

February 23, 2021

The Alamance County Social Services Board met for its regular monthly meeting on this date. The meeting was held virtual (zoom) with the following in attendance were: Commissioner Pamela T. Thompson, DSS Board Member; Ms. Heidi Norwick, DSS Board Chair; Dr. Ernest Eason, DSS Board Member; Ms. Edna Parker, DSS Board Member; Ms. Adrian Daye, Director; Ms. Angela Cole, Child Welfare Program Manager; Ms. Lynette Wellons, Assistant Director of Services; Ms. Ayoka Baldwin, Child Welfare Program Manager; Ms. Candice Gobble, Assistant Director of Operations; Ms. Jamie Hatfield, Economic Services Program Manager; Mr. Robert Ring, HR Director; Ms. Danae Pickard, Economic Services Program Manager; Ms. Jamie Hamlett, DSS Attorney; Mr. Jason Cole, IT Director; and Andrea Rollins, County Managers Office were present.

Heidi Norwick, DSS Chair opened the meeting.

Public Comment:

None –

Consent Agenda: Heidi Norwick, DSS Board Chair

January items on the consent agenda approved. Edna Parker made motion to approve and seconded by Commissioner Pamela Thompson.

Staff Reports:

Fiscal: Ms. Candice Gobble

Ms. Gobble reported on January Expenditures and Revenues. Ms. Gobble reported we are now 7 months of the FY – We are meeting our target rate of 58%.

	JANUARY 2021	% OF BUDGET	PRIOR YTD	% OF BUDGET
REVENUES	\$6,249,570.00	54%	\$5,491,668.00	49%
EXPENDITURES	\$10,765,982.00	55%	\$10,589,332.00	53%

Fraud: See report –

Unit	January 2021	January 2020	Current YTD	Prior Fiscal Year
Fraud	\$5,862.00	\$17,662.29	\$35,461.00	\$118,576.40

Collections remain suspended through February 28, 2021.

Performance Management -

Ms. Gobble reported we added description section to goals not met outlining reasons why the particular goals were not met.

Services – Ms. Lynette Wellons/Assistant Director of Services -

Adult and Family Services Program Manager:

Child Support – (Statistical Report Information)

Unit	January 2021	January 2020	Current YTD	Prior Fiscal Year
Child Support	\$758,896.76	\$856,927.39	\$6,288,707.96	\$6,216,097.43

Adult Services -

No report

Children Services Program Manager: Ms. Angela Cole/Ms. Ayoka Baldwin

No report

Economic Support: Ms. Jamie Hatfield

Ms. Hatfield reported the following:

- **P-EBT Benefits** - North Carolina Pandemic Electronic Benefits – In partnership with DHHS with the NC Department of Public Instruction announced last week they will begin issuing additional food & nutrition benefits through the P-EBT program for the 2020-2021 school year to those schools that meet the required criteria. While DSS does not issue P-EBT benefits or oversee the application process, DSS staff does receive many phone calls from the community with questions regarding this program. We have provided staff with information on how to best support the customer and where to direct those inquires.
- **Audit** – In 2019, the Office of Compliance & Program Integrity conducted an audit on 200 Medicaid cases that were reviewed over a 10-month period. During the 10-month process, 20 cases were randomly selected each month (10 active and 10 negative) and reviewed to determine if we were compliant with the State’s accuracy standards.
- The State’s accuracy standard for eligibility is 96.8%. Unfortunately, Alamance County did not meet the accuracy standards. Our active actions were 95% and our negative actions were 90%. As a result, we will enter into a Joint Improvement Plan with Division of Health Benefits. We recently met via zoom with Division of Health Benefits and our OST Representative to discuss the improvement plan. The plan will be submitted this week and we will continue to meet until we meet the accuracy standards for 3 consecutive months.
- These results do not reflect the work that is currently being done. Since 2019, there have been many measures put into place and revised to ensure accuracy. We will continuously

evaluate our processes and will continue to provide training to continue to meet the standards. With the changes made in 2019, we have seen improvement in cases.

Family Justice Center – Skye Sullivan

No report

Operations – Ms. Candice Gobble, Assistant Director of Operations

Administrative Support/Personnel: Robert Ring

See Statistical Report – as of January 31, 2021

Vacancies	26
New Hires	5
Interagency Transfers	0
Resignations	3

We currently have 23 vacancies. Staff continue to interview for all open positions.

Energy Programs: Candice Gobble

No report

Child Care: Candice Gobble

No report

IT Report: Mr. Jason Cole

No report

Director’s Report – Ms. Adrian Daye, Director –

Director Daye shared concerns about Cardinal Innovations regarding the placement of Foster Children. We continue to work with Cardinal Innovations daily regarding Alamance County children. Recent zoom meeting with Cardinal Innovations, Bryan Hagood, County Manager and Commissioner Turner to discuss pending cases. Director Daye announced Cardinal Innovations will assign a liaison that will be housed at Alamance Co. DSS. The liaison will be available for CFT meetings and other meetings as we work through the issues with placements. Director Daye reported she will share more details of the position once all has been confirmed.

Director Daye reported we provided 24-hr. care for one foster child, which quarantined 32 Social Workers, due to no placement.

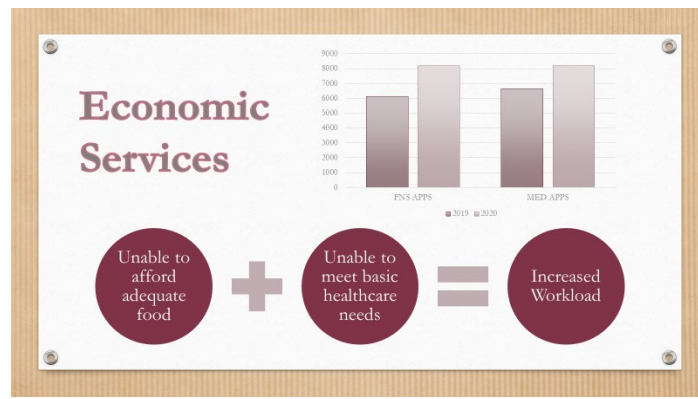
Director Daye announced we continue working on proposed FY 2021 – 2022 budget. The budget proposal will be presented at March DSS Board Meeting.

New Business: COVID-19 Impacts at Social Services

Director Daye briefly discussed the purpose of presentation – COVID-19 Impacts at Social Services. Since the start of pandemic, Social Services has been impacted through all services as it relates to staff regarding policies and procedures as well as the impacts on customers.

Director Daye turned presentation over to management staff

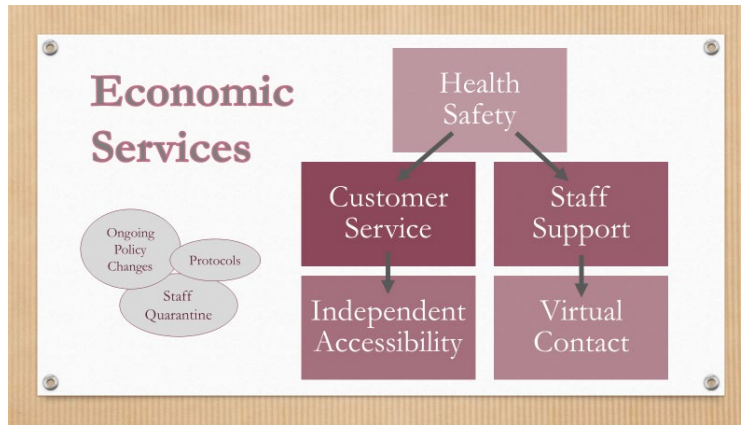
Economic Services – Ms. Danae Pickard –



Ms. Pickard expressed there has been extensive health & economic effects in our community with the citizens we serve. There have been sharp increases in families being unable to afford adequate food and basic healthcare. We recognize Alamance County Social Services is the safety net for those individuals and families.

These impacts led to an increase in Economic Services workload. Our Medicaid staff have seen an overall increase in applications of 23%, with some months as high as 52%. With our FNS staff, we have seen an overall increase of 33%, with one month as high as 185% at the beginning of the pandemic.

We continued to serve while navigating the challenges in changing how we at Alamance Co. DSS conducted business with the health of our staff and customers as a priority.



