

**Tioga County Department of Human Services
Advisory Board
August 10, 2022
12:00 noon**

Board Attendance: Jim Bodine, Commissioner Roger Bunn, John Eckman, Kristin Hamilton, Saira Olson, Sara Rice, Laurie Roof, Drew Simcox, Sue Sticklin, Seth Watkins

Guest Attendance: Robin Adams, Wanita Applebee, Abigail Barton, Angelina Barton, Midge Bialis, Jessica Birbeck, Michael Birbeck, Jenny Bowen, Rachel Burrous, Joy Childs, Nancy Clemens, Kory Cole, Tatton Cole, Heather Doty, Jenny Farrer, Christa Hilfiger, Marilyn Jones, Sean Kalbach, Maegan McConnell, Marc Rice, Dakota Parks, Mellissa Parsons, Marcie Reese, Michele Reese, Michele Regalbutto, Matthew Root, Jim Stidfole, Sherry Stidfole, Trisha Tanner, Karen Usavage, Diane Weed, Katie Wheeler

Remote Attendance: Kimberly Alfieri, Lori Hartman, Nikki Luckovich, Colleen Wilbur

Call to Order: Chair Saira Olson called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

Secretary's Report: Sara Rice asked the Advisory Board to review the minutes from the June 15th 2022 meeting. Sara asked if there were any questions, concerns, discrepancies. No voiced concerns. John made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, Kristen Seconded. All in favor- 10 Ayes, 0 Nays. Motion carried.

Treasurer's Report: Sara Rice states at the end of July 2022 the Advisory Board balance is \$7,960.45. Seth made a motion to approve the treasury report as presented, Sue seconded. 10 Ayes, 0 Nays. Motion Carried.

Agenda Items:

Saira began "The Tioga County Department of Human Services Advisory Board will facilitate the Public Hearing regarding the 2022/2023 Children and Youth Implementation Plan and the Needs-Base Plan from 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 pm. The purpose of these hearings is to inform the public and solicit stakeholder input. During the Public Hearing any member of the public is invited to provide testimony, verbally or in writing, regarding the plan."

- **Christa Hilfiger- Executive Summary**

This year's plan is very similar, in the questions that the state was asking to last years. The state has asked us how our county is being impacted by Covid-19. In the last year, our county has had to work remote a few times because of the amount of transmission in our office. We have had many staff having to quarantine several times this year. We still continue to practice our safety precautions. Three of the major challenges that we have faced in the past year: ongoing issues with truancy, limited resources for Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol services, and with staff vacancies. In the plan we have written adjustments to help with these problems. Tioga County is doing really well with continued quality work and services to the residents in the county. Our county did not have any citations during our licensing for safety issues regarding children. We have seen an increase in the number of children entering into foster care. We have been utilizing kinship care more. Tioga County is a family engagement initiative county, so we work hard with the families up-front when the initial reports come in, in our intake department. We identify supports and needs that the children and families have. As the case progresses, the in-home workers continue to work with those families. If a case needs to go to court, we continue to work with those families to identify supports. Eventually the family can leave on those supports and not rely heavily on case management. We hold crisis rapid response meetings which are meetings put together when a crisis arises in a family initially within 24-72 hours. We report to the state how many crisis rapid response meetings that we have. We have had success with keeping children out of care during our crisis rapid response meetings because families are stepping forward to help their family out. Some will petition the court and take custody

themselves to keep the children out of foster care. We have had a significant amount of children finding permanency this year. We have had a lot of adoptions and several Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship's (SPLC) with identified supports. Our Drug Endangered Alliance has been very active this year.

- Saira Olson- Probation

Our challenges with juvenile probation this year have been finding detention centers. Pennsylvania has been shutting down several detention centers and secure placements across the state. We are diligently working trying to secure at least a bed in Ohio, which is the closest one that we can find that would house one of our juveniles' if/when a juvenile needs to be detained. The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System (JCJC) has been trying to work with other counties to obtain an agreement. We will continue to try and find other placements for these children.

