

**GEAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF MENTAL HEALTH
AND RECOVERY SERVICES**

**Steven Oluic
Chairman of the Board**

**13244 Ravenna Road
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**Leila Vidmar
Interim Executive Director**

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Board Minutes

February 15, 2023

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ann Bagley, Alberta Chokshi, Martin Fay, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Linda Miller, Gregory O'Brien, Steven Oluic, Michael Petruziello, Mary Ruth Shumway

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Walter Claypool, Carolee Lesyk, Ryan Mekota

GUESTS: Melanie Blasko (Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers), Mary Wynne-Peaspanen (Signature Health), Shelly Lewis (Geauga League of Women Voters), Tia Lawrence (Torchtlight), Vicki Clark and Marsha Pettus (Ravenwood Health), Michelle Bertman (Catholic Charities), Kim Carter and Kevin Liptrap (NAMI Geauga), Anastasia Nicholas (Chagrin Valley Times), Andrea Gutka (WomenSafe), Angi Daugherty (Family Pride)

STAFF PRESENT: Leila Vidmar, Teresa Slater, Christine Lakomiak

I. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL

Dr. Oluic called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was then recited. Ms. Chokshi called the roll for attendance purposes and the following Board members were present: Alberta Chokshi, Martin Fay, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Linda Miller, Gregory O'Brien, Steven Oluic, Michael Petruziello, Mary Ruth Shumway. Ms. Bagley arrived at 6:04 PM.

II. APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES FROM JANUARY 18, 2023

Ms. Johnson moved to approve the Minutes as written. Ms. Chokshi seconded the motion. **Voice Vote: Ayes-8; Nays-0; Abstentions-1. Motion approved.**

III. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dr. Oluic said this is a good day for the Board and Geauga county. We are moving forward and have overcome dysfunction as reported yesterday. He reported that the Selection Committee has made a decision as to the new Executive Director and the Board can now move forward in the hiring process. The Selection Committee was comprised of himself, Ms. Miller, Ms. Chokshi, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Petruziello. They reviewed 20 applications. Nine were good, they narrowed it down to 6 applicants, and then chose three individuals for phone interviews – Adrian Springfield, Christine Lakomiak, and Diane Grendell. Ms. Lakomiak was brought in for a face to face interview and is the best candidate for the position. She was offered and has accepted the position of Executive Director.

Dr. Oluic reminded everyone that a Board member has resigned. There will be more state and county positions open after June 30th. Dr. Oluic then introduced Christine Lakomiak, the Board's new Executive Director. Ms. Lakomiak thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve in this capacity. She then briefly talked about her professional and personal background.

IV. INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Vidmar referred to her written report and provided the following updates:

- She has been part of the transition team to welcome Ms. Lakomiak. She thanked staff and the Board for their work.
- Ms. Slater has continued to be cross-trained in other areas.
- She picked up the duties of the Associate Director, which includes client rights. The staff has developed a matrix of what is outstanding and every program the Associate Director was involved with.
- She has been in contact with OhioMHAS about the request for proposal process.
- She helped put together the EMDR Resolution.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Agency Relations

Ms. Johnson reported that she and Ms. Miller will be working together starting next week and will meet with agency directors as soon as possible. She attended the Geauga Faith Coalition meeting on February 11th. This Coalition is not a function of the Board, but we are a member. It is not large group at this point. The main purpose for the formation of the Coalition is to bring resources together for churches and to add faith-based resources to that list. Ms. Martin-D'Arienzo created a "street card" that lists social service entities and what resources/programs are available in the county. There is one church at the forefront of the Coalition. Their next meeting will be held in the Board's conference room on March 6th at 5:00 PM.

Ms. Shumway said the Board has briefly talked about doing an RFP bi-annually and feels the Board needs to think about the mental wellness of the agencies when making that decision. Ms. Johnson replied she can investigate that issue.

b. Finance

Mr. Petruziello reported that the committee met prior to this meeting to review Ravenwood Health's audit. They are working on a corrective plan of action to address the deficiencies listed.

c. Planning and Policies

Ms. Chokshi reported the committee will be looking at the policy manual and updating it as needed. The committee talked about creating a policy to address working from home.

They also discussed the process used to choose agencies for funding. Ms. Bagley said there was quite a lot of discussion on how to review the policies.

d. Capital Planning

Ms. Shumway had nothing to report at this time.

e. Opiate Hub

Ms. Miller had nothing new to report at this time. One of the subcommittees did recently meet at the Board office.

f. Executive Director Selection

This agenda item was discussed during the Chairman's Report.

