

Henderson County Board of Social Services

January 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes

A. Call to Order

The Henderson County Board of Social Services meeting was called to order by Chair Simpson at 12:16 pm.

Board Members Present	Josh Simpson, Member 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, local advocate, spoke to the board about wanting to get a better understanding of the local Department of Social Services. One of the things that Tae would like to bring attention to is diversity, equity, and inclusion for social workers. Tae stated he had looked over the National Association of Social Workers policies, ethics and standards, and there were statements regarding anti-racism and diversity. Tae asked if DSS had insight into how this relates to social workers and what role racism and diversity plays.

Director McFalls stated that we have a code of ethics and a mission statement but it is not specific to social work. We have many different positions at DSS. Economic services, child support, clerical positions, so our policies are not limited to the National Association of Social Workers.

C. Adjustments to the Agenda

None

D. Approval of Minutes

Chair Simpson asked if there were any changes to the minutes from the December 19th, 2024 regular meeting, there were none. Mr. Gwaltney moved to approve the minutes as written, Mrs. Lowrance seconded the motion and the motion passed.

E. Board Education

Changes to Special Assistance Medicaid

Misty Hodge, Long term Care/Special Assistance supervisor, spoke to the board about the Special Assistance Adult Medicaid program. This program is specifically geared toward individuals typically 18 years and over. This is a monetary based program if they need in home assistance, and a monetary based program, and assistance being placed into a living assisted type residence if they cannot remain at home.

For the monetary assistance, we work in collaboration with APS here at DSS and VAYA Health to evaluate their needs and determine if monetary monthly assistance is needed. For assisted living help, we work with our APS here to find placement and we work with assisted living places across the state to find placements.

It has been over twenty years since the rate for eligibility has increased. Now, every time the Social Security rate is increased, the rate for Special Assistance will increase.

With the Special Assistance/In-Home monetary program, social workers do an analysis to determine how much monetary assistance a client needs monthly to meet their needs. Payments are a flat maximum payment based on their current income.

The income for a basic special assistance client has increased to \$1396. There is also an enhanced rate for an Alzheimer's diagnosis, \$1770.

Mrs. Smith asked if all clients on Special Assistance are on Medicaid. Mrs. Hodge stated yes. Now that the income limit has been raised, it is higher than the Medicaid rate, so now qualifying for Special Assistance will qualify you for Medicaid, and now you will have both.

Mrs. Hodge stated that just because you own a home, it doesn't disqualify you. Medicaid Policy states that you can own a home and a car. The income limit is \$1396 per person. Resources are considered for the client only. Spouses are seen as separate. Each individual has a maximum of \$1396 per person.

F. Reports

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

Chair Simpson brought attention that Henderson County DSS has exceeded the Federal Minimum requirements for child visits in NC and exceeded the State of NC minimum requirements. Director McFalls stated that our social workers see every foster child every month. To be above the state minimum means we are seeing and hearing what their needs are and are able to support their needs.

Chair Simpson asked Director McFalls about the Suicide Prevention the State and Communities have been working on. He stated that the local high schools have had three high school student suicides within the last year. Mr. Simpson stated that it needs to be addressed.

Director McFalls stated that the Partnership for Health is looking at what schools and communities can do and how we move forward with prevention. The County Commissioners approved a position that will focus more on suicide prevention throughout our community. Director McFalls stated that she was at a meeting last week discussing what we can do in our schools. Mrs. Lowrance stated that teachers need more training to recognize what children are at risk. The children are not giving indicators so there aren't obvious factors. Director McFalls stated that there will be a meeting with the Partnership for Health Monday, February 12th. Director McFalls invited the board to attend if they would like. Chair Simpson, Mrs. Lowrance and Mr. Gwaltney asked to be put on the list to attend.

Mr. Simpson stated that it is not a DSS issue, but a community issue. We need experts to educate what to look for. Mrs. Lowrance stated that she feels that social media is a contributing factor. With social media, there isn't a way for youth to get away from bullying.

Mrs. McCall stated that as a result of a task force focused on disconnected youth, they are starting a mentoring project called Pathfinders with middle and high schoolers. Children will be assigned success coaches. Twenty-two people currently have volunteered to participate. Retired teachers, professionals, or anyone who is available to meet with four or more children focusing on career development. Mentors will be vetted through the school system. This program will begin next year.

January Employees of the Month (Attachment II)

Questions only

None

December 2022 – December 2023 Statistical Report (Attachment III)

Questions only

None

January Program Administrator's Report (Attachment IV)

Questions only

Mr. Gwaltney inquired if the CPS intake reports are usually lower in the month of December. Director McFalls stated that generally when school is out, the numbers are lower. Once schools return, the numbers increase.

Financial Report December 2023 (Attachment V)

Questions only

Mrs. Lowrance inquired if we are currently working on the budget for salaries and deferred compensation for the upcoming year as there aren't figures noted in this year's budget. Melissa Novack stated that we will do a budget amendment for temporary workers. We hired two auxiliary workers, so we will need to do a budget amendment as we had not budgeted for those positions. We are working on a more definite amount for the auxiliary workers as those won't be ongoing positions.

2nd Quarter Personnel Report

Questions only

None

G. Old Business

DSS Staffing Update.

Director McFalls stated that we currently have seventeen vacancies. Three vacancies are in social work and eleven are in economic services, one child support agent, one Human Services Planner Evaluator, and one Administrative Assistant 2. Eleven income maintenance positions are available. We have approximately eight applicants from the outside that are in the process of hiring and that will help our numbers tremendously.

Mrs. Smith asked if DSS has child Support cases. Director McFalls stated that we handle all the child support cases for the county. The clerk's office used to also handle child support, but now all

Attachments:

- I. Director's Report –January 2024
- II. January Employees of the Month
- III. Statistical Report – December 2023
- IV. Program Administrators' Report –January 2024
- V. Financial Report – December 2023
- VI. 2nd Quarter Personnel Report