

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 2025 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona**

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Donna Gority, Mike Stubler, Jeff Colbert and Ken Dean,

Board Members Absent: Steve Martynuska, Jane Petroski, Sue Franco, Susanna Tomlinson, Matt Dumm, Dana Melton and Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Keelin Cannon, Maria Brandt, Jamie Henry, Jennifer Kensinger and Aimee Burns

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Donna Gority welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Self-Introductions were made.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of December 5, 2024 & February 6, 2025 Advisory Board Minutes

- **Due to a lack of quorum, the approval of the December 5, 2024 & February 6, 2025 meeting minutes were tabled.**

4. Board Operations – *Tricia Johnson, Director, Department of Social Services (DSS)*

- Finance and Allocations Committee
 - Tricia reviewed the purpose of the inactive Finance and Allocations Committee as listed in the Advisory board by-laws.
 - Donna added that the current Blair County Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) Leadership Coalition has assumed the responsibilities of the Finance and Allocations Committee.
 - Details, including membership, of the Leadership Coalition were addressed in the February 6, 2025 meeting minutes. Tricia reviewed that information.
 - Donna stated that the by-laws could be updated to reflect that the HSBG Leadership Coalition oversees the finances and allocations of the HSBG allowing for the removal of the Finance and Allocations Committee being removed. A vote will still be needed by 2/3rds of the Advisory board members, when that change is made. Tricia will make the necessary changes and email out to the Advisory board prior to the June 5, 2025 meeting, so that feedback can be received prior to a vote.
 - Donna requested that Leadership Coalition be added to the Advisory Board agenda so that updates can be given at future meetings.
- Tricia stated that Matt Dumm would like to resign his position on the board due to conflicts with his work schedule. Rashonda Coffee did submit a Talent Bank Application which is currently being reviewed by the Commissioners. Dana Melton has also mentioned that she would like to resign also due to work conflicts. Possible replacements were mentioned, but names were not given.

4. Mental Health Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kyle gave an overview of MH Committee report.
- Katie Clauss, MS, CPRP, Program Director (UPMC WBHA) gave a presentation on Transitional Housing. Information was included in the agenda packet.
- Donna asked if there are any prohibitions to serving on both the Mental Health Committee and the Developmental Programs Committee. Tricia did not know of any rule forbidding dual membership.

5. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Donna gave an overview of the meeting.
- Melissa added that SASMG is trying to get more providers to use staff technology since the field is in a staffing crisis. Also, there is a medical number that clients can call for medical issues instead of going to the Emergency Department (ED), but if the medical doctor deems it a medical emergency the doctor will contact the ED to coordinate care.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Trish reported that the Department of Social Services (DSS) is without a fiscal officer. Scott Andrews tendered his resignation on March 7, 2025. Jeff Kranch, Sandy Macharola and Karen Wise are handling the fiscal duties. The position has been posted.
- The Income & Expense Report (I&E) and the Retained Funds requests were approved by the State.

Mental Health – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that DSS is not applying for the Co-Responder grant for varying reasons. Tricia and Cindy discussed using funding from the MH base funds, if increased, to do the co-responder program. Tricia has requested a meeting with the district attorney, at the request of local law enforcement, to discuss this program and get his approval. Tricia explained that law enforcement would identify situations where there is a need for a behavioral health co-responder on scene, making them able to offer assistance without having permission granted by the individual involved. Donna asked if Altoona Police Department (APD) is involved in this and Tricia stated that she has not had a response from APD yet. Logan Township and Tyrone Borough are on board.
- DSS is working with Healthy Community Living and UPMC WBHA on transitional and supportive housing. Currently, there are individuals, in Torrance State Hospital, who could be discharged, but due to the lack of transitional and supportive housing, they remain there.
- A LOSS (Local Outreach for Suicide Survivors) Team is being formed. This would be a team of two (2). One must be a caring and helpful individual and the other must have lived experience of losing someone to suicide. This team would go out in response to suicide to talk to survivors. Nikki McHugh will coordinate this team.
- May is Mental Health month.
- May 29th is the Mental Health event at the Altoona Curve. T-shirts are available for purchase.
- Out of the Darkness Walk is Saturday, April 5, 2025 at the Penn State Altoona Campus.
- Crisis Incident Stress Management (CISM) training is scheduled for April 30 through May 2, 2025. Must attend all three (3) days.
- DSS is working on revitalizing its Emergency Behavioral Health (EBH) team. This team would be dispatched to help during a county emergency such as a flood or fire to lend emotional/mental support.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa shared that there is an Emergency Planning Workshop for People with Disabilities and their Caregivers scheduled for May 15, 2025 at The Arc of Blair County. You can choose from a morning session (9 am – 12 pm) and an afternoon session (1 pm – 4 pm). An event flyer will be emailed out. SASMG would like to make this training available, on a broader scale, with providers so that they can develop a plan to use during a catastrophic event, which may leave residents to fend for themselves.
- Melissa asked if anyone had any experience (good or bad) with Adult Protective Services (APS). SASMG is mandated to make reports to APS. Recently, SASMG has been involved in two (2) cases, APS closed both cases early, one of which resulted in a death and the other resulted in police involvement. APS must take the least restrictive action first. APS has the ability get an immediate court order to have an individual removed, but SASMG does not. SASMG is looking for anyone else's experience/input involving APS.

Early Intervention (EI) – Jamie Henry

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Jamie stated that Kelly wanted to remind the group about the EI Infant MH training on May 7.
- EI monitoring is going well.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy is working on the 2025/2026 contracts. Providers that will be receiving retained funds will be receiving a 24/25 contract change.
- Missy reported several applications were approved to utilize the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) demolition funds to demolish some properties in the City of Altoona.
- Missy stated that Center for Community Weatherization's program sometimes blends funding with Trina Illig's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)/Whole Home (WH) funds to complete housing repair projects.
- Missy talked about the AHTF Code Compliance Program, which allows up to \$5,000 in AHTF funding, to help with code violation repairs. However, some of the repairs go beyond the \$5,000 cap. Again, some of Trina's funds were blended to complete some of these projects.
- Operation Our Town (OOT) Landlord Workshop is planned for November 14, 2025.
- Donna stated that perhaps volunteers from the Blair/Bedford Carpenter's Assoc. or Carpenter's Union could fill in some of the gaps for repairs needed on homes.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin recently hired an administrative assistant.
- Erin was asked to join the newly formed Blair County Crisis Workshop.
- CONTACT Altoona will take part in the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) webinar training.
- Some of Erin's Peer Mentor Team (PMT) clients live at Tartaglio House.
- Donna added that you can participate in CONTACT Altoona's Volunteer training for a \$50 fee, if you want the training, but do not plan on becoming a volunteer.
- Blair County Food Sustainability Day is Wednesday, April 23, from 8 AM to 2 PM at The Casino (Lakemont Park).

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- NAMI's Conference is Thursday, April 10, Blair County Convention Center.
- Evelyn Quay, NAMI's Children and Youth Coordinator, is working to connect with local schools to introduce NAMI programs into more schools.
- Power of Creativity program is up and running.
- NAMI is working on having virtual support groups.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- The Arc is having another parent training next week.
- Marie stated that some of The Arc's members are competing in pickle ball games outside of The Arc. Also, The Allegheny Ukulele Kollektive has partnered with The Arc and some members are going and playing with them.
- Marie stated that this Saturday, April 5, that the Hollidaysburg Women's Club will be set up at the Hollidaysburg YMCA giving away food and toiletries, starting at 9 AM.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie included an update in the agenda packet.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Tricia reported that the Leadership Coalition Legislative Breakfast was held on Friday, March 7, 2025. There was more conversation and feedback than in past years.

- Donna announced that the Chamber of Non-Profit Businesses is having a Legislative Breakfast on April 25, 2025 at The Casino at Lakemont Park at 7:30 AM. Donna will be the moderator. Senator Ward, Representative Schmitt and Representative Barger will be in attendance.
- Donna also added that the ArtsAltoona Blair Creators Festival will be held on April 26, 2025 at the Downtown Altoona Heritage Plaza.
- Kyle stated that a Glow Walk will be held May 10, 2025 at 8:30 pm at the Altoona Curve Stadium and Lakemont Park's WalkWorks.

Donna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, June 5, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona, PA

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting