

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, March 25, 2021  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on March 25, 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. Mike Wallace – chair, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Marzella Morrissey, and Mr. Jesse Dowe and Ms. Ila Davis joined by phone. 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 made to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Marzella Morrissey and minutes were approved for the February 25<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**New Business**

**Budget and Expenditures Report** – There were no new items of concerns with the budget and expenditures and it appears that the agency will end the fiscal year well within budget. There are a significant amount of funds remaining in the LINKS line item and Ms. Susan Thigpen explained that these funds can be used for purchases to support youth in care and had not been spent for LINKS meetings as they have been in the past since there have been no meetings throughout the past year. This line item can also be used for social worker administrative time so the agency will be reviewing youth in care to see whether there are any that it would be appropriate to use LINKS funding.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support** – Child Support has seen an increase in collections recently and has reported a 27% response rate to the red letters that were recently mailed to noncustodial parents, resulting in collections in the amount of \$8,330.01. Child Support is also piloting a modified order for adjudicating arrears. This would enhance the agency's compliance with the incentive measures developed by the state.

The Board reviewed the monthly data provided on Economic Benefits. SAA timeliness was significantly below the benchmark but it is important to note that only 1 case of 6 was untimely and this was due to an issue with NC FAST. FNS Regular applications were slightly below the benchmark established in the MOU. In identifying issues contributing to untimeliness, it has been determined that documents brought into the agency or left in the drobox are often given to the Medicaid worker instead of the FNS worker, resulting in improper denials. The agency has

implemented strategies that should address this problem and will monitor data closely over the next few months to verify that no further action is needed.

**Personnel** – There are currently 12 vacancies and the agency is currently seeing an increase in the number of staff leaving for jobs outside of Social Services. There have been seven resignations to date in 2021, two retired and four left for employment in other fields. Lower salaries compared to neighboring counties is also contributing to the high turnover rate for the agency. Board members are optimistic that the salary study that has been approved by the Commissioners will assist in establishing more competitive salaries. The agency has continued to receive no applications for the IMC Investigator position and will continue to explore the possibility of moving this position to another area of the agency. The agency is in the process of filling the Program Administrator’s position and hope to have that position within the next few weeks.

**Social Work Programs** – There has continued to be an increase in the number of Child Welfare reports with a jump from 58 total reports in January to 76 in February. Assessment caseloads are also increasing significantly as a result of more reports and delays in case decisions as a result of recent guidance requiring CMEs in more situations than previously. Eight of the 13 overdue assessments are because of delays in obtaining either CMEs/CFEs or obtaining reports from these evaluations. In Home Services and Permanency Planning continue to maintain caseloads below state guidelines. The agency currently has a part-time supervisor for Child Welfare that is contracted through Vanguard that is assisting with screening decisions and supervisory oversight for initial contacts with Assessments.

Ms. Marzella Morrissey asked that program administrators and managers present their reports at the next Board meeting to give her an opportunity meet everyone.

### **Director’s Update**

Duplin County Social Services will begin it’s 10 month REDA audit in April. Ms. Susan Thigpen will be the lead for this audit until the vacant program administrator’s position has been filled. This audit will include 10 approved and 10 denied Medicaid cases each month. Cases will be randomly selected and the county will have five days from receipt of the sample to scan in all documents for the cases. The agency has opted to review results with the auditor on a monthly basis in order to identify trends in a timely manner and minimize potential errors and paybacks. The agency will receive case findings each month and will have five days to concur with or rebut findings. Corrections must be made to all cases with identified errors within 20 days. The county must meet a 96.8% accuracy rate on determinations and a 90% accuracy rate for internal errors, errors that do not impact eligibility, or will be responsible for the development and implementation of a program improvement plan. The state has not provided guidance to date on how paybacks will be handled as of July when the state moves to managed care and PHPs will be provided a set amount of Medicaid dollars for each recipient enrolled with them instead of a fee for service payment. Second party reviews will be critical in ensuring that Duplin County meets the accuracy rates established for the audit and the amount of turnover in Economic Benefits and the limited experience of IMC IIs and lead workers increases the


likelihood of errors being overlooked during the application process and second party record reviews.


North Carolina continues to move forward with implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Effective October 1, 2021 counties will no longer receive federal reimbursement for IV-E eligible children placed in congregate care for more than two weeks unless the facility has been approved as a qualified residential treatment program. At this point, there are no children in agency custody that would be impacted by this change and Duplin County does work diligently to avoid congregate care settings whenever possible by identifying and utilizing kinship placements or licensed foster homes. Congregate care settings are typically used only when placement is needed to address mental and behavioral needs. FFPSA also requires states to provide trauma informed services that are well supported by outcomes and research and North Carolina has opted to go to Safety Organized Practice (SOP) model. This program focuses on what is going well, what families and the agency are worried about, and what needs to happen. The state is also in the process of reviewing and making changes to the Structured Decision Making Tools to make them align more closely with SOP. North Carolina does not currently have a definitive timeline for full implementation.

North Carolina has decided to move forward with NC FAST for Child Welfare with an augmented system. They have not provided information regarding when they expect to roll out with this or what the augmented process will look like for counties.

Ms. Susan Thigpen, other Social Services directors in Judicial District 4, the GAL Regional Administrator and Chief District Court Judge Sarah Seaton will be meeting the first week of April to prioritize needs for child welfare. The biggest concerns that have been identified include the need for one case – one judge and additional court dates in order to catch up on cases that have been continued for several months as a result of COVID. The agency was unable to file petitions without accompanying Orders for Nonsecure Custody for several months and have just now started filing these petitions so there will likely be a significant increase in cases for some time. Ms. Angela Mainor inquired about the possibility of Social Services obtaining a full-time agency attorney. The addition of a paralegal to agency staff has been invaluable in ensuring that the agency and the contract attorney meet the requirements of court and that court orders are prepared and entered in a timely manner.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Marzella Morrissey and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on April 25, 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. Mike Wallace, Chairman

  
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: April 25 2021