

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, July 22, 2021
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on July 22, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. in the Social Services Community Room located at 423 North Main St. 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 – chair, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Ila Davis, and Ms. Marzella Morrissey. Ms. Susan Thigpen, DSS Director, was also present for the meeting. The invocation for today's meeting was given by Ms. Marzella Morrissey. No changes or amendments were made to the agenda and there were no public comments received. Mr. Jesse Dowe, Board Chair, will contact the newly appointed Board member, Ken Jones, to swear him prior to our next meeting.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Ila Davis and minutes were approved for the June 24th meeting.

New Business

Budget and Expenditures Report – There are no concerns at this time with the close out on the budget for SFY 2020-21. The agency has submitted a ticket regarding an accounting error at the state resulting in a negative balance in Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP). Funds were over expended in the COVID-Low Income Energy Assistance line item so the state transferred the funds from LIHEAP at the same time they were re-allocating statewide funds. The agency continues to have problems with water coming into the lobby. We have had one person to come out for an estimate and are waiting on a final estimate and are also attempting to find 1-2 additional contractors for estimates. The windows are expected to arrive on the 26th of this month but we are currently unsure when the work will begin.

Revenue collected for State IV-D Child Support for the state fiscal year was 161.57%; especially significant when you consider the amount of time with no court, avenue for enforcing orders

Income Maintenance and Child Support Report – Child support staff were recently awarded plaques and gift cards to recognize the top three workers who achieved the largest amount of collections and largest amount of arrears.

The Board reviewed the data on the MOU measures and the agency did meet the benchmark for all measures except one, including FNS Regular applications. There was one case of two SAD cases that did not meet the timeliness benchmark. This was a worker error and has been addressed to avoid future errors. The management team is continuing to monitor and address any issues.



Economic Benefits units have demonstrated great teamwork during the past month. Staff from all units and the management team worked together to send out recertification letters and to complete accompanying documentation on nearly 400 cases in a single day.

Personnel – Duplin County Social Services is continuing to see a high amount of turnover; most frequently to other DSS agencies. This year has been particularly challenging maintaining adequate staff due to nine prospective employees being selected and later deciding not to accept an offer of employment. As a result, the hiring process is further delayed. Various challenges over the past year to include COVID, job stress, personal issues, and the stressful nature of the job has resulted in more referrals to EAP than we have ever seen before. Ms. Marzella Morrissey expressed interest in having Human Resources Director Pam Brame come and present to the Board on the information employees are providing during their exit conferences but no decision was made by the Board to request that at this time. Board members emphasized the importance of maintaining experienced workers and Ms. Marzella Morrissey noted that the agency should do everything to keep an employee and workers should be promoted based on work experience within Social Services.

Social Work Programs – The number of cases in Assessments and Permanency Planning have remained fairly stable. In Home Services workers have been managing blended caseloads to include Assessments as their caseloads have dropped slightly and the experienced social workers are currently carrying 15-16 total cases. Supervisors and management have recognized the importance of cross training social workers in handling case management responsibilities for both Assessments and In Home services and will focus on this as new hires are brought into the agency so social workers can easily adjust to shifting case management responsibilities as vacancies fluctuate between units. Despite high caseloads, social workers have managed to keep the overdue assessments down to four. This month has seen a significant increase in the seriousness of allegations with multiple reports requiring immediate responses after hours.

Director Susan Thigpen asked the Board to approve filling the two Social Worker IV Trainer positions as regular Social Worker IV positions at this time due to the number of vacancies and the need to utilize these positions to manage caseloads. At some point in the future, these two positions could be filled again by more experienced Social Workers that could function in the role of trainer. Mr. Jesse Dowe indicated that these positions were given to the agency specifically to provide training and support to new social workers as they gain experience in the field and they have not been utilized as they were intended. No decision was made by the Board and these positions will remain vacant at this time and Mr. Dowe indicated that a decision will be made in the future regarding these positions.

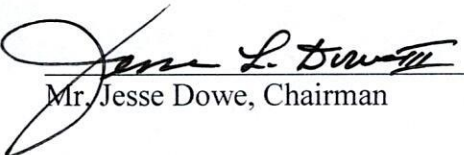
Director's Update

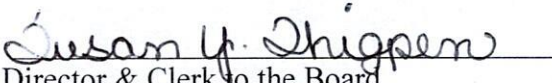
Managed Care has created challenges for some recipients, particularly those in need of mental and behavioral health services that were switched to the Standard Plan. There has been some inconsistent messaging between the Division of Social Services and the

Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services. The agency worked with a local provider over several days to address this issue for a 17-year-old in need of Intensive In Home services. There is a 60-day period during which providers can bill regardless of whether they are included in the assigned PHP but this message has not been adequately conveyed to many providers, resulting in individuals being turned away for services. The agency has assisted Medicaid recipients with these situations to the fullest extent possible.

Duplin County Social Services continues to have monthly conferences with the REDA auditor and she has indicated that the agency is showing a positive upward trend with 16 of 20 cases correct in May versus 13 of 20 in April. Supervisors are conducting unit meetings and one on one training sessions to address error trends. The auditor has noted that it is evident the agency is adequately addressing identifying issues as no trends are continuing at this time.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Marzella Morrissey to go into closed session. Following the closed session, the Board returned to open session and a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on August 26, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. The next meeting will be held at Social Services in the Community Room, allowing for adequate social distancing.


Mr. Jesse Dowe, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: August 26 2021

