



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2020

1:00 pm

Location: 2100 Comer Avenue, Columbus GA 31904

Call to Order

- Muscogee County Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Board Meeting was held on November 19, 2020 via online by TEAMS
- Meeting began at 1:00 PM and was presided over by Charonda Huff.

Attendees

- Charonda Huff and Jennifer Melvin participated via Teams
- Voting members Barbara Story-Jones and Tolua Puailo were not in attendance
- Georgia Division of Family and Children Services staff in attendance included Muscogee County Director Tonika Wadley and Cobb County Director Lasondra Howard-Boddie

Review/Approval of minutes from last meeting(s)

- Approval of the September 17, 2020 minutes and the October 15, 2020 minutes did not take place because there was not a quorum.

Old Business

- There was no Old Business

New Business/Agency Updates

- Mrs. Wadley said that Intake had a total of 132 case reports to access. There were 2 children that had to be taken from their families and placed in Foster Care, but we were able to exit 15 children out of Foster Care and place them with either their parents or an immediate family member. There are a total of 386 children in Foster Care. Some adoptions are pending finalization hearings.
- OFI has been extremely busy processing benefits. More clients are being served and given benefits because workers are able to process more applications working from home. Case workers are able to complete more cases in a timely manner because Telework allows virtual visits, which eliminates the case workers having to take time to go out for visits. Social Services still goes out for in person visits if needed. The time eliminated with traveling is freed up and allows processing more cases.
- The Virtual Lobby for constituents that has been created allows clients who would not or could not come in for service a faster way to apply for benefits and this has given us the ability to serve more clients and it has increased benefits given to our families. Clients can request for an in-person appointment through the Virtual Lobby for OFI and Social Services. Paper applications can be printed out online or clients may pick one up from the Blue application box and can place them in our Drop Box in front of the building if they do not wish to complete an application online.
- Low Energy assistance is a need that we can not process at this time because they require in person processing, so we are referring clients to other agencies.
- We have partnered with Walmart for Secret Santa and we are collaborating with them to have the toys dropped off to us for distribution. We are also receiving donations from our Partners for children in Foster Care who we received after November 3rd who did not make the Secret Santa list so that they will get toys as well.
- There is a new Expenditure form from accounting that will be forwarded to you by email.

Budget Update

- From our Budget of 41,500.00 we have a balance of 38,745.84. With Board approval we will pay for our Employee Holiday Luncheon. The luncheon will be on Friday, December 11, 2020. It will be catered by Country's Barbeque and hosted in the parking lot at our Comer Ave location.

➤ OFI Totals for October 2020:

- I. TANF**
 - 168 Active Cases
 - 196 Applications processed
 - \$69,945.00 Tanf funds distributed

- II. FS**
 - 20,926 Active Cases
 - 1,266 Applications processed
 - \$8,585,874.00 Food Stamp funds distributed

- III. Medicaid**
 - 15,685 Active Cases
 - 2,014 Applications processed
 - Medicaid funds distributed not Available

Personnel Update

- **Vacancies:**

Child Protective Services:

Program Director - CPS (1)

Program Administrator - Permanency (1)

Supervisors - CPS (2)

Supervisors - Permanency (1)

Case Managers - CPS (3)

Case Managers - Permanency (6, 1 new hire pending)

Staffing Numbers

Social Services Tech - CPS and Permanency (6)

Case Managers - CPS (14)

Case Managers - Permanency (7 , 1 new hire pending)

Supervisors - CPS (3)

Supervisors - Permanency (4)

Program Administrator - Permanency (1)

Program Director - Permanency (1)

- **Hiring:**

- A. Interviews for CPS Supervisor was conducted on November 13 and the interviews for CPS Administrator was conducted on November 18 and the interviews for the CPS Program Administrator were conducted yesterday, November 18 and we have begun the reference checks. This position is being filled from within, which will give other workers an incentive for staying. Hopefully the background checks will be completed shortly, and the employees can be in place within the next month. The New Hire process is still a concern because it is very lengthy, but HR is trying to eliminate some of the steps to speed the process up.
 - B. Staffing is in a great place. There are a few vacancies, but we are filling positions as soon as we are allocated and approved to fill them. We should be on track with staffing by February 2021.

