

Winona County Citizen Review Panel

2017 Annual Report

Citizen Review Panels (CRP) provide opportunities for volunteer community members to play an integral role in ensuring the child protection system is protecting children from abuse and neglect. Citizen Review Panels represent a partnership among citizens, community agencies, county child protection systems, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In addition to evaluating different aspects of the child protection system in their own communities, Citizen Review Panels look at ways to improve the child protection system statewide. In Minnesota, panels have been established in Chisago, Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, and Winona counties.

Mission Statement

Winona County Citizen Review Panel promotes and supports the continuous improvement of a child protection system that will provide safety, permanency and well being for all children in Winona County.

Panel Members

David Knight and Betsy Rowekamp agreed to continue as Co-Chairs of the panel. Mary Hewett has agreed to be the Secretary for the coming year and Joanne Gilmore, Sonia Hanson, Chong Vang and Barb Klink continue their service on the panel.

Unfortunately Dawn Selleck found it necessary to resign her position on the panel. This fall we were very pleased to welcome Tammi Stoos to the panel. Tammi has a long history of service to Winona County as a foster care provider, and is a member of the Winona County Community Services Advisory committee. She also provides training to other foster parents throughout the State for the Department of Human Services. Her knowledge and expertise in the area of foster care recruitment, training, and support will be of value to the Review Panel and the County Child Protection staff as the focus for the coming year will be increasing the number of licensed foster homes in Winona County.

Meetings

The Panel held monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of the month from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Members have also become active in other community meetings to broaden our perspective on other community groups that have child protection issues of concern. Examples are: The Children's Justice Initiative; the Child Abuse Prevention Committee facilitated through the Family and Children's Center; and a group called the Primary Prevention Project that meet to discuss a number of issues related to child protective

services, including Human Trafficking, Domestic Violence, and other family and children related issues. Mary Hewett is a member of the Winona County Community Services Advisory Committee. They work with the County Administrator and Commissioners to monitor the Human Service Department, Public Health Department, and Veterans Administration Department. In August, co-chair David Knight attended the ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) training and remains involved in the ongoing ACES Initiative project.

Several members continue attending County Child Protection Screening meetings to gain a better understanding of the process, and the utilization of the new Screening Guidelines that were introduced in late 2015 and early 2016. Many positive comments have been shared by members regarding the difficult and arduous task that screening involves.

Presented 2016 Winona County Citizen Review Panel Annual Report to the Winona County Board of Commissioners at their evening meeting on April 25th.. Copies of the report were also sent to the Department of Human Services and our local legislators.

The panel hosted a reception for Winona County Child Protection Department staff as a gesture of appreciation for their work on behalf of children and families. The event took place on November 10, 2017. The panel members provided food, beverages, and door prizes. Gift certificates were given to all child protection workers. The certificates were donated by local coffee shops. In addition to the recognition the panel had the opportunity to discuss efforts of the ongoing plans for Foster Care recruitment efforts, and the exploration of Human Trafficking issues in Southeastern Minnesota by the local CRP.

Child Protection Investigation Redeterminations 2017

The Citizen Review Panel provides a very important service to the Child Protection Unit by being available to conduct redetermination reviews on substantiated child protection cases. Minnesota State Statutes provide that the subject of a child abuse or neglect report, for which there has been a substantiated finding, has the right to request a redetermination of that finding. A group of panel members is then assembled and reviews the entire investigation including all reports, interviews, and evidence. The case is usually presented by the investigator and then the panel conducts their independent review and makes their determination regarding the initial finding.

In 2017, the panel conducted 3 of these reviews, the findings of which were all upheld. These reviews also provide feedback and positive support to the investigator(s) regarding the consistency and accuracy of their findings.

Activities and Learning

2017 was a year of education and learning for the panel members. Throughout the year panel members attended a number of child protection specific training events. These included the following:

Human Sex Trafficking

Several members have attended training sessions on Human Sex Trafficking throughout the year. There continues to be a great deal of concern about and substantial efforts to thwart this growing issue at the State and National level. The Department of Human Services defines Commercial Sexual Exploitation occurring “when someone engages in commercial sexual activity, which includes anytime anything of value or a promise of anything of value (for example, money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, or higher status in a gang or group) is given to a person by any means in exchange for any type of sexual activity. A third party may or may not be involved.” Attached to this report are several informational handouts from the Minnesota Department of Human Services on Minnesota’s Safe Harbor program. More information can be found regarding the Minnesota Human Trafficking Task force at mnhttf.org. The Superbowl will be held in Minneapolis this year, and this event alone has been identified as one of the largest markets in the world for human traffickers to ply their trade. Estimates as high as 5,000 human trafficking victims may be in Minneapolis during this time period!

Mortality Review Statewide Training

Three members of the panel attended a training session regarding Collaborative Safety. This is a new look by the Department of Human Services in Minnesota and throughout the country on how to respond to child mortality review cases.

In the past when the child protection system fails (i.e. the death of a child) the common response of child welfare agencies is to use reactionary approaches such as firing employees, writing new policies, or retraining staff. Evidence suggests however, that using reactionary approaches decreases safety because true accounts of how the “system” operates or how things could be improved are kept secret and driven underground. Staff fear being fired or sanctioned and reactionary responses lead to burnout, turnover and secondary trauma for workers.

The State of Minnesota is committed to changing this type of reaction to a Collaborative Safety approach. The concept of child safety is a systemic and cultural issue. In order to promote the shift to a systemic and proactive culture of safety, agencies need to be supported to make three key transitions: 1. Transition from a culture of blame to a culture of accountability; 2. Transition from simple to systemic methods of learning and investigation, and 3. Transition from continuously applying quick fixes to addressing underlying systemic issues.

National CRP Conference in Alaska

Two members of the panel attended the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in Alaska in May. This is an invaluable opportunity for local members to interact with CRP members from throughout the Country, and to learn about programs, issues, and ideas for dealing with a myriad of Child Protection issues. Issues are identified are often similar, but diverse and unique solutions or program ideas to address solutions are shared.

A seminar on “Why are So Many kids in out of home placement”

Mary Hewett had the opportunity to attend a program sponsored by the William Mitchell Hamline School of Law addressing “A Critical Look at the Removal Process in Minnesota and Why So Many Children are in out of home placements.” Panelists and speakers from around the country discussed current social science research related to the experiences of children during the removal process and what are the “best practices” for child centered removal.

One speaker addressed the facts surrounding the trauma that occurs to children who are removed from their home, and its impact on their overall well-being. Children have many issues including: a lack of clarity about people with whom they are being placed; they don’t know how long they are going to stay; they don’t understand why they are being placed; they don’t necessarily know where they are (many are placed long distances from their homes); and a basic understanding of what is foster care?” Foster care may not be the SAFE option, as 14% of youth self-report being physically or sexually abused when placed in foster homes.

2012-2016 has shown a big increase in foster care placement. Drug use/abuse seems to be the biggest cause for out of home placement increases. 2016 national average showed 60% of cases reported to child protection were due to neglect rather than serious physical or sexual abuse. In the State of Minnesota placement is 48% with non-family; 34% in congregate settings and 14% in relative care.

A two day train the trainer training on ACES and community resilience

One member of the panel attended a 2 day train the trainer session on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) presented by the Department of Human Services and coordinated by Dr. Ruth Charles of Winona State University. This training resulted in 30 trained facilitators who are available to provide information sessions to the community regarding the tremendous impact of ACES as the leading public health issue in the United States. Community organizations can contact Margaret Schild at Community Education as she maintains a list of ACES trainers and will arrange a presenter when requested.

In addition to almost all school programs in District 861, trainings have been held at churches and

presentations will be done to jail staff and inmates in January and November. There is an active Winona ACES Initiative Steering Committee that meets monthly as well. Their Mission statement is “leading a holistic movement to infuse the greater Winona area with trauma-informed practices.” Their Vision is “Increasing understanding of ACES across all community sectors to build resilience and hope for future generations.

Annual Statewide CRP meeting

Four members of the panel attended the annual statewide meeting of Citizen Review Panels (representatives from the 5 statewide panels, and staff from the DHS Child Mortality Review panel the Children’s Justice Act Task Force and other DHS staff) in Cottage Grove, Minnesota in November.

There were three main presentations given. Prenatal Exposure to drugs by Sue Krinkie; Domestic Violence and its impact on Child Protection by Rebecca Wilcox and Human Trafficking by Sarah Ladd who is the newly hired Human Trafficking Child Protection Program Coordinator for the State of Minnesota Department of Human Services. There was also a roundtable “Cafe’ process” during which CRP members could discuss ways in which we can address these issues in our communities.

Child Protection System: Oversight and Concerns

As a review, Citizen Review Panels involve community members in ensuring that the child protection system works well and protects children from abuse and neglect. Panel members review and evaluate various aspects of child protection systems at the state level and in their communities. We are very pleased that staff vacancies including an additional licensing worker, the Public Health Supervisor and new Community Services Director have been filled.

In January 2016 there were 37 children in placement. In January 2017 there are 71 children in placement; nearly a 100% increase. These placements include foster care (which many are out of County), relative care placements, and residential treatment placements. In 2016 the costs for out of home placements was approximately \$1.9 million! These costs have risen about \$200,000 per year over the last few years.

This paragraph from last year’s report was staggering, yet now here we are at the end of 2017 and there are 90 children in out of home placement at a cost of \$2.3 million. 63 of the 90 are in placement due to drug related investigations, and there are only 8 licensed foster homes in Winona County! In addition there are 25 children in care awaiting adoption. Out of home placements continue to rise and foster care homes decline. This translates into more and more children being placed out of County, away from their schools, friends, and families. Many children end up being placed in “treatment foster care homes” which are much more expensive than a regular licensed foster care home, and they may not even need that level of care, BUT it’s where there is a bed.

We believe this is the single most critical issue for children and families in Winona County. Therefore as a review panel we will be focusing on doing everything we can to assist the Child Protection staff in the recruitment, support and retention for additional foster care homes. One issue that should be of major concern is that there are NO licensed foster care homes that are culturally specific for non-white families.

One project underway is a CRP sponsored weekly spotlight in the Winona Daily News. This will be used as a means of bringing these issues of out of home placements, need for foster care homes, the impact of drugs and domestic violence on children and their resulting out of home placements to the citizens of Winona County. This idea is still under discussion with the Editor, but it looks very promising. It would appear weekly, most likely in the Sunday edition. Hopefully the title of the piece will be “Children and Families Matter.” This idea is also being forwarded to the editorial staff at the Winona Post. So as to control information and facts, the CRP will be responsible for providing the written information for these items.

Looking Ahead

The Winona County Citizen Review Panel plans to continue to participate in committees that address the issues related to child protection and the safety of Winona County children and families. We will continue to keep the citizens of Winona County aware of the work of the Panel and continue to recruit new members as an ongoing process working to have a diverse representation of county citizens on the Panel.

We will continue to work closely with Winona County Child Protection Services to provide oversight and support in our role as a Citizen Review Panel.

Acknowledgements

The Winona County Citizen Review Panel members deeply appreciate the guidance and support of Mary Doyle from the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Karen Sanness of the Winona County Department of Human Services. We look forward to a continued positive and productive relationship in 2018.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the panel by David J. Knight, Co-Chair