

Ward County Human Service Zone Board

Minutes

Special Board Meeting – April 6, 2021 – 8:00 a.m.
Second Floor-Ward County Commissioner's Chambers

PRESENT:

Melissa Bliss, Zone Director
Rich Berg
Mac McLeod
Hiedi Folstad-Miller
John Fjeldahl
John Pietsch
Shelly Weppler

ABSENT: Clayton Fegley

Also present was Karen Schultz, Zone Board Secretary designee and Youthworks (YW) Program Manager, Emily Yanish, was present by teleconference.

The purpose for today's meeting was to discuss concerns brought up at the last Ward County HSZ Board Meeting regarding issues at the safe bed shelter. The Board had questions regarding policies and procedures governing the placement of non-Ward County youth in the shelter, as well as concerns for the assignment of liability for the youth and staff at the facility as well as any damages that may occur as a result of the youth's behavior.

Director Melissa Bliss provided the Board with information as to usage thus far in 2021 as well as a copy of the Shelter Care Service Agreement between the Ward County HSZ and Youthworks. Ward County also has an agreement with Youthworks to utilize the space for Attendant Care placements by local law enforcement. She indicated that early on in discussions regarding the shelter program, out-of-county placements were discussed as possibilities, as neighboring Zones are having similar difficulties finding placements for some youth with behavioral issues. Three other custodial agencies outside of Ward County have utilized the shelter. North Central Human Services has used the shelter bed for Respite for some of their youth. These placements are no longer than 24 hours and usually far less. Having other entities utilize the shelter has helped to keep the program funded and staffed.

Concerns were voiced by Board Member Weppler that the non-WCHSZ placements were outside of the contract, that the only agreements in place are for Ward County youth to utilize the space and that an MOU more specific to the use of the space and expectations regarding liability and responsibility should be in place in order to protect the County. Additionally, she stated that she would like to see Youthworks provide a plan to Ward County regarding usage by other entities.

Ms Yanish responded to the concerns by indicating that when YW contracted with the Ward County HSZ, it was at a reduced rate. When other custodial entities use the program, they are asked to pay more, which goes toward assisting with staffing costs. She further indicated that it was the initial understanding that the shelter would likely be utilized by other Zones, which would serve a need and help defray costs, though this does not appear to be in writing in our agreement. Board members voiced that they were not aware that it was being used by other entities and the question was raised if the County should be seeing some financial reimbursement for the use of the facility itself, as well as a contract or MOU re: liability and program rules.

Questions from the Board were regarding maintenance and repair/renovation; how many children were placed at one time in the shelter; the number of days a youth could be sheltered; and the staff to youth ratio.

Ms. Yanish indicated that, in regard to renovations including a shower, it was not their intention that the county would pay that entire cost and that YW was willing to assist with those costs. She indicated on one occasion, they had three youth in the facility, a few times, there were two and more often than not, there is one youth placed. They accept youth between the ages of 12-17 with 14-15 being the average age. Our Service Agreement indicates they will take only one shelter youth at a time, but that may be negotiable for our agency in more dire situations. There is a staff person on call 24/7 for possible placements, but based on need, additional staff can be brought in at any time if the numbers require it. YW Staff has never been assaulted or improperly accused of anything. Web based cameras are in place and staff has a cell phone on them at all times.

Director Bliss added that without this program in place, Ward County Human Service Zone staff could wind up staying with the youth in our office or in the facility, which has happened on a handful of occasions prior to Youthworks taking over the sheltering program. She also indicated an interest in knowing whether Juvenile Detention takes in youth from other counties and if so, a desire to see their contracts that are in place as far as liability for the county and maintenance, etc.

Board members voiced agreement that an MOU, contracts or agreements need to be in place to outline the areas discussed today, with specific interest in liability, procedures and financial compensation when youth from outside of Ward County are placed in the shelter care facility.

Director Bliss and the Board were in agreement that agencies other than Ward County HSZ and local law enforcement will not be allowed to use the Ward County facility until further notice. The Ward County Human Service Board will meet at their regular scheduled meeting in two weeks and prior to that time, Director. Bliss and Ms. Yanish will begin drafting a new MOU beyond the current Service Agreements.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 a.m.

Melissa Bliss, Ward CHSZ Director

Date

Mac McLeod, Ward CSSZ Board Secretary