Other Matters

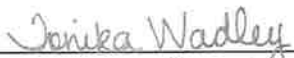
- Mrs. Melvin asked Mrs. Wadley if there is still concerns regarding whether the Police Department or DFCS has authority and who can make decisions for Child endangerment calls.
- Mrs. Wadley said Law enforcement still calls us after incidents happen and it's getting a little better, but as far as them contacting us to receive a call as soon as an incident occurs sometimes Intake doesn't get information until a hour or so later. Everyone is on board except the Patrol Unit because they seem to not understand why we must contact parents or family members when the child is needed to be picked up. They still want someone (DFCS, if not family) to come out as soon as they call.
- Mrs. Melvin said that she doesn't feel that the children have a Mandated Reporter for those who are attending school online.
- Mrs. Wadley said that collaboration with the School System regarding Mandated Reporter is better. The school's issue was just that they did not have anyone to communicate with. I told them to just email me so I would receive concerns and reports immediately. We talked about the students

who are virtual, and they will contact us if they believe or feel a child needs a Mandated Report and they are unsure. An example of concern would be as if a child is alone and appears to be babysitting during lessons, etc. So, staff teaching virtually will be monitoring the virtual students' surroundings. Virtual should not be a problem and the School System understands to call or email if not sure. However, Mandated Reporters such as Doctors or Dentist might be harder for reporting purposes because they are not seeing the children as much because of the COVID.

- Mrs. Wadley asked if there were any concerns regarding Staff morale or Culture/Community morale because there were concerns from last year, but she said that it has completely turned around because we have new staff and they work together very well. Working virtually has helped allow the opportunity to get more work done without the necessity to go into the field. She also said that the Community and Partner relationships are better since they are being informed better and are being included in virtual meetings.
- The next Board Meeting will be Wednesday, December 17, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. With no other items to discuss, the meeting was then adjourned.

Adjournment

The meeting ended at 1:50pm.



Board County Secretary
Tonika Wadley Director
Muscogee County DFCS

Board Chairperson
Jennifer Melvin
Muscogee County DFCS



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2021

1:13pm

Location: 2100 Comer Avenue, Columbus GA 31904

Call to Order

- The Muscogee County Georgia Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting was held on February 18, 2021 via online by Microsoft Teams
- Meeting began at 1:13 Pm and was presided over by Chair Board, Jennifer Melvin.

Attendees/participants

- Board members Jennifer Melvin and Charonda Huff participated in the meeting.
- Member Tolua Puailoa was not in attendance.
- Georgia Division of Family and Children Services staff in attendance was Muscogee County Director Tonika Wadley.

Review/Approval of minutes from last meeting(s)

- There were no prior minutes needing approval, so a quorum was not needed.

Old Business

- There was no old business to discuss.

New Business/Agency Updates

- Governor Brian Kemp has approved a one time \$1,000.00 bonus for all employees that make under \$80,000.00. The bonus should be distributed by the end of March.
- Muscogee County DFCS has been given an opportunity to redesign our family support program. The program involves people calling in for maltreatment that are considered low risk such as insufficient food, poverty issues and budgeting issues. The pilot program will allow cases to be referred to our community partners so that we will not be the only ones working with families. Our first meeting will be tomorrow morning. The program will be starting within the next couple of months. It should lower our case managers caseloads.
- In 2019 Muscogee County DFCS had roughly 400 overdue(backlogged) cases that put us out of compliance. We have been able to tackle that issue with the help of others within the State. Since February of 2020, we have been able to maintain our caseloads. We have been recognized by State leadership as the county with the most improvement in our work and have been given the opportunity to present how we are able to sustain and overcome our barriers in what is called Café 212 on Microsoft Teams every other Friday during the month of March. Mrs. Wadley stated she will provide board members with the link so they can observe.

Budget Update

- Our beginning Budget was \$41,500.00. Year to date expenditures were \$6,442.88, which brings the ending budget balance to \$5,057.12.

