

Promoting a healthy community by Councilor Morrie Pongratz

Paul Jaramillo spoke at the November 13, 2018 County Council meeting during a discussion of James Whitehead's petition. He made the comment that Los Alamos is "...no longer Mayberry." He recommended putting together a plan to address issues of mental health, substance abuse and homelessness in Los Alamos. Mr. Jaramillo has updated his request (see attachment B). In fact, Los Alamos County and Los Alamos Public Schools do have a plan, it is funded, and it is being executed, but perhaps following a "Plan-Do-Study-Act" sequence, it is time to "study". Is the plan being implemented in an effective and efficient manner? In addition, we may need to do a better job of touting our efforts.

Many of Mr. Jaramillo's issues fall under the domain of the county's Social Services Division (SSD) (as an aside, Paul Andrus, Community development Director, reports that over 130 affordable housing units are "in the works" along DP road). The Social Services Division manages the Health Care Assistance Program, which supports access to health-related programs and services for indigents. The Division also manages Social Services Contracts with half a dozen agencies who provide a wide range of programming for families, youth, and seniors throughout the community. Lastly, the Division coordinates the work of the Los Alamos Community Health Council (CHC) and supports the work of the local DWI Planning Council, both of which hold monthly public meetings (see attachment C for a description of SSD programs). Concerns about Gross Receipts Taxes from LANL forced the county to adopt a "flat" budget for FY2019 and agency funding fell short of the proposed amounts. The Youth Resiliency Committee, chaired by Ms. Kristine Coblentz, is a subcommittee of the CHC; their mission is to promote well-being for youth and their families by bringing awareness to issues, highlighting activities, and promoting resources in and around our community.

One of the council's community goals is to support Los Alamos Public Schools. The county does this by partnering with Los Alamos Public Schools to provide funding for school projects as appropriate. The schools' access to students gives them powerful leverage to address youth health-related issues. In recent years the county's partnership has fostered the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board (JJAB) and the new Teen Center operated by the YMCA under a contract with the Social Service Division (see attachment D for a description of Teen Center concerns). Because physical and emotional wellness is important to a student's ability to focus on learning, the schools now have a Healthy Schools Initiative directed by Kristine Coblentz.

The current Leadership Los Alamos (LLA) group had their Youth Session at the Teen Center on November 9. It was chaired by Sylvan Argo and George Marsden. In the morning they had World Café-style discussion where the LLA guests included a veritable "who's who" of adult sponsors of youth activities from scouting to JJAB to Kiwanis. There was a youth panel discussion in the afternoon. Some of the youth comments raised serious concerns for some LLA members (see attachment E, a note from LLA member Dick Martin).

At their Monday, November 19 meeting the Youth Resiliency Committee discussed the data in the Youth Risk and Resiliency (YRRS) survey of youth resiliency (see attachment F for a description of trends in the YRRS survey results). Los Alamos Living Treasure, Chick Keller, likes to pose three questions – What? So, What? And Then What? This evening we will use the objective data of the 2017 YRRS (complete survey in attachment H) and expert testimony to address the “what” question. The “so what” question concerns the health risk behaviors of our young people – substance abuse/DWI/addiction, teen pregnancy, and suicide. The county and schools have done a lot to address the “then what” question. The effectiveness of these efforts needs to be assessed. Are we doing enough? Are we doing the right things? Some of these efforts need to be celebrated. In an op ed State Senator Cisco McSorley describes his concerns about “vaping” and his proposed legislation (see attachment G).

We expect expert testimony from:

- Ms. Kristine Coblentz to describe the "Healthy Schools Initiative and Prevention Program strategies" and review the results of the YRRS survey.
- Chief Sgambellone describe the concerns of our police.
- Donna Casados to describe LAC Social Services Division
- Lisa Zuhn to review efforts of the JJAB.
- Ms. Sylvan Argo could describe impressions from the Teen Center vantage point.