Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF)

Ombudsperson Board for Asian Pacific Families

Tuesday, June 24, 2025, 6:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

Minutes prepared by KH

# Present:

Ombudsperson for Asian Pacific Families Manuel B. Zuniga, Jr. (MBZ), Brook Mallak (BM), Derek Kuns (DK), Sergeant Toy Vixayvong (TV, special presenter), Katie Heilman (KH) taking minutes.

# Absent:

Thanh Glasco (TG), Yi Li You (YLY)

# Minutes

1. BM decided to start the presentation with TV at 6:02pm since quorum was not needed for a community presentation.
2. TV originally came from Laos and has worked as a police officer in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. He is currently with the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD) gang unit. There is a focus on prevention and intervention in SPPD’s gang unit now. TV collected some colleagues to get into the schools to prevent and intervene instead of arresting through the problem of drug use, as well as to be a resource. Humboldt High School’s Karen community was seeing overdoses among students. TV and his colleagues took the time to break down that barrier of students assuming a police presence meant they were getting arrested, such as going into schools in plainclothes instead of uniforms. In the 90s the new Asian immigrants formed gangs to protect themselves from getting picked on, but this eventually turned into infighting within communities. TV visits the Juvenile Detention Center once they’re arrested to try to stop them from going further down that path. TV attended a course at the University of Minnesota on Suboxone, a medication that helps treat opioid addiction. He then worked with parents and got permission that they can work with those students and check in at school, as well as get them prescribed Suboxone. This has to happen at the University of Minnesota, because minors can’t be prescribed Suboxone in Ramsey County. When the program grew to 60 kids, TV reached out to Urban Village, a Karenni nonprofit, to help the kids – they have 16 mentors who can work with the kids after school and get them to their Suboxone appointments. Humboldt High School is now down to zero overdose calls, and other schools with Karenni communities (Como, Washington) have reached out. TV and his colleagues started getting tutors for the kids since they were struggling with academics, and now most are passing classes, and some are graduating. TV made connections with Minnesota Trades Academy to introduce students to the trades, so if they aren’t going to college, they have options. Interns are paid $16 per hour, 32 hours per week over the summer. Funding is available for 2 years – at the end of the program, they get offered free drivers’ education. Next year TV and his colleagues will start going into middle schools to reach out to the younger siblings, and they have formed a partnership with the Hmong American Partnership. TV believes this is the future of policing to really serve the community.
3. MBZ asked about how funding works. Nonprofits do most of their own funding – the more kids they can recruit, the better chance they can get funding from the state. TV also looks for opportunities for funding via the police department.
4. MBZ asked if there are ways the OBFF could collaborate with SPPD for this effort, such as sharing information on the website or newsletter. BM mentioned child protection is on the periphery of what TV and his colleagues are doing – noticing issues in home situation, spotting barriers between families and government agencies. BM brought up cultural brokers, who can help increase trust with families for government agencies. MBZ mentioned OBFF could collaborate with TV for navigating state government bureaucracy.
5. MBZ asked how much training law enforcement officers in SPPD receive for child removal situations. TV replied that there is training on that at the academy, and they have to keep up with that training and cultural sensitivity training annually. TV mentioned he wanted to get more training for officers on this subject. There are also issues of working at night and struggling to find relatives for child placement after all the usual resources have closed for the day. Often, officers have to put kids in a shelter because it is too late at night to find relative care. BM suggested setting up a task force or emergency response team to handle those late-night situations (with Urban Village and Hmong American Partnership) – they can help kids find relatives in the middle of the night. MBZ asked if there are issues with finding interpreters in those situations – TV says yes, and there are also issues with running into time constraints (how much time do we spend trying to find connections for the child vs taking other calls).
6. MBZ suggested this is a great opportunity to create a multi-disciplinary team, as there are many issues that could be solved through collaborating with different entities. TV suggested assistant chief Paul Ford and all the deputy chiefs would love to have that conversation. TV mentioned a few issues with using Language Line for interpreters: it’s not a personal connection, technology issues, miscommunication – it can all cause issues with the communication with families. BM suggested interpreters she has worked with who could be on call – they are from those communities and would have a better time communicating.
7. MBZ asked if there are things he is seeing that are community-specific. The high availability of opioids is a major issue. The kids get fentanyl from their friends for free and then get hooked, or they start out of boredom. TV mentioned wanting to get into the churches to educate the families, but there are cultural issues with families struggling who get shunned and then are too embarrassed to seek help. TV will bring doctors with him to help with education – how to use Narcan, for example.
8. MBZ asked if there are similar initiatives for other communities? TV explained that based on ER reports, Somali students are starting to overdose, so SPPD wants to get into that community. MBZ said that the joint boards may be interested in a presentation. BM suggested that TV reach out to Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families, as well.
9. BM said that this is her last board meeting – she is having health issues and will need to resign to cut back on extracurricular activities. She will send a formal notice of resignation this week.
10. Because the meeting did not have quorum, no official motion was needed to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 6:58pm.