

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 11:30 AM
Blair HealthChoices, 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg**

Board Members Present: Stephen Martynuska, Chris Cohn, Rick Petroski, Mike Stubler, Matthew Dumm, Robert Smith, Amber Hatfield, Susanna Tomlinson, Commissioner Bruce Erb

Board Members Absent: Cindy Barton, T. Grant Phillips, James Stratton, Donna Gority

Others Present: James Hudack, Theresa Rudy, Melissa Gordon, Lorrie Hetager, Aimee Burns, Erin Kay, Ken Dean, Jennifer Kensinger and Missy Gillin

MINUTES

Welcome and Call to Order

Steve welcomed everyone and brought the meeting to order.

1. Approval of August 5, 2021 Minutes

- *Motion by Rick Petroski to accept the August 5, 2021 minutes. Bob Smith seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

2. Board Operations – Jim Hudack, Executive Director, Department of Social Services

- Jim reported that since the last meeting, he has reached out to board members, Amber Hatfield, Susanna Tomlinson, Rick Petroski and Cindy Barton, who are all up for reappointment. All, with the exception of Cindy Barton, are interested in being reappointed. Jim stated that a candidate, to replace Cindy, will be presented to the Board, to vote upon, during the December 2021 meeting. Stephen Martynuska, Chairperson; Michael Stubler, Vice Chairperson and Christopher Cohn, Secretary have agreed to continue their respective positions on the Board.

3. Mental Health Committee Report – Theresa Rudy

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- Theresa reported that the State did issue a new bulletin regarding telehealth. Notice was received stating that everything that was suspended during the Pandemic will continue to be suspended. Audio only will be allowed if visual is not available.

4. Developmental Programs Committee Report – Susanna Tomlinson

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- No further updates were presented.

5. County Reports

Social Services Executive Director – Jim Hudack

- Jim reported that the Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) 2021/2022 was submitted to the state on July 26, 2021. To date, no response from the Department of Human Services has been received.
- The Department of Social Services is in the process of preparing its FY 2021 Income & Expense (IE) report. Final numbers are needed from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to be able to submit the report.
- Retained funds are projected in the amount of \$202,000 to \$225,000. Retained fund requests total \$393,000. On October 18, 2021, the Leadership Coalition will meet to discuss and to prioritize the requests.
- Program staff will start to work on the 2021 board report that is distributed to the DSS Advisory Board members in December.

- Jim expressed his appreciation for the staff of the Department of Social Services and Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) for stepping up and helping out during the last eleven and half months, while he continues to duly serve as Executive Director of DSS and Interim Administrator of Children, Youth and Families (CYF).
- Commissioner Erb thanked Jim for all his hard work.

MH/COD –Theresa Rudy

- Theresa reported that DSS is waiting for its fiscal year Human Service Block Grant (HSBG) allocation letter.
- Theresa stated that Mental Health applied for and received the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (CMHSBG), offered through The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), for two expansion projects, involving mobile crisis and the Student Assistance Program (SAP). The CMHSBG awards allocated \$465,000 for mobile crisis and \$258,000 for SAP to be used by June 2023.
- Theresa reported that the UPMC Crisis Director position is vacant.
- Theresa stated that referrals, through SAP, have increased in all school districts.
- In response to the staffing crisis, Blair HealthChoices has formed a Retention & Recruitment Workgroup to discuss strategies.
- Theresa reported that back in March of 2021 excess funds were identified and redistributed to SASMG and Blair County Drug & Alcohol Partnerships (BDAP).

Mental Health – Ken Dean

- An update was included in the packet.
- Ken reported that admissions and discharges are again frozen, at least for 14 days, at Torrance State Hospital (TSH) due to positive COVID cases among staff members.
- Ken stated that the Reentry Coalition has named Sue Weimer as Chairperson and Chris Frantz as Vice Chairperson. A Reentry Conference is to be held October 21, 2021 at the Penn Stater in State College.

Rick Petroski asked Theresa about the status of a possible children’s inpatient unit located in Altoona. Theresa answered that the Blair County Healthy Coalition Mental Health Workgroup has been researching that possibility for the past five years. Jim added that the data is being updated and that there is support for it in Blair County with UPMC Altoona possibly being the provider, but conversations with other providers is a possibility. Rick questioned if it would be for children 13 and under. Jim answered that the unit would be for adolescents 14 and older.

Steve asked Ken how many Blair County residents are at TSH. Ken answered that Blair County has twenty-one beds available to them. At this time, nineteen Blair County individuals reside at TSH. Ken added that Blair also has four people at the Ebensburg State Center.

