

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

January 04, 2021

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Mell called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

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

I. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Steen made a motion to approve the December 07, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Breitling seconded it. Motion carried.

Ms. Mell offered a welcome to Mr. Kapitan as a new Human Service Zone Board member.

II. Operations Report

Ms. Mell stated she would send out the Department of Human Services news report to the members of the board following the meeting. The news report addresses information on some of the changes including Intake being centralized as of January 4, 2021 as part of the redesign process. Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) started to take their own intake calls as part of HCBS redesign back in the month of October. Vulnerable Adult Protective Services (APS) also has a separate intake phone number for reporters to utilize. The Central Intake Team is comprised of 14 county staff from across the state which include intake workers and two supervisors to concentrate on intake. They have put together centralized phone number and have informational brochures they are putting together to send out to community members to assure the uniformity of process across the state. They are still county employees. Ms. Mell is currently co-managing the three Cass County intake workers in collaboration with their Intake supervisor who is located in Richland Sargent Ransom (RSR) Human Service Zone. Ms. Mell and the supervisor are collaborating regularly and will co-manage the work and performance of those members.

Mr. Breitling asked what ARSAN stands for on the second page of the operations report. Ms. Mell clarified it means Alternative Response to Substance Exposed Newborns.

Mr. Hagen noticed traditional Medicaid has decreased but ACA (Affordable Care Act) has increased substantially did the Medicaid transfer to ACA or was there another change? Ms. Mell stated she would clarify the numbers with Mr. Schock. Ms. Mell agreed, while the monthly numbers do not change significantly, the numbers from the beginning to the end of the year have changes significantly. She will learn more and report back to the Board.

Mr. Wilson noticed the comments regarding the Alternative Response to Substance Exposed Newborns on the Operations Report Narrative. On the second page it is noted: "This author joined with Family Service staff members to design the policies and processes for a program

targeted at avoiding children exposed to substances at birth from entering traditional Foster Care.” In the past, in efforts to avoid unnecessary placement there were some alternative practices designed which caused a bit of a rub with what is required for removing children from what was a dangerous or unhealthy environment for the children. Mr. Wilson wants to assure the operations department is speaking with the legal department to avoid any issues. He stated he does not expect there is a problem, but the memory popped into his head as he read the report. Ms. Mell asked for clarification if Mr. Wilson was referring to the Alternative Response to Substance Exposed Newborns or the Child Welfare Safety Practice Model, which is implementing defined standards as to how Social Workers assess present and impending danger in homes. Mr. Wilson keyed in on the line which refers to children entering Foster Care. Ms. Mell confirmed the process is being worked on internally in Cass County but as well as with Department of Human Services across the state. Ms. Mell assures all appropriate parties are involved with the process to assure there is no challenge to the legal system.

III. Reporting in 2021

Ms. Mell asked if the Operations report is giving the board the information they need. Is the information meaningful or does the board need more information to assure they are comfortable fulfilling the 6 roles laid out in the Century Code along with the additional 14 items outlined in the November special meeting with Ms. Stolt and Ms. Hasbargen? Do the Board members feel they have a good picture of how the Human Service Zone is doing? Ms. Mell feels information like the caseload level and reunification rates are useful information but there may be more information which would be helpful. Comparing caseloads to requests for new staff may be helpful.

Mr. Peterson would like to have information on caseloads which tells some real data. Something which compares apples to apples with the 18 other Zones in ND. He voted against his first budget as a Commissioner because he was given an 87 page report the day of the vote and did not have the time to properly review the information. He believes the more information the better so he can have the ability to make proper decisions. The information has been lacking in the past so Ms. Mell would be the first Director in 20 years to openly share information. The more information the better, if Ms. Mell questions sending out information than she should just send it. Ms. Mell wants to confirm she does not always believe all problems are solved “throwing” staff at a problem there is often process changes which need to be considered as a solution. Working on process and then adding staff is more important and significant in making a difference. Mr. Peterson believes the team members are gifted and talented. He believes utilizing their input is important.

Mr. Steen would like to hear more information in the coming months on child placement and child protection services in regard to reunification. To understand the expectations from the state and the Cass County Zone Board would be good information to discuss in the upcoming months.

Ms. Scherling stated county commissioners across the country have been tasked with deciding how many refugees can be supported in the county. This can turn into a very politically motivated conversation so it would be great to have measurable data to support decision making. There is a rough idea but measurable information would be helpful. Ms. Scherling

understands information needs to come from more areas than Human Services (Police Officers, school capacity, etc.) but any information would be helpful. Mr. Hagen talked to the head of Department of Human Services and he mentioned by law Lutheran Social Services has to report monthly on the services used by refugees and this information is available. In the past this was provided monthly but having this information more regularly would be helpful to figure out how to transition the refugees into the workforce.

Mr. Hagen would like to see the rules around TANF and eligibility. How are you eligible and what do they provide for assistance (childcare, educational assistance, schooling)? He has spoken to groups around town who would like to discuss these topics. Currently these questions are going to Job Services. Is Job Services the best place for these questions to go? What resources can we connect with other agencies so they can help their clients. A lot of questions about what is provided and how the mechanics all work together.

Mr. Wilson shared his idea to define who is in each role in regard to the foster care issues, the COVID issues, the homeless issues and the various committees and groups in Human Services. Defining who is in each role would be helpful.

Mr. Peterson stated he and the Commissioners have quarterly meetings which provide the data on refugees in the area. The information is not always as deep as he would like but there is a lot of helpful information. If the Biden Administration is increasing the number of refugees which will end up bringing in record numbers. This will affect police support, human service support and the like. As the numbers increase, Mr. Peterson feels we need to be prepared.

Mr. Kapitan asked if there is a way to track the background of the refugees. What their jobs were in their home country and what their positions are here. He feels the skills they learned in their home country are being underutilized once they arrive in Fargo. For example, those who were trained in professional positions are forced to take jobs as janitors. Ms. Mell stated she would look into the question and share the information. Mr. Hagan stated the state does a rigorous questionnaire on the refugees who enter so the information is out there. Mr. Peterson stated the problem is standardization of practices does not transfer from other countries to the United States. Recently there was reciprocity made available to those who have practiced in other certain areas so they can more easily practice in the state of ND, but it does not address all professions. Ms. Mell agrees with Mr. Kapitan, it would be ideal if there is a way to connect refugees with the proper resources so they can meet the needs they have for themselves and family.

Ms. Mell summarized she will continue with the current reporting topics but will evaluate and speak with the Human Service Managers to bring the most pertinent information back to the board members each month.

IV. Additional topic

Mr. Steen would like to address an item not listed on the agenda. He has sent out an email to the board members regarding an annual evaluation on Ms. Mell. He would like the evaluation questions answered by each member and sent back to Mr. Steen by January 14, 2021 so the topic can be discussed in the special meeting on January 19, 2021.

Ms. Mell has sent out the meeting notification and invite to all board members for the special meeting on January 19, 2021.

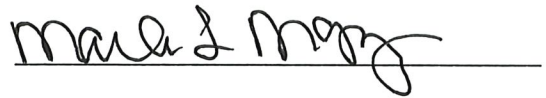
Ms. Mell summarized she will continue with the current reporting topics but will evaluation and speak with the managers to bring the most pertinent information back to the board members each month.

V. **Adjournment**

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:43 p.m. Mr. Peterson seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Mell, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Marla McIntyre, Recorder