

**The Blair County Department of Social Services  
Advisory Board Meeting  
Thursday, June 3, 2021 at 11:30 AM  
Blair HealthChoices, 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg  
BlueJeans Conference Line**

**Board Members Present:** Stephen Martynuska, James Stratton, Rick Petroski, Michael Stubler, Donna Gority, Matthew Dumm, Robert Smith, James Stratton and Amber Hatfield

**Board Members Absent:** Chris Cohn, Cindy Barton, T. Grant Phillips, Commissioner Bruce Erb

**Others Present:** Theresa Rudy, Jamie Henry, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager, Aimee Burns, Jamie Pyo, Amber Bott, Nicole Germaux, Amy Marten-Shanafelt and Missy Gillin

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*MINUTES*

**Welcome and Call to Order**

Steve brought the meeting to order. Self-Introductions were made.

**1. Approval of April 1, 2021 Minutes**

- *Motion by Rick Petroski to accept the April 1, 2021 minutes. Robert Smith seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

**2. Board Operations – Theresa Rudy, Mental Health Program Director**

- Theresa reported that the Mental Health (MH) Committee will not meet on Thursday, July 1, 2021. The next MH Committee Meeting will be September 2, 2021.
- Theresa announced that Jim Hudack would like to have the August 5, 2021 Social Services Advisory Board meeting at Fort Roberdeau. There were no objections by any Advisory Board member.

**3. Mental Health Committee Report**

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

**4. Developmental Programs Committee Report**

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

**5. County Reports**

*Mental Health Director – Theresa Rudy*

**2021/2022 HSBG Annual Plan**

- Theresa reported that the guidelines for the 2021/2022 Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) Annual Plan were released on May 21, 2021. Minor changes were noted on the mental health section.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Public Hearing was held virtually on Friday, May 7, 2021. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Hearing is scheduled for July 9, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. using the BlueJeans Conference Line.

**Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (CMHSBG)**

- Theresa reported that the Department of Social Services (DSS) did submit two (2) letters of interest (LOI) for funding from the CMHSBG for the following projects:
  - Expansion of Mobile Crisis
  - Expansion of the Student Assistance Program (SAP)
- At this time, DSS has not received an invitation to apply for the funding.

### **Mental Health Safety Net Coalition**

- Theresa reported that the coalition started working in January 2020 to advocate for a cost of living increase for the MH budget. Pennsylvania Counties would like to see a 3% increase in mental health based funding.
- Theresa stated that, in part, due to the pandemic restrictions that the Mental Health HSBG funds had a retention beyond the allowable HSBG 5%. Funds from that retention were reallocated to Blair County Drug & Alcohol Program and Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG).

### ***MH/COD –Theresa Rudy***

- Theresa reported that the Altoona Curve Mental Health Awareness Night was held Wednesday, May 26, 2021. Cindy James, CASSP Coordinator, organized the event. Cindy would like to light the Curve Stadium up in the color green for the 2022 event.
- Theresa gave further details on the “988” hotline. Potentially rolling out in July 2022, “988” will be used as a suicide prevention/mental health hotline much like the “911” emergency number.

### ***Mental Health – Ken Dean***

- An update was included in the packet.
- Theresa stated that Ken is busy with mental health reviews/hearings, appeals, record expungements and the reentry coalition.

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

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Melissa reported, that according to State criteria, Blair County remains in the moderate range for active COVID cases. Day Programs have remained open.
- Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) have changed their criteria involving COVID restrictions/closures depending on the percentage of clients vaccinated within agencies and programs. With less than 70% vaccinated, the agency/program may have to restrict or close again. Masking requirements have remain unchanged, but ODP is reevaluating that policy.
- Melissa reiterated that staffing shortages are, also, seen within ID programs/agencies.

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

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that Early Intervention is targeted to get funding from the American Rescue Plan. No information has been given as to how the money can be spent.
- An off-site, virtual EI Verification review was conducted in April. The final report was issued last week. EI has 30 days to respond to any areas of non-compliance. Some areas identified were training, transition planning and documentation issues (COVID related).
- EI is currently working on 2021/2022 contracts.
- EI has not received any updated criteria related to COVID mitigations. Kelly stated that all prior policies regarding masking, social distancing, hand washing etc. are still in place regardless of vaccination status.

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

- Missy reported that the Department of Social Services presented 12 completed, renewal contracts for the fiscal 2021/2022 for approval at the June 1, 2021 Commissioners’ meeting.
- Missy stated that the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) administered through Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP) has issued over \$500,000 in rental and utility assistance to landlords and tenants. BCCAP is currently working on processing over 500 applications.
- Family Services’ Landlord Tenant Mediation program has had only one mediation to date. A renewed interest in this program is expected when the Eviction Moratorium is lifted on June 30, 2021.
- Melissa reported that Blair County will be receiving funds through the American Rescue Plan. Some funding will be designated for homeowners to be used toward mortgage assistance.

## 6. Ex-Officio Reports

### *NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns*

- An update was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee stated that future Peer to Peer courses, the NAMI Family Support Group, NAMI Connection Support Group will meet at the H.O.P.E. Drop-In, 711 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Altoona.
- Aimee reported that NAMI has received 3 applications for new board members. The nominating committee will be meeting later today to review those applications.
- Planning for the 2022 Mental Health Awareness conference will begin in July 2021.
- Aimee is working on trying to grow and build NAMI's local presence with a membership drive.

### *CONTACT Altoona – Nicole Germaux*

- Nicole reported the following call totals:
  - March 2021:
    - 3,000 calls (48 COVID related calls)
  - April 2021
    - 2,945 calls (48 COVID related calls)
  - COVID related calls pertained to distress or fear due to the pandemic.
- Volunteer training begins the end of September 2021. Applications can be found on the CONTACT Altoona web-site.

### *The Arc – Maria Brandt*

- No updates.

### *ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager*

- Lorrie reported that the biggest issue facing many providers is the staffing crisis. Please call legislators to report S.3369- Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act.
- Incident Management Bulletin was issued March 1, 2021 and will be effective July 1, 2021. The training is expensive and will be a challenge to get out to all employees, volunteers, people supported and their families. There are two initial web-based trainings that are required in order to access an online training that consists of eight (8) modules. There will be additional trainings on the system where incidents are entered called EIM (Enterprise Incident Management).
- Lorrie thanked The Learning Community. They receive food donations weekly and include all providers to share with people they support.
- Lorrie also thanked Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) for their support to providers through monthly provider meetings, risk management team, Community of Practice, Quality Assurance Group, and Certified Investigator Group. Their support and collaboration, which happens with the help of ID Leadership, is appreciated.

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

- Amy stated that when the COVID pandemic hit in March 2020, BlairHealthchoices (BHC), Community Care and the State coordinated to set-up alternative payments with providers. BHC is slowly discontinuing alternative payments.
- Amy reported that providers, mental health, behavioral health and drug & alcohol, are experiencing staff shortages.
- Amy, also, noted that some clinicians are migrating to 100% telehealth which is an obstacle for many of their clients.

Open Forum: No discussion

Steve closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

**The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 5, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. at Fort Roberdeau, White Oak Hall, 383 Fort Roberdeau Road, Altoona, PA**

**The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 2, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. at CONTACT Altoona or Virtual Meeting**

**The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 2, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting**