

**New Hanover County
Board of Social Services
Budget Retreat Minutes
Government Center
9:00a.m. – 3:00p.m.**

The New Hanover County Board of Social Services met in open session on Friday, February 15, 2008 at 9:00 in Meeting Room B of the New Hanover County Government Center.

ATTENDING: Ann Pitts, Chairman; Bill Caster, Vice-Chairman; John Craig; F. Wayne Morris; Minerva Glidden

ALSO ATTENDING: LaVaughn Nesmith, Secretary to the Board; Stephanie Monteath, Assistant to the Director

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Craig moved for approval of the agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caster and passed unanimously.

Mrs. Pitts led the invocation. Mr. Craig led the pledge of allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mrs. Glidden moved for approval of the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caster and passed unanimously.

INFORMATION AGENDA

Mr. Morris shared information from the North Carolina Association of County Boards of Social Services to include a copy of the bylaws. Currently the Association has 100% participation. Mr. Morris gave the history and make-up of the Consortium. Information about the Consortium can be found at <http://ncacabss.org/>.

SSDI

Mr. Caster noted that the number of children in DSS custody has gone down. Mrs. Marino explained that IV-E Waiver efforts and a hard working Legal unit have made an impact on that number falling. Mr. Nesmith echoed what Mrs. Marino said and shared that it has been a goal of DSS to reduce this number significantly. Ms. Talbutt noted that the number of children available for adoption has gone down, which is not a good thing. The decreased number of children ready for adoption is directly correlated to the loss of IV-E Waiver funding for contract attorneys. Mr. Nesmith discussed the Work First Family Assistance numbers, explaining that a majority of the cases are child only cases. The adults who are able to work have shifted to other programs or are disabled and unable to find work. Mr. Nesmith explained that many poor parents are giving their children to their grandparents to raise.

County Budget Expenditures

Carol Thiel reviewed the budget line items for the month of December. Ms. Thiel explained different strategies, such as moving funds to/from other programs, to meet Maintenance of Effort (MOE). Mr. Nesmith complimented the efforts of Carol Thiel, Wanda Marino and Beth Schrader from County Finance. Mr. Nesmith noted that for the first time in 2 years the agency is not having an issue meeting MOE.

Mrs. Pitts noted the "Attapersons" and how nice it is to see thank you notes to DSS staff.

The agency will be receiving additional funds for Day Care due to reallocation of funds. The State Division of Child Development has received 2.5 million dollars for the More at Four program that has not yet been spent. Some of this money will be reverted to NHCDSS. Mr. Nesmith will push for no County match of funds as the State has these extra funds. Mr. Nesmith explained that while there are several funding sources for Day Care none of the dollars are allocated for administrative costs.

There is a Fatherhood meeting on February 19, 2008. Many different human service organizations will be participating in the meeting. Following that, a Fatherhood conference is scheduled for May 2008. DSS is charged by the Federal government to sponsor Fatherhood efforts. Mr. Caster asked about last year's Fatherhood conference. Mr. Nesmith said although that conference was not widely attended it was recorded onto video. The conference now airs on Government T.V. and has had good feedback. Chris McNamee said that she is hopeful to have as many good workshops as were offered last year. She explained that workshops teach men how to be good fathers. Ms. Glidden asked if fatherhood prevention efforts are made. Ms. McNamee responded that several agencies such as WHAT and Child Advocacy promote fatherhood prevention efforts. Ms. Glidden asked how the agency handles situations in families where the father is violent. Mr. Nesmith explained that in such cases the father is not pushed to be reintegrated into the family but there are not as many efforts to help fathers as there are to help mothers, such as counseling and mental health programs. Most often the fathers are incarcerated and the get back out and do the same thing. Ms. Glidden asked if there are violence intervention programs here. Julia Talbutt responded that there is a Domestic Violence Offender Program which uses the Duluth model for treatment. Ms. Talbutt further explained that it seems a majority of the cases she and Dean Hollandsworth are involved with are domestic violence cases and Domestic Violence treatment is a condition for visitation and reunification.

Mr. Nesmith explained the evacuation drill in which NHCDSS will be participating in May. The county will simulate evacuation to 2 inland counties. Mr. Morris said that Dare County does not use shelters, but instead moves its residents to Pitt County shelters.

Mr. Nesmith reminded all that a copy of the DSS portion of the County Audit is included in the front cover of each board book.

