



GENERAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 2:00 PM

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

STAFF: Ashley Balius

INTRODUCTIONS & CALL TO ORDER:

Ashley Balius welcomed the General Assistance Advisory Board Committee Members.

Ashley called the meeting to order at 2:01 P.M.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

GA Advisory Committee reviewed the minutes of January 27, 2021. Motion was made and approved to accept minutes as presented.

BUDGET & POLICY DISCUSSION

Ashley started by reviewing the current budget situation. As of March, 59.7% of the budget had been expended but by this time we would generally expect that 75% 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 a large 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 she believes that currently we are not seeing as many people because of tax refunds and stimulus checks. Ashley said that this is likely to exacerbate the potential surplus. Ashley stated that this was why the Advisory Committee approved the temporary exception for needy applicants at the last meeting. Ashley then reviewed the exception already in place:

Increase payments to "Needy" applicants until 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 have not been as many people utilizing this as we expected but again believed this was due to the many other resources in the community as well as tax refunds and stimulus checks.

Ashley stated that when we realized we were still looking at a potentially large surplus the staff started to think about what other opportunities we might have to make an impact in the community much like the temporary exceptions we have already approved. The staff realized that our area of biggest opportunity is with our ongoing. Ashley reminded the Advisory

Committee that our ongoing clients can receive monthly assistance from GA until they receive a decision on their application for SSI. GA is reimbursed for all assistance provided so long as they win their case. Currently GA pays \$450 per program guidelines but we could be reimbursed for up to \$794 per month per the Social Security Administration. So, Ashley stated that GA would like to pilot temporarily increasing the reimbursement rate for ongoing clients to the maximum that we can be reimbursed for, currently \$794 through the end of this fiscal year for the months of April, May, and June. Ashley stated that there are a few other reasons to make this change. First, we are paid back for a majority of ongoing clients we assist: 61% in FY19 and 69% in FY20. Also, because it seems like the right thing to do for our clients. Currently, if an ongoing client attempts to work to make ends meet, they are disqualified from the program because they would not win their case for SSI. However, this means that we are asking ongoing clients to make their monthly budget work with whatever they get in food stamps, GA's \$450 for housing & utilities, and any other unearned income they can gather which of course is not doable for most and so they are often behind on bills. Ashley stated that in the short term, she hopes this will help our ongoing clients get caught up on any bills that they are behind on, but help us better understand what the impact of this may be in the long term. Ashley said because it seems like the right thing to do she is going to pursue this as a permanent change but acknowledges we need to better understand what this would mean to the program if pursued. The Advisory Committee supported this approach and approved this temporary change.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ashley then stated that the next topic of discussion was to discuss strategic planning. Ashley stated that her goal today is to walk through a series of questions and have a high level conversation about General Assistance and where we want to see the program go.

- What do you think of first when I say "General Assistance"
 - o Rent
 - o Funeral expenses
 - o Confusing
 - o Vague title
 - o Last resort - can't get assistance anywhere else
 - o Paperwork
 - o Helpful
- What do we know about rent/ utility/ burial assistance in Linn County?
 - o Don't qualify because they already receive HUD funding - have to explain the programs - confusing eligibility depending on the programs
- What concerns you?
 - o Families, larger sized units, falling through the cracks or are not eligible
 - o Lack of awareness about General Assistance
 - o Rising rent costs/ stable assistance amount being provided
 - o Getting to rural residents (are we getting to the rural populations?)
 - o Lawful sources of income legislations - what impact will that have on GA?
- What is most exciting?
 - o Changes that have been made to the program
 - o Continuing to change based on what community needs
 - o Streamlining of services
 - o Much for customer/ user friendly
 - o Continuing to step up and work with and for community after disaster/ pandemic
- Where is more work needed?

- o Burial funds - does not pay what it costs - especially with the increase use of GA
- o Costs of everything has gone up - can we get more funds for GA
- o Continue to look at the covid-model of service provision - not making people come to the building for services
- o Continue to evaluate staffing model
- What questions does this conversation raise for you?
 - o Are we getting customer feedback? They will have better insights than the GAAC
 - o How can we clarify eligibility for GA so people know - improve ease of access
 - Why don't they qualify - make that clear concise and up front
 - o How do we become more culturally responsive/ accommodating related to burial assistance
- What kind of changes will we need to make?
 - o Increase the amount for burial assistance
 - o Focused on family size and make changes related to that - single person v. family of 7 - very different situations
 - o How do we effectively bring back the food/ non-food program
 - o Is it more beneficial to support a food pantry that will still provide the needed items?
 - o Could we pay for legal services when ILA?
 - When ILA cannot represent - can we somehow fill this gap?
 - o Can we partner more closely with ILA - they come in a few times a week
- What thoughts or ideas has this conversation triggered for you?
 - o Car repairs - difficult to do but worth it
 - Preferred relationship with a particular vendor that can be trusted
 - o Assistance with application fees - how could we assist with that
 - They can get really expensive.... Do we want to do some investigation into whether or not people may be successful
 - No one else is doing this -would not be a duplication.
 - o Expungement for rental history - where someone was taken to court but maybe not evicted.
 - o People returning from prison, immigrant & refugee, and homeless population

MEETING SCHEDULE

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

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.