

Child Well-Being Annual report to the board



December 2021



Introduction

Since 2017, the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee has supported an ongoing transformation of county services and supports for children and families.

This work started in the child protection system, with six major system improvement recommendations made to the Hennepin County Board by the preceding Child Protection Oversight Committee in 2016.

This year's report again focuses on key work aligned with those original recommendations. But their heart and enduring strength comes through a primary focus on well-being, and working towards that vision involves many of us. Increasingly, that work is not only held by Children and Family Services but shared in partnership with others: within Human Services, across Hennepin County and in the community.

An evolving pandemic and discourse around public safety and racial justice have marked the year, affecting families in Hennepin County and the work we do to serve them. Our data should be interpreted with that in mind. We won't understand the full impact for years to come, but our strategic direction continues to focus on racial disparities and improving outcomes for residents of color.

Through it all, we hold that vision for child and family well-being. This report shares our progress in 2021, and the groundwork laid for the work still ahead.



A new focus on child well-being

Coordination center and emergency response

Following Catholic Charities' closure of the emergency shelter and central intake programs at St. Joseph's Home for Children in 2020, Hennepin County brought that placement work in-house this year through a new coordination center.

Our first goal remains keeping children safe in their homes whenever possible. For children who must be separated from their parents, our goal is to reduce trauma by placing them with relatives.

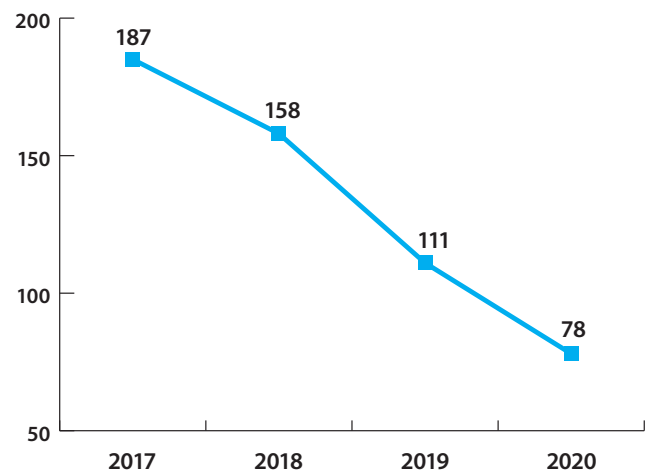
When those two options aren't possible, we now place children directly in non-relative foster homes — eliminating the first stop children previously had in a shelter foster home. We know multiple placements are hard on children and youth. By eliminating them when we can, we are rebuilding our system in a trauma-informed way. This shift in practice through the coordination center is one step that's part of a much larger system change.

We're also standing up an entirely new team of social workers through the coordination center to support children and foster families at the time of placement. The placement support team will arrange health assessments, coordinate other services, and connect parents and foster providers. With the right support during this critical time, we can promote placement stability and children's well-being.

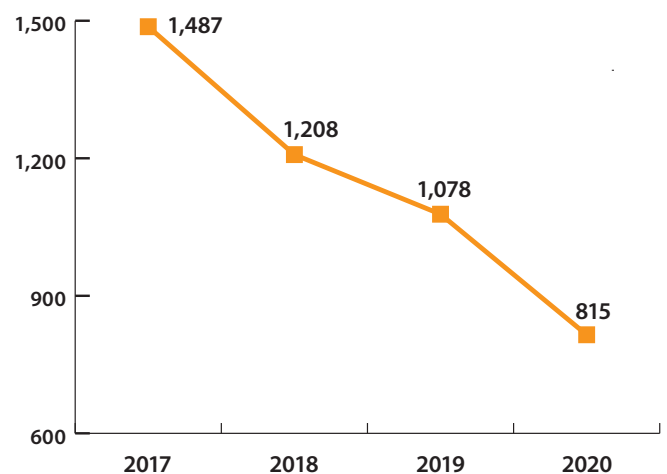
All of this is about changing the experience for children in our system, but we've also seen a steady decline in the number of children entering out-of-home placement at all — a trend that started pre-pandemic, with a 45% decrease from 2017 through 2020.

This progress can be credited to many efforts in recent years as we've focused on child and family well-being. Yet we know that disparities persist. We continue to work towards reducing disproportionality.

