

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, December 3, 2020 at 11:30 AM
BlueJeans Conference Line Only**

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

Board Members Absent: Chris Cohn, Cindy Barton, John Allender, T. Grant Phillips

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

MINUTES

Welcome and Call to Order

Steve thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to order. Self-Introductions were made.

1. Approval of October 1, 2020 Minutes

- *Motion by Robert Smith to accept the October 1, 2020 minutes. Michael Stubler seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- Jim informed the Board that John Allender, who is resigning as long standing Advisory Board Member effective December 2020, was unable to join the meeting today. John Allender served on the Advisory Board since 2007/2008. John also chaired the Developmental Programs Committee a number of times over the years. Prior to his retirement from the Altoona Area School District, John was an advocate for transitional youth seeking employment. Jim stated that John will be truly missed.

Luncheon Monetary Donation

- Steve proposed an idea to the Board Members to donate the cost of their catered luncheon to benefit a needy Blair County family identified by Missy Gillin. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the Board was not able to have an in-person, catered luncheon for December. Steve stressed donations would be voluntary and would take place annually in the month of December. Steve asked for thoughts or suggestions on the subject.
- Jim Hudack informed the Advisory Board of the projects Social Services is involved in during this Holiday Season. Children, Youth & Families (CYF) has an Angel Tree that has gift requests from CYF children. Social Services picked three gift ideas from the tree and purchased them. The other project Social Services is helping with is “God’s Little Offerings”. Social Services staff is buying non-perishable food items to donate to be used for Christmas baskets for those in need. Jim said if anyone would like to donate food to give Social Services a call and someone from the office would go out front to pick it up.
- Susanna Tomlinson asked about how to make monetary donations. Jim then mentioned that CYF has a “Children’s Special” Fund program and that checks could be mailed directly to CYF to help out with that fund. Jim is to send out a flyer containing information regarding that program.
- Once in-person meetings resume, the topic will be revisited.

Blair County Social Services 19/20 Annual Board Report

- Jim asked the Board Members to take the time to look over Board Report that was mailed out to acting Board Members. A digital copy was sent out to everyone.

Introduction of Newest Board Member: Matthew Dumm

- Jim introduced Matthew Dumm, who is replacing John Allender, as a new Board Member with appointment date of January 1, 2021.
- Matthew Dumm shared a little bit of his background in the Education field with the Board.

3. Mental Health Committee Report – Theresa Rudy

- An update was included in the packet.
- No items were presented to the MH Committee that needed approval.
- Theresa reported that the 20/21 HSBG Annual Plan needed two revisions:
 - MH Strengths and Needs Section
 - One Budget Revision
- Theresa highlighted some of the topics that were discussed during the MH meeting.
- Theresa reported that since that November meeting the Governor did pass the budget for the fiscal year.
- Theresa stated that there does not seem to be any cuts to the Human Services' budget, but there has not been anything received in writing or an awards letter.
- A Legislative Breakfast was held September 25, 2020. Another breakfast may be planned for February 2021.
- Theresa updated the Board on the transition of the Student Assistance Program (SAP) from UPMC Altoona to UPMC Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies.

4. Developmental Programs Committee Report – Melissa Gordon

- An update was included in the packet.
- Melissa stated that a lot has changed since that meeting took place and that she would cover those changes in her County Report.

5. County Reports

Executive Director – Jim Hudack

- Jim addressed the increase in COVID-19 cases in the area and the impact that is having on provider services. Many providers are reverting back to tele-services or no services.
- Jim talked about an article that came out today titled, “The Long Term Impact of COVID on Mental Health”.
- Jim expressed his appreciation for the Social Services staff and how they have been able to adapt to overcome some of the obstacles faced during the Pandemic.
- Steve asked for the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Helpline Flyer on page 30 of the Annual Board Report to be sent out to everyone so that it could be shared with other agencies. Jen to email out.
- Commissioner Erb expressed his appreciation for all that the Department of Social Services does. He also stated that the Courthouse is functioning by appointment only. Currently, the prison COVID-19 outbreak is a big concern.

MH/COD –Theresa Rudy

- Theresa elaborated on the operations of the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Helpline available Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- Theresa gave an overview of the mental health section in the Annual Board Report.
- Theresa stated that Social Services strength comes from its experienced staff. She thanked Ken Dean, Mental Health Program Specialist, and Cindy James, CAASP Coordinator, for all that they do.

Mental Health – Ken Dean

- Ken reported that due to increasing COVID cases, Torrance State Hospital has stopped all admissions and discharges. The Forensic Unit is still accepting patients, but the process is involved for admittance.
- Ken also stated that it is a challenge to get individuals the services that they need.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that all Day Service Programs are closed and plan on staying closed throughout December. At this point, there is no set date for reopening. Day Programs did offer alternative in-home or remote services to supported individuals.
- Melissa stated that they are seeing a rise in positive COVID cases with both clients and staff. A concern is that there may be a staff shortage in the foreseeable future.
- Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) is encouraging providers/staff to continue to do social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing etc. to help keep supported clients safe.

Early Intervention – Kelly Popich

- A report was included with the Agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that Early Intervention (EI) reverted back to tele-intervention on November 11, 2020.
- Kelly reviews the Department of Health (DOH) information that comes out weekly. Since Blair County was classified as substantial for COVID cases for two consecutive weeks, EI went back to primarily tele-intervention. If the County would return to the low-moderate classification for COVID cases for two consecutive weeks, then EI would change back to some in-person services.
- Kelly stated that there is limited in-person services for those families who do not have the capability to use tele-intervention. Kelly reviews all in-person requests to see if they are warranted.
- Kelly also reviewed EI's section in the Annual Board Report.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy stated that the Housing the Homeless Program, which was started in March 2020, currently, has 14 households in hotels/motels. Food is also being delivered on a need to need basis. From March 2020 through November 2020, over 90 Households have benefited from this program with many transitioning into more permanent housing.
- Missy reported that the Rent Relief Program, administered through Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP), ended on November 30. BCCAP helped 129 households with that program. Approximately 45 applications could not be processed due to lack of required documentation.
- Seven Blair County volunteers completed mediator training in mid-November for the Landlord/Tenant Mediation Program. The Mediation workgroup decided that the intake process will take place at Family Services. Marketing materials were sent out to District Magistrate offices and various agencies. At this time, the program is cost-free. Timeline to have first mediation is mid-January 2021, if all goes as planned.

6. Ex-Officio Reports

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Theresa

- Theresa reported that Sara McConnell resigned as Executive Director for NAMI. The position has been hard to fill since it is part-time with no benefits.

CONTACT Altoona – Nicole Germaux

- No Updates

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria commented that she is proud of how the County agencies are partnering together during this time. Maria also stated that a more positive spin needs to be placed on how we view the current COVID-19 situation because we need to reflect positivity to the individuals the Social Services' field serves.
- Rick Petroski stated that one positive is that tele-health services are going well and that he hopes that they continue even after the pandemic is over.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lori reported that the Health Care Quality Unit (HCQU) nurse, Sandy Corrigan, continues to work remotely. Sandy can provide virtual training as well as send out training materials.

- AID in PA <https://aidinpa.org> is a great resource for people who use out services, families, and employees.
- Providers are to look at their back up plans especially if there are missed visits, staff call offs, etc. Back up plans must be individualized and tailored to the person's needs.
- Crossroads Day Services was open for two days then had to close due to high thresholds of community spread.
- Skills day programs across the entire company will close until January 2021.
- CARES of Central PA surveyed their staff and they felt it would be best to close their program. They reported they raised money to buy food for two people.
- The Learning Community worked together with the Center for Independent Living and were able to give out 40 gallons of milk, eggs, cheese and chicken to families and people they support.
- ACEL has closed their day program, but is working with families who need help in their homes. Staff are splitting shifts to support one another.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- No updates.

Open Forum:

- No further discussions

Steve closed the meeting and wished everyone a happy holiday season.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 11:30a.m. at Blair HealthChoices or Virtual Meeting

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 7, 2021 at 9:00a.m. at CONTACT Altoona or Virtual Meeting

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 7, 2021 at 11:30a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting