

**CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING
OCTOBER 05, 2020**

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

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

Absent:

Presenter: Pearl Mell (Ferguson), Human Services Zone Director

I. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Breitling made a motion to approve the September 8, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Operations Report

Ms. Mell opened with the Operations Report and asked for clarification if all open positions had been filled in the agency. Ms. McIntyre, Administrative Support Manager, clarified all open positions have been offered and will be filled October 19, 2020 with the start of the newest team member in Family Services. Ms. Mell reported Economic assistance is consistent in their application numbers. They continue to be busy although by appointment only, which is working well.

III. Directors Updates

Ms. Mell presented the Social Services Redesign updates. Family Service team members have been participating in North Dakota's new Safety Framework Practice Model training. This training was designed to increase consistency in practice across the state, provide a clear definition of safety, establish set criteria for removal and reunification and identify and build protective capacities in parents and caregiver as part of social services redesign. The desire is to have consistent practices and mitigate unnecessary removal. This training began at the beginning of August and all cohorts of training will be completed November 6, 2020. Kickoff for the new Safety Framework Practice Model is December 14, 2020. In the interim family services staff have started coaching sessions with Field Specialist, formerly known as Regional Representatives, to hone the skills they learned in their training to better implement the safety practices learned.

Ms. Mell reported the state is about to start eligibility redesign. Cass County has been selected as an Eligibility Redesign Champion. They will meet in an all-day session on Oct 15, 2020. They will do an Eligibility Redesign Kickoff meeting. The primary goal is to work together as champions to build Eligibility processes that level workload across the state while maintaining high quality and timeliness standards for case processing. Some Human Service Zones do what is called process management and some do case management when it comes to processing eligibility applications. Cass county currently does case management which requires you follow a case through the process working with multiple programs. They will be moving to process management which should help level out workloads. There is a high caseload in Cass County so this will be a big procedural change but should be a positive change.

Ms. Mell presented the Human Resource Personnel Policies Update. Currently Zone Directors have been working collaboratively with the State Human Resources to develop consistent personnel policies that can be used across zones to allow for consistency between the zone. Most of the policies are based in administrative code and cannot be amended, but some policies do allow for zone specific addendums. Addendum examples include: the dress code, business

hours, benefits, the EAP, inclement weather, donated leave, etc. Ms. Mell along with Ms. McIntyre have been reviewing the existing county policies which align with the state policies and allow for addendums. Going forward addendums will mirror county policies to promote internal congruence for all county staff. Any addendums that do not align with an existing county policy will be brought before the Human Service Zone board for review, discussion, and approval at the November 2020 meeting. Mr. Wilson requested Ms. Cindy Stoick, Human Resource Director for Cass County be included in any discussions of county policies. Ms. Mell assured the board Ms. Stoick is already aware of the discussions.

Ms. Mell reported on an update to the performance management cycle. In the September meeting Ms. Mell outlined 17+ organizational development items which would benefit the agency. To date Ms. Mell and Ms. McIntyre have started to work on performance management cycle to address the number of inconsistencies in the process. This will assure staff are evaluated and measured according to fair and consistent guidelines. This project will address 30-day probationary reviews for new staff with their supervisor, to assure the new employees have the training and education they need to stay long term. This new process will include a probationary status review at 6 months, to recommend if the probationary period is extended or the employee moves to permanent status. This will also address annual performance appraisal as required by the state. Performance reviews will include goal setting to allow staff to grow and develop in their roles. Monthly one on one employee and supervisor meetings will be required to review goals, address performance issues, and offer a designated time to build trust and relationships. This process will incorporate the state progressive disciplinary process. So far the new employee 30 day and probationary status reviews have been defined. The annual performance evaluation forms are partially completed with additional work needed on goal setting and monthly supervisor meetings. There will be no changes made to the state's progressive discipline process. When the processes, tools, and policies for the performance management process are completed all staff and supervisors will be provided with training.

