

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
August 17, 2015

THE ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES MET ON MONDAY: August 17, 2015 at the Hillsborough Commons, Hillsborough, North Carolina.

BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES MEMBERS PRESENT: Tamara Dempsey-Tanner, Chair; Ann Wilkerson, Vice-Chair; Pat Garavaglia; and Claire Millar.

GUEST: Hannah Marion, DSS Intern.

BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES MEMBERS ABSENT: Earl McKee.

STAFF PRESENT: Nancy Coston, Director; Denise Shaffer, Assistant Director; Lindsey Shewmaker, Human Services Manager; and Katherine Thompson, Management Analyst.

I. Call to Order and Introductions

DSS Chair, Tamara Dempsey-Tanner, called the meeting to order at 4:07pm.

II. Board Comments

None.

III. Public Comments

None.

IV. Agenda Changes

Director Nancy Coston added a housing research project presentation and a brief update on records retention to the agenda.

V. Action Items

On a motion by Pat Garavaglia, the Board approved the minutes of July 29, 2015. Claire Millar seconded the motion. The motion was carried without dissent.

VI. Items for Discussion and/or Decision

1. Housing Research Project Presentation

Management Analyst Katherine Thompson and DSS Intern Hannah Marion presented the housing research project to the Board. The purpose of the project is to assess the impact of rent and mortgage payments made to clients over the past three fiscal years. Are clients still living where DSS made the payment? Are they still living in Orange County? If not, why did they move and did DSS help them move? The project is also looking at other factors, such as the client's age, current monthly rent, whether or not the client worked with a social worker, and which office location the client visited. Approximately 850 clients received housing assistance in the past three years. Katherine Thompson and Hannah Marion have spoken with 81 of these clients thus far. The majority of clients are still living where DSS made the payment. Those who moved out-of-county typically moved because they felt that Orange County was too expensive. The majority of clients who worked with a social worker found the worker helpful. Clients' age and current monthly rent

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varied widely. Most clients provided a positive review of their experience with DSS. Katherine Thompson will continue to update the Board on the project's progress. She is compiling all of the information collected from clients in an Excel database.

2. Emergency Assistance Policy

Director Nancy Coston explained that Orange County DSS is changing its procedure for Emergency Assistance. The agency is moving some of the intake functions for these funds to Economic Services, where there is adequate staff to address walk-ins. However, if a client requests assistance more than once or requires a higher level of assistance, then the client's case will be transferred to a social worker. With this change, the Economic Services unit, and not the Community Services unit, will handle the majority of intake for the Emergency Assistance program. For this reason, Human Services Manager Lindsey Shewmaker plans to implement the change in the next month before the energy assistance programs start.

Nancy Coston stated that the Orange County administration is very concerned that the county may be too expensive for some people to live in. Thus, DSS is willing to make more than one Emergency Assistance payment for a family if it helps the family to maintain their housing. She spoke about the importance of keeping people where they are; once an individual is three months behind on their rent, it is extremely difficult to salvage their housing. Last year, DSS did not spend all of the money provided by the county for emergencies. However, if the agency starts to run out of money this year, DSS will limit spending to its target groups, which include at-risk families and elderly, disabled, or medically fragile adults.

Lindsey Shewmaker explained that the agency is reconsidering the definition of a crisis and may make it broader. For example, instead of requiring eviction or cut-off notices for county assistance, DSS could look at past due balance statements provided by the client. Pat Garavaglia stated that FRIENDS of DSS no longer has funds available for rent or utility assistance. Nancy Coston said that she would advise DSS staff to consult Assistant Director Denise Shaffer about using available county funds rather than FRIENDS money.

Ann Wilkerson asked about the stranded travelers clause in the Emergency Assistance policy. Nancy Coston explained that DSS usually receives these referrals from law enforcement. DSS provides these individuals with food and helps them to return home. Stranded travelers can include individuals who were recently released from prison and are struggling to connect with their families.

The Board reviewed the Emergency Assistance policy.

3. Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Processing Timeframes

North Carolina is in trouble with the USDA regarding the timeliness and accuracy with which FNS (food stamps) applications are processed. As a result, the USDA is threatening to pull funding for administration from all counties (\$1.2 million from Orange County) if these issues are not corrected soon. The state put together a Corrective Action Plan and is requiring each county to develop one as well. The state has changed its policy regarding FNS processing; now, all expedited applications must be processed by the fourth day, and all regular applications must be processed by the 25th day. There is zero tolerance for overdue expedited applications. Lindsey Shewmaker stated that it will be difficult to ensure that all counties have no overdue applications. Workers sometimes make mistakes, and because many clients submit their applications online via EPASS, these clients never come to the agency for an interview. Additionally, homeless clients often have their mail sent to DSS, so their review forms come to the agency and staff are unsure of how to contact them.

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Nancy Coston co-chairs the Economic Services Committee for the Directors Association and sat in on the state's meeting with the USDA. She and the other attendees talked with the USDA about waiving the interview requirement as long as the worker can verify an applicant's identity through other means. The USDA informed them that the state can apply for a waiver, but the state has not done this yet. Nancy Coston explained that the directors believe this is the only way that counties can meet the new processing deadlines. Lindsey Shewmaker discussed ex parte reviews and pre-loaded EBT cards for expedited cases as other possible solutions.

The sanction likely would not go into effect until one year from now. Lindsey Shewmaker has designated three staff members to process FNS applications. Orange County DSS is working toward same-day processing. She informed the Board that she is waiting to receive the due date and template for Orange County's Corrective Action Plan and will share the plan with the Board once it is complete.

4. Work First Drug Testing

The General Assembly passed a law requiring county DSS offices to drug test certain individuals for Work First. At application or review or any other time, DSS administers the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) and refers individuals with positive findings to a qualified substance abuse professional. Under the new law, DSS must also administer the DAST-10 (Drug Abuse Screening Tool), and anyone with a score of 3 or higher must be referred for drug testing in Durham. Positive AUDIT findings do not affect an individual's eligibility for Work First. A person with any type of drug conviction (misdemeanor or felony) within the past 3 years must automatically be referred for drug testing. If they fail the drug test or fail to comply with the requirement, then they are not eligible for Work First; however, the other members of their household can still receive Work First assistance. Child only cases are exempt from the drug testing requirement. Someone already in a drug treatment program will be sent to a qualified substance abuse professional and can receive benefits if he or she is complying with the program. Human Services Manager Lindsey Shewmaker informed her staff that all referrals for drug testing must go through a second-level review process. She will update the Board on any progress at the next meeting. So far, no referrals have been made. A technician will be available to transport clients to Durham for drug testing if needed.

5. Records Retention

Nancy Coston explained to the Board that DSS is conducting a records retention study. DSS is purging records according to state rules. Most records can be purged after ten years. However, adoption records can never be purged. DSS is also undergoing document management. All Economic Services and Child Care records will soon be purged or in the agency's document management system.

Ann Wilkerson moved to approve the agency's purging of records according to state rules. Pat Garavaglia seconded the motion. The motion was carried without dissent.

6. Director's Report

The DSS Institute will be held in Hickory this year from October 21 to 23. The mandatory Board session will be shorter so that members can attend other sessions of interest. The TANF Academy will bring in researchers on the toxic effect of chronic poverty on children. There will also be some kick-off events for Project 3 of NC FAST, which includes the child care and energy assistance

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programs. Orange County DSS has been asked to pilot the child care program in NC FAST.

Nancy Coston and CPS Supervisor Crystal Mitchell previewed the software that will be used for child welfare at the IBM offices in Research Triangle Park. They liked the program a lot and felt that it had a lot of functionality.

As part of the Family Success Alliance, Nancy Coston is working to convene all of the agencies that deal with the issue of food insecurity. She also stated that DSS is going to hold a Job Fair at University Place (formerly University Mall) in Chapel Hill. She will contact the Board with the date and further details as they develop.

Ann Wilkerson asked about the results of the outside agency funding recommendations. Nancy Coston said that she would send her this information.

VII. Announcements

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 21, 2015 at the Hillsborough Commons, 113 Mayo Street, Hillsborough, North Carolina at 4:00pm.

Claire Millar moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:41pm. Pat Garavaglia seconded the motion. The motion was carried without dissent.

Submitted by:

Nancy Coston
Director

Tamara Dempsey-Tanner
Chair