**WESTERN PRAIRIE HUMAN SERVICES BOARD MEETING**

**August 2, 2024**

The meeting of the Joint Powers Board for Western Prairie Human Services was held August 2, 2024 at the Western Prairie Human Services Office in Elbow Lake office.

**MEMBERS PRESENT OTHERS PRESENT MEMBERS ABSENT**

Larry Lindor Stacy Hennen, Director Paul Wildman

Paul Gremmels Tracy Bowman, Fiscal Manger Gordy Wagner

Ken Johnson Chris Schmitz, Executive Assistant

Troy Johnson Crystal Zaviska, Financial Assistance Supervisor

Doyle Sperr Dwight Nelson, Traverse County Commissioner

Paul Gerde Kayla Schmidt, Traverse County Commissioner

Bill LaValley

Dwight Walvatne

**A. Opening:**

1. Chair Troy Johnson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

3. The agenda was reviewed. There is one additional agenda item that needs approval, see item 16. Agenda 10,11 and 12 have been moved, after financials. Commissioner Walvatne made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner LaValley, MCU

4. Approval of the July, 2024 meeting minutes. Commissioner Gerde made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Lindor, MCU.

5. A summary of the July 2024 bills was presented by the director. After discussion, Commissioner Lindor made a motion to approve the bills, seconded by Commissioner LaValley MCU.

The fiscal manager reviewed June 2024 financial information. After questions, Commissioner Gerde made a motion to approve the financial reports, seconded by Commissioner Gremmels, MCU.

**B. CONTRACTS/AGREEMENTS**

6. None

**C. OLD BUSINESS**

7. **Out of Home Placement List**

The director discussed the out of home placements for the month of June. Western Prairie Human Services has 20 children in placement which is two less than we had in May. We have two kids in 18-21 placement, both are age 20 now. We have two kids in waivered care one who is 16 and one who is 18 that we are doing some transitional services for before they move to independent living. We have a sibling group of four close to permanency, one more that is going to start on permanency soon, a trial home visit that is reuniting soon, and an adoption that finalized this month. The remaining kids are working towards reunification. The director went over the caseloads in detail and indicated she would like to change the document for that so it is easier to read, the board agreed that it is hard to follow.

8. **Case Counts**

The director discussed the current case counts. Our social services numbers are at their lowest for the year, which is very normal for the time of year. Child protection is generally quietest in the summer, which has been helpful as we have been going through changes in personnel as well as training new staff and trying to hire staff. However, we are at our highest for the year in adult protection, children’s mental health and adult mental health. Our staff remain very busy even with lower numbers as we train two new child protection workers and just hired two more.

The Financial Assistance Supervisor discussed that child support continues to grow as they are extremely busy with legal actions that is represented in the increase in numbers. Child Care Assistance is stable they have denied 4 cases in June. In July the team processed all the COLA disregards and standard changes. This was a big lift as usually as the workers look at every case throughout the month. Otherwise, numbers are very stable. The lead workers have been developing processes and rolling those out to the teams. It has been great to have a high-level reference sheet to allow all workers to reference with hyperlinks into policy and resources. We have learned that everyone needs something different and hopefully this will help fill the gaps of learning in certain areas. We have used collaborative safety to help develop goals for the lead workers and has been a great way to track our progress for team development. Outreach: the parade committee will be handing out 4,000 items at Waterama and Flekkefest thanks to the sponsorship of Prime West and the LAC to raise awareness for food insecurities. We will be distributing small bottles of water, peanut butter packs, Fruit and veggie pouches, fruit cups and fruit snacks.

9. **Personnel/Hiring Update**

The director discussed the agency as a whole is becoming fully staffed with the hiring of two Child Protection in the Glenwood office. One will be starting mid-August and one starting at the end of August.

**D.** **New Business:**

10. **Funding Formula**

The director discussed the funding formula. The Joint Powers Association (JPA) asks that we review the funding formula annually when we review budget, which means that some of the numbers are not their most current since some are updated in September. The annual changes at this point are minimal and the finance committee is recommending it remain as is and not change annually. The director noted that other JPA entities do not change or review their formula annually. They either do not change it at all or they review it at 5- or 10-year increments to promote more stability. Minimally, the finance committee recommends leaving it as is while we have our conversations with Traverse since it will be assessed at that time if we move forward. After discussion, Commissioner K Johnson made a motion to leave the formula where it is, seconded by Commissioner Gerde MCU.

11. **2025 Preliminary Budget**

The director discussed the 2025 Preliminary budget with the board. Western Prairie Human Service overall preliminary budget has changed from 2024 by an increase of $394,365.36. Our preliminary budget includes all of the changes the board discussed in their closed meeting in July and was approved by the finance committee to be moved to the full board for approval in August, to be in compliance with our Joint Powers Agreement. We need formal approval of the prelim budget as well as the levy. After discussion, Commissioner Lindor made a motion to approve the 2025 preliminary budget of $9,494,085.36, seconded by Commissioner Walvante MCU.

12. **2025 Preliminary Levy**

The directory discussed the preliminary levy request which has been approved by our finance committee and moved forward to the full board for 2025 is $3,493,228.36. This is an increase of $132,854.36, which is a 3.9% preliminary increase. When we formed WPHS in 2022, 39.98% of our budget was levy. Generally county human services budgets are around 40-45% levy. Both Grant and Pope County were already fiscally healthy when WPHS was formed, it was a benefit that helped us in our merger. In human services, a merger isn’t necessarily intended to decrease your levy, but it should slow your growth because you have a better scale. Even though we are not huge, that has been shown to be true for us as well. With our preliminary 2025 budget request, 36.79% would be levy, a 3.19% decrease in levy percentage since our inception. So, while our budget has increased, we have been able to maximize our federal and state reimbursements and keep our growth at a reasonable pace while still being 3 deeps in terms of program knowledge. After discussion, Commissioner Gerde made a motion to approve our preliminary levy at $3,493,228.36, seconded by Commissioner LaValley MCU.

13. **Licensing Audit Results**

The director discussed the Western Prairie Human services licensing programs have gone through significant transitions in the past year, having lost the previous licensor, the program moving into another unit, and another social worker moving into the licensor role. During that transition, the new licensor Ashley Kellen, former licensor Brady Brecht, and Amber Ramey worked together to fill gaps and complete all licensing functions while also working their regular caseloads. As this recent audit of child care files illustrates, the three of them came together during a time of tremendous stress and pressure to ensure that the licensed family child care providers in Grant and Pope Counties continued to receive the highest quality service during the transition.

14. **Traverse County Update**

The director discussed with board the potential merge of Traverse county. The executive committee talked about a process to move forward and wanted to update the rest of the board since our discussion in June. The Traverse Board voted 4 to 1 to move forward with discussions with the WPHS board. The no vote indicated that they wanted to hear from staff first. There are several variables that will need to be discussed going forward. Western Prairie Human Services is looking to finalize an agreement by 1/1/2026.

15. **Parental Fee Policy update**

The director discussed the process for implementing a parental fee change. In 2022, guiding agencies reviewed on a case-by-case basis as to whether collecting a fee will impact the parents’ ability to support for reunification. Since the information needed to make these determinations is not solely in one unit, management team decided we would do it as a group. The policy is slightly modified to ensure the process is clearer for implementation. The management team will be completing a form at management for each removal that will review the following questions: Requiring reimbursement/parental fee would compromise the parent’s ability to meet the child’s treatment and rehabilitation needs before the child/children returns to the parents’ home. Requiring reimbursement would compromise the parents’/guardians’ ability to meet the child/children’s needs after the child returns home. Requiring reimbursement would compromise the parents’/guardians’ ability to meet the needs of the family. Redirecting existing child support payments or changing the representative payee of the social security benefits to the lead social services agency would limit the parents’/guardians’ ability to maintain financial stability for the child/children/ upon the child/children’s return home. After discussion, Commissioner Sperr made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gremmels MCU.

16. **Productive Alternatives’ Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU)**

The director discussed the new Crisis Stabilization Unit in Hoffman is requesting a variance to the licensing rules. Both variances are/have been in effect at the original Fergus Falls CSU location. Productive Alternatives is requesting a variance to MN Rule 9555.6225, Subp. 3 that requires a physical examination of each client “no more than 30 days before or within three days after” admission. Due to the nature of crisis admissions and the short term of stay, it is felt that this Rule hinders their ability to expedite services to people in crisis. After discussion, Commissioner Lindor made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Sperr MCU.

**Report from Board Appointments:**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Troy Johnson at 11:05 a.m.

A. Lakeland Mental Health Center………………. K. Johnson/Gerde

B. Horizon Community Health Board……………. Sperr/Walvatne/Lindor/Wagner

C. Prime West Health CBP……………………………... Wagner/K Johnson/T. Johnson/Lindor

D. West Central Communities Action, Inc. ………... K Johnson/Lindor

E. Agency on Aging…………………………………… Lindor/LaValley

F. Child Protection Pre-Placement………………. T. Johnson/Gremmels

G. Rainbow Rider ……………………………………… LaValley/Walvatne/Gerde/

H. R4S Governing and Executive Board…………… K. Johnson/Wildman

I. Child and Youth Council……………………………. Sperr/Wagner

J. WPHS Personnel Committee……………………… Lindor/Wildman/Sperr/T. Johnson

K. WPHS Executive Committee………………………. T. Johnson/Walvatne/Gremmels

l. WPHS Finance Committee………………………... Gerde/Lindor/LaValley/K. Johnson

M. WPHS Safety Committee…………………………………... Sperr/Wildman

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Board Chair Board Secretary