

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 15, 2025 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Lee Armbruster, Rania Assily, Martin Heberling, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick

Excused: Roberto Davila, Christina Doran, Kenneth Glynn, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Kim Withrow

Also Present: Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

The Board does not have a quorum for today's meeting. All votes will be tabled until the February 19, 2025, Board meeting.

B. Review Agenda

The Board was provided with the January 15, 2025, Board Meeting Agenda.

C. Review and Approve Minutes

The Board minutes for the December 18, 2024, Board meeting will be reviewed and approved at the next Board meeting on February 19, 2025.

II. Public Comment

Board Chair Jim Miller confirmed that there were no requests from the public to address the Board.

III. Old Business

A. Tabled Items

None.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Staff Presentation- Direct Services

Direct Services Caseworkers Nicole Huerner and Sarah Boesger provided a presentation to the Board regarding ongoing services and safety planning.

Ongoing Services, presented by Nicole Huerner:

- A case plan example was provided. When a family is transferred to ongoing, a family team meeting (FTM) is held to discuss case plan goals. Case plans can be voluntary, court involved with children remaining in their own home, or if the concerns are significant enough the children are removed.

- The case plan outlines the expectations for the parents as well as the caseworker. Specific services are identified, i.e. drug alcohol, mental health, etc. If children are removed from their home, the goal is to bring the children back into the home once the case plan goals are met.
- If new concerns arise, the child moves, etc. the case plan is updated.
- Children are seen at least twice per month.
 - The Board was provided with copies of the ongoing home visit checklist and dictation guidelines.
 - During home visits, caseworkers are checking in with parents/caregivers regarding their progress on the case plan, expectations, and addressing concerns.
 - Children are interviewed on their own regarding aspects of safety/questions related to physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence.
- The Court involvement is an entirely separate aspect of ongoing and can be quite involved.
- It is not unusual for a family to be involved with the agency for several months, sometimes years.

Safety Planning, presented by Sarah Boesger

- Safety plans are voluntary. They are used to mitigate concerns in the least restrictive way possible.
- An in-home safety plan is used when possible. The children can stay home and someone else can reside in the home to help keep the child safe. The safety plan responsible party is given instructions on what is expected and asked to report concerns to the caseworker. The children are seen every other week.
- An out of home safety plan is used when the concerns are too high for the children to reside in the home. The children would reside with a family member or close friend until the concerns are addressed. The children are seen weekly.
- Safety plans are meant to be temporary; children need permanency.
- A few examples of concerns that would lead to safety plans- environmental neglect, substance use, a child that is hospitalized/medically fragile.
- If the safety plan cannot be maintained, we may need to file a request with the court for Emergency Temporary Custody (ETC). The Board was provided with an example of an Individual Child Care Agreement (ICCA), demonstrating the detail that is provided to caregivers, along with an extensive packet of paperwork and information.
- If a child is removed and placed with a family member in another school district, a decision is made for where the child will go to school. They have the option to enroll in the new school district. Distance can be a factor. The burden is on the school district where the child resides prior to their removal.
- The agency focuses on family search and engagement, looking for relatives, family friends, etc. Removing a child from their home is a last resort. Safety planning is a great tool, when possible, to avoid disruption.
- Once the motion is filed to petition the court for custody, the goal is to have a adjudication and disposition within 90 days, then temporary custody can be

held by the agency for up to 12 months, with two additional 6-month extensions if needed: up to two years total. Parental agreement plays a role in the length of time the agency holds custody.

- Caseworkers are mandated to complete 36 hours of training per year.

B. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

There were no new hires or leaves for the month of December.

C. Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the Ombudsman Quarterly Report from October 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024, including the number of Grievances Filed, Public Complaints, Telephone Calls, Emails, Walk-ins, New Requests for Ombudsman Services, Pending Requests Resolved from Last Quarter, and New Requests Resolved within this Quarter. Kristen Fox-Berki reviewed the Pending Requests Resolved from Last Quarter, and New Requests, with the Board.

D. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan Update

Kristen Fox Berki provided the Board with the LCCS Strategic Plan Update, Period 2: July 2024 – December 2024.

Goal 1, Safety

1. Objective 1- Reduce the recurrence of maltreatment from 8.2% to no more than 7% by December 2026.

Although we did not meet the target measure of 8.2% by December 31, 2024, we will remain under the federal measure of 9.7%. Re-maltreatment occurs when another indicated or substantiated incident occurs within 365 days from when the case was last closed. The disposition can be appealed, reviewed by the CQI department, and overturned if warranted. One of the strategies we will use to attempt to reduce recidivism will be providing additional training to help caseworkers fine-tune their skills when deciding to indicate or substantiate an allegation.

2. Objective 2- Reduce the number of children in congregate care from 26 to 12. We reduced the number of children in congregate care to 19, exceeding the goal of 26 by December 2024.

Goal 2, Permanence

1. Objective 1- Increase the percent of children that exit agency involvement within 12 months of case opening from 65% to 80%.

The goal was to reduce agency involvement to 65% by 12/31/24. This goal, which includes all agency involvement, was met and exceeded.

2. Objective 2- Increase the number of caring, inclusive, and qualified LCCS foster families by 5% per year for the next three years.

The goal was to increase the number of foster families to 74 by December 31, 2024. The goal was not met, however, in 2024 we started with 66 foster families and increased to 69 by the end of the year, which was a positive outcome. We will continue with recruitment efforts in 2025.

Goal 3, Well-Being

1. Objective 1- Increase the number of children in non-kinship foster care who remain in Lorain County or Adjoining Counties (November 2023- 76%).
After further review, it was discovered that three of the goals were related to increasing foster homes. The goals will be merged because of the duplication.
2. Objective 2- Increase the number of siblings placed with some or all their siblings when placed in traditional foster care (Nov 2023- 81%).
The goal was to have 83% of children placed with all or some of their siblings. We exceeded the goal with 85% in December 2024.
3. Objective 3- Increase the number of fathers (or non-custodial parent) participating on case plans from 62% to 80%.
The goal was to have 66% of fathers or non-custodial parents participating on case plans by the end of 2024. By December 31, 2024, 82% were participating, which far exceeded the goal. Although the goal was met, we will challenge ourselves to continue with the increase. We have been working with the fatherhood initiative. They will continue to participate in our meetings and provide information to staff on their services.

The Board congratulated Kristen Fox-Berki and the entire LCCS staff on a job well done.

E. Visitation Center

The Resolution was passed by the Lorain County Commissioners to enter a contract with Williams Brothers Builders. The contract was completed by the prosecutor's office, signed by all parties, and construction is now underway.

F. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

No update to provide.

V. Fiscal Reports

A. Policy 6.1 Quarterly Financial Update

Kristen Fox-Berki presented, and the Board reviewed the Lorain County Children Services Revenue, Disbursements and Cash Fund Balance as of December 31, 2024.

Revenue:

The total Revenue for October – December 2024 is \$3,009,345.55.

Expenditures:

The total Expenditures for October – December 2024 is \$6,945,094.32.

The Beginning Fund Balance for October – December 2024 is \$17,679,746.57 and the Ending Fund Balance is \$13,743,997.80.

- Total expenditures for 2024 was \$27,598,727.33, which was approximately \$1 million less than budgeted for the year, due to the efforts made to reduce the annual budget.
- The total revenue for 2024 was \$26,293,938.20, which was higher than anticipated.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

None.

VII. Executive Session *(to discuss litigation, personnel matters and other matters required to be kept confidential by law)*
None.

VIII. Announcements

Mallory Santiago's Board term expired December 31, 2024, and her term was not renewed by the Commissioners. Ms. Santiago will attend the February 19, 2025, Board meeting so that the Board can show their appreciation for her service to the Board, and to the children of Lorain County.

IX. Adjourn

The Board meeting was adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 19, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

Minutes Prepared by:
Kimberly Kassam, Administrative Supervisor

Approved by:
Jim Miller, Board Chair