

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, December 2, 2021 at 11:30 AM
Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg
BlueJeans Conference Line**

Board Members Present: Stephen Martynuska, Rick Petroski, Mike Stubler, Matthew Dumm, Amber Hatfield, Susanna Tomlinson, Donna Gority, James Stratton, Cindy Barton, Commissioner Bruce Erb

Board Members Absent: T. Grant Phillips, Robert Smith, Chris Cohn

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

MINUTES

Welcome and Call to Order

Steve welcomed everyone and brought the meeting to order. Steve thanked everyone who was able to make monetary donations to the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center.

1. Approval of October 7, 2021 Minutes

- *Motion by Rick Petroski to accept the October 7, 2021 minutes. James Stratton seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- Jim announced that Rick Petroski, Susanna Tomlinson and Amber Hatfield have agreed to serve another term as board members on the Social Services Advisory Board.
- Rebecca (Becky) Aungst, retiring Skills CEO, will be appointed to join the members of the advisory board. Becky will be replacing Cindy Barton.
- Jim explained, moving forward, all board members, who agree to be reappointed, will have to complete a new Talent Bank Application that will be submitted to the Commissioners for approval.
- Jim stated that Stephen Martynuska, Chairperson, Michael Stubler, Vice Chairperson, Christopher Cohn, Secretary, will continue to serve in their respective roles on the Board.
- Jim announced that all future Advisory Board meetings will be in-person only, unless something drastic happens to change that.

3. Mental Health Committee Report – Mike Stubler

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- Mike mentioned a few MH meeting highlights, such as, SAP referrals have increased and the renovations to the new crisis center are progressing.

4. Developmental Programs Committee Report – Susanna Tomlinson

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- Susanna stated that the staff shortage crisis continues.

5. County Reports

Social Services Executive Director – Jim Hudack

- Jim reported that the Department of Social Services (DSS) had approximately \$271,000 in retained funds.
- Those retained funds were reallocated to a variety of programs to include: Big Brothers/Big Sisters, CRS Warm Hand Off, Forensic Case Manager, Family Services Shelter Operations and Mediation

Program, Healthy Blair Coalition, MH/ID Navigator and SASMG Summer Employment Initiative. Jim clarified that these funds are a one-time payment and are not guaranteed for next year.

- Jim, once again, acknowledged the help and support of DSS and SASMG, while he continues to serve in his dual role of Executive Director of DSS and Acting Administrator for Children, Youth & Families (CYF).
- Jim commended Ken Dean for his assistance in coordinating the County's Emergency Behavioral Health (EBH) team, in response to, the death of Blair County Corrections Officer, Rhonda Russell.

MH/COD –Theresa Rudy

- Theresa discussed MH's section (pages 16-31) of the annual board report.
- Theresa mentioned the fact that DSS has not received any increases to the MH budget since 2009.
- Theresa reported that 2,512 persons were served in FY2020/2021.
- DSS was awarded funding from the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (CMHSBG) to be used for two projects: Student Assistance Program (SAP) Expansion and Mobile Crisis Expansion.
- Theresa shared that the newly renovated crisis/access center is projected to open mid-January 2022.
- On November 11, 2021, Theresa and Jim participated in the UPMC Altoona Site Visit.
- Theresa reported that DSS did receive its Primary Mental Health Allocation in the amount of \$763,000.

Mental Health – Ken Dean

- Ken updated the meeting attendees on the State and County response to the tragic incident involving a Blair County Corrections officer.
- For the past two weeks, Ken had been embedded in the Department of Corrections Critical Incident Stress Response Team. The Department of Corrections sent in teams from numerous State Correctional facilities and State Administrative offices to provide support and debriefing. A large number of individuals attended the memorial service. Six teams of therapy dogs were in attendance. Two defusings were done at the prison. Two days of debriefing were offered, but nobody showed up. The group took advantage of the down time by doing training scenarios.
- Emergency Behavioral Health (EBH) Team also responded to a suicide at Homewood Retirement Community in Martinsburg.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- The ID/EI report that was in the agenda packet was incorrect. The correct report will be sent out.
- Melissa stated that the Summer Employment Initiative typically runs May through August and is for any transitioning-age student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and ID diagnosis.
- Melissa reported that during the 2021 year, 1,340 incidents were reported for the ID program. Emergency Room (ER) visits (426 total) and medication errors (286 total) were the highest. In comparison to 2019/2021, there was a 20% increase in ER visits, but there was a 17.86% decrease in medication errors. Across the board, there was an 18% decrease in total incidents.
- Currently, the Blair County ID system is supporting 803 individuals. 121 people are on the wait list.
- Meetings, such as Risk Management & Quality Management, have restarted after being put on hold due to the Pandemic.
- Jim Stratton asked Melissa how many medication errors were severe. Melissa responded that medication errors are not recorded according to severity, so she did not have any stats to share.

Early Intervention – Kelly Popich

- The ID/EI report that was in the agenda packet was incorrect. The correct report will be sent out.
- Kelly reported that House Bill 1861, in regards to tele-health/tele-intervention, which was slated to expire September 2021, has been extended to March 2022.
- Kelly stated that most families are using in-person services.
- EI is experiencing a shortage with special instruction hearing services.
- Another issue is determining qualifications of providers' staff.
- The state is aware of the existing shortages.
- Kelly reported that EI met its requirement for the 2021 Family Survey with a return rate of 25.5%.
- Kelly talked, briefly, about the EI section of the annual report.

- From May 2021 through October 2021, EI referrals trended upward. Families are following through with the referrals and children are qualifying for services.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy reported that Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP) continues to house the homeless.
- Family Services' shelter is under construction. The shelter project is slated to be completed by May 2022.
- The Landlord/Tenant Mediation program has not drawn any further interest.
- BCCAP has distributed over 3 million dollars in rental and utility assistance through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which continues through September 2022.
- The PIT Count, organized by BCCAP, will be on January 26, 2022. This count involves BCCAP staff and other volunteers going out into the community to look for homeless individuals.
- Missy stated that the 211 database has over 200 people registered as homeless or near homelessness.

6. Ex-Officio Reports

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- An update was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee stated reported that NAMI did sign an agreement for a keynote speaker for the upcoming NAMI April 2022 conference. Vendor tables are available. Location is the Altoona Grand Hotel.
- NAMI is looking for a veteran who would be interested in becoming a NAMI member and training to become a NAMI Homefront facilitator.
- Family to Family Support Group has wrapped up for the year. Peer to Peer course will be ending for the year on Monday. They will be offered again in the Spring of 2022.
- The Family Support Group and NAMI Connection Support continues to meet every other Thursday at 6:00 pm at the HOPE Drop-In Center. A virtual support group is in development.
- NAMI has been going through extensive training for “988”, which will be launching July 2022.
- No reschedule date yet for “In Your Own Voice” training.
- NAMI's has gotten more books for their newly established “Lending Library”.

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay, Administrative Assistant

- Erin reported that Nicole Germaux, Executive Director of CONTACT Altoona, is resigning on December 15, 2021. Erin will be taking over the Executive Director position. CONTACT Altoona will need a new administrative assistant.
- Even though COVID cases have been increasing, COVID calls to CONTACT Altoona are down.
- In the past 2 months, CONTACT Altoona received 5 new referrals.
- “12 Days of CONTACT Christmas” fundraiser is going on. \$5 per ticket.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. She stated that all is going well at The Arc.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that providers received notification on December 1, 2021 that they can receive a one-time supplemental payment to address recruitment, retention, and COVID-19 related staffing expenses for direct support professionals.
- Lorrie stated that Charles Lansbury expressed positive experiences with employers, Sheetz and Maybrook Hills Rehabilitation Center. To date, Sheetz has hired individuals with disabilities at twelve (12) locations and Maybrook hired one (1) applicant on the spot.
- December HCQU Newsletter came out December 2, 2021. Lorrie will forward it to Jen for her to email out to everyone.
- Lori reported that Penn State nursing students continue to intern with ACEL. Positive feedback has been received from the nursing students.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- No updates.

Open Forum:

- Aimee added that she has been chosen by the State NAMI CEO to be trained as an ED for the NAMI Advocacy Program. Training will begin in January 2022.
- Donna Gority reported that a Blair Events Calendar is being developed. At the present time, you can find local events on the Blair County Convention Center web-site, as well as, AltoonaArts.org.
- Cindy Barton officially announced that she will be retiring from her current job and will no longer be serving as a member on the Developmental Program Committee or board member on the Social Services Advisory Board.

Steve wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 3, 2022 at 11:30 a.m. at Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA (Formerly 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg)

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 6, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA (Formerly 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg)

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 6, 2022 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting