



GENERAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES Wednesday, January 8, 2020 at 2:00 PM

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

STAFF: Ashley Balius & David Thielen

INTRODUCTIONS & CALL TO ORDER:

Ashley Balius welcomed the General Assistance Advisory Board Committee Members. Members then introduced themselves.

Ashley called the meeting to order at 2:00 P.M.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

GA Advisory Committee reviewed the minutes of October 23, 2019. Motion was made and approved to accept minutes as presented.

BUDGET USAGE INFORMATION

Ashley then reviewed the GA Budget Usage information. She stated that because of the holidays the last few weeks and the timing of this meeting we do not yet have all of the data for December compiled and so we will be looking at trends we are seeing July through November. She started by telling the Advisory Board that as of right now we are over budget. The expected budget utilization for this time of year is 41.7 and that is due to a significant increase in volume over the past few months, October in particular. She stated that she suspects this is in part due to the policy changes which slightly expanded eligibility and likely increased awareness of services offered. However, Ashley stated that she also felt like something else was going on in the community to cause this significant increase in traffic to the General Assistance office and so she looked at the 211 caller data to see if they saw an increase in demand for rent and utility assistance as that is the best dataset we have that is up to date to refer to. Ashley then reviewed a few slides comparing 211 caller data to GA budget utilization data and highlighted the following points:

- October was a very busy month and the main reason we see a tight budget now
 - o Requests for rent assistance increased in October for both GA and 211
 - GA also saw a spike in increased asks for lot rent. Ashley noted that given the state and national conversation around lot rents this is something we are going to keep an eye on to gauge what is happening locally
 - o Requests for utility assistance increased in October for both GA and 211
 - In reviewing the last 2 years of 211 caller data, requests for utility assistance doubled in the month of October 2019 as compared to previous years
 - o Requests for Burial Assistance were also very high in October
 - Unusual for this time of year as we typically see this spike in December and January

Ashley then reviewed appointment data and shared the following highlights

- There have been no unused appointments since September 2019
 - o Typically we have anywhere from 10 - 70 unused appointments in a month
 - o October 2017 - 50 unused
 - o October 2018 - 18
- There has been a waitlist for the months of December, January and now February
- The waitlist for January appointments reached 62
 - o January appointments filled before the end of December
- The waitlist so far for February is at 36

UPDATES

Ashley then stated that since the agenda went out originally there have been a few questions that have come up. She started with the first one which was a question from Abbe. Ashley explained that Abbe is a community agency that we frequently work with and that they have a few supportive housing units that we have previously not paid to. Ashley stated that this has been our practice because Abbe rents the apartments and the tenants essentially sublet from Abbe, meaning that the tenant is not on the lease which has been mandatory in the past. This is because we only make payments to landlords directly and so we want to ensure that we are in fact paying rent for the correct tenant. However, Theresa Graham-Mineart has requested that we reconsider this practice and allow for payment to Abbe Supportive Housing units. She has provided documentation of an agreement that they have between the tenant and Abbe that is accepted by HUD and Rapid Rehousing. Ashley then asked the Advisory Board what their thoughts were on changing this practice. Ashley stated that her recommendation to the Board is to allow for this practice when it is from a community agency that we work with on a regular basis and documentation can be provided. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed that it made sense to pay in this instance since it is a community agency that we work with on a regular basis. Ashley recommended that if this comes up again with another community agency that we handle this on a case by case basis.

Ashley then moved on to the next topic of discussion which is a potential change to a General Assistance Resolution in regards to ongoing clients and unearned income. She stated that the current resolution states that an applicant cannot receive ongoing assistance if they have an unearned income greater than \$150. We commonly see this impacting families that are receiving FIP assistance or have a child that receives disability. Ashley noted that this same policy does not apply to our needy applicants. If they receive FIP or a child receives disability then it is simply counted against the overall income guidelines. Ashley then described a situation we have right now with a mother that cannot work due to cardiac issues as a result of childbirth and is seeking temporary ongoing assistance for up to 6 months. She has a child that is deaf and currently receives disability assistance. She is currently requesting an exception to the policy for her situation. With this request Ashley stated that she wanted to bring this discussion to this Advisory Board. Ashley stated that she would really like to make an exception in this case but this is a common issue that comes up and it would not be fair to make an exception in this case when it has not been made for others in a similar situation. Ashley stated that she would rather pursue a change that makes sense to the resolution and then can be applied equally throughout the community. She stated that she would like to hear feedback from this Board on this topic. She added that this will likely be a discussion topic today but a voting item in the future to then go before the Linn County Community Services Board as well as the Board of Supervisors. The Board agreed that with the state of the budget and past practice, it would be better to deny the request for an exception to policy now and make a change to apply to all of Linn County in the future.

Ashley then discussed the revised survey that the Board had previously approved. She stated that it has not yet been administered but will be as soon as we move downstairs in a couple of weeks.

Ashley also mentioned to the Board that through the Learning Institute, we are looking to completely change the way we provide assistance because our current operation puts a lot of burden on our clients. She stated that making people come in twice, once for the screening and once for their appointment, is a lot to ask of people in crisis that already struggle with transportation. We are going to use Polk County General Assistance as an example and provide services electronically. We would still have appointments with persons who want them or who may have a more difficult case. Our hope is that we would be able to handle each situation more efficiently and be able to respond to requests closer to the time frame in which they request assistance from us. In addition, we would be able to accommodate different schedules that people may have and be more accessible to rural residents in need of assistance. Ashley stated that this is still very much a work in progress but a goal that we are striving to meet. The Board agreed that the screening form process can be a burden to clients but also stated that they felt like in person appointments can be beneficial. Ashley stated that she agreed and would always allow for the option of appointments. She stated that she would keep this Board informed and seek their input as we move through this change.

Finally, Ashley wanted to share some news about what is happening with another General Assistance Department in the state. She said that recently the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors decided to 'privatize' their General Assistance program. They will now pay a Dubuque non-profit \$30,000 to allocate their \$100,000 budget. Ashley stated that she will be anxious to hear how this new relationship goes and if there is anything that we can learn and benefit from in Linn County.

MEETING SCHEDULE

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, April 8, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. Ashley stated that this may be cancelled as she is pregnant and due April 9, 2020. She stated that she will be sure to let the Advisory Board know if this will be cancelled. If it is cancelled, the next meeting will be on July 8, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 2:57 p.m.