

**The Blair County Department of Social Services  
Advisory Board Meeting  
Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 11:30 AM  
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona**

**Board Members Present:** Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Matt Dumm, Susanna Tomlinson, Donna Gority, Steve Martynuska, Rick Petroski, Commissioner Burke

**Board Members Absent:** Mike Stubler, Becky Aungst, Dana Melton, Sue Franco and Amber Hatfield

**Others Present:** Tricia Johnson, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Lorrie Hetager, Kelly Popich, Maria Brandt and Jennifer Kensinger

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*MINUTES*

**1. Welcome and Call to Order**

- Donna Gority welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

**2. Public Comment**

- No public comments were received.

**3. Approval of October 3, 2024 Advisory Board Minutes**

- **The October 3, 2024 minutes were asked to be amended to reflect that Rick Petroski was in attendance and not marked, both absent and present. Steve Martynuska was not listed on the meeting minutes and asked for the meeting minutes to reflect that he was absent for the October 3, 2024 meeting.**
- *Motion by Susanna Tomlinson to accept the October 3, 2024 minutes as amended. Kyle Siskron-Leonard seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

**4. Approval of the March 7, May 2 & September 5, 2024 Mental Health (MH) Committee Meeting Minutes**

- *Motion by Rick Petroski to accept the March 7, May 2 & September 5, 2024 meeting minutes. Kyle Siskron-Leonard seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- **By-Laws Update Approval**

- Due to lack of a two-thirds majority of board members in attendance, the updated by-laws were not approved. However, a few tweaks need to be made to the amended by-laws before presenting them for approval.
- The vote must be held in person or virtually, so that all members can interact in live time.
- Tricia to send out a survey or doodle to see when the board members would be available in January to do a virtual meeting.

**Board Reappointments**

- Susanna Tomlinson submitted her talent bank application to be reappointed to the board.
- Rick Petroski and Rebecca Aungst declined to continue to serve on the board.

**Board Member Talent Bank Applications**

- Trish announced that three talent bank applications were received:
  - Ken Dean
  - Jeff Colbert
  - Jane Petroski
- Currently, all applications have been submitted to the commissioners and are awaiting approval.
- Tricia would like to increase board membership beyond the current 13 (thirteen) members appointed.
- Maria commented that she would like a parent of individual with intellectual disabilities to serve on the board.
- Tricia reviewed the board membership section of the by-laws to include:

The membership of the Board will consist of at least (13) members who live or are employed in Blair County, and will represent the community in the following categories where possible:

1. One representative of the board of county commissioners.
2. At least two physicians, one shall be a psychiatrist and the other a pediatrician.
3. There shall be appropriate representation drawn from the following groups:
  - a. The professional fields of psychology, social work, nursing, education and religion.
  - b. Local citizens' organizations active in the field of mental health.
  - c. Local citizens' organizations active in the field of developmental disabilities.
  - d. Local health and welfare planning organizations.
  - e. Local general hospitals.
  - f. Community groups whose membership represents the economically, socially and culturally disadvantaged.
4. Appropriate representation shall be deemed to mean representation approved by the Secretary of Welfare and shall include at least one member from each category in Article IV, section 1-3.
5. At least two (2) members who are or have been a recipient of mental health services or family member.
6. At least two (2) members who are or have been a recipient of developmental disabilities services or family members.
7. Residents of Blair County that represent the general public.
  - Donna suggested reaching out to Tim Balconi (UPMC Altoona Foundation President) to see if he would like to apply to be a board member.
  - Maria said she may know a certified registered nurse practitioner (CRNP) who may apply, if she could attend virtually. She, also, stated that local pastors would probably be interested in serving on the board.
  - Rick asked if it would be a conflict for someone to serve on the board if their agency receives funding from the Department of Social Services. Cindy and Tricia answered that it would be a conflict.
  - All members were in agreement on adding more board members beyond the 13 (thirteen) who currently serve or will be serving.
  - ***Motion by Kyle Siskron-Leonard to recommend to the commissioners to act upon Susanna Tomlinson's reappointment to the Social Services advisory board and to review and act upon the talent bank applications for Jeff Colbert, Ken Dean and Jane Petroski to be appointed to the Social Services advisory board. Steve Martynuska seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.***
    - A certificate of appreciation was presented to Rick Petroski. Certificates will be mailed to Becky Aungst and Amber Hatfield.
    - Voluntary, monetary donations were accepted for the warming center.
    - The Annual Board Report was distributed during the meeting.
      - Donna suggested adding the (814) area code to the phone numbers in the board member directory.
  - Trish reported that DSS is looking to hire a third mental health program specialist.
  - DSS is working with its community partners to try to figure out a solution for the county-wide homelessness crisis.

#### **4. Mental Health Committee Report**

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Cindy Harmon, The Lexington Clubhouse, gave an informative presentation during that meeting.
- Cindy would like to continue to have presenters from agencies that DSS contracts with.
- Donna questioned if board members can serve on both committees. Trish is going to look into that.
- Kyle gave an overview of some of the highlights of that meeting.

#### **5. Developmental Programs Committee Report**

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Susanna reported that Crossroad Services, Inc. presented at their meeting.
- Also, Steve gave an update on the InVest program.

## **7. County Reports**

### ***Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson***

- Trish reported that due to a change in state regulations, all mental health delegates, must be licensed professionals except for the county MH/ID director. The state is working on that statute, so in the time being, all mental health delegates will need a waiver and must be qualified, county employees. Beginning January 1, 2025, Cindy James, Ginny Christy, Nikki McHugh and Tricia Johnson will be the in-house, mental health delegates.
- In addition to delegate responsibilities, possible job duties of the third MH program specialist would include community and special population. No qualified candidates have been identified through two civil service job postings.
- Trish and Cindy are discussing ways to bring additional transitional and/or supportive housing into the county.
- Warming Center is scheduled to open on January 6, 2025.
- The Income & Expense (I&E) report will be submitted to the state in the next month. DSS have more retained funds for FY 2023/2024.
- Trina Illig, Grants Coordinator for Community Development, is busy with her housing rehabilitation programs. Her waitlists are extensive.

### ***Mental Health – Cindy James***

- Cindy asked the attendees if they had any questions about her section of the board report to just ask.
- Cindy reported that the county is allotted 21 (twenty-one) beds at Torrance State Hospital, but the county is currently borrowing a bed from another county, making their total admissions 22 (twenty-two). Currently, the county has 2 (two) people on the wait list to get into Torrance.
- There are 6 (six) individuals, who are at Torrance, who have been recommended to go to a Long-Term Structured Residence (LTSR), but Blair has only 1 (one) bed at the Cambria County LTSR and it is already occupied by a resident who could be discharged, but there is no suitable, supportive housing for that individual to go to.
- Goals that DSS is working on for FY 2024/2025 are Infant Mental Health, Mobile Crisis Expansion, and Trauma Informed Culture. Another program that DSS was going to look into implementing was Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT), but with the shortage of county judges that initiative is on hold.
- Cindy will have Jen email out a Psychiatric Crisis flyer.
- Commissioner Burke shared that the land that the county has been looking at for a new prison would have enough ground to create some type of supportive housing.

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

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa attended a meeting in Harrisburg to discuss the restructuring of funding for the ID community. Current waiver maximums are: consolidated waiver (unlimited); community living waiver (\$97,000); P/FDS waiver (\$47,000). A study found approximately 30% of an issued waiver was not being used, so the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) wants to take that remaining funding to give to someone on the waitlist. All PA counties must develop a plan to do this. Waivers are to be needs based only. In the future, SASMG would have to look at all service requests, in which, they would have to approve or deny based off of it being a need or a want. This could cause families to challenge those decisions. A contingency fund would have to be available if needs or rates change or if an emergency arises. SASMG will focus on developing a plan for this throughout 2025.
- ODP is also focusing on performance based contracting. ODP also wants providers, especially residential providers, to move individuals into a life-sharing or supportive housing atmosphere, but there is a struggle finding any families willing to do it.

### ***Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich***

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly pointed out some of the data that was in the board report. She said that the data will be analyzed.
- The 2024/2025 family survey has been moved up to January 2025 and needs to be completed by May 2025. EI is watching to make sure that the survey is reaching the families that it needs to go to.

- Verification for EI is scheduled which is the program review. The State will be on-site for 3 (three) days. The State will be looking at policies & procedures, records review for children, contracts, fiscal, staff interviews & observations.
- Performance Determination will be out in January and a Quality Enhancement Plan will be developed based on those results.
- Kelly will be working on organizing an Infant Mental Health training for this spring.

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

- Missy reported that Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 (ERAP) is wrapping up. DSS was able to give Center Community Action additional funding for the Housing Assistance Program (HAP). Also, additional funding is being allocated to Child Advocates for Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT).
- 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 stated that Affordable Housing Trust Fund's (AHTF) Code Compliance Repair Assistance Program is getting a lot of applications, majority of which are from the City of Altoona. This program awards funding to qualified homeowners to get code violations repaired to help avoid the magisterial code compliance judicial process. Some of these funds are being blended with Trina's housing rehab money to be able to do more projects. One issue has been finding local contractors to do the jobs.

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

#### *CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay*

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that Outreach has slowed down.
- No volunteers missed shifts from July to October.
- 3 (three) new clients
- Strategic planning sessions are scheduled for January and February 2025. A consultant was hired and surveys will go out to volunteers and board members after the holiday.
- 689 (six hundred and eighty-nine) tickets were sold for the 12 Days of CONTACT Christmas fundraiser.

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

- A report was included in the agenda packet.

#### *The Arc – Maria Brandt*

- Maria was in attendance, but due to prior engagements she left the meeting early.

#### *ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager*

- Lorrie reported that North Star Support Services has two new supervisors: Angela Harris and Britany Hoover.
- Blair County Community of Practice celebrated their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is the longest standing Community of Practice across the country.
- Bethel held a cultural and historical luncheon where stories were shared and new foods were tried. It was fun and interactive for all involved.
- CARES of Central PA had a Thanksgiving lunch for people supported and their families on November 22, 2024.
- Emily Weaver of At Peace Healthcare will present at the next Developmental Programs Committee meeting.

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

- No one from Blair HealthChoices was present.

#### *Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:*

- Commissioner Burke reported that Sherry Socie has decided to remain in her position as chief clerk. An assistant for Sherry has also been hired.
- Commissioner Burke stated that Children, Youth & Families was put back on another 6 (six) month provisional license despite progress being made. Staffing is still low, but it is higher than it has been in quite a while. Overall case numbers have crept downward.

- Rick asked about response time to a Child Line report. Commissioner Burke answered that it depends on the facts that are relayed to the screener. Responses can be within 24 to 72 hours. Rotating schedule for staff to go out on triage. Daily meetings with on-call supervisors to discuss calls received during the off hours to check consistency of how calls are handled.
- Steve stated that the employment project with Sheetz is moving forward with the idea of having 10 (ten) people employed, each year, over the next 4 (four) years. They just announced that Syntex will be the other designated employer to be a part of this grant.
- Erin added that Texas Roadhouse will donate 10% of customer food purchases to the Suicide Prevention Task Force on Wednesday, December 11, 2024 from 3:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Erin distributed flyers for this event.

Donna closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

**The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 6, 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, January 2, 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, January 2, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting**