

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING
March 7, 2022

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Bollinger called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Present: Duane Breitling, Rick Steen (via Teams), Carey Fry, Brian Hagen, Julie Haugen, Michelle Kommer, Dan Madler, Gail Bollinger

Absent:

Presenter: Gail Bollinger, Zone Director; Lynn Flieth, RSR Human Services Zone Director; Heather Collins, Executive Staff Officer; Carissa Cowley and Carrie Smith, CCHSZ Case Management Supervisor

I. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Breitling made a motion to approve the February 7, 2022, Board minutes. Mr. Hagen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Featured Program: Family Services

Carissa Cowley and Carrie Smith, Family Based (Case Management) Supervisors in the Family Service Division, were present to present on Family Services. Tammy Ressler and Brad Hassler are two other Family Based Supervisors who were not present as they were tending to emergencies.

Ms. Cowley and Ms. Smith shared an overview of the Family Service Division. A statewide central intake unit is used to report child abuse concerns as well as cases being referred to as Children in Need of Protection Services (CHIPS) versus Deprivation. Current barriers including finding appropriate placement for children with behaviors and higher mental health needs. Due to the increase in these types of cases, it is becoming more difficult to find appropriate placement and/or staff adequately trained to handle higher behavioral problems.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Cowley provided an update regarding the upcoming redesign of Foster Care and In-Home programs. As of April 1, 2022, there will be a Centralized Foster Care Division for the State of North Dakota. This change will allow any Zone to utilize any licensed foster home in the State.

Discussion ensued related to the tool utilized by Child Protective Services during the assessment. Ms. Cowley indicated the tool would be provided to the Board at the next meeting. Additional discussion focused on the availability of facilities for placement for children with mental health needs. It was also inquired if there were other facilities that would take children in need of placement. Staff explained there are very few. Prairie St. John's would be able to accommodate if there are higher mental health issues. The agency does partner with PATH, who can provide therapeutic foster homes as well, but it is a lengthy process and there is a wait list. Currently there is a state request for proposal for Shelter Care funds available to individuals who would like to set up appropriate placement options for these types of situations. However, as of this date, there have been no applicants.

Ms. Smith explained there are approximately 250 children in out-of-home placement currently in Cass County. Approximately 68 are in kinship placement, and 50 of those are in process of terminating parental rights. RSR Human Services Zone Director Lynn Flieth explained that in January, the Child Welfare supervisors presented on the complex issues that agencies are facing regarding placing children out of the home. The Children's Cabinet, which includes legislative members and the Lieutenant Governor, is showing interest and concern in the barriers, but admit they are unsure of potential solutions.

Staff were asked if Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch (DBGR) or the West Central Juvenile Detention Center (WCJDC) in Moorhead, MN would be an option for placements. Ms. Smith explained the agency routinely submits applications for DBGR, but a third-party referral is required. Ms. Flieth also explained many are not accepted into DBGR due to disqualifying characteristics, such as cognitive impairments and sexualized behaviors. To be placed at WCJDC, a minor would need significant criminal charges filed against them. When asked, both Ms. Smith and Ms. Cowley reported seeing much more complex issues with families to include mental health, chemical dependency, and domestic violence. Families are more mobile and have less supports in the community.

Ms. Kommer inquired if there was anywhere that currently had a best practice model that was showing any promise. Ms. Flieth responded that she was not aware of one.

Chair Bollinger expressed her gratitude to all Family Service staff for their work and to Ms. Smith and Ms. Cowley sharing with the Board.

III. Personnel Update

Heather Collins, Executive Staff Officer, provided a brief update regarding current open positions. There have been five resignations since February 2022, with three new staff beginning today in Family Services. There are 12 positions in varying stages of hiring and onboarding. Ms. Collins reported to be continually busy with all activities related to this process. It was asked if the agency continues to receive several applicants for these open positions and whether the turnover is slowing down. Ms. Collins expressed optimism in the quality of applicants continuing but states it is hard to tell whether the turnover is slowing down. She will be working on getting updated statistics for the Board members.

IV. Director's Report

Chair Bollinger submitted the updated Zone Plan to the State. The plan was originally approved in 2020. Being there were no major changes, there was not a need for Zone Board approval.

Chair Bollinger attended a the COVID and Safety Net Innovation (CASI) TA Initiative site launch meeting on March 2nd and 3rd. Cass County Human Service Zone, RSR Human Service Zone, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone, Southeastern North Dakota Community Action (SENDCAA) and Job Service – Fargo have been selected to be part of the nationally project that focuses on identify gaps and addressing barriers to families accessing TANF and other resources.

The Department of Human Services will be holding budget workshops over the coming months. This will be the first time since becoming a Zone that Cass County Human Services will play a part in developing their fiscal budget. Chair Bollinger will share more with Board members as the process is developed. Each budget will be unique to each zone.

It was inquired if the Financial Director will be present for Zone Budget discussions. Chair Bollinger stated that they are still learning what the process will look like. There are indirect costs that the county does fund so it would be helpful to have the Financial Director part of the discussions. The Board will be able to make recommendations, but there will be a different process than in the past. Chair Bollinger assured the Board members that she will continue to share information as she receives it regarding the new process. Concern was raised as to how Board members would be able to advocate for services if they are not involved with the process. Ms. Flieth stated if there are unique costs associated with the budget, those would be brought to the Board members for review and/or approval. She reports the plan is to have the budget finalized by June or July 2022.

On February 15, 2022, the North Dakota Department of Human Services held a town hall meeting regarding the merging of North Dakota Department of Health and Department of Human Services into one entity. It is anticipated CCHSZ would not be impacted, but there will be some role adjustments at the State level.

Chair Bollinger reports to be continuing to engage with community partners and individually with Zone Board members.

As mentioned earlier, Chair Bollinger reported Foster Care Licensing staff is transitioning to State employees, which means there will be three positions Cass County Human Services will lose. Her plan is to ask for two additional FTE positions to replace those staff to assist in the absorption of duties.

Chair Bollinger continues to work through her state orientation program with the Director of Zone Operations and will attend the Zone Director meeting on March 9th and 10th.

V. Adjournment

Ms. Kommer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:55 p.m. Ms. Fry seconded. Motion carried.



Gail Bollinger, Zone Director
Cass County Human Service Zone



Blair Hodge, Recorder