

# HENNEPIN COUNTY

## MINNESOTA

### Response to the Citizen Review Panel's 2018 Annual Report

APRIL 2019

## I. Introduction

Hennepin County welcomes and appreciates its partnership with the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) and our shared commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and families. The feedback and recommendations offered in the CRP's annual report continue to inform and strengthen the policies and practice of Hennepin's Children and Family Services (CFS).

## II. Background

Hennepin County is transforming its child protection system to focus on child well-being. The effort was launched after a 2015 report by the Casey Family Foundation identified several issues with the Hennepin system. Their report, coupled with a Governor's Task Force-led investigation in child protective services statewide and a Hennepin County Child Protection Oversight Committee's recommendations to improve the county system, led the County Board to invest millions of dollars into system reform, including creating a Child Well-being Advisory Committee.

In 2018, Hennepin Child Protection had several accomplishments:

- We adopted KVC Health Systems' Safe and Connected™ framework that provides a structured way to make decisions with and for children and families. The model promotes critical thinking and collaboration to ensure a balanced assessment of risk with the outcomes of improved child safety, well-being and permanency.
- We introduced Collaborative Safety to staff, which is a systems approach to learning and improvement. Collaborative Safety provides tools, training and ongoing support to child welfare agencies to enhance critical incident reviews and establish a safety of culture. By the end of 2018, more than 200 staff had participated in orientations and five supervisors and program managers had attended a four-day training. In collaboration with the Department



of Human Services (DHS), we've done 20 reviews using the new approach. Staff say they feel good about the process, especially because no one is looking to blame individuals. **We believe the Collaborative Safety model and the Safe and Connected™ framework will transform the culture.**

- We expanded Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP), which is also using the Safe and Connected™ framework to assist with identifying family strengths and protective factors, as well as with developing next steps. Our work includes a new partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools. Since PSOP began taking cases in April, we've provided case-management services to 132 families. Not only are we helping families earlier, but we are on track to generate approximately \$80,000 of Child Welfare-Targeted Case Management revenue in 2018! This revenue will serve additional families in 2019.
- We are addressing inherent bias and racial disproportionality in our child protection system with education and training. In 2018, we reached more than 1,800 mandated reporters with the new training.
- We expanded Family Group Decision Making, a proven method to reduce disproportionality and racial bias. Staff received 300 referrals for family and youth meetings and convened 240 meetings in 2018. Another important accomplishment is we were able to include the father and/or paternal relatives in 59 percent of Family Group Decision Making family meetings.
- We launched an awareness campaign and trainings and are developing a toolkit to better engage fathers and establish a father-child relationship. The training outlines the benefits of engaging fathers and establishing a father-child relationship, highlights biases that may influence efforts to engage fathers, and acknowledges the diversity of the fathers we serve. Attorneys, social workers and supervisors are part of the first training, which will expand to include staff throughout Children and Family Services.
- We expanded community outreach efforts and are focusing on addressing cultural needs. Hennepin expanded its ICWA unit and welcomed a tribal flag installation in the courts.
- Children's mental health is serving more families thanks to a Department of Human Services' grant and building a new System of Care to address children's mental health needs. We're strengthening our partnerships with community agencies that provide children's mental health case management and have improved our processes around determining a family's eligibility for services. Together, nine agencies serve over 2,440 children and families.
- We are transforming our transportation services to better support the well-being of children. Hennepin case management assistants provide transportation services to all youth 0-36 months and are responding quickly to requests.
- We're studying and changing our out-of-home placement model since its one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for the needs of today's youth. Recommendations were brought to the Child Well-being Advisory Committee, and we are moving forward with plans.
- After investing in staff hiring in 2017 and 2018, we are seeing signs that the strategy paid off.

- Caseload sizes are down – in March 2019, we reached our goal of having no more than 11 cases for both ICWA and non-ICWA case workers.
- Staff turnover has decreased significantly. The retention rate is now at 93 percent.
- We surpassed the state requirement for kinship care. We’ve increased the percent of children placed with relatives to more than 60 percent!
- We reached our goal of making more than 90 percent of monthly face-to-face visits with children in out-of-home placement, which indicates we are engaging families and spending time to make sure kids are safe and getting what they need.
- We’re getting better and better at meeting federal guidelines! As of January 2018, 69 percent of the seven broad outcomes reviewed were achieved. By September 2018, we reached 77.89 percent substantial compliance.

### III. Overarching themes and recommendations

The 2018 Hennepin County CRP conducted three projects:

- Workforce retention and secondary trauma (year two of a three-year project)
- Kinship care (year two of a two-year project)
- Complex cases (year one of a two-year project)

### IV. Workforce Retention and Secondary Trauma

In the 2018 Hennepin County CRP report, the panel reports on the second year of a three-year study regarding the CFS’ Induction Training Unit. Although the study is not complete, the CRP has five key findings with a number of recommendations included in the fifth finding.

#### 1. Effectiveness of induction training

*Few inductees viewed their experience with Induction training as a positive experience.*

**The concerns identified by the CRP in the 2018 report are real and have been an area of priority and focus for Hennepin County in our transformation efforts.** As we strengthen and transform our system, we are learning many lessons. One important one was that hiring a large cohort of staff was not an effective or efficient process, and it was frustrating for new staff. We can and we will do better.

We are now limiting our cohort group size to 15 which allows for a more intimate setting to provide a better opportunity for staff and trainer engagement. More importantly, as

referenced in our response to the 2017 report, we continue to build our training capacity via two partnerships.

- First, we are working with DHS to conduct their core trainings in-house. This new Training Academy has been a win-win: our staff will receive training more quickly and have ongoing opportunities to shadow veterans and practice on 1-2 cases, and DHS will be able to relieve some of their six-month backlog. We will roll out this new onboarding in 2019. Eleven new Induction workers are in training now and we hope to hire 10-15 more in March. In addition, we are rolling out new training components such as a mock court hearing with the County Attorney's Office.
- Second, we continue to partner with CornerHouse, a Minneapolis nonprofit that is an accredited Children's Advocacy Center. Their mission is to offer hope and healing to those silenced by trauma and violence. CornerHouse provides training to new staff on forensic interviewing techniques, best practices and the process.

## 2. **De-centralized office model (flexible workspace/regionalization)**

*For the most part, a large majority of respondents view the open workspace concept positively. They appreciate the flexibility it affords.*

CRP identified several areas of improvement for Hennepin in how we manage open workspace, and we took action on all of them in 2018. Issues included building relationships, feeling disconnected from their team, challenging to find supervision, distractions and not enough lockers.

Supervisors and program managers have made concerted efforts to build a team atmosphere through having regular unit meetings and quarterly all-staff meetings. Beginning in 2018, we began implementing group supervision throughout all of CFS which allows for a weekly opportunity for staff to maintain connection with one another and their supervisor. Additionally, in 2018 we had our first All-CFS staff meeting and are in the planning process for the 2019 All-Staff meeting scheduled for June.

One of the issues raised by staff included being able to find supervisors. Now, supervisors have, for the most part, settled in certain areas and can usually be found in the same building, on the same floor, and in or around the same office. This allows staff to find their supervisor much more easily than in the past.

Distractions remain an issue for some, and we encourage staff to use small meeting rooms for privacy. But staff are right – open workspace comes with more distractions.

Each staff person is assigned a locker, and there are "open" lockers at each site for visiting staff to use.

### 3. Secondary trauma

*Approximately half of the respondents stated that Induction provided adequate training on secondary trauma and burnout for workers.*

Hennepin County is committed to building a trauma-informed system including attending to secondary trauma. In April 2018, Hennepin began to implement the **KVC's Safe and Connected™ Consultation and Information Sharing Framework** as the basis for decision-making at all levels. The Safe and Connected™ framework is being fully implemented across CFS via group supervision and the implementation of multi-disciplinary teams.

Safe and Connected™ has been proven to build in shared accountability and mutual ownership, creating a safer-feeling work environment and richer opportunities to improve practice through better relationships with colleagues. Everyone will use the same guiding principles and practice standards to make team decisions.

Toward the end of 2018, we began rolling out **Collaborative Safety** to staff, which is a systems approach to learning and improvement. Collaborative Safety provides tools, training and ongoing support to child welfare agencies to enhance critical incident reviews and establish a safety of culture. Collaborative Safety is based on the same science that most safety-critical industries use to review complex cases – for instance, how the National Transportation Safety Board reviews a train derailment. Trained staff review records and conduct "human factors debriefings" with staff who were involved in the case, looking for systemic influences into decision making and barriers within everyday work. Then, a team of people who weren't involved in the case but have the same roles look at what are the rules and practices and laws that went into a decision. The process moves away from finger pointing and assigning blame to a person to instead understanding barriers and finding paths to improve the system.

Hennepin is also addressing our role in reducing racial disparities, building cultural competence, and engaging the communities we serve – all are priorities that will infuse all levels of decision making. Ongoing, consistent, supportive worker training and onboarding will be a key part of this implementation. In other words, **we believe and are acting on our belief that child well-being starts with worker well-being.**

Lastly, Hennepin is also addressing secondary trauma through new training curriculum being developed. We also have a team of supervisors who have taken lead in building a supportive environment for staff that includes creative ideas for the reduction of stress and secondary trauma, including working with local volunteer resources for therapy pet visits.

#### 4. **Retention**

*Ongoing efforts by the county to increase workforce retention seem to have been yielding some success. .... However, for newly hired child protection social workers going through Induction training in 2018, 13% are no longer employed, through either voluntary or involuntary termination.*

High turnover is an inherent part of Child Protection in every jurisdiction, nationally. We acknowledge that this has a negative effect on child outcomes. That said, our staff turnover is decreasing. In 2015, it was 15%. Now, CFS' staff turnover rate is at 7.5% which is lower than the 8.4% in Children's Services and 8.8% in Child Protection we reported in our response to the 2017 CRP report.