STRATEGIC ACTION AGENDA

Mr. Nesmith read his State of the Agency letter addressing the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009, highlighting upcoming program expenses, under-funded and unfunded mandates, potential avenues of income and agency retention measures.

Mr. Caster asked about Medicaid revenue. Beth Schrader interjected that the budget is still in draft form and final numbers are not yet in. Mrs. Pitts wondered what would happen if the State takes over the Medicaid program. Sam Lane explained that DSS would still be responsible for administering Medicaid benefits and determining eligibility. The state gives DSS administrative funding for this program.

Chris McNamee explained the steps taken to complete the County Budget Process. Ms. McNamee reviewed how Leading by Results assists us in budget development. Leading By Results monitoring helps us to determine the needs of the agency as well as the needs of the community. Ms. McNamee reviewed recruitment and retention efforts such as: the supervisor support group, revision of the selection process and various incentives like the Cultivating Courtesy campaign. NHC is the only county in the State using NC Fast's SDI process. Funding was needed to connect NHCDSS to the State system but the result of cutting down on dual entries of client information makes the expenditure cost effective. In outreach efforts, DSS has televised programs about services and developed DVDs for trainings and public speaking events. DSS is also enhancing community partnerships with WHAT, Community Health Center, Child Support/Pre-Trial Release, and Carolina Access/Health Navigators. Ms. McNamee explained that there were many other things DSS would have liked to have asked for in the budget however in light of the budgetary restrictions, we are only asking for what is critical for running the agency.

Carol Thiel passed out an Executive Summary of DSS' Budget Requests. Included in the budget is a 3% salary increase for all employees and a 5% salary differential for all bi-lingual staff. Ms. Thiel reiterated that the budget is a draft and a working document.

Carol Thiel reviewed the revenue pie chart. The majority of funding for DSS is Federal, followed by State funds, County funds and a sliver of other resources to include private donations and grant funding. Mr. Morris noted that if the State takes over Medicaid, the pie chart would change as the County funds would be significantly less.

Chris McNamee recapped the budget strategy.

The Chairman recessed for a ten minute break at 10:20a.m.

The Board reconvened at 10:38a.m.

Administrative Support

Carol Thiel shared the vision for Administrative Support. Ms. Thiel reviewed the first two targets of drawing down 99% of available State and Federal funds and 94.16% of

clients were satisfied with their services. There was discussion as to why the goal for customer service is not 100%.

Stephanie Monteath shared the target of less than 12% turnover. Ms. Monteath reviewed turn over and things that effect a low percentage such as freezing staff positions. Currently, DSS is right on target for mid-year with turnover at 6%. Ms. Monteath also reiterated the importance of a pay differential for bi-lingual staff as DSS has a lot of Spanish speaking clients who are undocumented and not reflected in the New Hanover County census.

Carol Thiel and Chris McNamee reviewed the financial data for Administrative Support.

Food and Nutrition Services

Mary John Brantley reviewed the target and result for Food and Nutrition Services. Case loads are increasing with an average of 765 applications per month currently. Ms. Brantley explained that monthly Food Assistance applications tend to sharply rise after a hurricane. Chris Coudriet asked what percentage of applicants is deemed eligible to receive Food Assistance services. Ms. Brantley and Mr. Nesmith explained that it is difficult to track as some applicants are eligible but don't receive services if they don't bring in documentation to prove they are eligible. Sam Lane explained further that there are 30 days from the date of the application to make a determination. There are a lot of verifications and contacts that need to be made prior to eligibility. The Food and Nutrition unit works really hard to get applications processed well before the 30 day limit as it is believed that food is a basic necessity that county residents can not go without. Staff are seeing a lot of families coming in crisis situations as their dollar is not going as far as it needs to. Mr. Lane said they need additional staff resources to process the huge number of applicants coming in every day. Ms. Pitts asked if someone who would like to receive the service has to come in to apply. Ms. Brantley said phone applications can be taken but it takes longer to process as everything needs to be mailed back and forth. If a friend or family member can come in for the applicant it is easier. Mr. Nesmith explained that if a person is convicted of a felony they can not receive Food and Nutrition services. Mr. Nesmith shared that the agency is in the process of tracking reasons why people are denied services. Ms. Glidden asked if a person has committed a felony, are they ineligible for ever. Ms. Brantley explained there are different classes of felonies. Certain felonies such as possession have just a six month waiting period. Mr. Lane shared that folks are actually calling from other states to see what services they would be eligible for if they moved to New Hanover County. Mr. Caster asked how administrative costs are divided for staff. Mr. Lane explained that Federal money pays 50% of administrative costs while the State pays nothing leaving the County responsible for 50% of administrative costs. Chris Coudriet asked if DSS tracks how long each household receives services in an effort to see self sufficiency. Mr. Nesmith said most cases are open for years. Mr. Lane explained that each caseworker carries a case load of over 500 cases. Between answering phone calls, taking back to back applications and waiting for information to verify applicant eligibility the caseworkers are very overwhelmed. Beth Schrader suggested utilizing the reverse 911 phone system to let people know the status of their application.