Average shelter placements per month



Out-of-home placement entries



Stabilize the workforce

Caseloads

Healthy, manageable workloads help staff do their best work supporting and engaging with families. These point-in-time measures demonstrate progress in efforts to add staff and lower caseloads in recent years, but our 2020 numbers also reflect the reduced volume during the pandemic. We have more work ahead to keep caseloads where we want them to be.

Turnover

In Children and Family Services, staff turnover was low in 2020—just 4.8%. Our target has been 7% in recent years. According to Casey Family Programs, a turnover rate less than 10-12% is considered optimal in child welfare, but national averages often far exceed that rate.

While this number suggests stability in our workforce, the year was defined by considerable instability: the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and lingering uncertainty. Our staff, like our community, have been affected. We will continue monitoring workforce data in the years to come, supporting our staff in their own well-being, learning and growth.

Caseloads per worker

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ongoing child protection case management	15	13	13	10
ICWA ongoing child protection case management	16	11	12	9
Child protection assessment/investigations	7	9	12	7

Note: Caseloads in December of each year.

Improve professional supports for staff

Reflective supervision

Effective supervision leads to professional growth and skill-building for our staff, and by extension to quality engagement with the families we serve. To invest in our supervisors and build capacity in multiple levels of our workforce, our child protection supervisors began a reflective supervision practice this year.

In one-on-one coaching sessions, supervisors learn new approaches to promote growth and self assessment and develop emotional understanding. In turn, this practice helps support our staff in being the kind of social workers they want to be, and that our community needs.

It's another way we are working to reduce bias in our practice, slowing down and understanding how we work with each other — and with specific attention to race and equity. We believe this is important for supporting and retaining a diverse workforce, and to do effective, inclusive work with our diverse community.

Team approach to family strengths and culture

The KVC Safe & Connected™ Consultation & Information Sharing Framework® is a core part of our practice. The framework is used across the department in group supervision, case consults and in preparation for decision point meetings, promoting critical thinking and helping us reach the best decisions possible. Structured, culturally responsive approaches like this guide us to consider families' strengths as well as the challenges they face. It's also a key way we reduce bias in our work, with multiple perspectives at the decision-making table.

Our multidisciplinary Intake Review Teams continue to use the Safe & Connected™ framework, too, bringing those same advantages to screening discussions for child protection reports. This year, we reached a big milestone: Community partners joined the screening teams in June. That broader community perspective has enriched the decision-making conversations within the team, and encourages involvement of community-based resources to support families.

Offer early and practical help to families

Supporting educational needs

During the pandemic, the critical need to support children and families in education and school success has been more urgent than ever — and to do it, we must work across and outside county business lines.

Initially funded with federal pandemic relief dollars, the now-permanent work of the county's Education Support Services helps Hennepin County youth focus on their full academic potential through mentoring, advocacy, and tutoring. Child protection, children's mental health and juvenile justice programs refer children and youth to educational services. Increased math and reading scores among participants demonstrate the positive impact we can have in such work: reducing educational disparities for children involved in county systems.

Our partners in the Hennepin County Attorney's Office support school attendance through the Be@School program. The goal is to prevent deeper family involvement in county systems, including child protection, by offering information and interventions to address barriers to attendance. Service providers include both community agencies and Hennepin County.

As a voluntary, strengths-based child welfare program, our Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) continues to focus on increasing well-being and decreasing risk. Over the last four years, the percentage of PSOP families who experience a future maltreatment finding has continued to decrease, down to just 2.7% in 2020.

These are positive early interventions and strengths-based approaches, but at the deep end, educational neglect and truancy are embodied in a punitive system. This can be a barrier to students and families engaging with services that can help.

In 2021, a crosssection of county services that support youth and education joined together to identify gaps and limitations in the system for responding to educational neglect and truancy.

With a disparity reduction lens, we see an opportunity to shift away from a reactive response that disproportionately affects families of color. Instead, we can imagine a holistic approach that is a better fit for addressing the true need: supporting educational success.

Where we're going

As we're seeing with education, we can improve child and family well-being with an expanded framework of culturally responsive services, focused on reducing disparities in key domains.

A new family response and stabilization service supports the entire family when a youth is experiencing behavioral or mental health issues. It's different from existing crisis services that may focus on a clinical response to a diagnosed condition. For family response, no issue or conflict is too small. The goal is to interrupt racial disparities in out-of-home placements for youth of color by helping families de-escalate and address the immediate concern right away, followed by connection to ongoing community supports.