➤ OFI Totals for January 2021:

- I. TANF**
 - 280 Active Cases
 - 95 Applications processed
 - 646 Active Clients
 - \$75,362.00 TANF funds distributed
- II. FS**
 - 23,282 Active Cases
 - 1,474 Applications processed
 - 46,712 Active Clients
 - \$8,467,094.00 Food Stamp funds distributed
- III. Medicaid**
 - 16,166 Active Cases for Family Medicaid
 - 1,078 Applications processed
 - 6,459 Active ABD Medicaid cases
 - 22,625 Active MA cases
 - 43,411 Active Clients
 - Medicaid funds distributed not Available

Personnel Update

- **Staffing Numbers:**

Program Director

CPS – Vacant

Permanency - 1

Program Administrator

CPS - 1

Permanency - 1

Supervisors

CPS – 3 (1 vacancy) One will be leaving on February 22, 2021

Permanency – 4 (1 vacancy)

Case Managers

CPS – 19 (1 vacancy) As of March 2021

Permanency 19 (1 vacancy)

Social Services Tech (1 retirement this month)
6 CPS and Permanency)

Social Services Monthly Report

Program	Number open @ Beginning of the Month	Number of New Cases Receive	Number of Cases Closed	Number of Cases currently Open
Child Protective Services (CPS)	118	49	34	133
Family Preservation	94	8	0	102
Permanency	374	0	3	371

Other Matters

- There were no other matters.
- The next Board Meeting will be March 18, 2021.
- With no other items to discuss, the meeting was then adjourned.

Adjournment

The meeting ended at 1:35 pm.

Board County Secretary
Tonika Wadley Director
Muscogee County DFCS

Board Chairperson
Jennifer Melvin
Muscogee County DFCS

Board notes April 2023

Onboarding new staff (12 in the last three months)

New technology for CMs to make it easier to document in the field. Complete safety plans, etc. (mCase)

Federal Health Emergency is ending. Medicaid renewals will begin again this month.

Exceeded allocated funding for general services. Will begin again July 1st using County funds. However, if there is a need (extenuating circumstances), we will still be able to assist clients. Request for funds for next fiscal year has been submitted.

Child Abuse Protocol signing held April 19th

Staff to celebrate Social Work Month (March) on April 21st at the office. Staff will receive a thank you gift and lunch.

Planning is under way for the Backpack give away for youth in foster care, July.

Spring Fling/Self Care day is scheduled for May 6th for Region 8 staff and family at Woodruff Park.

Need to discuss Co-Chair position

Board meeting agenda

May 2023

Self care day- Region 8 DFCS staff held a self care day on May 6th at Lakebottom Park. Staff came out and enjoyed games, music, and barbeque. The next event will be held in Sumter County.

National Foster Care Month – There are foster care appreciation events being held all over the state this month. There are several events in the region. The Episcopal Church in Americus will be hosting an event for foster parents. Clement Arts has received a grant from Care Portal, they will be hosting a foster parent workshop for Harris and Muscogee Counties. On May 24th at 11:00 a.m. virtual Caregiver of the Year celebration.

Public Health Emergency is scheduled to end May 11. Medicaid renewals will begin again starting June 2023. Staff have completed Medicaid refresher training in preparation.

We are continuing to hire staff. Muscogee Co. social services has fewer vacancies.

There is discussion regarding Foster Parent Association in the Region. This will allow foster parents to come together to support each other. It is already in place in some regions.

Governor Kemp's new budget includes a \$2,000 raise to staff for next fiscal year, effective July 1st.

Muscogee County DFCS is currently working with Juvenile Court to change the way kids come into care from the bench by having a DFCS Liaison. Still working to develop this role.



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting Minutes
June 15, 2023 - 1:00 p.m.
Location: 2100 Comer Avenue, Columbus GA 31904

Call to Order

The Muscogee County Georgia Division of Family and Children Services Board's June 2023 meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees/Participants

Mrs. Gwendolyn McIntosh, Mrs. Jennifer Melvin, and Dr. Darlene Smalls attended the meeting. Member –Pastor Johnny Flakes was not in attendance.

Georgia Division of Family and Children Services staff in attendance – were Muscogee County Director - Tonika Wadley and the Administrative Assistant - Chris Nunn.

Review/Approval of minutes from last meeting(s) All details of the April 2023 Board meeting were provided to each Board member via email.

Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

Mrs. Wadley greeted the Board Members and thanked them for their attendance. She began the meeting sharing about the statewide Office of Family Independence's (OFI) challenge/backlog in which Food Stamp recipients are not receiving their benefits at their scheduled issuances. This is all because of the decrease in staff; however, Mrs. Wadley indicated that the current staff are working diligently to overcome the challenge. The OFI administration is hiring new staff; however, all staff must be fully trained prior to processing applications for any of the programs governed by OFI. While Mrs. Wadley doesn't manage this area of our agency, she will provide OFI's monthly report to the Board once she receives the report from the state office. She also shared with the Board that while the OFI program is housed here they are managed by a Regional Management Team. The Board members were invited to direct any persons with concerns or questions to either her or Chris Nunn for assistance/guidance.

The second item shared by Mrs. Wadley pertained to the cost-of-living raise made possible by the governor and the state legislature in the amount of \$2,000.00. This increase will be effective July 1, 2023, for all state employees and teachers.

The 2nd Annual Backpack give-away for our foster children in care will be July 21, 2023. The event will be held at our office – 2100 Comer Avenue, Columbus, GA. We've partnered with Walmart to order the backpacks that will be filled with school supplies. While there is 400+ children in foster care, we've only planned the event to serve 200 kids – as some of our children are in homes across the state and not locally. The children not housed in Muscogee county will

be assisted individually, according to Mrs. Wadley. The kids who are residing in the county will enjoy ice cream upon their retrieval of the backpacks.

The last item Mrs. Wadley shared was regarding the month of June being recognized as "Reunification Month." The state recognizes those families who have been reunified with their children after being separated and placed in foster care. Our region (Region 8) was recognized as the number one region in the state to have reunited more families than any other region in the state. Muscogee County had the most kids to be reunified with their natural families, Mrs. Wadley reported. Additionally, there are number of children who can't be reunited with their families; however, we arrange for guardianship with other family members and/or foster parents. The guardianship is with the purpose of adoption. This is a way to process children from foster care even when they can't be reunited with their natural families. The family that will be recognized this year is a young couple (23 years of age) who were separated from their 3 children and were reunited with them earlier this year. The parents were diligent in accomplishing this task. They will be able to tell their DFCS story on June 30, 2023, at Bibb Mill Event Center. Our Board, the Muscogee Team, the DFCS attorneys, the regional administration, Judges, CASA, and the honorees and their family supporters will be invited to the celebration. The event cost is \$3,284.17 for the use of the space and catering of the meal at Bibb Mill Event Center. Mrs. Jennifer Melvin, Mrs. Gwendolyn McIntosh, and Dr. Darlene Small approved the use of the County funds in the amount of \$3,284.17.

Mrs. McIntosh commended Mrs. Wadley for the fine job being done and asked how the families are assessed to ensure they are caring for their children once they are reunified. Mrs. Wadley shared that a court order for aftercare is provided where between 3 and 6 months a plan is implemented to make sure the parents can meet the needs of the children. The family that is to be honored on June 30th is currently in aftercare to make certain the 2 little girls and one little boy can remain in their parent's care forever.

Mrs. Jennifer Melvin and others thanked Mrs. Wadley for all she does and with such grace. Mrs. Melvin also thanked her for how well the Board is kept informed. With no further questions or comments, the meeting concluded at 1:22 p.m.

Next Board meeting will be July 20, 2023, at 1:00 via Microsoft Teams.

Tonika Wadley

Board County Secretary
Tonika Wadley Director
Muscogee County DFCS

Board Chairperson
Jennifer Melvin
Muscogee County DFCS

Muscogee County DFCS Board meeting 7/23/25

*Meeting did not occur due to low participation.

- Staff development training will be offered to staff ongoing, in the areas of Child Protection and Well-Being.
- Onboarding of new CPS/FC staff during the months of July and August. There will be eight case managers, one Administrator, and one Admin Asst. (1).
- Approval of county funds for new fiscal year- \$50,000
- Muscogee DFCS will be partnering with local church for Fall Festival- details forthcoming
- Reclassification of job titles for staff, included a pay increase (different for each title)
- Will begin general assistance (utility assistance) in September. Will send an email update on the details to share with community.

OFI updates

- Continue to onboard staff
- TANF cases- 100; FS cases- 18, 897; Medicaid cases- 22,412

SS updates

- Currently 512 children in foster care
- 90 current assessments
- 74 ongoing cases

Next meeting, November 19th at 4:30 p.m. at the DFCS office.

December 2024 Muscogee County DFCS Board updates

- November was National Adoption Month. To celebrate National Adoption Month, we sent out baskets to honor our families. Region 8 created a Regional Adoption Team to assist in expediting the adoption process to help children secure permanency.
- OFI worked on DSNAP for counties hard hit during Hurricane Helene. There were 4 phases, with the first phase that began on October 21, 2024. This is the largest D-SNAP in the history of Georgia. This is for families that don't normally receive benefits. There are different criteria for these benefits. 57 designated counties.
 - The district is now processing renewals for TANF and ABD only. The statewide renewal time is addressing all other renewals.
- There have been some position changes at the state level effective October 16, 2024:
 - Chris Apsey will now serve as Chief of Staff
 - Mary Havick will now serve as Deputy Chief of Staff
 - Lon Roberts will serve as Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare
- We are preparing for our Annual Clark's Christmas Kids Event. Every foster child will receive gifts to open on Christmas Day. Currently we have over 400 youth in foster care in Muscogee County.
- All staff holiday luncheon will be held on December 20th beginning at 12:30 p.m. on the 3rd floor.

Muscogee County DFCS Board meeting 7/23/25

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Next meeting, November 19th at 4:30 p.m. at the DFCS office.

Muscogee County DFCS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Date: November 29, 2025

Time: 4:30 PM

Location: — Muscogee DFCS Office

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM.

Attendance

Members Present:

- Tonika Wadley
- J. H. Flakes
- Gwendolyn McIntosh

Agenda Approval

Agenda approved as presented.

Service Updates

- All services have been **suspended due to the government shutdown**.
- The suspension affects **transportation, behavioral aide services, and other federally funded supports**.
- Clients **will still receive services**, but **not through federal funding**.
- The current **hiring freeze** will remain in place.
- There has been a **drop in available funds**.

Financial Update

- The organization currently has an **extra \$10,000** available.

Programs & Events

- **Thanksgiving Lunch** will be held **Friday, November 21, 2025**, and **Roz Café** will provide the meal.
- The **month of December** will include **multiple activities** for participants.
- **General Service Assistance** for **utility assistance** will begin **January 20, 2026**.

Community Announcements

- According to J. H. Flakes, **Spencer High School** will host a **food giveaway** on **November 21, 2025**, from **2:00 PM – 3:30 PM**, including **gift cards**.



January 21, 2026

Quarterly Muscogee County DFCS Board meeting could not be held due to not having a quorum. Below are notes in lieu of the meeting.

- The DHS hiring freeze is over. Muscogee DFCS will interview for 6 vacant CPS case manager positions.
- There has been some messaging around DFCS inability to provide services to children and families due to budget restraints. However, DFCS continues to provide services to all families with an identified need, whether through foster care or CPS services. We have streamlined our approval process to ensure appropriate and necessary services are provided to families.
- OFI new process will allow clients who are SNAP eligible to call a number and conduct interviews via phone instead of waiting on a call from staff to complete the interview. Pilot will begin Jan 26th If case is eligible, the system will trigger a response to the client and give them a number to call to complete an interview. It will be staff designated specifically for the interviews. They are called On Demand interviews. Failure of client to complete the call will result in the case being closed.
- Christmas was a success for our children. We had donations from multiple community partners, as well as Clarks Christmas event for our youth in foster care.
- General assistance started this month. Will assist with utility bills through June 30th or until funds are depleted. Must have proof of income, bill must be in the name of the person seeking assistance, can only be assisted once per calendar year.

***Next scheduled board meeting will be held on April 22, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. at the Muscogee County DFCS office, 2100 Comer Ave. Columbus, GA 31902**

