

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

July 6, 2020

MINUTES

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

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

Absent: Brian Hagen, Robert Wilson

Presenter: Pearl Ferguson, Human Services Zone Director;

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the June 1, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Human Service Zone Board Composition**

Director Ferguson drafted a form to be used for Zone Board Member Recommendations. The form would be used to identify any potential Zone Board members should the Board decide to include more than the current composition. She stated there was an issue with the link but that has been corrected and she will resend to the Board members. Director Ferguson is seeking feedback from the Board regarding the questions on the form.

Mr. Ellingsberg stated he was unable to access the link, which Director Ferguson acknowledged, and indicated he would be more inclined to provide certain organizations versus specific names for recommendations. He made additional change recommendations, of which Director Ferguson confirmed she received. She stated she would make changes to the form and resend to the members.

Mr. Steen questioned how many members will be on the Zone Board. Director Ferguson explained the maximum number would be 15 including herself. The State does require at least one Commissioner. During the June 1, 2020 Zone Board meeting, it was discussed to have a minimum of three Commissioners. It was felt that the intent of the Board may be the deciding factor as to number of members. Director Ferguson explained the duties of a Human Service Zone Board included providing information relative to the community's needs and being an advocate to meet those needs. The Zone Board would also review services and programs, making periodic recommendations as needed. Mr. Pawluk stated he felt comfortable going forward with the present Zone Board configuration. Mr. Peterson suggested adding one or two more members, possibly legislators that may not have a complete understanding of this agency and what it provides the community. Ms. Scherling suggested the Board determine what role it will play now and in the future prior to engaging additional members. Director Ferguson explained she still has not received a date on Zone Board education and there is no timeline regarding making changes to the Zone Board so it might be more beneficial to wait to make any decisions until the training has been completed so a Zone Board member's role is better clarified.

Director Ferguson also notified the Zone Board that a vice presiding officer would need to be elected and a Secretary would need to be appointed. Ms. Scherling suggested waiting to appoint these positions until December after the election and when any committee changes would occur. Director Ferguson suggested adding it to the January Zone Board Agenda since the committee changes would occur after the Zone Board Meeting in December. It was questioned what the function of the Secretary would be and if it would count as a Zone Board member. Director Ferguson stated the language is vague and she would have a follow-up conversation with the State about the Secretary's role.

III. Operations Report

Director Ferguson announced Chip Ammerman's resignation effective July 15, 2020. He currently supervises the Intake Unit and was temporarily filling the manager position in Adult Protective Services (APS). The State has not approved to fill that position at this time. As of July 16, 2020, Director Ferguson will manage APS and Intake staff's personnel needs. She anticipates a future redesign for the APS unit will include the transition of their management to the State.

In looking at Family Service numbers, Director Ferguson explained the category labeled Crisis Case Management should in fact be In-Home Case Management, which was effective in May. Due to the new definition, May numbers appear to be inflated; however, it is only reflecting numbers that were originally reported in a different capacity.

Without having a manager, Ms. Scherling questioned the efficiency and delivery of services for the APS and Intake Units. Director Ferguson reported she met with the APS staff to understand their roles better, stating she is familiar with the services they provide due to her previous employment. Director Ferguson does not anticipate any operational issues with the four APS and three Intake staff. If there were issues, Director Ferguson stated she felt comfortable going to State Human Resources and Sara Stolt, Chief Operating Officer for the Department of Human Services, to advocate for a change. Within the next few months, APS will be going through a redesign and while there is not much clarity at this time, Director Ferguson still does not anticipate being unable to handle the units in the meantime.

Mr. Ellingsberg expressed concerns of additional responsibilities being added to Director Ferguson's role and how that impacts her. Director Ferguson explains she currently supervises five staff and with the addition of seven more, she will supervise a total of 12. She reports it would be more complicated if it were long-term but feels it will be manageable for the short-term basis. She added the State has been supportive of her as a new director and she has had a good experience working with them at this point.

Mr. Peterson suggested Director Ferguson request the money that is being saved by not filling these positions be reapportioned to the agency and incorporated into the budget. Director Ferguson stated she would investigate that.

Noting no strong impact to the services provided by this agency, Mr. Ellingsberg inquired if any staff have contracted the virus. Director Ferguson explained the agency continues to function as normal with no large increase in numbers as anticipated. Staff have been keeping up with the demands, many still working at the level they were prior to COVID-19. Since most staff are mobilized, Director Ferguson sent out a survey to collect their feedback on their experiences working remotely. Many reported that it is working well for them. They appreciate not having to commute, experiencing fewer interruptions, and are able to maintain a better work/life balance. A reported challenge has been technology. Staff have not been called back to the building and the agency continues to see clients by appointments only. Director Ferguson credits the staff for continuing to document their visits, document clients coming in, and continuous screening, which has helped decrease staff exposure. There have been some potential exposures and some that have tested positive, but in one case, the person that tested positive never came into contact with agency in the weeks prior to or after their exposure due to them already telecommuting.

Mr. Steen inquired to Director Ferguson's contact with other Zone Directors. She shared she had one in-person visit with the Regional Directors from Agassiz Valley and RSR Human Service Zones. She continues to participate in weekly phone calls with all Zone Directors as well as State-facilitated Zone Director meetings. There has been discussion about potentially resuming in-person Zone Director meetings in September. Mr. Steen also reiterated the interest for the Zone Board education. Director Ferguson stated she has reached out to the State and will continue to reach out to them regarding training for Zone Board members. There was talk about possibly providing that training during the

upcoming ND Association of Counties (NDACo) conference this fall, but nothing has been finalized. Mr. Ellingsberg questioned why the training could not be presented virtually and expressed his displeasure that the State has not developed something sooner. Ms. Scherling added that the NDACo conference is not until October and is typically meant for county employees, such as Commissioners, Auditors, etc., not necessarily new Zone Board members or other community members that would make up a Zone Board.

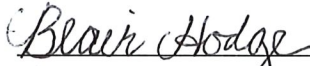
Mr. Pawluk inquired about any challenges Director Ferguson has been dealing with professionally. She stated it has been a steep learning curve. Fortunately, her background in healthcare has provided her exposure to social needs of individuals in the community. Overall, it has been going well. She has had assistance from the Division Managers along with a cohort from the Alia project. Director Ferguson continues to build connections at the State level. She has found many interesting components of the job, such as the decision making for adoptive placement. In the past, this decision was made by the Regional Representative, but now, along with other team members' input, this is the Zone Director's responsibility to decide. She reports continuing to get to know everyone, which can be difficult given the fact that not many are seen daily and so much is done virtually versus in person.

IV. **Adjournment**

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:49 p.m. Mr. Pawluk seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder