

**New Hanover County
Board of Social Services
Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2010
Multi Purpose Room A
9:00a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**

The New Hanover County Board of Social Services met in open session on Tuesday, March 2, 2010 at 9:00 in Multi Purpose Room A of the New Hanover County Department of Social Services.

ATTENDING: John Craig, Chairman; Bill Caster, Evelyn Bryant and Patrick Riley

ALSO ATTENDING: LaVaughn Nesmith, Secretary to the Board; Stephanie Monteath, Administrative Support Specialist

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Caster moved for approval of the agenda. The motion was passed unanimously.

Mr. Caster led the invocation. Mr. Riley led the pledge of allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Riley moved for approval of the consent agenda. The motion was passed unanimously.

INFORMATION AGENDA

Promotions

Christine McNamee was promoted to Assistant Director of Economic Services. Renee Hall and Mary Beth Rubright were promoted to Social Work Supervisors.

County Service Awards

Deborah Allen was recognized for 5 Years of Service to the County.

State Service Awards

Wanda Marino, Kim Evans, Cheryl Mote, Sheila Merritt, Arena Everett, Marlene Dancy, Celeste Chadwick and Cora Waddell were recognized for 20 years of service to the State of North Carolina.

SSDI

Mr. Nesmith pointed out numbers of interest in the Significant Service Delivery Indicators and discussed the impact of the continued economic downturn. He noted that the foster care workers have done an excellent job at finding relative placements for children in foster care. Mr. Nesmith forecasted Child Care Subsidy would maintain a

waiting list for all of 2010. Mr. Nesmith talked about the expense of Title XIX Medicaid Transportation for out of county medical appointments. Although clients are asked to try to schedule appointments on the days the WAVE van runs out of county some specialists are not able to schedule appointments on those days.

Mr. Riley asked how often DSS checks to ensure the people receiving Day Care Subsidy are actually qualified to receive assistance. Ms. Heslin explained a monthly review is conducted to ensure people receiving Day Care Subsidy continue to be eligible. As well, people on the waiting list for Day Care Subsidy are reviewed every 6 months for eligibility.

County Budget Expenditures

Mr. Caster asked about the MAPP class. Mr. Nesmith and Ms. Julie Steinbeck explained that it is a class conducted by DSS which trains people to become licensed foster parents.

Director's Executive Report

There were no questions or comments.

STRATEGIC ACTION AGENDA

Proposed Budget for FY 2010/2011

Mr. Nesmith reviewed the agency mission statement and discussed growth in programs. He noted staff is fatigued due to the increase in clients and the decrease in staff. The current focus of DSS is to minimize the impact of growth and evaluate program needs, which sometimes means reclassifying or moving staff. Mr. Nesmith has asked the board to support a request to end furlough, restore leave accruals and reinstate much needed positions.

Mr. Caster noted that mandated programs are federally or state funded at least partially noting DSS should only do what they are funded to do. Mr. Nesmith explained each area of need would be detailed further during the presentation.

In beginning discussions about the budget, Ms. Christine McNamee expressed her concern that final numbers of funding have not yet been received from the State.

Mr. Nesmith commented on the impact DSS programs have on the economy of the county. Millions of dollars go to grocery stores, child care centers and health care providers because of the services provided by our agency.

Ms. Angelina Bernard talked about the LBR process regarding Community Outreach. LBR promotes community education and we are addressing that goal through improving web access for applications and program information, continuing our monthly government television series, sponsoring the annual fatherhood conference, and the rapid response team which goes into the community after big layoffs to explain how to fill out applications and access services DSS offers.

Ms Bernard identified some of the many partnerships that DSS cultivates to improve our services to County residents including Wilmington Access for Teens, Access III Cape Fear Health Net Tileston Clinic, Employment Security Commission, Phoenix Employment Ministries, Methodist Home for Children and ADR. Through these partnerships, DSS is able to more fully provide services to the community efficiently and effectively while creatively adapting to new Federal, State and local legislation, changing demographics and service demands.

Ms. McNamee and Mr. Nesmith reiterated the request to reinstate the sixteen frozen positions, eliminate furlough, use technology and increase contracting to provide support staffing. DSS has significantly felt the increase of service demands as, in addition to the 16 frozen positions, the hours lost through furlough equate to the loss of 10 additional staff people

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Ms. McNamee reviewed the vision to exceed expectations of our community by providing support services, stable and appropriate funding levels, maximization of revenues and technology that increase efficiency and better provide for our clients needs.

Ms. McNamee explained in FY 08/09, 111.95% of all available state and federal dollars were utilized to reimburse the county for all allowable costs. The target for FY09/10 is 100% or greater.

Ms. Bernard talked about the target of getting clients seen by a worker within 30 minutes of registering. She explained that in order to meet the benchmark of 80% renovations are being done to the lobby.

Mr. Caster asked why the turnover rate had increased so much in the year measured. Ms. Stephanie Monteath explained the increase is due to the Early Retirement Incentive program the county offered. As well, there are no longer Information Technology positions at DSS as they were moved into the fold of the County IT department. Freezing positions has delayed our goal of filling vacancies in less than 40 days.

FOOD AND NUTRITION

The vision for Food and Nutrition Services is to supplement the food purchasing power of low-income families by promptly, courteously and accurately providing food and nutrition benefits and educating and/or connecting them to other available resources.

Ms. Mary John Brantley talked about the extraordinary growth in the Food and Nutrition Services program which is much higher than she had projected the previous year. Currently, each caseworker has a caseload of 710 clients. Mr. Nesmith noted that caseloads above 450 have much higher error rates. On-going monthly cases are at 9,871 for 2009 as opposed to 7,791 in 2008 and steadily increasing.

MEDICAID

The vision for Medicaid and Health Choice is to assist eligible low income individuals, families and children in obtaining access to medical services by quickly and accurately

determining their eligibility for Medicaid/Health Choice and providing information to citizens to help them obtain medical coverage.

Ms. Heslin discussed how the Medicaid caseloads for her staff are 703 per caseworker. Mail-in applications are increasing as well as walk-in applications. On-going caseloads in Family and Children's Medicaid have increased from 9,025 in 2008 to 12,216 in 2009. New applications have increased from 13,688 in 07/08 to 14,643 in 08/09. Adult Medicaid caseloads have increased to 1792 per month in 2009 from 1562 per month in 2008, while on-going cases have dropped by a little over 100 due to adults expiring due to health and age. Again, innovation to work smarter not harder is the goal for these units.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

The vision for Child Care Subsidy is to ensure safe, quality, accessible and affordable child care for children in New Hanover County, supporting the independence of families by enabling responsible adults to secure and maintain employment and meet the basic needs of their children.

Ms. Heslin shared the situation looks dire. As money continues to be cut, so will families be cut from the Child Care Subsidy program.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

The vision for Child Support Enforcement is to ensure that non-custodial parents acknowledge and accept responsibility for the care and well being of their children through the payment of child support payments on a regular and consistent basis.

Ms. Alyssa Harrell discussed Child Support and paternity testing for children that were born out of wedlock. Currently, Child Support collection is at a 67.87% where the state average is only 64%. Collections for arrears were very good at 56% where the state average was only 54%. Child Support is outsourced to Young Williams and DSS feels secure in continuing this contract.

PREVENTION SERVICES

Mr. Nesmith explained the Prevention Social Work program was cut as it was a non-mandated program. Unfortunately, by cutting this program, more families end up in crisis with bills or in a child protective service case as DSS is no longer able to front load services to prevent the family from ending up in crisis.

WORK FIRST

The vision for Work First is to promote economic self-sufficiency and well-being for Work First recipients and other at risk individuals and families through the provision of family-centered, strength based, solution focused services.