Carol Thiel reviewed the financial data for Food and Nutrition Services. She feels the projected spending is low and would like to revisit that figure.

Medicaid and Health Choice

Mary John Brantley shared the vision for Medicaid and Health Choice: To assist eligible low income individuals, families and children in obtaining access to medical services by quickly and accurately determining their eligibility for Medicaid/Health Choice and providing information to citizens to help them obtain medical coverage.

Ms. Brantley shared in FY06/07, 66.73% of eligible population received Medicaid and Health Choice. Ms. Brantley explained the Family Planning Waiver has a much higher participation rate than was expected as adults that don't qualify for Adult Medicaid are encouraged to apply for the Family Planning Waiver. The process of applying for Adult Medicaid has become cumbersome as proof of citizenship, identity and residency has intensified. As well, DSS will be participating in the PACE program administered through Elderhouse. Due to the Transfer of Assets-Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, the "look back" period of time has increased from 36-60 months. As a result, DSS Attorney Dean Hollandsworth has been dealing with Estate Planners which lengthens the time it takes to process applications. When a person has property (considered a resource) outside North Carolina that too effects application time. Lastly, the Special Assistance In-Home Program has been given additional available slots. DSS Adult Medicaid workers administer this program.

Ms. Brantley reviewed the Aging and Disabled Population versus the number of Adult Medicaid Staff. The increase of aging/disabled citizens is disproportionate to the growth of Medicaid staff.

Mr. Lane explained that DSS is requesting an additional Adult Medicaid staff position. Mr. Lane feels an additional staff person would reduce the possible errors that can be made with all the new requirements.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for Medicaid/Health Choice to include Title XIX Medicaid Transportation. Ms. Thiel feels the numbers will be more accurate by the March board meeting.

Mr. Caster asked about Health Choice. Ms. Heslin shared that Health Choice is a lower cost insurance program for children that do not qualify for Medicaid. Applications for Health Choice are taken through DSS. Ms. Heslin explained that another insurance program Kids Count will most likely be run through DSS in the coming year.

Ms. Pitts asked about Medicaid Transportation. Ms. Thiel explained there are a number of vendors that provide this service. There were more private providers but the insurance requirements were so stringent that private providers (often family or friends) can not afford the cost. As well, Title XIX payments are now made directly to the person receiving services instead of the transportation provider. The person must then pay the provider.

Child Care Subsidy

Ms. Heslin shared the vision and goals for Child Care Subsidy ensuring safe, quality, accessible and affordable child care for children in New Hanover County, supporting the independence of families by enabling responsible adults to secure and maintain employment and meet the basic needs of their children.

Ms. Heslin discussed that 90.02% of children are receiving quality child care which surpassed the set benchmark and target of 85%. Mr. Caster asked if there was a noticeable difference in the outcome of putting a child in a 5 star day care as opposed to a 3 star daycare. Ms. McNamee shared data shows children perform better and succeed when the child teacher ratio is lower, as is the case in a 5 star day care facility. Ms. Schrader interjected that the cost to provide child care to an infant is vastly different than providing child care for an after school 12 year old regardless of the star rating of the facility.

DSS currently provides child care subsidy for 2,063 children. Families receiving subsidy are employed or attending education activities that support employment. The average co-payment paid by a parent is \$93.30. Fifty-one percent of children receiving child care subsidy are under the age of 4. New Hanover County is receiving less subsidy money than in previous years. Ms. Thiel reviewed the financial data for Child Care Subsidy. Last year zero dollars were budgeted for day care. This year money has been budgeted for day care and DSS will receive grant money to assist with this need as well.

The Board recessed for lunch at 12:05 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 12:35 p.m.

Sam Lane asked the Board to request the County earmark \$500,000.00 of MOE money for child day care. Mr. Lane explained that the money is not new money from the County; DSS would just be spending it early so that additional State funds could be spent on day care in an effort to maintain the children that already receive day care subsidy.

Child Support Enforcement

Sam Lane shared the vision for Child Support Enforcement to ensure that non-custodial parents acknowledge and accept responsibility for the care and well being of their children through the payment of child support payments on a regular and consistent basis. This will help children, families and adults to become economically secure.

Carla West noted a 6.4% increase in child support collection from the previous fiscal year. In the first 6 months of FY07-08 there have been collections of over 6.3 million dollars. Mr. Lane noted that there will be a spike in collections as it is reaching a tax intercept period. The second half of the fiscal year tends to have much higher collections.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for Child Support Enforcement. Mr. Nesmith reviewed two graphs showing collection growth trends from FY04/05 through FY06/07.

Children's Services

Kari Sanders shared the vision for Children's Services: Each child in New Hanover County shall achieve a permanent sense of belonging to a family that gives security, good health, adequate nutrition, a safe environment, a quality education and hope for the future.

Ms. Sanders discussed the target of achieving permanent placement for children in less than 12 months after removal from the home. The benchmark is 55%. During FY06/07, 53.09% of children met that goal. In the first 6 months of FY07/08, 52.94% of children had achieved a permanent placement within 12 months of removal.

Ms. Sanders next explained the target of children adopted within 24 months of DSS assuming custody. In FY06/07 27.27% of children met this goal with an agency target of 32%. In the first 6 months of FY07/08 23.08% of the children had been adopted within 24 months of the Department assuming custody.

Ms. Talbutt explained how much time it takes to process Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), which is necessary for a child to be eligible for adoption. There has been a rise in custody battles in the past year. Ms. Talbutt and Mr. Hollandsworth are now in court every Wednesday in addition to the regular Thursday court days. Mr. Hollandsworth explained that DSS is mandated to initiate TPR within one year in adjudication. Increase in the number of appeals and efforts of the Family Court Judges to make TPR "appeal proof" increases the length of time it takes to get the termination and to final decision.

Kari Sanders shared the Challenge for Children results. For FY06/07 there was an 18% decrease in the backlog of children. Fifty percent of the children coming out of DSS custody were adopted, 23% were reunified with their parents, 8% were emancipated or were moved to custody with a non-removal parent, 5% custody of the child was terminated and 4% found guardianship with a court approved caretaker.

Ms. Talbutt noted that while reunification is often the goal, chronic problems such as substance abuse often take longer than 12 months to resolve. In those cases, it is a good thing for DSS to retain custody while the parent receives the help they need. Mr. Caster asked what percentage of children are taken into custody due to parental substance abuse. Ms. Talbutt estimated around 80%. Ms. Talbutt clarified that children affected by domestic violence are children that were injured when the parents were fighting or are exposed to their parent's fighting. Cases identified as abuse refer to children injured directly by a caretaker.

Ms. Sanders shared the second vision for this for Children's Services: New Hanover County youth will be productive, law abiding and substance abuse free at home, school, the work place and in the community. Ms. Sanders explained that DSS was failing this population (which grew up in the Foster Care system) as they were not getting their high school diplomas or living in stable housing. In a proactive measure, DSS hired a LINKS coordinator to track and work directly with this at risk group. This has proven to be a success.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for Children's Services emphasizing programs that were retained despite the loss of IV-E Waiver money.

It was noted that group home rates will no longer be flexible. The State will set a rate based on the services the group home provides. The State will no longer be assisting with certain expenses. While this will take leverage away from group homes that were in some cases charging astronomical rates, it will also take away the ability to charge less in some cases. This may help and hurt DSS simultaneously.

Prevention Services

Ann Barkley discussed the Prevention Services vision. Ms. Barkley talked about the Work First program, challenges with that program and the grant obtained by DSS to employ a Job Coach-Job Locator Social Work position to assist with difficult to place clients. Work First has obtained a grant to employ a clinical psychologist to work with hard to place clients in an effort to evaluate whether or not those clients will ever be able to obtain and sustain work. Through these efforts, in the first six months of FY07/08 97.18% of able-bodied Work First participants did not return to the Work First program after six months. The goal for the year is 70% with a long term range target of 85%.

