

Morris County Advisory Committee on Women
April 20, 2022, 5:30pm to 7:00pm
Via Microsoft Teams

Present: Karen O’Keeffe, Kasey Errico, Pam Bennett-Santoro, Eileen Specchio, Donna Boyce, and Sydney Ugalde

Welcome and Introductions: Ms. O’Keeffe welcomed members and guest speakers Michelle Roers, United Way and Peggy Rauscher, Parsippany Child Day Care Center. Introductions were made.

Presentation by Michelle Roers, Senior Director of Strategies for ALICE, United in Care, and ALICE Action Network, United Way and Peggy Rauscher, Executive Director, Parsippany Child Day Care Center.

Ms. Roers began by stating that this presentation will specifically be focusing on children, and childcare. Often times, “reframing childcare” as early childhood education, and putting a focus on the quality of care and the educational experience the children are getting and need.

Ms. Rauscher stated the Parsippany Child Day Care Center is a three star rated Center, and will be going through their third assessment this year. Enrollment pre-COVID was 90 children, currently they have 48 children enrolled. They are operating at about half of where they could be and that is due to staffing. They cannot enroll additional children until they can hire staff that is stable and reliable for retention. The Center is currently getting 4 to 5 contacts a day for childcare services.

Ms. Roers reported that since 2009, the United Way of Northern NJ has been producing the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) reports. Recently United Way has launched a new series called ALICE in Focus and conducting mini briefs that are focused on different populations. The first one that was launched two weeks ago was ALICE in Focus on Children. Ms. Roers shared information on the initiative: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/> **The ALICE population, are families who struggle to find financial stability. They earn above the Federal Poverty Level yet struggle to afford basic expenses.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/alice-in-focus> **Based on the 2019 Census Data, in NJ, approximately 12%, (230,000), of children are living in poverty**, 29% of NJ children live in the ALICE population. Predominately Hispanic households fall within this threshold. Over 324,000 Hispanics with small children fall into this demographic, compared to the Caucasian population of 230,000 and African American population of 149,000.

United Way will also add to the series: ALICE in Focus for Disabilities and ALICE in Focus for Military Veterans. Regarding the Disabilities brief as it relates to youth, it has been identified that in NJ, there are approximately 75,000 children with disabilities, which represents 4% of the children in this state.

Ms. Roers reported that many ALICE families are living in unstable housing situations. Children in general who fall below the ALICE threshold, 55% of those households were in rentals vs. 19% who live in their own homes. Regarding educational challenges, on a positive note in NJ, there has been a lot of emphasis over the past several years, about the expansion of public pre-school and access to pre-school services through some of our childcare agencies and partnerships with school districts. 70% of NJ pre-school age children are enrolled in pre-school programs. The National Average is approximately 49%. New Jersey is struggling with childcare for infants and toddlers. Before the Pandemic, there were a number of licensed Childcare Centers that have been encouraged to participate in the Grow New Jersey Kids Quality Rating Process, to ensure children across the State have access to high quality services. Not all the Centers across the State are participating, many have not yet met the standards. Part of the challenge is staffing, it has become a huge issue. Many childcare providers

and educators are women. Unfortunately, the salaries for these positions often times don't meet the financial needs to sustain a family household. Many home based Child Care Center providers are not register (which is not a requirement in NJ), through the State to run their business, so they do not have access childcare subsidies. The registration process can be onerous.

Ms. Rauscher added that currently the challenges and issues she is experiencing within her Center is low staffing and a need for professional development training. Staff has to be willing to do the job, and have experience in early childhood education. Her Center competes with the public school systems in terms of their 3 to 5 year old children's programs. Parsippany runs a 12 month program, school based pre-school may only run a 10 month program, which is appealing to potential candidates who have a certified teaching degree. None of the staff at the Parsippany facility currently has a teaching degree. They do have their Child Development Associates degree, and degrees in Early Childhood Education, but they are not certified teachers. In the United in Care program, there is funding for professional development training for Child Care Centers, and Day Care Providers. Grow NJ Kids supports most of the professional development training. A lot of money has come in over the past two years to support sustaining Child Care Centers, however, what happens in the next few months is really important. Pre pandemic, the Centers were pay based for subsidized children, based on attendance. When the pandemic hit, the State switched to an enrollment based payment. So, as long as a child is enrolled, the Center gets paid regardless of attendance (due to illness, vacation, etc.). The State is looking into moving this process back to attendance based payment system. This could affect the reimbursement rate for smaller facilities.

Ms. Roers stated that last week United Way had their official kick-Off of the "United in Care" initiative. They received some Federal assistance and were awarded \$1.1 million dollars. This money will allow the United Way to work in partnership with home based Child Care facilities, Parsippany Child Care Center and Children and Family Resources in Morris County to help address quality of care and other issues and gaps in services. Ms. Rauscher responded that the Parsippany Child Care Center has had a 50 year partnership with the United Way. Throughout the long-term relationship, United Way has assisted Parsippany Child Care in many ways including providing childcare equipment/furniture, and training and tuition assistance for staff.

Q&A

Ms. O'Keeffe asked about the teacher's education requirements, CDA was mentioned earlier. Ms. Rauscher responded that CDA is a Child Development Associates Degree. Candidates also need to be certified in CPR and First Aid.

Ms. Errico stated she attended the United in Care event last week. It was great to see all the dignitaries that attended. One of the speakers, who owned a Home Based Child Care Center and served ALICE youth, were also of the ALICE population. It was interesting to hear their remarks. She also mentioned that the County's Workforce Development Board may be able to assist with staffing issues. Ms. Errico will forward the contact information.

Ms. Boyce asked if there is a way to keep tabs on this very important topic as it evolves. Ms. Roers invited her to join their Advisory Committee, she will forward links to share. A Dashboard is being developed and is expected to be launched this summer.

<https://www.unitedwaynj.org/united-in-care>
<https://workforcestrategies.unitedwaynj.org/>
<https://parsippanychilddaycare.com/>
<https://www.grownjkids.gov/>

Ms. O'Keeffe thanked Ms. Roers and Ms. Rauscher for the informational presentation and for the links to the topics discussed this evening.

Review of March 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes: Members decided to vote on the March 16th minutes in May, as the Committee did not have enough members for a quorum. Ms. O’Keeffe informed the Committee that Charlotte Miller resigned from the committee.

Discussion on the PowerPoint Orientation to the Advisory Committee on Women conducted at the March 16th meeting:

- a. Role of Sub-committees – per the Bylaws, members are required to join at least one sub-committee.
 - Seeds of Change – Ms. O’Keeffe reminded members that this sub-committee will need to begin meeting soon to allow enough time for the planning and implementation process.
 - Action – Housing as Healthcare – Ms. O’Keeffe stated that the sub-committee needs to define the goal of this initiative and keep it manageable.
 - Ad hoc committees (i.e., Annual Report, Communication, etc.)
- b. Opportunity to attend other Human Services committee meetings and/or Commissioner meetings and report back to the Women’s Committee. Ms. O’Keeffe, as an example of other committees, recommended attending the HSAC (Human Services Advisory Committee). Ms. Errico mentioned other Human Services Advisory Committees: ACADV (Advisory Council on Aging, Disabilities and Veterans), MHSAAB (Mental Health Substance Abuse Advisory Board), Municipal Alliance, YSAC (Youth Services Advisory Committee), WDB (Workforce Development Board). Information on these committees can be found on the County website, Human Services web page [Human Services – Morris County, NJ \(morriscountynj.gov\)](https://www.morriscountynj.gov/human-services). Ms. O’Keeffe asked if the meetings are still virtual. Ms. Errico responded that yes they are. However, the ACADV conducted a successful hybrid meeting (people can attend in person or virtually) last month. Most Committees meet on a monthly basis. Commissioner Meetings are generally held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. Ms. O’Keeffe stated that if members attend any of the above meetings as a guest, send her an email and she will add the topic to the agenda for a report out.

Old Business:

- a. Homeless Trust Fund support letter discussion – Ms. Bjornson and Ms. Boyce are still working on this matter.
- b. Update on the Women’s Economic Empowerment Summit to be held on May 18th from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Dover Middle School. Ms. Bjornson was working on getting additional information on this event. Ms. Boyce stated she received a registration link for this event and will forward the link to Ms. O’Keeffe for distribution to the Committee.

New Business: None

Public Section/Questions: None

Next Meeting: May 18, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. via Microsoft Teams.

Adjourn: Ms. Specchio made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Boyce seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.