



# MEETING MINUTES

## COMMUNITY INCLUSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

### CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chair, Ms. Fields, called the Community Inclusion Advisory Committee (CIAC) meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. in Council Chamber, 5555 Perimeter Drive.

### ROLL CALL

Members Present: Ingrid Fields, Kristine Aldemir, Crystal Maiuri

Members Absent: Ming Yu, Imran Malik

Staff Present: Christine Nardecchia

Guests: Sara Harrison-Mills, Syntero, CEO; Susan Ortega, Syntero, Chief Program Director

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fields inquired if there were any corrections to the August 8, 2025 CIAC minutes. [No corrections were requested.]

Ms. Aldemir moved, Ms. Maiuri seconded approval of the meeting minutes.

Vote: Ms. Maiuri, yes; Ms. Aldemir, yes; Ms. Fields, yes.

[Motion approved 3-0]

Ms. Fields inquired if there were any corrections to the joint 09-09-25 Advisory Committee minutes. [No corrections were requested.]

Ms. Mauri moved, Ms. Aldemir seconded approval of the meeting minutes.

Vote: Ms. Maiuri, yes; Ms. Aldemir, yes; Ms. Fields, yes.

[Motion approved 3-0]

### CITIZEN COMMENTS

There were no citizen comments.

### OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

### NEW BUSINESS

- **Presentation – Suicide Prevention Awareness – Syntero**

CEO Sara Harrison-Mills and Chief Program Officer Susan Ortega from Syntero presented an update on their agency's suicide prevention awareness program.

Ms. Harrison-Mills provided an overview of Syntero, explaining that they are a mental health and recovery board serving Franklin, Morrow, and Delaware counties. She detailed their comprehensive

services including outpatient therapy at two locations, telehealth services, psychiatry and medication management, case management services that involve going into homes to help link individuals with resources, and aging supportive services for older adults in the northwest quadrant of Franklin County, including Dublin, Upper Arlington, and Hilliard. She emphasized their extensive school-based program, currently serving 12 school districts across three counties, including Dublin City Schools, Hilliard, Upper Arlington, and Grandview Heights, as well as four public school districts each in Delaware and Morrow counties.

Ms. Ortega then presented current mental health trends, starting with broad statistics and narrowing to the local community. She noted that the percentage of Ohio adults reporting frequent poor mental health days increased by 20 percent from 2011 to 2020, with the largest increase occurring among young Ohioans aged 18 to 24. She discussed the Ohio YES survey results from 2022-2023, which found that 37 percent of kids reported feeling sad or hopeless every day for the past two weeks, a key indicator for suicidal ideation and depression. The 2024 state mental health report revealed that one in five kids had at least one major depressive episode in the last year, with more than half not receiving treatment.

Ms. Harrison-Mills stated that the decade leading up to the pandemic had already shown a trend of increasing mental health disorders. Since the pandemic, while there have been increased conversations about mental health and reduced stigma in many communities, there has also been a significant workforce shortage, creating a crisis in access to care that has affected the country, Ohio, and the local community. She stressed that community connection is a significant protective factor for individuals of all ages in reducing the likelihood of developing mental health disorders or increasing their ability to seek support if they have one.

When asked about the demographics covered, Ms. Ortega clarified that the data primarily represented high schools that administered the Ohio YES survey tool, as each district decides which grade levels to include.

Ms. Ortega encouraged the committee to explore the Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition, which has been rebuilding since 2019 and offers a speakers bureau for trainings throughout Franklin County. She noted that the coalition has representatives from every sector, including faith communities, young adults, and different ethnic backgrounds, with various action teams focusing on different areas. From the 2024 Franklin County report, she shared the statistic that from July 2022 to June 2024, the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline received over 37,000 calls from Franklin County community members experiencing mental health crises.

Ms. Ortega revealed that in 2022, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death among Franklin County residents, accounting for 168 deaths. Among youth ages 13 to 18 and young adults 19 to 24, suicide was the second and third leading cause of death respectively. She highlighted concerning trends in the non-Hispanic Black community, where younger age groups have had higher suicide rates, with suicide rates among residents 15 to 24 increasing 70 percent from 2019 to 2022. Firearms continue to be the main method of death by suicide both nationally and locally, accounting for just under 50 percent of suicides in Franklin County.

Ms. Ortega stated that it is important to understand how suicide impacts the Dublin community specifically. She indicated that Mobile Response Stabilization Services (MRSS) is a crisis response team for youth that families can contact through calling 988. The team comes to homes or

community locations to assess situations and provide crisis intervention or linkage to further evaluation. Different providers serve different counties, with Nationwide Children's serving Franklin County and Ohio Guidestone serving Delaware and Morrow counties. She noted that while this service is established for children, the adult system is still being developed, though the Franklin County Crisis Center recently opened for adults only.

