

The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, October 3, 2024 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona
Amended

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Sue Franco, Becky Aungst, Susanna Tomlinson and Rick Petroski

Board Members Absent: Donna Gority, Mike Stubler, Steve Martynuska, Matt Dumm, Dana Melton, Commissioner Laura Burke and Amber Hatfield

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Jamie Henry, Erin Kay, Lorrie Hetager, Amy Marten-Shanafelt and Jennifer Kensinger

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Susanna Tomlinson welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of August 1, 2024 Advisory Board Minutes

- *Motion by Kyle Siskron-Leonard to accept the August 1, 2024 minutes. Chris Cohn seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- **By-Laws Update Approval**
 - Due to lack of a quorum, the updated by-laws were not approved.
 - The attendees discussed options like having a virtual vote. Trish discussed amending the by-laws to include an email option vote, but that would also require a vote, which has been the barrier to approving the amended by-laws.
 - Trish will reach out to the board members about having a special, virtual meeting to approve the by-laws.
 - The group decided for the December 5, 2024 meeting that SASMG would provide pizza and salad for a luncheon. No drinks would be provided. Attendees can bring “finger foods”, if they would like to. An RSVP will be needed.
- **Board Reappointments**
 - Board members up for reappointment include: Rick Petroski, Susanna Tomlinson, Rebecca Aungst and Amber Hatfield.
 - Jen is to send out the Talent Bank application to those board members. Jen will also reach out to Amber Hatfield, who has not been in attendance for an extended period of time, to see if she has any interest in continuing to sit on the board.
 - Trish informed the attendees that Dana Melton, current board member, may not be able to continue to serve on the board due to a recent change in her schedule.
- **Annual Monetary Donation to a Non-Profit**
 - Missy suggested making the Warming Center the recipient of the monetary donations.
 - Amy Marten-Shanafelt stated that Overflow Church would receive the funding, which would be designated for the warming center.
 - Everyone agreed that any voluntary, monetary donations during the December meeting would go to the warming center.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kyle gave an overview of some of the highlights of that meeting.

- Cindy added that \$37,000 was raised from the Out of the Darkness Suicide Prevention walk.

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Susanna highlighted the efforts that Steve Martynuska, OVR & Sheetz are making to create more competitive working opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Trish reported that The Department of Social Services (DSS) did not receive its annual Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) annual allocation, but did receive its 1st quarter allocation, which appears to be unchanged. However, DSS did receive its non-block grant allocation information, which reflects an increase in approximately \$285,000 in mental health base funding. This increase could go toward increased services and/or supportive/transitional housing.
- Trish reported that the housing crisis only continues to increase due to lack of affordable housing in the area.
- Missy stated that she attended a housing summit on Wednesday. Topics included the lack of affordable housing and the increase in the homeless population. Both are a state-wide issue.
- Trish stated that Trina Illig, Grants Coordinator for Community Development, is quite busy with her programs.

Mental Health – Cindy James

- Cindy introduced Nikki McHugh as DSS's newest MH program specialist.
- Cindy announced that DSS will be posting for another MH program specialist due to new State requirements for county delegates. Current delegates, who are not county employees, will no longer be eligible to be delegates.
- One thousand dollars in state funding for "988" was used for commercials to make residents aware of "988", which is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Cindy is working on wrapping up the 2023/2024 contracts. Cindy is looking at reallocating unused funds to other programs/services that have unpaid invoices.
- Cindy did an interview regarding CONTACT Altoona's accreditation. Erin added that she has some work to do to meet the standards of the accreditation. CONTACT Altoona has a 6-month contingency plan to meet those standards.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported SASMG is beginning their Quality Assessment & Improvement (QA&I). Six providers will be assessed this cycle.
- SASMG had their rates for service increase which began October 1, 2024. In addition to, the Community Living waiver cap increased from \$85,000 to \$97,000 and the PF/DS waiver cap increased from \$41,000 to \$47,000. SASMG was awarded 16 community living waivers and 2 consolidated waivers to get individuals off the waitlist. At this time, 8 people were awarded community living waivers. SASMG has to wait until January 2025 to award the remaining 8 community living waivers and the 2 consolidated waivers.
- Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) wants residential Direct Support Professionals (DSP) and Support Coordination entities to get accredited. Training materials are available on the MyODP website. This is all a part of ODP's Performance Based Contracting, which allows for providers to get accredited and fall in a higher tier that would give them additional funding.
 - Becky asked if accredited DSPs would get a pay increase. Jamie answered that there are different levels of accreditation for DSPs and that it would be up the administration of the agencies to allocate the funding.
- DSPs were recognized in September.
- Melissa reported that SAM, Inc will no longer be providing support coordination in the county. However, Bridge for Independence will become a support coordination entity in Blair.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly was not in attendance, but Jamie Henry stated that there were no additional updates to report.

