

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 11:30 AM
BlueJeans Conference Line Only**

Board Members Present: Stephen Martynuska, James Stratton, Rick Petroski, Michael Stubler, Susanna Tomlinson, Donna Gority, Matthew Dumm, Robert Smith, and Commissioner Bruce Erb

Board Members Absent: Chris Cohn, Cindy Barton, T. Grant Phillips, Amber Hatfield

Others Present: Jim Hudack, Theresa Rudy, Jennifer Kensinger, Jamie Henry, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager, Aimee Burns and Maria Brandt

MINUTES

Welcome and Call to Order

Steve thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to order.

1. Approval of February 4, 2021 Minutes

- *Motion by Mike Stubler to accept the February 4, 2021 minutes. Robert Smith seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

2. Board Operations – Jim Hudack, Executive Director Blair County Dept. Social Services

- Jim stated that, hopefully, the next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held in-person with a virtual option. The meeting, if held in-person, would be either held at Blair Healthchoices or The Arc.
- Jim added if anyone is need of any resources, regarding getting the COVID vaccine, to reach out to him.

3. Mental Health Committee Report – Michael Stubler

- An update was included in the packet.
- No further updates.

4. Developmental Programs Committee Report – Susanna Tomlinson

- An update was included in the packet.
- Steve announced that Susanna Tomlinson is the new Chairperson for the Developmental Programs Committee.
- Susanna stated that all program areas reported positive outlooks in regards to services.

5. County Reports

Executive Director – Jim Hudack

Jim welcomed Aimee Burns, Executive Director of NAMI of Blair County, to the Social Services Advisory Board.

2021/2022 HSBG Annual Plan

- Jim stated that the guidelines for the 2021/2022 Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) Annual Plan have not been released yet.
- The required HSBG Annual Plan public hearings will be held virtually.

2021/2022 State Budget

- Jim stated that there is a big push by the County Commissioners Association of PA (CCAP) and Rehabilitation & Community Providers Association (RCPA) to increase mental health based dollars.

- Jim announced that Pennsylvania will get a substantial sum of money from the America Rescue Plan, some of which is earmarked for rental and mortgage assistance. Other programs receiving funds include: Early Intervention (EI) and Behavioral Health Supports (i.e. substance abuse). At this point, it is not known if the funds are a 1 time infusion or if the money will be distributed over time.

COVID-19

- Jim warned, as the Pandemic continues, we will see an increase in behavioral health needs, as well as, inappropriate behaviors out in the community. The effects will be far-reaching and will span over a period of time.

MH/COD –Theresa Rudy

- Theresa stated the Department of Social Services (DSS) is keeping an eye on the state budget and the American Rescue Plan to see how the funds will be allocated to Blair County.
- Theresa made a recommendation to the Board to endorse a County letter of support, which is a requirement, for a provider change for crisis services from Altoona UPMC to UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital/Altoona Crisis. The Department of Social Services will have a contract with UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital beginning July 1, 2021.

Mike Stubler made the motion to endorse the letter of support as requested by Theresa Rudy. Rick Petroski seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Mental Health – Ken Dean

- No updates.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that Appendix K, which was added to the Intellectual Disabilities (ID) regulations to amend or modify services during the Pandemic, was extended, from its original expiration date of March 10, 2021, until December 31, 2021.
- Melissa stated that Blair County COVID cases are, once again, increasing. If the case range would elevate to the moderate category, day service providers would have to put some safeguards back in place.
- Melissa announced that Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) has been helping to organize a vaccine clinic to be held at Senior Life in Ebensburg on Friday, April 2, 2021. Also, The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is looking to have a vaccine clinic, in the near future, at The Arc of Blair County, which will include individuals in the 1B category.

Early Intervention – Kelly Popich

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that EI received a new resource material from the State, in regards to COVID-19 guidance, which includes updated FAQs, a new flowchart for deciding service delivery strategy and a revised screener for EI services. The biggest change is that families can request in-person services at this time.
- Kelly stated that EI received their local program determination results for 2019-2020. EI meet requirements in all areas except for staff training.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Jim Hudack

- An advertisement for the latest Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) was included in the Agenda packet.
- Jim Hudack reported that ERAP is rolled out and implemented. Blair County Community Action Program is processing a lot of applications.

6. Ex-Officio Reports

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- Aimee Burns accepted the Executive Director position with NAMI the beginning of March 2021.
- Aimee stated that she is currently working on NAMI's reaffiliation with National NAMI, as well as, budget forecasting for the coming year.

- In regards to NAMI programs, Aimee said she is learning the membership renewal process, as well as, working with the Board to make sure that everyone's training, which is being conducted online, is up to date.
- Aimee shared that she sits on the Board of a few other non-profit organizations. Also, she has thirty (30) years medical and non-medical home care dealing with mental illness and individuals with disabilities.
- In response to Steve's question asking if any mental health events were planned for the month of May, Aimee answered not as of yet, but that possibility will be discussed at next week's Board meeting.

CONTACT Altoona – Nicole Germaux

- No Updates

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria relayed some good news about President Biden's American Jobs Plan which includes 4 billion dollars to invest in Home & Community Based Services and the Direct Care Workforce. All the specifics are yet to be determined. Maria has the complete White House briefing statement if anyone would be interested in seeing it.
- Maria announced that The Arc of Blair County is going to be having their programs outside.
- Maria is still in need of corks, as well as, tin (soup/vegetable) cans. Donations can be dropped off at The Arc, 431 Jackson Avenue, Altoona.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Many individuals who receive services are receiving the COVID vaccine. More people are returning to day services. Employees continue to mask and disinfect thoroughly.
- Charles Lansbury from Skills reports, as of early March, businesses are allowing community-based assessments for employment and rates for employment services have been increased for both youth and adult services.
- Cathy McFee from Skills noted skills completed 1st and 2nd round vaccine clinics. Skills will start round 3 in March.
- Incident Management Bulletin was issued 3/1/2021 with effective date of 7/1/2021. The bulletin aligns nicely with Everyday Lives (Important to the person, self-determination, and important to families). Theme of the bulletin focuses on Respect, Listen, Ask, Believe, and Respond. The number of investigations are increasing so that we can understand why incidents are occurring and steps to prevent.
- Agency with Choice has a new bulletin effective 12/2020. Lorrie stated that it is refreshing that families are interested in Person Centered Thinking Training.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- No updates.

Open Forum:

- Maria expressed concern that the next vaccination clinic, which is being planned to be held at The Arc, will not have a good turnout due to mass vaccination clinics being held in the area, making the demand decrease.
Commissioner Erb commented that there is "huge need" for the vaccine, in fact, the County is below in its numbers of getting individuals vaccinated. Commissioner Erb added that the biggest concern is the number of people who are refusing the vaccine or taking a "wait and see" approach to receiving the vaccine.
Steve closed the meeting and wished everyone a Happy Easter.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, June 3, 2021 at 11:30a.m. at Blair HealthChoices or Virtual Meeting

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 9:00a.m. at CONTACT Altoona or Virtual Meeting

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 11:30a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting