

The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, August 7, 2025 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Donna Gority, Jane Petroski, Susan Franco, Steve Martynuska, Jeff Colbert, Mike Stubler, Rhonda Cadle and Ken Dean

Board Members Absent: Susanna Tomlinson, Dana Melton and Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Lorrie Hetager, Jamie Henry and Jennifer Kensinger

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Donna Gority welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.
- Self-Introductions were made.
- Rhonda Cadle, newest board member, was welcomed by the group.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of the June 5, 2025 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

- *Motion made by Chris Cohn to accept the June 5, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Ken Dean seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- **Social Services Advisory Board By-Laws Amendments Vote**
 - A copy of the amended by-laws was included in the agenda packet.
 - 2/3 of the board members were in attendance.
- *Motion made by Ken Dean to approve the amended by-laws as presented. Chris Cohn seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed. The amended by-laws will now be submitted to the Commissioners for their approval.*
- **Leadership Coalition Update**
 - Tricia gave an overview of the Leadership Coalition.
 - Donna gave a brief history of the evolution of mental health, intellectual disabilities and drug and alcohol services, as well as Blair HealthChoices role in the community.
 - The two Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) Annual Plan public hearings were held Friday, June 13th at Greenbean Coffee House. The FY 25/26 HSBG Annual Plan was submitted to the State for review on July 28, 2025.
- Included in the FY 25/26 HSBG Annual Plan is the proposal to make Penn Highlands-Tyrone hospital an additional Blair County 302 facility. Currently, UPMC Altoona is the only designated 302 facility. The State must approve this before the county can move forward with the idea. Also introduced, as a new priority in the Annual Plan, is hiring a third DSS Mental Health Program Specialist who would work with the Courts and the District Attorney's office to identify individuals involved in the criminal justice system who may also have mental health issues, so that they can be diverted into treatment.
- Tricia sent a request to the commissioners to have a representative from their office attend the Advisory Board and Leadership Coalition meetings.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- No July meeting

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- No July meeting

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Trish shared a letter from the State regarding a delay in social services funding, among others, due to the budget impasse.
- Trish spoke with Lindsay Dempsie, Blair County Finance Director, and both believe that DSS should be covered, financially, through September 2025.
- Currently, the proposed budget calls for additional mental health base funding.
- DSS is wrapping up FY 24/25 with the potential for retained funds.
- Trish and Cindy are applying for the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) grant through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). Potential funding would be used for either another Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) or for the additional MH program specialist position. There is also a possibility of receiving Community Hospital Integration Project Program (CHIPP) funding for the MH position.
- Trish shared information on the S.R. Agreement which is a federal lawsuit filed on behalf of a class of PA children and youth who have been adjudicated dependent and have mental health disabilities. The plaintiffs alleged that they did not receive the correct services or did not receive them in a timely manner. This Agreement must be approved by the Court. In the future, there may be a possibility that MH funding will be tapped for this.
- DSS has a new Fiscal Officer (FO), Patty Muriceak. Jeff Kranch and Sandy Macharola are still assisting with fiscal duties.

Mental Health – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that Cindy and Nikki were at Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) Team training. A LOSS Team is comprised of suicide loss survivor and a concerned community member who go to the scene of suicide to support those left behind.
- A flyer was shared on Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training.
- Out of the Darkness Walk is September 14, 2025.
- All schools participated in a Safe Schools Network standardized information and reunification drill. Goals of this drill are to have all the schools use the same terminology/reunification process in an emergency.
- The Student Assistance Program (SAP) will be starting up again. Each school district is required to have SAP. The SAP team monitors and refers students to services.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) is starting their self-assessment, which will be sent to the State to be approved. In October, The State will also be do an on-site visit to review records to compare to their self-assessment.
- Now through March 2026, SASMG will be doing provider monitoring.
- SASMG is looking for members for their Human Rights Committee. The committee meets monthly for about 90 minutes. The responsibility of a member is to review restrictive behavior support plans to decide if any of the restrictions that are put in place should be put in place.
- Cierra Matthews is SASMG's new Administrative Assistant.
- Melissa stated the Blair County Emergency Management Committee is planning a mock emergency training, in real time, for individuals who have any type of physical or intellectual disability.

Early Intervention (EI) – Jamie Henry

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Jamie stated that EI's verification process was completed in June 2025. A final report will be detailed at a future meeting.
- EI Service providers and Evaluation agencies contracts were renewed for 25/26.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy is working on the 2025/2026 contracts renewals.
- Missy made some funding adjustments when closing out the 2024/2025 contracts.
- Affordable housing is an ongoing issue.

8. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that they only had three missed shifts this fiscal year, however, for the month of July, two shifts were missed.
- Social Determinants of Health (Introduction) will be held Friday, September 26, 2025.
- Community Resource Fair will be held on October 21, 2025.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria was not in attendance.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that two providers have volunteered to present at the Developmental Programs Committee.
 - September: Lori Karageanes
 - November: Blue Angels
- The Learning Community was awarded grant money and will be working with students to design logos. They also will be serving shaved ice cream and concession stand food. They will learn how to start their own business and customer service.
- Casey's Café Altoona opened May 29. Casey has a disability, and her dream has been to have a place where she can cook and bake tasty treats to share with others.
- Gannister Station will be celebrating their 20th anniversary on October 3, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. They will have food trucks, a DJ, apple cider and cookies. Gannister opened another building next to their current location in Catherine Township. They also had a yard sale on July 25 & 26.
- Crossroads annual picnic will be at Lakemont Park. They will have a petting zoo. They are succeeding in keeping everyone busy outside of the building, which includes volunteer work. Every Wednesday, they volunteer at Shaver's Creek by cleaning up the trails and ensuring the signs are in good shape.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Tricia distributed an Opioid Settlement survey flyer.
- Steve asked that Pam Sheehe, retired SASMG administrative assistant, be recognized by the board and its members for her thirty-five years of service.

Donna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, October 2, 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, September 4, 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, September 4, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting