

Minutes of Meeting

SOCIAL & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING Department of Social Services

December 17, 2012

Present: John Salka, Town of Brookfield
Roger Bradstreet, Town of Nelson
Alexander Stepanski, Town of Stockbridge
Michael Fitzgerald, Commissioner
Mark Scimone, Administrative Assistant to the Chairman
Karolyn Sayles, Mental Health Department
Teisha Cook, Mental Health Department
Dr. James Yonai, Director, Mental Health Department (arrived 4:30)

The Social and Mental Health Services Committee met in the large Board of Supervisors conference room. As the Youth Bureau agenda was coming to a close, Chairman John Salka spoke about the tragic incident that occurred the previous Friday in Newtown, Connecticut. Twenty children and six adults had been killed at an elementary school by a lone gunman. John wanted to make sure that, as national and state dialogue about the incident would surely lead to changes, he wanted to make sure, locally, that we also addressed the needs. Throughout the committee meeting, discussion was held about what was needed (an idea like the community response to the bath salts epidemic was mentioned), the timing (there are regularly scheduled meetings with the school superintendents with the next meeting scheduled for March 13 at 1:00 p.m. at DSS), the structure of services (it was noted that kids most at risk are often “singled out” and every effort should be made to avoid this, especially for children who may have mental health or other developmental and/or cognitive disabilities), and involvement (it was agreed that the county and schools were largely responsible, but that other community partners need to be at the table). It is hoped that the discussion will continue over the coming weeks, months, and years.

John asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the November 26, 2012, committee meeting. On a motion by Roger and seconded by Alex, the meeting minutes were approved.

Mike reviewed the caseload and expenditures report next. He noted that there was a budget modification for the 2012 budget in the resolution packet to take money from under-spent accounts to cover those accounts over budget. All in all, the year will wrap up with DSS coming in under budget by nearly \$3 million or so. Mike did note that in previous years, the fund balance would see about \$4 million from DSS unspent funds, so the budget is getting tighter. Roger asked about the use of relatives in place of foster care. Mike answered that is an area DSS struggles with. Going back a few years, DSS placed few children with family resources in a “foster care” setting. There were a variety of factors that kept placements low. However, what we have learned through research and practice over the years is that relatives can be wonderful resources for children and families. We currently have about 10 children (out of 60) in foster care. Roger thought that seemed low and Mike agreed that 20 percent is likely still not maximizing the availability (as an example, New York City places about half of the children coming into care with relatives or kinship). There are a number of factors that keep us from attaining higher kin placement including: the child’s needs; the history of the relatives (either

criminal histories or previous abuse/neglect); and, often, the desire of the relatives to take care of their minor relatives without the intrusion of DSS. Being in a small community, we often know the players (or they know us) and that keeps some families from being considered. We are required, by law, to reach out to any identified family and certain members of the mother and father's family in all cases of foster care. There being no further questions about the report, the resolutions were introduced.

The first resolution was to modify the 2012 adopted budget. As Mike had previously stated, the budget modification was covering accounts that were overspent with those under spent. There were some large transfers (\$140,000 and \$62,500) that Mike attributed to eligibility criteria and not due to loss of funding or increases in costs. On a motion by Roger and seconded by Alex, the resolution passed unanimously.

The next two resolutions were to renew agreements with Liberty Resources for domestic violence services. Mike explained that the program receives a variety of funds from different sources and they all are combined into a "consolidated domestic violence" budget. The two funding streams Mike had prepared resolutions for supported, in the case of the \$10,083 appropriation, ancillary counseling services for victims and their children while at the domestic violence shelters. The larger \$174,523 resolution supported the domestic violence hotline that has seen an increase in call volumes and services in the past year. Dr. Yonai spoke highly of the services provided and referenced a recent example. On a motion by Alex and seconded by Roger, both resolutions, under one motion, were approved unanimously.

Lastly, Mike had the indigent burial resolution prepared for committee action. Mike reviewed the long history and request for increases that had been made. In the end, increases were included for the allowance for caskets and vaults (increase of \$100 each) and the transportation rate now mirrors that approved through the coroner's contract (\$2 per mile up to \$200). Mike stated that the one area that would certainly cause unrest among the funeral directors was the "hard cap" of no more than \$1,000 contribution by family. He said that had always been the intent, but the previous wording was interpreted to mean \$1,000 contribution for services (calling hours) and any additional amounts for merchandise (cards, flowers, etc.). Mike cautioned that it would be likely that the funeral home directors would advocate directly to the town supervisors and some may use Park Strategies, health insurance, and retirement as examples of the county's "largess." The committee felt that the resolution was the best compromise available with the county under extreme fiscal constraints. Ultimately, it is the funeral home directors' choice if they want to accept the rate offered. Mike will continue to monitor what other counties do and make any recommendations, as appropriate.

There being no further discussion, the Mental Health Department began its presentation.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael A. Fitzgerald
Commissioner

Approved by Committee Chairman: _____ Date: _____