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# **Minnesota Citizen Review Panel Annual Report**

Reporting for 2019

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## Overview of Citizen Review Panels

Citizen Review Panels (panels) are required by federal law [Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, P.L. 111-320], and state statute. [Minn. Stat., section 256.01, subd. 15] These panels provide opportunities for community members to play an integral role in evaluating the extent to which State and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities. Minnesota has panels in Hennepin, Washington, Ramsey, Chisago, and Winona Counties. Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) staff is encouraging county agencies to expand Citizen Review Panels to additional areas of the state.

In addition to evaluating different aspects of the child protection system in their communities, panel members also look at ways to improve the child protection system statewide. Comprised of seven to 16 citizens each, these panels represent a partnership among citizens, community agencies, county and tribal child protection systems, and the department.

This annual report provides a summary of activities and recommendations submitted by each Minnesota panel for 2019. Acknowledgments and responses from department staff are included.

## Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel

**Mission statement:** “As citizen volunteers, we collaborate to understand, communicate, and recommend improvement to the child protection systems, and engage our communities to ensure the safety and well-being of all our children and families.”

### County report

The Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel conducted two projects, as well as devoted efforts to learn more about the child welfare system, and recruiting new panel members. The two projects are:

- Reviewing complex cases in Hennepin County (year two of a two-year project).
- Looking at how Hennepin County child protection services are doing with father engagement.

### Project one: Complex cases in Hennepin County

#### Initial observations

The panel reviewed 15 cases provided by Hennepin County staff. Panel members analyzed these cases and gathered the following initial observations:

- All but two of the 15 cases involved addiction to drugs and/or alcohol as a primary characteristic of identified parents or guardians who abuse. Most of these parents/guardians had been through treatment at least once, whereas some had been through many times. There was little evidence in these cases that the parents/guardians were willing to give up their addiction/s.
- Most of these families had been in the child welfare system for longer time periods, sometimes relocating to Hennepin County from other counties and/or states.

- Due to the length of time in the child welfare system, several families now had teenagers who developed serious problems themselves, often posing a threat to younger children in the family.
- All of the families experienced housing instability. Poverty was an obvious reason, as well as behavior, especially of teenagers who in several cases had gotten their families evicted from homes, apartments and shelters. Several families were living in cars/vans, because the behavior of teenagers in these families resulted in evictions from the last possible shelter.
- Many teenagers were on the run not only from their families, but also from emergency care, foster care, and residential treatment programs.
- Girls were frequently involved in sex for money.
- Several girls were pregnant.
- Several parents had developmental disabilities that left them less capable of providing the necessary environment for their children.
- Other families had children with developmental disabilities, impacting a family's ability to care for them, and children's ability to benefit from services.
- Almost all of the teenagers had mental health issues.

### **Case observations**

The panel then selected five of the 15 cases to consider in depth. Panel members interviewed the caseworker for each of the selected cases. Their initial review of cases and subsequent observations were confirmed. The following were common factors:

- Serious and chronic abuse
- Teen pregnancy
- Eviction from shelter due to teenagers' behaviors
- Numerous previous terminations of parental rights with other children
- Parental and/or child mental illness
- Parental and/or child developmental disabilities
- Child sex trafficking
- Rape
- Threatening and intimidating behavior toward their caseworker
- Long-term involvement with the child protection system and law enforcement
- Numerous returns from out-of-home placements
- Drug and alcohol abuse

### **Recommendations**

The panel provided the following 10 recommendations:

1. The single most significant issue is an inability of the child protection system to identify which cases will become intractable from the outset, or at identification of the earliest significant problem. Many similarly appearing cases can be brought to family stability, improved parenting, and successful outcomes for families, but early determination of which cases are amenable to improvement is a fundamental challenge. This first recommendation is not limited to Hennepin County, but is a sincere plea for more research to identify those specific characteristics that may

predict which families will not be conducive to success with standard family assistance practices requiring either extraordinary efforts or earlier termination of parental rights.

2. Reviewing these cases made a convincing argument for early intervention and implementation of trauma-based therapies to mitigate lifelong neurological impacts on brain development of children suffering abuse.
3. When first becoming apparent that a family is not amenable to standard interventions, these cases should be assigned to a more experienced caseworker.
4. For cases in which there is evidence of aggressive, threatening, and/or manipulative behavior toward a caseworker, a new caseworker with experience and skills needed to cope with a situation be assigned. (The panel interviewed one caseworker who was a corrections officer and not easily manipulated or intimidated. She seemed to be able to make progress with the family and provide a much-needed protective feeling for the children.)
5. Train judges in identifying courtroom behavior and roles of various family members to not be manipulated by a primary parent/guardian who abuses. The court system needs to include the testimony of caseworkers in person, as well as guardians ad litem, attorneys, and other participants in the outcome.
6. The system needs to develop the following programs to meet the needs of these families:
  - Have foster placement capacity for teen mothers with their babies.
  - Provide intense trauma-based mental health treatment early on for children of all ages.
  - Locate residential programs for sex trafficked teens that are not near traffickers (these centers need to function much like battered women's shelters).
  - Have a multi-disciplinary review of cases before appearance in court.
7. Make a decision at some point to separate disruptive teenagers from their family and treat them separately, so families and younger children can achieve housing stability and recovery, if possible. The county agency needs to develop a protocol for determining whether this is the best option for protecting remaining family members.
8. Consider sending teenagers with developmental disabilities to residential programs for these disabilities before sending them to mental health programs. The evidence indicates that these children may do better in a therapeutic developmental disabilities program before they can tackle their mental health issues. If placement does not work out, the county agency can revert to mental health placement as plan B.
9. Supervisors need to be aware of boundary and intimidation issues with child protection workers under their supervision. The agency should offer in-service training on managing these issues.
10. Caseworkers should be required to document all case notes thoroughly. The case notes that panel members encountered were hard to follow and contained little insight into actual family problems and relationships. Many case notes were a list of encounters with a family. Often, it was hard to identify the parent/guardian who abused, type of abuse, the mental health condition of family members, and other indications of what was actually happening. Case notes often did not even explain why a family was in the system. There needs to be a "front page" that provides immediate information such as the number, names, gender, and ages of children. The ages and educational levels of parents would also be helpful. After reading case notes, it consistently came as a surprise to panel members to learn from the caseworker what a situation actually was within a family.

Panel members were consistently impressed with the quality and compassion of caseworkers they met. Panel members said that Hennepin County is large with numerous problems over which the county agency has no control. Within this milieu, panel members found management that was not only competent, but also compassionate toward families and children they serve, and caring of the staff they

work with and supervise. The panel was impressed by the magnitude of problems Hennepin County staff encounter every day.

**Project two: Hennepin County child protection services and father engagement**

The father engagement project team (comprised of panel members) conducted extensive research on father engagement overall, the process used by Hennepin County to inform and encourage father engagement, and the process used to measure success. The team completed interviews with child protection and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) supervisors, other staff and fathers. They did literature searches and looked for possible general data connections to specific data outcomes. Based on this information, they identified key themes and developed recommendations for next steps.

**Themes and recommendations**

Panel members found, based on their research, that the work of engaging fathers needs to be intentionally communicated, reviewed, revised, measured and supported. Given the positive outcomes that result from father engagement, documented in the research, there needs to be a sense of urgency in this area.

Theme (we learned that ...)	Recommendations
<p><b>Definition of father engagement</b></p> <p>-No consistent definition</p>	<p>-Define what successful father engagement is.</p> <p>-Communicate this to all workers and supervisors with the expectation that this is the goal when engaging fathers.</p>
<p><b>Data</b></p> <p>-There is not a measurement of how fathers are involved.</p> <p>-There is not a common expectation of data collection.</p> <p>-Much of the important information regarding what was actually done regarding father engagement is only in case notes. This information cannot be “pulled” for data collection and may be difficult to find.</p>	<p>-Develop better measurements of father engagement, not just noting contact and case plan inclusion; being able to measure how a father was involved in his child’s life and the beneficial effects for his child.</p> <p>-Develop quality indicators that accurately reflect involvement of fathers in case plans; develop roles and responsibilities for collection and utilization of data.</p> <p>-Continually monitor for quality improvement and change metrics, if needed.</p> <p>-Consider the possibility of having a separate place in the notes to record father engagement.</p>
<p><b>Role of culture</b></p> <p>-Hennepin County agency staff believes culture, race, and age are important.</p>	<p>-Provide rigorous, ongoing, mindset, and skills training transforming individuals and the organizational culture.</p>

Theme (we learned that ...)	Recommendations
<p>-Some caseworkers do not believe that the age and race of fathers plays a role in their work with fathers.</p> <p>-Some caseworkers believed that more training would be helpful.</p>	
<p><b>Training for engaging fathers</b></p> <p>-Hennepin County’s current training on father engagement is on “awareness,” not building skills. The actual training for engaging fathers, particularly resistant fathers, appears to be left to supervisors.</p>	<p>-Intentionally work to change the culture of the organization to one that values fathers, their role and contributions.</p> <p>-Measure the impact of training.</p> <p>-Provide ongoing and sustained training, and training that produces improved skills for engaging fathers. Simply putting a policy in place and offering one-time training does not guarantee success. Caseworkers need encouragement to actively work to involve fathers; it is important that both workers and their supervisor view father involvement as a positive for children in the system.</p>
<p><b>Importance and role of an effective supervisor</b></p> <p>-Strong advocate for engaging fathers.</p> <p>-Regularly discusses and communicates requirements for engaging fathers with caseworkers.</p> <p>-Demonstrates enthusiasm and passion for involving fathers.</p> <p>-Believes the mindset of the Hennepin County agency must change for the current father engagement mandate to succeed.</p>	<p>-Intentionally include supervisors in caseworker training – this is very important</p> <p>-Provide ongoing training to supervisors about the importance of engaging and working with fathers.</p> <p>-Utilize supervisors who are enthusiastic regarding father engagement to provide training.</p> <p>-Develop consistency of expectations for supervisors to improve practices regarding culture, data collection, accountability, etc.</p> <p>-Expect supervisors to conduct regular case reviews and set consistent expectations for putting notes in the case files, and to complete any additional data requirements that might be established.</p>
<p><b>Hennepin County barriers to successful father engagement</b></p> <p>-Caseload size of workers and supervisors.</p> <p>-Lack of standards or guidelines for what constitutes diligent effort to identify and locate non-resident fathers.</p>	<p>-Reducing caseload size (as is currently happening in Hennepin County) allows workers more time to focus on fathers, especially resistant fathers.</p> <p>-Develop guidelines and expectations regarding identifying and engaging fathers.</p> <p>-To help identify fathers early in a case, use investigations help to identify and contact a father. When possible, use Family Group</p>



Theme (we learned that ...)	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Delay or difficulty identifying fathers in a timely manner.</li> <li>-Discomfort of some workers in engaging with fathers, particularly resistant fathers.</li> <li>-Biases/stereotypes about fathers among all who work with child protection clients.</li> <li>-Fathers' needs are not assessed in a formal or structured manner.</li> <li>-Lack of resources and services tailored to meet fathers' needs.</li> <li>-Lack of housing for fathers.</li> <li>-Transportation problems that make it difficult for fathers to visit with their children.</li> </ul>	<p>Decision Making to help with the process of identifying and connecting with fathers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ongoing training for caseworkers regarding the importance of involving fathers in their children's lives and effectively engaging and working with them. Caseworkers need encouragement to work actively to involve fathers; it is important that both workers and their supervisors view father involvement as a positive. There should also be ongoing efforts to discuss implicit bias/stereotypes with all those involved in child protection cases, including lawyers and judges.</li> <li>-Recognize that father's needs are different from those of a mother. Establish clear goals for a father. Do not view fathers as an afterthought. Take time to hear father's story. Utilize structured assessment tools, as necessary, to understand fully the needs of fathers.</li> <li>-Develop relationships/contracts with agencies that have a history of working effectively with fathers. Research suggests that programs that have success in working with fathers have some of the following characteristics: "Cultural appropriateness, male staff, facilitators who believe in the program, high staff to participant ratios, clear goals, theory-based approaches, and personalized information." (1)</li> <li>-Work with agencies to develop housing for fathers and their children. Work with chemical dependency treatment facilities to develop residential facilities that allow children to live with their father (ICWA supervisors specifically made this point).</li> <li>-Provide more resources for transporting children and/or fathers for visitation. Perhaps more use of case aides to transport children.</li> </ul>

## Summary

Panel members said it was an honor to research the topic of father engagement in Hennepin County. Members were appreciative of the staff members who gave of their time and talents to assist with this project through research, interviews, and fulfilling data requests. They also commend the compassion and commitment of those that work in child protection, acknowledging that their job is demanding and the pressure is often intense.

Panel members wish to give a special "shout out" to the ICWA unit for its value in engaging fathers and results that are evidence of this value. They also wish to give a big "thank you" to Nick Metcalf for his expertise, willingness to assist, and contribute many hours of research.

The panel identified the following six main areas in which to concentrate efforts:

- Intentionally work to change the culture of the Hennepin County agency to value the involvement of fathers
- Define successful father engagement
- Develop better measurement of father engagement
- Provide ongoing, high-quality training in the areas of culture, race, and skill building
- Empower supervisors to advocate and support caseworkers in their efforts to engage fathers
- Work to develop contracts and relationships with agencies that have a history of working effectively with fathers.

Panel members believe that without these program basics in place, the Hennepin County agency will be unable to monitor efforts of father engagement, evaluate what is working, make changes as needed, and document ongoing improvement. Fathers will continue to be overlooked, and their children will suffer from the loss of father involvement.

## **Acknowledgment**

Department staff thank the Hennepin County Citizen Review Panel project teams that looked into complex cases and father engagement. The complex cases project, more than typical projects, required extensive discussion and in-depth expert analysis. The project team's recommendations reflect the difficulty of understanding why some cases seem intractable.

The father engagement project was a comprehensive overview of the progress Hennepin County has made in an area vigorously supported by department staff. The inclusion of fathers has been an ongoing issue in both government and nonprofit agencies for decades; many different approaches have been tried. The system has adjusted from some of these approaches. The themes and recommendations identified by the project team include and highlight current research. Panel recommendations are comprehensive and can assist Hennepin County Health and Human Services as it continues to make progress in this system and culture change process.

It is important to note the panel's positive impression of county staff and their work cited in the report. These cases represent a lot of in-depth and expert work on the part of Hennepin County caseworkers.

## **Department response**

### **Project one: Complex cases in Hennepin County**

Department staff is highlighting the project team's recommendations five and six below:

5. Judges need to have training in identifying courtroom behavior and roles of various family members to avoid being manipulated by primary parents/guardians who abuse . The court system needs to include the testimony of caseworkers in person, as well as guardians ad litem, attorneys, and other participants in the outcome.
6. The system needs to develop the following programs to meet the needs of families:

- Foster placement capacity for teen mothers with their babies
- Intense trauma-based mental health treatment early on for children of all ages
- Residential programs for sex trafficked teens not located in the vicinity of traffickers (need to function much like battered women’s shelters)
- Multi-disciplinary review of cases before appearance in court.