- Brett Weiskopff- Trends

There have been increased numbers this past fiscal year with family services. We have had an increase with truancy, nutritional neglect, repeat referrals, CPS numbers, domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues, and mental and behavioral health issues of both the parents and children with a lack of resources. Several parents and children have been on a long waiting list for treatment. Some of the drug and alcohol issues that we have had are exposure to marijuana including THC gummies. We have had parents admit to giving their children marijuana stating they already knew they were smoking it so they wanted to manage it. We have had two cases of children drinking meth water.

- Jenny Farrer- On-Going Services

If the intake department decides that a case needs services past 60 days, then those families get referred to on-going services. Jenny states that they have had less families and children that they have worked with however they have noticed the cases are more intense with extensive drug use and domestic violence in which each case takes more time. We have had several large sibling groups this year. Some of those cases have ended up as placement cases. We do try to prevent that, but sometimes we cannot. Our placements this year, we have put less kids into care than in the past and we exited more children this year than we put into care. We have had several children this year that have had very complex needs and we use complex case reviews.

- Trisha Tanner- Foster Care

This past year we have had an increase number of kinship homes. Because of the meetings that have been put into place, we have been able to identify family for emergency placement homes. We have had an increase in completing home studies within 60 days. There have been a few families who have not completed their paperwork in time which put a pause on their funding. We have also seen an increase in regular resource homes as well. We have had a significant increase in adoptions, 17 adoptions last year and projecting 17 more for this year. As of January 1st, we have had 12 adoptions. CPLC numbers have come down. We have maintained a very positive relationship with our judge. He has come to meet with the staff and discuss what he sees in court and what he would like us to improve on.

- Michelle Regalbuto- DEC

Endangered Children Alliance (DEC) continues to be successful and we have upwards of 100 different affiliates throughout the county that consists of different disciplines that are working with children, meeting bi-monthly. The key subjects this year that we have are truancy, proximity to mental health services, concerns for meth use, and the misuse of prescribed marijuana. Because of how well we have been working together, we received block grant money to put money out into the community that we utilized for pro-social events and activities. This helped get our name out there and to let the communities know that we are here to help. With this money, we have supported different programs throughout the county: library programs, mental health fairs, yoga, skating rink in Tioga, pool passes, karate, momentum music, movie theatres, etc. and we made sure that these programs were spread throughout the county and have events through to January 2023. It was well received throughout the community. Tioga County Children and Youth has a very positive relationship with schools, law enforcement, and physician's offices.

- Katie Wheeler- Truancy, Plans of Safe Care

To meet needs, we are requesting for an additional truancy worker. In 2021/22 our truancy program

received 157 referrals and we currently only have one worker who is responding to all of those referrals. Our goal is to increase the number of staff so that we can have a worker for each school district within the county. This would allow for the worker to spend more time with the children that are suffering from truancy problems. Regarding Plans of Safe Care, we were able to work together with Nurse Family Partnership and host a training for the physicians of Tioga and Bradford County to help educate them of what Plans of Safe Care is and the importance of them making referrals. We have had a success rate of over 50% in engaging families. We credit that towards celebrating the child and taking the focus off of substance use.

- Jenny Farrer- Permanency

In the last three years, as part of the plan, we have had to develop a program improvement strategy. We are sent data regarding different areas. If we are below the national average, we have to look at the data, hold meetings, and come up with ways to improve those areas. This year we only have one area where we fell below the national average, which is finding permanency for children within 12 months. We looked at the causes of why we are falling below average in that area and have come up with strategies to put into place next year so that we are within the national average. We've looked at the data and it all goes back to the trends: Children and Youth Timelines, do not correlate with Drug & Alcohol timelines. When children are being removed, sometimes to get the parents to seek services doesn't always happen immediately. The families need more time and we need more time to work with them to ensure that if children return home, they are safe or if they can't return home, we have an appropriate plan for permanency.

- Adjustments

Every year we write for adjustments where we request additional money for specific things. This year on-going services wrote for five adjustments, in which three of them focus on three specific children that have complex cases that require an appropriate placement that meets all of their needs. Those placements are beyond what our normal cost is for placement. We wrote an adjustment for gas cards to help families with transportation to get to visitations and appointments. We do not want transportation to be an issue for these families and we are receiving a lot more requests to assist with gas money. The last adjustment we wrote for was for the Every Student Succeeds App (ESSA) which involves any time a child is removed from their home, we do our best to remain in their home school so they have some sort of consistency.

Foster care had two adjustments this year. We are requesting a third foster care case worker due to the increase of kinship homes and keeping numbers down for non-reimbursement. This case worker will help utilize completing home studies in a timely manner. I also requested for a third paralegal. We have had 134 children in care last year with only 2 paralegals. To compare, Bradford County has four paralegals with a maximum of 120 children in care.

We are writing an adjustments for two additional visitation aides. The visitation program supervises visits between parents and children when the children have to be removed for safety concerns. We are seeing an increase in the amount of visits that we are doing through the Family Engagement Initiative or court ordered, where we are asked to provide more hours of visitation to help keep families bonded and together. This program also transports families and kids to these visitations. A large amount of time is spent getting everybody who needs to be at the visit to the visit.

- Christa Hilfiger- Budget

For the 2022/23 Implementation budget we are projected at \$11,198,775.00 for our Needs-Base Plan Budget 2023/24, we are projected at \$11,506,270.00. This fiscal year we were underspent for our budget, but we do not have exact number as we are still finishing up the fiscal year. We are writing an adjustment for a new vehicle lease to transport our clients. We are being proactive and writing an adjustment for increasing starting salaries in small increments each year for staff retention.

A large part of our adjustment costs are for placements for our complex cases because the cost of care for a facility or a group home is hundreds of dollars per day. We look at where the complex cases are currently placed and project for the current cost of those placements.

- Advisory Board Questions/Comments

Commissioner Bunn clarified the increased budget is approximately \$308,000.00. Christa affirmed that is what is projected for 2023/24. Roger asked the percentage that comes from the County? Sara states 20% local match.

Question- How are we going to meet the national average for finding permanency within 12 months and what timeframe does it take us to find permanency?--The state looks at three different time frames: 0-12 months, 13-24 months, and over 24 months. We exceed the national average for the 13-24 months and the over 24 month timeframe. Our focus right now is for under the 12 months.

Difficulties that we are facing are getting the parents to accept services right away, child reunification timeframe, and if the permanency is an adoption, that will take longer than 12 months. We have had more adoptions with permanency than reunifications in the last year. We are a one judge county so we have limited court hearing timeframes as well.

Question- Can you contribute to why there has been an increase in adoptions?- We are using more kinship families. A lot of kin go into their care with the state of mind that they are keeping their relative and the parents tend to like kinship adopting because they will be able to still have a relationship with the child.

Question- Is the Crisis Rapid Response team a set team?— The team consists of mostly the child's family. The goal of these meetings is to have more family and kin at the meeting than professionals however the caseworker, supervisor, school, and the child's therapist are all usually invited to those meetings.

Question- What is the Handle with Care?- Handle with Care is when a child has been involved in trauma and we notify schools, daycares, headstarts, etc. to let them know the child needs extra care without giving specific details. The school counselors will check in with the child. This program is helpful because when a child experiences trauma, they will go to school the following day with sometimes bad behavior. These children need extra care and empathy, not discipline. We also have purchased teddy bears and have given these out to all of the police officers and emergency medical service provider to give to those children.

Question- What happens to a child that is in the back seat when someone is under the influence?— This is a joint response. If law enforcement is out on a drug overdose, they 911 back and request a caseworker. We then connect those families with the services that they need right then. The families are more receptive to services right then, rather than waiting until the next day. This works well because of our relationship with law enforcement, we each have respect for each other and we understand that we both have jobs to do.

Question—Is there anything else we are doing as far as positive steps for staff retention?—We participate through the child welfare resource center through the University of Pittsburgh organization effectiveness meetings, which are made up of directors, supervisors, and managers to discuss potential solutions. We also have a staff representative for each department and we have tasked them with coming up with ideas for each of their departments. Supervisors provide staff appreciation activities and team building activities.

- Public Comments

To accommodate as many speakers as possible, comments will be limited to 3 minutes per person, and individuals may offer comments only once during the meeting.

Roy Boom, President of Iron Reign Motorcycle Club, asks if the county has contacted the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) regarding the mini-bikes program. AMA is a non-profit American bikers aiming towards education and it would be worth looking into for their support with the Nypum mini-bikes program. Question—How fast do you act upon a call when a child is involved in substance abuse?—we have two different types of reports: child abuse report, which we act on immediately, and general protective services report, which we have ten days depending on the allegations.

Robin Adams—The 2023/24 Needs-Base plan, is that part of what the Advisory Board reviewed today that is due and is it one written plan?—Yes it is the implementation plan and the need-base plan together. Question- Is this something that will be posted online?—The draft plan is on public display

at the courthouse until August 15th and anyone has access to this. Comment- I recommend that the Advisory Board members look at other counties regarding their budgeting tools, minutes, and advisory board rosters, so that the public has access to that.

Karen Usavage, retired family nurse practitioner, requests introductions from everyone and has concerns whether or not someone from the medical community is representing the Advisory Board and what recruitment efforts are being made for other disciplines. Karen would like to know the process of how sexual abuse referrals are being handled. Karen expresses she would like information to be available to the public online as well. Introductions were made by the board, each of them giving their names and what field they are representing. The Advisory Board recruitment efforts are made on a regular basis and we have had 6 new members within the last year. Dr. Barry Clark is representing the medical field and we have invited two medical professionals to join the Advisory Board within the last two meetings of which we have not received acceptance on.

Jessica Birbeck expresses that the community would like these public documents listed online to be more convenient and asks what the point of the draft is? – The point of this hearing is to give the public an opportunity to make suggestions and to hear their thoughts regarding something that you've seen in the community and listen to your feedback. We take that suggestion, and we would take it into consideration and modify the draft plan if it is something that we can do.

Marjorie Bialis, retired RN, would like to know who to contact regarding the Needs-Base plan draft if they had questions and who is the medical professional is representing the board?- Sara Rice informed the public that they could email her regarding the plan and the medical professional representing the board is Dr. Clark.

Mike Birbeck states people would like more transparency and requested for us to look at what other counties are doing in the state so that the community can give more meaningful feedback.

Mike Birbeck and Sherry Stifle mention putting a draft watermark on the draft plan prior to posting it online for the public to view the draft.

Marcie Reese begins by thanking the children and youth workers of their presentation. Some things she wants to highlight: your performance improvement plan work: you invited the state in plus you invited data analysis. A few years ago your re-entry and stability were targeted for your performance improvement plan. Current as of this year, I see that you were well better than the national and state average. You talked about Drug and Alcohol hitting the 12 month mark- Marcie refers to Diane Weed, SCA Administrator, but recovery and timelines don't always fall within twelve months. We always support the families in recovery, but we can't force them to be in full recovery by 12 months. The Handle with Care program is a program that assists in any sort of trauma a child may have had, like house fire, car accident, etc. This program is excellent to minimize a significant amount of trauma to children. Lastly I wanted to mention DEC- minimizing trauma to the kids is critical. It really isn't like that across the state and it is very important to speak about this across the state regarding those relationships.

Saira/Sara made a motion to adjourn. Motion Carried. The Advisory Board was adjourned at 1:25 pm.

Submitted by:



Sara J. Rice

Secretary/Treasurer of the Advisory Board
Administrator of TCDHS

