

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES

BOARD MINUTES

Special Scheduled Meeting

Minutes

Tuesday, December 23, 2019

8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a 'Special Scheduled Meeting' on December 23, 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, and Ms. Ila Davis. Mr. Gary Ange was present by phone. Also present for the meeting were Mrs. Susan Thigpen, Director. 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.

Old Business

Mrs. Thigpen stated that the agency has now included a statement on the County website and our notices that Social Services Board meetings are open to the public and that public comment is welcome as requested by the Board.

New Business

Budget Report - Our expenditures are on track at this time according to all reports. Contracted Food Stamp Payment to State and the Office Machine/Building (Lease) Rent line items appeared as though they would be ending the year in the negative as of the last Board meeting and this has since been clarified. Lease for the building maintained to house records is paid once a year in the amount of \$13,000.00. Mr. Gary Ange questioned the agency's record retention policies. Mrs. Thigpen states that it depends on each program that we have and is established by State and Federal guidelines. All records have to be maintained as long as they are subject to audits; and after that, retention varies from as little as a few years to permanently. Some agency records are maintained for case history and invaluable family information although purging is allowed after a certain amount of time for these records.

The agency is also working diligently to ensure that we are utilizing the budgeted funds for our building repairs for 2019-2020. Challenges continue to exist with getting estimates in order to move forward with needed repairs. Many companies and individuals are reluctant to provide estimates knowing that the agency will go with the lowest bid.

Income Maintenance & Child Support - Income Maintenance began accepting applications for the LIEP program on December 1, 2019. We are taking applications for the elderly and the disabled during December and in January will be accepting applications from the general public. Our new staff have been trained on how to manage this program and will be utilized for the administration of these funds. We have not had to contract with any extra staff this year to assist our agency with this program. We will reassess this in January to see if the number of applications has increased to a degree that additional staff may be needed.

Child Support continues to either meet their benchmarks or be less than 1% below the benchmark. Our state consultant is confident that the agency is performing well at this time and a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan was developed with our State consultant at a recent visit to increase performance in those areas just below the benchmark.

Effective January 1, 2020, the WFFA (Work First Program) worker, who has always been under a Children's Medicaid Supervisor, will be moved to the Food & Nutrition Unit because of the similar requirements between programs and the additional emphasis that can be placed on employment activities as a result of this move. Due to the low number of families now qualifying for Work First, it is challenging for the agency to be successful in employment efforts with these families. This is a program that the agency has historically ignored. The State has had some discussion about not holding counties responsible for benchmarks when their numbers in programs are below ten (10) but no final decision has been made and the agency does want to increase performance in this area regardless. The agency recognizes that getting families to work and self-sufficiency whenever possible is important.

Personnel - We have had four (4) employees to resign in December throughout the agency and two employees that were dismissed due to personal conduct. One of the resigning employees accepted a Supervisor position in Pender County for a \$13,000.00 raise. There are six (6) social worker vacancies in Child Welfare Services at this time.

During this time Child Welfare is not using the SW IV QA/Trainer positions in that capacity due to continued vacancies and inexperience of existing social workers. Mr. Jesse Dowe questioned why these Trainers are being paid more money if they aren't being used as Trainers. Mrs. Thigpen states that when we are experiencing the turnover that we have in Child Welfare Services we must utilize our Trainers to step in and help with the new cases that we are receiving and they continue to be utilized as much as possible to go out with newer social workers and provide coaching and modeling. Mrs. Susan Thigpen noted that the two (2) QA/Trainers' salaries are not substantially higher than the Assessment/In Home Services Social Workers at this time.

Child Welfare - There were 95 Assessments involving 176 children, 35 IHS cases involving 70 children, and 32 children in foster care. There were 34 new Assessments assigned in November. Despite being short-staffed, there were only 4 overdue cases; 2 cases waiting for CMEs and 2 cases for "Other" reasons. A question was raised regarding the impact on cases whenever an assigned social worker resigns and Ms. Susan Thigpen indicated that there is never a time that a case does not have a case manager. When a worker leaves their cases are immediately re-assigned; however, the amount of time required to then complete the case can be lengthier since the newly assigned social worker has to become familiar with the case. The agency continues to track the amount of backlog for the QA/Trainers as requested by Ms. Angela Mainor. One has 11 backlog cases and 13 open cases while the other has 15 open cases and 41 backlog cases. Backlog cases are cases that are closed and case decisions have been made but the documentation has not been completed. Ms. Angela Mainor continues to question how these social workers, who should function as role models for newer social workers, have such a high backlog. Ms. Thigpen noted that the QA/Trainer with the largest backlog spent much of last summer handling Assessments with only one other veteran social worker so caseloads were at times as high as 20 or more cases each month.

New social workers are given three (3) months of experience before going on the on-call rotation list. The Foster Care Supervisor assumed on-call responsibilities after the loss of a supervisor earlier in the year and all of our Child Welfare Supervisors are expected to receive cross-training in all areas of child welfare.

Director's Update

Board members were provided with information obtained from the North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services regarding the new SNAP Rule. Despite concern that beneficiaries in NC may be affected by these new guidelines, the new rule does not apply to North Carolina and will not impact anyone's benefits.

Two substantial changes in legislation that will impact child welfare are the new changes in juvenile law and the definition of caretaker changing to include any adult living in the home with the child. Both are

expected to increase the number of reports that will be received in Child Welfare and could increase the number of older youth coming into foster care since resources for juvenile offenders are limited. Notification for an individual being placed on the Responsible Individuals List has been changed from seven (7) days to "expeditiously", which will allow some flexibility in contacting the individual and will allow for more individuals to be placed on the RIL when they initially attempt to avoid notification.

More requirements have been put on our Child Welfare Services due to these new laws and other ones in recent years. These laws have placed increasing responsibility on social workers and the agency to assess for abuse and neglect. For example, the agency is now required to assess all alleged minor victims of human trafficking, regardless of whether the alleged perpetrator is a caretaker or not. We can expect more burn out and turnover within the agency as responsibilities increase. There are also a number of bills, to include a foster parent's ability to file Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petitions, that could still become law and the agency will continue to monitor these closely.

Ms. Susan Thigpen asked the Board for approval to move two, potentially three if one becomes available within the next few months, IMC III positions to IMC II positions. One of the two vacant positions has been vacant for three months now because there are only a few people qualified for the position and they have no interest in it. At this point it appears that the agency needs more IMC IIs in order to meet the needs of caseload responsibilities. There are sufficient IMC III positions, even with these reclassifications, to meet the training/quality assurance responsibilities of these positions. These positions will be at a lower salary and will provide more staff to process cases and will assist in maintaining adequate staffing with the current turnover the agency is experiencing. More IMC II positions will also be critical when the state moves forward with Medicaid Transformation. Ms. Ila Davis made a motion to re-classify these positions and the motion was seconded by Mr. Jesse Dowe and the Board approved reclassifying two to three IMC III positions to IMC II positions.

Medicaid Transformation remains suspended at this time until a state budget has been passed. The agency continues to get a lot of calls from beneficiaries trying to figure out what is truly going on with their Medicaid and who their provider will be moving forward. There are grave concerns about recipients with behavioral health needs whenever they move to managed care in 2021 and both physical and behavioral health needs will be addressed by the LME/MCO. The LME/MCOs currently struggle with adequately meeting the behavioral health needs of individuals within Duplin County so increased challenges are expected. Mr. Jesse Dowe suggested that the agency have a meeting with Eastpointe to see what they are planning to do with these clients. Ms. Susan Thigpen pointed out that the agency has been paying \$200.00 a day in all-county funds for one youth in agency custody because a levelled placement suited to meet his behavioral health needs has not been located by Eastpointe.

The state is moving forward with conversation with transportation providers. It seems that the agencies that were going to be contracting for Medicaid transportation within each county have a limited understanding of transportation needs in rural communities. Duplin County Transportation has asked to meet with Social Services to discuss transportation moving forward during the delay of Medicaid Transformation roll out. They have expressed interest in receiving priority for transportation needs but also having the option of declining. This is concerning in light of Medicaid policy regarding Medicaid transportation and will need to be explored further.

The director's one-year evaluation was completed on this date by Board members. There is concern that the standard evaluation is generic and does not adequately assess performance of a department head. The yearly evaluation will be completed in the near future and should better capture job specific responsibilities.

Motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Mr. Jesse Dowe to adjourn meeting and motion passed. Mike Wallace adjourned the meeting until January 23, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. This meeting will be a regular scheduled board meeting.

Mike Wallace
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman

Susan H. Shippem
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on January / 23 / 2020