Recommendation five will be presented to the Children’s Justice Act Task Force, which addresses improvements on the intersection between the child protection system and the legal system. The Task Force consists of mandated seats for judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, medical and mental health representatives, etc. It can make recommendations, or route the issue to other agencies or organizations.

Regarding recommendation six, some of these services are in place, but not always accessible due to limitations on space, location, service requirements, funding, etc. Accessibility may be added or increased through the Family First Prevention Services Act, requiring services and use of federal funding streams. Examples include residential services for pregnant and parenting teens and increased availability of mental health services in the home. Residential programs for sex-trafficked teens away from their traffickers has been funded by the legislature in recent years. Statewide training for multi-disciplinary (MDT) review of cases is currently offered on a limited basis, but increased funding is necessary to continue this service. Hennepin County is in the process of implementing MDT reviews of legal cases for each child involved in the child protection process.

**Project two: Hennepin County child protection service and father engagement**

As stated in the report, fathers and other members of a biological family have not been viewed as positive supports to their child/ren. Hennepin County has begun the process of changing this mindset by delivering information to staff. As supervisors promote father engagement, staff buy-in will increase, particularly when seeing positive results. The panel’s recommendations represent next steps in building connections with fathers as a recognized priority of the child protection system. Department staff support these panel recommendations.

## Washington County Citizen Review Panel

**Mission statement:** Citizens partnering with child protection services, advocating to keep children safe.

### County report

#### Summary

The Washington County Citizen Review Panel (panel) did an analysis of its mission and consequent role in the county regarding the health and wellness of families and children, and the services needed for families’ ongoing wellness. A presentation from Glynis Shea of the Konopka Institute, University of Minnesota, on reframing, assisted in this work.

The above study led to continued work by a panel subcommittee with the result that the panel changed its title to “The Washington County Citizen Review Panel: From Risk to Wellness.” This new title indicates the intention of the panel to evaluate the county agency as it provides families and children with supports necessary as they progress to wellness.

Many of the panel’s subsequent projects supported this goal, such as distributing prevention cards (ideas for supporting families in different settings), and hosting social supports, such as planned pizza parties for foster families. Other projects and discussions addressed specific issues, such as the child protection response to sex trafficking and the shortage of affordable housing in the county.

The panel made itself available for various learning opportunities throughout the year. Members were available to participate in eight maltreatment reconsiderations during the year. Their participation in reconsiderations allows the county agency to hear citizen perspectives regarding complex or difficult cases. Panel members actively decided on educational topics, inviting speakers on those topics.

### **Recommendations**

Panel members request that the county agency look into the concept of blind removal as part of its efforts to decrease disparities in the child protection system. They use the following as justification for this request.

1. To transform child welfare, take race and neighborhood out of the equation: Blind removal eliminates implicit bias from child protection screenings and decisions. In a [recent study on blind removal](#), there was a 20% change in decisions over five years; a 31% drop in children of color.
2. The “Broken Places” documentary illustrates how some children are permanently damaged by early adversity, while others are able to thrive. The panel recommends purchasing a copy of this documentary to use for countywide education.

### **Acknowledgement**

Department staff thank Washington County Citizen Review Panel members and agency staff for contributing time and expertise to child welfare work. Members worked diligently to gather and distribute information on a wide variety of topics in child welfare, and to support the community. The panel is comprised of generous and thoughtful individuals dedicated to improving their community. Their interest and thoughtful work are appreciated.

## Department response

While the Department does not sponsor pilot programs involving “blind” screenings and/or removals, it is important that systemic racism be addressed in the child welfare system through focused activities of decentering Whiteness. Additionally, the workforce engaged in important decisions involving children and families should be required to complete cultural trainings and demonstrate advanced cultural knowledge and skills competencies. Minnesota’s child welfare workforce should also be required to complete the Intercultural Development Inventory and create a development plan for intercultural competencies within the Foundations curriculum through the Minnesota Child Welfare Training Academy.

## Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel

**Mission statement:** Provide opportunities for citizens to play an integral role in ensuring the child protection system is protecting children from abuse and neglect and ensuring a nurturing home environment.

### County report

#### Summary

The Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel (panel) conducted a yearlong assessment of juvenile sex trafficking and exploitation within the county. Panel members assessed the impact that issues of juvenile sex trafficking and exploitation are having on the most vulnerable children and families in the county, including children and youth of color, and those with disabilities, homeless youth, and those in foster care. Panel members also learned how sex trafficking and exploitation are impacting child protection management and staff, foster care providers, and other community-based service providers in Ramsey County. The panel heard from a variety of individuals representing various professional perspectives, including:

- Alex Cleaveland, Ramsey County manager of children’s intake, gave a presentation about sexually exploited youth (SEY), including data that 80 youth were screened in as SEY from May 29, 2017, to 2019.
- Hanna Getachew-Kreusser, executive director for Face-2-Face/Safe Zone, presented to the panel.
- Trevor Berberick, east metro regional navigator, Midwest Children’s Resource Center, Children’s Hospital Minnesota, presented on Ramsey County sexually exploited youth, the east metro regional navigator, and the Runaway Intervention program
- Becky Hilderman, Ramsey County investigator in children’s intake, presented on the child protection intake process, interaction with victims/families, and resources

- Sergeant Nikki Peterson, investigator for the Human Trafficking unit, St. Paul Police Department, and Karen Kugler, attorney from the Ramsey County Office on Human Trafficking and Sexually Exploited Youth, presented to the panel
- Leigh Ann Ahmad, Ramsey County planner, and Kristen Jackelen, Ramsey County Community Engagement coordinator, facilitated a discussion regarding the Sexually Exploited Youth Project to help the panel clarify and narrow its recommendations.

The panel finalized its recommendations and voted to adopt them. John Hanna and Kristen Jackelen drafted a letter to Ramsey County leadership; Anne Barry and Kim Cleminson, and the panel approved the letter.

### Recommendations for Ramsey County

1. Create a process/procedure for youth in foster care to receive information/literature about sexual exploitation issues, Safe Harbor, Face-2-Face/Safe Zone, and other community resources
2. Provide training to foster care youth regarding healthy relationships, domestic abuse, and sexual exploitation
3. Improve training for foster parents, professional organizations, and community members on prevention and identification of sexual exploitation of youth and provide resources
4. Secure temporary living arrangements for sexually exploited youth at risk of runaway
5. Collaborate with department staff and stakeholders on addressing racial disparities youth are experiencing in arrests, homelessness, foster care placement, and sex trafficking.

Panel members requested an update regarding these recommendations. They received a response letter from Kimberly Cleminson, division director, Children and Family Services, Ramsey County Social Services:

December 12, 2019

Dear Children’s Services Review Panel Members,

I want to thank you all for your in-depth work on juvenile sex trafficking and exploitation within Ramsey County and the impact it has on the children and families in Ramsey County. The proposed recommendations are very helpful. We will be implementing the recommendations in the upcoming year. I will expand on what that looks like within the Ramsey County Children and Families Division.

The process of developing a brochure which lists community resources available to children at risk of or experiencing sex trafficking and or exploitation has started and should be complete by January 2020. We will put this in the placement packet. This brochure will be provided to and discussed/explained to all school aged youth in foster care.

Three Social workers have been trained to provide trainings on Sexually Exploited and Trafficked youth. This training will be added to the initial foster care provider orientation and will also be available each year to providers and the community.

We have developed an initial Screening Tool that will be included in the Resource Brochure. This is a structured tool which includes a process on how to request help if anyone in the community suspects and child is exploited/trafficked or at risk of exploitation/trafficking. The Trainers referenced above will be training all Departments in Ramsey County in 2020 and will be available to train the community by request.

Ramsey County currently contracts with The Link and Brittany's Place which are secure temporary living arrangements for youth who are at risk or are sexually exploited or trafficked. Once foster providers receive training, this will be an additional resource for youth.

We are currently collaborating with the SPPD and DHS on initiatives that will decrease racial disparities across the children and Family Division of the Social Services Department.

If you are interested in training related to the screening tool or other training related to sexually exploited and or trafficked Youth please contact Alex Cleaveland.

Thank you again for your work and partnership.

Kim Cleminson  
Ramsey County, Division Director for Children and Family Services

### **Recommendation for the department**

1. Collaborate with Ramsey County and stakeholders on addressing racial disparities youth are experiencing in arrests, homelessness, foster care placement, and sex trafficking.

### **Acknowledgement**

Department staff are grateful to the Ramsey County Citizen Review Panel for its focus on the county's work with sexually exploited and sex trafficked youth, in addition to their work on the Child Mortality Review, and resources for foster parents. These projects included focused presentations, thoughtful discussion, and clear, useful recommendations to the county agency. The panel provided effective community-based input. Department staff thank each panel member, and county and community staff representatives for the many hours of focused work contributed to this effort. It is appreciated, leading to a major accomplishment this year.

### **Department response**

Department staff are pleased to provide updates on work done to address disparities in youth populations. The department collects and analyzes data on youth disparities regarding out-of-home placements and sex trafficking. Department staff use the information to develop appropriate responses that are equity-driven and focused on decreasing disparities. In the past two years, the department has expanded the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) unit to review ICWA cases statewide. It is also in the process of requesting funding to create an African American Family and Child Well-being Unit. Department staff are committed to reducing disparities in child welfare and providing appropriate services.

In addition to the major project on sex trafficked youth, the panel also focused on two active sub-committees: Child Mortality Review and Foster Care Parent Resource/Tip Guidebook. Panel members took turns attending the Ramsey County Child Mortality Review meetings and reporting discussions to the panel. A subgroup of members worked on developing a Foster Care Parent Resource and Tip Guidebook for distribution to county foster parents.

## Chisago County Citizen Review Panel

**Mission statement:** To provide an opportunity for citizens to play a role in ensuring children are protected from abuse and neglect, and to encourage and help build nurturing homes for children in our communities.

### County report

#### Summary and recommendations

The Chisago County Citizen Review Panel (panel) focused on the distribution and discussion of child maltreatment prevention materials. Materials developed by the panel are sourced via computer websites. Some materials used were on the Colorado Department of Human Services website, which approved distribution in Minnesota. The panel provided information on how various community groups could provide support to stressed parents, e.g., how to support parents under stress in public, at work, in a faith setting, etc. These materials were actively supported by the panel and distributed in communities. They were added to bags at food shelves in churches, etc. Feedback was positive; examples of the cards were shared with other Citizen Review Panels. Washington County also distributed the information via various community settings.

Recruiting new members is a priority for the panel. Sara Smit, panel chair, presented at several community groups to recruit new members. An article focused on recruitment was published in several community newspapers.

The panel also decided to re-interview county foster parents regarding training and support they receive from the county agency. Training and support were topics for focus groups conducted with foster parents in 2018; panel members wanted to see how current foster parents viewed changes in training and support.

Panel members participated in eight maltreatment reconsiderations.

#### Acknowledgement

Department staff thank the intrepid members of the Chisago County Citizen Review Panel for all of their efforts and successes on preventing child maltreatment in Chisago County.

#### Department response

Increased membership on the Chisago Citizen Review Panel is needed. This has been difficult to accomplish in a time of high unemployment and in a county with a smaller population base than other counties. Panel members plan to continue with multiple types of recruitment. They will also request that the county place recruitment messages on county media. This has been successful in other counties.

As small as the panel is, it has accomplished significant goals. Child abuse prevention materials were distributed and viewed positively. The panel also continued to distribute materials and support



prevention of abusive head trauma. County staff in the public health and social work areas use model babies purchased by the panel, and continue to provide materials and information on how to prevent additional abusive head trauma.

