

**DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**BOARD MINUTES**

*Regular Scheduled Meeting*

**Minutes**

*Thursday, July 25, 2019*

*8:30 AM*

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a 'Regularly Scheduled Meeting' on July 25, 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. Mike Wallace, the Chairman, Mr. Jesse Dowe, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Ila Davis and Mr. Gary Ange. 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 and seconded and minutes were approved for the June 27, 2019 Board Meeting.

**Old Business**

There was no old business for today's meeting.

**New Business**

Mr. Ange inquired about the possibility of new social workers receiving required training through James Sprunt Community College to reduce training expenses. Mrs. Susan Thigpen explained that all of the required trainings in Child Welfare must either be provided by trainers with the North Carolina Division of Social Services or agency staff who have been approved to provide trainings and agencies are required to open up trainings to other counties in those situations.

Mr. Ange expressed interest in publishing the Social Services Board Meeting Minutes on the agency's website accessed through the Duplin County Government site. He feels that the county will be able to see all of the different programs and services that are offered at this agency. Ms. Susan Thigpen will explore this and follow up with the Board at the next meeting.

**Budget Report** – Ms. Dana Bonneville reported that the 2018-2019 budget has been closed out and the agency reflects spending at 84% of the year's budget. A substantial part of the unspent funds was the result of delays in getting maintenance and grounds repairs done due to hurricane repairs across the county. Social Services will be working diligently to get estimates in the next few months to ensure that needed repairs and maintenance are completed in the 2019-2020 budget year.

Remaining LINKS funds were used to purchase computers for our youth in care and Reunification funds were utilized for a Vanguard employee who assisted with transportation and visits for children in care. The agency will continue to monitor those funds closely in the next budget year to ensure that there are no funds returned to the state at the end of the budget year.

The State has also assumed responsibility for sending the letters to clients demanding payment when clients that have been found guilty of committing fraud for all of our programs so the county has also seen



an increase in collections there. NC FAST (Medicaid) Program & Program Integrity has been successful in collecting funds in fraud cases in Medicaid, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services.

**Adoptions & Foster Care** - Foster care payments for the year were \$108,000. The expenditures are not as high as the allocated amount due to diligent efforts to place children with relatives. The agency will be receiving more than \$40,000.00 in adoption promotion funds for 2018-2019 as a result of finalizing ten (10) adoptions, including a sibling group of four during the year. These funds can be used in a variety of ways to facilitate and support adoptions and staff are exploring ways to best utilize these funds in the upcoming years. The annual Christmas party is one of the ways the agency currently uses these funds.

**Performance Development Plan (PDP)** - Mr. Gary Ange inquired about the status of the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) for Duplin County's child welfare program. Ms. Susan Thigpen explained that the identified needs that have not been fully addressed for the CAP were rolled into the county's Program Development Plan (PDP). The state generally coordinates with the county for updates every six months but there has not been a formal review or update since December 2018 due to numerous changes in the CPR role for Duplin County. We are having our next PDP in October 2019. The agency should be able to clarify the status of our CAP at that time. Mr. Gary Ange indicated that the Board had requested a monthly update on the activities identified as part of the CAP from one of the previous directors and Ms. Susan Thigpen will start providing this at the next Board meeting.

**Child Support** – Ms. Monique Jones provided fiscal year data to confirm that Child Support met their goals except for collections. Our regional program representative Ms. Cora Foreman has been questioned about why Duplin County is struggling with collections and she noted Hurricane Florence had a substantial impact on eastern counties collection rates. Ms. Foreman also indicated that the entire state is not meeting its' goal in collections. The Courts are frequently failing to enforce child support orders for those parents impacted by Hurricane Florence and the Court is now focusing more on "ability to pay" than they have previously, also impacting collections. Our agency is collaborating with James Sprunt Community College to provide clients with information regarding classes for trade skills such as Barber school, truck driving, welding, electronics. James Sprunt Community College also offers training to people on interviewing and work skills. We have seen an increase in the number of Child Support cases. There are a lot of people that have been working repairing homes from the hurricane damage but we will not be able to collect child support since these salaries are often not reported and workers are paid in cash. Attorney Robin Rhodes will be handling child support at this time. The agency is hoping to get a paralegal position in the near future and this person would be able to assist the Child Support Unit and Robin in getting cases calendared and court orders issued in a timely manner.

**Personnel** – Ms. Angie Miller reported that during the month of May, there were five (5) In-House promotions and two (2) new employees were hired; 1 Social Worker and 1 IMC. For June, there have been four (4) In-House promotions. Currently we have nine (9) vacancies. Of the 9 vacancies, 5 are due to In-House promotions. For June we had 4 resignations, in July we had 5 resignations. The agency continues to lose employees to other counties for higher salaries. Ms. Thigpen is conducting Exit Interviews with all employees and salary has been the primary reason for leaving. The County HR Department is experiencing short staff as well and this is causing huge delays in selected employees starting. We are currently waiting on 4 selected applicants' pre-employment screenings to be approved. It was also discussed that 2 applicants that were selected for hire were later rejected as a result of references for one and a criminal record for the second prospective employee.