- The health of our staff and customers remained TOP priority
- We were always mandated to see customers face-to-face, with the ever-changing policies and procedures regarding the pandemic, face-to-face interviews were waived.
- We have worked diligently to provide the highest level of service by the safest means.
- We have provided a successful self-service hub in lobby that allows customers to continue to obtain services timely (applications and drop box available)
- Our supervisors changed how we support our staff – with the majority of staff teleworking – all communication is conducted virtual.
- We made a major shift on how we train new staff through in-person and virtual platforms – we have many creative strategies on how training is conducted to continue to promote engagement with staff
- We continue to meet all policy requirements and have become a more independent workforce in Economic Services



Subsidized Child Care – Assistant Director Candice Gobble

Assistant Director Gobble shared the impacts from Child Care –

With disruption of Continuity of Care – there were many issues that impacted the Child Care Unit. With the statewide shutdowns, child care facilities were impacted:

- Teacher shortages in child care facilities due to quarantine of staff
- Decrease in enrollment at child care facilities due to loss of employment/reduction of hours for parents
- Increased child safety concerns at child care facilities – we partnered with Alamance Partnership for Children to help child care facilities

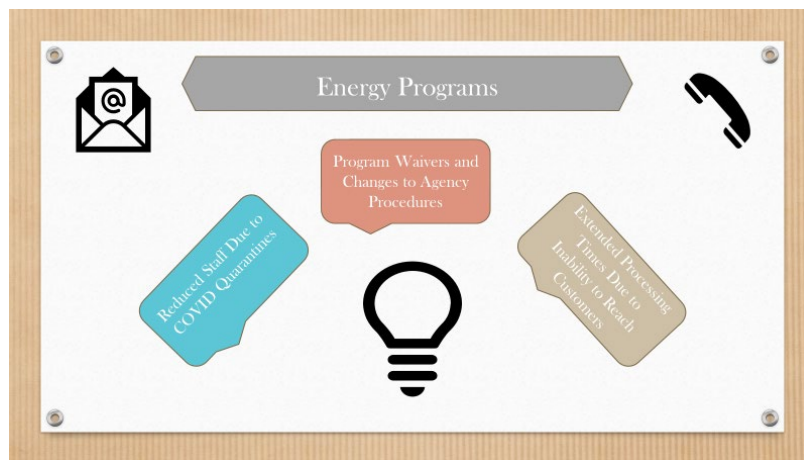
There were measures put into place to ease the burdens to families, such as:

- NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) parent fee waivers implemented at the beginning of April 2020 through August 2020 to ease the burdens on families to pay for child care, but as a result of waivers, no payments received impacted county allocations to Social Services budget.

There were new program guidelines developed for child care to promote safety for customers, as well as staff:

- Waiver of face-to-face interviews helped reduce customer contact
- Implementation of electronic submissions for waitlist and requested documents
- Partnered with child care providers for parents to sign child care vouchers at their facilities to reduce customer contact at Social Services

Energy Programs – Assistant Director Candice Gobble



DSS Energy Programs:

1. Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) – Individuals and families experiencing a heating or cooling related crisis may apply for this service.
2. Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) – federally funded program that provides a one-time vendor payment to help eligible households pay their heating bills

With both of these programs – there were changes to procedures during pandemic:

- All applications can be completed by mail, email, fax or drop-off
- Face-to-face interview was waived
- Disconnect notices are not required during the pandemic

- Applicants can present a final notice or past due utility bill and must have a health related or life-threatening emergency to be eligible for CIP funds
- Processing times were extended due to inability to reach customers
- Reduced staff to process applications due to all programs did not require face-to-face interviews

Fiscal Impact – Assistant Director Candice Gobble -

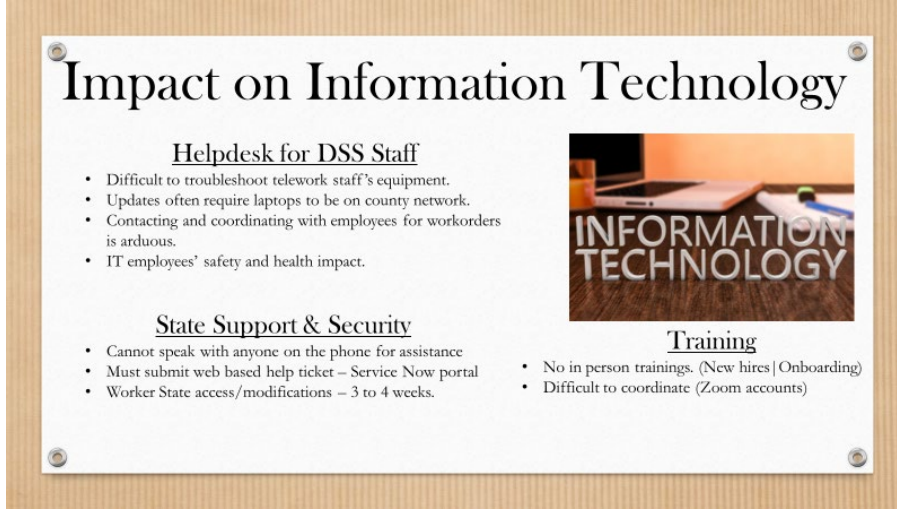


Assistant Director Gobble expressed there have been minimal impacts to the Fiscal Unit of DSS. We continue to operate normal procedures. Customers are able to continue to pick up EBT cards, Medicaid cards as well as checks.

The Fiscal Impacts to the agency were:

- Increased need for staff to telework (purchasing of additional equipment)
- Increased need to locating and purchasing of cleaning supplies
- Decreased expenditures in Training/Travel due to most trainings have been conducted virtual
- Waivers within Economic Services has impacted reduction of revenues for services due no collections of child care funds and NC Health Choice

Information Technology (IT)- Jason Cole



Impact on Information Technology

Helpdesk for DSS Staff


- Difficult to troubleshoot telework staff's equipment.
- Updates often require laptops to be on county network.
- Contacting and coordinating with employees for workorders is arduous.
- IT employees' safety and health impact.

State Support & Security

- Cannot speak with anyone on the phone for assistance
- Must submit web based help ticket – Service Now portal
- Worker State access/modifications – 3 to 4 weeks.

Training


- No in person trainings. (New hires | Onboarding)
- Difficult to coordinate (Zoom accounts)



Question: Have you seen any difference in the phone calls since the last meeting?

Yes, there have been changes made to account for APS/CPS Hotline with transfer of numbers to accommodate.

Human Resources – Bob Ring




Human Resources

Interviews & Job Offers

- Supervisors began utilizing Zoom in April 2020 and have conducted 218 interviews.
- HR conducted job offers via phone beginning April 2020 and transitioned to Zoom in November 2020. Conducted 45 job offers.
- Prior to hiring, more informative documents, such as written job offer, county benefits, dress code, etc. sent to applicants.

Interpreter Services

- Interpreters began teleworking in May 2020.
- Continue to provide services in person and via phone and FaceTime.



Mr. Ring shared COVID impacted the way we interact with new staff in several ways:

- Begin utilizing Zoom in April 2020 and conducted 218 interviews
- All job offers were conducted via phone in April 2020 and transitioned to Zoom in November 2020 – conducted 45 job offers
- All documents required before job offer are now emailed to new hires before the scheduled zoom meeting (written job offer, county benefits, dress code, etc.)

Interpreter Services –

We have two interpreters here at Social Services who begin teleworking in May 2020. They are currently providing services in-person, via phone and Face Time.

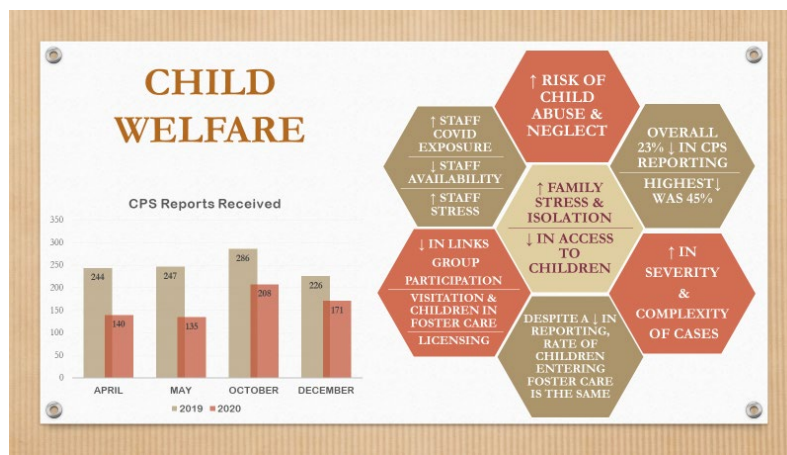
Question: Are applicants who apply within Alamance County, former employees or newly graduated?

- *The majority of applicants come from students who have recently graduated.*

Question: Are applicants Alamance County residents or Out of County?

- *The majority of applicants are from Alamance County and Guilford County. We receive a lot of applications from Guilford County. We have received maybe 2 or 3 from Out of State.*

Child Welfare– Angela Cole and Ayoka Baldwin



Ms. Angela Cole expressed since March 2020 when school systems across the State decided to go to in-person learning and the loss of jobs, families were home together during lockdowns which increased family stress and intensified the increase of the risk of Child Abuse and neglect.

With schools closed to in-person learning, it took away the eyes and ears of our most frequent reporters of child abuse and neglect. As the access to children decreased, health care providers had less access also as an important reporter. Due to less reporters, we had an 43% - 45% decrease in reports compared to last year.

When schools returned in August and September, we saw an uptick of reports. By October 2020, we still had a decrease of 27.3% and December 2020 there was a 24.3% decrease in reporting than the prior year.

Despite the decrease, the severity and complexity of cases continue to grow. There has been an overall increase of 32% in investigative assessments at the start of the new fiscal year.

Ms. Ayoka Baldwin, Child Welfare Program Manager shared with the implications of the severity and complexity of cases impacted the number of children entered into Foster Care during the pandemic. From March 2019 – December 2019, there were 50 children entered into Foster Care and March 2020 – December 2020, 47 children entered into Foster Care – only a difference of 3 children over a year. The licensing program has seen a reduction from 2019 (13 families) to 2020 (6 families).

Ms. Baldwin expressed we continued LINKS (Independent Living Services for Foster Children) groups, but had a decrease in participation. We normally have at least 20 LINKS children, but only had 2 – 3 children participate. We changed the group format to virtual instead of face-to-face.

There was a period where we cancelled visitations foster children due to families exposed to COVID. We conducted some visits virtual and changed locations to outside.

With the pandemic, Child Welfare staff were impacted by levels of exposure, which led to quarantine of staff. With staff quarantine, staff availability decreased, which increased stress levels while assisting with co-worker's caseloads when unavailable.

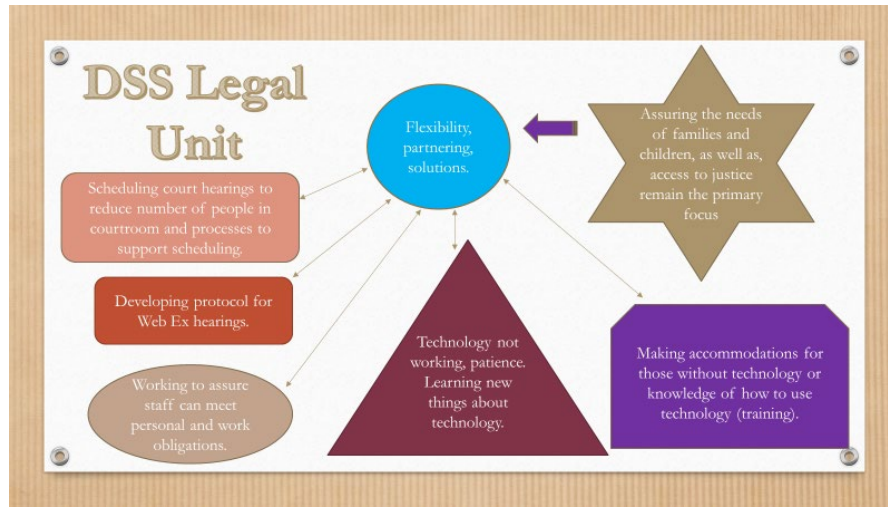
Question: How are you dealing with Foster Parents during COVID?

We are doing fine – there were some issues with families wearing masks. Director Daye developed letter outlining expectations regarding visitation and mask mandates which changed the outcome of visitations.

Question: Does the community know any of this information? Can you present this to County Commissioners?

Yes, we can present at a future meeting. Director Daye will check with Bryan Hagood, County Manager and Tory Frink to schedule.

DSS Legal Unit – Attorney Jamie Hamlett

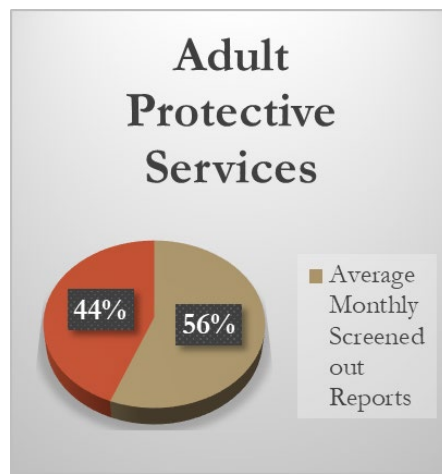


Attorney Hamlett expressed we continued to assure the needs of families and children, as well as access to justice remain the primary focus.

The Legal Unit continued to operate with flexibility and partnerships:

- Scheduling court hearings the reduce the number of people in courtroom and processes to support scheduling
- Juvenile Court continued to run in Alamance County
- We developed protocols for WebEx with Judges to be able to continue abuse/neglect cases
- Child Support continues to operate
- We made accommodations for those without technology or knowledge on how to use technology for court cases (Adult Services)

Adult Services – Assistant Director Lynette Wellons



Assistant Director Wellons discussed the Adult Services area – the constant impact has been there are very few appointments occurring for the Adult population, due to risk of COVID. Those in facilities have restricted outside visitors and family members have stepped back also because of the risk. With the reductions of contacts has left the Adult population vulnerable and heightened the risk for abuse, neglect and exploitation.

With the reduction of contacts, decreased the amount of reports we normally would see in Adult Services. However, with the medical facilities returning to operation, we did see an uptick of reports. Social Workers had to be creative and use measures to make contacts safe for customer, as well as themselves. To keep everyone safe placed increased burdens on planning for safety and ensuring good services were taking place. We were able to use some COVID relief funding for CPS/APS to support communication: clear face masks to assist with lip reading.

Staff were impacted:

- Worried about not doing their job thoroughly
- Struggles with access to elderly population in facilities
- Mentally taxing and overwhelming – we had some staff who resigned due to COVID

Unclaimed Bodies – This service is rarely used at DSS. But, during the peak of positive rates in December, we had 8 unclaimed bodies that passed away due to COVID. We had 5 to pass away in one week, when Alamance County morgue reached full capacity.

Child Support Services – Assistant Director Lynette Wellons



With Child Support – due to increased layoffs or business closures, child support collections were impacted.

Issue of Paternity –

- On average 2 out of every 5 cases – paternity is in question

- In January of this FY, we have worked to resolve 92.88% of barriers

Court Closures –

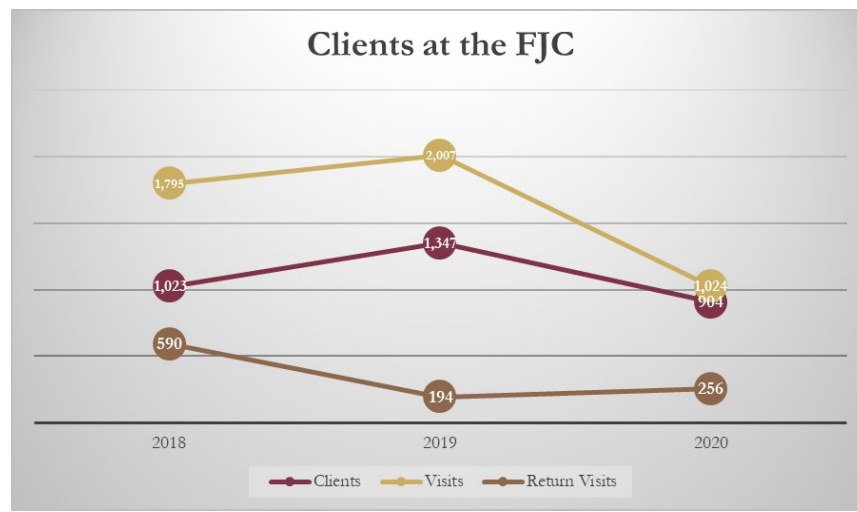
- The closures at the beginning caused delays, backlogs and inability to have timely changes and child support orders entered
- Inability to establish paternity timely
- Impacted the ability to establish support obligations, place cases under order and conduct genetic testing

