

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, June 24, 2021  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on June 24 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, Mr. Jesse Dowe, Ms. Ila Davis, and Ms. Marzella Morrissey, who arrived after the meeting had started. 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 Mr. Jesse Dowe and minutes were approved for the May 27<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**New Business**

**Budget and Expenditures Report** – The agency ended the fiscal year well within budget and was able to obtain approval to move funds for the few line items that threatened to go over budget. There are no concerns at this time regarding agency spending.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support Report** – Duplin County Social Services was removed from their program improvement plan for FNS this month. The REDA Audit is continuing and the agency has not met the benchmarks yet but the auditor has indicated that this is fairly normal in the first few months of the audit so the agency hopes to start seeing some improvements with findings. The errors currently being found are related more to human error and are not indicative of training or knowledge issues. Board members were provided with the monthly data for the MOU and Regular FNS is the only area not meeting the benchmark although it remains only a few points below 95%. Daycare data specific to the waiting list is not being shared with Board members at this time due to inconsistencies between data sources regarding this measure. The state is in the process of validating data specific to Subsidized Childcare Assistance.

**Personnel** – There have been six resignations in June; of these, two did not share their future plans. The agency has been getting more applications for Economic Benefits but is struggling to fill Child Welfare positions. Most of the social work applications that are received are for either the Adult Services or Permanency Planning positions. Ms. Angie Miller is currently posting all vacancies to a statewide website dedicated to Social Services positions and is currently registered to post our vacancies at 22 colleges and universities across the state as well. There were two potential hires in June that the refused the offer of employment – one opted to remain in another

county due to upcoming raises and the other indicated she could get employment at Sampson County at a higher salary based on their most recent raises for 2021-2022.

**Social Work Programs** – The agency has contracted with Vanguard for a retired state employee to do Intake. She is currently working at least three days a week but can occasionally work up to five days a week. We are also hoping to get a second employee from Vanguard in early July that will be managing assessments. The agency has also brought in a temporary part-time social worker to handle courtesy visits and a small caseload. Management is also exploring ways to utilize the Permanency Planning unit social workers to assist with In Home Services cases and assessments since their caseloads are currently most closely aligned with state recommendations. During the month of June, child welfare workers have focused on loading services for In Home Services cases and closing cases as appropriate in order to establish more manageable caseloads and In Home Services workers have been assigned Assessments as caseloads have diminished. The four Child Welfare supervisors, Program Manager Christy Jones, and I met last week and conducted a process flow of the Assessment and in Home Services programs to identify and address inconsistencies between units and identify areas where services and processes can be streamlined. This was a very successful meeting and supervisors will continue to meet every two weeks over the next several months. A decision was made for all Social Worker IVs to be brought in with blended caseloads – all workers would begin with Assessments and would be responsible for providing case management for the first case they have moving to In Home Services. Providing cross training and emphasizing the need for flexibility in job duties would allow the agency to provide capacity with limited impact wherever vacancies may be concentrated. The agency is currently piloting a program with an employee who is finishing their Bachelor's Degree, allowing them to work flexible hours in their assigned job so they can get required internship hours in Child Welfare. Management is optimistic that this will minimize turnover as workers are finishing their degrees and will increase the possibility of employees moving to Child Welfare or Adult Services rather than going to other Social Services agencies. This approach seems to be working well for the employee who is doing this and she has expressed a commitment to remaining with Duplin County Social Services. Ms. Angela Mainor voiced concerns about allowing the worker to do this since there are already vacancies and her absence from her assigned duties could potentially create an additional burden for coworkers. The worker is still responsible for managing all job duties in addition to completing her internship hours and ongoing supervisory oversight would be critical to the success of this program.

### **Director's Update**

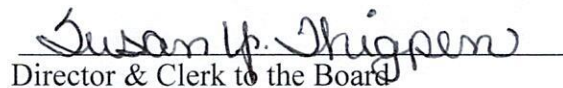
Ms. Susan Thigpen has been part of a Recovery Plan Funding workgroup with directors from across the state to prioritize opportunities for best meeting the needs of our clients. Child Welfare and Adult Services have been identified as two areas of significant need at this time. There are \$8.5 million in funds that will be utilized to reimburse counties at 100% of administrative costs for FNS instead of 50% from July to September. This will provide additional revenue to the county. LIHWAP remains a significant concern for counties due to the inability of agencies to provide the staffing capacity needed to administer the program. At this point, there has been discussion about both a crisis and a one-time allotment component to the program. The agency will have approximately one month from federal approval to roll out. The

amount of reimbursement for administrative time is unknown at this time but would be no less than 50% and potentially up to 100%. The program would be available through September 2025. In an effort to expend funds prior to the deadline, \$150.00 will be provided for each child in an active WFFA case. Benefits will be provided to families next week and will be one-time payments. Mr. Jesse Dowe indicated that he would also be involved in discussions over the opportunities for utilizing American Recovery Plan dollars over the next several days.

Ms. Susan Thigpen shared a strategic plan that was developed with the management team to address the recent increase in turnover. There are some portions of the plan that could be implemented immediately and others that would require county manager and/or County Commissioners' approval to implement. Based on the current volume of NEMT clients that will be moving to managed care; it appears that there could be additional capacity for one of those workers to provide administrative support to other programs. The director will also be exploring the possibility of converting the Income Maintenance Investigator II position to an IMC III floating position. Both positions are classified at Grade 65 so the salary would be the same. Ms. Susan Thigpen has already requested that the county manager approve employees having the option of comp/bonus time or getting paid for time worked beyond 40 hours each week as suggested by members of the Board last month but he has not provided a response to date. Additional considerations that would require additional funding were also discussed with the Board but no decisions were reached for action at this time. Ms. Susan Thigpen will be moving forward with the plans that require no additional funding.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Ila Davis and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on July 22, 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: July 22, 2021