

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 11:30 AM
Virtual Zoom Meeting**

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Matt Dumm, Donna Gority, Steve Martynuska, Jeff Colbert, Ken Dean, Jane Petroski and Sue Franco

Board Members Absent: Mike Stubler, Dana Melton, Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Lorrie Hetager, Kelly Popich, Maria Brandt, Roshanda Coffee, Jamie Henry 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 Advisory Board Minutes

- The Board members reviewed the minutes, but inadvertently forgot to make a motion for approval.

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

- Due to lack of a two-thirds majority of board members in attendance, the updated by-laws were not approved.
- Tricia is to send out a Doodle to see when the board members would be able to meet virtually to approve the updated by-laws.
- Tricia announced the Alicia Tiracave has been promoted to Chief Clerk upon Sherry Socie's resignation.
- Donna questioned the existence and validity of the Finance and Allocations Committee listed in the Blair County Department of Social Services (DSS) Advisory Board by-laws. Since DSS became a part of the Human Services Block Grant (HSBG), the Leadership Coalition formed taking over the duties of the Finance and Allocations Committee. Members of the Leadership Coalition are Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Judy Rosser, Jamie Henry, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Amy Marten-Shanafelt, Shannon Tucker and Joe Cox. Tricia is to get Donna Gority more information on the mission of the Leadership Coalition before moving forward on removing the Finance and Allocations Committee from the by-laws. Donna also suggested removing "One (1) representative of the Behavioral Health Providers Association" from the Ex-Officio Members" removed from the by-laws. Donna would like to see representation from Blair Drug and Alcohol Programs, Blair County Children and Youth, and United Way of the Southern Alleghenies since they are listed in the by-laws as Ex-Officio members. Also, CONTACT Altoona needs to be added as an Ex-Officio member.
- The Leadership Coalition Legislative Breakfast will be on Friday, March 7, 2025.
- Tricia welcomed new board members, Jeff Colbert and Ken Dean. Jane Petroski joined the meeting later. Susanna Tomlinson was reappointed to the board, but was not in attendance.
- A thank you letter was received from Overflow Church for the Advisory Board monetary donation of \$244.

4. Mental Health Committee Report

- No meeting was held on January 2, 2025 due to no board members being present.

5. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- The meeting was canceled.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Trish reported that the, in-house, 302 delegate rotation is working well. Cindy, Ginny and Nikki are waived until January 15, 2026 due to not being a qualified mental health professional. Tricia, DSS director, does not have to meet that requirement.

Mental Health – Cindy James

- Cindy reported that DSS is working on getting Penn Highlands-Tyrone designated as a 302 facility. Currently, UPMC Altoona is the only designated 302 facility in Blair County. Penn Highlands-Tyrone will not have a unit like UPMC Altoona 3G, but they do have other Penn Highlands locations that do.
- DSS is organizing a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training for late April or early May 2025.
- DSS is also working with providers on transitional housing for individuals coming out of Torrance State hospital or other State facilities.

Intellectual Disabilities – Jamie Henry

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Jamie reported that SASMG is beginning all of their cycles for qualification and requalification for providers and risk management tools.
- Request for Proposal (RFP) site for both ID & EI has been launched, not without some kinks in the site.
- Jamie announced that SASMG's administrative assistant, Pam Sheeche, retired earlier in the week, after fifty (50) years of service between the County and SASMG.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly stated that EI is coordinating an infant and early childhood mental health training. Dr. Robert Gallen of the University of Pittsburgh will be the speaker. It will be held May 7, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Continuing Education Units (CEU) are being looked at, so that they can be offered to professionals.
- In collaboration with Mental Health, a document has been created with the Behavioral Health Service providers for children under the age of five (5). This document will help assist with identifying who to reach out to when having behavioral or mental health issues with a child under the age of five (5).
- EI's Performance Determination report has been received. Standards are high at 95 to 100% expectations.
- Also, the Quality Enhancement Plan has to be developed by April 1, 2025. Kelly will have the scores available at the next DP Committee meeting.
- EI, both preschool and infant/toddler, have been working with the three (3) county home visitor programs (Nurse Family Partnerships, Family Resource Center and Healthy Families America). Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) are in place for EI's referral processes and Child Find.
- EI has begun its provider monitoring and contract process for 2025/2026.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that the overnight warming center has been up and running for over a month. Attendance has increased since last year.
- The Salvation Army has opened a daytime warming center.
- Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) is going to reorganize their meeting format to discuss affordable housing/homeless issues and how to solve them rather than to just report on the data.
- Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) meets Wednesday, February 12, 2025 to discuss the First Time Home Buyers, Code Compliance & Demolition programs.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- CONTACT Altoona has been a helpline in the area since 1982.
- Monthly calls received average out to about six hundred (600).
- Reassurance calls (safety checks, medication reminders and social calls) are also made.
- CONTACT Altoona's strategic planning includes increasing volunteer number from thirty-three (33) to fifty (50). A volunteer training session will begin in April 2025.
- Working on contingency report for accreditation.
- CONTACT Altoona also offers a Peer Mentor Team (PMT) which makes visitations to individuals, who stay in the area, after being released from Torrance State Hospital (TSH) or other state facility.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- A NAMI Conference registration form is included in the packet. NAMI is still looking for sponsors and vendors.
- NAMI will attend the Galentine's event.
- Aimee will be participating in the Suicide Prevention Task Force Walk at Penn State. If you are interested in donating, contact Aimee and she will send you the link.
- Support groups continue.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- The Arc had a Parents Night Out which focused on the differences between Guardianship and Power of Attorney. Another one will be held in April on a different topic.
- The Arc continues to be busy with their advocacy efforts.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that SASMG had trainings on Incident Management Point Person and Person Centered Thinking.
- Changes for residential that have life sharing and supported living services: Current providers can participate in the performance based contracting process, but any new entities that want to be those providers need to be enrolled in a competitive request application process and when only commence when ODP determines that there is a need for new or additional services.
- Federal reimbursement for transportation is now seventy (70) cents.
- North Star hired two (2) new supports coordinators.
- Skills has been doing a lot of community outreach.
- Safe In Home, remote support, recently did a training about their services.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Steve wanted to reflect, in the notes, a thank you to Pam Sheeche for her many years of dedication to the Human Services field.
- Tricia thanked all the new board members for joining the DSS Advisory Board.
- Tricia shared that an individual, who has been staying at the warming center, shared his excitement that he was getting an apartment.
- Maria stated that The Arc is keeping a close eye on the state budget in regards to Medicaid funding and the budget that involves ID and education. A Call to Action may be needed from the Advisory Board.
- A participant asked if there were any numbers yet on the Point in Time (PIT) Count which is when Center For Community Action and other volunteers go out to look for homeless individuals in Blair County. Kyle did not have finalized numbers, but the last count, from the January 22, 2025 PIT Count, was forty-four (44) individuals who were considered homeless, or living in uninhabitable conditions, or staying in a motel paid by someone else. Back packs of necessities are also distributed to these individuals, when identified.

Donna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, April 3, 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, March 6, 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, March 6, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting