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Human Services

The Human Services Committee of Community Board No. 2, Manhattan held its regular monthly meeting by Zoom on November 29, 2021, at 6:30pm.

Committee Members Present: Susanna Aaron, Chair; Adam Zeldin, Vice Chair; Ivy Kwan Arce; William Benesh, Keen Berger, Ritu Chattree, Wayne Kawadler

Committee Members Absent Without Notice: John Paul Deverna

Public Members Present: Rachel Yarmolinsky

Other CB2 Members Present: Michael Levine, Ryder Kessler

CB2 Staff Present: Bob Gormley, District Manager

Agenda: Meeting with Kelsey Louie, the new Chief Executive Officer of The Door.

REPORT

Kelsey Louie was appointed CEO of The Door about five months ago. For the previous seven years he served as CEO of Gay Men's Health Crisis, and before that spent seven years as COO of Harlem United, an HIV organization. He has worked in child therapy, substance abuse prevention, and foster care prevention. He holds an MBA as well as an MSW.

SERVICES

The Door runs a host of programs to service young adults. It is a Federally Qualified Health Center; it shares a building with Broome Street Academy, a charter high school that it founded but that is now independent of The Door; and it delivers comprehensive services in a drop-in model. It offers legal services with a staff of 25 attorneys, working mostly on immigration issues. It also offers mental health services, substance abuse counseling, arts programming, runaway and homeless youth services. In the East Village it operates a housing facility for 100 young people.

The Door offers food, clothing, and showers for day shelter, but does not provide overnight drop-in, and because of COVID its center is not currently open on Saturdays. Of its clientele, which was about 11,000 pre-COVID, roughly 10% is "transitory" (discontinuously) homeless. The Door is familiar with the relationship between youth homelessness, survival sex work, and domestic violence, and hence works closely with Ali Forney Center and Hetrick Martin to ensure youth a continuum of services.

It runs career and education services that offer everything from career access pathways, job readiness and job placement programs. A partnership with Old Navy has provided jobs to about 400 young people whose average length of employment has proved longer than that of the average non-Door employee, thanks to The Door's ongoing job coaching. The Door runs training in culinary arts and EMT.

Donors are asking The Door to focus on training for jobs that provide higher wages, like tech, and not just retail. Per Scholas is helping with tech placements. The Door knows that in order to lift a family out of poverty, people need to make more than 2 ½ times the poverty level. It sometimes frames itself as an anti-poverty organization, and while it calls itself a youth development organization, it is also trying to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

CLIENTELE

Its program is open to ages 12 to 24, though 97% of clientele is at least 16 years old. 81% of clients identify as Black or latino, 40% as immigrants, 20% as LGBTQ. 19% of clients hail from Manhattan; 30% from Brooklyn, 29% from the Bronx, 14% from Queens, and 1% from Staten Island. About 15% have been involved in the criminal justice system, and 15% in the foster care system.

Broome Street Academy reserves 50% of its 330 spots for young people who have been involved either in the foster care system or the criminal justice system. The student body ranges across abilities and needs. Six students have reached the final round for a national scholarship, while others struggle just to attend. New York State funds about 90% of the school's \$7.5 million budget.

BUDGET

The Door's 2020 budget was \$26 million, 50% from government grants. The largest source of income is from contracts, particularly with New York City. Approximately \$3.5 million comes from Medicaid or third party reimbursement. About \$1.5 million comes from individual donations. It receives about \$900,000 from discretionary NYC Council funds spread across several programs, including career and education, runaway youth, and legal services.

The organization considers itself well-funded and its donors have been "generous and understanding."

Budget allocation by program is 27% for career and education services; 23% for mental health and personal development; 18% for its health center; 16% for management and general expenses; 11% for providing legal services; 3% for fundraising; and 2% for nutrition services that include the culinary training program, free meals, and since COVID also a pantry program with to-go meals.

IMPACT OF COVID:

As it did for so many organizations, COVID made difficult the mission of operating a multi-service organization with integrated and coordinated care. Word of mouth and physical encounters are important to its drop-in method of service delivery. It saw a sharp decrease in people served – from about 11,000, to about 7,500 in 2020 - which also proved clients' reliance on the drop-in model. The climate of race-based violence throughout the last year also contributed to many feeling "exhausted and burned-out."

The health center remained closed for just one week. It increased its use of telehealth and is still using that at a rate of about 20%. It is able to administer the Moderna vaccine, but not the Pfizer – which is recommended for younger patients – because it lacks appropriate refrigeration equipment, so it instead refers young patients to partner clinics that offer Pfizer. A mobile van approach did not receive much uptake, for reasons difficult to track. The Door does not provide COVID testing but has arranged for Housing Works to come on-site weekly to do so.

Broome Street Academy has been in-person since the fall. Other programs have opened up as needed and as requested, so the center is slowly returning toward being fully open. Its leadership hasn't determined whether the goal is to return to 100% in-person – a model that is traditional to The Door and that has proven successful – or if it sees a need to adapt to a model with greater remote services. Its reopening committee meets weekly.

MONITORING SUCCESS

Louie aims to go beyond contract deliverables in The Door's programs. Funders generally measure performance through *outputs*: ie, number of meals, number of students. Louie is adding *outcome* measures: what was the result, say, of a client's 30 mental health visits? The Door is also embarking on a study with researchers at NYU for long-term program evaluation. This is currently finishing its first phase of examining the questions relevant for study. The study will be aided by data that The Door has collected. This will be useful for competitive funding and for replicating the model of service.

LOOKING FORWARD

While most of his time is absorbed in operations, Louie is considering strategic initiatives:

-Are we offering the right menu of services? There has been an increased need for mental health services, for example. We are in the process of applying to be an Article 31 mental health clinic and to increase our capacity in mental health services. This would also be able to generate revenue for the organization through Medicaid reimbursements.

-Do we have the right pathways for young people to receive multiple services, so that we are treating the whole patient and not just the specific symptom that brought him in?

-One of my pet projects will be the LGBTQ parts of The Door. Day to day, it feels to me like our LGBTQ population is higher than our official 20% count. Not everyone checks off the box, but day to day, we see young people who are trying to develop their identity younger and younger. A series of workshops we held on use of pronouns was well received. Our Pride celebrations here are legendary. And we have seen an uptick in requests for Trans health so we are about to launch a Trans health program.

-Next year is our 50th anniversary and we want to make sure that we are doing all we can to contribute to youth services. We know that there are 125,000 young people in New York City who are disconnected to work and school, which is an increase over 2018 and 2019. We would like to contribute to the field by helping other organizations, by providing technical assistance or by replicating our model. We're looking to expand some of our work to the Bronx. We did a short community needs assessment and are looking to add mental health, legal, and supportive housing services there.