

CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING

January 3, 2017

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Bennett called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

Present: Vern Bennett, Arland Rasmussen, Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Glenn Ellingsberg, Brian Hagen

Presenter: Chip Ammerman, Director; Shawna Croaker, MSW, LICSW, Children's Consultation Network; Pat Podoll, Family Services Manager

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Rasmussen made a motion to approve the December 5, 2016 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Children's Consultation Network**

Mr. Ammerman has arranged representatives from three different community agencies to present to the Board in upcoming meetings. These representatives are resources currently contracted with Cass County Social Services.

Mr. Ammerman introduced Ms. Shawna Croaker, MSW, LICSW from the Children's Consultation Network (CCN). Cass County Family Services is just completing the first year of working with Ms. Croaker and her co-worker, Ms. Jody Claus, MS, LMFT, in order to provide early intervention to help prevent intake of children into the Family Services system and to assist with those children currently in the system who need additional supports due to behavioral problems. Their focus is on children between 0-8 years of age and their caregivers, which can include foster parents, teachers and child care providers. CCN provides services to assist families and caregivers with decreasing anxiety, increase listening, strengthen relationships as well as other behavioral issues. Ms. Croaker explained they only provide short-term therapy of up to eight sessions. If long-term therapy is required, they will refer on to other resources.

In 2016, CCN served 15 families involved with Cass County Family Services. A referral can be made at any point of contact with the family and does not have to be when Child Protective Services (CPS) is involved. Many times, they are receiving referrals from schools or child care providers before CPS even receives a report on the family.

Children's Consultation Network has also provided additional training and support to Parent Aides. They have worked together to create forms and developmental checklists for the Parent Aides to assess the families they interact with. Over the last year, Parent Aides were provided training on motivational interviewing to enhance client interaction and promote behavioral change.

Ms. Croaker and Ms. Claus are both trained in trauma therapy, as well as the Nurtured Hearts Approach to Parenting. Both are able to provide information on the Nurtured Hearts Approach to caregivers on an individualized basis instead of having to refer them on to additional parenting classes. In order for CCN to bill insurance they would need to provide a diagnosis, which they do not do, so they solely rely on contracts with the community for financial support. This includes SENDCAA, Head Start and the Dakota Medical Foundation. Payments from clients are based on a sliding fee scale or whatever clients are able to pay. Cass County Social Services currently has a three year, \$7,500 per year contract with CCN.

III. General Assistance Burials

Mr. Ammerman presented the Board with the corrected Cass County Burial Policy per discussion from the December 5, 2016 meeting. There was question again in the use of the word "burial" throughout the document. Mr. Ammerman stated "burial" was the verbiage used in the state law and was used by Mr. Birch Burdick in his recommendation to the Board. Mr. Ammerman stated it would be best to leave "burial" in the document to be consistent with state law's verbiage. Board members were in agreement with this.

The Board members discussed additional wording in the document and made suggested minor changes to the application and to the payment document. Mr. Rasmussen made a motion to change "'poor" to "indigent" and "disposed" to "interred" in the Cass County Burial Policy as well as "Cremation" to "Burial" in the Cost Proposal with the intent to present the policy at the next Commission Meeting without further discussion from the Social Services Board. Ms. Scherling seconded it. Motion carried.

IV. Child Protection influx of cases and trends

Pat Podoll provided the Board with a handout showing the trends in the number of reports received for Child Protective Services (CPS), as well as a year-by-year comparison. She pointed out the increase of reports in January through March. During the summer months those numbers decrease only to raise again when children return to school. Even though cases have increased each year, there has not been an additional CPS Social Worker hired since 2001.

CPS staff are seeing an increase in cases with more serious injuries to children. Some of these incidents include shaken baby and severe malnutrition. There is also an increase of involvement with younger children, specifically newborn to four years old. This is due to the significant drug and alcohol use issues currently happening within the community. It has been found that those families experiencing this type of issues are less likely to engage or be engaged in improving the family system. Extended families are also less prevalent or unable to care for children, which leads to more placements of children in foster care.

Ms. Podoll stated historically, CPS has very little turnover of staff. The unit has recently experienced multiple staff on extended medical leave, as well as staff turnover. In the past, new staff are not typically given a full caseload until proper training has been completed. Due to the absences and amount of cases, new staff are at almost a full caseload and receiving many of the same type of difficult cases as those who have been on staff for years. This is having a significant impact on staff, who report struggling with fatigue, not sleeping, anxiety, as well as creating an impact on their family/marriage lives. Other struggles include CPS staff being unable to make required phone calls and other contacts associated with the case.

Mr. Ammerman stated CPS is ending the 2016 year with high numbers and is going into a month (January) that is typically high in reports. In 2016, there were 1,389 cases assigned, which is approximately half of the calls received by the agency. Per state standard, the average caseload should be 9-12 cases per worker. Currently, part-time CPS staff have approximately 10-11 cases assigned; full-time CPS staff carry approximately 17-19 cases. Mr. Ammerman voiced concerns with the caseloads being too high and CPS staff being able to complete their assessments accurately and thoroughly.

Mr. Ammerman asked the Board for temporary assistance for CPS' current situation. One option suggested by Mr. Ammerman was to contract with past interns to assist. One is a licensed social worker and would be able to carry a caseload. The other just recently ended her internship with Cass County and would not be able to carry a caseload but could assist with paperwork and follow-up calls. The cost associated would be approximately \$13,000 for three months for each intern.

Ms. Scherling asked if another county could be utilized as it had with Economic Assistance Division. Mr. Ammerman stated they have reached out to Richland and Traill County and both are unable to assist due to staffing issues and their own caseloads. Mr. Ammerman explained in Economic Assistance's case, the assistance required mostly computer input of information. The assistance needed by CPS requires face-to-face contact with the client, which could prove difficult for other counties.

Mr. Rasmussen made a motion to add an additional Social Worker III position. Mr. Steen seconded it.

Mr. Hagen questioned if the position would be funded from the Social Welfare fund. Mr. Peterson replied it would be easiest to fund from that account. Mr. Ammerman stated it would not have to be designated because there will be a roll up of funds in the budget, as there has been in past years. If the Board passes this new position, Mr. Ammerman would identify how much it would cost and where the funds to support the position would be allocated from. This information would be included in the proposal submitted to the Commission for approval.

Mr. Bennett called for a roll call vote concerning the hiring of a Social Worker III position to support Child Protection Services. Four members voted yes; three members voted no. Motion passed.

V. Operations Report

There was no discussion on the Operations Report. Mr. Steen asked Mr. Ammerman if it would be possible to provide documentation on the population needs of the community and how it relates to Social Services. Mr. Ammerman stated he would gather further information for the Board regarding this request.

Mr. Peterson questioned how a county in extreme distress compares with Cass County and what it is they do differently, such as Clark County in Las Vegas, Nevada. Mr. Ammerman stated he has had the chance to speak with staff in Clark County when Cass County needed to transfer a case due to a child moving to that jurisdiction. Mr. Ammerman was told the case could be transferred, but because the case was not severe enough, Clark County would not do anything with it. Clark County has very high turnover with the average length of service being approximately nine months. Mr. Ammerman felt that, through his contact with other counties, the counties that are in extreme distress do not address the concerns unless severe enough to assess.

VI. Adjournment

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:01 pm. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.



Vern Bennett, Chair
Cass County Social Services Board



Melissa Kain Varno, Recorder