

Henderson County Board of Social Services

October 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes

A. Call to Order

The Henderson County Board of Social Services meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Lowrance at 12:05 pm.

Board Members Present	Melinda Lowrance, Member Judy Smith, Member Stephen Gwaltney, Member Rebecca McCall, Member
Staff Leadership Present	Jerrie McFalls, Secretary to the Board/Director Lorie Horne, Social Work Program Administrator Melissa Novack, Finance Officer Debby Freeman, Economic Services Program Administrator Deborah Johnson, Administrative Assistant/Board Clerk
Guest	None

B. Public Input

Tae Brown, community advocate, wanted to express his concern over homeless babies in the county. He stated he attended a City Council meeting the previous day when the discussion of homelessness in Henderson County was one of the topics. Mr. Brown wanted to express his concern over the number of homeless children and wanted the board to be aware of the collaborative effort between North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and communities. They have developed a plan called the Action Plan for an Early Childhood Homeless Support System. Mr. Brown will forward the report to Director McFalls.

C. Adjustments to the Agenda

None

D. Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Lowrance asked if there were any changes to the minutes from the September 19th, 2023 regular meeting, there were none. Mr. Gwaltney moved to approve the minutes as written, Mrs. Smith seconded the motion and the motion passed.

E. Board Education

Adoption Month - November

Libby Myers, Program Manager for Foster Care and Adoptions, spoke to the board about Adoption Permanence and Placements. November is National Adoption Awareness month. HCDSS has requested a proclamation to proclaim November as Adoption Month in Henderson County.

*Henderson County DSS had 28 adoptions last fiscal year

*115 children are in care (in custody)

*Children available for adoption – 17 (we have identified families for them)

*We have six children that do not have identified families

Different types of Permanence

- *Reunification (with parents)
- *Adoption (gives more permanence) than guardianship or custody with relatives or court identified person
- *Guardianship (with a relative or court identified person)
- *Custody (with a relative or court identified person)

If adoption is a possibility, we want that permanence if a child can't return to their parents.

Mr. Gwaltney asked why we don't have families to adopt those children without identified families? Ms. Myers explained that most children, that don't have an identified family, are in therapeutic placement. Some of the children have very high needs. Children in extended care a lot of times, do not want to be adopted. Children after age 12 can say they do not want to be adopted.

Mrs. Lowrance asked what the ages of the six children that are free for adoption. Ms. Myers stated that the youngest is 13 or 14 years of age. Mrs. Lowrance asked what happens once they age out. Ms. Myers stated that they can sign a VPA (Voluntary Placement Agreement) and remain in care until age 21. If the child is willing, they can continue additional care. VPA's, ages 18-21, work with a Social Worker in adult services. At age 17 ½, we start talking with the children about the VPA program. We encourage what we believe is in their best interest. Mrs. Lowrance stated the possibility of them being homeless is high and Ms. Myers stated that it is a possibility if they do not want support through the VPA program.

At age 18, even if they deny a VPA, they can change their mind until age 21. Some children are in their own housing or college, and still want the additional support. Some youth remain in the care of foster parents. This program provides additional support to help them be successful.

Mr. Gwaltney asked what percentage of our foster children are in therapeutic care. Mrs. Horne stated about 20% (23 level 2 or up) need therapeutic foster care.

We try to identify relatives where children can be placed. Even if the relatives can't take placement, we encourage the relationship with relatives. Next month, on November 16th, kinship placement will begin receiving financial aid from the State for children in kinship placement. The payments would be half of what licensed placements would receive. We encourage kinships to get licensed to receive more support. With kinship placements, we give assistance through clothing vouchers and other county assistance to help support our placements.

Mrs. McCall asked how many PRTF's (Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities) are in the state? Ms. Myers and Mrs. Horne said not nearly enough. There is a shortage of placements. When a child is placed in a facility, our mandates stay in place. We make monthly contacts with the child. We still have the same expectations to meet the child's needs.

Mr. Gwaltney asked what is needed to make things better? Ms. Horne stated more mental health support and therapeutic placements in the state for children. If a child must be placed further away, it makes it even more difficult for reunification, for parents to connect with the child.

F. Reports

**Director's Monthly Report (Attachment I)
Questions Only**

The transportation of high-risk juveniles was approved in the NC budget, and we will be utilizing this service. Over the next few months, we will see more of what was approved in the budget.

