

**The Blair County Department of Social Services  
Advisory Board Meeting  
Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 11:30 AM  
BlueJeans Conference Line Only**

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

**Board Members Absent:** Chris Cohn, Cindy Barton, Matthew Dumm, Robert Smith, T. Grant Phillips, Amber Hatfield

**Others Present:** Jim Hudack, Theresa Rudy, Melissa Gillin, Ken Dean, Jennifer Kensinger, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager and Maria Brandt

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*MINUTES*

**Welcome and Call to Order**

Steve thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to order. Roll call was taken.

**1. Approval of December 3, 2020 Minutes**

- *Motion by James Stratton to accept the December 3, 2020 minutes. Michael Stubler seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- Jim stated, until further notice, the Advisory Board meetings will continue to be held virtually via the BlueJeans Conference Line.

**3. Mental Health Committee Report – Michael Stubler**

- An update was included in the packet.
- Mike Stubler will be the new chairperson for the Mental Health Committee meetings. Rick Petroski will fill in during Mike's absence.

**4. Developmental Programs Committee Report – James Stratton**

- An update was included in the packet.
- Jim Stratton said that the major concern of the Developmental Programs Committee meeting was that providers are not able to do face to face interactions/meetings/intervention because of COVID-19 protocols.

**5. County Reports**

*Executive Director – Jim Hudack*

**2021/2022 HSBG Annual Plan**

- Jim stated that the guidelines for the 2021/2022 Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) Annual Plan should be released in the next month or so. The required HSBG Annual Plan public hearings will be held virtually. Jim urged Advisory Board members to attend those hearings, if possible.

**2021/2022 State Budget**

- Jim reported Governor Wolf introduced his 2021/2022 state budget, which Jim did not get a chance to review in depth. Jim stated that there is a push by The County Commissioners Association of PA (CCAP) and Rehabilitation & Community Providers Association (RCPA) to get an increase in all human services funding, but particularly funding for mental health based dollars. Jim stated that Social Services is putting some information together for the Deputy Secretary of the Office of Mental Health. Jim relayed that in comparison to 2019/2020, 302 mental health commitments have increased by 10% and suicides

increased by 20%. Also, there has been a tremendous amount of substance abuse issues, as well as, overdoses.

### **COVID-19 Update**

- Jim stated that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on all programs, in turn, creating extra work for everyone involved and that it could be three to five years until there is a return to some sense of normalcy. Jim encouraged everyone to get a vaccine when it becomes available to them. Jim stated that there is also another Blair County COVID-19 testing clinic starting on February 5. Jen is to email out the information to everyone after the meeting.

### **Legislative Breakfast**

- Jim announced that the Department of Social Services (DSS) is having a Legislative Breakfast on March 5<sup>th</sup> with local State Representatives. The atmosphere will be a little more relaxed with discussion topics to include: the impact of COVID-19 on provider programs, noticeable challenges and what the Representatives may see as challenges. Steve asked if Advisory Board members are invited to attend. Jim answered that the invitation is for the Leadership Coalition members and some of their staff.

### ***MH/COD –Theresa Rudy***

- Theresa reported that UPMC Altoona will be transitioning and closing their family based program toward the latter part of February. Social Services, Blair HealthChoices (BHC), and Community Care (CC) have been working with UPMC Altoona, CenClear Child Services and Blair Family Solutions on the transition. There will be ten to thirteen families transferring to either CenClear or Blair Family Solutions for services. Theresa and Missy have been working on contracts with CenClear and Blair Family Solutions. The contracts, effective February 1, 2021, will also include blended case management.
- Theresa reported that DSS received a letter from UPMC Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies informing us that the Child & Adolescent Partial Program located in Lakemont and the Adult Partial Program located on Chestnut Avenue by mid-February. DSS will work with BHC and CC to look at any alternatives that could be offered. Rick Petroski asked if the closure of the partial programs was due to COVID-19 and Theresa answered that the census has been going down over the past five years, but COVID-19 did have any impact.

### ***Mental Health – Ken Dean***

- Due to technical difficulties, Ken was unable to give a report.

### ***Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon***

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that five (5) day service programs are reopening in February, at limited capacity, with remote services being offered for those hesitant to return. One provider has not determined a reopening date.
- Melissa stated that Jamie Henry will be sending out proposal requests, this month, in regards to the Employee Initiative.
- Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) is working with Emergency Management Agency (EMA) to help providers that have not been able to secure a pharmacy yet to give COVID-19 vaccines.
- Maria Brandt added that next Thursday at The Arc, Rite-Aid pharmacists will be administering 120 COVID-19 vaccinations to individuals with disabilities, including Agency staff members, who fall under the 6400 regulations.

### ***Early Intervention – Kelly Popich***

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that EI is still in the substantial range for the transmission of risk, making teleintervention the primary mode of service delivery since November 2020. To return to the hybrid model, the Department of Health (DOH) data would have to reflect two consecutive weeks in the low to moderate range.
- Kelly stated that they have also worked with EMA to get vaccinations for providers. Most have gotten their vaccinations, at least their 1<sup>st</sup> dose, or are in a list to receive a vaccination.

- Kelly informed the Board that the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) informed EI that being fully vaccinated does not mean that services can return to face to face.
- EI is hoping to get further guidance from the State when they can return to more in person services.
- Kelly stated that, most likely, the hybrid model would only be for families experiencing barriers.
- COVID-19 has impacted provider's revenue and staff.
- Kelly reported as of January 25<sup>th</sup>, EI is using the Request for Proposal (RFP) database, which the ID program uses as well. This database is for families who do not have a provider preference. Data can be tracked electronically. Kelly hopes to use the RFP system for initial evaluators at some point.
- Kelly also addressed the statewide Family Survey developed by OCDEL. As of last year, EI is responsible for getting the survey to families. The survey is open from February 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021. The state implements thresholds of return rate and have increased that threshold from 15% to 20%.

#### *Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin*

- Missy reported that Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP) offered their location for Primary Health Network (PHN) to administer free, drive-thru flu shots for uninsured and/or homeless individuals on two separate Fridays, but no one attended either event.
- BCCAP continues to house the homeless in hotels/motels and provide food to those individuals, in need, while they are housed there.
- Family Services is overseeing a Landlord/Tenant Mediation Program. The program had its first successful mediation last week. Family Services will follow-up on that mediation within thirty (30) days.
- Missy spoke about Senate Bill 109, which is currently in the House. This bill includes another round of rent relief and utility assistance. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is hoping to have it open by April 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30, 2021. Arrearages may be allowed for the past six months. This is Federal funds being allocated to the State for distribution.

## **6. Ex-Officio Reports**

#### *NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Vacant Position*

- No Updates

#### *CONTACT Altoona – Nicole Germaux*

- No Updates

#### *The Arc – Maria Brandt*

- Maria asked the attendees to let her know of any places that may have openings for vaccinations. She has several individuals who fall under the 1A category, but are unable to secure a vaccine, at this time, because they are not receiving any provider services.
- Maria commended ARC members for their strength, resiliency and positivity during this pandemic.
- Maria added that The ARC is going to start having outdoor programs in March. A recycling/upcycling program is being organized and Maria asked for donations of plastic grocery bags, glass wine bottles, wine bottle corks and plastic bottles. To make those donations, contact Maria at The ARC.

#### *ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager*

- Lori reported that Blair County's COVID thresholds have been below 10% for two weeks in a row. Providers are able to open day centers and provide transportation. Providers must follow the Office of Development Programs (ODP) guidance on masking, close contact, screening and handwashing. Adult Center for Exception Learning (ACEL) opened yesterday with thirteen people attending. Seventeen people attended today.
- Skills registered all their licensed entities with the Department of Health (DOH) in October 2020. Pfizer vaccines began January 18, 2021. Two hundred plus sites were signed up with Moderna. Moderna has a subcontract with CVS Pharmacy. The first rollout will be to all the community homes across the company. The rollout continue into March. Each site is give three dates. The first date is for the first shot. The second is for the first or second shot. The third is for everyone. Consent forms need to be signed. Consent forms and a spread sheet must be submitted five days before the vaccine is administered with the exact number of vaccines needed. The second rollout will be to all day programs. Anyone

coming in contact with a group home, e.g., LPN's, program specialists, managers, directors, maintenance, transportation, can also get a vaccine.

- Loris stated as of last week, UPMC had given the COVID vaccine to over 72,000 people across Pennsylvania. Around 62,000 are UPMC employees and approximately 10,000 are first responders.
- Most people are reporting more side effects with the second vaccine shot. This was also discussed during OPD's COVID-19 vaccination update webinar on February 1, 2021. During this webinar, it was also shared there have been no deaths due to allergic reactions to the vaccine. Dr. Cherpes, ODP Medical Director, reviewed myths vs. facts during this webinar which included helpful information to share with people supported, their families, and employees.
- ODP requested providers of Community Participation Support and Transportation Trip services hold January billing for these services. ODP sent an announcement yesterday providing guidance regarding the implementation of temporary rate increases to the Fee Schedule Rates due to the impacts on service as a result of COVID. The temporary increases are retroactive January 1, 2021 and will end June 30, 2021.

#### *Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt*

- No updates.

#### **Open Forum:**

- Susanna Tomlinson stated that Center City Church, 1220 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Altoona has been distributing food boxes. A distribution is slated for this Saturday, February 6, 2021 from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. There are no requirements or limits. Volunteers are always welcome. To make a monetary donation, contact the church.

**The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 11:30a.m. at Blair HealthChoices or Virtual Meeting**

**The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 9:00a.m. at CONTACT Altoona or Virtual Meeting**

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