Ms. Barkley discussed the second result: Children and families will live in safe, healthy and stable environments. In FY06/07, 6.72% of families accepting prevention services had a confirmed protective services report within six months. The target for FY08/09 will again be that less than 5% of families accepting prevention services will have a confirmed report within six months. One of the prevention services is Day Care Subsidy provided through TANF dollars.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for Prevention Services. Mr. Nesmith noted that many counties are putting extra money into Prevention Services. The concept is that it is easier and more cost effective to assist a family before they go into a crisis situation, whether it is financial crisis or child protection situations.

Mrs. Marino explained the break down of Emergency Financial Assistance; Crisis Intervention Program (CIP), Energy Neighbor Fund, TANF Emergency Assistance, Faith Community, General Assistance, Good Friends and Share the Warmth. Four of those programs are funded by private donations. The number of Emergency Assistance Applications is steadily rising. Chris McNamee noted that the churches are giving less money (Faith Community) as people in the community are going directly to the church for donations.

Carol Thiel reviewed the financial data for Emergency Financial Assistance.

Adult Services

Ann Barkley shared the vision for Adult Services: NHC elderly and disabled will live safely and independently. Ms. Barkley discussed that DSS continues not to meet targets for Adult Services as there have been many substantiated cases of maltreatment and recidivism. One strategy recently put into place is to re-structure/organize the Adult

Services Social Workers between two supervisors. The goal of the Adult Service unit is to be more proactive and less reactive. In that, DSS has been making a concerted effort to locate family members to be guardians for aged and disabled adults.

Mr. Caster asked about Jasmine Cove. They have been renamed Glenn Care and have a new owner. So far there have not been any more problems with that domiciliary care. Mr. Hollandsworth explained that he has a backlog of incompetency and guardianship cases on his desk. When there is no person serving as a guardian for an incompetent/disabled adult, and that adult needs placement or surgery, attorneys have to go before the judge and the process is lengthy. It is much easier and less time consuming when a person has a power of attorney or a family member that serves in that capacity.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for Adult Services. Figures are likely to change as more information is received.

Child Protective Services

Pat Jessup shared the vision for Child Protective Services: Every family in New Hanover County will be respected for their strengths, competence and their ability to change and they will be responsible for the safety and well-being of their children.

Pat Jessup reviewed targets for Child Protective Services (CPS), noting that percentages of children who are repeat victims of maltreatment are slightly higher in the first six months of FY2007-2008. During the first six months of 07/08 21.35% of children found "in need of services" had previous "in need of services" decisions. Ms. Jessup found that a majority of cases in the first six months were due to substance abuse by the caretaker. Proactively, the CPS unit is putting families in charge of their lives and encouraging them to come up with their own plans to fix their situation. There has been a rise in heroin and cocaine use in New Hanover County. As well there seems to be a trend of multi-family dwellings, where people are piled on top of each other in the home as a result of the affordable housing crisis. The ADR Center continues to mediate Child and Family Team Meetings and use of these meetings have been very successful. Families have indicated they enjoy Child and Family Team Meetings and feel heard.

Carol Thiel reviewed financial data for CPS. The budget for this unit is very similar to last year.

Mr. Nesmith recapped the requests for FY08/09: 1 Food and Nutrition worker, 1 Adult Medicaid Worker, 1 Attorney and 1 Paralegal.

Mr. Caster abstained from voting as he will have to re-vote on these positions as County Commissioner. John Craig moved to support the new positions. The motion was seconded by Mr. Morris and passed with 4 aye, 1 abstain.

Ms. Pitts asked for a vote to earmark funding for Child Care Subsidy. Ms. Glidden moved to support this. The motion was seconded by Mr. Craig and passed unanimously.

Chris Coudriet asked that the board prioritize the 4 positions being requested and be prepared to advocate for those positions in the near future. Mrs. Pitts asked for suggestions to prioritize. Ms. Glidden asked that some thought and time be given before the board decides its priorities.

Next Meeting Objectives

Resident Care Facility Ratings
Child Day Care Update
Program Integrity Update
Client Satisfaction Update
Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation
Work First Demonstration Grant Update

Board Self Evaluations

The Board completed self evaluations.

Additional Items

Mr. Nesmith gave the Board a copy of the Annual Report.

As there were no items to discuss in closed session as provided in G.S. 143-318.11 pursuant to G.S. 108A-80 and/or G.C. 154A-98, the meeting was adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

LaVaughn Nesmith,
Secretary to the Board

Ann Pitts
Chairman

Date approved: _____

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