For families involved in the child protection system, we're seeing continued and growing needs around substance use and housing. This year, we've laid the groundwork for future efforts to support families in these areas: developing supportive housing for our service population, and piloting an in-home treatment and recovery option for families experiencing substance use disorder.

Continue study and maintain system accountability

Foster care needs analysis

As part of the Settlement Agreement, we engaged Wilder Research to conduct a foster care needs analysis this year. The resulting report assesses needs and gaps in our foster care system, with recommendations for us to better meet the needs of children in foster care.

The analysis looked at the years 2017–2019, with data sourced from the state and county, as well as surveys and interviews with foster providers and other key experts.

The report is informing our next steps to redefine the placement experience. In coordination with the Settlement Subcommittee, we're developing a work plan guided by the recommendations in the foster care needs analysis and in context of county efforts underway since 2017–2019.

Relative search application

Kinship social workers identify relatives and kin for children who have been court-ordered into out-of-home placements. Until this year, that relative search information was captured in a static document that frequently grew to dozens of pages. There was no way to find connections across families or gather data, and it resulted in duplicate efforts.

To overcome that, we developed a new relative search application with Health and Human Services IT. While all the same information is collected, it's now stored as data points that can be queried. This means the system can help find and answer important questions about identified relatives, far more quickly than was possible before.

Improved efficiency was a clear goal, but this is about more than saving clicks. The relative search application directly contributes to children thriving in safe, stable families, surrounded by support from relatives.

The relative search functionality is just the first piece of a broader technical solution to better support children in out-of-home placement. As informed by the foster care needs analysis, new application development in the coming years will reduce the gaps in our current data system and allow for better matches between providers' strengths and capacities and children's needs.

5,241 relatives/kin identified through the relative search application in 2021



60%
maternal



40%
paternal

Note: Data as of October 31, 2021

Permanency and review teams

A safe, permanent home is essential for children's well-being. Reunifying and returning to their family of origin is how most children leave out-of-home placements. When that isn't possible, we seek other permanency resources within the family.

While the total number of children in out-of-home placement in Hennepin County has declined since 2017, children are spending more time separated from their parents. This is a complex problem, but we are working to better understand the barriers and where we should focus to improve outcomes.

Established in 2020, our four permanency review teams examine cases involving children under guardianship or who have no permanency disposition and who have been in placement for more than 24 months.

The teams have reviewed 134 legacy youth who exited placement since the spring of 2020 and of those, 87.3% were adopted – that means a permanent home and a forever family. But overall, the racial disparities are staggering. In 2020, more than 90% of children legally free for adoption were children of color.

We recognize the impact of trauma throughout our system, and know it's a factor affecting permanency, too. It's our responsibility to address this, for timely permanency and our children's well-being.

ICWA compliance

Our Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Data Unit produces a summary of the year's audits and reviews each year, evaluating the findings and any resulting conclusions or recommendations.

One such audit by the Minnesota Department of Human Services assesses compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act. This work is central to honoring the sovereignty of tribal nations and preserving connections for children to their tribes.

This year, our overall compliance was at 93%, and we improved in every category that was not already at 100%. Our scores were higher than statewide scores in every category, and our overall performance ranked ninth across all Minnesota counties.

We believe this audit captures our strong practice in this area. We continue to work towards 100% compliance, which means identifying every child with tribal connections at the beginning of our work with a family and coordinating services with tribes.

Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2021

The final recommendation of the Child Protection Oversight Committee in 2016 was to establish a permanent successor to that group’s work — the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee.

Since 2017, this group of community and child welfare system experts has helped guide and advise county staff, and update the county board on progress toward child safety and well-being outcomes.

Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2021

October 2021

Member	Title	Organization	Term Expires
Angela Conley	Commissioner	Hennepin County Board	Board
Debbie Goettel	Commissioner	Hennepin County Board	Board
Medaria Arradondo	Chief of Police	City of Minneapolis	2022
Jeanette Boerner	Adult Representation Services Director	Hennepin County	∞
Tikki Brown	Assistant Commissioner	Minnesota Department of Human Services	∞
Craig Enevoldsen	Chief of Police	City of Brooklyn Park	2021
Eric Fenner	Managing Director	Casey Family Programs	∞
Anne Gearity	Community and clinical faculty	University of Minnesota	2020
Deirdre A. Golden	Behavioral Health Director	NorthPoint Behavioral Health Services Clinic	2021
April Harrison	Pastor	Church of New Life Bloomington	2023
Dianne Heins	Attorney	Faegre Drinker	Special appointment through 2024
Rosa Herrera	Resident with lived experience	Partnership Academy School	2023
Juan Hoyos	Judge	4th Judicial District	∞
Traci LaLiberte	Executive Director, Center for the Advanced Study of Child Welfare	University of Minnesota	2021
Michael Lehan	Assistant Superintendent of Equity & Achievement	District 279 — Osseo Area Schools	2022
Anne McKeig	Associate Justice	Minnesota Supreme Court	2022
Mike Scholl	Director	Casey Family Programs	∞
Ada Smith	Resident with lived experience		2023

continued on page 10

Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2021, continued

Alice Swenson	Pediatrician	Children's Minnesota	2020
Lolita Ulloa	Deputy County Attorney	Hennepin County Attorney's Office	∞
Noya Woodrich	Deputy Commissioner, Health Department	City of Minneapolis	2021

Hennepin County staff

Jodi Wentland	Deputy County Administrator — Health and Human Services	Ex officio
Lisa Bayley	Senior Policy Advisor — Child Well-Being	Ex officio
Susan Palchick	Director of Public Health	Ex officio
Ann Ahlstrom	Staff to committee	Hennepin County
Evangeline Filosi	Staff support	Hennepin County
Stacy Rudnick	Data Coordinator	Hennepin County

Settlement subcommittee annual report

The Settlement Subcommittee provides additional guidance and oversight for reform efforts, guided by the settlement agreement that concluded a federal class action lawsuit naming Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services over child maltreatment and child placement concerns.

The Settlement Subcommittee makes its own annual report to the board, as follows here.

Biannual report of the settlement subcommittee

Annual year end report

December 2021

Background

The settlement subcommittee was created as part of the settlement of a class action lawsuit in federal district court in Minnesota. In the lawsuit, T.F., et. al. v. Hennepin County et. al., Plaintiffs alleged that the Hennepin County child welfare and child protection system was not doing all it should to protect children. Plaintiffs did not seek monetary damages but rather changes to the operation of Hennepin County's child welfare and protection system. Defendants asserted numerous defenses and denied any liability to Plaintiffs.

After numerous mediation sessions, the parties agreed to settle the lawsuit and entered into a settlement agreement that established the settlement subcommittee and its responsibilities, including providing annual reports to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. The settlement subcommittee is to be maintained for a period of at least four (4) years to monitor timely compliance by the County with the settlement agreement, including evaluating the results of audits and reviews, and identifying, directing, and/or conducting the reasonable and necessary reviews identified in the settlement agreement, reporting the findings of evaluations and reviews to the Child Well Being Advisory Committee and providing strategic guidance and recommendations regarding priority issues and concerns for further analysis and improvement by Hennepin County.

Under the terms of the settlement agreement, the settlement subcommittee has some shared responsibilities with the Child Well Being Advisory Committee, its own unique responsibilities and other areas of review and oversight.

This is the second biannual report of the settlement subcommittee for 2021, prepared in advance of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioner annual special meeting on child protection issues as required by the Settlement Agreement. This report summarizes the subcommittee’s work in 2021 on matters identified in the settlement agreement and previews our 2022 work priorities.

Settlement subcommittee

The settlement subcommittee has five voting members and one ex-officio non-voting member.

1. Jodi Wentland, Deputy Hennepin County Administrator- Health and Human Services (appointed by Hennepin County)
2. Dan Rogan, Assistant Hennepin County Administrator — Operations (appointed by Hennepin County)
3. Dianne Heins, Counsel, Faegre Drinker law firm (appointed by Plaintiffs)
4. Susan Ault, former Senior Director, Casey Family Programs, and former Director, Ramsey County Child and Family Services Division (appointed by Plaintiffs)
5. John Stanoch, former Hennepin County District Court Judge, appointed as Independent Neutral and Chair of the settlement subcommittee by the court, with the agreement of the parties
6. Eric Fenner, Managing Director, Casey Family Programs (ex-officio, non-voting member)

During 2021 the settlement subcommittee continued to meet monthly. Due to the ongoing global pandemic, all our meetings were held remotely during the year.

Permanency

While the total number of children in out of home placement in Hennepin County has declined since 2017, children are spending more time in out of home placement. The median number of days in placement has increased from 309 days in 2017 to 495 days in 2021.

The majority of Hennepin County children in out of home placement are young and children of color. State Wards in Hennepin County are referred to as legacy children, and a majority are age 11 or younger and most are children of color. Legacy children also experience out of home placement for longer periods of time.

In the 2020 report the settlement subcommittee indicated it was essential to develop a better understanding of the reasons for these outcomes and develop recommendations to address improved outcomes. This was a major focus of our work in 2021 and will continue into 2022 as we continue to learn from the work of the Hennepin County child protection review teams and review the Out of Home Placement & Permanency Dashboard published for Hennepin County Juvenile Court and court stakeholders.

Hennepin County’s performance in achieving timely permanency for children within 12 months has varied since 2017, improved since 2019 and is on track to meet the federal performance standard this year. Performance in 12–23 months has fluctuated since 2017 but is also on track to meet performance this year. Performance in 24 months or more has steadily increased and performance has already been achieved for 2021.

– Permanency trends

Figures as of September each year

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
12 months Target 40.5%	39.4%	39.2%	38.1%	32.2%	38.5%
12–23 months Target 43.6%	33.6%	35.0%	34.5%	36.3%	41.8%
24 months Target 30.3%	25.3%	24.4%	25.7%	25.5%	30.8% MET

– Court improvement project

Working with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office and Hennepin County Adult Representation Services, Hennepin County Child Protection and the Fourth Judicial District Juvenile Court have developed a proposed child protection court improvement project titled "Disparity Reduction Effort in Out of Home Placement for Children in the Child Protection System." This work will be facilitated over 24 months by an independent third party with experience helping other states and jurisdictions across the country to address permanency issues in the child protection system. The Hennepin County Juvenile Court and Hennepin County Attorney's Office are also working with the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota to improve efficiencies in court scheduling. These initiatives have the potential to result in reform efforts, with input from all key stakeholders, that will improve case processing and outcomes, including more timely permanency decisions for children. The settlement subcommittee is hopeful that this process involving child protection system stakeholders will yield useful information about permanency outcomes and result in positive changes to address system disparities. The settlement subcommittee intends to receive monthly updates on this work in 2022 and we will continue to evaluate the impact of this work on permanency decisions, timelines, and disparities.

– Permanency dashboard

With the full support of the settlement subcommittee, during 2021 Hennepin County Child Protection engaged the Hennepin County Juvenile Court, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, and Hennepin County Adult Representation Services in a process to develop a permanency dashboard that could be used by all system partners to better track out of home placements and permanency cases. The Hennepin County Guardian Ad Litem Office and Public Defender's Office have also indicated an interest in collaboration and exploring shared data.

Substantial work was completed in 2021 on this project, including identifying data needs from each user, defining the data elements of the proposed dashboard, assessing privacy considerations and communications and training for all users. A charter for the work group of system partners has been approved, a work plan developed, a project steering

committee membership finalized, and the first meeting of the steering committee was held in June 2021. Hennepin County estimates the work to have a permanency dashboard in place will be completed by the second quarter of 2022.

In addition, at our October 2021 meeting the settlement subcommittee received a demonstration of the Hennepin County Out of Home Placement Power BI report, which reflects data on all children in placement broken down by age groups, race, gender, ICWA status, and ethnicity, as well as length of stay, primary removal conditions and placement settings. The data and metrics can be tracked over time by month and year. This data tool is now in place and will allow the settlement committee to monitor trends and conduct deeper analysis pending the rollout of the permanency dashboard in 2022.

– Barriers for children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency determination

Pursuant to Section 5.b. ix. of the Settlement Agreement, in March Hennepin County presented the second biannual report regarding children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. The settlement subcommittee continued its discussion regarding the report in April. The report reflected Hennepin County's compliance with the Settlement Agreement's requirements for the review process, team participants, and elements reviewed for the period ending December 31, 2020.

In 2020, the Hennepin County Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) data unit and Hennepin County Children and Family Services, in partnership with the Hennepin County Attorney's office, established a more robust process for reviewing all cases involving legacy youth (previously known as "state wards.")

