

Winona County Citizen Review Panel

The Winona Citizen Review Panel (CRP) members are well informed regarding community issues and maintain this status by sitting on a variety of community boards and initiatives. They also attend a variety of trainings and conferences pertaining to child welfare issues. Several panel members attended the annual all CRP meeting in November, and two panel members attended the national CRP conference in Alaska. One member attended a national program sponsored by William Mitchell Hamline Law School. Also, panel members sit in on screening meetings of Winona County child protection. Three members of the panel attended the Collaborative Safety introduction. One member attended the two-day training session on Adverse Childhood Experiences. Panel members attended training sessions on human trafficking throughout the year.

The panel hosted a reception for Winona County Child Protection staff as a gesture of appreciation for their work on behalf of children and families. The event was November 10, 2017. 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 ongoing plans for foster care recruitment efforts, and the exploration of human trafficking issues in southeastern Minnesota with child protection staff.

The Citizen Review Panel provides an important service to the county Child Protection Unit by being available to conduct redetermination reviews on substantiated child protection cases. Minnesota 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 findings. A group of panel members is assembled and reviews the entire investigation, including all reports, interviews and evidence. The case is usually presented by the investigator and the panel conducts its independent review and makes a determination regarding the initial finding.

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

Winona Citizen Review Panel project, Child Protection System: Panel Oversight and Concerns

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. The panel was pleased that staff vacancies, including an additional licensing worker, public health supervisor and new community services director have been filled.

In January 2016, there were 37 children in placement. In January 2017, there were 71 children

in placement; nearly a 100 percent increase. At the end of 2017, 90 children were in out-of-home placement at a cost of \$2.3 million. Sixty-three of the 90 are in placement due to drug-related investigations, and there are only eight licensed foster homes in Winona County! In addition, there are 25 children in care awaiting adoption. In 2016, the costs for out-of-home placements were approximately \$1.9 million.

Out-of-home placements continue to rise and the number of foster care homes has been declining. 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.

Panel [members] believe this is the single most critical issue for children and families in Winona County. Therefore, as a review panel, it will be focusing on doing everything they can to assist child protection staff in the recruitment, support and retention of 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.

The Winona County Citizen Review Panel plans to continue to participate on committees that address the issues related to child protection and the safety of Winona County children and families. They 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 diverse representation of county citizens on the Panel.

They will continue to work closely with Winona County Child Protection Services to provide oversight and support in the role of a Citizen Review Panel.

MN DHS Response

MN DHS staff supports the panel in its plans, and will provide information, data or specialized services members request.

MN DHS staff is appreciative of the time and work donated to the county and state agencies by members of the Winona Citizen Review Panel. They represent the citizen perspective in the redetermination review process. Panel members represent the child welfare system accurately in many and varied community meetings and events. Panel members take a great deal of time to educate themselves about the system, and stay current with emerging issues. Most important, they raise awareness of community members regarding the needs and issues in the child welfare system as well as the work being done by child protection staff. Thank you to the Winona Citizen Review Panel members and staff.

