

NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING & SUPPORT SERVICES
107 FISHER POND ROAD
ST. ALBANS VT 05478

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

MAY 6, 2026

Present: Jason Minor, Lisa Whittemore, Rob Hirss, Elaine Carpenter, Ken Gagne, Jim McMillian, Dan Thompson, Casey Toof,

Excused: Anjanette Watson, Angela Poirier, Gagne Ken

Staff: Todd Bauman, Ryan Davis, Danielle Roberts, Emily Richards, Belinda Bessette, Matt Habedank, Kim McClellan, Stacey Remillard, Tamara Mathieu, Tina Cross, Megan Martinson, Elizabeth Linton

Public: David MacCallum

Minutes received and meeting called to order by Jason Minor at 5:39pm.

Motion was made to approve the April minutes as presented by Dan Thompson. Second by Elaine Thompason. All in Favor

Presentation

- PAEA Program presented by Tamara Mathieu, Tina Cross, Megan Martinson and Elizabeth Linton
- Art and Music Showcase is Friday May 22nd and everyone is welcome

Executive Director Report

- We got notice from the state that we received our CCBHC certification and the feedback we got from them was that our application was really good which had a lot to do with our collaboration cross divisionally. This also came with our DMH designation. Our DAIL designation process will be coming up soon.
- As you all know we have been working on the PCB situation at Soar. The state ordered that all schools needed to be tested. We do have a section of the Soar with a PCB count above the state's threshold. We have been working with a consultant that you have all met, we have asked for a few estimates. Both of the first two estimates were higher than anticipated. Todd went back to the consultant and asked of there was a way to fix the building and keep kids and staff safe. He is going to bring an estimate for that forward. Once we have that, we will bring it here so we have three options to choose from so we can continue to move this project forward. Matt has been doing a great job of keeping staff in the loop, as it is hard to see the progress when it is in this phase of pulling together estimates. The question was asked – Will staying in the same building limit our ability to grow the program? We do not think so, Matt feels like with the remediation of the PCB we will have the ability to change some things around within the building which will help with programing. The question was asked – If we go the remediation route will we need to rent a space for the program to be while the work is happening? We do not know the answer to that yet and will not know until the details are decided.

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- We are continuing conversations with an agency in Williston. As you know they reached out to us asking if we would be interested in merging. We have continued to meet with them and have great conversations. Staff have been there to meet with them; they came to one of your new employee orientation sessions and last month Angela and Elaine met with some of their board members. We are moving forward and engaging with an attorney. We have encouraged them to do the same. Elaine wanted to make sure that through this process we are thinking about how this can help us. We believe it will help us with the ability to scale and lower our administrative costs. We currently have another team in Chittenden County so overall this would be a good thing for us. One of the things that the attorney told was to make sure our missions match. This has brought us to think more about our current mission statement. It currently focuses on Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, but so many people who we work with live outside these two counties. We are not asking you to change the mission statement today we are just starting the process to think about it and wanted to let you know.

Finance Update

- March has officially closed. We have a deficit as we did last month. We are currently showing a 2.69M loss. Ryan can explain a few things that are contributing to the loss. We have had some major healthcare costs. We are self-insured, which means we pay all the claims, there tends to be a five-year cycle where you see an upswing and we are in that. Based on what we know about these claims we are likely to see one more bad month. The question was asked – Do we have the ability to negotiate our rates? We are part of a captive, which means yes we do get to negotiate them, and we do it on a larger scale so that helps us with the rates. And then staff get to pick the plan they would like based on what they would like to pay. As we have talked before there has been a planned loss that goes with the staff patterns, we are planning for in conjunction with CCBHC. The finance team does have some staffing issues right now, so the grants have been invoiced for which is contributing to the loss. There is also a payback in our Developmental Services (DS) Division, which is based on the need to meet a 65% utilization of the clients budgeted funds. Some of the things that we are doing to help in these areas are creating a dashboard to help DS staff monitor the utilization rates for clients. We are also working closely with the new case management organizations, because all the changes we use to make internally to help with this now need to go through them. We are learning this process together. The state is also hiring two data folks to help with this as well. We are starting to get the CIS funds that we have been waiting for, this will only grow as time goes on and the systems continue to improve. Ryan has also started interviews for his old position so that is very exciting. The question was asked – Where do the new CCBHC positions fall? Most are in the Community Mental Health division and some are in admin. They are not all full yet.

Executive Committee Report

- Everything we talked about has been discussed here.

