

**The Blair County Department of Social Services  
Advisory Board Meeting  
Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 11:30 AM  
Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA**

**Board Members Present:** Stephen Martynuska, Matthew Dumm, Mike Stubler, Bob Smith, Susanna Tomlinson, James Stratton, Commissioner Bruce Erb

**Board Members Absent:** T. Grant Phillips, Donna Gority, Chris Cohn, Rick Petroski, Becky Aungst and Amber Hatfield

**Others Present:** Theresa Rudy, Missy Gillin, Ken Dean, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager, Aimee Burns, Erin Kay, Maria Brandt and Jennifer Kensinger

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**MINUTES**

*Commissioner Erb requested an amendment to the agenda by adding a Public Comment period. Going forward, a public comment period will be added to future agendas.*

**Welcome and Call to Order**

**1. Public Comment**

- No public comments were noted.

*Following the public comment period, Commissioner Erb made a motion to amend the agenda to add 1 (one) item to the agenda, which is the consideration for a Letter of Support for UPMC Altoona EmPATH Center. Bob Smith seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

**2. Added Agenda Item:**

- Consideration of a Letter of Support for UPMC Altoona EmPATH Center.

**3. Public Comment (Added Agenda Item):**

- No public comments were noted in regards to the added agenda item.

**4. Approval of February 3, 2022 Minutes**

- *Motion by Mike Stubler to accept the February 3, 2022 minutes. Bob Smith seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

**5. Board Operations – Jim Hudack, Executive Director, Department of Social Services (DSS)**

- No updates

**6. Mental Health Committee Report – Theresa Rudy**

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- Theresa commented that there were not any motions, from that meeting, to be brought forward to the Board to approve.
- Theresa had no further updates to add.

**7. Developmental Programs Committee Report – Susanna Tomlinson**

- A report was included with the agenda packet.
- Susanna stated that COVID cases are down, making more services open, but with less providers available.

## 8. County Reports

### *Social Services Executive Director – Jim Hudack*

- No updates

### *MH/COD –Theresa Rudy*

- Theresa reported that the Crisis Center opening and licensing is on hold until an ordered door arrives and is installed. Theresa anticipates another (3) months until completion.

#### **EmPATH Discussion:**

- Theresa reported that she, Jim Hudack and Commissioner Erb met with Tim Balconi, Mike Corso and Kimberly Corle of UPMC Altoona to discuss envisioned plans not only for EmPATH, but for the entire Emergency Department (ED). If all funding comes together, an EmPATH (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment and Healing) Unit would be embedded in the ED.
- An article, “EmPATH Units: Improving Psychiatric Emergency Care” written by Scott Zeller, MD was distributed to meeting attendees.
- Theresa stated that the County is in the learning stages of this project. The proposal would include having psychiatric nurses, mental health workers and ED evaluator clinicians. Annually, there are over 1,000 inpatient admissions.
- Theresa mentioned the positives of the EmPATH Unit to include:
  - Decreased wait times in the ED for psychiatric patients,
  - Timely evaluations of psychiatric and substance abuse conditions
  - Walk-In Crisis Therapy
  - Quicker Admissions
  - Referral to Drug & Alcohol Programs
  - Rapid Referral to Behavioral Health Treatment
  - Closed Pod for Behavioral/Psychiatric Patients
  - More conducive, in the waiting area, for beginning and completing a thorough assessment
  - Reengagement, Treatment and Recovery
- Theresa stated that there is funding available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding and Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA Federal Funding).
- UPMC Altoona is wanting Blair County Department of Social Services Advisory Boards’ support to ask Congressman John Joyce to consider the request for \$250,000 of the HRSA funding.
- Theresa reported that approximately 1500 sq ft of the ED would be remodeled. Estimated cost of the EmPATH Unit project totals 1.4 million dollars. That cost has been recently updated to reflect inflation.
- Commissioner Erb stated that he is going to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that a chunk of the County ARP funding goes to this project due to the evidence based treatment plans that work well. Other advantages include decreasing the ED population, as well as, help law enforcement since EmPATH can hold the individual for 23 hours.
  - **Questions**
    - Maria Brandt asked what the length of stay is in EmPATH Unit since placement may take longer than 24 hours.
      - *Theresa could not answer that question definitively since treatment varies for each person.*
    - Maria Brandt also asked how the unit would be staffed with psychiatric nurses since there is a current staffing shortage.
      - *Commissioner Erb stated that “staffing issues” were not discussed at the meeting, only funding opportunities were examined.*
      - *Commissioner Erb reiterated that the intent of the Letter of Support to Congressman Joyce is for the Board to offer their support for the concept of the EmPATH Unit.*
    - Susanna Tomlinson asked whether anyone checked out other EmPATH units across the country.
      - *Theresa answered that there are only 3 (three) that she knows of and that 1 (one) is new and possibly not up and running yet.*
    - Aimee Burns asked if the EmPATH Unit would also serve the youth population.
      - *Theresa responded by saying that all ages go to the ED so she felt that it would be for all ages.*

- Maria also expressed concern for sustainability of the EmPath Unit.
- Theresa added that the EmPATH Unit would be a safe space for an individual to receive treatment rather than going to the ED or an Inpatient unit. Also, families and patients would be in a more relaxed area and that it would also help reduce assault cases.
- Commissioner Erb added that it would also help decrease the Blair County Prison population, which would cut operating expenses.

### **Approval of the EmPATH Unit Letter of Support to Congressman John Joyce**

- *Motion by Mike Stubler to provide the letter of support to Congressman John Joyce for funding from HRSA for the EmPATH Unit at UPMC Altoona. Bob Smith seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.*

*A letter will be drafted for Chairperson Steve Martynuska to sign.*

- Theresa ended her report by stating that the MH department is quite busy. Cindy is working on the MH events for May, which include, “Light It Up Green” and MH Awareness Night at the Altoona Curve on May 21, 2022.

### ***Mental Health – Ken Dean***

- A report was included in the packet
- The Reentry Coalition continues to meet.
- Ken stated he will be attending a CJAB (Criminal Justice Advisory Board) Conference in State College on April 12 & April 13.
- Ken has been participating in Emergency Behavioral Health (EBH) planning meetings. Two trainings will be held in May. One for coordinators and one for responders. One goal is to have more participants trained in EBH.
- Ken reported that Theresa has arranged for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) classes so that more individuals can be certified in that.
- Ken stated that efforts were being made to update his job description, since he will be retiring in early July.
- Steve, along with the attendees, thanked Ken, not only for his seven plus years of service with the Department of Social Services, but for his 38 years in the field. Ken received a round of applause.

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

- A report was included in the packet.
- Melissa reported that Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG) did fill their vacant Risk/Incident Manager position. Deanne Evans started that position on Monday, April 4, 2022.
- Melissa stated that the annual Summer Employment Initiative Grant, which allows young adults to gain work experience, will go out Friday, April 8, 2022. There will be two grant opportunities. Recipients of the grant will be determined by returned proposals, number of individuals served, as well as, innovative ideas. An update will be given during a future meeting.

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

- A report was included in the packet.
- Kelly stated the report includes the annual Local Program Determination results. Early Intervention’s (EI) Quality Enhancement Plan was submitted last week.
- Kelly reported that EI is collaborating with Blair County Healthy Coalition to update the Blair County Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LLIC) “Blair County’s Care for Kids and Families Resource Guide”. A small LLIC sub-committee is reviewing the information, which will be sent out to other community partners for final revisions. A printed and electronic version will be available. A QR code may be included.
- Kelly stated that Week of the Young Child (WOYC) started April 2<sup>nd</sup> and will continue through April 8<sup>th</sup>. Virtual events can be found on the Family Resource Center Facebook page. An in-person celebration is May 7, 2022 at Lakemont Park.
- EI’s 2022/2023 contract process has begun. Provider contract monitoring continues.

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

- Missy reported Blair County Community Action Program (BCCAP) has distributed over 6 million dollars in rental and utility assistance through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program 1 (ERAP 1). There are a lot of pending applications for this program. ERAP 1 funding is projected to be depleted between June and July 2022, despite the program being open until September 2022.
- Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 (ERAP 2) will be opening soon, so those applications that did not process through ERAP 1 will go through ERAP 2.
- Missy stated that one of the biggest issues facing Blair County residents is finding affordable housing. Landlords are evicting tenants, so that they can command more rent for their properties. Also, less and less Section 8 vouchers are being accepted.
  - *James Stratton asked if there were still issues associated with late fees and penalties for people who miss utility payments.*
    - Missy answered that there are programs such as Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), but shut-offs continue, possibly due to the tedious application process.

### **9. Ex-Officio Reports**

#### ***CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay***

- A report was included in the packet.
- Erin reported that CONTACT Altoona's volunteers did not miss a shift in January. Only 1 shift was missed in February.
- Erin announced that CONTACT Altoona was nominated for the Non-Profit of the Year Award from Blair County Business Hall of Fame.
- Erin stated that she was nominated for the 2022 Top Non-Profit Female Leaders.

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

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee stated that the NAMI Conference will be held April 21, 2022 from 9:30 am – 2:30 pm at the Altoona Grand Hotel. Registration closes, for guests, on Friday, April 8, 2022.
- Family to Family course has resumed using a hybrid model. Attendance has increased. The hybrid meeting has allowed for individuals in different geographical locations to participate.
- NAMI Connection and Family Support groups meet every other Thursday at 6:00 pm.
- Marty Dombrowski, Center of Independent Living (CIL), will be the guest speaker at the next NAMI Education Day on Monday, April 11, 2022 at 1:00 pm.
- One of the Veteran Non-Profit groups requested NAMI present their Homefront program. That presentation will be May 5.
- NAMI is taking applications for NAMI presenters. You must become a NAMI member to be a presenter.
- Aimee stated that the Lending Library will be up and running when the QR code issue is resolved.

#### ***The Arc – Maria Brandt***

- Maria reported that the Transition Council meetings will be offered using a hybrid model beginning in April. Meetings are held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday every month. Parents, who have a child ages 14-21 with intellectual disabilities, mental health or behavioral health issues, are encouraged to attend.

#### ***ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager***

- Lorrie reported that North Star Support Services reopened April 1, 2022.
- Jess with CCR reports they hired two new support coordinators. Jeanna who will cover people who have intellectual disabilities and people supported through the autism waiver and Laura who will strictly support people with intellectual disabilities.
- Tefoni with Care Smart Solutions is having a Spring Fundraiser to benefit seniors in our area on May 21, 2022 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be an ox roast, flea market and craft vendors. Tefoni is to send out a flyer.
- ACEL will be working with the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art again. Jan Kinney, Storyteller, will be doing a (20) twenty day residency in May and June. Penn State students and residents with Altoona Family Physicians continue to visit the program. This has been a very positive experience.

- The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) recently announced an opportunity for supplemental payment (American Rescue Plan Funding) to providers to address staff training, credentialing and business associates programs for employment. Providers are currently researching cost, commitment and sustainability. Providers must apply/submit an application for this supplemental funding by June 30, 2022.

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

- No updates.

Open Forum:

- Steve reported that 15 out of 18 identified Sheetz Stores, currently, employ individuals with disabilities. One of those employees, who works at the Greenwood Sheetz store, is going to receive the Governor's Award on May 5<sup>th</sup> at the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association's annual conference in Hershey. These job opportunities will be expanding to Sheetz Bros. Kitchen and the Distribution Center.
- Susanna Tomlinson noted that the Family Services Homeless Shelter project is nearing completion. Opening date may be Summer of 2022.

Steve thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

**The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, June 2, 2022 at 11:30 a.m. at Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA (Formerly 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg)**

**The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 5, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA (Formerly 120 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg)**

**The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 5, 2022 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting**