

**City of Alexandria, Virginia**  
**Department of Community and Human Services**  
**Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes**  
**January 27, 2025**

**Present:** Ashley Caison, Abby Curran Horrell, Samantha Pedrosa, Karen Carter (Vice Chair), , Ann O’Hanlon, Josh Barnathan (Chair), Shawna Gary, Katrina Ashmore (DCHS Staff), Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff),

**Absent:** Maura Miller, Allison Greenleaf, Jordan Nally, Michael de La Guardia

**Call to Order/Welcome:**

The meeting was called to order by Josh Barnathan (Chair) at 7:03 p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the January meeting.

**Guest Speaker: Workforce Development Center Chief - Katrina Ashmore**

The Workforce Development Center provides programs and services to assist adults, youth and persons with disabilities in finding employment.

***Main programs and services:***

WIOA- Youth Work Experience Program:

- Seven hundred thousand dollars to support individuals looking for jobs and being placed in-demand fields.
- Forty people are currently enrolled in the program.
- From this funding, about five thousand is allocated per individual for in-demand training: CDL License, Medical Billing & Coding, Project Management Certificate
- There are services that are co-located at Minnie Howard Campus, offer 1:1 coaching and offer year-round programing.

Career Readiness Workshops:

- Focus on topics to enhance job readiness. Topics can include resume writing, job search support, and one-on-one employment coaching.

SkillUp/Metrix Learning:

- Program that is free to all Alexandria/Arlington residents. It provides access to workplace, business and IT courses that target in-demand jobs in the DC Metro region.

TRANSFR Virtual Reality Lab:

- The lab utilizes Oculus VR technology to support employment and training by allowing users to experience in-demand job roles virtually.
  - This provides first-hand experience and a better understanding of the work environment and expectations in various industries.

Meet the Industry Workshops:

- These events serve as a gateway to engage participants with potential employers and showcase various career paths.

**Summer Youth Employment:**

The program serves 170 youth annually, ages 14-21, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as students who receive free/reduced lunch or have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

New Program Structure for 2025:

- For Ages 14-15:
  - Four weeks of in-classroom instruction.
  - Career guest speakers and field trips.
  - The final two weeks will consist of internships within city agencies.
- For Older Youth:
  - One week of career readiness bootcamp.
  - Four weeks will transition into work assignments where they are partnered with industry professionals.

**Program Highlights (Summer 2024):**

- 256 youths served.
- 88 employees were involved.
- A ratio of one staff member to every 36 young people.
- Key workshops: Resume writing, interview skills, applying to colleges/financial aid, and financial literacy.

**New Metrics to be tracked in 2025:**

- Tracking the number of work hours completed, job offers extended post-program, work readiness skills gained, and altruism from employers.
- Collecting feedback from youth, parents, and businesses for program evaluation.

**Program Needs:**

- Seeking work sites to host youth for 5-week, 20–30 hours per week work opportunities.
- Seeking speakers for career readiness days to educate youth about various industries.
- Youth are looking for competitive wages in their placements.

**WIOA Program Outcomes and Data (7/1/24 - 1/17/25):**

- Program Participants:
  - 141 adult participants.
  - 47 youth participants.
- Program Achievements:
  - 26 participants completed training.
  - 11 earned credentials in high-demand career fields (e.g., GED, Nursing).
  - 69 participants achieved measurable skills gains.
- Employment Tracking Metrics:
  - Earnings are tracked in the 2nd and 4th quarter after exit to determine program success.
  - Credential attainment after one year in the program.
  - The number of measurable skills gained is a key indicator of program effectiveness.
- Program Outcome Challenges:
  - Youth participants are not meeting the target for measurable skills gains.
- Summer Youth Employment Program Support:
  - Katrina Ashmore (DCHS Staff) will share the details from the summer youth employment intake identifying industries the youth are interested in with the SSAB to assist in identifying employers who can host youth participants.

**Approval of minutes:** The minutes of the January meeting were approved with no changes by SSAB members.

**Updates from meeting with Councilmember Bagley**

- Councilmember Bagley would like more information about salary differences between Fairfax County, Prince William County, Arlington County, and Prince George's County.
  - SSAB members discussed the available information on remote work policies for each of these counties and SSAB member Shauna Gary provided Josh Barnathan (Chair) research that she was able to find.
    - Councilmember Bagley shared that she needed some clarity about which jobs can be done remotely with the consideration of how the complexity of the work affects these options.
- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will send the relevant classifications for jobs within these sectors to further assist in understanding the remote work and salary considerations.
- SSAB board members will continue the conversation at the next meeting based on research.

### **DCHS Updates: Lesa Gilbert**

- Staff Retention and Recruitment Update:
  - Behavioral Health: Significant vacancies were experienced during the summer, but salary increases and bonuses implemented in July helped reduce vacancies and improve retention.
  - Child Welfare: Intentional support for recruitment and retention was discussed, emphasizing creating a supportive work environment and providing competitive compensation. Three over-hires have been implemented to support when turnover happens and support vacancy reduction.
- Budget and City Council Priorities: The budget is expected to be released prior to February, following the City Council's two-day retreat which will help determine the upcoming year's priorities.

### **Open Discussion / Miscellaneous Topics**

- SSAB members inquired about social engagement.
  - Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will share SSAB bylaws that outline SSAB meeting guidelines.
- Discussion on the 5-hour/month board member requirement for activities on behalf of the board.
  - Activities that count towards the requirement include:
    - 2-hour monthly meetings.
    - Participation in additional meetings or events, with a report back to the larger meeting.
    - Research tasks count toward these hours as well as writing letters to the City Council.
  - Josh Barnathan (Chair) will add standing agenda item to allow SSAB board members the opportunity to discuss with the larger group about monthly activities.
- Staff Appreciation Efforts:

- In previous years, thank you cards, gift cards and have been collected in previous years, and will be collected by the board to show staff appreciation.
- Upcoming appreciation months:
- February: Benefits Appreciation
- March: Social Worker Appreciation
- April: Advocacy Month
- SSAB members will coordinate staff appreciation efforts via email and discuss during the next meeting.

### **SSAB Goals and Focus Areas for the Upcoming Year:**

- SSAB and City Council Engagement:
  - Increase SSAB representation at city council meetings, particularly when relevant items are on the agenda.
    - Suggestion for assigning board members to different council members to build relationships.
- Engagement from Social Services Involved Community Members:
  - Focus on increasing engagement from those on receiving end of social services. The board expressed interest in hearing from these individuals.
    - In the past, the board has engaged participants to understand the process of receiving services.
- SSAB and Other ALX Boards Communication:
  - On February 10 there will be a Boards and Commissions meeting where all boards provide updates on what they are working on.
    - Suggestions included attending other board meetings to find areas to collaborate on.
  - Josh Barnathan (Chair) suggested that a list of upcoming events will be placed on future agendas to bring awareness to opportunities that are happening.
- Connecting with Neighboring County Boards:
  - SSAB members discussed engaging with neighboring jurisdictions SSAB boards to engage in regional efforts.
    - Josh Barnathan (Chair) will send emails to neighboring county boards to explore collaborative opportunities and gauge their interest in working together.
- Discussion about improving information storage and member boarding.
  - Google Drive will be used as a platform for keeping centralized information. SSAB members will research other platforms they may want to use.

- Creation of a one-page SSAB summary document to help new members understand the board's purpose and operations.
- Policy Focus Areas:

Employee Retention & Employer of Choice:

- The board will prioritize supporting initiatives that make the organization an employer of choice by focusing on staff retention strategies and improvements in the work environment.

Support City Council Objectives:

- Focus on City Council priorities while also highlighting policy areas that are not on councils' radar by tracking and addressing Virginia legislative policies that impact social services.

Housing Focus:

- Increased focus on marginalized communities, particularly those impacted by domestic violence and foster care youth in relation to housing support.

Child Welfare & Benefits Challenges:

- Address the challenges faced by child welfare and benefit programs due to recent and upcoming federal changes.

**Upcoming meeting dates (third Monday of the month)**

- Monday, February 24
- Monday, March 17
- Monday, April 21

**Meeting adjourned: 8:40pm**