We have a roll out date for Medicaid expansion as December 1st. We haven't received a lot of information from the State yet. The State is currently working on the manual.

The budget is still a work in progress because policies will have to be put in place. One important bill is the Federal government is looking at having a separate license for foster parents and kinship placements. It would allow more family members to be able to take in children.

Mrs. Lowrance commented on the rise in suicide per the Director's report. The state reports it is mostly due to covid and the pandemic, but she questions whether it could be social media and bullying.

**October Employees of the Month (Attachment II)
Questions only
None**

**September 2022 – September 2023 Statistical Report (Attachment III)
Questions only**

**October Program Administrator's Report (Attachment IV)
Questions only**

Mrs. McCall stated that the number in foster care has decreased. Director McFalls stated that the numbers reflect increases in reunification and adoptions. The numbers fluctuate weekly with children coming into custody and children going out of custody.

Mrs. Lowrance asked about unwinding Medicaid waivers. Mrs. Freeman stated that we have to give clients 30 days to respond with required information before Medicaid can be terminated. They have ninety days from termination to have the case re-opened if they respond with everything required. The policies from the state have not been updated and makes it difficult on the workers to determine eligibility due to the amount of researching they must do.

You can no longer go to the manual for updated policy. However, the state is working toward updating.

**Financial Report August 2023 and September 2023 (Attachment V)
Questions only**

Director McFalls introduced Melissa Novack as Joe Maxey's replacement as the Administrative Officer. Director McFalls stated we have given more information on the budget than in previous reports. The board will have information on more line items and where we are at in the budget at this time. This will give the board more information that will be helpful when it comes time for the budget.

We are within budget for the year. We have spent 23% of the budget. We are currently under the 25% expected at this date.

G. Old Business

DSS Staffing Update

Director McFalls stated that we currently have twenty-four vacancies. Nine vacancies are in social work and eleven are in economic services. In addition, we have one child support agent, one HSPE 2, one accounting tech 3 position and one processing assistant 4. We have three new hires scheduled to start and two in the hiring process.

The county recently conducted a salary study of social workers. The social workers received a \$3 per hour increase. We will use this as a tool to attract and retain workers. We are now more comparable to Transylvania County DSS and closer to Buncombe County DSS. The social workers were very grateful for the increase.

We have a number of openings on the income maintenance side, but we have had a larger number of applicants to fill those positions.

H. New Business

Senate Bill 625

Director McFalls stated that this bill covers a lot of DSS issues. If board members are concerned about issues, you are encouraged to talk to your legislator.


For instance, in conflict-of-interest cases, this bill states the Guardian Ad Litem must be notified. Conflict cases do not initially have a Guardian Ad Litem. An investigation must be performed first. The notification to the Guardian Ad Litem wouldn't make sense because until a case is taken to court and the court appoints a Guardian Ad Litem, they would have no knowledge of the case or the families.

Another item in the bill is *The Director's Failure to Immediately Remedy*. DHHS could immediately say DSS isn't doing what the state told them to do. The director and agency would then be on their own and the state would not back DSS, there is no due process in this situation. The liability would be solely on the county. Without due process, DSS could not give explanations as to what is entailed in the case. DHHS already has the ability to take over a DSS. DHHS could say they are not assuming any liability even though they supervise DSS.

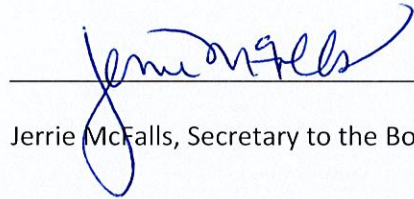
NCACDSS does not support Senate Bill 625.

I. Adjournment

Vice-Chair Lowrance asked if there were any additional items for discussion. There were none presented. Mrs. Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mrs. McCall seconded the motion. All present were polled and the motion passed. Mrs. Lowrance adjourned the meeting at 1:21 p.m.


Josh Simpson, Chair

11/21/23
Date


Jerrie McFalls, Secretary to the Board

Date

Attachments:

- I. Director's Report –September 2023
- II. SB 625 NCACDSS
- III. September 2023 Financial Report
- IV. August 2023 Financial Report
- V. Program Administrators' Report –October 2023
- VI. Personnel Report – 1st quarter
- VII. DSS Organizational Chart
- VIII. Statistical Report – October 2023