

# CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

September 8, 2020

## MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

**Present:** Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Ken Pawluk, Duane Breitling, Robert Wilson  
(all present via Teams Meeting)

**Absent:** Brian Hagen, Glenn Ellingsberg

**Presenter:** Pearl Ferguson, Human Services Zone Director

### I. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the July 6, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

### II. Operations Report

Ms. Ferguson introduced the Organizational Development Initiatives. The development initiatives developed by Ms. Ferguson include input from other managers to flush out what needs to be done on an agency level to work efficiently and effectively. This plan is currently a work in progress with opportunities for improvement. The purpose of the plan is to outline the initiatives that need to be addressed both operationally and administratively. There were several questions asked which the initiatives are set out to address. The initiatives include and evaluation and update policies and procedures so they focus on best practices and consistency in work; address any cultural issues; assure workforce wellbeing; conduct an evaluation and update of the mission and values to assure they are written so staff can demonstrate those values daily; address the needs of the citizens, community and staff; assure human resources are maximized; and improve training development and staff engagement. Currently there are 17 initiatives including action items such as the need for documents, policies, or processes to support these initiatives. This is in the initial stage so the initiatives will evolve as they are fully flushed out, prioritized, and staff members are chosen to work through their design, implementation, and monitoring. This process will occur over the next months and years since there will be a need for continuous review to address changes that may come up with new federal rules and regulations along with state and county policies changes. These initiatives will continue to include immediate issues and future goals. There is a need to also require regular evaluation and collaboration with the county and state to assure consistency.

Mr. Steen stated he reviewed the Organizational Development Initiatives with Ms. Ferguson prior to the meeting and agrees there has been a lot of thought put into the plan but asked how much will be accomplished and what is the timeframe? Ms. Ferguson clarified it will have to be done in sections. The priority is to start with the mission vision and values of the agency because they will permeate and align with all the other initiatives. Next step will include policies and procedures to address and assure they are uniform. Telecommuting for COVID and performance management cycle needs to be improved and updated for consistency. The timeframe will be outlined through project management so it will be possible to run some initiatives simultaneously once the mission, vision and values are outlined. This process will take several months. Mr. Steen agrees this will take several months but wanted to assure everyone understands the timeframe.

Ms. Scherling worked with Mr. Wilson last year and believes the Organizational Development Initiatives are in line with much of the work already completed. Ms. Scherling believes one of the top priorities is to address the makeup of the Human Services Zone Board. The state has promised training but there appears to be a holding pattern so the board will also need to be

focused on. Ms. Ferguson informed the board the state has hired a Director of Zone Operations. Ms. Kristen Hasbargen has worked as the Zone Director for RSR in the Wahpeton area and in Human Services for approximately 25 years. One of her primary objectives includes zone board training. Ms. Ferguson has upcoming Zone Director meetings once a month to work on projects, so training the board will be a collaborative task. Ms. Hasbargen does not start her position until October 1, 2020 but a collaboration with all the Zone Directors will help expedite the roll out following the start of her position. The concerns expressed by the Cass County Human Service Zone Board are in line with concerns expressed from other zone boards, so this is a good move forward in getting the boards across the state educated.

Mr. Wilson asked if there would be a follow-up on staff surveys to see how the staff are doing since Ms. Ferguson has been onboard. Ms. Ferguson agreed it is important to survey individuals but is it most meaningful to implement a survey which include employee engagement and satisfaction. Ms. Ferguson stated studies show it is best to use an evidenced based survey tool to be most effective. Best practice is to assure any previous survey included an action plan and response to employees' concerns. Ms. Ferguson expressed concern that this is a challenging time to conduct another survey since the previous survey has not yet had an action plan put into place to address the employee documented concerns. In addition, there have been many changes which have taken place since the last survey such as a pandemic, leadership changes, and much of the development plan has not been implemented. This makes it difficult to make a comparison between the answers. Instead, Ms. Ferguson suggested, there should be consideration made for a Cass County survey, where Human Services would be a subsection of the survey. A survey including all county services may reveal reoccurring issues across the divisions which could be addressed. Mr. Peterson stated he appreciated Ms. Ferguson's explanation and understands why the previous survey could not be used again but wants to assure there is an action plan created to improve the employee issues from last year. Ms. Ferguson confirmed there may be copywrite issues using a proprietary survey and if the contents of the previous survey have not been formally addressed then the staff will not have faith and may not engage in the new survey. The goal is to decrease turnover and increase engagement so when, and how a survey is conducted, must appropriately capture the information needed for improve. Mr. Peterson requested Ms. Ferguson communicate any plans for improvement with the employees, so they understand progress is being made to address the issues and concerns previously expressed by the staff. Ms. Ferguson stated she will meet with Mr. Wilson to address the county issues which were brought up on the previous survey by the employees. Mr. Hagen shared his experience using surveys across his company and confirmed it has worked well. He also suggested bringing together a team to address cultural changes and to help structure a plan. Ms. Ferguson agreed partnering with Human Resources, Mr. Wilson and other department heads would be a good approach. Mr. Wilson agreed and feels Ms. Ferguson's expertise will benefit the process.

#### Operations report:

Ms. Ferguson reported the number of foster care licenses in July were not previously documented but were at 89.

Mr. Steen requested clarification on the use of the overflow shelter and asked why there were youth discharged from a state operated residential facility with no plan. Ms. Ferguson clarified there are various levels of care for a child. The high-level care facilities are appropriate for youth with intense counseling. This offers them a place to stabilize but is not appropriate for long term. Human Services supports children in the lowest level of care possible. There are a limited number of spaces available, so the demand for care exceeds the supply. So, when a child's order is discharged, they no longer need the additional care. The child may leave the high-level care residential facilities with behaviors or history of trauma or abuse and may be on medication. Foster families or low-level care residential facilities may not have room or the ability to take on

a child with additional issues. The overflow shelter available for these cases. It is intended to be temporary, but Human Services must staff the shelter. Ms. Ferguson stated this is a morale issue for staff but there are ongoing discussions between the state and the counties to find a better option. Mr. Hagen asked what current options are available to shelter children. Ms. Ferguson explained there is a youth work shelter but due to the pandemic other shelters are not currently available because of safety issues. Mr. Wilson informed the board that Ms. Ferguson and Linda Dorff were amongst the staff who stayed at the shelter with a youth overnight. Ms. Ferguson expressed her extreme gratitude for the staff who have helped provide care for the youth. Meals, play time, homework time, etc., Ms. Ferguson stated it is everyone's responsibility to step up and the staff have been flexible creative and supportive.

Ms. Ferguson addressed the Directors Report and reiterated Ms. Kristen Hasbargen will begin her position as Director of Zone Operations on October 1, 2020 and will be a positive addition to the team. Ms. Ferguson reported she is currently working on several groups. These teams include the Zone Directors Performance Appraisal group, which is short term and should end once they complete the juvenile justice bill. Ms. Ferguson is also a member of the Zone Directors Association Transitions which is tasked to address the changes from County Directors to Zone Directors assuring the membership to NDACO will continue. Ms. Ferguson recently started a project working with a team on the theory of constraints and continuous quality improvements. Within the community, Ms. Ferguson will serve on steering committee for Stand to Protect, an agency providing adult education on the prevention of child sexual abuse. Ms. Ferguson is expected to be voted in as a board member of the Red River Valley Children's Advocacy Center which has a strong partnership with the Human Service Zone. Ms. Ferguson is also a member at large on the Board of Health which is currently working on COVID support team meetings. Ms. Ferguson's goal is to branch out in the community and to be a liaison between the agency and the community.

Ms. Ferguson received a Human Service Zone Plan with feedback from Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Sara Stolt and state legal. The next step is to identify individuals that need to be in a follow-up meeting with the state to finalize the Human Service Zone Plan. This may include auditors and Human Service Zone Board members. Ms. Ferguson has until December to finalize.

Ms. Ferguson reported the state has been working on personnel policies which can be utilized across the zones. This will allow for standardization. Individual zones will have the ability to write addendums to add information not covered but required within a specific zone. The addendums will be provided to the Human Zone Board for feedback prior to November when they are due back to the state.

Mr. Peterson asked if any zones were struggling with the new structure. Ms. Ferguson reported all zones are doing good with the redesign and collaboration between zones is going well. The Zone Directors meet once a week and once every two weeks with Chief Operating Officer, Sara Stolt. They are developing as a team. The state is being supportive as well.

### III. Adjournment

Peterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:56 p.m. Mr. Pawlick seconded. Motion carried.

  
Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director  
Cass County Human Services Zone Board

  
Marla McIntyre, Recorder