



GENERAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES **Wednesday, January 27, 2021 at 11:00 AM**

PRESENT: Randy Knudson, Renee Grummer-Miller, Emily Zimmon, Ken Benson, Chris Poole, Erin Koehn, Kristi Tisl

STAFF: Ashley Balias

INTRODUCTIONS & CALL TO ORDER:

Ashley Balias welcomed the General Assistance Advisory Board Committee Members and thanked them for their flexibility in making the revised meeting time work. She stated that there were a few things we needed to vote on and approve and so she wanted to ensure that we had a quorum. Members then introduced themselves.

Ashley called the meeting to order at 11:05 A.M.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

GA Advisory Committee reviewed the minutes of October 14, 2020. Motion was made and approved to accept minutes as presented.

BUDGET & POLICY DISCUSSION

Ashley started by reviewing the current budget situation. As of December, 36.2% of the budget had been expended but by this time we would generally expect that 50% would be expended. Ashley stated that this is due to the pandemic and that there are many other resources available in the community. She added that given current trends, we could be looking at up to a \$300,000 surplus. She also added that this is in part due to the continued partnership with Waypoint and other rent/ utility assistance providers. This means that unless GA can meet their whole need, then they are referred to another agency for assistance to make the process effective and efficient for clients. Ashley then stated that there is also about to be another state-wide assistance program that will pay for up to 12 months of rent and up to 3 months of back rent in addition to utility bills. Ashley said that that could exacerbate the potential surplus. Ashley stated that there is absolutely the need out there and that she thought GA could play a role in meeting it with a temporary shift in our policy while we have a surplus and there is the need in the community. Ashley then proposed two ways that we can spend down our current and anticipated surplus to better meet the needs of the community:

Recommendation 1: Fund a position at Waypoint to support to the collaborative effort: \$36,863

Ashley stated that the biggest issue the various agencies participating in this collaboration are having is staff capacity. There are a lot of funds available and a lot more people in need but there wasn't an increase in staffing to accommodate the need. Ashley stated that at their weekly meetings they discussed a staff position at Waypoint that would help to support capacity by doing the following:

- Complete application materials

- o Note, this collaborative is currently in discussion to create a shared application between the providers to further support ease of access and efficiency
- Gather all required information and follow up with clients to get
 - o ID & Social Security Card (SS for all household members)
 - o Lease
 - o Utility bills
 - o Past 30 days of income
 - o Bank statements
 - o Possibly other documents but that would be determined
- Submit documents to a shared, protected database that rent and utility providers could access.

So this would mean that before an agency receives a referral this position would be collecting and assisting clients to gather all required information and documentation. Ashley stated that in General Assistance this would be a great help because that is something that staff spend lot of time doing - tracking down paperwork and required documentation. Ashley stated that one big benefit to this is that it would support all agencies and clients not just General Assistance. Ashley then asked for any additional questions and asked for a motion to approve. Emily Zimmon made the motion and Renee Grummer-Miller seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

Recommendation 2: Increase payments to applicants until surplus is spent down

Ashley stated that she has discussed the idea of the surplus and has tried to figure out the best way to meet the need. As previously stated, the need is still very much there even with all of the other resources, but our current policy does not meet that need as it currently stands. In discussing this with the other providers, this is the recommended temporary policy change:

Increase monthly payments until the surplus is spent down:

- Double payments to \$900 for "Needy" households
- Allow for paying 2 months at one time (\$1,800 at one time but then they are no longer eligible for the rest of the year) if:
 - Owe back rent
 - Owe back utility bills

Ashley stated that there are many benefits to doing it this way because we would not only better meet the community need but we would also serve clients more efficiently and save on staff time - only work on each household once instead of twice. Ashley then asked if there were any questions and then asked for a motion. Chris Poole stated that he was concerned that GA may overspend and then run out of funds. Ashley stated that GA is now in a new data management system that allows for a much better and real time look at where we stand with the budget and so that would not be an issue. The budget will be closely assessed if we went this route. Chris Poole then made the motion to approve this recommendation. Erin Koehn seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Ashley thank the committee for their time and consideration. She stated that both of these recommendation would then got to the Linn County Community Services Board on 2/9/21 for approval.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ashley then stated that there was not too much time left but wanted to start the strategic planning conversation with the Advisory committee. Ashley asked for any priorities that committee members had. It was noted by multiple members that increasing the rate that we pay for burials needs to increase since it has been so long since it was previously updated. Ashley

stated that she was able to find the previous meeting minutes in which that was discussed and it was from 2008 when it increased from \$750 to \$1,000.

Ashley then stated that one thing she has considered is to add a staff person to the department that would solely be focused on helping clients submit SSI claims. She stated that because we have a longer term relationship with clients when they become “ongoing” while they apply for SSI she thought that this would be a good idea. Additionally, she said it would add more sustainability to the budget since we are paid back from most when they win their case with SSI. She thought keeping this all within the department made a lot of sense. She stated that they would need to be SOAR trained and still needed to investigate what that would entail and how we would fund the position. Chris Poole and Emily Zimmon stated that they support this because there is a need for more SOAR trained professionals in the community to help clients submit SSI claims. They also added that there are grants available for these types of positions through SAMSHA.

Ashley thanked the committee for their time and consideration. She stated that the strategic planning conversation would continue into the spring.

MEETING SCHEDULE

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.