

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, June 6, 2024 at 11:30 AM
Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg**

Board Members Present: Becky Aungst, Chris Cohn, Steve Martynuska, Rick Petroski, Kyle Siskon-Leonard, Susanna Tomlinson, Sue Franco and Matt Dumm

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

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Melissa Gordon, Kelly Popich, Erin Kay, Maria Brandt 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 February 1, 2024 Advisory Board Minutes

- *Motion by Rick Petroski to accept the February 1, 2024 minutes. Steve Martynuska seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

Approval of April 4, 2024 Advisory Board Minutes

- *Motion by Chris Cohn to accept the April 4, 2024 minutes. Becky Aungst seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- Tricia confirmed the following board member positions:
 - **Chair: Donna Gority**
 - **Vice Chair: Susanna Tomlinson**
 - **Secretary: Sue Franco**
- **By-Laws Update**
 - Included in the agenda packet were copies of the current Advisory Board by-laws and the updated version of the by-laws. Since 2/3 of the board members were not attendance, the updated version, of the by-laws, was not approved. Tricia reviewed the highlighted changes with the attendees.
- **Zoom Link/Meeting Location Change Discussion**
 - Tricia addressed possibly having a virtual Zoom link for future meetings to help increase attendance. After discussion, the attendees agreed to offer a Zoom link for upcoming meetings.
 - Cindy brought up changing the location of the meeting so that it is more centrally located for those travelling from the east part of Altoona. After discussion, the attendees felt that Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group (SASMG), 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona, would be a more ideal location to hold future meetings. An email will be sent out to everyone to seek opinions from absent members.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- No additional comments were made.

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- No additional comments were made.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that The Department of Social Services (DSS) had its 1st Human Services Block Grant (HSBG) public hearing on May 29 at the H.O.P.E. Drop-In. It was not well attended by the public, other than H.O.P.E. Drop-In members. General public opinion was that mental health services in Blair County are lacking.
- Tricia stated that once the 2024/2025 HSBG annual plan guidelines are released a date, time and location will be set for the required 2nd public hearing. Last year's location was the Logan Township building, but parking was limited. Possible locations include Blair County Drug & Alcohol Program (BDAP), Altoona Public Library and the Altoona Water Authority.
- Tricia reported that the 2022/2023 Income & Expense (I&E) report is not officially approved yet. Once no further revisions are needed, the I&E report will be submitted to the commissioners for their approval.
- Tricia said that DSS is still looking to fill its open mental health program specialist position. Currently, there is an ad circulating on social media. To date, there has only been 2 (two) qualified applicants. At this time, applicants are being screened to see if they meet all the requirements before the Civil Service application and test are offered.
 - Tricia reported that the State made changes to the mental health 302 delegates. The State has taken away DSS's ability to contract per diem unless the individual is a qualified (licensed) county employee. DSS is consulting with Steve Wicks, DSS attorney, to see what can be done to retain the current delegates who are not licensed county employees. The State is asking for compliance by July 1, 2024, but probably will be lenient with that deadline.
 - Steve asked how many delegates DSS has. Cindy answered five (5), but three (3) of the five (5) are not county employees.
 - Steve asked if delegates can do this work virtually. Cindy answered that is done by phone. Crisis and UPMC Altoona have delegate pre-signs.

Mental Health – Cindy James

- Cindy asked the attendees to share the mental health program specialist social media post.
- Cindy reported that the mental health event at the Altoona Curve was well attended. Twenty-Five (25) vendors were set up.
- A Suicide Prevention Cruise-In event is being held in Tyrone on Friday, June 7. Chris Cohn is helping with the vendor table.
- A Suicide Prevention Summit that usually takes place in September will not be happening in 2024, but there may be a Suicide Prevention Symposium featuring Dr. Posner who developed The Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS).
- Cindy is learning the DSS contract process. Contracts will be kept the same this year, but will be reviewed once state funding is allocated.
- Tricia commented that the state budget is in a holding pattern. Governor Shapiro is requesting \$20 million in mental health funding for all sixty-seven (67) counties, but some other PA groups are requesting \$250 million.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that Governor Shapiro would like to get ID/Autistic individuals off the waiver waiting list. Melissa is anticipating additional waivers for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024/2025. The State wants to increase the cap for Community Living and PFDS waivers, but any of those increases will be wiped out or exceeded due to rate increases.
- Melissa said as an Administrative Entity (AE), SASMG has taken on looking at risk assessments, which means SASMG looks at every provider in Blair county. A tool is used to determine if a provider has any risks. Also, SASMG also has to look at any out of the county providers.

- SASMG has also taken on incident management, which means they go out to do investigations. SASMG did receive word that they will have the additional funding needed to retain the incident manager.
 - Melissa said that Tricia has organized a meeting with UPMC doctors and staff to do cross-training. Issues have stemmed from UPMC emergency department doctors not admitting ID folks, claiming it is more behavioral than mental health.
 - Another issue SASMG is dealing with is the discontinuation of Beacon Light’s Dual Diagnosis Treatment Team (DDTT) which worked closely with Beacon Light’s Community Stabilization and Reintegration Unit (CSRU) which offered in-need individuals admission for up to 6 (six) months. SASMG has talked with Blair HealthChoices, a behavioral specialist and a psychiatric nurse who are interested in being a part of a DDTT. A meeting is to be held Monday to discuss it further.
 - Maria asked if other, out of county agencies who offer DDTT, were explored. Melissa stated that they have looked into it, but remote psychiatric care, after a crisis, is usually not beneficial.
 - Melissa added that plan B would be to have an agency, who is already doing the service, create a team here. Another obstacle that SASMG faces is that the State wants to divert ID individuals away from state hospitals and centers.
 - Rick asked Melissa to explain what SASMG’s waivers are.
 - I. Consolidated Waiver: No cap for services
 - II. PFDS Waiver: \$41,000 cap
 - III. Community Living Waiver: \$85,000 cap
- Steve explained that the term “waiver” came from waiving the funds, from use in state facilities, to use in the community.
- Steve asked Melissa about the summer employment program, but SASMG is not offering the program, due to not receiving any HSBG retained funds.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that the EI contract processes has been completed and the contracts have been presented to the commissioners for their approval.
- The family survey is moving along with a return rate of 23% out of the required 25%, which is needed by June 30, 2024.
- Kelly stated, in May, that there was some panel discussion with EI programs to discuss relationships and referrals to Children, Youth & Families (CYF) programs. There has also been a push from the State in regards to initiatives with family support, home visiting and EI.
- EI participated in the Community Resource Fair at the Altoona Area High school on June 5.
- Child Find & the Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) will be targeting physicians. Many families are seeing physician assistants, instead of physicians, and referrals are not getting made. However, (59) fifty-nine referrals were made in May.
- Discussions continue about Infant Mental Health to identify gaps in services available.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Tricia Johnson

- Kyle stated that Center for Community Action Program (CCAP) opened the Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 (ERAP 2) application process for (1) day only on Thursday, June 6, 2024.
- Tricia announced that the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) started a new program called the Code Compliance Repair Assistance Program, to assist low to moderate income homeowners avoid the magisterial code compliance judicial process, by funding the property repairs. Homeowners must complete an application and submit two (2) bids from licensed & insured contractors. The funding is capped at \$5,000.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that the spring training apprenticeships are completed.

- Erin stated that CONTACT Altoona did not have any missed shifts in April and only one (1) missed shift in May.
- CONTACT Altoona, also, participated in the Community Resource Fair on June 5, 2024.
- Erin is still looking for sponsors for the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community on June 15, 2024, which is the same day as the Let's Move Blair County Day.
- Erin distributed a flyer for the Duncansville Community Days (July 19th & 20th).

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria stated that The Arc of Blair County is participating in the Highmark Walk on June 15, 2024. She is hoping that is well attended by ID individuals.
- The Arc has scheduled a Parent Workshop for June 26, 2024. The workshop is for the parent only, so movie tickets are being provided for the children.
- Marie stated that The Arc has identified employment and transitioning youth as gaps in services. Maria said that The Arc will be focusing on these gaps by working with parents and the school districts.
- Matt reported that the Altoona Area School District (AASD) is developing a program, “Leader in Me” that will help students with life skills. The program will be for ninth (9) and twelfth (12) graders with possibility of including tenth (10) and eleventh (11) graders.
- Marie added that the AASD purchased a building that will be used to help transitioning children learn skills like doing laundry and washing dishes.
- Melissa asked Maria to reach out to Jeanna Bilek who is the Education and Outreach Coordinator for SASMG.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie was not in attendance.

Blair HealthChoices/Community Cares – Amy Marten-Shanafelt

- Amy was not in attendance.

Open Forum:

- No further comments

Susanna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 1, 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