Ms. Mell addressed the Alia education sessions and breakthrough days. Cass County has worked with Alia since 2018. Alia is a group which challenges the status quo on child welfare system. They will provide two, free of charge, education sessions to Cass County staff and community partners. The first session is The Human Need for Belonging. This session covers what humans need to survive and thrive. Children need relationships to survive and thrive. The second is Building a New Way Together. Which examines portions of the child welfare system which don't promote strengthening and preserving families. These sessions will be presented by Dr Amelia Meyers who works at Alia and presented Ted Talks on these topics. Ms. Mell has provided flyers and zoom meeting links to the commissioners if they would like to attend. These are important sessions because they support redesign around child welfare and the safety practice model and looking at how we address removals and reunification in both physical and psychological safety of children as they enter the child welfare system. Alia is also offering breakthrough days on October 19th and 21st, 2020, which will allow the leadership group to meet and build internal trust. Ms. Mell feels it is good to have all managers and supervisors in one place to work on building teams and trust. This will support moving forward with the many challenges in providing child welfare services. These sessions will also be provided free of charge. Ms. Mell will report on the outcome of those session in the November meeting. Ms. Scherling asked if there are any other zones participating in

Alia and what is the cost? Ms. Mell was not here when it started but her understating is Governor Burgum has a connection with Alia and wanted someone in the state to work with them. Mr. Ammerman and Ms. Dorff started the process in 2018. No cost associated. The State does not underwrite anything. Alia themselves provides consulting services to child welfare agencies. This cohort which they are running is grant funded and includes jurisdictions in North Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Maine. The five jurisdictions included have all met to discuss what they can do in the child welfare system to make meaningful changes. The grant funds will end in March 2021. They have not discussed future opportunities. Ms. Scherling asked if Cass County handles child welfare differently than the rest of the state. Ms. Mell confirmed each zone does handle child welfare a little differently which is why the safety practice model for the state is important. Ms. Scherling asked if Alia will have input on the Safety Practice Model across the state. Ms. Mell confirmed they will not be involved in the Safety Practice Model across the state, but the Casey Foundation has been working with the Safety practice Model with the state. Ms. Scherling asked why Cass County would participate if there will be no adoption of the safety practice model. Ms. Mell clarified Cass County has implemented some safety levels but a much smaller scale than the safety practice overall. Some jurisdictions have made huge changes within their system. With the leadership changes this past year in Cass County there has not been the chance for focused work to be done. They offer opportunity but Alia is not a regulatory body. Mr. Steen asked if there was a copy of the Safety Practice Model for review. Ms. Mell stated she will look to see what the state has provided and share the information with the board. Mr. Ellingsberg asked what the acronym Alia stands for and if the board could be provided with a bio on the company. Ms. Mell clarified it not an acronym, it is the name of the company, but she will provide information and a link to the website. Mr. Peterson stated he does not believe the inspiration of working with Alia was the Governors but rather the former Human Service Zone administration to the best of his knowledge. He clarified there have not been direct costs but has included extensive staff time, travel, and hotel. Mr. Peterson believes the Alia practice exposes the county to liability. He went on to explain investigating and asking questions is a good thing but there are not all positives which is why Cass County has only gone so far with the program. Mr. Peterson believes ending the program in March is good and walking away at that time is better. He believes the board needs to seriously look at the ramifications since there may be a lot of left-wing ideals with Alia which may not work in Cass County or North Dakota. Ms. Scherling expressed this is the most she has heard of this program and requested in the future major policy changes are presented to the board sooner so they can be discussed in more detail. Mr. Peterson feels it was the prior administrations intention to withhold the information. Ms. Mell stated she does not have all the historical knowledge so there may be outside issues she is unaware. She re-confirmed there have been no policy, procedural or practice changes made based on Alia. She agrees Alia is extremely progressive on how child welfare is managed which she agrees can be difficult for people to adopt and understand. She confirmed there have been ramifications in jurisdictions where it has been adopted despite the positive financial changes and reductions in out of home placements, reductions in termination of parental rights and higher numbers of reunifications. It is a paradigm shift in thinking about child welfare which can be difficult for boards and public at large. Ms. Mell feels overall it has been a positive experience to think the process through. She confirmed Cass County does not exist to remove children but to strengthen families. Sometimes you must remove a child and so you need to consider other ramifications. We need to

think critically about the practices used to preserve and strengthen families. Cass County's practice is to follow state statues, rules, regulations without going off course is still the process. Mr. Steen would like to request a schedule of policies which are changing vs what we have today so the board can stay up to speed. Ms. Mell reassured she will always bring redesign to the board. She clarified her experience is, if it is not documented it is not a policy or procedure. In the past this agency has interpreted email messages as standard practice which is not how she wants the agency to continue. Ultimately, at the end of the day we are held accountable. Written policy and procedure should be written according to statute and law. Mr. Peterson thanked her for stating her stance on policies and agrees written policies are important. Ms. Mell confirmed, policy and procedure allows for the consistency of practice, so the community is treated fairly and equitably. They exist for staff accountability we need to be held accountable.

Ms. Mell and Ms. Dorff has started to have routine meetings with the Cass County Child Welfare Attorneys and Ms. Karen Kringlie, Director of Juvenile Court, to review policies and collaborate to build strong internal partnerships to meet the needs of children and families we serve. This will assure the agency is not an island but working with the teams which are considered partners. They will continue to maintain meetings and work on other internal partnerships. In terms of community partnerships there has been a memorandum of understanding with Friends of the Children which is a long-term mentoring system, k-12 to help ensure those children have good positive outcomes out of high school. To participate in the program a child must have experienced some level of abuse the agency is assisting in gathering the information to allow the children in need an opportunity to participate in the program. They are a good program and they serve the Fargo-Moorhead area. A second partnership is with Encompass Family Services which provides a range of disability services to youth and family. They have an Early intervention birth to three, they have an in-home component to help families, and they are working on a program called res-hab which allows individuals 24/7 support in their own home to build skill. These partnerships have been built over the last couple months.

Ms. Mell addressed the Human Services Zone plan. Initially the plan was due in June but due to COVID the date was delayed. She prepared and submitted a draft zone plan on June 1, 2020 and the state provided feedback on Sept 3, 2020. This information was included in the Boards packet. The feedback was provided by legal and Ms. Sara Stolz. She reviewed the information with all Zone Directors during a previous zone director meeting. The next step is to incorporate the feedback from that meeting. There is a meeting set for October 12, 2020 to review the updated changes. They will make final recommendations and Ms. Mell will finalize and present to the board during the November meeting. Comments from that meeting will be included in the final draft to be submitted to the state in December. Ms. Mell does not anticipate an additional extension dates, but the board will be updated if there are any additional extensions. The current recommendations are manageable, but Ms. Mell still needs to coordinate with auditor's office to provide financial information, attach updated organizational charts to show reporting structure, and updated insurance coverage attachments will need to be provided. Mr. Steen asked when the Zone Board will address the issue of assuring the members are a representation of the population within the human service zone. They have delayed while awaiting training, but he reviewed the training available and believes it will not help the board with the changes in membership. Mr. Steen asked if changes should be made to satisfy the desire of the state. Mr. Peterson stated the board should wait until the elections transpire and then let the board evolve. Mr. Peterson would like to get partners involved to see how they think things are going. Mr. Steen agreed with waiting until after the election. Ms. Mell also planned to wait until after the election, but she believes there will be continued encouragement to have representatives from the community involved in the board activities. As the board

changes and new people are added, there is no reason the Commissioners will miss any information. She will assure they stay informed on the happenings at the human zone board.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:04 p.m. Mr. Pawluk seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Mell, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Marla McIntyre, Recorder