

**New Hanover County
Board of Social Services
Minutes
December 12, 2007**

The New Hanover County Board of Social Services met in open session on Tuesday, December 12, 2007 at 10:00 in Multipurpose Room A of the New Hanover County Department of Social Services.

ATTENDING: Ann Pitts, Chairman; Bill Caster, Vice-Chairman; John Craig; F. Wayne Morris; Minerva Glidden

ALSO ATTENDING: LaVaughn Nesmith, Secretary to the Board; Jean Lewis Personnel Secretary

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Mr. Craig moved for approval of the agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caster and passed unanimously.

Mr. Caster led the invocation. Ms. Glidden led the pledge of allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Caster moved for approval of the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Craig and passed unanimously. Ms. Glidden moved to add an item under Additional Items. The motion was seconded by John Craig and passed unanimously.

Urgent Need for Additional Legal Resources:

Julia Talbutt introduced Chief District Court Judge J.H. Corpening. He spoke in support of the DSS Legal Department's request for additional staff.

Juvenile Court has large backlog despite efforts to alleviate the problem. DSS Juvenile Court has increased from one day to two days a week. DSS lawyers and paralegals are doing all that they can do. Judge Corpening praised Julia Talbutt, Dean Hollandsworth and their staff for doing a great job, but stated that it's not enough. ASFA has regulations about the type and timing of the hearings DSS is involved in. New Hanover County is having problems meeting the requirements of these regulations, and the state is imposing penalties. DSS needs to meet these timelines. The agency incurs financial penalties when timelines are not met and children suffer because of problems with permanency planning in these cases. There are four days a month available for court hearings for terminating parental rights. DSS is currently unable to fully utilize these opportunities because the legal department lacks the time. Children suffer when adults fail.

It is Judge Corpening's opinion that the lack of legal staff for DSS constitutes an emergency situation.

Judge Corpening recommended increasing the DSS Legal Department by one lawyer and one paralegal. Julia Talbutt noted the American Bar Association guidelines are 60 children per lawyer. DSS has an average of 459 children, which would require 8 lawyers.

Ms. Talbutt also stated that one attorney must be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The DSS Board approved the request for new legal positions at last year's budget retreat. That request was denied by the County Manager. Bruce Shell recently indicated that he supports the addition of new legal staff and has told Mr. Nesmith that he will not wait until FY08/09 to approach the county commissioners with the request.

Beth Schrader, New Hanover County Budget Analyst suggested that DSS emphasize the county will be reimbursed by the state for half the cost of the new positions whereas the county loses money through imposed penalties when DSS does not meet required deadlines.

A motion was made by Ms. Glidden to request two attorneys plus support staff instead of one. The motion was seconded by John Craig and passed unanimously.

The Board thanked Judge Corpening for his presentation.

INFORMATION AGENDA

New Hires

Zoila Brock was introduced as the new Child Protective Services Social Worker/Zone 2. Kimberly Brown and Keeva Nichols were introduced as new Children Services Social Workers/Zone 2. Roynetta Capers was acknowledged as having moved from a Temporary Economic Services Caseworker Trainee position to a Family and Children's Medicaid Caseworker/Zone 1 position.

Service Awards

Richard Ohmer was recognized for 5 years of service to New Hanover County. Lisa Johnson and Leslie Smiley were recognized for 20 years of service to New Hanover County

LINKS

Mr. Caster asked about the LINKS Program. Wanda Marino explained LINKS is a program that provides services to help foster children ages 13-21 move toward self sufficiency. All foster care children are eligible. A LINKS Survey is used to validate the need for the program and to help make improvements in the program. Six foster children have gone onto college with LINKS scholarships.

CARS

Mr. Caster asked about the CARS Program. Ms. Marino explained the program is for foster children that have reached the age of 18 who chose to stay in care for certain reasons. Ms. Marino explained VPA stands for Voluntary Placement Agreement.

SSDI

Mr. Caster addressed Item 3 Page 3, stating that there was a notable jump in the level of TANF funds. Ms. Marino explained that DSS received additional funding and had transferred money between funding sources. There has been a dramatic increase in requests for TANF assistance for rent payments. Ann Barkley remarked the number of people losing their homes is a major contributing factor for the increased requests. There were 1,000 more applications for Work First in October 2007 than in September 2007. The cost of living and the cost of housing in this community is getting higher, but wages are not. Section 8 has a waiting list of 3 years. It was mentioned that social workers are finding that several families are living together in one house. It is less expensive to pay a light bill than to bring children into our custody. Mr. Caster asked about the number of Food Assistance applications. Sam Lane stated there were 275 new applications in October, and that 2/3 of those applicants are considered working poor; meaning that they have jobs but their wages are not enough to support themselves or their families.

Ms. Glidden remarked the number of clients enrolled in the Work First program has dropped over 70% since 1995. Mr. Nesmith noted many of the clients currently enrolled in the program have mental and/or emotional issues making it difficult for them to secure employment.

County Budget Expenditures

Carol Thiel explained that DSS is currently on target with most programs. Areas of concern are GA, TANF and Smart Start. More money is expected in January for crisis intervention and through faith community funds.

Mr. Caster asked why so many programs were funded solely through county dollars. Ms. Thiel explained that the County Budget Expenditure sheet does not include/show State and Federal funds. Mr. Morris pointed out that this is a County and DSS budget sheet.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Nesmith asked the board for feedback on the Director's Report. Mr. Caster and Ms. Pitts said the report is what they were hoping for. Ms. Glidden remarked on the use of the word "disproportionate" concerning the number of minorities in juvenile court. Julia Talbutt stated that "over represented" might be a more accurate phrase.

STRATEGIC ACTION AGENDA

Family Find Proposal:

Ms. Marino addressed the Board concerning the Family Find Proposal from the Division of Social Services. Ten counties will be selected to pilot this program. Ms. Marino proposed New Hanover County DSS apply to be a pilot county. The Family Find project would place children with a family member before they enter foster care. This would be especially helpful with adoption or difficult to place cases. It involves finding extended family in or outside the United States. The program should quicken the process of finding permanent placement for children. The Division of Social Services feels sure

Family Find will be fully funded by a Duke Endowment for all ten pilot counties. The funding would include salary and benefits for one social worker to work only with this program. A software program will be provided and family searches would be included in the funding. Family searches normally cost \$25.00 per search. DSS has used these searches before and had a high success rate with them.

Ms. Marino asked for approval from the DSS Board to present the proposal to become a pilot county to the county commissioners.

John Craig moved to approve Ms. Marino's request, and Mr. Morris seconded the motion. The Board took a vote and it passed unanimously.

North Side Center Survey

Angelina Bernard and Sam Lane spoke to the Board concerning the North Side Center. In September, Mr. Nesmith was approached by the North Side Center requesting an out-posted Economic Services Caseworker to accommodate more clients. DSS sent out 800 surveys to research the feasibility of the request. Only 80 surveys that were returned and of those, 64 said they would go to the North Side Center if a DSS worker was available there. Mr. Lane explained that DSS staff specialize in one program or another so several workers would be required to fulfill the needs of the relatively small number of clients they would serve. This would not be cost effective. Based on this information, Ms. Bernard and Mr. Lane recommended that DSS not station any personnel at the North Side Center at this time.

A motion was made by Mrs. Pitts for the Board to accept Mr. Lane and Ms. Bernard's recommendation. It was seconded by John Craig and passed unanimously.

Capital Improvement Project

Mr. Nesmith informed the Board that the County Manager has stated that he will accept a proposal for expansion and renovation of the DSS building. Mr. Nesmith gave the Board copies of the written proposal he will submit to the county manager for consideration. Mr. Nesmith is hoping the county will consider this plan for this fiscal year (FY07/08), if not, then next fiscal year (FY08/09).

Next Meeting Objectives

Resource Needs identified by LBR

Board Self Evaluation

The Board completed self evaluations.

Additional Items

As a follow up to the November 2007 board meeting the board suggested a subcommittee be set up with Ms. Glidden serving as Chair, to review the agency's current drug policy.

The subcommittee would report back to the board with its recommendations. Ms. Glidden feels the current policy is very general and contradictory in places.

As there were no further items to discuss as provided in G.S. 154A-98 to consider information that is confidential pursuant to G.S. 108A-80 and or G.S. 154A-98 the board by consensus adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

LaVaughn Nesmith
Secretary to the Board

Ann Pitts
Board Chairman