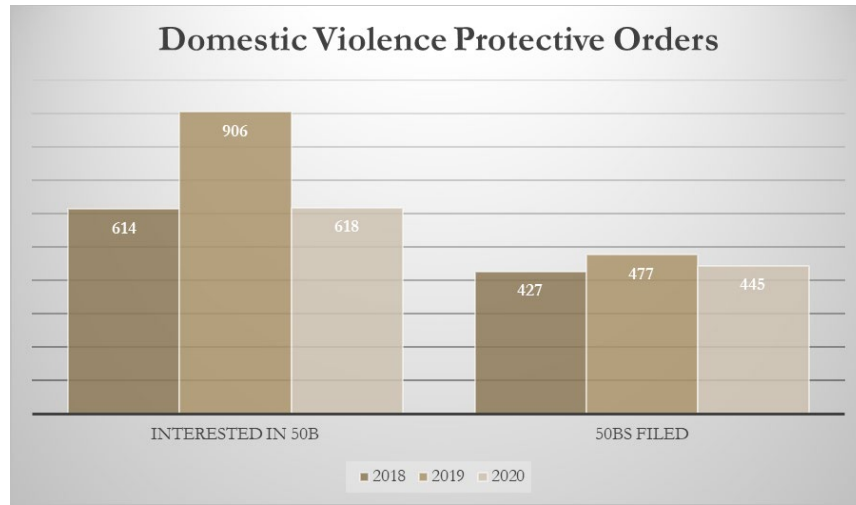
There were sanctions on non-cooperative cases have been lifted on outstanding cases and not issued on new ones.

Decreased staff –

- Quarantine
- Departures/Resignations for family needs
- Impacted ability with service delivery

Family Justice Center – Director Adrian Daye





Director Daye reported on Family Justice Center due to Skye Sullivan, FJC Director at another engagement.

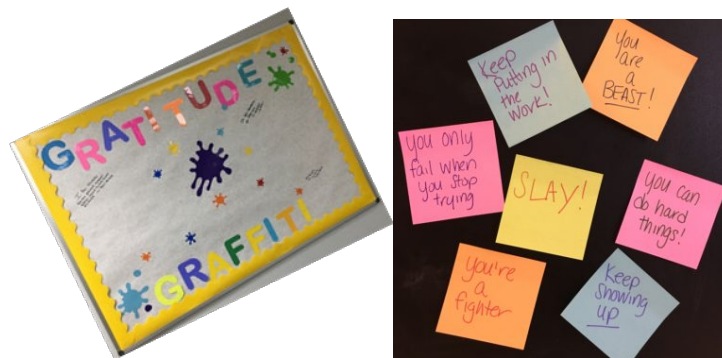
Family Justice Center (FJC) continued serving victims face-to-face during the pandemic, while implementing safety protocols:

- Face Coverings Mandatory Requirement
- Temperature Checks
- COVID screenings
- Air Scrubbers
- UV Lights
- Plexiglass dividers

FJC saw a decrease in victims receiving in-person services, especially marginalized victims (Elderly 50+ and Latin X population). Drastic decrease from 2019. Discussions ensued regarding signage (DSS signage) and the reason we kept signage in front of building.

We did see a huge drop for victims interested in 50B from 2019 to 2020 vs those who filed them.

Trauma Informed Agency – Assistant Director Lynette Wellons



During the pandemic, we at DSS continue to provide ongoing support and engagement to staff in various manners with Mary McGinty Shaw, DSS Trauma Specialist:

- We-Care Groups – groups held as an agency/area specific to discuss self-care, needs or pressing matters
- Monday Morning Meditations – 15 minutes focus and prepare for the week
- Workgroups that focus on:
 - Grief – this group has been prominent during this year – family’s members have experienced personal loss due to COVID
 - Environmental – this group focus on the agency appearance and enhancement for our customers, as well as staff is warm & engaging
- We started bulletin boards that are updated quarterly – so far, we have created two – “Gratitude Graffiti” and “Post-It Affirmation Notes” – these boards allow staff to jot down positive notes and affirmations.

From March 2020 – January 2021 – there have been 105 support meetings conducted (via zoom and in-person) with 150 participants.

Throughout COVID-19, Alamance County DSS remains committed to:

1. Keeping Our Assistance Programs Available
2. Protecting & Supporting our Community
3. Supporting the Needs of our Staff

Announcements:

None

Adjournment -

The next board meeting is 12:00 noon **Tuesday, March 23, 2021** via Zoom.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted:

Carmen L. Morrow

Date approved: _____