The challenge for Work First is there are fewer jobs to place people in so people are staying in the program longer. As well, the folks involved in the Work First program

have a lot of issues with mental health or stability due to myriad factors such as domestic violence, lack of a high school diploma or substance abuse. The Work First program is continuing to partner with Phoenix Employment Ministries and the Employment Security Commission to find placement for Work First clients.

EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Celeste Chadwick explained that Emergency Assistance applications for bills remain high at 2,025 in the first 6 months of FY09/10. Emergency Assistance is only given if money is available. As well, Emergency Assistance workers try to link clients with donation programs such as Good Friends, Faith Community and Share the Warmth. With the extremely cold weather this winter, it is expected that more applications will be coming in to DSS.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The vision for Children's Services is for each child in New Hanover County to achieve a permanent sense of belonging to a family that gives security, good health, adequate nutrition, a safe environment, a quality education and hope for the future.

Ms. Julie Steinbeck talked about the success of Family Find. Several challenges Ms. Steinbeck notes are: families working toward reunification have issues which are often not rectified quickly, people are not signing up to be foster families due to difficult economic times, and some families are no longer fostering kids as they have adopted the children they were fostering. Ms. Steinbeck talked about the Links program which connects teenagers between ages 16-18 coming out of foster care with available services in an effort to keep them from engaging in risky behavior such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy or homelessness. Links also helps older teenagers find support (financial or other) to go to college and find successful employment in the community.

ADULT SERVICES

The vision for Adult Services is simply that New Hanover County elderly and disabled citizens will live safely and independently.

Ms. Susan Sprenger discussed the target to decrease repeat maltreatment of aged and disabled adults. Unfortunately this year the number of people maltreated has increased. When Ms. Sprenger looked into what happened, the folks that had been maltreated had decided to check out of a safe monitored facility and move back home where they were neglected or abused again. Ms. Sprenger explained that Adult Services staff works very hard to encourage aged and disabled adults to make safe choices for themselves. On a good note, Adult Daycare funds were increased and this helps families by providing a safe place for an adult with special needs to go during the day while the family works.

Ms. Sprenger explained that many nursing facilities have had to close due to a decrease in Medicaid income. As well it proves problematic for folks who have too much income to be eligible for Medicaid but not enough to afford to live in a care facility. Many of these folks are not aged but have extraordinary mental health issues and need assistance.

Ms. Leslie Smiley explained that out of the 192,235 people who live in New Hanover County, 25,395 of those folks are over 65 (13.2%). This number does not include the number of people eligible for care/assistance due to mental illness or developmental disabilities.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Ms. Kari Sanders talked about strategies used to help families involved in a child protective service cases such as linking families to parenting classes or substance abuse counseling. Ms. Sanders noted the loss of the Prevention Unit directly impacts the amount of cases that turn into Child Protective Services cases. Caseloads for treatment social workers (working on prevention skills) are now extremely high and well above state standards.

Ms. Sanders notes that since July 2009 DSS has assumed custody of 124 children (21.26% of the children involved in a confirmed CPS case). As well, mental health continues to play a role in CPS. Even when children are taken away from an unstable mother, those mothers continue to have more children. Luckily, DSS has been really successful in placing children with family members. In response to a question, law enforcement is involved in all physical and sexual abuse cases. A law enforcement officer with a social worker will conduct interview for abused children at the same time to reduce the amount of times the child must relive the trauma.

BUDGET SUPPORT VOTE

The board unanimously voted to support the budget by stating aye.

Additional Items

Ms. Bernard asked for the Board's permission to purge and destroy outdated Food and Nutrition case files. Mr. Caster moved to destroy the files. The motion was passed unanimously by the board.

Renovations will begin March 29th, 2010 and predicted to be finished sometime in May 2010. The multipurpose rooms will become the waiting room temporarily.

Next Meeting Objectives

In-Home Aid Annual Review
Work First Success Committee

Board Self Evaluation

The Board completed self evaluations.

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 at 11:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

LaVaughn Nesmith,
Secretary to the Board

John E. Craig,
Chairman

Date approved: _____

LN: scm