H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center December Donation Discussion:

As a way to “give” during the upcoming holiday season, Steve discussed giving monetary donations to the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center to be collected during the next Social Services Advisory Board meeting scheduled for December 2, 2021 at Blair Healthchoices. Amber Hatfield will have a donation box available for those wishing to contribute. A reminder will be sent out prior to the next meeting.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that SASMG was awarded ten new community living waivers. Criteria to receive the waiver would be for anyone who does not have any supports currently or for anyone who has a Person/Family Directed Support (PFDS) waiver with an over-cap exception.
- Melissa stated that Skills of Central PA, due to staffing issues, has consolidated some of their residential homes. Skills is down over fifty full-time staff members. Family Services consolidated some of their residential homes as well.

- Crossroads Day Service closed on September 27, 2021 due to having more than ten people with COVID within their residential homes and day program facility.
- Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition was held in September.

Early Intervention – Kelly Popich

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- No further updates were reported.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy reported that the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), administered through Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP) will continue through September 2022. BCCAP has distributed over 2.5 million in rental and utility assistance. At this time, there are still 1,200 pending applications.
- ERAP 2, another assistance program, is in the works. The program qualifications will vary slightly by allowing individuals to apply by showing a hardship during the COVID period, rather than being directly or indirectly affected by COVID. Income guidelines will still be relevant. This program will run through September 2025.
- Family Services' shelter is under construction. Because of funding deadlines, the shelter project needs to be completed by May 2022.
- Missy reminded the attendees of the existing Landlord/Tenant Mediation Program implemented through Family Services. To date, there has been only one mediation, despite the program being posted on various websites.

6. Ex-Officio Reports

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- An update was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee stated that the Peer-to-Peer Course beginning date has changed from October 11 to October 18, 2021.
- Aimee said that 3 individuals are getting ready to take part in the “In Our Own Voice” presentation training. Once trained, they will be able to go into schools to speak if approved by the school superintendent.
- Aimee reported that she has had two veterans reach out to her who would like to become NAMI members, as well as, get trained in the NAMI Homefront course.
- Aimee hopes in early 2022 that she can look for some student volunteers to focus on the student programs NAMI has to offer.
- The H.O.P.E. Drop-In will be having a Craft/Yard Sale on October 16, 2021 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.
- NAMI will be starting, hopefully by December 2021, a lending library for folks who would like to borrow mental health related books.

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay, Administrative Assistant

- An update was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that eight people are halfway through the CONTACT Altoona Fall five day training course.
- Erin stated that CONTACT Altoona is backing away from the 211 program. The 211 system is not user friendly and CONTACT Altoona receives no guidance. Erin added that CONTACT Altoona only refers homeless individuals to 211 to do the required survey.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- No updates.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that a staffing crisis continues for all providers.
- Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week was held September 12th-18th. Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG), Health Care Quality Unit (HCQU), Independent

Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q), and the Blair Quality Assurance Group donated signs, treats, gift cards and volunteering time for DSP Recognition week. Skills gave their DSPs t-shirts, candy bars and popcorn. The Learning Community received donations and gave their staff gift cards. Gannister Station sent a letter home to families to join in supporting their DSPs and they were able to purchase jackets for their employees.

- Keystone (Nathan Gerhard) presented remote support and technology at the September provider meeting. They explored the idea in 2018 and worked with the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) licensing. They began with a home that had asleep, overnight staff. The following technology is available: call buttons, alerts if smoke detectors went off, med dispensers, cooking sensors, bed sensors and door assist. They started backing off overnight staff in 2 hour increments and gradually worked up to 8. All people receiving services were trained in CPR and First Aid. Initial set-up cost is approximately \$2,000 then a \$50.00 monthly monitor cost. For remote/rural areas the cost was about \$55.00 for a data line. The system with door-assist costs about \$10,000 with the same monthly fees. This was much needed information for providers with the current staffing crisis.
- Charles Lansberry left Skills and is now working at The Learning Community as their new Assistant Director. Jennifer Riggle has taken over Charlie's former position at Skills.
- Greg Baldwin joined UPMC BHA ACEL in July as a new Program Specialist.
- Lorrie will email Jen the October Health Care Quality Newsletter for her to forward to everyone.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- No updates.

Open Forum:

- Matt Dumm stated that the Altoona Area School District (AASD) metal detects every student on a daily basis. Also, students must use clear backpacks. The school district has implemented a “monitoring” plan to deal with students destroying restroom facilities. To date, AASD has had multiple quarantines due to COVID, but no school shutdowns.
- Amber gave a brief description of the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center's mission, as well as, activities offered to those 18 years or older living with a mental illness with or without a drug and/or alcohol addiction.
- Rick announced that Evolution Expressions is having a Monster Mash Cash Bash on October 30, 2021 at the Jaffa Shrine from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.
- Aimee stated that ArtsAltoona is restarting its free after school arts programming for all local junior high and high school students.
- Plans are to have the next and future Mental Health Committee meetings at Blair HealthChoices (Lower Level Conference Room) due to its larger size as compared to CONTACT Altoona.

Steve closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, December 2, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. at Blair HealthChoices, 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA or Virtual Meeting

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. Blair HealthChoices, 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA or Virtual Meeting

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting