**City of Alexandria, Virginia**

**Department of Community and Human Services**

**Social Services Advisory Board Meeting Notes**

**May 18, 20206**

**Present:** Abby Curran Horrell, Karen Carter (Co-Chair), Shawna Gary, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Ashley Caison (Virtual)

**Absent:** Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair)

**Call to Order/Welcome**:

The May meeting was called to order by Karen Carter (Co-Chair) at 7:15 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** The review of April's meetings minutes did not take place due to not being disturbed with enough time to review, SSAB members decided to move the approval of April's minutes to the June meeting.

**SSAB Member Updates:**

- Karen Carter (Co-Chair), Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) and Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) attended the quarterly Boards and Commissions Chairs Meeting held on May 11, 2026.
    - During that meeting other boards shared having difficulties recruiting new members. A strategy being implemented with some housing boards is a merging of some boards that have overlapping missions to help address this.
- SSAB members shared that they have shared to their respective networks the posting to sign up for the Board.
    - The recruitment efforts will continue as the Board continues to consider ways of attracting new members.

**SSAB Visioning Session Discussion:**

SSAB members used the session to develop a vision towards a work plan for the new structure of co-leadership for the Board. This would define the purpose of the board, the direction the board is going, and be used to attract new members. While also supporting the same priorities for the new term of the co-chair(s) of 2 years.

***SSAB members discussed questions:***

- What does this board do?
- What is this board uniquely positioned to do that others cannot?
- Which activities in the last 12 months have most directly connected to our core purpose?
- In the last 12 months what are we doing out of habit that we might not choose if starting fresh?

- What would meaningful impact look like for the next 18 months?
- What does the community need most from an advisory board like this?
- What would be our 2-3 top priorities?

***Historical Role of the Board:***

Board members agreed that the Board has historically fulfilled the following roles: advocacy, support of DCHS staff; and learning about the City's social services and their associated challenges. Members highlighted that presentations from guest speakers have been particularly valuable and expressed a desire to make greater use of the insights gained.

***Unique Positioning of the Board:***

SSAB members identified that the Board is uniquely positioned to:

- Advocate directly with City leaders on matters heard from the community, non-profits, and DCHS staff;
- Participate in community activities uplifting the learnings of the Board while representing voices that are not present in the setting;
- Advocating and connecting with other social services boards;
- Acting is based on information learned from expert guest speakers.

***Activities Most Connected to Core Purpose:***

In the last 12-month activities most directly connected to the Board's core purpose were:

- Touring Carpenter's Shelter and visiting ALIVE! Food distribution center:
- Sending a budget letter to council members:
- Listening to presentations from SS divisions within DCHS community to develop understanding of issues;
- Attending community information sessions on priorities of the board;
- Supporting appreciation efforts of DCHS staff.

***Moving Forward:***

The board members highlighted the following changes to implement:

- Learning and adhering to the Robert's Rules of Order in board meeting rules more closely,
- Ensuring to follow up more swiftly and diligently on concerns and needs raised by guest speakers.
    - Inviting speakers that are directly connected through this visioning exercise
    - After each speaker committing to follow-up by "what do we do with this information" discussion item to the agenda, and afterwards someone sending a thank you to the speaker with an offer of support.

- Sharing out on the four hours of service per month that Board members are completing.

***Meaningful impact in the next 18 months:***

SSAB members discussed what meaningful impact would look like over the next 18 months:

- Advocacy efforts on behalf of community and DCHS being listened to by City leaders not just City Council;
- Connect with the City's legislative liaison;
- Be present at DCHS-sponsored events,
- Become known to the people to the people on whose behalf the Board advocates for, a focus on more community engagement with the community that DCHS serves.
- Connect with other SSABs across the region.

***Community Needs:***

The SSAB discussed that community that DCHS serves needs most from the board is consistency, awareness, the ability to voice their needs and concerns, a deep understanding of concerns/barriers, advocacy and action/visibility.

***SSAB decided that the top four priorities would be:***

1. Focusing on SSAB Membership

- engagement- new member recruitment through all available networks
- retention – focusing on creating ways to retain people that are currently engaged by finding more ways to connect
- orientation- while the state offers an orientation creating a way for new members to be orientated to the City of Alexandria Social Services specifically.

2. Advocating for Public benefits

- Respond to the needs of community members served by DCHS;
- Create opportunities to hear the voices of the people the Board represents.

3. Support and respond to the needs of the DCHS employees

- Respond to the needs of DCHS employees, including matters such as teleworking policy.

4. Education/advocacy

- Research and visit providers to identify how the Board can best support them;
- Respond to the needs of community members served by DCHS;
- Partnership with other Boards and Committees on shared priorities, or advocating for SSAB's priorities;
- Engaging local businesses.

***Implementation of priorities:***

SSAB members how to ensure goals and priorities would be met. Key measures identified include:

- Designating a project manager, whether appointed or volunteer to oversee implementation;
    - Someone that would be responsible for establishing the initial workplans.
- Having the Board establish timelines for each priority;
- Conducting regular review of priorities;
- Forming subcommittees based on members' personal interests and areas of knowledge to take ownership of the work;
    - This would also require assigning a lead for each priority/subcommittee area to keep the full Board informed;
- Incorporating the perspectives of the communities served by DCHS, which are currently underrepresented on the Board.

**Nest steps:**

SSAB members acknowledged that several next steps are available to the Board; however, they agreed to prioritized membership recruitment to build capacity necessary to implement the identified priorities.

**Upcoming Meetings:**

SSAB members voted to hold the June meeting on a different Monday due to vacation schedules and to hold June's meeting off-site.

- Next Meeting Date: June 22nd
- Location: Community Lodgings, 3912 Elbert Ave, Suite 108, Alexandria 22305
- Time: 7:00 pm-9:00 pm
- SSAB will be on summer break during the months of July and August.

**Meeting adjourned: 8:15 pm**