Quality and Risk Management Report

- The facilities team wanted to make sure that everyone knew that they enjoyed working with Heather on the Elm Street house, they were blown away with the care that Heather shows for the clients, she had chili in the crock pot for him when he moved in because it is his favorite.
- As we have talked before, we entered into a contract with UCS around their developmental services. In the last month there have been a lot of changes there, the ED has stepped down, and a sister agency is stepping in to help with the oversight of the full agency. We have our staff going for our first unannounced visit this week. We will keep you posted on how things are progressing with this.

Developmental Services

- Sam wanted to give a shout out to our nursing team. With all our residential programs it is nice to know that we have them and they are always here for us.
- Sam wanted to draw your attention to page 12 in the agency newsletter, Tammy (who just presented) is the team leader of AOL. She is doing amazing things there, there is a client who has had a very small world but decided to try out AOL and now his world is expanding and he is out more, it is really lovely to see.
- The morale booster that is hosted by DS is this month; we make delicious nachos it is a staff favorite event.
- Our quality review is coming soon so we will keep you all posted on that.
- We had a client move into the new house on Elm St. He was so excited. The facilities team did a great job of making sure this home was safe for him.
- The division has started a weekly email that is being sent out by someone on the leadership team which includes a little tip or resource that folks can use and staff have really been enjoying that.
- Sam wanted to share a little client story. We have a client whose big goal was to go to Canada. One of the hurdles they needed to get over was getting their enhanced license, things kept coming up, but she worked through it with staff and now has it and is planning her trip. They are so excited.

Community Relations Report

- Dani knows how important partnerships are and is noticing that folks are reaching out to us vs us having to reach out to them. It is impressive how fast things are moving and it is amazing to see how tough our employees are. One thing she has noticed is how important our story telling is.
- There are a lot of events coming up – Kingman Fest where we will be tabling with afterglow, May is Mental health awareness month.

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- The Autism Walk is the 31st, we lost our big sponsor this year but the team has come together and gotten support and it is going to be a great event, free food for everyone will be provided by Georgia Market. Hope to see some of you there.

Human Resources Report

- Stacey was able to get an additional \$500,000 to add to the \$750,000 for the VCP EI Funds we have already gotten. We have spent about \$740,000 of that so far. We need to spend the rest by the end of the year. We are putting in a request to extend the grant but are waiting to hear back on that. We are doing our best to spend it, it is offered to all new staff.
- We work with Northwest Tech Center in a lot of ways, one of those ways in placement for their students. We have a panel for them where they get to ask our staff questions, we do this every year and is a great event. We also have one student who has shadowed with us coming to work part time.
- We also have our new team member Jen Buckley. She is a great addition to the team. She did the newsletter this month, check it out.

Community Mental Health

- Celebrations of the Arts is tomorrow at 1pm at city hall everyone is welcome, it is a great event.
- Belinda wanted to share with you an experience that came up this week, almost 20 years to the day, she and Todd were called to a school to help support as a beloved teacher had passed. They sat in the back while the principal made the announcement and then everyone went about their day because students were coming in. Belinda remembers not knowing what their role was in all of this. Fast forward to this week, Belinda got a call at 9pm on Monday night, there was a beloved teacher that passed away after a battle with cancer. The principal reached out and wanted to work together to make a plan. We now have processes in place to help and within minutes we have four staff wanting to be on site Tuesday morning. The staff that were there said that the administration “got it” they understood the need for connection with us and the support we offered all day. The school reached out to thank us for the partnership and talked about how important it is. These things are not seen at the state level but it is a reminder that we are doing good work.

Nursing Update

- It is nursing appreciation week, and April has a bunch of activities planned for her team. One thing is lunch tomorrow.
- We have hired a medical assistant, it was internal hire, they started in DS but really had all the things we were looking for in this position, and it has been great so far. We are looking forward to seeing how we can improve our services with her in place.

Early Childhood and School Based Services Update

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- Matt would like to note that we worked with town school around an event where a 5 year old passed away. This aligns with all the things that Belinda talked about.
- Every year our Parent Child Center team does a day long retreat. Working a little and having some fun. Once thing they did this year was look at the state standards and how they are meeting them and where they can improve. They are doing a really great job.
- It is teacher appreciation week, and Soar has been doing a few things so far and have some more activities planned for the rest of the week. They did change it up a bit and changed it to staff appreciation because they recognize that it takes more than teachers to make things run there. Matt also wanted to give Lindsey the school nurse because it is school nurse's appreciation day and she does a great job! Everyone loves her.
- Matt wanted to give Less from a shout out. He does a great job with the Soar showcase. He finds a way to get the kids involved and works with them to find something they love. It truly is a great event. Lisa was there year and said it was amazing. It is great to see the kids and how the staff jump in and are so encouraging.

Motion made to adjourn by Dan Thompson. Seconded by Jim McMillian. All in Favor.

Meeting adjourn at 7:31 pm

Minutes recorded by: Emily Richards