



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting
Minutes
August 18, 2022 - 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 Meeting was held on August 18, 2022, via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees/Participants

Dr. Flakes, Mrs. Gwendolyn McIntosh, and Dr. Darlene Smalls participated in the meeting.

Members – Jennifer Melvin and Tolua Pailo were 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 July 2022 Board meeting were provided to each Board member via email.

Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

- Mrs. Wadley shared regarding the approval of the County Funds for the new fiscal year in the amount of \$41,500.00. She has plans to allocate a portion of this amount towards the General Assistance Program. This program will aid persons who have a need (basic needs – rental/utilities assistance), if they meet the criteria to receive the assistance. This opportunity will be available during the same days and hours the OFI Lobby is open – Tuesday through Thursday from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Once the amount she's permitted to allocate, she plans to start providing services in October 2022. The persons who receive the funds from the General Assistance Program do not have to be clients who have open cases with us already,

but for anyone outside of them. She reported this effort will be the first time this will be done through our department. The complete details of her plan will be shared with the Board so that they're aware and able to share with their networks. Dr. Smalls asked how the process will work or how will it look. Mrs. Wadley indicated that all the specific criteria haven't been determined yet, but one of the criteria is that the electricity can't be turned off. We are unable to pay the reconnect fee but can assist with the amount for an upcoming bill. It's our plan to sit down with them to review the amount owed, determine the amount we can assist with, and coach them towards being able to pay going forward themselves – as we are only able to aid them once per fiscal year. If a client comes back in for assistance again, we will make referrals to other community resources that are able to teach them to develop a budget and maintain since the goal is to help them maintain and not have to seek assistance again. Mrs. Wadley will develop the specifics in writing so it will be our process, and anyone can retrieve it and know how the program operates. Dr. Smalls affirmed the elements of Mrs. Wadley's plans and emphasized the importance of helping clients to maintain or sustain themselves moving forward with the assistance of the community's resources.

- A meet and greet is set for next month with our local law enforcement partners (City Police, Sheriff's Office, and School Resource Officers). This will take place on September 15, 2022, from 10 until 11 AM. With the new staff that has come aboard it will be necessary for them to meet and know our Law Enforcement partners. This meeting will be important to be able to share with our Law Enforcement partners what our department can legally do with children that may have been removed from their home by an officer(s) and taken to the police station. According to Mrs. Wadley, this has happened, and the officers would call our department to come get the child(ren) from the police station. However, a signed court order by a Judge would be required to do so. In those cases where the parents are having a difficult time managing their children's behavior, our department is available to provide them with support/services to better learn how to deal with the inappropriate behaviors of their children and maintain the children in their homes. Dr. Flakes shared of an experience with a school system in Atlanta he had done work with where in place was a procedure/policy that when there were kids who were having so many challenges in the school system with in-school suspension or out of school suspensions and/or

having a difficult time complying – the principal, the in-school Social Worker, along with the police department would come to sit with the kid. If the child complied with the expectations, they remained at the school; however, if they didn't – they were taken away from the school and detained for an hour. According to Dr. Flakes, they were looking for a restorative type of system, rather than a punitive one. He asked if this could be discussed as a possibility to be seen as more of a rescuer of the kids that have been removed from home by the police. Mrs. Wadley shared that the school system has done very well in trying to do everything they can with a particular matter before they contact our office. She reported that monthly truancy meetings are held where several community agencies are present, including our office, law enforcement and the parents of the children. These meetings will probably get started around October/November after school has been in for a couple of months or so. During the meeting the discussions are surrounding the child's absences or misbehaviors, issues at home, etc. This is a helpful way to help resolve issues as early as possible. According to Mrs. Wadley, the School Resource Officers are ones who tend to handle the matters that arise and tend to not involve us much; however, the Columbus Police Department tends to do what was referenced earlier even after numerous discussions on the matter. Mrs. Wadley added that teenage delinquency is a huge problem in Columbus. Research has shown that over the past couple of years, teenagers are the perpetrators of the violent crimes in the Columbus area. Given this circumstance, it's hard to justify bringing a child into foster care with delinquent charges or behaviors. While they are needing to be accountable, placing them in foster care will not solve the issues. A continued conversation about what our department can and cannot do will be had with CPD. Dr. Smalls shared how she honored our department's roles of standing in the gap to keep kids from eventually being placed into the prison system or for long-term incarceration. After Mrs. Wadley thanked Dr. Smalls for her statement, she reiterated that the goal of the upcoming meeting is to determine how the agencies can work collaborative to combat abuse and neglect of children in Muscogee Co. – as DFCS isn't able to do this work alone. Light refreshments will be served on the day. Mrs. McIntosh inquired about the location of the meeting, to which, Mrs. Wadley shared, here at the DFCS office. She plans to share the flyer with the Board in hopes of their attendance, too.

- New Case Managers (CM) are being on-boarded. This is a great thing, reported Mrs. Wadley. While there are those who are leaving, it's not at a pace where the caseloads aren't manageable. There are staff in place to do the work without having to assign tasks left undone to other people. She indicated that the department is interviewing currently to fill 5 Case Manager positions and on-boarded by next month.
- Mrs. Wadley informed the Board members that by the end of the year, all the DFCS offices in the State of Georgia will re-open their Office of Family Independence's lobbies. The large counties like ours were already opened, but all offices will be open soon. It was reported that Muscogee's lobby has been open for several months now, and all has gone very well. Mrs. Wadley feared a huge influx of people, but it appears that many people have gravitated towards the on-line services that are offered.

The Social Services CMs are still working remotely and there's no word as to when they will return. While Mrs. Wadley was hesitant at the onset of everyone working from home and fearing people will not be efficiently attending to tasks, she's been pleasantly surprised that she hasn't had any issues, at all. She reports that the staff are doing better at home than in the office. With that being the case, she's not rushing their return to the office. Their performances have been good. Dr. Smalls mentioned that the performance piece is the most important thing and how the ability to work from home could serve as a retention factor.

Mrs. Wadley shared that there are **5 Performance Indicators** that are measured for each fiscal year. **1. Timeliness** to respond to new reports, as some are immediate, while others are 24 or 72 hours dependent upon the safety threat of each case. The goal is to attain 95% or better. We exceeded that by scoring 98% the past fiscal year. There were some families who hid over in AL during the response time, and we were unable to meet the expectations, she indicated.

The department was able to attain 98% or better in four of the five performance indicators. The one where the 95% goal wasn't attained was missed by 2%. She mentioned being in a meeting with the supervisory team prior to the Board meeting – assisting them with developing goals and steps to increase the quality of the work we do to make significant differences in the lives of the families being served.

Dr. Flakes asked Mrs. Wadley for the other four indicators, Mrs. Wadley shared, 2. Timely closures. There are up to 45 days to close a case. This goal was met scoring a 100%, she believed. 3. Making sure case contact documentation is entered in the system within 72 hours. 4. Making sure timely services are provided to families once needs are identified. 5. Making sure Case Managers are staffing their cases with their supervisors. It is a must for 100% of their cases each month to be staffed with their supervisors. 6. Making collateral contacts, which involved contacting other service providers, other family members or anyone who has knowledge of the safety/wellbeing of the children in the home. Normally there are conversations with medical staff, school personnel, neighbors, grandmothers, etc., Mrs. Wadley added.

Dr. Smalls asked if there are any contact with the client to ensure their needs were met? Mrs. Wadley reported that there is policy that require that the parents are met with at least once a month; however, they will meet more than once a month given the severity of needs. She added that if there are Infants or any substance abuse issues, visits are made more than once per month.

Dr. Flakes also asked is there any way we can support the Administration, Case Managers and their families as the 4th Street MBC's House of Hope on the Street provides food and new clothing and shoes each 3rd Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. There are no limitations of those who participate. However, they ask for a name and number to do a follow up with the participants. Mrs. Wadley assured Dr. Flakes that the flyer will continue to be provided to the team monthly, with the hopes of families finding this to be a great resource in our community. She also mentioned that annually there is a "Secret Santa" initiative through our state office to purchase gifts for children in care. In the past Walmart has been the vendor the items are purchased from, but because of the complexities experienced with Walmart of late, we have selected Target as a new vendor. Any donations to assist other families/children who aren't in foster care, like those served by our Family Preservation department are certainly welcomed. Dr. Flakes invited that the list be provided or for the Case Managers to come to retrieve the items for the families.

Mrs. Wadley inquired of the Board if the monthly meetings are working for them. Dr. Flakes advised her to converse with Mrs. Melvin to determine what's best for her. Mrs. Wadley will do so and then present back to the

board. Additionally, she is interested in determining a co-chair to serve during those times Mrs. Melvin can't attend.

Dr. Smalls asked if the approvals were received to get car seats purchased. Mrs. Wadley confirmed that they were and that the car seats will be purchased from Target soon.

Mrs. Wadley ended assuring the Board that they will soon receive the "Meet and Greet" event flyer, the procedures for the General Assistance program so that the details can be dispersed to their contacts.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:41 p.m.

Next Board meeting will be September 15th at 1:00 via Microsoft Teams.

Tonika Wadley

Board County Secretary
Tonika Wadley Director
Muscogee County DFCS

Jennifer D. B. Melvin

Board Chairperson
Jennifer Melvin
Muscogee County DFCS