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.
- Missy said that applications are being received for the staffing at the warming center, which will open during the months of January and February.
- Missy talked again about the Affordable Housing Trust Fund's (AHTF) newest 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. Several applications have been received, but no applicants have been awarded any funding yet. Some of the applicants have additional housing rehab needs and are able to apply for other program funding available through the county.
- Missy mentioned that the City of Altoona is looking at demolishing blighted property that cannot be rehabilitated, which also contributes to less housing stock.
 - Melissa asked who pays for the demo of the property. Missy answered that the City of Altoona has funding to use for that purpose and that the properties being demolished are on the repository.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that CONTACT Altoona's Volunteer Recognition event was a success.
- CONTACT Altoona will be participating in the Community Resource Fair at the Jaffa on October 21.
- Volunteer training will begin October 28.
- Erin is waiting on the final report from the Accreditation team. She will be working on CONTACT Altoona's strategic planning. A consultant has been hired to do their strategic plan.

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

- DSP Appreciation week was 9/8/24 through 9/14/24. Southern Alleghenies Service received 30 nominations from providers for DSPs who provide excellent service. Jeanna Bilek personally delivered gifts and notes to the DSPs. This really meant a lot to them!
- Providers are updating billing with the new rates. New rates effective 7/1/2024.
- New ODP announcement out (24-094) regarding changes to TB requirements. Initial testing requirement remains in place. New requirement only needed if doctor recommended, symptoms of TB, known exposure to TB, and ongoing transmission issues in a care setting.
- Jamie Henry added that SASMG is celebrating a 20-year anniversary of the Blair County Community of Person Centered Practices (BCOPCP). It was founded with a small CCAP grant to pay for a facilitator to organize the all-volunteer group. The idea of the group is to Practice and spread Person centered skills and lifecourse curriculum. SASMG wanted to recognize the commitment that many of their member agencies have committed over the two decades to help improve lives, by holding an event at Marzoni's (Hollidaysburg/Duncansville location) on October 17 from 2 P.M. to 5 P.M. Light refreshments will be served. RSVP by Oct 10.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- Amy reported after the ending of the Public Health Emergency in April 2023, Blair county residents who were on Medicaid decreased from 35,000 to 31,000. Blair HealthChoices and other providers are trying to make sure those, who may qualify for Medicaid, get enrolled or re-enrolled.
- During the pandemic, Blair HealthChoices (BHC) started a new program, Community Based Care Management, which looks at some of the reasons why individuals are readmitted to the hospital, which the top three (3) being housing, co-occurring drug & alcohol issues and the lack of social support. Some of the goals of the program are to prevent readmission and increase follow-up. In this effort, BHC has partnered with Blair Community Action Program, Drug & Alcohol and the H.O.P.E. Drop-in. BHC is now # 2 in the state with readmissions. Amy will provide data at the next meeting.
- Amy is using reinvestment dollars to create housing in the county. Using those reinvestment dollars, BHC purchased a local motel to use as transitional housing. This approach is more cost effective. BHC will not own or manage the motel.
- BHC has used their funds to help providers with recruiting and retaining staff. Overall, BHC has seen waitlists go down. Jamie asked if SASMG would be able to house individuals there temporarily and Amy said that they could be.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Rick commented that Sheetz has their own “in-house” therapist.
- Amy distributed a flyer about a Stigma to Strength Conference to be held on October 30, 2024 from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Blair County Convention Center. It is free to attend.
- Kyle shared that in the Altoona Area School District that there are 284 homeless students and 187 families facing homelessness. Kyle will email additional data to the board and its members.

Susanna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, December 5, 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, November 7, 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, November 7, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting