

**DAVIDSON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

Dale Moorefield, Director



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**Davidson County Department of Social Services
Board Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2017**

Board Members Present

**Ms. Barbara Presnell; Mr. Andy Morris;
Mr. Lance Barrett; Mr. Steve Jarvis**

Others in Attendance

**Mr. Dale Moorefield; Mr. Scott Craver; Ms. Katrina McMasters;
Mrs. Elizabeth Huff; Mrs. Susan Craig; Ms. Lynn Meeks; Mrs. Caroline Hedrick;
Mrs. Sheri Woodyard; Mrs. Lexa Eagle; Mrs. Michelle Swaim; Mrs. Priscilla Loftin;
Ms. Olinthia Tate-Fielding; Ms. Leslie Kerr; Ms. Margaret Heher**

Call to Order

Ms. Barbara Presnell called the meeting to order at 4:16 p.m. Ms. Presnell offered an invocation.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Andy Morris made a motion to approve the Agenda. Mr. Steve Jarvis seconded the motion. The Agenda was approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Lance Barrett made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 28, 2017 meeting. Mr. Steve Jarvis seconded this motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Address

There was no public address. However, Mr. Dale Moorefield took this opportunity to introduce the guests – CPS supervisors, Mrs. Michelle Swaim, Ms. Olinthia Tate-Fielding, Ms. Leslie Kerr, Ms. Margaret Heher and Mrs. Priscilla Loftin.

Management Report

Mrs. Caroline Hedrick reported that as of March 31, 2017, we are overspending in some areas as previous months. Overall, we are at 73% spending and the target for the end of March is 75%. We are on target to spend as projected.

Mr. Dale Moorefield reported on the vacancies in the Agency. We currently have 12 vacancies. We will be hiring for 11 positions because one clerical position is on hold. We had three individuals that were to start on May 8, 2017; however, one has notified us that she has declined our job offer. All of the vacancies were explained. Mr. Moorefield shared the information he has learned from exit interviews conducted with staff who are leaving the Agency. One person left to go to Cabarrus County in the same job, making more money. One person left to go to the State Employees' Credit Union; a job where she stated she would be more comfortable in her knowledge and abilities. She stated the job here is very difficult and felt as if you were never going to get it all done. One person left going to work from home for United Health Care. Two people left and had no job to which they were going, and were under disciplinary action or pending the disciplinary action.

Mrs. Elizabeth Huff shared with the Board that Medicaid and FNS are still doing very well on processing times. Applications for Medicaid were back up for the month of March. There were no numbers available from the State for caseloads at the time the report was completed. However, numbers were available before this meeting – 28,194 cases in Medicaid, which is down slightly from the previous month. In the Special Assistance area, the numbers stayed about the same. In the FNS area, caseloads are about the same. In the Fraud area, collections went up significantly, due to tax collections. In the Work First area, applications were up in March, and the number of adults entering the work force was up as well. Inquiries and caseloads in Work First remain about the same. In the Child Care area, we are at 98 to 100 percent spending, which is exactly where we want to be. We currently have a small waiting list due to the implementation of NC Fast. Staff is currently working out of two systems because NC Fast was delayed another month. We continue to serve about the same number of families each month. In the Emergency Assistance area, LIEAP is over. We did not spend all of funding, even after reverting part of the funds back to the State. We served 2103 families, which is about 190 less than last year. The trend for other programs in Emergency appears to be the same as well, serving fewer people. Mrs. Huff gave a brief explanation as to why the numbers may be down.

Mr. Scott Craver reported that Child Support numbers are relatively steady. Child support had a tremendous month in collections. \$1.356 million was collected, which is more in this month than ever before. He also shared the Shout Out awarded to the top 20 in collections; Wendy Burcham from Davidson County actually had two shout outs for two different, very large collection amounts.

Ms. Katrina McMasters reported that the five supervisors should be commended for their efforts in getting case numbers down. They have been extremely successful. 225 cases were closed in March. The number of assessments open is down to 188 in March compared to 226 in February. As of the end of March, there were 21 cases left open in investigations. 194 reports were received in March and 110 were accepted for investigation. Ms. McMasters gave a complete breakdown of CPS statistics. The number children coming into care was down for the month of March, as well.

