

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, August 1, 2024 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona**

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Steve Martynuska, Kyle Siskon-Leonard, Sue Franco and Matt Dumm

Board Members Absent: Donna Gority, Mike Stubler, Rick Petroski, Becky Aungst, Susanna Tomlinson, Dana Melton, Commissioner Laura Burke and Amber Hatfield

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Erin Kay, and Jennifer Kensinger

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Sue Franco welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of June 6, 2024 Advisory Board Minutes

- *Motion by Steve Martynuska to accept the June 6, 2024 minutes. Kyle Siskron-Leonard seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- **By-Laws Update Approval**
 - The approval, of the bylaws, was tabled until the October 3, 2024 meeting due to not having 2/3 of the board present to vote.
 - Tricia reviewed the minor updates, which were highlighted in yellow, with the attendees.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- Mental Health Committee did not meet in July 2024.

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- Developmental Programs Committee did not meet in July 2024.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that The Department of Social Services (DSS) 2nd Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) public hearing is scheduled for tomorrow, Friday, August 2, 2024 at 2:00 pm at the Altoona Public Library. Once the annual plan is finalized, it will be submitted to the Commissioners for their approval on Thursday, August 8. Deadline to submit the annual plan to the state is Monday, August 12, 2024.
- The 22/23 Income & Expense (I&E) report has been accepted and certified.
- The 23/24 I&E is being worked on. Hopefully, DSS will have more in retained funds than the prior fiscal year.
- Tricia stated that PA's budget allotted for \$20 million, across the state, for mental health, but no details, yet, on how the funding will be distributed or if there are any requirements on how the money can be spent.
- At the present time, DSS provider contracts' funding allocations have remained the same as last year, but that may change depending on how much money DSS receives.
- A contract was approved between DSS and Jeff Kranch, Accounting Specialist, to help with DSS reports/fiscal operations over the next year.
- Cindy added that she is meeting with providers in August.

Mental Health – Cindy James

- Cindy announced that DSS finally hired someone for the vacant MH program specialist position. That individual will start on Monday, August 12, 2024.
- Cindy asked the attendees to let her know of any ideas to help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.
- Steve asked if there were any events held in May for May is Mental Health Month. Cindy replied that there was an Altoona Curve event which 28 vendors set up at. Public Service Announcements (PSA) were made on local radio stations. Also, NAMI Blair County had a conference in April. Steve stated that he read that youth mental health issues are on the rise. Cindy said that, last year, the Student Assistance Program, served approx. 1,250 youth. Cindy added that DSS will also be looking at the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PYS) survey to access more data. Survey results are available online.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported SASMG is finishing up its self-assessment and moving on to provider monitoring.
- Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) wants SASMG to manage their own budget by redistributing unused waiver monies to individuals on the waitlist. SASMG has the database for the e-budget, but no instructions or budget yet. Melissa stated that a client who receives a PF/DS waiver may only have an identified need requiring \$20,000 in funds, so the remaining, unused monies may be reallocated to someone on the waitlist. Melissa added that there would have to be a “small pot of money” reserved for rate increases and modifications. SASMG averages approximately 126 to 140 clients on the waitlist every month.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that EI is experiencing service needs especially in the area of occupational and speech therapy. EI will be reaching out to providers to see if they can accommodate the times and dates requested by their clients. If not, EI will reach out to other providers to see if they would like to contract with SASMG/EI.
- EI is also looking for interpreters for Spanish speaking families.
- EI is finalizing 23/24 data.
- The Blair County Children, Youth & Families (BCCYF)/EI agreement has been signed. EI is to meet with BCCYF to go over the referral process.
- EI, along with, the Infant/Toddler and Preschool EI programs and home visiting programs are working on signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the referral process.
- EI Family Survey return rate currently stands at 24.9%, goal being 25%. The final results have not been issued yet.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy reported that Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 (ERAP) received over 300 applications when it reopened for one day in June. Center for Community Action (CCA) is still processing those applications. The funding for this program is expected to run out by the end of 2024.
- Hope for the Homeless group has been discussing the plans for the reopening of the warming center. The warming center will be opened for a shorter duration through the months of January and February. The group also wants to hire a coordinator, who would also be security for the operations. Trisha added that Tyrone is talking about starting their own warming center or possibly partnering with Altoona.
- Missy talked about the Affordable Housing Trust Fund’s (AHTF) new program called the Code Compliance Repair Assistance Program, which would assist low to moderate income homeowners avoid the magisterial code compliance judicial process, by funding the property repairs. Homeowners must complete an application, show code violation paperwork, and submit two (2) bids from licensed & insured contractors. The funding is capped at \$5,000. One issue that has evolved, with this process, is finding contractors who are interested in doing the work.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin stated the deadline for Healthy Blair Coalition’s needs assessment survey has been extended to September 15.
- Erin will be presenting at the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).
- Erin will be representing CONTACT Altoona at the Night Out Against Crime on Tuesday, August 6, 2024.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Cindy James reminded everyone that the Out of the Darkness Walk is scheduled for September 8, 2024.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria was not in attendance.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that the state budget has been approved. Intellectual Disability Services funding did not receive the funding in the original proposed budget. New rates are anticipated to be published on August 31st, to be effective October 1st, and retroactive to July 1st
- Non-residential rates expected to go up by 8% across the board
- Residential rates expected to go up by 6% across the board
- Providers are encouraged to bill at the current rates and expect a gross adjustment sometime after October 1st
- Christine Greene is leaving IM4Q (Independent Monitoring for Quality). Kim Basal will be the point person for any questions.
- Bill Vigne retired from UPMC ACEL.
- Lori Karageanes shared a shout out to the people who volunteered for Batters UP Baseball. Jodie Feath and Alex Redmond were pitching in the heat. The volunteers were making sure everyone was ok and were hydrated. They will have a picnic on the first Sunday in September.
- SAM, Inc. is leaving Blair County
- SASMG and providers planning for DSP Appreciation week in September.
- Two positive stories:
- Lynn Haller shared a story about a woman celebrating her 10-year anniversary of living on her own in her own apartment with support. This person is living her dream life. This would not be possible without the services she receives through the ID system. Recognition for her amazing team: Chasity Lovett, Support Coordinator, Ellen Black, Trauma Informed Therapist, Barb Smilnak, Skills Behavior Support, Lynn Haller, Supports Broker, and Dr. Vanacore, psychiatric care and monitoring.
- Person receiving support from her family through Agency with Choice. This woman is very active with the Central PA Humane Society taking care of the animals, taking blood, assisting with surgeries, and providing support to pet owners.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- Amy was not in attendance.

Open Forum:

- Cindy suggested adding “feel good stories” to the agenda.
- Trish reminded everyone about Stuff the Bus donations. (Flyer was included in the agenda). Erin stated that the deadline for those donations has been extended until Friday, August 9.

- Sue said that the Penguin Project will be performing Aladdin Jr at the Altoona Area High School on August 9 & 10. The goal of the Penguin Project is to provide a supportive environment for children with disabilities to explore their creative talents.

Sue closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, October 3, 2024 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 5, 2024 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 5, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting