

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, October 22, 2020  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on October 22, 2020 conducted by phone as a result of COVID-19. 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, Chairman, Ms. Angela Mainor, and Mr. Jesse Dowe. Ms. Susan Thigpen, DSS Director, was also present for the meeting. The invocation for today's meeting was given by Ms. Susan Thigpen. No changes or amendments were added to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Mr. Jesse Dowe and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the September 24, 2020 meeting.

**New Business**

**Budget Report** –There is nothing of note with expenditures and revenue as this is early in the budget year. Social Services continues to monitor expenses for computer security since these were not included in the 2020-2021 budget. To date, the agency is paying for each email address and recently began paying for Sentinel, a security program to minimize risks from malware. We do not believe at this time that we will have issues covering these expenses but will continue to assess available funds on a monthly basis. The agency is still exploring ways to utilize COVID Cares Act funding designated for child welfare and adult services. Ms. Angela Mainor requested that the agency look into purchasing a fogger with these funds. The agency had initially hoped to purchase a case management system for Services but was unable to come up with the remaining costs that would not be covered by these funds.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support** – Child Support has returned to a normal schedule for court but it will take months for them to catch up on cases due to cases being continued for so many months. Collections are expected to be lower this year as a result although the collection rate for this year to date is only slightly lower than collections at this time last year. Child Support measures for next year's MOU dropped substantially due to the state now holding counties to the federal benchmarks rather than utilizing the benchmarks for incentive dollars. The newly established measures, to be implemented effective January 1, 2021 will not create any hardships for the county in ensuring that they are met.

**Personnel** – There have been six resignations in October and one termination. The agency has also been able to bring in six new hires during the month. Four of the six resignations left to go to other agencies for more money, a fifth one left to stay home since she is pregnant with her 2<sup>nd</sup> child, and another left due to stress and anxiety related to the nature of work. Many of our workers reside in other counties but are initially unable to get jobs in those counties due to a lack



of experience. As a result, Duplin County trains these new employees and then loses them to their counties of residence since these agencies are often closer to the employee's residence and the salary is significantly higher. The agency recently hired a social worker for the on-call position that will be working evenings Monday through Friday but since she has no experience in child welfare, she will initially work from 8:00 – 5:00 for training and shadowing other workers and her supervisor before being released to work on-call. Supervisors will need to provide an increased level of supervisory oversight but everyone is in agreement that this will provide some relief for social workers who are currently rotating on-call responsibilities.

**Child and Adult Services** – The agency has not seen the increase in Child Welfare reports that was initially expected whenever school resumed and was able to drop the total number of assessments from 92 to 76 in September. In Home Services cases also dropped from 48 to 37. Permanency Social Workers continue to assist with Intake since they currently have additional positions based on caseload guidelines from the state. It is important to note that a single large family unit could impact caseload sizes and capacity. Duplin County also has a number of children placed out of county, requiring social workers to spend more time on the road making visits. Child welfare continues to monitor contact and limit visits inside the home due to COVID. Workers are now making visits with children in agency custody but do defer to the facility's guidelines anytime children are placed in a childcare institution in order to minimize the possibility of COVID spread. Adult Services continues to avoid face-to-face contact with clients to the fullest extent possible.

### **Director's Update**

**Engagement Survey Activities** - There are a total of five supervisors and all of the management team that will be participating in the Energize and Engage Employees virtual training that is being conducted through UNC. This group will be responsible for developing and monitoring an agency wide plan to address morale, identified as an issue in the recent Engagement Survey. The ongoing work group will likely include workers from various units as well. Books have been ordered for supervisors for the Leadership Training and it will likely be conducted sometime in early 2021. There have now been two Orientations with new employees. The first day is being conducted twice a month and focuses on county and agency policy while the second portion of the training is being conducted once a month with new employees and focuses on Customer Service and Conflict Resolution. Existing employees will eventually receive this training as well.

Director Susan Thigpen is also interested in providing Diversity Training to staff in response to concerns that were raised in the survey. Ms. Angela Mainor pointed out that these trainings have been provided in the past and had not been successful. Ms. Susan Thigpen is researching options for a training focusing more of recognizing personal biases and cultural sensitivity. Ms. Thigpen is continuing to pull together data specific to salaries and turnover. The Board plans to present to the Commissioners early in 2021 regarding the need for higher salaries and possibly performing a salary study in Duplin County. Board members pointed out that lower salaries are a county problem and not just a Social Services issue.

**Medicaid Transformation** – The state will be sending out packets to recipients on March 1, 2021 and enrollment will open on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Automatic enrollment will begin on May 15,

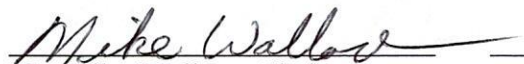


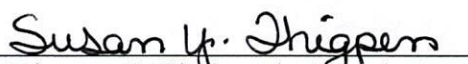
2021 for all individuals who have not selected a provider and primary care physician. The state has been forced to respond quickly due to the short amount of time given for implementation. Social Services will continue to coordinate transportation for all individuals who remain under the traditional plan. As a result of high turnover, many of the newer Income Maintenance workers are not familiar with managed care and will need to participate in a number of training opportunities beginning in January. While the eligibility process will not change for Social Services employees, the volume of calls and concerns from recipients is expected to rise substantially in early 2021 and Ms. Susan Thigpen expects it to be particularly high since managed care stopped abruptly in the past and recipients may be confused about how to proceed.

**LIEAP** – Automatic benefits will be issued for all elderly and disabled recipients approved for LIEAP in 2019-2020. Letters will be sent out in mid-November asking former recipients to notify Social Services if there have been any changes since their previous application and benefits will be issued to providers in early December. It is likely that there will be increased call volume from this as well since any errors would have to be addressed by Income Maintenance workers and not the state. The agency has decided to set up stations in the community room in December and January to allow for adequate distancing since all other individuals will have to complete the application process. Applicants will also be able to apply through ePass.

The agency will be holding the Bake Sale again on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving but will be doing it in the community room and/or on the sidewalk outside. The volume of people is expected to be lower than in years past. Everyone will be encouraged to place orders for baked goods or ham biscuits prior to the day of the event and curbside pick-up will be available. The agency has also decided to modify the Christmas celebration for foster children that is held each year. For 2020, the agency will have Santa Claus and children will be assigned designated times to come see Santa Claus, have their picture taken and receive a Christmas present and there will be no formal gathering for foster parents and children to minimize the risk of COVID.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Mr. Jesse Dowe and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next special scheduled meeting on November 19, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. Proper notice to the public will be provided of this meeting.

  
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman

  
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: November 19, 2020