

**New Hanover County
Board of Social Services
Minutes
January 08, 2008**

The New Hanover County Board of Social Services met in open session on Tuesday, January 08, 2008 at 9:00 in Multipurpose Room A of the New Hanover County Department of Social Services.

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

Mr. Caster led the invocation. Mr. Craig led the pledge of allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Glidden moved to approve the December Board Minutes with the following change to page 4 under Additional Items – the Board suggested a subcommittee be set up with Ms. Glidden serving as Chair, to review the agency's current drug policy. The subcommittee would report back to the board with its recommendations. Ms. Glidden feels the current policy is very general and contradictory in places. With the following change to the December minutes, Mr. Morris moved to approve the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Glidden and passed unanimously.

INFORMATION AGENDA

New Hires

Dorothy Stewart was introduced as the new Community Services Assistant. Swandella Nixon was introduced as the new Temporary Food Stamps Caseworker Trainee.

Service Awards

Mandy Hancock was recognized for 5 years of service to New Hanover County. Christy Thompson was recognized for 10 years of service to New Hanover County. Linda Mayes was recognized for 15 years of service to New Hanover County. Mary John Brantley was recognized for 25 years of service to New Hanover County. Frank Demeter was recognized for 35 years of service to New Hanover County.

Introduction of new Assistant County Manager

Mr. Caster introduced Chris Coudriet, the new Assistant County Manager.

SSDI

Mr. Caster asked why the numbers for Forensic Reports, Substantiations, and MRS numbers did not add up to the number of cases reported. Wanda Marino explained that the reason the numbers of reports may not equal the number of case decisions is because some assessments or investigations can extend into the next month. Julia Talbutt further explained that the level of involvement of DSS varies with prosecution and sometimes there is a removal of a child from a parent, but other times the child is moved to the non – offending parent which affects the length of time a case stays open.

Mr. Caster asked for clarification on the Multiple Response System (MRS). Wanda Marino reviewed the MRS process. MRS is used for cases that are not abuse or serious neglect which would automatically go to a Forensic track. The MRS system assists families to stay together, using methods such as Child and Family Team Meetings, front loading services and contracting through the Mediation Center. MRS is strength based and family centered.

Minerva Glidden asked why the TANF number went from 3 Emergency Assistance cases in November 2006 to 550 in November 2007. Ms. Marino explained that money was transferred from General Assistance to Emergency Assistance to better serve clients needs and count toward showing Maintenance of Effort (MOE).

County Budget Expenditures

Carol Thiel explained that the County Budget Expenditure report is always one month behind as DSS is reporting on reimbursements. Ms. Thiel explained DSS is deliberately trying to spend the Smart Start money as there is no county share on that. General Assistance (GA) and Emergency Assistance (EA) are slightly higher. DSS appears to be on-track with our spending. Mr. Nesmith said President Bush has reallocated some money for energy assistance so the agency may be getting a little of that money. Mr. Nesmith explained DSS is having a hard time meeting MOE as services DSS had previously charged have been eliminated. Mr. Nesmith will keep the Board informed of progress.

Work First Gift Cards

Mr. Caster asked Ann Barkley about the Work First Gift Cards. Ann Barkley explained that Work First is having a difficult time meeting its participation rate this year. Money was moved into a line item which will help to fund activities that lead to employment, such as job searches. If a Work First participant is doing a “countable activity”, they can get a \$50.00 gift card to be used toward work related expenses, such as work clothes.

