



STATE OF GEORGIA

Division of Family and Children Services

Nathan Deal
Governor

Bobby D. Cagle
Director

2017 Hart County Annual Board Report

The Hart County Board meets quarterly on the fourth Wednesday of January, April, July, and October. The Board is currently comprised of community members, Shely Myers, Earnestine White, Bennie Harper, Pam Gordon, and Chris Pritchett. The Board reviews the work and expenditures of the county office. County Funds are expended primarily on the needs of children in foster care.

The Hart County Department of Family and Children Services has managed county needs effectively during 2017. A number of changes have taken place this year and the local office has worked to adapt as needed while still serving the local population. The County has trained staff in the new Solution Based Casework practice model and moved them into the certification phase. OFI staff have been trained in the Georgia Gateway computer system and are in the transition phase.

The County Board's assessment of the effectiveness of the county department's provision of services

Social Services

Hart County social services programs are implemented by staff who serve both Hart and neighboring Franklin County on a regular basis. All supervisory staff including the County Director maintain a regular presence in each office to ensure availability to case managers and the community. During 2017, a number of staffing changes have taken place. A Social Services Administrator position was approved for the first time and filled by an internal promotion. Two other internal promotions were granted advancing case management staff into supervision. All staff are trained and able to meet the needs of the community. Turnover remained very low with only one case manager leaving the department.

Social Services staff have achieved particular success in finalizing adoptions this year. Two foster care case managers have been assigned to specialize in this work resulting in thirteen finalized adoptions with several more in progress. Hart County staff managed 45 new investigations opened through September and 132 new Family Support cases. During the first full year of the Child Abuse Registry there were no substantiated case determinations overturned through the appeals process. Foster care case managers worked with 35 Hart County cases during the year in addition to assigned cases for Franklin County. Social Services also participated in the community risk reduction team which was implemented. This team is comprised of multiple community agencies and works to provide support and intervention to families and youth in need early on, preventing the need for court action or more formal agency intervention in many cases.

Office of Family Independence

All staff have been trained to utilize the new Georgia Gateway computer system and are currently engaged in the transition. This system is designed to be more client friendly and will offer more efficient benefit processing.

The County Board's assessment of the needs of the community

Hart County continues to recruit and train foster homes. Ongoing recruitment remains a strong need. Seven new foster homes were opened during the year. Currently there are twenty open foster homes in the county with 53 bed spaces. The majority of these spaces are occupied. There is also a continued need for mental health and other appropriate services to youth with behavioral issues. Better coordination and cooperative implementation of services between agencies and other providers is needed.

The County Board's recommendations for improved operations of the county department – including recommendations regarding staffing levels and worker safety, as well as other areas.

The Board supports continued hiring of staff to ensure that once optimal staff to work ratios are met, they can be maintained. The Board appreciates the increased base pay implemented for front line staff and supervisors. The Board recommends that corrections be made to ensure that all staff regardless of job title are paid appropriately. Recognition should be given to staff with longer tenure and managers should not receive less compensation than subordinates.

Positive and regular communication between the Department and local law enforcement ensures staff safety. Law enforcement staff are available and willing to assist Department workers whenever a concern about safety in the environment arises.

This report is being submitted to comply with the requirements of the child welfare reform law, Senate Bill 138.

Submitted,

Shelvy Myers, Chairperson