Our goal for both is 7% but we're exceeding by far the national average of 20%.

#### 5. **Inductee improvement recommendations**

The CRP report lists 15 suggested improvements, and we are on our way to address many of these via the new training model. There will be more information on childhood trauma, the stress of the work environment, the Hennepin culture, the required paperwork and tools required to do the job.

Given the reduction of caseloads and improved staff retention, CFS is in a better position to create a mentoring program with more experienced staff partnering with new hires.

## V. Project 2: Kinship care

*Hennepin County has made significant improvement in the area of kinship placements for children and youth involved in the Child Protection system.*

According to data from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Hennepin County's kinship placements were at

- 41.4% in 2014;
- 43.7% in 2015;
- 52.8% in 2016;
- 59.2% in 2017 and
- 61% in 2018.

We easily exceed the state performance standard of 35.7%. This percentage is consistent for all racial groups and suggests that kinship placement is an area in which we are gaining on racial disparities.

While we have made significant progress in utilizing kinship placements, we recognize the need to make improvements in this area. CRP presented five recommendations:

- 1) *Improve support and engagement of kinship families by county workers, including clear, consistent communication*
- 2) *Improve county infrastructure to support effective kinship practice*
- 3) *Strengthen teaming approaches within the county, both informally and formally*
- 4) *Strengthen the approach for matching children with potential kinship caregivers*
- 5) *Develop an approach for assessing how well children are doing in their kinship placements and how well the whole kinship family is doing.*

CFS has engaged in the following initiatives or efforts to address the concerns outlined in the 2018 CRP report related to kinship care:

#### 1. Kinship Project

This project is a comprehensive analysis of Hennepin's current kinship practices as well as examination of best practices and other service models related to kinship work. **The goal of the project is to improve outcomes for youth, families and kin by changing our practice in the following areas related to kinship: family finding, licensing kinship families, supporting kinship placements, and achieving permanency for youth in kinship placements.**

#### 2. Child well-being practice model implementation

CFS has engaged in a transformation of our child welfare system. As noted above in our 2018 accomplishments, we have engaged a consultant, KVC, to assist CFS in transforming our system by using the Safe and Connected Framework™ as a way to help staff conceptualize their work with families through a comprehensive, strength-based, child well-being perspective. We began using Collaborative Safety, which provides tools, training and ongoing support to child welfare agencies to enhance critical incident reviews and establish a safety of culture. We are investing in earlier interventions, such as expanding the PSOP program

#### 3. Reasonable caseload sizes

Over the course of the past two years, CFS has been working diligently to stabilize our workforce. By reducing caseload sizes to a reasonable level, staff are better able to learn about and practice proposed practice changes, are better able to engage with youth, families and kin, and are better able to team with other professionals involved in the case.

After two years of significant hiring and onboarding and culture change, we are seeing payoffs. Staffing levels have stabilized in most units, and our retention rate is now 93

percent, which surpasses the national average in child welfare work. In March 2019, we reached a goal of having no more than 11 cases for both ICWA and non-ICWA case workers.

What does this mean for children and families? We are making progress in several performance standards, including overall timeliness (rose from 59.8 percent in 2015 to xxx in 2018), placement stability and we reached a goal of making more than 90 percent of monthly face-to-face visits with children in out-of-home placement, which indicates we are engaging families and spending time to make sure kids are safe and getting what they need.

#### **4. Family meetings**

CFS has been working to implement the practice of having a family meeting whenever there is consideration of separating the child/youth from their family for safety reasons. These family meetings are an opportunity to bring extended family and kin to the safety and case planning in an intentional and transparent way.

We use a Family Group Decision Making model, which is a family engagement strategy used internationally. This evidence-informed practice engages a network of family and friends to help with critical decisions when a child comes to the attention of the child welfare system. The model is proven to reduce disproportionality and racial disparities because it addresses power differentials that exist when poor or disenfranchised people interact with the child welfare system. With intentional efforts to address these imbalances, families of color or poverty or other social disadvantages are at high risk of a disproportionate agency response to their situation.

In 2018, staff received 300 referrals for family and youth meetings and convened 240 meetings in 2018. Another important accomplishment is we were able to include the father and/or paternal relatives in 59 percent of Family Group Decision Making family meetings.

## **VI. Project 3: Complex cases**

Hennepin CFS leadership asked CRP to review complex cases in the system to identify commonalities that lead to costly, resource-intensive outcomes. It has been difficult to define "complex" and there are many more questions as this project enters its second year. CRP will make its report on complex cases in its 2019 report.

We welcome CRP's partnership in the complex case review. Permanency for a child means a safe and stable living situation, and it's a goal that all in the child welfare system value. Long stays in foster care can lead to challenges with school, mental health, delinquency, and income, so being able to identify commonalities and perhaps integrate earlier interventions could lead to better outcomes for children and their families.