

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING
February 01, 2021

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Mell called the meeting to order 2:00 at p.m.

Present: Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Duane Breitling, Brian Hagen, Jim Kapitan, Chad Peterson
Guest: Robert Wilson, County Administrator
Absent:
Presenter: Pearl Mell, Human Services Zone Director
(all present via Teams Meeting)

I. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Breitling requested the January minutes be corrected on the seventh paragraph under section III from Bison administration to Biden administration and then moved to approve minutes once corrected. Ms. Mell stated she will assure the minutes are corrected.

Mr. Breitling made a motion to approve as corrected the January 4, 2021 Board minutes. Ms. Scherling seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Operations Report

Ms. Mell asked for any comments or feedback regarding the narrative or statistics on the operations report. Mr. Steen stated he had no questions on the operations report but asked if there would be conversation about Refugee information due to Lutheran Social Services closing. Ms. Mell stated she did not have that topic listed on the agenda because she did not have any updates at the time the agenda was created. Mr. Peterson stated he has some information on the topic. Ms. Mell confirmed they would open time after the Directors Report to discuss Lutheran Social Services.

Ms. Mell stated she took the feedback from the last meeting regarding requested information to report at the monthly meeting. She will work with the management team within the Human Service Zone during their February meetings they will work to address the suggestions and will bring those to the next meeting. Until then she will continue to track and present the same information until there are agreed upon benchmarks and reporting mechanisms.

III. Director Updates

Ms. Mell reported she has been thinking a lot about the kind of survey to send out to staff. This has also been discussed at several Human Service Zone Board meetings as well as at her annual performance evaluation meeting several weeks ago. In drawing on her experience and educational background she realized she had an evidenced based tool to implement within the agency to allow staff the opportunity provide rate and provide feedback on how the organization is supporting them. Staff can rate levels of agency support and provide feedback on what the agency could do to support staff. Ms. Mell implemented the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support as recommended for researchers and practitioners by the top experts in

Organizational Support Theory and Perceived Organizational Support. She asked staff think back over 2020 and to rate the encounters they had within the organization over that period of time using a Likert Scale to rate experiences. The second part of the survey was designed to gather feedback using open ended questions. Ms. Mell stated she would open the floor for questions.

Mr. Steen asked for the length of the survey. He stated, he would not ask what all the questions are but if the survey is too long then people lose interest in taking it. There is a lot of detail in the narrative in regard to the survey, so he is curious as to how the survey is completed. Is it all narrative or rating responses, how does it work? Ms. Mell stated under the section that says Measuring Perceived Organizational Support of the handout, the first 10 questions are in a Likert Scale so you rate 1-7 using strongly disagree as a one to strongly agree as a seven. The second section allows for written comments on the 10 previous questions. They are worded, for example, to say "Over the course of 2021, what can the organization do to demonstrate it values my contribution to its well-being". So, you first note the department you are representing, then rate the 10-question using the Likert Scale, and then there is the option to provide 10 responses to the open-ended questions. It is relatively short and takes about 15 to 20 minutes according to the information gathered. Ms. Mell has gotten some preliminary feedback, about 40 surveys have been completed as of that morning. Some has used the open-ended questions to indicate they have nothing to say and some have provided narrative feedback or ideas for future implementation.

Mr. Hagen commented they do a similar survey in their organization. They do not give the results directly to the managers. They will look at a branch in total and if there are issues HR will work with the branch to identify a game plan. Mr. Hagen would like to know who is involved. The surveys he has worked through there are usually about 40 to 60 questions because if you want to know about wellbeing there are many ways to go at it. Different personalities will respond to different questions so there are usually follow up questions. He was surprised at the handful of questions, but he knows there are many ways to use surveys. His company has had success with about 80% response rate. He attributes the high response rate to the staff knowing the information is held in confidence. Ms. Mell stated the survey is an anonymous survey with the option to include your name, if the staff would like to follow up on their suggestions or thoughts, then they could have a confidential follow-up conversation with her. Regarding how the information will be used, she has provided a timeline and action steps to the Board members. The chart outlines tentative plan for how the survey information will be used. To start, the staff have a chance to participate, then the aggregate information will be shared with managers and finally the information will be presented to the Zone Board. Depending on how the information effects each division, Ms. Mell and other staff will start to build action plans around each area. Ms. Mell will use the information provided by staff and to help build best business practices action plan and form a committee of staff members where necessary to address issues. Then status updates can be presented. One goal is to hold quarterly town halls to discuss what has been implemented in past quarters and what the plan will be in the next quarter to be clear and transparent on how things are going. So, the staff know what to expect and then they can provide feedback as well on what they have experienced during through the process.

Mr. Breitling did not have any further questions but asked to refer back to the minutes. He stated Mr. Hagen had inquired as to the substantial changes in Medicaid and ACA reports and representations. Has Ms. Mell had a chance to follow-up with Mr. Schock to learn more information and report back to the Zone Board? Ms. Mell stated she had forgotten and will make a note to follow-up. Mr. Hagen stated he also had a request for information on TANF. Ms. Mell stated she would pull that information as well.

Ms. Mell asked if there were any other issues to discuss regarding the survey. She stated she feels this survey made a lot of sense and is a practical place to start because it addresses collective needs of employees across the agency. The first research conducted on organizational support was in the mid-1980's, so there is more than 30 years of research and thousands of research articles conducted by industrial and organizational psychologists and business practitioners that support when you utilize this information and you implement processes on how you treat people in the workplace, it is strongly correlated with positive outcomes like employee engagement, satisfaction, retention, mitigation of lost work hours due to absenteeism as well as cultural improvements. Because it is well researched using this survey made more sense than creating survey independently. Ms. Mell is excited about this process going forward and to share results. She is not looking at this through rose colored glasses. There is a lot of work to do but hopefully as staff continue to fill these out they will really add information that is meaningful to them so the agency can demonstrate they will work to meet their needs to steer the culture of the agency in a direction that is very staff oriented and demonstrate the agency cares for staff well-being.

One thing that Ms. Mell did not include in the Board members update is to mention the Human Service Zone staff have been given the opportunity to receive the COVID vaccine. Staff have been participating in that process. Ms. Mell reports it has been good to work with Fargo Cass Public Health to coordinate those efforts. This is exciting news for the agency. Ms. Scherling asked if there was any idea of what percentage of staff has turned that opportunity down. Ms. Mell stated when she met with Fargo Cass Public Health, they requested an anticipated number of staff interested in receiving the shot. Ms. Mell then sent an anonymous survey to all staff to comment "yes" or "no" if they want the vaccine, and out of the feedback we have received 109 responses from the approximately 135-140 staff. Of those that responded 90 (83%) indicated they were interested in the vaccine and 19 (17%) stated they were not interested. This does not capture all the staff. Also, some of the 'No's' stated they already received the vaccine through another job or their medical provider due to health issues. Ms. Mell feels those are promising numbers based on the questions and concerns the general population has voiced in regard to vaccines.

IV. Additional Topic – Luther Social Services

Ms. Mell asked Mr. Peterson if he would share his information on Luther Social Services. Mr. Peterson stated he has not heard back from Mr. Dan Hannaher. He has heard from other staff to help coordinate an open dialog with Mr. Hannaher as he seems to really have the information. In Bismarck he met with Senator Kathy Hogan and in summary the profitable aspects of

Lutheran Social Services (LSS) are being absorbed by other community partners. Those programs which do not make money, and he is unsure which programs this includes, are being absorbed by the State. Governor Burgum made a statement last week, no costs will be passed down locally, but Mr. Peterson was unsure of the reality of this other than Governor Burgum's statement.

Ms. Mell stated she has heard the same as Mr. Peterson from her Zone Directors Meeting last week where Ms. Sara Stolt and Mr. Cory Pedersen, of DH, reported on the status of several programs that DHS would be assuming responsibility for.

- Department of Human Services (DHS) is taking over 3 childcare programs, 4 Refugee programs and some Behavioral Health programs previously offered by LSS. The Childcare programs are going to be called Growing Future, Bright and Early, and Child Care Aware. DHS is temporarily taking on 33 staff to continue those programs so there are no gaps in services.
- With regards to the Refugee Resettlement, Ms. Stolt reported the State will be designated as the refugee resettlement program. All refugee resettlement is on hold at this time but DHS will continue with health promotions, medical screening, MA access, service for older adults.
- For any programs offering financial assistance to families, the number was small enough, they will continue the process through the State without gaps.
- They will also address the unaccompanied minors. There are about 20 individuals who are not in foster care, so this may be one issues which will impact the Human Service Zone if there is need for designation around custodians or oversight of these unaccompanied minors.
- The State will also address the Gamblers Choice Program temporarily, but this will likely transfer to The Village.
- The State will take over Project Renew which was the COVID relief funds relating to behavioral health. This program was 100% Federally funded.
- All the adoption work will be centralized through The Village, including all records.
- One of the biggest issues discussed is they have no idea what will happen with the housing portion of LSS.
- Interpreter services have already broken off along with Abound Counseling and other services, to become their own nonprofit organized by individuals interested in taking this on.

Mr. Peterson offered general concern about the closure of LSS and the impact that an agency of that size will have on human services, counties, and the state. Mr. Peterson offered general concerns about how DHS and other agencies across the state are going to assume the responsibility of all of the programs and services that LSS offered to citizens of North Dakota. Mr. Peterson offered to support Ms. Mell in future Zone Director meetings with DHS where LSS was a topic. There is general concern about the lack of information circulating regarding the continued provision of LSS's programs and services.

Ms. Mell stated after this information was presented to the Zone Directors, she directly asked for official communication to provide back to Zone Directors, so they know how to direct staff, clients, and to the Human Service Zone Board. She has been given a verbal, "yes", but she does not know the timeframe. Ms. Mell voiced that the closure of LSS during legislative session has made the coordination of their programs and services even more complicated because many state and county officials are very busy. Mr. Peterson stated they have the time to address the questions. Ms. Mell also questioned how do we stay on track and what do we need to know as it pertains to human services versus the entire scope of the situation? What does the Human Service Zone Board need to know and what are the expectations in terms of Ms. Mell's responsibility to gather general information about LSS.

Mr. Hagen offers some historical context. He was the county conduit or oversight of refugees. In 2010 they reassigned the contract to LSS. This contract has to be pulled and taken off the table. Those duties need to be analyzed and those channels of funding need to be interrupted and redirected. There is several million dollars annually to fund ESL and it needs to be assured that money continues. Also, need to get a handle on where that money is being handled and deposited. Last, he knew it was around \$8 million and so it needs to be found and redirected appropriately so that programs, like the schools, who need that funding receive it. The contracts need to be pulled and handled at the state level. Mr. Hagen agrees with Mr. Peterson, this needs to be reanalyzed to figure out what worked well and where the challenges are so there can be a better process moving forward.

Mr. Peterson agrees with Ms. Mell, she should not get over involved in LSS as not all LSS pertains to the provision of human services. Mr. Peterson stated he would be willing to be directly involved to make sure these issues if there is the opportunity through DHS. There was general discussion on the millions of dollars of funds that need to be allocated for the care and support of North Dakotan's.

Ms. Mell stated she needs to understand what her role is in reporting LSS information back to the Human Service Zone Board. From her perspective this feels like a commission level activity and she does not want to get into commission business during Human Service Zone Board Meetings. What is appropriate for her to facilitate? From her perspective, she unexpectedly received an update on LSS in a Directors meeting. The information came from the Chief Operating Officer and Cory Petersen from the State. Ms. Mell wants to look practically at what she can and should do in this situation. Mr. Peterson agrees that Ms. Mell should focus on the operations of the Human Service Zone rather than LSS. Much of this topic is out of the scope of concern for the Zone Board but may have an impact on Human Service Zone activities. He agrees it is best to let someone from the County Commission take over. She should not be burdened with this. Ms. Mell agrees, knowing where to refer clients who previously used LSS is important but much of their services is outside the realm of the Human Service Zone. Mr. Hagen stated he would be willing to help Mr. Peterson, work through the process. Mr. Hagen knows many of the leaders and can introduce Mr. Peterson but would allow Mr. Peterson to move forward.

Mr. Steen agrees with Mr. Peterson, Mr. Hagen or Ms. Mell. His reason for bringing this up is because this not Human Service Zone Board Business. However, if the state starts delegating unfunded activities, responsibilities, and assignments, this could interfere with the work that needs to be done. Ms. Mell should plan to keep the board informed on what the issues are at the Zone level. Ms. Mell agrees it is important to narrow down the scope on what is important for the Human Service Zone Board. The Directors received an update because they work closely with LSS on some of those areas. It was information with no ask of additional information or additional work. It was an update of the programs the clients use and where to send them. Ms. Mell will ensure any LSS programs delegated to the Zone with no additional funding will be reported to the Human Service Board.

V. Adjournment

Mr. Kapitan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:50 p.m. Mr. Hagen seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Mell, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Marla McIntyre, Recorder