

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, November 15, 2023 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Secretary Christina Doran called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Christina Doran, Dan Gross, Martin Heberling, Tawana Jackson, Tamara Newton, Mallory Santiago, Terence Woolfork Jr.

Excused: Rania Assily, Kenneth Glynn, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller

Also Present: Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

- **Swearing In Ceremony for New Board Member**

Tabled. Judge Walther will be present at the December 20, 2023, Board meeting to swear in new Board members Rania Assily and Terence Woolfork Jr.

B. Review Agenda

Board Secretary Christina Doran asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the November 15, 2023, Board meeting. No additions or changes made.

C. Review and Approve Minutes

Board Secretary Christina Doran asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Minutes submitted for the October 18, 2023, Board meeting. Hearing none, the minutes are approved as distributed.

The Board welcomed new Board member Terence Woolfork Jr.

II. Public Comment

Board Secretary Christina Doran noted that there was no one from the public present and wishing to address the Board.

III. Old Business

A. Tabled Items

1. **2025 LCCS Levy**

Tabled.

2. **Policy 7.14 Client Grievance**

Policy 7.14 Client Grievance will be presented during Agenda Item IV Executive Director's Report.

MOTION: A motion was made by Martin Heberling, seconded by Mallory Santiago to move Policy 7.14 to Agenda Item IV Executive Director’s Report. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Christina Doran, Dan Gross, Martin Heberling, Tawana Jackson, Tamara Newton, Mallory Santiago, Terence Woolfork Jr.
Nays:	None- 0
Abstentions:	None- 0

3. Policy 1.2 Board Officers- Nominations

Tabled. Board officer nominations and elections will be held at the December 20, 2023 Board meeting.

The November 8, 2023, Ohio General Election featured fourteen (14) children services or related levies, with voters approving twelve (12). Of the two that failed, one was a new levy and the other was a replacement with an increase.

B. Unresolved Action Items

1. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Strategic Plan

a. LCCS Staff Presentation

The LCCS Board Subcommittee requested LCCS staff members attend the Board meeting to present the Board members with information regarding kinship care, foster care and foster parent recruitment. Increasing the number of foster homes and having children placed locally within Lorain County or neighboring communities is a focus for the next Strategic Plan.

Kinship

Nancy Griffiths, Family Based Care (FBC) Manager, provided an overview of a family’s involvement, from intake through adoption. Referrals are assigned to an intake caseworker. Following an investigation, they refer for services and close, or transfer for ongoing services. When a family remains involved, a case plan is developed, and can sometimes lead to court involvement. We do a great job of family search & engagement, looking at family or interested third parties and other community supports to find placement and take in a child when needed so they can remain within their own community, school, culture etc. and provide the best outcome. A few years ago, we connected w/ Kinnect and now have a specialist, assigned 1-2 cases at a time, complete relentless search & engagement efforts to locate families. She has approximately a 95% success rate. We have been fortunate to expand kinship unit staff and programming.

In January the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP) was implemented; a nationwide program to license our kinship caregivers. This program provides training, a home study is completed, and kinship caregivers become a licensed foster family which provides

additional funding and medical insurance. Once a case is closed with our agency, the children are eligible for a per diem rate until age 18, or age 21 for children entering the program at age 16 or older. Nancy Griffiths provided a handout to the Board to provide more information regarding KGAP. When we cannot find qualified family members or an interested third party willing to care for the children, we must identify and place the children in a foster home.

Foster Care

Kristin Ross, FBC Manager provided an overview on foster care. We currently have about Eighty (80) licensed foster homes for Lorain County. The majority do have children placed in their homes. We are diligent about keeping siblings together whenever possible and try hard not to overlap sibling groups to avoid a group home setting. Some foster parents are licensed as an adoptive home, and some choose to be foster parents without the option to adopt. We want our children to have the least amount of moves as possible, so we license as an adoptive home from the beginning, when possible, to avoid a placement move. The State changed the licensing requirement from 36 hours of training to 24 hours of training for foster parents to expedite the training and licensing process and offer a virtual training option. We now have the Short-Term Trauma Caseworker available to provide services at the time a child is placed into a foster home to bridge the gap until external services are in place. Other services we provide to foster parents are 1) a learn and connect group for foster parents, which provides an hour-long support group and an hour of training, 2) respite services, and 3) foster parent coaching; seasoned foster parents are matched with new foster families. Most foster parent coaches provide support to 2-3 newer foster parents and answer questions. We are working hard to build up foster homes that can take teens and large sibling groups. There are several large sibling groups that have recently come into care. In January, there were about 20 of our children placed out of county, mainly teens in a group home setting. There are not many group homes in northeast Ohio. There are more in the Cincinnati and Toledo areas. Through the Bring our Children Home initiative, we have been able to decrease the number of children placed in the Cincinnati area. Our goal is to bring as many children/teens as possible back home to Lorain County and advocate for foster parents to accept teenagers and wrap them with the needed services to ensure their success. So far, we were able to transition a few to an adoptive home, and a few went to stay with relatives. We have identified a home and are currently working to bring two children who are part of a sibling group closer to home. When children are in foster care, they have weekly visits with their parents, and virtual or in-person visits with their siblings. The caregivers often connect so that siblings can visit with each other, and foster parents can provide respite support for one another.

