

CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING
December 4, 2017

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Bennett called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

Present: Vern Bennett, Chad Peterson, Rick Steen, Brian Hagen, Mary Scherling

Absent: Glenn Ellingsberg, Arland Rasmussen

Presenter: Chip Ammerman, Director; Linda Dorff, Family Services Division Manager

I. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the November 6, 2017 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. SB2206 – Committee Update

Mr. Ammerman informed the Board there are four sub-committees that have been formed due to the inception of the SB2206. Mr. Ammerman participates in the Child Protective Services portion and Sidney Schock, Economic Assistance Division Manager, will be a part of the Economic Assistance sub-committee. These sub-committees are just beginning to meet. They will be focusing on service delivery and consistency across the State. They will identify what is unique to each area, as well as defining efficiencies and eliminating duplicated services that could potentially be combined without disruption to the service delivery of people. There are approximately 10-20 people participating per sub-committee. The goal of this SB2206 Committee is to provide recommendations to the Legislature, by October 2018, for the funding of Social Services by the State.

III. CPS Case Review

Mr. Ammerman stated a letter was sent to the Board members from a Family Services client concerned about the well-being of a child within the county. Some Board members had not received this correspondence, so Mr. Ammerman briefed them on the situation. No identifying information regarding the client was discussed nor revealed during the discussion.

Ms. Dorff then explained how Family Services facilitates the process and what Child Protective Services' (CPS) role is when the agency receives Child Protection reports. The CPS Guidelines was distributed to the Board members. Ms. Dorff informed the Board that the NDDHS manual outlines the State mandates and what CPS staff must follow when investigating a report. Unless the situation meets the criteria outlined in the manual, CPS is not justified to intervene within the family system. CPS' primary mandate is to assess the safety of the child with consideration that the focus is in keeping the children with their family, as long as it is safe to do so. CPS staff assess the safety of the situation and engage the parents or caregivers. Many incidences that occur are due to underlying issues, so the CPS workers attempt to engage caregivers in appropriate community services such as Intensive In-Home Services, chemical dependency programming, Short-term Case Management, etc. The continued added complexity of significant drug use and the drug culture exposure within the family has added to the difficulty in engaging the caregiver. Other added barriers are the lack of healthy extended family members within the community to assist families in the process of resolving potential risks for children.

Intake receives approximately 300 calls per month that are CPS-related. Of those 300 calls, 120-140 are investigated by CPS. Staff assess the situation according to the State-mandated guidelines. They will interview children, caregivers, and other collateral contacts to obtain

everyone's perspective on the situation. They will assess the impact on the child and what is in their best interest. There are many checks and balances in the process to include meeting the guidelines, supervisors to guide and mentor, peer review/mapping, and Child Protection Team meeting. Cass County Social Services has a low percentage of Services Required cases compared to other counties within the State, due to the attempts made to engage the caregivers in community resources. Approximately 60% of families receive services after CPS involvement.

Caseloads for CPS continue to increase. Three years ago, the average caseload was eight to nine cases per worker. The average now is approximately nine to twelve. Last month, some staff had 16 cases open. Assignment of cases is a never ending cycle of closing one and then being assigned another. One of the contributing factors for cases staying open longer than necessary is chemical dependency use and the ability for staff to obtain or maintain contact with the caregiver.

Chair Bennett questioned if children fight the removal from the home. Mr. Ammerman stated yes, in most cases removal of a child from their family home is very traumatic for the child. Regardless of the situation, the child is typically bonded to their caregivers and does not want to be separated from them.

IV. 2018 Contracts

Mr. Ammerman stated the contracts for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) remains the same every year, the exception being the date of the contracts and the fee schedule which is determined by the state. HCBS has \$100,000 in the budget to use for these designated services until the funds are exhausted. At this time, there is no waiting list for county-funded services and the agency is able to provide all services to qualified clients.

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the Home and Community Based Services contracts. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried. Ms. Scherling asked who Cass County Social Services contracted with for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). She questioned if the agency contracted through Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH) and, if so, why not solely contract through them. Mr. Ammerman stated one of the contracts is with FCPH, however they do not have adequate staff to handle the needs of all the agency's clients. Mr. Ammerman explained that Community Living Services and Tami's Angels, among others, are also utilized. Ms. Scherling questioned why there was not a waiting list for service if FCPH was not adequate. It was explained there is an ongoing rotation due to different levels of care clients require.

V. Operations Report

Interviews continue to be conducted in order to fill vacant positions created by the 13 resignations and three retirements that occurred in 2017. The resignations were a combination of staff not meeting the agency's expectations and staff seeking other employment outside of the agency.

Mr. Schock provided the Board members with an updated number of clients that are served each month by the Economic Assistance Division. At the November meeting, it was reported the agency served approximately 41,000 in the last month. After further review, Mr. Schock informed the Board members that between all the assistance programs provided by Economic Assistance, there are approximately 32,000 unduplicated individuals receiving services. It was estimated that 80% of the clients receiving benefits are the working poor; 10% are aged and disabled and are unable to work; and the remaining 10% are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which requires the head of the household to participate in a job-seeking program.

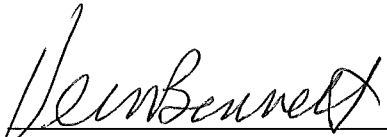
Mr. Peterson stated he was at a meeting in Ohio and learned that social workers were assigned to law enforcement to assist individuals with gaining employment, accessing needed community services, etc. Mr. Ammerman stated this is one of the topics the SB2206 Committee will be looking at as well.

Ms. Scherling questioned the use of social workers in schools. Mr. Ammerman stated the schools do want social workers there and through a federally funded program, there are currently five in the Fargo School District. Mr. Ammerman also stated there are groups and programs in place such as the Jefferson Project that assists in connecting school officials with some of the resources Cass County Social Services utilizes. School counselors are able to make the referral for these services.

Mr. Hagen made a motion to approve the Operations Report. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

VI. Adjournment

Mr. Hagen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:03 p.m. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.



Vern Bennett, Chair
Cass County Social Services Board



Melissa Kain Varno, Recorder