Panel members also participated in eight maltreatment reconsiderations, representing a significant contribution to the county agency.

## Winona County Citizen Review Panel

**Mission statement:** Promote and support the continuous improvement of a child protection system that will provide safety, permanency and well-being for all children in Winona County.

### County report

#### Summary and recommendations

The Winona County Citizen Review Panel (panel) actively followed child protection policy and resource challenges. Panel members are very concerned about restrictions on staff overtime and turnover in staff and administration. This places enormous stress on current staff and agency leadership at a time when the numbers of investigations and children in placement continue to rise. The panel hopes that these positions will be filled as soon as possible.

Panel members remain concerned about the numbers and cost of out-of-home placements in Winona County. They continue to monitor out-of-home placement trends locally as compared to state and national trends. Placement numbers more than doubled in 2017 and 2018, but leveled off in 2019 at a time when the number of available foster homes throughout the county also increased significantly. The approval and follow through for a second licensing worker in 2018 assisted dramatically in recruitment, licensing, and support of local foster parents.

The panel continues to study trends to gain insights about reasons for increased out-of-home placements. Ongoing issues impacting placements include parental drug/alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Ten years ago, most children were placed out of the home due to issues of neglect. Now, nationwide statistics show that a significant number of out-of-home placements are due to serious drug/alcohol use by parents and incidents of severe domestic violence. These numbers are no different for Winona County families. Attention is needed to address growing problems that methamphetamines and opiate-related drugs are creating for children and families.

In addition to placement, there are widespread concerns about the length of time children are spending in foster care. The longer a child is in out-of-home care, the less chance there is for positive reunification to take place. This becomes especially true with children over 14 years of age. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a pivotal stage as young adults learn skills needed to be healthy productive adults. Every child in foster care must have a transition plan that addresses this developmental learning process.

Transition planning continues to be a significant area of interest for the Winona County Citizen Review Panel. Continued information gathering and proposed recommendations have been an ongoing project over the past months. Over the past year, panel members have looked over different tools, read articles, and met with the county caseworker who works with youth in this category. The panel's goal continues to be identifying gaps in services, systemic obstacles, and any barriers specific to Winona County in working with this population and program, providing information and recommendations. In addition, the panel is committed to ensuring requirements are followed, plans are consistent, documentation is complete, while working alongside the agency in identifying barriers to these tasks.

The panel focused on issues of transition planning for youth and subsequent homelessness. Several county and nonprofit leaders working with youth were invited to present to the panel. It was found that homelessness for youth leaving care could be exacerbated in Winona County because the city of Winona houses many young adults attending college at the state university, private colleges, or post-secondary institutions. The panel then explored alternative housing options for young adults leaving care. At this time, it appears that youth transitioning out of care also leave the county. It is unclear if this is due to a lack of low cost rental housing. The panel will continue to focus on how to improve services for youth transitioning out of care in the upcoming year.

Panel members participated in eight maltreatment reconsiderations. This represents a significant amount of time contributed to county work. All of the maltreatment determinations were upheld.

Panel members also devoted significant time to training and attending conferences.

The panel will focus on new member recruitment in the upcoming year.

The panel hosted its annual appreciation meeting for Winona County child protection staff. It provided food, games, and door prizes to staff in appreciation for their work over the past year. This event was well attended; staff expressed appreciation for the recognition.

## **Acknowledgement**

Department staff thank Winona County Citizen Review Panel members for their continued work. The panel is well connected to other groups and work in Winona County through its membership on other boards. Due to this work, the panel is able to utilize additional county resources and benefit from other groups' knowledge and perspectives, and past work.

## **Department response**

Panel members contributed many hours to improving Winona County child protection by thoughtful use of community resources and connections. Their contributions are appreciated by department staff that resulted in a supportive child protection system for the community.

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