

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Special Scheduled Meeting
Minutes
November 14, 2019
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a 'Special Scheduled Meeting' on November 14, 2019 at 8:30 a.m. in the Local Agency's Administrative Conference room located at 423 North Main Street in Kenansville N.C. Prior and Public Notice of the meeting was given in accordance with G.S. 143-318.12.

Board members present for today's meeting were Mr. Jesse Dowe, Ms. Angela Mainor, and Ms. Ila Davis and Mr. Gary Ange participated in the meeting by phone. Also present for the meeting were Mrs. Susan Thigpen, Director; and Ms. Angela Miller, Administrative Assistant. The Invocation for today's meeting was given by Susan Thigpen.

No changes or amendments were made to the agenda and there were no public comments received during the Public Comment section of the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Ila Davis to accept the minutes from the September 24, 2019 Open Session and was approved by the Board.

New Business

Board members inquired about whether notices of Board meetings clearly indicate that these are open meetings and there is opportunity for public comment. Ms. Susan Thigpen will look into how regularly scheduled and special scheduled meetings are publicized and will ensure that this language is included in the future.

Budget Report - Expenditures continue to be on track at this time according to reports. Contracted Food Stamp Payment to State appears as though it will be overspent this year but there was a large payment taken out previously and there is no reason to believe that we would go over since we generally spend about \$1,000.00 a month. Office Machine/Building (Lease) Rent also reflects potential overspending; however, there is a one-time payment of \$13,000 for rent of the Quinn Building for 2019-2020.

Income Maintenance/Child Support – Duplin County Social Services is currently underspending in daycare funds and has a spending coefficient of only 78%. The state had suspended counties' option to add children but the supervisor met with our State Consultant yesterday and Duplin County will be able to add approximately 225 children from the waiting list to active daycare assistance. The daycare worker will be adding approximately 50 children at a time so continued eligibility and need can be verified and services can be approved. Individuals are allowed to pick the daycare that they would like their children to attend. Since staff has been cross training recently, there is no reason to believe that the agency will not be able to manage the increase in cases over the next few months.

Child support is a yearly measure for the MOU and the projected benchmarks indicate we are not meeting it for paternity establishment by .25% and for total collections we were only off by .85%. We have collected a substantially larger amount of money this year as compared to where we were at this time last year. A recent audit of daycare found only one overpayment in the amount of \$2.00.

LIEAP will begin in December for the county's elderly population. In the past, the agency has contracted with retired staff but there are no longer any retired staff interested in contracting so the agency will be

using newer staff to manage LIEAP cases. We can re-examine this if the county is unable to meet the need.

Despite ongoing turnover, the agency is hoping to change the way Income Maintenance cases are handled based on feedback received by staff leaving for employment at other agencies and existing employees. Workers will be doing only applications or recertifications rather than both and this should be easier for new workers to learn job functions and duties.

Personnel – The agency continues to struggle with turnover as employees are accepting positions in other counties for higher salaries. Vacancies continue to be problem but many of the current vacancies were the result of promotions within the agency. There were several promotions over the past month to supervision or IMC III positions. This does result in the agency have vacant positions for a longer period of time but should assist in maintaining staff. Child welfare currently has two vacancies – a QA/Trainer and a vacant Social Worker IV position. The replacement for the Social Worker IV position had been selected but she called back to confirm she had accepted a position somewhere else for a higher salary. Most social workers are now carrying full caseloads so it is providing some relief for veteran social workers.

Child Welfare – Caseload sizes have remained fairly stable through September and October. In Home Services cases did increase but this was expected since workers have been diligently working to close cases in a timely manner. Five of the eight cases that are out of compliance for case decisions are due to “other” reasons. Follow-up will be needed to ensure that this is not a trend. All trained social workers are now at or above caseload guidelines. Mr. Gary Ange asked if the state gives counties any guidance as to how to assist workers who are over caseload guidelines. There really is no guidance and counties must figure out how to best help individual workers and Child Welfare units to manage higher caseloads. Since 10:1 is for caseload and not number of children, large families require a substantially greater amount of time to complete case requirements. Ms. Angela Mainor also pointed out that smaller counties have greater challenges finding qualified staff. Mr. Gary Ange expressed concerns that the county remains well over caseload guidelines every month and child safety can obviously be compromised as a result of this and even if child safety is ensured, families cannot receive the quality of services that would be provided from skilled, veteran social workers. Ms. Angela Mainor and Ms. Susan Thigpen both pointed out that children are being protected but social workers are burning out and turnover will continue so they will have to find ways to work better and ensure that caseload requirements and documentation is completed. Turnover is currently a statewide problem in child welfare.

