Foundation in Peoria with curriculum that teachers could use that was online and downloadable. She discussed their work with programs on Mother's Day and Father's Day, where coffee shops offered flowers and coffee to participants. She said their website was being redesigned and those interested would be able to accept a mission online soon.

FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated their packet included the 2019 Needs Assessment priorities, townwide efforts, and a proclamation list. She discussed a list of opportunities from an inclusivity report, then asked the group to review the recommendations and to consider what may make events and festivals feel more inclusive. She said the next meeting would be on April 1, 2024.

COMMUNICATIONS

Report from Council Liaison on current events.

Council Liaison Tilque thanked the members and spoke of efforts previously discussed with the Task Force that was coming before the Council. She said that on the upcoming agenda, the Council would consider approval of a contract with Solari, which would include training with 911 to transfer calls to a professional. She also noted there was a contract on the same agenda to move dirt at the planned site for the future family advocacy center.

Report from Staff Liaisons on task force assignments and current events.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed the handouts provided including events that she highlighted that were related to their topic. She said it included upcoming opportunities that the Town was doing, then said the April 1st meeting would be an opportunity to collect thoughts and ideas. Lastly, she noted nominations were open for MVP Volunteer Awards and encouraged the group to nominate someone.

Report from Task Force Members on current events.

None.

ADJOURN

Vice Chair Lunt adjourned the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

ATTEST:

Suzanne Lunt, Vice Chair

Melanie Dykstra, Staff Liaison