

COUNTY OF CHATHAM

CHATHAM COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

PO Box 489
Pittsboro, NC 27312
Phone: (919) 542-2759
Fax: (919) 542-6355
Valerie Broadway



Jennie Kristiansen, Director

Social Services Board
Richard Edwards
Thomas Droke

Emily Lowrance

ORGANIZED 1770

707 SQUARE MILES

Chatham County Board of Social Services Meeting Minutes April 15, 2020

The April meeting was conducted by GoToMeeting due to COVID-19 social distancing. Members in attendance: Richard Edwards, Chair; Tom Droke; Vice Chair; Valerie Broadway, Member; Emily Lowrance, Member; Jennie Kristiansen, Director and Nancy Burgess, Executive Assistant.

Richard Edwards called the meeting to order.

March meeting minutes were approved with a motion from Tom Droke, a second motion from Valerie Broadway; all in favor.

Carl Thompson, Sr.'s board application is on the April 20th meeting agenda for the Board of Commissioners. Once approved, Mr. Thompson will be serving a second term with the board effective May 2020 and ending June 30, 2022.

Economic Services:

Since March the waiting area has been closed to the public, however, staff have been working to ensure that clients can access services. There is a drop box in front of the office that is available during regular business hours. Paper applications are available out front or can be mailed. Applications are being taken over the phone or through EPASS.

Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) programs re-certifications have been extended for 6 or 12 months, depending on certification period. The work requirements for Work First have been temporarily suspended as have parent fees for childcare. There have also been changes regarding FNS benefits. All current recipients are receiving the max allotment which means that they are receiving the maximum benefit amount for their family size.

There has been a significant increase in the number of FNS applications with 28 applications being made over the three day weekend (average monthly total applications for FY 20 are 162). There have not been any significant changes to Medicaid applications, however, this is anticipated. When an application is made through the Affordable Care Act website, it can trigger a Medicaid application and so this could be another way DSS would see additional applications coming in.

NC is awaiting approval from USDA to operate a Pandemic SNAP program. The program would provide a benefit of \$130 per child per month for each child who is receiving free and reduced lunch through the schools. An EBT card would be mailed to each family and the benefits loaded on the card.

For childcare subsidy, there have been a number of changes to help provide support to providers and families. Parent fees are being waived for the months of April and May. Other measures are in place to

support providers including paid the full time rate for school age children for April and May instead of the blended rate (which means a higher payment). Providers will be paid no less than the amount they were paid in February prior to the pandemic beginning for March, April and May. According to Division of Child Development and Early Education, these changes will be funded with a combination of county allocations, state money and federal money. DCDEE has asked counties to continue to serve new and applications are currently being taken by phone and mailing, faxing or scanning to clients for signatures. So far this has worked out with no issues.

All but three of Chatham County Child Care Providers completed the emergency application with the state and plan, at this time, to remain open. Providers are reporting that they have received a number of applications for the new Pandemic Childcare program which only requires that a family report that their income is within the limits, that the parent is considered an essential employee, and that they have no other option for childcare. The providers are being paid an enhanced rate that is higher than the current 5 star center reimbursement rate.

All families on the waiting list have been contacted and only four families have not called back. The spending coefficient for February was 99% and 31 new children were served. In March, 20 new children were served.

Family Services:

There have also been modification to service provision in child welfare and adult services. NC DSS and DAAS (Division of Aging and Adult Services) jointly issued several documents providing policy guidance regarding contacts during COVID 19. Webinars were held with all counties in groups of 25 to go over changes and answer questions. While making face to face contacts, particularly at CPS and APS initiations, is critical to ensuring safety, counties have also been given flexibility in identifying other ways to make contacts virtually or over the phone. Outside of initiations and high risk cases, most visits are all taking place virtually right now. Birth parents have been very flexible around these virtual visits with their children which has been truly remarkable, given all of the uncertainty COVID brings. In many families, the frequency of contacts has increased but for shorter amounts of time since it's difficult for many children to engage virtually for extended periods. In person visits are being done with social distancing modifications, including talking outside or sometimes through a glass door. Social workers have encountered situations where someone is being tested for COVID 19 and so they are trying to be creative around keeping distance but also making contacts with families. Supervisors are talking regularly with Cim Brailer, Program Administrator, and also Jennie Kristiansen, DSS Director to make decisions. For CPS timeliness, there were 20 accepted reports and 6 were outside of time frame for a timeliness of 70% for the month. In five of the six cases there were complications related to travel or incorrect address information. In two cases, children were out of state (in non-adjacent states). In another case, the social worker had three other visits scheduled on the same day that took longer than she intended. This resulted in the visit being rescheduled for the following day, several hours outside of timeframe.

Chatham County Court Programs submitted a three year, \$750,000 Family Treatment Court to expand services into Chatham County. This is a court program specifically for parents who have court involved child welfare cases and is designed to provide additional support and accountability for parents who have substance use disorders. The court has been operating in Orange County for over ten years and has been open to Chatham families, however, transportation to regular visits and court in Chapel Hill is often a barrier.

Wilder Horner and Jennie Kristiansen attended a virtual advisory committee meeting for the Supporting Families Project at Frank Porter Graham which will provide PPP (an evidenced based parenting intervention) for parents with substance use disorders who are raising adolescent children. The project should begin soon and parents will receive a stipend for participating in the program and completing

surveys. Since parenting programming is so limited in the county, this could be a beneficial resource for some families.

With no further issues to discuss, there was a motion to adjourn from Tom Droke, a second motion from Valerie Broadway; all in favor.

The next meeting will be conducted via GoToMeeting on May 20th at 3:00pm.

Chair

Date

Secretary

Date