COUNTY OF CALDWELL

Department of Social Services

Memorandum

BOARD MEMBERS
Donnie Potter, Chair
Jerrell Suddreth, Vice-Chair
Chapel Davis
Diane Dunn
Tracey Irvine

DIRECTOR
Kim Arnett

February 27, 2025

To: Caldwell County Commissioners
From: Kim Arnett, Director
RE: Justification of the Request for Part-time Temporary SW III Positions – 4

This memo is to outline the justification of the request for 4 part-time temporary SW III positions to assist with permanency case management while recruiting and training 4 FTE.

The demand for all social work positions continues to exceed available staffing levels, creating significant challenges in ensuring effective services for vulnerable children and families. Within our permanency unit, we currently have 4 FTE vacancies, 30% of our workforce. Three of these employees left employment with the county to work in different fields other than Child Welfare while one is now employed by a neighboring county in the same classification with an increase in salary of $8,000. A quick historical glance at turnover in permanency since 2021-2022 shows approximately 14 positions being vacated (excluding the recent 4) with 8 moving into different types of social work fields, 3 taking different positions within the Department and 3 retiring.

All social work positions in Child Welfare are essential positions within county government. Permanency social workers have the ultimate responsibility of ensuring proper care and safety of the children in the custody of the county while working toward a permanent plan for these children. A recent work study calculated each child requires approximately 14.2 hours per month of task-related activities. Duties associated with this responsibility are:

- Home Visits – Home visits are required monthly with children, birth parents, and placement providers. 64% of the children in our care are placed out of county complicating this task.
- Documentation
- Court report writing and Court attendance – Court attendance can be up to 8 full days per month.
- Collateral contacts
- Medical/mental health/educational appointments and meetings
- Referrals and follow-up
- Staffing/case consultation daily
- Crisis intervention – This can include placement disruptions, school issues and/or medical concerns.
- Visitation – This can occur weekly and possibly multiple times per week if parents visit separately.
- Travel – This includes in county, out of county, and out of state travel

The demanding nature of the role coupled with excessive caseloads contributes to this high turnover we are seeing across the state in Child Welfare. As a county, our turnover rate for FY23/24 in this discipline was 29%, which is slightly below the state average. According to NC DHHS, the annual turnover rate for Child Welfare is over 30% with some counties as high as 50%. This turnover disrupts continuity of care for children and families, increases training costs for new staff and places additional burdens on remaining workers. Although we have pulled social workers from other areas to assist and have assigned a caseload to a supervisor, our social workers are still responsible for approximately 15 children each. The most recent work study sponsored by NC DHHS, indicated an acceptable caseload for medium sized counties is 7.3 children per social worker. The

Caldwell County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

concern is this overburdening of our social workers leading to burnout among the staff, which increases turnover and results in poorer outcomes for children in foster care.

In addition to the daunting task of recruitment and retention, training prolongs the availability of staff after hiring. Social work requires expertise in identifying risk and safety, trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and case management. Specifically, foster care requires additional skill in navigating the mental and behavioral health system for treatment and placement. Applicants are unlikely to have experience in these areas extending the necessary and required training period.

For all of the reasons above, I am requesting 4 temporary part-time social work positions to work for a minimum of 6-9 months. Funding for these positions would be covered with lapse salary; therefore, a budget amendment for these positions will be unnecessary.

Respectfully,

Kim Arnett, Director

Cc: Human Resources Director, Beth Brown
Interim County Manager, Wayne Rash
Chief Financial Officer, Tony Helton

Caldwell County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.