

**Social Services Advisory Board members present:** Larry Cain, Katherine Hawkins, Dheeraj Jagadev, Brenda McMahon, and Anthony McGhee. These members constitute a quorum.

**Members Absent:** Yajaira Balcarcel and Cristina Mehrabani

**Staff present:** Anita Brown, LaTanya Buckhalter, Michele Childs, Michele Gehr, Jessica Moise, Tanya Robinson, Kalisha Spence and Remona Thompson

Call to Order: At 6:34 pm, Michele Gehr, Director DSS convened the Social Services Advisory Board regular meeting held via Google meet on Thursday, June 24, 2021.

Public Present: None

Additions to Agenda: None

Welcome:

Review of Minutes:

- The minutes from March 25, 2021 meeting approved with any corrections noted. Motion to approve minutes as presented 1<sup>st</sup> – A. McGhee 2<sup>nd</sup> – D. Jagadev. Motion passed without opposition.

**PRESENTERS:** Kalisha Spence –Family Service Senior Worker

In addition to her Child Protective Service (CPS) caseload, Ms. Spence has taken on the vital role of Foster Parent liaison. Currently the agency does not have a large number of children in Foster Care, but this can change anytime. Upon taking a child (ren) into foster care, the agency tries very hard to place in nurturing foster homes within the community. Whenever a child (ren) are taken into Foster Care, the goal is always to return home and assist the families in becoming whole.

Part of the recruitment process is to develop foster homes within the community so that the child (ren) can continue with familiar things, such as schools, activities, friends and so on. The agency provides exceptional Foster Parent training through several methods such as in-person and on-line. The agency is collaborating with another jurisdiction to conduct virtual on-line training. There is a great need for Spanish speaking and families of color.

In the past, the agency has used a third-party agency to place children in foster homes through that agency. The downside is most of the foster homes through third party agencies are often 3 hours away and it can be very disruptive to the child (ren).

The agency has three families who will begin their Foster Parent training on July 12, 2021, and ending in the middle of August. The prospective families must complete their on-line training during that period.

In addition to the training, the prospective families will undergo background checks to include an extensive family assessment. This is done to ensure that the children are being placed in a safe and nurturing home. If anyone is interested in becoming a Foster Parent, please feel free to contact Kalisha. Her email address is [kalisha.spence@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:kalisha.spence@dss.virginia.gov). A. McGhee indicated that he and his wife were former foster parents and might be interested in becoming an emergency foster home.

The recommendation is that contact with the Interfaith Council (IFC) for getting the word out to the community.

**DIRECTOR REPORT:** Agency report April/May/June 2021 (emailed to members previously) (attachment a, 3pgs.)

The department has a couple volunteer opportunities. The Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) and the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT). A parent representative for both. The CPMT meets monthly on the third Wednesday at 3:30 pm and the FAPT meets weekly on Thursdays at 1:00 pm. If anyone feels, they would like to either participate on either of these teams or know someone who would be interested. In order to consider for either team, the interested party must be a city resident. The Social Services website has more information and a link to the application.

**Benefits:** The Benefit unit welcomed two workers. One of the new hires was previously in the Department's Customer Service unit and the other new hire comes to our agency from another locality.

Changes to public benefits:

- Pregnant women will be covered no matter their immigration status.
- Refugee cash assistance will increase by 10%.
- Medicaid will begin dental coverage for adults with full benefits.

Waivers for SNAP and TANF are set to expire on September 10, 2021. VIEW program continues to grow.

**Services:** The Services unit will be spotlighted by the State in regards to the Kinship program. Two Family Service workers will be attending Child First Forensic Interview training. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, the State will launch the Family First Prevention Services Act.

**Customer Service:** With the promotion of a Customer Service staff member, the agency is in the process of hiring a worker. An increase in the number of walk-in clients is being seen, as the lobby is now open. Social distancing is still being encouraged.

**Housing:** The Housing unit will be receiving 7-10 new vouchers allocated to those who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk for homelessness. Also the Housing unit has secured a donated voucher for one of agency's Independent Living Clients. M. Childs, Housing Manager participates on the Regional Continuum of Care and is involved with city discussing low income housing.

**Administration:** The budget process is now complete. The agency received 3.5 new positions beginning July 1, 2021. All the funds from the Portner Funds were expended.

The agency is moving toward normalcy after COVID. In the new fiscal year, the agency will be working to identify gaps in service to the community.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

- a) Interfaith Council update-none
- b) CARES Act funding – Funds are still available. Approximately \$95,000 has expended. Residents thought the application process was too strict and were reluctant to provide some of the information. The whole process, including the application it's self were simplified. A relaunch utilizing the City webpage and Facebook was done. Assistance covered rent/mortgage, childcare, utility and burial expenses.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- a) Mask updates: In-person meetings.  
Consultation has been made with the Craig Brown, City attorney in regards to in-person meetings. Mr. Brown indicated that there is really no reason to continue meeting virtually for public meetings.

**\*Board member feedback-**

- It was expressed that meeting virtually did save time, but meeting virtually did not afford residents the opportunity to attend the meetings and these meetings are open to the public.
- Can a hybrid meeting take place? For example, half the meetings virtually and the other half in person. Possibly
- What are the advantages of meeting in person vs. virtually? It is really about the meeting being available to the public since the Advisory Board meetings are open to the public. On the Social Services webpage, contact information is there if anyone wishes to attend.

In person meetings will begin with the August 26, 2021 meeting. If someone has a medical or personal reason that you cannot attend in person, a zoom option will be available. It was the consensus of the Board that the recommendation above would be acceptable.

Next scheduled in-person meeting August 26, 2021.

**ADJOURNMENT** With no further business to discuss, meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Brown