

March 28, 2023

The Alamance County Social Services Board met for its regular monthly meeting on this date. The meeting was held at HSC Building (1st Floor) 319 N. Graham Hopedale Rd., Burlington NC with the following in attendance were: Ms. Heidi Norwick, Chair, DSS Board Chair; Dr. Ernest Eason, DSS Board Member; Commissioner Craig S. Turner, DSS Board Member; Mr. Timothy Britt, DSS Board Member; Ms. Candice Gobble, Director; Ms. Wendy Roberts, Economic Services Program Manager; Ms. LaPorscha McCullough, Adult Services Program Manager; Ms. Angela Cole, Child Welfare Program Manager; Ms. Lynette Wellons, Assistant Director of Services; Mr. Robert Ring, HR Director; Mr. Jason Cole, IT Director; Ms. Ashley Bryson, Child Welfare Supervisor and Ms. Tabatha Brown, Child Welfare Supervisor were present.

Heidi Norwick, DSS Chair opened the meeting.

Public Comment:

None

Consent Agenda: Heidi Norwick, DSS Board Chair

February 2023 items on the consent agenda approved. Dr. Ernest Eason made motion to approve and seconded by Commissioner Craig Turner.

Oath of Office:

Ms. Carmen Morrow, Clerk to DSS Board administered Oath of Office to Mr. Timothy Britt. Mr. Timothy Britt term will expire June 2025.

Staff Reports:

Fiscal: Ms. Candice Gobble

	FEBRUARY 2023	% OF BUDGET	PRIOR YTD	% OF BUDGET
REVENUES	\$7,738,320.00	56%	\$9,132,821.00	64%
EXPENDITURES	\$12,895,009.00	49%	\$12,700,111.00	52%

Fraud: See report –

Unit	February 2023	February 2022	Current YTD	Prior Fiscal Year
Fraud	\$1,050.00	\$3,995.85	\$28,161.34	\$57,969.43

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

Assistant Director Wellons reported we recently celebrated Social Worker Appreciation Month for all DSS Social Workers. There were multiple events scheduled throughout the month of March with food truck, spaghetti lunch and wrapped up with SW Awards.

Adult and Family Services Program Manager: LaPorscha McCullough

No report.

Child Support – (Statistical Report Information) – see report.

Unit	February 2023	February 2022	Current YTD	Prior Fiscal Year
Child Support	\$834,461.53	\$788,655.02	\$6,874,314.62	\$6,780,675.33

Child Support –

No report.

Children Services Program Manager: Ms. Angela Cole/Ms. Rebecca Lambert

No report.

Economic Support: Ms. Jamie Hatfield/Ms. Danae Pickard/Ms. Wendy Roberts

No report.

Operations – Ms. Candice Gobble, Assistant Director of Operations

Administrative Support/Personnel: Robert Ring

See Statistical Report – as of February 28, 2023

Vacancies	46
New Hires	1
Interagency Transfers	3
Resignations	3

Child Care: Candice Gobble

No Report.

IT Report: Mr. Jason Cole

No report.

Director's Report – Candice J. Gobble, Director–

Director Gobble presented Sign-On Bonus proposal to Board Members. The proposal requests the consideration of offering sign-on bonuses to incoming employees for the following positions:

1. SW III
2. SW I/A&T
3. IMC II

For the past three years, DSS has been challenged with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Sign-on bonuses will act as an incentive to attract qualified staff, ultimately filling the many vacancies within the Department. As of 3/20/2023, there are 38 vacancies within these three identified positions.

Sign-on bonuses will be offered in the total amount of \$4500. Eligible employees will receive three installments to be issued at the following:

- Completion of three months from date of hire
- Completion of six months once permanent status is achieved
- Completion of twelve months

Sign-on bonuses will be offered beginning April 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023. In an effort to capture staff members who recently joined Social Services, staff achieving permanent status beginning January 2023 through June 2023 will receive a total of \$3000. These eligible employees will receive two installments:

- First installment issued at achievement of permanent status
- Second installment issued at the twelve months from date of hire

In order to monetarily support the sign-on bonus program, Social Services proposes the use of lapse salary in the amount of \$276,750. (These amounts include fringe benefits)

- \$66,420 will be used the current FY to support those eligible staff permanent status of January 2023 to June 2023
- \$210,330 is requested to be carried forth into FY24 to cover installments occurring in the new FY

Discussion ensued regarding the \$1.5 million in lapse salary currently. The bonus could potentially cause havoc with existing staff who have continue to work with the amount of vacancies and continue to do the work. Director Gobble added she has had conversation with County Manager in previous months regarding retention bonus. Director Gobble reported with the past sign-on bonus of \$1500 – there were 13 staff impacted and 8 staff stayed to collect the bonus.

Action: Motion made by Dr. Eason and seconded by Commissioner Craig Turner - DSS Board unanimously voted for Director to move forward and present the proposal to County Manager in meeting and establish parameters for sign-on bonus. Director Gobble will reach out to County Manager to schedule a meeting and will bring decision back to board.

Director Gobble reported Medicaid Expansion has passed both the Senate and House in NC. We currently wait for the State budget to be signed in order for the bill to go forward.

New Business:

Child Welfare Presentation – Lynette Wellons

Assistant Director Lynette Wellons introduced Ms. Ashley Bryson and Ms. Tabatha Brown – Child Welfare Supervisors who presented the following:

The Cost of Living in Crisis -

What does the crisis of ACDSS currently look like?

Discussed the current amount of vacancies within Child Welfare Unit.

Barriers/Challenges:

Discussions held regarding the barriers/challenges when placement disruptions occur where Social Workers are staffing due to the disruption:

Staff Comments:

- “Stressed”
- “Oh gosh I have to work at night. Another teen that doesn’t listen.”
- “I’d be more willing for more compensation.”
- “Makes me want to quit. It is overwhelming.”
- “How is this going to affect my regular schedule.”
- “Do they have behavioral issues including physical violence? I am not trained for that.”
- “Oh, shoot again. I want to help, but what am I going to do with my own child. Am I going to be able to find childcare? I don’t want to put the burden on my coworkers, but I also need to think about my own family.”

Blue Cottage:





The “Blue Cottage” – modular located on Graham Hopedale Rd. is where we house children without placements for 12-hour shifts (8a-8p / 8p-8a). We have used the Blue Cottage in the past for 2 weeks before placement was found for one foster child. We currently have 4 beds on-site (twin beds).

Typical shift:

- Two Social Workers and the child sitting in the TV room.
- Child watches TV for the majority of the time while Social Workers are able to work virtually while covering.
- Many children have a history of elopement- Social Workers have to watch the door at all times and be aware.
- If overnight stay is needed, shower is required and child has to be transported to main HSC DSS building to shower.
- Beds have to be made when a new child comes to placement at Blue Cottage. The Social Workers are responsible for stripping the beds and washing the linens.

Physical Barriers:

- Confined to one room
- Not child friendly

- No home cooked meals (All Fast Food)
- No shower
- No outdoor space
- Noise (sirens, traffic from being in the city)

Barriers/Challenges:

Barriers	Challenges
Some children have been placed out of state due to lack of beds	1 in 4 of North Carolina 100 counties has a high turnover rate higher than 40% - which is a direct link to longer stays for children in Foster Care
Staff are burned out	Massive amounts of paperwork required with placement applications
Workers are not trained or qualified to meet the complex needs of the children –placing staff & County at risk	All local DSS are fighting for the same beds
Personal safety of staff and children	Lack of Leveled placements

Our families and children deserve to have consistency in their experience with Alamance Co. DSS. We have found out that when there is Social Worker change for the children, a lot is lost as it relates to the history and relationship with the child. The children get tired of telling their story over and over again.

There is lack of leveled placements across the State of NC especially in PRTF – Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities. There are only 16 PRTF in the State.

These facilities are as follows:

- Long term care for children and adolescents that provide mental health treatment.
- Not caring trauma-informed placements
- Staff maintain control through strict rules and routines
- Separated from families which is a barrier to the ability to work through family issues to make reunification possible.
- Not considered to be a best practice in treating mental health issues in youth, yet NC has increased reliance on PRTF placements at a rate of 119% since 2010
- Further away in distance to agency. Lower staff rates make it more difficult for children to be seen by assigned Social Workers timely (dependency on other agencies for support and visits)

What occurs when DSS is looking for placement?

- Referrals for each outside agency placement (each one can range from 5 minutes to an hour to complete)

- Typically, daily staffing's with VAYA that are 30 minutes to an hour long until placement is located (leveled placements are funded by VAYA)
- Licensing worker estimates 70% of each day spent dedicated to placement searches, disruptions, and respite needs. Some weeks are closer to 100% of time and escalating.
- Rough estimate of staff time dedicated to locating placements especially children with mental health needs

A Closer Look at Placement Crisis in NC -

- Data collected by Foster Care Capacity has shown that there has been a 20% decrease in licensed facilities in the past four years.
- At the start of the Pandemic, there were 7,185 licensed foster families in the State. By 2022, the number dropped to 5,500. We currently have 112 in Alamance County.
- There are 11,000 youth in the Foster Care system in NC.
- Placement is needed primarily with children who have MH/Behavioral needs
- Treatment facilities who do have available beds are reporting staffing concerns and inability to accept new residents.
- Guilford and Rockingham Counties currently have children housed in the County buildings or make shift housing (Anchor House – Guilford County)
- Foster children are sleeping on cots in jails, emergency rooms and DSS buildings.

Debunking Myths with Facts –

Fact #1 – Since January 2023, Alamance County DSS has used \$73,326.28 from VAYA funds to enhance placements to work with children without placement options. If we did not have these funds to use, we would approximately have 10 foster children placed at the Blue Cottage under DSS Supervision.

- Some of these placements have only required sleep placements
- Some have been Group Care with DSS paying full Medicaid rate or more to give children a bed.

Fact #2 –

- More than half of non-kinship foster parents quit within one year.
- Foster parents report that they need Crisis Management Support, better training and professional respect.
- Effective training and support for Foster Parents is associated with improved retention, increased placement stability and improved parental capacity to care for children and youth. This starts with ACDSS having staff to meet these needs.

Fact #3 –

- Children report overwhelmingly positive experiences with the foster families who care for them. More than 90% - “like who they are living with” and “feel like part of the family”.

- Rates of positive experiences are highest for children who live with kin or with a foster family and lowest for children who live in a group home setting.

Fact #4 –

Since January 2023, DSS had to provide day time supervision coverage at the Blue Cottage due to placements in transition:

Child One (February 6 – February 13)	Child Two (February 20 – February 28)
44 additional staff hours	145 staff hours
\$2100 of staff time	\$6400 of staff time

More Facts:

- Up to 80% of children in Foster Care have significant mental health issues, compared to approximately 18-22% of the general population
- Mental and Behavioral Health requires the presence of at least one nurturing, responsive caregiver who is stable in the child’s or teen’s life over time.
- Children and teen entering Foster Care have already have many traumatic experiences that have adversely affected their well-being. In Foster Care, ongoing uncertainty, multiple losses and transitions can further erode a child’s or teen’s sense of self and overall health.
- Prior Childhood trauma can be exacerbated in Foster Care by:
 - Multiple transitions that occur in Foster Care
 - Ongoing uncertainty of Foster Care placement
 - Professionals without sufficient training who may use language or interact with a child in Foster Care in ways that are not therapeutic or healing

Question/Answer Session:

Question: What level of pay is staff making who leave Alamance County for Social Work positions?

- *The amount varies from County to County – Durham is starting off with \$61k.*

Question: Do you have the ability in-house to address the issues? Pay Class Study?

- *No – The County completed a pay class study years ago.*

Question: Does SOG still have the pay rate scale for all counties?

- *Yes – the listing is from 2021.*

Question: Where are we with Attracting Staff? Do we know what the retention rates are for 2 yr./5yr/10yr. employee?

- *We can gather this information and share with Board Members.*

Question: What can we do to help retain employees?

- *We continue to be flexible – we offer WFH for employees.*

Announcements:

None

Adjournment -

The next board meeting is 12:00 noon **Tuesday, April 25, 2023** at DSS – Professional Board Room located on the 1st Floor at 319 N. Graham Hopedale Rd., Burlington NC.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted:

Carmen L. Morrow

Date Approved: _____