## **Social Media**

Social Media was discussed among the Board members today. It was suggested by Mr. Gary Ange that if a worker is found to have violated a Social Media policy that his advice is for the Director to have a conversation with the individual and advise them that the issue has been documented and if they continue to violate the county policy that further action will be taken against them. Ms. Ila Davis expressed her



opinion that county employees should not discuss anything pertaining their job on any social media. Ms. Angela Mainor also expressed that she is friends with many workers at DSS on social media and she states that she has observed inappropriate comments on social media. Ms. Angela Mainor agrees that this issue needs to be addressed with the entire agency. Ms. Susan Thigpen will discuss this with employees at the July staff meeting.

**Attorney Services** – Ms. Susan Thigpen stated that due our current County Attorney, Wendi Sivori's resignation, that Attorney Robin Rhodes has agreed to step in and cover the County Attorney's role with regards to DSS. Mr. Gary Ange expressed concern about a single attorney handling child support as well as child welfare and adult services due to some struggles with this previously when the county attorney was handling all of these. The agency is hoping to get a paralegal that would be able to provide some support with this. The ACTS system utilized by Child Support automatically generates court documents and orders to be signed by the County Attorney so be helpful to Attorney Rhodes. The paralegal will be able to prepare documents for the county attorney's signature.

**Child Welfare** - There were 37 screened in reports and 18 screen outs during the month of June and a total of 86 open assessments. In-Home Services has 31 open cases there are currently 44 children in foster care. Despite being short-staffed, there were only 10 overdue cases in Assessments. These cases were found overdue as a result of for medical records such as CME reports (Child Medical Evaluations) as well as CFME (Child & Family Medical Evaluations), additional reports coming in during the assessment, and one case had to be re-assessed after the resignation of a social worker. One case was found not to have any justified reason for being overdue. Our three (3) Quality Assurance/Trainers are also carrying a caseload at this time as new social workers are being trained.

Ms. Susan Thigpen discussed a recent case that resulted in the youth being placed in agency custody and praised the level of teamwork and compassion shown by all child welfare workers involved. Ms. Thigpen has spoken with the NC Division of Social Services and NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse regarding the high level of needs for this youth and the obvious lack of resources for placement and supports to the youth and family.

Child Welfare is hoping to pilot the Together Facing the Challenge model of care, a project funded by the Duke Endowment. This program will provide training and skills to staff and foster parents that is trauma informed and has shown promise in reducing placement disruptions. Stokes County DSS is currently the only county piloting this program and they are hoping to expand to several other counties over the next several months. Duplin County Social Services will be working diligently with agency staff and community partners to increase knowledge and skills in trauma informed practice. Recent trainings for the school social workers has provided an opportunity to build relationships within the schools and child welfare is optimistic that school counselors can be engaged in future partnerships.

### **Director's Update**

Social Services is exploring ways to message that the agency is a community support and resource center for the entire county. A GED Prep Class will begin here at our agency next week in connection with James Sprunt Community College. One section of our agency's lobby will be turned into a resource center for job searches, educational and growth opportunities and information exchange. Disaster Awareness information and even a Kids Corner will also be incorporated into the space.

We have had Hurricane preparedness meetings with the Health Department in preparing for hurricane season. We will be having some additional meetings over the next month to ensure all of our plans are in place and staff are in the process of completing American Red Cross Trainings on Shelter Fundamentals and Psychological First Aid.

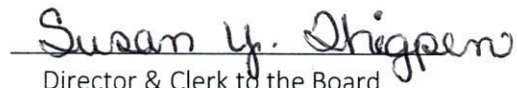
Medicaid Transformation enrollment will begin in October 2019. We expect a high volume of clients coming into the agency once the letters are sent out from the State alerting clients of these changes. Our

NEMT program (Non-Emergency Medical Transportation) will be most impacted by the Medicaid Transformation since the Prepaid Health Plans will assume this responsibility for everyone that receives managed care, resulting in a substantial decrease in cases that Social Services will be coordinating transportation.

The 2019 Social Services Institute is being held in Hickory NC from July 30<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup>. Medicaid Transformation will be the focus of several workshops so several Medicaid supervisors and lead workers from the agency will be attending and Board Members were reminded that there is a track specifically for DSS Board Members if any are interested in attending.

Motion was made and seconded to adjourn meeting and motion passed. Mike Wallace adjourned the meeting until August 29, 2019 at 8:30 a.m. This meeting will be a special scheduled board meeting due to conflicting schedules of the board members.

  
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman

  
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on August / 29 / 2019.