

February 28, 2000

DURHAM COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES

MINUTES

February 28, 2000

The Durham County Board of Social Services held a joint meeting with the Durham Board of County Commissioners on Monday, February 28th, at 5:00 p.m. in the County Commissioners Chambers. In attendance were Board members: Ms. Corinne Mabry, Chair; Ms. Katharine Bartlett, and Rev. Haywood Holderness. Attending from the Department were Mr. Dan Hudgins, Director; Mr. Arnold Dennis, Assistant Director for Family Self-Sufficiency; Ms. Gail Perry, Assistant Director for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults and Children; Ms. Gael Hallenbeck, Assistant Director for Program Support Services; Ms. Gail Angle, Program Manager for Child Protective Services; Ms. Jovetta Surlis, Program Manager for Child Placement and Supportive Services; Mr. Jerome Brown, Program Manager for Child Support Enforcement; Ms. Faye McCullen, Administrative Assistant, and Mr. Daniel Brisson, UNC-SSW Graduate Intern. Attending from the Board of Commissioners were Ms. MaryAnn E. Black, Chair; Ms. Ellen Reckhow, Ms. Becky Heron, Mr. Joe Bowser (also a member of the DSS Board), and Mr. William Bell. Others in attendance included Mr. David Thompson, County Manager; Ms. Carolyn Titus, Deputy County Manager; Mr. Wendell Davis, Deputy County Manager; Mr. Chuck Kitchen, County Attorney; Ms. Claudia Odom, Budget Officer; Mr. Keith Lane, Budget Analyst; Ms. Deborah Craig-Ray, County Information Officer; and Mr. Garry Umstead, Clerk to the Board. Ms. Angelique Witherspoon was present from the Durham Public Schools. Ms. Black, BOCC Chair, presided.

The agenda for the meeting included: 1) presentation of the Board of Social Services goals for 2000 and beyond, 2) the DSS Board's position on substantial equivalency and the Internal Equity Plan; and 3) mid-year reports from the Department's three Assistant Directors.

Ms. Black welcomed those in attendance and then recognized Ms. Mabry, Chair of the Social Services Board. Ms. Mabry began by introducing those members new to the DSS Board since the last meeting with the Commissioners. She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Commissioners to share goals formulated at the Board's annual planning retreat held on February 4, 2000. Ms. Mabry explained that the goals are for 2000 and beyond recognizing that while certain things will not be accomplished for several years, the foundation and leg work must begin now in order to achieve the identified outcomes. The Board's top priority is to have a new building for DSS by 2005, as part of a Human Service campus, and to push for a bond referendum to be on the ballot by 2001. To this end, the Board will: 1) create an education/advocacy strategy, 2) build bridges with the BOCC and other boards, and 3) create a "communication/PR" strategy to keep Board members informed and to share positive stories about the Department and its services while at the same time drawing light to the ongoing facility needs. The Board's second goal is to create a caring, compassionate environment in DSS that conveys respect for all constituents and DSS staff. The Board plans to be actively involved in the County's Capital Improvement Plan process, while continuing to address the Department's short-term facility needs. In addition, Ms. Mabry mentioned a number of customer service/public relations initiatives being planned. These include: 1) creating a "welcome center" periodically staffed by the Board, 2) looking at moving the location of certain offices to make staff more accessible to the public, and 3) Board participation in scheduled DSS functions and ceremonies. Ms. Heron asked about the time frame for implementing the customer service initiatives, and Ms. Mabry indicated that the Board is already moving forward on these. Ms. Black mentioned the recent snowstorm and the misinformation regarding emergency services being provided by the Department. She suggested that, in the future, the Department consider housing staff at the Emergency Management Office to field calls regarding the need for food or utilities. Mr. Hudgins stated that he and Ms. Titus have already been discussing other options for handling emergencies of this nature.

February 28, 2000

The Board took this opportunity to go on record supporting Substantial Equivalency and the County's Internal Equity Plan.

At this time, Ms. Mabry turned the floor over to Mr. Hudgins. Noting that it is customary for the Department to share a mid-year report with the Commissioners, Mr. Hudgins indicated that he would be calling on the three Assistant Directors to share highlights in their areas.

Ms. Hallenbeck, Assistant Director for Program Support, updated the Commissioners on the Department's customer care initiative. This initiative began by looking at what DSS clients want and how best to accomplish this. Clients want accurate information, customer orientation, and timely responses. The Department receives 200-400 families daily in its two facilities located at 220 E. Main Street and 300 N. Duke Street. In addition, approximately 750 calls are received each day. It is the Agency's belief that customer care should start when people walk in the door; therefore, efforts have been concentrated on reception services. The number of staff working in the reception/call centers has been increased. Customer service training has been provided, using the County Human Resources training model. There has been major remodeling in the reception stations and improved seating in the lobby area in the Duke Street Building. A paging system has been installed along with a computerized client tracking system. Telephone calls are now handled through a call center model with access to a database and quality monitoring of calls. Other steps are still in progress. These include development of a client satisfaction survey to be conducted in the lobby, installation of a new toll-free customer care line, and creation of telephone info-boxes which give general information about specific programs. Plans also call for an expanded Internet site and improved reception management.

Moving to the budget, Ms. Hallenbeck stated that the Department is currently spending at 54% for the fiscal year which is a little below the target of 58%. Reimbursements are at about 50% but tend to run two to three months behind. At this point, Medicaid expenditures are running ahead of budget, which may be cause for some concern. Staff will continue to track Medicaid trends and spending patterns.

At this time Mr. Arnold Dennis, Assistant Director for Family Self-Sufficiency, provided a Work First update. The goals for FY 99-00 are to reduce the Work First caseload by 10% and to have 640 participants entering employment. The program is on target for the number entering employment. The caseload continues to fluctuate although there has been a definite decline since July 1999. Approximately 89% of clients coming off the program have remained off the program. The Department received a Welfare-to-Work grant in the amount of \$665,000. These funds will be used to provide intensive services to those families who are the hardest to place in jobs because of major barriers such as education, employment history, or substance abuse. Mr. Dennis stated that the Department has been very busy partnering with other agencies in a number of initiatives to help families move from welfare to self-sufficiency. Two of these initiatives are the Families for Success program and the Family Violence Option Pilot Program. The Families for Success program focuses on those families who are long term public assistance families. The Family Violence Pilot Program partners social workers with a counselor from the Orange/Durham Coalition to work with families who are victims of family violence. The Work First Program also works closely with the Faith Community through a Faith Coordinator who matches families leaving welfare with congregations who provide supportive services. The Faith Coordinator is a county funded position through a contract with Durham Congregations in Action.

Next, Mr. Dennis commented on the School Social Worker Initiative. Currently, the Department has seven social workers assigned to 12 elementary schools in the county. Schools selected had a high percentage of children enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program. The program's goals are to improve students' school attendance, improve students' academic performance, and increase parents' school involvement. A program evaluation has been conducted which shows definite improvement in attendance and parent involvement. Academic performance is the hardest to impact as any number of

February 28, 2000

factors may affect a child's schoolwork. DSS social workers are in addition to Durham Public Schools' social workers. There is some disparity between DSS social workers and DPS social workers. For example, DPS social workers make more than DSS social workers while the services provided by the DSS social workers are more comprehensive. Inadequate office space and telephone access for DSS social workers are also major concerns. Mr. Bowser asked if abuse/neglect referrals received from the school social workers come from across the board or just from certain schools. Mr. Dennis responded that there does not seem to be any pattern. Mr. Dennis said the Department hopes to broaden county support for more DSS school social workers, preferably one per school.

Moving to the Child Support Enforcement Program, Mr. Dennis reported that four new positions approved by the Commissioners for this fiscal year have been filled. In addition, restructuring has taken place. There are now four units with eight to nine staff each. One of the units will be moving to Duke Street around the middle of March to work more closely with the Work First program. The collection rate has increased by 13% over the same seven-month period from the prior year. There has been a major focus on improving customer service with the creation of a Customer Service Committee. A Fatherhood Initiative was established as part of the Welfare-to-Work Grant with a coordinator being hired in January. The program will work with non-custodial parents to increase their child support payments through a number of different services. Ms. Heron asked if the Department has been able to do any cross-referencing of absent parents and inmates on work release. Mr. Jerome Brown, Program Manager, explained that there is no software in place to do this so staff are using a manual process to cross-reference. Ms. Heron then asked about the number of outstanding Child Support cases. Mr. Brown said a conservative estimate would be 2,500 cases with millions of dollars due to families. The limited amount of court time for child support cases is an ongoing concern. The Department continues to work with the judges around this issue but improvements are slow.

At this time Ms. Gail Perry, Assistant Director for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults and Children, touched on several of her programs. In the area of child welfare, currently there are 296 children in the Department's custody. The Department has been participating in a statewide program to reduce the number of children coming into care as well as the length of time they stay in agency custody before finding permanency. Adoptions have steadily increased for the past several years. The Department continues to face challenges in child welfare, particularly undisciplined youth. Because Durham does not have adequate placement resources for teens, many children must be placed in facilities out of town. Ms. Black asked the average age of undisciplined kids, and Ms. Perry reported it is from 12 to 14. Child Protective Services continues to see the number of reports of abuse/neglect grow while the percentage of reports substantiated remains fairly constant. Staff turnover in Child Protective Services is of major concern, with a turnover rate of 81% last year. This trend seems to be nationwide. Management continues to look for ways to curb this turnover.

In the area of Adult Services, the Department has just completed Phase II of a 3-year project with the UNC School of Nursing geared toward recognizing elder abuse. Phase II involved use of a screening protocol in the detection of possible elder abuse. The project is scheduled to end in May 2000. Mr. Bowser mentioned his service on the County's Nursing Home Advisory Committee. In this capacity, he has visited a number of facilities that are in very poor physical condition and have serious sanitation problems. He asked about the type of monitoring the Department provides. Mr. Hudgins explained that the Department has lead responsibility for monitoring all Adult Care Homes (rest home and family care homes). Durham DSS has two units that actually monitor these facilities monthly. When violations are cited, staff recommend administrative penalties and/or suspension of licensure to the State Division of Facility Services where final authority lies. The State's Facility Services is responsible for monitoring all nursing homes annually, which provide higher levels of care. The local Department of Social Services is assigned responsibility for investigating all reports of suspected adult abuse/neglect even in nursing homes. Ms. Perry acknowledged that many facilities face staffing problems due to low salaries, the lack of a career ladder, and lack of reliable transportation. Ms. Heron asked if Work First clients are referred to long term care

February 28, 2000

facilities for employment. Mr. Dennis replied that they are. Again, Mr. Bowser emphasized the need to protect seniors who are not able to protect themselves.

Ms. Black thanked the DSS Board and staff, on behalf of the County Commissioners, for the joint meeting and the information shared. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:20.