



Meeting Minutes

Date: 03-20-2025 **Time:** 3:00 PM

Meeting Called to Order By: Van Roberts

Location: Wayside Center @ 44219 10th St W, Lancaster, CA 93534

Organizations in Attendance

Voices of Our Youth, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Veterans Mental Evaluation Team (VMET), Tarzana Treatment Center, Children's Law Center, Lancaster Police Department, Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers Inc., Law Office of Emily Berger Parent Partner, AV Chambers of Commerce, Sandra's Bridal Collection

Minutes

Minutes were posted to the VOYCC webpage on the Voices of Our Youth website.

Reports

There are no reports at this time.

Old Business

There was no old business at this time.

New Business

Van initiated the meeting by emphasizing that the primary focus is on fostering a sense of community and mutual support among all participants.

In this space, you are entitled to express your thoughts in a respectful manner.

There are numerous activities and issues involving young people in this valley. Without our intervention, the situation is likely to deteriorate further.

At our upcoming meeting, we will extend an invitation to young people to participate. Additionally, Voices of Our Youth will be hosting a youth day and fundraiser on the 29th, and we are looking forward to seeing everyone there.

Van inquired if anyone objected to us inviting young people to the upcoming gathering.

We are passionate about empowering young people to reach their full potential, so let's see what you can do with them. When working with youth, it is important to be genuine and transparent, as they have a keen ability to detect insincerity.

Sandra emphasized that if anyone had an issue with the presence of youth, they were welcome to excuse themselves from the space.

Ken mentioned that he is unable to represent the Sheriff's Department as his primary focus with the LASD is on providing services for veterans. However, he is able to assist in enhancing financial resources and services for veterans families.

Daniella and Dennis are part of the team at the Law Office of Emily Berger. Daniella specializes in working with parents involved in dependency cases, while Dennis is a parent partner who is dedicated to the goal of family reunification.

Van presented our ice breaker activity, asking participants, "What do you want to be known for?"

Dennis emphasized the importance of family rebuilding efforts.

Daniella highlighted the significance of utilizing resources and advocating for others.

Max focused on breaking the harmful cycles within families.

Sarah emphasized the importance of truly seeing people and making them feel valued.

Ginger emphasized the importance of helping others.

Karen M stressed the importance of providing resources and connecting individuals to the help they need.

Sandra emphasized the importance of taking action and getting things done.

Teri emphasized the importance of making a positive impact and being a role model for her children.

Van highlighted the importance of being available for kids to talk to, always being there for them, and serving as a mediator between parents and children.

Van aims to create a comprehensive package (figurative) for presentation to each family, which can be replicated to attract additional resources.

We, the members of this council, hold the solution. Let's unite and collaborate as a team to achieve our goals.

When we first began, the room was filled with more people, but as time passed, the numbers decreased.

Kim introduced herself and shared for the icebreaker activity that she aspires to be recognized for her compassion and dedication to supporting others in need.

Van asked what it meant to engage youth, and Sandra explained that it involved keeping them entertained for long enough that they don't realize they are being entertained. Karen added that it also includes personally involving them and reaching out to connect with them on a deeper level.

Van inquired about the meaning of mentorship, and Daniella expressed that it involves connecting on an emotional level and building a strong relationship. Kim added that it also includes finding connections, building trust, identifying strengths, working on skills, recognizing their worth, and helping them improve. Ken emphasized the importance of building trust, allowing mentees to get to know you as you get to know them, being present for them, and providing guidance.

Van asked Max about the main issues they see in teenagers in the courts, and Max responded that a lack of trust is a significant problem. He mentioned that teenagers often feel like the community is always dictating what they should do, and they don't feel heard.

Kim chimed in, noting that teenagers simply want to do what they want without respecting authority. She added that teenagers are often left to their own devices without proper guidance.

Sandra shared her perspective, highlighting that teenagers sometimes behave like gangs because the gangs provide them with a sense of belonging and identity. She emphasized the importance of setting a better example starting from the home and expressed concern that the community is enabling this behavior.

Ken mentioned that families often reach out to the MET team as a final option for assistance. Those he interacts with understand that his presence does not mean they will be taken to jail, but rather that they will receive the help they need. Ken also ensures to follow up and confirm that the situation has been addressed appropriately.

In today's society, Dennis expressed concern that parents have had much of their authority taken away, and there seem to be no consequences for the actions of children. Children are seemingly let off the hook for almost everything they do. The majority of young individuals are engaging in substance use, including drugs and vaping, with a prevalent push towards marijuana consumption among youth. While there are efforts to educate and guide young people, ultimately, they have the freedom to make their own choices. Often, the blame is placed on parents; however, the circumstances surrounding youth today are vastly different from when we were growing up.

Karen noted that social media plays a significant role in influencing individuals, along with the support and influence of their peer groups.

Sarah mentioned that in the past, we relied on parents and teachers for validation, but now validation can come from strangers.

Dennis emphasized that while a vast amount of information online is not accurate, youth tend to trust it.

___ of the parent has been taken away.

Teri highlighted that numerous parents attempt to weaponize law enforcement.

Van expressed that many parents are unable to fulfill their parenting responsibilities either because they are not actively parenting or because they feel restricted by existing laws and regulations.

Teri highlighted that the challenge lies in children being perceived as adults and being granted adult privileges that they are not ready for, rather than it being a problem with parents. This can hinder parents from fulfilling their roles effectively.

Sandra mentioned that during her time in law enforcement, parents were encouraged to discipline their children in front of them. This practice aimed to deter children from viewing law enforcement as a threat or a means of punishment. Additionally, it was believed that this approach could potentially decrease the number of false reports of abuse made by children.

Sarah mentioned that there are emerging elements in today's landscape, and the stakes have been raised.

Dennis finds it challenging to provide a straightforward answer as the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has a tendency to escalate minor issues into major concerns.

Sarah mentioned that certain situations may require additional padding, while others may not.

It is crucial for parents to cultivate empathy and provide support for their children.

Van mentioned that in the VOY program Streets to Suites, we often encounter challenging situations with participants, especially when it involves children. Making the right decision in these situations can be difficult at times.

Dennis revealed that one out of every five households in the Antelope Valley has experienced involvement with DCFS. He also mentioned that the longer a child spends in the foster care system, the more detrimental it can be.

For instance, a child who is taken out of a home due to an unsanitary living environment may be separated for 18 months or longer. Parents typically begin to emotionally detach after 3 months of separation. This prolonged separation can have enduring impacts on the children, affecting their academic performance and grades.

Van shared a story about a family he worked with.

The core of our youth lies within each and every one of us. Together, we form a community where everyone has a voice. This sense of unity is what defines us. That's community!

Van remembered his childhood, where his neighbors played a significant role in shaping his upbringing. These neighbors were more than just people living nearby; they also served as surrogate parents, providing essential support when his own parents were busy or absent.

Kim emphasized the importance of collective effort in raising our children, highlighting that we cannot depend solely on law enforcement or schools for this crucial task. She stressed that waiting until high school is too late to intervene effectively.

Parents must be purposeful in their approach to raising children. Allowing social media to solely influence our kids is not an option. It is crucial for us, as parents, to actively be present in our children's lives. Building a strong sense of community around our children is essential for their well-being.

Van explained that the solution lies in having a foundation of support that is reinforced by another layer of support.

The current trajectory suggests that significant changes are on the horizon.

Dennis shared his frustration regarding the absence of programs and tutors in the Antelope Valley post-Covid. He observed that most of the funding goes to wealthier schools, leaving others behind. Dennis questioned the lack of proactive planning for crucial resources like tutors, academic support, and social activities to help students transition back to school and bridge the gaps in their learning.

Many young individuals experience the fear of being perceived as unintelligent, leading them to avoid attending classes. Educators often advise students to search for solutions on search engines like Google.

Ken emphasized the significance of community and how it plays a vital role in the lives of foster kids. These youth are able to connect with each other as they navigate through the system, offering support and understanding. The

challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase of 800 calls, resulting in a higher rate of relapses among individuals seeking assistance.

Dennis mentioned that online learning was not proving to be effective or successful.

Kim emphasized the significance of community when asked about its importance. She highlighted that as a parent, having a strong community is extremely vital. From her church family to engaging in activities, especially with a child who has ADHD, she stressed the need for a supportive community where trust is paramount. In her role as an employee of the Police Department, Kim mentioned that they hold meetings to strategize on ways to keep the community engaged. These meetings involve focus groups with parents, kids, and other community members to collaborate on initiatives and decisions.

Van revealed exciting news about a new skating rink in development for youth. The venue has been acquired and will be located on Valley Central Way.

Sarah said that in the absence of structured activities for youth, safe spaces are scarce. She reminisced about her childhood, where she enjoyed playing with dolls, spending time outdoors, and engaging in activities like writing out dictionary words. These simple activities brought her a sense of inner peace and contentment.

Dennis believes that children facing challenges often come from single-parent households. He believes that having both parents involved is essential for children to receive a well-rounded upbringing.

Van shared that he serves as a mentor and role model for numerous children in the community, taking on the roles of a big brother or father figure. He is dedicated to equipping them with the necessary skills and guidance to navigate their journey into manhood.

Van transitioned to discussing the March 29th community event and fundraiser, highlighting the shift in focus from simply raising funds to providing a platform for youth to express themselves. He emphasized the power of art in allowing young individuals to showcase their emotions and inner thoughts through their performances and creations. Van noted that the art created by youth serves as a window into their thoughts and feelings, effectively communicating their experiences and perspectives.

Dennis told us about a program at his church called Life Hurts God Heals, which he actively participated in. He described it as a beneficial program that supported young people in dealing with their challenges. Through his work with young people, he emphasized the importance of authenticity, noting that it is crucial for building connections with them.

Van discussed an exciting concept for the upcoming March 29th event. He shared his idea of setting up a professional boxing ring with a renowned boxer in attendance. The goal is to provide youth with the opportunity to step into the ring, hold a championship boxing belt, and experience the feeling of being a champion. This experience aims to showcase that we are all equal on the same ground, with only the future ahead of us. By looking forward to and striving for success, one can achieve that champion status. Meeting a true boxing legend and holding the belt can serve as a powerful motivator for the youth to aim high and pursue their dreams.

Van shared that we are also serving FREE hotdogs to all youth in attendance. It is important that they leave with a full stomach.

He then recounted an uplifting anecdote about two African American teenagers who approached him for assistance. The teens explained that their aunt had passed away, and they were in need of funds for her burial. In a gesture of kindness, he provided them with some donated items to sell.

A few days later, the teens returned, expressing that they were still short \$285 and inquired if there was anything else they could sell. Without hesitation, he retrieved a box of games from the garage and offered it to them. Grateful for his support, the boys thanked him and departed.

During their conversation, the teens revealed that they preferred to earn money through hard work rather than resorting to criminal activities. They confided in him that his assistance had deterred them from engaging in unlawful behavior. It was a confirmation of what he already suspected, having noticed a gun tucked into one of the boys' belts earlier.

Van shared this anecdote to illustrate the impact of showing kindness and taking the time to listen. In our fast-paced lives, we often overlook the importance of truly listening to others. By simply asking and genuinely caring, people will often open up about their struggles or needs. It all comes down to the way we engage with them. Let's remember to be compassionate, patient,

and consider how we would want someone to treat our own loved ones in similar situations.

Then Van concluded the meeting, and everyone dispersed for the day.

Other Information

None to report at this time.

Committee Reports

No reports at this time.

Announcements

No announcements at this time.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned around 5:00 pm.

Next Meeting

Thursday, March 20, 2025, @ Wayside Center @ 44215 10th St W, Lancaster, CA 93534, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.