Mrs. Susan Craig reported that 7 children entered Foster Care and 7 children obtained permanence. This leaves a total of 164 children in Foster Care in Davidson County. Mrs.

Craig also shared that May is Foster Care Appreciation month. She shared an insert with the group that will be made available to area churches to place in the church bulletin to help spread the word about the need for more foster families. May 21st is Foster Care Sunday and we are asking area churches to participate. The flyer that was shared is also available in Spanish.

Mrs. Craig shared that in the Adult Services area, the number of applications increased slightly and the number of reports accepted was the same as the previous month. We lost one ward due to death. The total number of wards in March was 87.

Old Business

Social Services Board Appointments for 2017 – 2020

The Board asked for recommendations for the next appointee. Mr. Moorefield let the Board know that the information has been posted in the lobby and on bulletin boards in the Agency. He also shared that some individuals have been approached, but no interest has been shown at this time. New Board members will be appointed by the Social Services Commission by June 30th. The Commissioners' appointment is on their Agenda for May 9, 2017. We would like to try to keep all parts of the county represented on our Board and at present, there is no Thomasville representation. This discussion will continue and we should let Mr. Moorefield know of any person of interest. All present were asked to make appropriate recommendations.

New Business

Program Focus – Child Protective Services

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Mr. Moorefield pointed out the banner and pinwheel gardens planted at DSS and the Health Department to bring attention to the issue of Child Abuse Prevention. On Tuesday, April 11, 2017, a resolution was issued by the Board of Commissioners recognizing April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and this proclamation was shared with the DSS Board. There was discussion regarding when the presentation of the proclamation should take place during the Commissioners' meeting. Mr. Lance Barrett shared that Proclamations will be moved to the beginning of the Agenda for the Board of Commissioners' meetings to allow those in attendance to be aware.

Mr. Moorefield gave a brief introduction regarding the information to be shared and then introduced Katrina McMasters, Program Administrator for the Child Protective Services area.

Ms. McMasters began by reporting that the group of five supervisors will be sharing what is happening in Davidson County now, both good and bad. They will also share where we need to improve. We have five supervisors, making up five teams with 29 social workers total. Mrs. Priscilla Loftin is the first person to see and screen all reports that come into the Agency, either by phone, fax or visit. Ms. Leslie Kerr supervises a full unit of assessors, who go into the homes to complete the investigations regarding the allegations made. MRS has changed the approach for CPS as to how reports are handled. Abuse cases are handled a little different and these kinds of reports are on the increase and seem to be more severe than in the past. Mrs. Michelle Swaim, Ms. Olinthia Tate-Fielding and Ms. Margaret Heher all have units that have both assessor and in-home social workers.

She also shared that the past audits have not revealed anything new, that we know where our deficits are and we are working toward reducing those. CPS strives to insure that we are initiating cases in a timely manner and this is one part of the Performance Based goals for each unit. According to State guidelines, we must be at 100 percent for initiating reports timely. Another area of concern is contact with the non-offending parent. The expectation is to get in touch and stay in contact with that parent. The State says that even if we have to do a door to door search to keep in touch, we should do it. The backlog in CPS has gone from numerous pages in the State system down to one page. Supervision is of the utmost importance to assure that cases are being staffed regularly and action taken appropriately. There was an audit in March 2017 for In-Home and Foster Care cases. The deficit found for In-Home cases was how much time cases are being kept open as well as not having contact with the father of the child involved.

Mrs. Swaim shared that the Intake form has changed, going from 9 pages to 17 pages. This results in longer times spent speaking with the reporter and gathering necessary information. This then delays the screening process and the reports being assigned to an assessor. Intake has been short staffed in recent months, but must continue to run 24 hours per day. The supervisor was taking reports and screening all reports, which was quite cumbersome. This caused the reports to become bogged down in screening and assignment. That area is now fully staffed and training is in progress. All staff have tried to pitch in and help in this area. There is also a high volume of assist requests from other counties and states. These requests are normally handled by the on-call worker, but have been given to daytime workers due to the volume. The State's expectations are that a decision be made within 2 hours of receiving a report as to whether it rises to the level for investigation.

Mrs. Loftin shared that the reports being received are much more difficult than in years past. You never know when a child's life is hanging in the balance. The School system and Law Enforcement are the main reporters, but they do not always know the procedure that DSS must follow before removing a child. The role of the Agency is not usually understood by other agencies and the public.

Ms. Tate-Fielding shared that the 45-day court response timeframe has been lifted. It is harder to walk away from these cases and this has presented many challenges to staff. The assessors are meeting roadblocks created by the parents and they are unable to build a rapport with parents. If no safety issues are discovered that are severe enough to warrant removal of a child or at the least, the need for In-Home Services, we must pull back and allow the family to remain intact. These families may move to another county to avoid DSS involvement. They sometimes refuse drug screens and the parents are cooperating only superficially. This means that DSS must close the case and back out. These cases are coming back in due to more reports being made.

The Board asked questions about the recidivism rate for these cases, but no statistics were available. The impact on the child is questionable. It is the responsibility of DSS to ensure minimal standards for the child and these standards may differ from our own standards. There almost has to be a "smoking gun" before court action can be taken. This also affects workers as well, having to carry the burden of not being able to do anything for the child.

Mrs. Sheri Woodyard gave some examples regarding the information needed to bring a case into court. She also shared that the impact on the workers is great because the social workers are so invested in caring for the children of the County. Information regarding a severe abuse case was shared. There is so much time and energy put into cases and this is so draining on the staff.

Mr. Jarvis told the staff that he appreciates the work of the social workers. He also asked that if anyone has a recommendation for things that can be changed through legislation, to please share the information with him.

Discussion was held regarding educating the community about safety versus risk. The community continues to call to make reports and question why nothing is being done about previous reports; however, the Agency cannot share information except basic procedure that the Agency must follow. The area teachers are aware of new policies set forth by the State. Dialog has been opened up with the community, teachers, DJJ, and other areas to help educate as many people as possible about the new policies.

Ms. Heher shared that In-Home services happen when a family is found in need of services, which may involve working a case plan and/or improving conditions in the home. Workers are trying to "fix" the issues that have been discovered. Safety and risk definition was shared and an example was given. A caretaker who admits to having issues, but has resources and the where-with-all to find help, is an example of a risk, but not a safety issue. The parent that is passed out with children present with no suitable supervision is a safety issue and these are the cases that in-Home services get. The worker must help identify a suitable support system and this would be whoever may be able to help eliminate the safety concern in the home. The parent is engaged with a social worker once to twice a week. Our workers try to make sure that everything that was not working when we started with the family is working when we leave. We now deal with the issues that are putting the child at imminent risk. We cannot force someone to go to treatment. If they can provide a reasonable solution to the problem and continue to use, then we have to let them work through this and our Agency must step away. We may be closing cases too soon, because the same families are coming back into the system; however, the State regulations are so stringent that this is what is happening. We are doing our best to help families get help with transportation, affordable housing, and other resources. One success is that we are jumping in and getting people to address issues, we are not hanging on as long, and letting them live their lives. The cases we are seeing are hard to deal with and are more challenging.

Ms. McMasters shared that the work is hard, taxing, and difficult, but there are successes. 1. We are streamlining service delivery. 2. We are building stronger partnerships with other agencies and the community. 3. We are utilizing our technology more. 4. We are taking full advantage of PFE. This initiative will be life changing for the families we currently work with. 5. We have a contract with Mr. Linwood Bunce, Attorney, to prevent children from coming into care. 6. We are using data to see where we stand as an Agency and the actual numbers of cases open. 7. We are celebrating the small successes. Last, but not least, 8. There were 481 kids in Davidson County in March that were protected by DSS.

In-home cases are at 98 to 100 percent rate of no repeat maltreatment within six months, but there are no numbers for assessments. Some are repeat offenders.

We have a strong supervisory staff, with many years of experience between them in Davidson County and other counties. The children in the County are lucky to have these people looking out for their best interests.

Motion to move into closed session by Mr. Andy Morris. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lance Barrett at 5:35 pm.

Closed Session

No action taken during closed session.

The meeting returned to open session at 5:47 pm.

Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, May 23, 2017, at 4:15 p.m., first floor of Social Services in Lexington, Conference Room D.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:48 pm.

Minutes submitted by Dale Moorefield