Mr. Caster asked if the gift cards were like a bribe to get people to participate in Work First. Mr. Morris, Ms. Glidden and Ms. Barkley all agreed that the gift cards could be looked at as positive reinforcement. Mr. Caster is concerned that people may use the gift card to buy beer and asked how many gift cards the people could receive. Ann Barkley explained Work First is not designed for long term participation. Mr. Nesmith noted some county DSS’ are acting as employment agencies. Mr. Nesmith explained that the problem is not finding people jobs; the problem is helping people maintain their jobs due to bad work ethics. Mr. Caster asked how long the gift card initiative will last. Ann Barkley responded the program will last until June 30, 2008.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Nesmith explained that DSS plans to ask for one Attorney and one Paralegal immediately as our current budget could sustain those positions. DSS will ask for the additional Attorney and Paralegal in FY 08-09 Budget. Julia Talbutt said that the one Attorney and one Paralegal immediately will help get DSS above water as the agency is still in a crisis situation. The Family Finding proposal has still not received a decision from Duke Endowment. Mr. Nesmith met with the Director of the North Side Center who has requested a meeting with the DSS Board. Mr. Nesmith reviewed IV-E Waiver Assisted guardianship. Child Support has asked DSS to define what enhanced services the agency will provide. Mr. Nesmith introduced the Confidential Intermediary process. Wanda Marino then expounded on the process; if an adult adopted child wishes to meet their biological parent, a Confidential Intermediary will be provided. The Intermediary will contact the biological parent to determine if they would like to meet their biological child. There are other agencies in New Hanover County that are prepared to take on the Confidential Intermediary responsibility. There is no funding for DSS to take on this process. Any agency wishing to serve as an intermediary would set its own fees. There is currently no training for DSS staff to learn how to become an intermediary. Ms. Marino explained that in reading posts from the 100 county list serve she is a part of, other DSS overall are not planning to participate. DSS will be responsible for providing a list of agencies that will provide intermediary service for folks wanting to find their parents.

Ms. Glidden moved New Hanover County DSS not provide Confidential Intermediary services at this time. The motion was seconded by Mr. Craig and passed unanimously.

STRATEGIC ACTION AGENDA

Child Support Annual Report

Carla West of Child Support Enforcement presented the Child Support Annual Report. Ms. West gave the history of Young Williams relationship with DSS. Young Williams began managing NHC Child Support in 1998. The current DSS-Young Williams contract expires in June 2008. Young Williams employs eighteen full time staff that are very active with State and County processes. Young William participates in a number of activities to include: NHC Partnership for Fatherhood, NHC Annual Fatherhood Conference, NHC Work First Planning Council, NHC Work First Hardships Status and LINC, Inc. (Leading Into New Communities Incorporated). Young William is involved in State and Federal Initiatives such as NC Child Support Council, NC Journey to Excellence, NC Strategic Planning Committee, National Child Support Enforcement Association and Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association.

Young Williams has been working to increase paternity establishment rates: in FY 04-05 the percentage of paternity establishment for NHC was 102.46%, in FY 05-06 the percentage was 104.36% and in FY06-07 the percentage was 107.12%.

Ms. West noted New Hanover County is greatly ahead of the state wide average of cases under order. Currently NHC has an 86.54% average of caseloads under order as compared to the state average of 83%.

Ms. West discussed current support collections. NHC is currently at 69.20% as compared to the state average of 66.00%. Ms. West explained that “arrears” refer to money that is owed that was not collected on the month it was due. New Hanover County has an arrears collection rate of 63.4% while the State average is 64%. Total Collections are continuing to rise each year. In FY04-05 \$11,089,255.00 was collected by FY07-08 \$12,455,290.00 was collected.

Ms. West reviewed the benefits of maintaining a relationship between NHCDSS and Young Williams: NC experience; proven leader in the community, State and Nation; exceptional relationship with DSS and the Court system; outstanding customer service; high quality- low cost vendor.

Mr. Caster asked what Old Fashioned Way of doing business meant. Carla West explained that since the birth of technology Child Support staff have stopped doing some of the leg work to include calling folks on the telephone to get information. Young Williams has gone back to making those calls and visiting homes to find contacts of people that owe child support.

Mr. Caster asked about the electronic monitoring bracelet. Ms. West explained that a person using the electronic monitoring program is not in jail which enables that person to work and pay child support. The electronic monitoring bracelet costs \$11.00 as opposed to the cost of keeping a person in jail.

Mr. Craig moved to renew the contract with Young Williams. The motion was seconded by Ms. Glidden and passed unanimously.

Mr. Caster asked that he be informed when a vote is going to be taken ahead of time. Mr. Nesmith explained that items in the Action Agenda will most likely need action taken.

Resource Needs Identified by Leading by Results

Chris McNamee shared a presentation on the Resource Needs Identified by LBR. Ms. McNamee clarified that no motion/action will need to be taken after the presentation, its purpose is information sharing. Mr. Nesmith clarified the information is being presented to the board for thought as next month DSS will be asking for action during the board retreat. Ms. Glidden explained that action could be noted on the action agenda face sheet. Ms. Monteath explained that normally action is noted on the agenda face sheet but due to a communication gap, she was not informed a vote would be taken on the above information.