Foster Care Recruitment

Judith Padua, Foster Care Recruitment Coordinator provided the Board with a handout outlining Agency Overview and Highlights of recruitment efforts for 2023. Staff volunteered their time and attended several community events to recruit community members to become foster parents, with an emphasis on targeting diverse populations. Sharing the message to become a foster parent will drive community members to reach out and connect with the agency. There are different levels of involvement. Some may become licensed to provide respite care while others will become foster parents or foster to adopt. Some are ready for placements and licensing right away while others need to think about it and need time to prepare. Emails were sent to target populations in September and October and flyers were mailed out with the Valpak mailer. We also have billboards centrally located in Lorain County. We work in partnership with the Ohio Child Care Resource Center developed by Governor DeWine and the State of Ohio to help with marketing foster care for private and public agencies and help guide families through the licensing process. We are working diligently on developing partnerships with the faith-based community. Judith Padua shared that her goal is to involve more foster parents by attending two (2) churches per month alongside foster parents to share their message from their own point of view. Reengagement of families that have shown past interest in becoming a foster parent is another strategy used to recruit. Judith Padua urged the Board to share the message about becoming a foster parent with coworkers, friends, network groups and others and offered to attend engagements to answer questions and provide more information. We are working diligently to find foster families, and everyone has a responsibility to share the message with others. The agency has two Facebook pages, one for the agency and another for LCCS Foster Parents. We also have a YouTube channel to produce commercials for foster parent recruitment, which features a series on becoming a foster parent, filmed by a professional crew with interviews of foster parents sharing their experiences.

Tawana Jackson suggests the Board consider developing a Foster Parent Recruitment Subcommittee. Christina Doran will follow up with Board Chair Jim Miller and Board Vice Chair Andrew Lipian with the suggestion.

November is National Adoption Month. All of the adoptive families will receive a proclamation and a gift. Kristen Fox-Berki thanked the staff and the Board for their roles in making recruitment efforts a success. Staff hold a recruitment meeting monthly, with an option to participate in-person or virtually and invited the Board to participate.

Issue 2 passed, and marijuana will be legalized. Kristen Fox-Berki is working with the Prosecutor's office for guidance. The measure will take effect 30 days after Election Day. It also goes into a rulemaking and planning phase. Governor DeWine is focusing on the safety and well-being of children.

IV. Executive Director's Report

Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the Ombudsman Quarterly Report from July 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023, including the number of Grievances Filed, Public Complaints, Interested Third Party (ITP), Telephone Calls, Emails, Walk-ins, New Requests for Ombudsman Services this Quarter, Requests Pending from last Quarter and New Requests Resolved within this Quarter. Kristen Fox-Berki reviewed the New Requests.

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hire for the month of October:

1. Jacquilyn Daniels, Fiscal Account Clerk 10/23/23

Leaves for the month of October:

1. Samantha Kimbler, FBC Placement Caseworker 10/6/23
2. Tawana James, DS Caseworker 10/18/23
3. Sarah Blasini, DS Administrative Assistant 10/27/23
4. Rainelle Henry, DS Caseworker 10/31/23

B. Visitation Center

The architect completed the field study and sent floor plans earlier today. Kristen Fox-Berki will review them with staff. Lee Armbruster asked about seeking input from clients, and the benefit of creating a focus group with stakeholders. This suggestion will be taken under advisement. Kristen Fox-Berki will seek input from staff that will be utilizing the facility, including the Independent Living department. We are also in the process of securing a lawn care contract. The Visitation Center will be moved to the Executive Director's Report Agenda Item for future Board meetings.

C. Policy 6.6 Adoption, Foster and Kinship Rates

Tabled.

V. Fiscal Reports

None.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. LCCFFC Contract Approval

Tabled.

VII. Executive Session (to discuss litigation, personnel matters and other matters required to be kept confidential by law)

None.

VIII. Announcements

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with an invitation to the 2023 Family Based Care Holiday Party for foster parents and kinship caregivers at the Elyria Polish Club on Sunday, December 3, 2023, from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Tawana Jackson to adjourn the Board meeting at 6:36 p.m. Motion carried.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 20, 2023, 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:
Christina Doran, Board Secretary