

During the time I have been assisting with Interim Director duties, specific to the Child Welfare Unit and Adult Protective Service Unit, I have attempted to gain a deeper understanding of current functioning and contemplate solutions. Below are some of the observations and recommendations I would offer for consideration in selecting the next CCHSZ Director. If I had a theme for it, it would be to look for someone who can see the “big picture” and can operationalize a strategy to align the agency’s activities accordingly. The second theme would be: supportive accountability.

- The next Director should be an individual who is present, accessible, and communicates with openness and transparency to staff. Staff have expressed appreciation for with current interim co-directors for being responsive and following up with them—communicating back with answers, information, decisions.
- Leadership will need to hold staff accountable directly, with honesty and without “repercussions”, and have the same expectation for supervisors to hold their staff accountable. It does not appear that current mid-level supervisors are able (or willing?) to identify and address problematic performance issues with the staff they supervise.
- Specific to Child Welfare Unit: The Supervisors do not operate consistently or as a team. There appears to be personality conflicts which impede their ability to work together and cooperatively. This is a barrier to the work flow, as cases transition from one program to another. The personality differences amongst supervisors have resulted in animosity between programs in general, further impeding any agency teamwork or cohesion. It was recently learned that there is a supervision coach who is working with the CW supervisors. Kim and I will be meeting with this provider to learn more about the service and if it can be utilized to address some of these concerns.
- The Adult Protective Service Unit appears to be completely disconnected and forgotten about by the remainder of the agency. They are an independent group and do have strong support and supervision through DHS but operate almost as a separate entity. While they do not seem to require a significant level of attention, they should be included in agency communications and activities.
- It appears that there is a general lack of leadership at all levels. It does not appear that CCHSZ has an environment where staff have been empowered to develop their own leadership and decision-making skills. The term “repercussions” is frequently utilized. It is unclear where repercussions may have come from or what they were, but there appears to be a culture of strict hierarchy. Processes are followed without consideration of efficiency or practicality, and critical or creative thinking is not encouraged. The next director should develop leadership and decision-making skills to empower staff through supervision, support and accountability. From my position within the child welfare and APS units, we are trusting staff to make decisions about safety and well-being of vulnerable children and adults, but yet require a Director signature on routine paperwork. These types of inconsistencies are imbedded in a variety of areas & processes.
- It is essential that the Director reach out to and work with administration at DHS, the county, clients and community partners to learn what their experiences are when

working with CCHSZ team members. That information and feedback back should be incorporated to improve quality and the culture of the agency, and modeled by leadership. Relationships with essential community partners are damaged.

- It does not appear that the philosophy and structural changes through the formation of Human Service Zones is understood, and certainly is not embraced by CCHSZ. In many aspects, the Zone has operated in isolation. CCHSZ appears to believe they are unique in the barriers and problems the Zone encounters. In an agency of this size, problem solving, processing, etc. is done “in house” with internal co-workers & supervisors. Whereas many other smaller zones have needed to reach out and form partnerships and collaborations with other zones. This type of “networking” lends to a broader view of human services and forms relationships and partnerships. This isolation, particularly in the new zone hybrid model, requires partnering with DHS, the county, as well as other zones.
- DHS views that all HSZ’s have “one caseload”, and that previous restrictions of county lines is cumbersome and ineffective. The expectation is that we (DHS, HSZ & counties) are all working as one. It does not seem that this message/expectation has been relayed, and certainly is not understood nor implemented at CCHSZ. Again, encouraging CCHSZ staff to participate and learn from their colleagues in other zones, as well as the director communicating ‘current events’ to staff can promote greater insight, and encouraging collaborative work with others to address problems system-wide.
- The child welfare unit has expressed to me that they have appreciated having a social work perspective in this interim director role. While having a social work degree is not required to be a Director, some type of human service experience or educational foundation must be heavily considered. Serving as the custodian to foster children, and making important live-altering decisions for them is a huge responsibility and requires more than just an administrative skill set. Balancing policy, best practices, and problem-solving barriers to achieving permanency requires a broad knowledge base. Economic Assistance programs are heavily regulated by policy, but those policies impact human beings. It is important to keep our clients and the impact of decisions and policies at the forefront.
- Since initially starting this list, the loss of Marla McIntyre, and potential loss of Shelly Tang, have materialized. The two of them carry a great deal of technical and informal knowledge of agency operations. This is a significant loss for staff as well as the future Director. I am aware that Kim has provided her thoughts on potential administrative restructuring. I am hoping that some of the existing support staff’s talents and knowledge can be drawn upon to lend a sense of stability during this time of transition.

I would like to continue to dive a bit deeper in the coming months to try to address some of these issues and will continue to offer observations and support to the future Director. The last several weeks have been interesting and challenging. I have spent much more time than I initially imagined I would! I want to continue to be helpful and provide some stability and leadership to the child welfare & APS units, but also need to balance my responsibilities to the

RSR Human Service Zone. While I know there is not a defined timeline for the position to be filled, at this time I cannot commit to the current level of involvement past December of 2021.

I appreciate this opportunity to partner with CCHSZ and provide support during the interim. I have already learned a great deal, and hope that that my experience has been a benefit to staff and zone operations.

Lynn Flieth