VI. BOARD REVIEW AND ACTION ITEMS

a. Resolution 23-02-1 Permanent Supportive Housing Program Grant Award

Dr. Oluic asked Ms. Slater to read the Resolution. Ms. Miller moved to approve the Resolution. Ms. Bagley seconded the motion. Discussion: It was requested that CEO be removed so that it reads Executive Director. **Roll Call Vote: Ayes-10; Nays-0; Abstentions-0. Motion approved.**

b. Resolution 23-02-2 Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Training Funding Request from Ravenwood Health

Dr. Oluic explained that this funding request from Ravenwood Health is for financial support to have four therapists receive Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing training. Ms. Shumway moved to approve the Resolution. Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Bagley said she has heard great stuff about this program, and it is a great move for Ravenwood to have staff trained in this therapy. Ms. Chokshi said agency staff need to receive training when new techniques are developed. Dr. Oluic commented that in his personal experience, there are not enough practitioners, but there are many people who would benefit from this therapy. Ms. Shumway said she has been sending people out of the county to receive EMDR therapy.

Ms. Clark said she only asked for funds to train four therapists, but she has ten who would like to go through this training. Ms. Daugherty has staff that would like to be trained if there is an opportunity to send more staff from Geauga county. Mr. Petruziello asked what data will be presented to show this type of therapy is working effectively and what mechanism is used to measure outcomes to determine if it works or not. Ms. Daugherty said her agency became certified to provide this therapy after the Chardon shooting. EMDR therapy can greatly reduce the length of stay and length of service. This therapy can be very effective after as little as ten sessions if received soon after a traumatic event.

Ms. Bagley asked if this therapy can be used for those suffering from depression and early childhood trauma they don't remember. Ms. Clark said the study of what this therapy helps with has been expanded. Ms. Bertman said she was trained in EMDR therapy last June. It can open a door to barriers and achieve a new level of healing by changing a person's neural pathways. It has been shown to be effective in healing preverbal trauma.

Mr. O'Brien said it is great to get people trained in new therapy methods. He asked what assurances the agency will receive so that someone doesn't leave and go somewhere else after receiving this training. Ms. Clark said the therapists will sign an agreement to stay for two years. Mr. O'Brien suggested that the other providers submit requests to the Board for what they need to have clinicians trained to provide EMDR. Dr. Oluic agrees that there has to be a mechanism in place if someone leaves and takes this skill with them.

Ms. Vidmar said she is trained in EMDR and suggested offering a countywide training. She said this therapy can address losses and trauma a person may not even know exists. Dr. Oluic asked if staff are certified to teach EMDR after receiving the training. Ms. Miller suggested amending the Resolution to provide Ravenwood with funding to train eight therapists as a starting point. Mr. O'Brien again suggested other agencies submit requests for staff to be trained in this therapy.

Ms. Miller moved to amend the Resolution to pay for eight therapists from Ravenwood Health to receive EMDR training at a total cost of \$11,200.00. Ms. Shumway seconded the motion. She then asked agencies if this training was provided inhouse countywide - she is assuming at a lower cost - how many additional staff would agencies want to get trained. Mr. O'Brien loves the idea of saving money, but he doesn't know how long it would take to get a trainer here and at what cost. Ms. Lakomiak said there are certification classes held on weekends, which would mitigate the issue of reduced productivity. A "claw back" requirement could be put in place however the training occurs. **Roll Call to Amend the Resolution: Ayes-10; Nays-0; Absention-0. Motion to amend the Resolution approved.**

Ms. Miller moved to approve the amended Resolution. Ms. Bagley seconded the motion. Discussion: Mr. O'Brien asked Ms. Clark to supply the names of the individuals she will be sending to the training. He would also like the names of any other agency staff who receive this training due to the financial support of the Board. **Roll Call Vote on the Amended Resolution: Ayes-10; Nays-0; Abstentions-0. Motion approved.**

c. Resolution 23-02-03 Hiring of Board Executive Director

Dr. Oluic said Ms. Lakomiak's actual start date is March 13th, but she will be transitioning and meeting with staff in the meantime. Ms. Johnson moved to formalize hiring Christine Lakomiak as the Board's new Executive Director. Ms. Bagley seconded the motion. **Roll Call Vote: Ayes-10; Nays-0; Abstentions-0. Motion approved.**

d. Financial Reports

Dr. Oluic read the written recap submitted by Mr. Mausser. Dr. Oluic said the Board has a lot to accomplish this calendar year, including addressing housing needs and agency workforce retention.

VII. Discussion Item:

a. Presentation by Vicki Clark, CEO of Ravenwood Health

Dr. Oluic asked Ms. Clark to speak about some of the funding challenges agencies are facing.

Ms. Clark said she has requested help from the Board with salary challenges. She and agency staff met with Dr. Oluic and Mr. Petruziello about this subject. She is not sure what the final solution is, but what may need to change are the rates by conducting a review of the overall system. In the late 80's/early 90's, a unit rate was calculated by developing what the actual cost would be to provide that service, whether paid by Medicaid or the Board. Medicaid then decided what the rate would be and did not take the actual cost into consideration.

In regard to salaries, Ms. Clark gave the example that several years ago the salary for a master's level therapist was \$20,000. It is now \$100,000. Agencies have done many different things, but there is a point where you can't cut costs or get increased production without increasing the cost. Ravenwood has increased production quotas three times. There is a point where you just can't do that anymore. Community counseling services address very complex issues – the mom is depressed, a kid is getting kicked out of school, a husband losing his job, people who are at risk of self-injury, addiction, or overdosing. Clinicians are seeing 5/6 of this type of client every day. Often there are multiple agencies involved or Court ordered services. Private practice clinicians can be more selective with their clientele.

Ravenwood has worked hard to diversify revenue streams – such as contracting with schools, and contracting with Aetna for OhioRISE. They can't survive on fee for service. They are partnering with other agencies, have pursued grants on their own, and looked at many ways on how to make the agency stay afloat. There is a shortage of therapists and psychiatrists in particular and their competitors now are the national organizations. Recently a for profit agency similar to Ravenwood offered therapists \$20,000 more than Ravenwood can pay and are aggressively pursuing other clinicians. Ms. Clark said \$20,000 makes a major difference in someone's life. They are also competing with online services and clinicians who work from home and make great money. Ms. Clark also cited the amount of documentation they must do because of accreditation and outcomes. Private practice, for profit or online services don't have to do all of that. She feels it isn't going to get better, but is going to get worse. Ravenwood is currently using 26 interns, and can't recruit new clinicians.

Ms. Shumway commented in regard to staffing, she has not seen any staff from the Geauga Youth Center attend any court hearings. Ms. Bagley suggested agencies could

sponsor interns who want to get their Masters of Social Work degree. Ms. Clark said agencies collaborate very well with each other and clients get great care. GYC staff is a whole other area – some kids are in residential placement, sometimes there is not enough staff to cover shifts, so therapists are covering and then doing regular work the next day. She emphasized the need for agencies to increase salaries. Ravenwood recently lost an employee who went to work at Aldi's.

Dr. Oluic said the Board has discussed various options available to address this issue, including increasing reimbursement rates, looking at giving agencies block grant assistance, and other means of addressing these shortfalls. He is hearing about the increased need for mental health services to youth, a shortage of staff, and a lack of funding. He is very concerned that we are heading for a collapse of mental health care. Mr. O'Brien said in regard to the challenges with labor and costs, the Board may not be able to completely bridge the gap between the non-profit and private sectors. He suggested the agencies each submit some type of financial spreadsheet to the Board showing the work force challenges they are experiencing in hiring and retaining staff who are qualified. For someone starting out, \$20,000 difference in pay definitely moves the needle. He would like the Board to work toward providing the funds agencies need to get and keep qualified individuals. The Board may also be in a position to provide funding for staff training as well. Mr. O'Brien is also curious what agencies have to do now and why they have to do something they didn't have to ten years ago.

Mr. Petruziello feels a lot of these issues need to be addressed through the legislature. It is important to explain the problems agencies are having and remove some of the burden. Mr. O'Brien responded that could be part of the Board's long-term vision. Ms. Bertman said insurance rates are being reviewed. Geauga has many private practitioners with various funding mechanisms in place. Agencies are challenged in this area in that they can only accept certain clients depending on the staff licensure requirements. Ms. Vidmar said independently licensed clinicians can provide virtual therapy and can make a lot of money that way.

Ms. Chokshi said each agency is certified to provide particular programs and services. She feels the Board can use the outcomes necessary for certification purposes to help decrease some of the burden on agencies. Ms. Gutka said each funder requires a different set of outcomes. Ms. Clark said a private agency from Cuyahoga has approached staff at Ravenwood to come work for them. She is not sure how agencies who are trying to establish community behavioral health centers are able to make ends meet. Ms. Chokshi said community mental health centers in Cuyahoga didn't succeed and big agencies absorbed small agencies. Ms. Bertman said all of these challenges make them prime pickings for bigger agencies because they can't compete – due to salaries, reimbursement rates, medical model requirements. Mr. Petruziello said the Board has to collectively look for a different approach and be very creative so local non-profit agencies can compete.

Dr. Oluic said the Board has been hearing about the money issue for quite a while. This is a crisis that needs to be addressed. One of Ms. Lakomiak's priorities will be to meet with agency directors, determine what the issues are, and then bring solutions and recommendations to the Board on how to move forward.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business discussed.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

There was no New Business discussed.

X. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Carter introduced Titan, their newest member of the K9 program. She then introduced Kevin Liptrap, NAMI's new Director of Programs/Outreach/Development.

Ms. Blasko said Ms. Clark did a great job of speaking for all the agencies. She is a member of the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers, who has been looking at the workforce issue and Medicaid rates. In 2012 as a result of Behavioral Health Redesign, some of the rates increased, but many rates were lowered. They did an analysis using consumer price index trends from 2010 to 2019 which she can share with the Board. Ms. Blasko said agencies can't raise their rates and asked the Board to be more involved in this challenge.

Dr. Oluic said the Board should provide leadership and take care of those who live in our county. He then pointed to the Board's Mission Statement. He said there is a lot going on and the Board needs to maintain momentum to get things accomplished.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bagley moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Petruziello seconded the motion. The meeting was then adjourned at 7:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

**Ms. Teresa Slater
Secretary/Receptionist**

**Dr. Steven Oluic
Chairman of the Board**

**Ms. Alberta Chokshi
Secretary of the Board**