

**DAVIDSON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

Dale Moorefield, Director



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**Davidson County Department of Social Services
Board Meeting Minutes
November 28, 2017**

Board Members Present

**Mr. John Byrum; Mr. Andy Morris
Mr. Richard Wagner; Mr. Steve Jarvis**

Others in Attendance

**Mr. Dale Moorefield; Mr. Scott Craver; Ms. Katrina McMasters; Mrs. Susan Craig;
Mrs. Elizabeth Huff; Ms. Sheri Woodyard; Mrs. Caroline Hedrick; Mrs. Lexa Eagle;
Mrs. Jennifer Cavanaugh; Mrs. Ginger Branscome; Ms. Paige Cogan; Mr. Chuck Frye**

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:18 p.m. by Mr. John Byrum. An invocation was offered by Mr. Byrum.

Adoption of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Steve Jarvis made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 24, 2017 meeting. Mr. Andy Morris seconded this motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Address

There was no public address. Mr. Dale Moorefield took this opportunity to introduce the special guests we have for the meeting – Jennifer Cavanaugh, Foster Care Supervisor and Ginger Branscome, Foster Care Social Worker who will be observing several meetings for her Master's Degree requirements. Paige Cogan, Supervisor of Adoptions with Davidson County Clerk of Court's Office, introduced herself. County Attorney Chuck Frye was also introduced at this time.

Management Report

Director Moorefield gave an overview of the Management Reports for each area of the Agency. In the Operations/Expenditure area, the figures presented to the Board represent the operation and expenses for the Agency through October 31, 2017. Overtime spending is at 119 percent, due to increased numbers of children in Foster Care with the Agency; vacant positions or workers that have not had preservice training; as well as increased numbers of reports in the Child Protective Services area. Our vehicle mileage at is 42 percent, which is good because that indicates that we are using the vehicles in our fleet for transport rather than using personal vehicles. The increased expenses for Interpreting Services is due to a Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing individual with which we are involved. The increase in Foster Care expenditures is closely related to the 18 to 21 year old regulations; however, these expenses are 100 percent reimbursable.

Our Agency currently has nine vacancies for the month of November; however, some of those will be filled in December. We are awaiting drug screen results for two individuals who will begin work in December. Some of the vacancies in the past two months have been filled with two in-house promotions and two in-house transfers. We are working to fill all positions.

In the Income Maintenance area, percentages are high for accuracy and timeliness. The State guideline for timeliness for Medicaid is 90 percent and for FNS it is 95 percent and we are far exceeding those standards with every area being at 95% or higher. Medicaid applications are up slightly and with the Health Care Marketplace's open enrollment currently underway through December 15, that may drive up Medicaid application numbers even more. We issued out more than \$2.7 million in FNS benefits in October.

In the Work First area, we currently have 244 cases, which is the lowest number of cases we have had in a while. This is an indication that the economy is better and people are just not applying for this program. Most of the Work First cases are for child only benefits. Our Agency has assisted 10 people through Work First and Career Connections to move into employment so far this year.

In the Child Day Care area, spending is at 103 percent. We are okay at this point, but will need to be mindful of spending in the future. If the spending continues or increases, a waiting list may have to be instituted for our County. At this time, all applicants for Day Care services are being served as they come in.

In our Emergency Assistance area, the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) begins December 1, 2017. A priority population meaning those over 60 or anyone receiving services from DAAS will be served during the first month of the LIEAP application period. Beginning January 1, 2018, all others may begin to apply for these benefits and applications will be taken through March 31, 2018 or until the funding is exhausted. The benefit amounts distributed will depend on the number of people in home and the heating source. These applications must be made in person or by a representative and no appointments are made per LIEAP policy.

Child Support continues to do well. A third of the way through the year collections are at 32.23% percent and we have 6267 cases open. Collections are expected to show an increase during and following tax season as lump sums are garnered through tax intercepts. \$1.1 million was collected in October. Referrals from NC FAST to the Child Support area are

processing better and picking up, as the Adults in Family and Children's Medicaid cases must cooperate with Child Support in order to receive assistance for themselves.

In the CPS area, 246 reports were received and 126 were accepted. There were 15 abuse cases in October. We have 235 assessment cases open and 77 cases open for in-home services. Requested Child fatality information was shared with Mr. Jarvis, with data available through 2016.

In our Foster Care area, they had a good month as permanence was found for 13 children. We now have 169 children in agency custody and care.

The Adult Services area received 40 reports in October and we still have 86 wards for which our Agency is responsible. We continue the contract with Hope for the Future, who have guardianship of the wards in our County that have multiple issues and many needs.

Old Business

There was no Old Business.

New Business

Adoption Awareness

The Board of Commissioners issued a Proclamation regarding November being Adoption Awareness month at the last Commissioners' meeting. That Proclamation was shared with the DSS Board. Our Agency has completed 23 adoptions this year as well as numerous stepparent adoptions. There are currently 35 children awaiting adoption. The majority of these children are in pre-adoptive and adoptive homes. Nine children are not in adoptive homes. They are older children and most have significant mental health issues. Most of the children coming into our care now are coming with extreme trauma. Our County is in need of foster families and these families need to be aware of these issues. We are not an adoption agency, but do complete adoptions for the children in our care to be able to reach permanence. Our Agency works diligently to get adoptions finalized quickly. We have two full-time and one part-time adoption workers. These workers stay very busy with all that is involved in completing an adoption. The termination of parental rights is a big issue and must take place through the court system unless a parent willingly relinquishes their rights as a child's parent. Terminations of Parental Rights are normally done after a child is in a pre-adoptive home.

There were specific questions about the 9 children who are not in adoptive placements at present. Some of them are out of state and all are placed out of the County, as services are not available here. Some of these children are in Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF). Some are in therapeutic foster homes and some are in group treatment homes. Once they age out, the hope is that we have provided the means for them to become self-sufficient. Some of these children actually go into adult care and become adult wards. Ms. Cavanaugh works with Licensing to recruit for foster home/adoptive parents.

Ms. Paige Cogan shared that the Clerk's Office has done over 40 adoptions this year and about half of those were for Social Services. She expressed the desire of the Clerk's Office to do more adoption outreach through that office. She also shared that in addition to the regular work of Social Services, they receive requests from the Clerk's Office to complete home studies for individuals/families not involved with DSS.

Mr. Moorefield shared that the Adoption Committee for the Agency meets as needed to discuss and approve adoptions. These meetings are always uplifting because it means a child is able to find permanence and become part of a forever family. Mr. Jarvis offered to help get awareness out into the community to help with recruitment and adoption.

DSS Legal

Mr. Moorefield began the conversation indicating that our work in Child Welfare Services may result in safety concerns moving us towards custody of children when we cannot be assured that family will provide it for their kids and relatives. In Adult Services, vulnerable adults not capable of making their own decisions may lack suitable family to help them and DSS is assigned guardianship. Our Child Support collections efforts are greatly enhanced due to legal actions taken by our team in the establishment and enforcement of Child Support orders. With that introduction, Mr. Moorefield turned over the discussion to Deputy Director Scott Craver.

Mr. Scott Craver described the court procedure for the Child Support area. Attorney Mike Newby is the main staff attorney that handles these proceedings. He does a great job each Thursday of the month, with alternating days for establishment and enforcement split between Lexington and Thomasville offices. He works well with the Child Support staff. The caseload sizes continue to grow; however, Mr. Newby continues to do well with all aspects of the court proceedings.

Mr. Chuck Frye introduced himself and gave his history with DSS. He shared that he still enjoys the work with DSS and that this Department requires many legal services from his department. He also added Mr. Newby might have 300 cases on the docket on any given Thursday. He is able to complete most of these cases with the assistance of the Agents, who work the cases during court. Mr. Newby then presents the cases that cannot be worked out behind the scenes. Mr. Frye shared that Child Support is a glorified collection agency and that legal services aid greatly in those collections.

Ms. Katrina McMasters shared that our Agency cannot file petitions without legal services and in order to remove a child from a home, a petition must be filed. Our Agency tries to make sure we are filing because of the maltreatment, but also address all of the legal facts and ramifications involved. We want to be sure that if we take children from their home it is in the best interest of the child. We would not be able to keep children in care and safe without the legal services and minds that we have and our Juvenile Attorney Ms. Sheri Woodyard leads that effort for us. Ms. Woodyard has been great with training staff as to what is needed in order to file a petition and remove a child. She helps to make sure we have the best information and presentation we can have. Judges have a different respect for our workers due to her presence and her help. Workers are encouraged to go to Ms. Woodyard for prepping to be sure the workers are comfortable, especially for new staff.

Mrs. Susan Craig shared that with 169 children in care this means all of their cases have to be brought into Court at least twice a year and some go more often, due to circumstances. Stricter guidelines have been passed down by the State and these new guidelines mean more Court involvement. Ms. Woodyard has to work with staff in other counties when there are conflict cases that are being worked. Orders from the Court are now growing in size, and each order is unique and must be completed based on the case. Our Agency and Ms. Woodyard make every attempt to be sure these orders are good and sound so that appeals do not happen. Agency Staff is very appreciative of Ms. Woodyard's help in court and in prepping for court and the committed, positive attitude of support that she brings.

Ms. Woodyard shared her daily responsibilities as the DSS attorney. She is involved in all staffings for removal. These staffings include social workers involved, social work supervisors, foster care placement worker and sometimes program administrators. They discuss why the child needs to come into care and a decision to remove a child is based on the evidence as it is presented by the investigating social worker. Ms. Woodyard has outlined what she needs from staff as well as what her expectations are for each case. There may be lots of information and legwork involved, but this has proven to be most helpful. There was discussion as to feasibility of making sure all issues are addressed upfront rather than having surprises during a court hearing. She stressed that she wants NO surprises in court. She shared that she demands a lot, but overall, the workers are willing to get the information needed. Some of the staffings can be a day long process and very stressful for the workers and for Ms. Woodyard, but it is worth it in the long run. We do not have a lot of contested hearings. Juggling of cases in court is sometimes necessary when cases run long. Ms. Woodyard stressed that it is a huge responsibility for our Agency to take custody of a child and the courts hold DSS to a high standard, as they should be. Ms. Woodyard shared that workers get "beat up" in court sometimes, but they have done good work and can stand by it when this happens. Parents' attorneys and the Judges will "beat them up" verbally. Ms. Woodyard goes to juvenile court (delinquency), DSS court and TPR court. Subpoenas that are received for records is also a very time consuming process. These records have to be provided, at times, when there is a custody suit and DSS has been involved with the children. The Court orders that we have to release these records. Training for workers was also discussed. Most of the training is held with foster care workers due to the hearings they have to be a part of. Staff must be prepared and Ms. Woodyard makes sure that they are. Court reports are completed by a social worker for each hearing that is held.

Mr. Frye shared that the DSS attorney job has become much tougher over the years. Statutes have changed and Judges sometimes have an adversarial attitude. He shared that this is a thankless job that Ms. Woodyard does and it is not going to get any easier. DSS demands much of the attorney's attention and the present demand for attorney services is high and getting higher.

There were questions asked and answered about whether someone else could handle some of the work and issues. There were also questions as to how best to handle this problem, whether with another paralegal or another attorney. Mr. Frye explained that there are three models statewide for providing services to DSS. One is contracted services through attorneys outside DSS; second is to have an attorney working solely for DSS; and the third is what we have evolved to here in Davidson County, which is having a legal department and have specific attorneys dedicated to certain services needed within the County. During the interim of the vacancy and possibly ongoing, we may have to have some services contracted out because there is no one with both skill sets that the previous attorney had, which were working with DSS children and Tax law. Mr. Moorefield shared that DSS will be contracting with Holly Groce, Attorney for the short term. There are advantages and disadvantages to contracting with outside attorneys and some of those were discussed briefly.

Ms. Woodyard shared that she wants to be as accessible as possible to staff, but by the same reasoning, does not want to get burned out. She feels she is okay for now, but if the numbers in foster care continue to increase, this could become a problem.

The Board expressed that the information that has been shared is good to know and that they understand the demands that may require more staff.

Closed Session

Mr. Steve Jarvis made a motion to go into closed session at 5:15 pm for the purpose of reviewing a personnel issue and per General Statute 143-318.11(a)(1) to prevent disclosure of privileged or confidential information. Mr. Andy Morris seconded this motion.

Mr. Andy Morris made a motion to end the closed session at 6:34 pm. Mr. Richard Wagner seconded the motion.

Date of Next Meeting

Friday, December 15, 2017, at 11:30 am, at Lexington Church of God located on West Fifth Avenue in Lexington. The Agency Christmas Luncheon will follow at 12 noon and the Board is invited to attend.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Minutes submitted by Dale Moorefield