Ms. Harrison-Mills and Ms. Ortega outlined Syntero's longstanding partnership with Dublin, including participation in the Safe Space Initiative, the Forever Dublin Hub Navigator service for older adults, the Dublin ACT Coalition partnership, content provision for Healthy Dublin articles, Ms. Ortega's five-year term on the Chief's Advisory Council ending in May, and their public safety services liaison position with a clinician embedded with Dublin Police who follows up on referrals for mental health support.

Ms. Harrison-Mills discussed Syntero's involvement in Dublin's community health needs assessment, with representation on three of the four focus groups now part of the Dublin Wellness Alliance: youth behavioral health, healthcare navigation, and community connections workgroups. She emphasized that addressing suicide prevention requires a community-wide effort through ongoing conversations, not just mental health professionals or one-time trainings.

Ms. Harrison-Mills and Ms. Ortega shared their history of partnering with Dublin on two town hall events: a suicide prevention town hall in September 2021, which addressed social media effects and loneliness among young people and social isolation among aging adults, and a second town hall in November 2022 focusing on the importance of connection and community. Ms. Harrison-Mills noted that their organization had presciently identified social isolation and loneliness as focus areas in February 2020, just before the pandemic shutdown, emphasizing that community connection is a huge protective factor.

Ms. Ortega explained their purpose for attending the meeting was to seek input and guidance on crafting a series of community conversations for 2026 and asked for the committee's thoughts on structure and cultural considerations. She emphasized wanting to facilitate conversations that fit each community rather than coming in as experts.

Discussion occurred among committee members. Ms. Aldemir suggested creating more intimate, cozy neighborhood environments for conversations rather than large town halls, offering coffee and water, recognizing that different neighborhoods have different needs - some missing family, others worried about paychecks. She shared personal experiences of reaching out to lonely neighbors during holidays, making 10-15 phone calls to people she knew would be alone. She recalled how Upper Arlington had a "friendly calls" program where volunteers would call homebound individuals twice weekly, which at that time, benefited her mother-in-law.

Ms. Nardecchia clarified that getting volunteers is not an issue; the challenge is getting seniors to sign up for services. Their experience shows older adults are more willing to participate when asked to assist teenagers in gaining experience through intergenerational programs.

Ms. Maiuri noted the opportunity for religious organizations to reach out, particularly for the African American community where people traditionally "share their concerns with Jesus." She emphasized the value of faith leaders reaching out to their congregations. Ms. Maiuri stated that socioeconomic factors contribute to suicide, noting that some families struggle to get into the Dublin school district, creating stress and anxiety. She suggested partnering with the Dublin Food Pantry to

reach struggling families, emphasizing the need to "go to the people" rather than expecting them to come out when battling depression.

Discussion touched on the importance of reaching various cultural groups. Ms. Aldemir shared that misunderstandings can occur when communities do not understand different cultural practices. She stated that some cultures view discussing mental health as shameful or a show of weakness.

Ms. Maiuri recommended that Syntero connect with the Veterans Committee, noting that through her work at the Veterans Administration, she has become aware of the significant suicide prevention needs in the veteran population. She suggested having speakers from the various Franklin County Society of Community Prevention agencies talk to veterans.

The committee discussed various outreach methods, with Ms. Maiuri proposing a Dublin pen pal program for creating off-computer connections, noting how meaningful physical letters can be compared to digital communication. Ms. Aldemir shared how serving others, like her experience cooking at the Ronald McDonald House, creates a "helper's high" that benefits mental health.

When asked about measuring community engagement, committee suggestions included monitoring social media platforms specific to different cultures (like WeChat for the Chinese community), going to existing groups rather than expecting attendance at large forums, and utilizing faith communities, neighborhood groups, and cultural meetings.

Ms. Ortega expressed gratitude for the feedback, emphasizing this is not a one-and-done situation but requires multiple approaches including intimate conversations, information dissemination to those working multiple jobs, and partnerships with organizations like One Dublin and the food pantry.

- **2026 MLK Sunday Supper Topic and Facilitation**

Ms. Nardecchia presented a draft plan for the 2026 MLK Sunday Supper, emphasizing this was not the final iteration and invited committee feedback. She explained that while they did not want to celebrate Dr. King's birthday by explicitly discussing suicide, the event would focus on "how we take better care of each other." The proposed panel would include Dr. Marchhausen, Chief Páez, Chief O'Donohue from Washington Township, and Ms. Ortega from Syntero.

The objective would be to have individual table discussions to inform the suicide prevention or mental health and wellness town hall, normalizing conversations about taking care of one another. Using feedback from Dublin Parents of Black Students, the proposed table questions include: Do civil and social justice values create barriers to mental health in Dublin? Is Dr. King's vision of bringing all social classes together important for caring for one another? What should a mental health and wellness town hall address? How do we normalize discussing it?

Ms. Maiuri suggested changing the first question from "civil and social justice values" to "socioeconomic factors contribute to or create barriers to mental health," explaining that financial struggles are real in Dublin despite the City's wealth bubble, with some families struggling to pay even \$25 parent group dues. She emphasized that these struggles contribute to mental health issues and that issue within the community should be brought to light.

Ms. Aldemir shared an example of stress caused by economic disparities among Dublin students, where well-to-do students would buy Starbucks coffee and snacks for friends who could not reciprocate, causing stress for families who could not afford such expenses.

The committee discussed how to frame the conversation within the community context, discussing how to look out for one another rather than explicitly discussing suicide prevention. Ms. Mauri suggested adding a question about recommendations for social outreach with neighbors, encouraging people to share how they feel comfortable connecting with community members.

Ms. Nardecchia noted that Washington Township, police, and schools are very aware of this issue. She requested that committee members serve as table facilitators, noting that this discussion would be a grassroots conversation. She mentioned incorporating information about the Safe Space initiative at the event.

The committee agreed to move forward with the refined questions and approach.

- **2026 Proposed CIAC Meeting Calendar**

Christine Nardecchia presented the proposed 2026 meeting calendar for CIAC. She noted that the current cadence of meeting every other month has worked well and proposed continuing this pattern. The proposed dates include meetings in February, April, June, August, October and December.

Committee members expressed satisfaction with the every-other-month cadence.

Ms. Aldemir moved, Ms. Mauri seconded approval of the proposed 2026 meeting calendar.

Roll call: Ms. Aldemir, yes; Ms. Mauri, yes; Ms. Fields, yes.  
[Motion approved 3-0.]

## **STAFF COMMENTS**

- **Inclusion Updates**

Christine Nardecchia provided updates on inclusion efforts throughout the City, focusing on December activities. She began by highlighting the strong momentum in intergenerational connections through the Teen Buddies program, which pairs high school students with older adults in one-on-one relationships. She explained the program's evolution from a COVID-era, letter-writing campaign to pen pals, then phone calls, and now in-person connections. The program, now in its fifth year, has created lasting lifetime relationships, with teens planning gatherings and events while maintaining regular phone contact with their older adult partners. Syntero now helps these teens work through issues of grief or loss as their older adult partners face health challenges.

The Kids in Dublin Service program engages K-5 students in giving activities, primarily based at Avondale with older adults. In November, the children made treats for election poll workers.

“Shop with a Hero” took place on December 9th, pairing first responders with families and children in need for holiday shopping. Despite the very cold weather on Saturday, December 13th, former Grand Leprechauns successfully produced an event honoring every veteran buried in the Historic Dublin cemetery.

Ms. Nardecchia noted that *Dublin Life* magazine highlighted the 10-year anniversary of Dublin's friendship with Mashiko, Japan, including a photograph of former Mayor Mike Keenan from 10 years ago in Mashiko formally forming the international friendship.

The Link Ahead podcast recently featured newly-named One Dublin executive director Brian Carr, who has a faith background. One Dublin provides utility assistance, household goods assistance, and other support for Dublin families in need. Ms. Nardecchia encouraged committee members to listen to the City's podcast during their commutes.

The Dublin Link pedestrian bridge has been lit for various occasions in December, starting with a popular post for the first days of Hanukkah beginning Monday. There was a resident request for "Light the Way to Learning" through Restoring Rainbows Dublin. The bridge will also be lit for both Christmas and Kwanzaa at the end of the month. The lighting schedule is available on the City's website, with scheduling criteria requiring at least 30 days notice and meeting specific requirements.

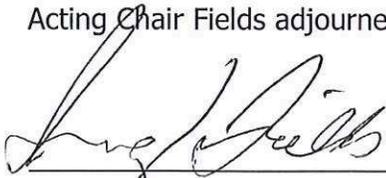
In response to Ms. Maiuri's inquiry asked about potential new members for the committee, Ms. Nardecchia explained that the terms of two council members are ending and two new Council members will be seated in January 2026. The new Council would have their organizational meeting on January 5, 2026 to decide on mayor and vice mayor appointments and committee assignments. The Administrative Committee, which oversees Council's board and commission recruitment, would then review all its boards and commissions including CIAC. Ms. Nardecchia noted that while there are CIAC applications in the pipeline, the new Council members would want to look at committee composition, focus areas, and representation to ensure that body truly represents the community.

## **ROUNDTABLE**

There was no Roundtable discussion.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Acting Chair Fields adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

  
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Ingrid Fields, Acting Chair

  
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Assistant Clerk of Council