Ms. McNamee reviewed the overriding themes in Leading by Results; Improve Customer Service and Increase Staff Retention.

Ms. McNamee reviewed the following resource needs:

- Increase legal staff with the addition of 2 attorneys and 2 paralegals. DSS will ask for one of each immediately and one for the next fiscal year. Mr. Caster asked how it would be presented to the Commissioners that the cost to hire an attorney would actually decrease some of the other costs of not having the attorney. Ms. McNamee noted IV-E Waiver funds were justified by how expensive it is to keep children in Foster Care. Justification for this resource is as

follows: large caseloads exceeding ABA recommendations, increased court days to address timelines, increased number of appeals, proposed permanency mediation program and risk of sanctions. The community will be impacted by: increased number of adopted children who are adopted within 24 months of latest removal, increased number of adopted children who are adopted within 24 months from removal of birth home, staff morale and retention.

- Hire one additional Adult Medicaid worker. Justification for this resource is as follows: rising caseloads, a growing aging population and DSS involvement in the PACE Pilot Project. The community will be impacted by: increased number of persons potentially eligible for Medicaid or Health Choice who receive it, improved customer service and increased number of county's aged and disabled adults receiving SA.
- Reclassify Family and Children's Medicaid staff from Zone 1 to Zone 2 reclassifications and reclassify two temporary positions in Food Stamps to regular full time positions with benefits. Justification for this request is as follows: increased caseloads, additional policy requirements resulting in increased processing times, additional programs such as Family Planning Cases which has a much higher participation number than State projected it would and a need for flexibility in case assignments. Moving the temporary positions to permanent positions would be a 50/50 split for the county. Mr. Lane explained that the county would only be adding benefits to staff currently employed in temporary positions. The staff and community would be impacted by: enhanced customer service, increased number of persons potentially eligible for Medicaid, Health Choice or Food Assistance, increased staff morale and retention and DSS resources will be maximized through reclassifications.
- Hire an additional Interpreter. Justification for the Interpreter is as follows: there are a growing number of people requiring interpreter service and DSS is federally mandated to make programs equally accessible to all clients. The community would be impacted by: the number of persons potentially eligible for DSS services that received them timely, without long waits which translates to improved customer service and increased staff morale.
- Hire an additional records management clerk. Justification for this resource is as follows: there has been an increase in records managed, a decrease in on-site storage space and additional scanning responsibilities. The staff and community would be impacted by: improved staff morale and retention, better customer service, a reduced number of records filed on site and an increased efficiency in moving to paperless system.
- Enhanced Scanning and Document Management Project; increased number of scanners, improved functionality, document collection and storage. Justification for this resource is as follows: eliminate storage costs for future records, duplicate documents, printing costs \$50,000.00 just in paper costs for 2007-2008. The agency will be impacted by: resources being maximized through more efficient use of staff time and resources, improved customer service, improved storage and easier retrieval of documents for auditing requirements.

- Building renovation to include; redesigned lobbies, additional office space, additional visitation rooms and increased security. Justification for this resource is as follows: current wait times are excessive, state requirement to provide visitation rooms and need for increased security/privacy.

Board Self Evaluation

The Board completed self evaluations.

Additional Items

The Board was asked to choose a date for the annual budget Board Retreat in February. Mr. Nesmith asked if the third week in February would be OK. Ms. Glidden noted that February 15, 2008 is currently listed as the Board Meeting date from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mr. Caster moved to keep the 15th as the retreat date as it is marked as such on his calendar. The motion was seconded by Ms. Glidden and passed unanimously.

Mr. Nesmith explained that he prefers to receive support in the form of board approval on each issue DSS plans to bring to the County Commissioners for approval.

It was noted that agenda items for vote should be stated as such on the action agenda cover page. Ms. Glidden will bring an example of an agenda cover page that she liked for Mr. Nesmith's perusal.

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 10:28a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

LaVaughn Nesmith,
Secretary to the Board

Ann Pitts
Chairman

Date approved: _____

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