

Kent County
Family & Children's
Coordinating Council

KCFCCC Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2020 12:00pm – 1:00pm
Kent County Administration Building
Via ZOOM

Members/Alternates

Present: Ron Caniff, Candace Cowling, Lynne Ferrell, Tracey Fountain, Judge Gardner, Sandra Ghoston-Jones, Kristen Gietzen, Cynthia Gladyness, Lynn Heemstra, Maureen Kirkwood, Jacob Maas, Jackie O'Connor, Julie Ridenour, Savator Selden-Johnson, Scott Smith, Bill Ward.

Members Absent: Chris Becker, Adam London, George Meek, Jim Paparella, Kasie Pickart, Diana Sieger, Michelle VanDyke.

Guests: Doug Booth, Tawana Brown, Veneese Chandler, Mike Fortman, Shannon Gardner, Carol Paine-McGovern, Rachelle McKissick, Courtney Myers-Keaton, Sonia Noorman, Kristyn Peck, Wende Randall, Jim Talen, Annemarie Valdez.

1 Welcome & Call to Order

Sandra Ghoston-Jones called the meeting to order.

Candace Cowling made a motion to accept the minutes from the September meeting, 2nd provided by Lynne Ferrell – Vote was unanimous.

Julie Ridenour made a motion to accept the agenda, second was provided by Candace Cowling – vote was unanimous.

2. Public Comment

There was none.

3. Discussion Re: 2021 plans for KCFCCC Areas of Focus – Sandra Ghoston-Jones introduced Mike Fortman to share some data outlining the disparities of the people of color impacted by COVID-19. Mike Fortman shared a visual of Kent County's public dashboard. The dashboard contains many details such as case counts, positivity rates, impacts of the virus on areas, ages and races. He said Kent County has been steadily increasing over the months. He said that the hospitals have better protocols and

treatments, so he is hoping the increased number of cases will not see a substantial increase in deaths as well. He said the statewide positivity rate has increased to above 10%. Kent County is running higher than the state average. This is very concerning. Cases have now expanded beyond the urban Grand Rapids area, impacting more of the rural areas of the county. Mike also shared how the data shows the case rates by ethnicity. He said the African American percentage of cases started out to be very high (about 20%) but has leveled out to be similar to their percentage of the population. He added there has been a difficulty in contact tracing due to the non-cooperation of some people and also due to staff being behind in making contacts.

A large spike in case rates happened when colleges and universities first returned to classes but has since leveled out.

In discussion, there appears to be issues in finding testing sites. Sandra Ghoston-Jones provided a listing of testing sites. Concerns were raised about the lack of access to testing appointments.

Sandra asked Council members to share what impacts their organizations have felt from COVID.

- Lynn Heemstra said Grand Rapids Public Schools families are experiencing issues with technology, keeping kids focused and afterschool school lesson planning. There was an overwhelming response to the Youth Employment Program over the summer, pointing to youth feeling a need to help their families financially.
- Courtney Myers-Keaton from the Continuum of Care is hearing from parents about their frustration with the lack of timely communication or flexibility coming from their school districts.
- Wende Randall from ENTF reported that parents are experiencing issues with childcare, so parents are unable to return to work or to work from home. They are also experiencing food insecurity. She said some creative partnerships have developed over the pandemic. Issues continue with internet access, devices and digital literacy.
- Carol Paine-McGovern, with KSSN agreed that communication has been a critical issue. Increases are being seen in all basic needs. Working with parents in connecting them to resources for things such as applying for unemployment. One area of concern is mental health issues not being addressed. Referrals are slow due to other issues being the focus for families. School staff is dealing with their own anxiety as well.
- Kristen Gietzen with Arbor Circle said she thinks it's important to recognize the work we are all doing together. She has been impressed with the amount of grace that both families and teachers have been giving each other. Kristen expressed concern over a potential surge for mental health services in the future due to lack of attention to the issue now.

What are agencies not doing because of the impact of COVID?

- Scott Smith from Cedar Springs Public Schools said one of the concerns school districts are facing that many students are off the grid...they are not in person or remote learning. Parents are not responding to efforts at contact, so well-checks are taking place. There are some concerns for the safety of these students.
- Wende Randall said they have observed that relationship building is more challenging. Families are reluctant to connect with providers other than their usual due to lack of trust. This has the potential to create duplication of services instead of partnerships.
- Venece Chandler from the Family Outreach Center shared they aren't seeing as many people at the agency and have rolled back some of their outreach in the community. A significant amount of services is being provided virtually. Some services are being provided in schools where students are in-person learning. She added they are seeing an uptick in referrals from Network180 and are responding to those but agrees there will likely see a larger increase in needed mental health services in the future.
- Shannon Gardner asked if there has been an increase in severe mental health issues where the patient is unable to receive in-patient treatment. Venece responded that is a backlog of discharges that their agency is struggling to get to, so it has created somewhat of an unavailability of inpatient beds.

Bill Ward from Network180 added that there has been an uptick in intensive crisis services in-patient. He said they have been working with hospitals around the State to be sure these patients are addressed. The State is involved and are helping with the issue. Bill expects to see a continuation of an increase going forward. He added that the Access Center is open 24x7 to address critical patients.

- Jackie O'Connor from AAAM said older adults in the community are seeing a decrease in direct care and congregate programs, making seniors even more isolated than usual. Also, 85% of the deaths in the state have come from the senior population. This group also suffers from lack of computer skills and internet access. Other concerns include how to get the flu shot and eventually the COVID vaccine to the senior population.

Sandra thanked the group for their comments and said that they will be used to chart the path of moving the KCFCCC forward into the next year. One of the areas of focus will be Mental Health challenges among the community.

Also, Sandra hopes to introduce the new President/CEO of DA Blodgett/St. John's Home at the next meeting.

4. **Crisis System Update** – Bill Ward provided this update in Adam's absence. A Crisis Center Administrator candidate is in the process of being approved. The County passed a resolution to extend the services of the Crisis Center Consultant due to time lost in getting this project completed. The next step is in building a business plan and a timeline and project plan in moving the recommendations forward.

5. Agency Updates:

- Candace Cowling introduced Rachel McKissick-Harris who is new to Family Futures. Candace added they are serving many new families who have not connected to services prior to this and don't know where to start. Also, they are close to resuming their program of connecting families to resources who have newly given birth in Kent County. The program was on hold since June due to an access issue with the state database.
- Lynn Heemstra said the Mayor's Youth Council is moving forward, offering services virtually. They have also launched a new geared library in the Southeast and Southwest neighborhoods, hoping to get families outdoors. Lynn also announced her retirement effective January 5, 2021.
- Maureen Kirkwood from HealthNet of West Michigan shared that they are up to their pre-COVID levels of referrals. They are working hard expanding their team.
- Kristen Gietzen asked for a future agenda item in addressing the health and wellness of staff. Discussion on how employers are responding to the mental health issues of staff.
- Commissioner Jim Talen also said goodbye as he will be retiring from the Board of Commissioners as well.
- Cynthia Gladyness offered her congratulations to those retiring. She also expressed concerns for those who have fallen through the cracks and reiterated that mental health services are greatly needed in the community.
- Ron Caniff gave a shout-out to the group and the Kent County Health Department on their fine work. He also reminded the group his last day before retirement will be 12/30/2020. Ron Koehler will be the interim for the 2021 school year during the Superintendent search.
- Bill Ward said Network180 has been certified as a community behavioral health center, which gives them the ability to draw on the SAMSHA grant they recently won, allowing them to serve anyone who walks through their doors, Medicaid or not. Also the Network180 Board has just passed its second consecutive balanced budget, ending the fiscal year on a positive note.
- Annemarie Valdez stated that First Steps, along with KConnect are conducting a series of parent listening sessions. There will be a series of videos and a report coming.
- Wende Randall said the ENTTF is wrapping up their strategic plan and will be sharing the report documents soon.

- Julie Ridenour cautioned the group to not take their eyes off the ball of the issue relating to homelessness. Also, her last day is sometime in January.
- Courtney Myers-Keaton shared that the COC is about to begin their strategic planning process. The plan is to have it wrapped up by mid-summer 2021. She added they conducted a summer point in time (PIT) count to get an idea of a point in time number of persons experiencing homelessness for HUD. Also, they will be implementing a new coordinated entry process, which is how people access homelessness services and are connected to a resource. The new approved policy is available on their website now.

6. Miscellaneous

Sandra announced plans to introduce our new Deputy County Administrator at the January meeting.

- 7. Adjournment** – Meeting adjourned at 1:32 PM. Next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 12, 2020.