



**AITKIN
COUNTY**
EST 1857
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
COUNTY BOARD MEETING MINUTES
September 22, 2020

Attendance

The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners met this 22nd day of September, 2020, at 9:03 a.m. as the Aitkin County Health & Human Services Board, with the following members present: Commissioners Bill Pratt, J. Mark Wedel, Don Niemi, Anne Marcotte, and Laurie Westerlund. Others present included: H&HS Director Cynthia Bennett, Public Health Supervisor Erin Melz, Accounting Supervisor Carli Goble, Public Health Educator Hannah Colby, Assistant to the H&HS Director Shawn Speed, County Administrator Jessica Seibert, Assistant to the County Administrator Angie Sahr, Human Resources Payroll Specialist Nikki Knutson, and Jennifer Eisenbart, Aitkin Independent Age.

Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Niemi, seconded by Commissioner Wedel and carried, all members present voting yes to approve the September 22, 2020 Health & Human Services Board agenda.

Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Westerlund, seconded by Commissioner Niemi and carried, all members present voting yes to approve the August 25, 2020 Health and Human Services Board minutes.

Bills

Carli Goble, H&HS Accounting Supervisor noted that there were no notable bills this month.

Motion by Commissioner Wedel, seconded by Commissioner Marcotte and carried, all members present voting yes to approve the bills.

Directors Update

Cynthia started by informing the board of a recent conference call that Jessica Seibert, Kim Larson and she participated in with Senator Amy Klobuchar involving 6 other agencies in the area about the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

The group found that there were many similarities amongst the organizations as to what they were experiencing. There was consensus that there are many challenges to accessing services in the rural settings and found that this was accentuated with COVID-19. They also saw an increase in people isolating, depression, anxiety, domestic and verbal abuse. The group also noted that folks receiving unemployment were actually disincentivised to return to work as they were making more money on unemployment with the additional 600.00 than they were making when working. That extra money was found to have been used, by some, to purchase drugs or alcohol causing relapses.

They also mentioned that there have been more citations given during COVID-19, for drug or alcohol related offenses versus arrests being made for those offenses. This has caused fewer people to seek treatment.

Also, they found that it was not just these populations that were being affected by COVID-19 stressors, it was the professionals, service providers, and employees. Because of this the Crisis Line has dedicated two mental health professionals to be available to take calls from service providers or professionals if they felt the need to talk to someone or just decompress.

On a more positive note, she noted that one local provider had refurbished and distributed 75 computers to consumers so they could more easily access services. There has also been an increase in creative

outreach ideas such as virtual peer support groups, virtual day treatment, and virtual outpatient treatment.

In the end Cynthia really felt like the Senator had listened to all of their concerns and that the call was valuable. Although we are not sure of the outcome for this call, the Senator wanted to assure that any new coronavirus funding packages had enough funding designated for mental health and SUDS services

Next Cynthia talked about the AMC virtual conference where she spent time with the HHS Policy Committee discussing topics and figuring out what the priorities were for the coming legislative session.

The main topics that were decided upon were:

- First, to continue the waivers already in place due to COVID-19 that were granted by DHS which includes the ability to use technology to do visits with individuals versus face to face meetings. Counties have found that the case managers are able to spend more time with their clients due to not having to include travel time in their appointments and also are saving money for the counties by eliminating mileage and travel time.
- Second, to support COVID-19 response and Public Health funding. The LPHA has carried, on its legislative platform the last several years, the request to reinstate the funding that was lost several years ago. Public Health has a responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of every citizen and that work cannot be done without the proper resources to support that.
- The 3rd area was a tie between DHS redesign and DHS budget solutions. This deals with revamping DHS and looking at how their relationship is with counties. It is integral that counties are able to have input into what is happening with things like the regional treatment center discharges, competency restoration, and budget solutions. She added that she foresees these becoming one in the future as you cannot do the work of redesigning the structure of an organization without talking budget
- Community Based Purchasing and Procurement. Counties should have the right to have a say in the process and to be able to sit at the table and be a part of it.

Lastly Cynthia mentioned that when the COVID-19 response happened, HHS started asking how can we best partner and support our community, our employees, our schools, our long-term care providers, and our businesses and we have really been able to get involved with all of them and provide partnership, guidance, and collaboration to find solutions to gaps and issues that we are seeing. One thing we have done internally is to create an infographic that shows what we have been doing during this response Cynthia will bring a sample to the next HHS Board meeting next month to share.

Cynthia noted that Erin would be talking about one way we have partnered with the schools and Hannah Colby would be doing a presentation later about the food drive that was a community initiative related to COVID. She then yielded the rest of her update time to Erin Melz to talk about the 14 day case rate and how Public Health has been working with the three county school districts in relation to that.

Erin started by remarking that Public Health has been meeting with all three school districts and Riverwood Healthcare on a weekly basis for the last few months now, but also added that they are talking to one or more of the school districts just about every day to assist them with scenarios and utilizing the decision tree that MDH and MDE developed for schools and childcare providers.

Erin talked about the 14 day case rate, how it relates to the schools and how it was initially developed to help schools determine the type of learning model to utilize to begin the school year. Since then, however there hasn't been clear messaging to relay that this rate is an indicator of COVID-19 activity within an entire community and the rate is one variable to consider when determining what learning model to use as the rate and number of cases ebbs and flows. Erin mentioned that we know that we need to look closely at what the impact of COVID-19 activity is on the schools to determine the best reaction to a fluctuating rate, that it may not always require a change of learning model. As such Public Health has developed a more real time 14-Day case rate data sheet, shared with the public and the school districts on the Aitkin County Website. That sheet is updated twice per week, Mondays and Thursdays.

Review/Approve Contracts/Agreements/Appointments

Motion by Commissioner Marcotte, seconded by Commissioner Westerlund and carried, all members voting yes to approve the Foster Care Transportation Agreement between Aitkin County and the Aitkin School District, effective July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021.

Motion by Commissioner Wedel, seconded by Commissioner Niemi and carried, all members voting yes to approve the contracted case management contract between Aitkin County and Thomas Allen, Inc., effective October 1, 2020 through December 31, 2021.

Motion by Commissioner Wedel, seconded by Commissioner Marcotte and carried, all members voting yes to approve the appointment of Lynn Jacobs, Aitkin County CARE, to the Aitkin County Health & Human Services Advisory Committee for the remainder of the 2020-2021 term.

Food Drive Summary, Hannah Colby

Hannah gave the board members an update on the community food drive that was coordinated May 8th through June 19th. More than 870 pounds of food was collected at Ukura's Big Dollar in McGregor, Roadside Market in Hill City, County Market in Aitkin, and from Aitkin County employees. The food donations were kept local, being distributed to each respective community food pantry. Riverwood Healthcare Center participated by making a monetary donation.

Committee Reports

HHS Advisory Committee Report

Commissioner Wedel commented that the last meeting was September 2nd and that they had been given a very informative presentation on ACES from Stacey Durgin-Smith and that he would defer any more update on that during the next meeting when there will be actual advisory members present at the board meeting.

AEOA Committee Update

Commissioner Westerlund said they had met and the main topics of discussion was the need for new members and for a new board chair.

CARE Board Update

Commissioner Westerlund stated that they reviewed the budget.

Lakes & Pines Update

Commissioner Niemi mentioned that they had met on September 21st and that they had went through some grants and who was awarded them. He also mentioned that they are still providing tax preparation services to qualified individuals.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.

Next Meeting – October 27, 2020