Adult Services was recently monitored and passed all areas of the review. Forty-six cases were reviewed and while all areas were not at 100% compliance, there were no deficiencies or needs identified in the provision of services.

Ms. Susan Thigpen discussed the additional challenge to Child Welfare over the past several months as a result of youth with mental health needs entering DSS custody because our LME/MCO is not working diligently enough to get these youths placed and assuming custody is the only way we can get an expedited evaluation in order to get appropriate placement. Ms. Susan Thigpen has added this subject to the Eastern Regional Director’s Meeting at the end of November to discuss this issue and consider possible solutions. This topic is expected to be an ongoing subject of discussion between counties and the state.

Ms. Angela Mainor raised the question of the QA/Trainers getting paid more than line workers despite their primary job duties continuing to be Assessments. These workers are still accompanying new workers and providing coaching in addition to carrying caseloads. The agency has been working with the two QA/Trainers on reducing their caseloads so we can put them back into their roles as of January. Ms. Angela Mainor has requested a report each month regarding the number of backlog cases each of these workers has and the efforts being made to reduce their backlog each month. These positions should be role models for other social workers and if there are no consequences for backlog the workers will never get these cases out of their office. Ms. Susan Thigpen pointed out that with the shortage of social workers

throughout 2019, the QA/Trainers were often the staff that were tasked with heavier caseloads, at times more than twice as high as caseload standards. The 10:1 standard for cases is just a guideline and social workers should understand that caseloads may be over standards and they have to find ways to manage this.

The one-year director's evaluation was tabled until next month since all Board members were not present on this date.

Director's Update

Medicaid transformation is still moving forward at this time and beneficiaries must enroll with one of the four plans by December 13th or they will be auto assigned. Duplin County Social Services does have an enrollment broker working in the agency five days a week and she has been seeing 40-50 people each week. A low number of individuals have currently enrolled with a plan and a variety of reasons may be contributing to this to include a number of physicians within the county have not enrolled with the plans to date so it is difficult to know which one to go with. The agency is exploring the possibility of having a representative from each of the four plans at the agency one afternoon from around 3:00pm – 6:00 or 7:00 pm to talk with individuals about their plans.

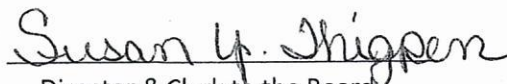
Public Charge Rule is a term used in immigration law to determine whether an individual is likely to become dependent on government for support. Although the appeals court has currently placed an injunction on this until the legality of this rule has been established, unqualified residents continue to have fears about applying for services for which they may qualify. This rule would affect programs that assist with basic needs such as food, housing, or health care. Social Services will continue to provide encouragement to potential beneficiaries about the status of this rule to ensure that children, who would be most impacted by this rule, receive all services that they qualify for and need in order to ensure their welfare.

The NC DSS has recently released a Dear County Director Letter informing counties that they are not to be handling abuse, neglect situations through civil custody orders and will be reviewing a sample of cases over the next month or so in all 100 counties to ensure that juvenile court is being utilized properly. This practice has never been done in Duplin County and juvenile court cases are transferred over to civil court only in situations as outlined in N.C.G.S. 7B-911.

The annual Bake Sale to raise funds for foster children and adult wards will be held the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. The agency will also be selling \$1.00 tickets for a drawing.

Motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Ila Davis to adjourn meeting and motion passed. Mr. Jesse Dowe, who chaired today's meeting, adjourned the meeting until December 23, 2019 at 8:30 a.m. This meeting will be a special scheduled board meeting due to the next regularly scheduled meeting falling on a holiday.


Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on December / 23 / 2019