Hennepin County has established a review team structure of four sub-teams that review every child each quarter. These sub-teams are comprised of relevant staff with close knowledge of the cases being reviewed. CQI staff document the review elements for each child, using a consistent set of questions regarding placement and permanency plan appropriateness, barriers to reunification (24+ month) or barriers to adoption, and recruitment efforts for legacy children/youth.

In addition, a high-level Permanency Review team has been established comprised of several child protection managers, supervisors, a county attorney, and members of the CQI data unit. This team discusses barriers that have been identified by sub-teams, especially systemic barriers.

The biannual report is data rich and has provided the settlement subcommittee insight into several critical areas, including age, race, ethnicity, ICWA status and gender for each category of youth, specific information regarding barriers to permanency, the number of documented barriers to permanency for each child, information on parents still working toward permanency and visiting the child, whether there is a concurrent permanency plan or a permanency resource and barriers to reunification.

The report and work of the review teams have revealed the striking prevalence of mental health issues for children and youth whose parents' rights had been terminated—more than half—and that their mental health concerns served as a barrier to a permanency disposition, most children or youth having at least three identified barriers to matching with a new legal family. Of children in care for at least 24 months with parental rights intact, about 70% were identified as having parental substance use as a barrier to reunification, followed in frequency by parental mental health: in these families, most had at least two barriers to reunification.

In September, Hennepin County presented more information regarding barriers. The Continuous Quality Improvement team identified five barriers to permanency that are highlighted in the trend report: learning disabilities, youth declining adoptions, children's mental health and developmental disabilities case management, chemical health of parents and death of a parent. Hennepin County will next present these factors to the high-level permanency review team looking at trends in these cases for further analysis and discussion and inclusion in the next trend report. The subcommittee is also interested in further discussion on work to help children address and heal from trauma and address mental health issues, recurring themes of urgency across several areas of focus by the settlement subcommittee, including permanency and foster care.

Foster care needs analysis

As required by Section 5.b.vi of the Settlement Agreement, Hennepin County commissioned a third party foster care needs analysis. The settlement subcommittee reviewed the Request for Proposals prepared by Hennepin County in early 2020 and approved the selection of Wilder Research to conduct the needs analysis.

The settlement subcommittee also reviewed the scope of work to be conducted by Wilder Research and offered suggestions to provide additional depth to the study, including interviews of foster parents and other system stakeholders. In addition, it was determined early on that there was a need to supplement the Wilder Research work with information on a significant number of Hennepin County children placed outside of Hennepin County to provide a comprehensive view of the needs of all children in placement.

The Wilder Research study, entitled "Assessing Gaps and Needs for Children and Families Involved in Hennepin County's Foster Care System," was presented to the settlement subcommittee in September and to the Child Well Being Advisory Committee in October, accompanied by an "Out of County Placement Analysis" prepared by Hennepin County Human Services relating to children placed outside Hennepin County. An executive summary of the Wilder Research report finding and recommendations is included as Attachment C to this report.

The study covered data from 2017 through 2019 and addressed issues required by the Settlement Agreement but not current initiatives or changes made by Hennepin County as a result of the settlement.

The report examined many aspects of the Hennepin County foster care system, including:

- System capacity, including the number and characteristics of licenses and available placements, requested and granted variances, and the licensure process.
- The characteristics of needs of children and youth in foster care, such as age, race and ethnicity, ICWA status, disability status, mental and behavioral health, and sibling groups.

- The experience and needs of foster families, such as provider recruitment, preparation and training, and ongoing support and communication from Hennepin County.
- Safety and stability for youth in foster care, including the number of moves youth experience, maltreatment reports, and the factors that contribute to placement instability and maltreatment.

Wilder Research made findings and developed the following recommendations for Hennepin County to consider to better meet the needs of providers and children in foster care.

Improvements to child and youth-level experience

- Focus on the child's initial entry into care to ensure the best placement possible and immediate services to support that child and foster home.
- Preventing maltreatment involves a shift in the child welfare system towards a culture that allows children to speak up, share their voice, and help them understand safe boundaries and healthy relationships.
- All children in placement have experienced trauma; all foster homes need to be therapeutic and connected to mental health services and other supports.

Improvements to the recruitment and retention of foster families

- Instead of focusing on recruitment of foster families, focus on partnership and retention.
- The best recruitment focuses on intentional and ongoing relationship building with the community and its networks, rather than focusing on individuals.
- Improve the process for a family to become a foster home.
- Improve the supports to keep families as a foster home.
- Intentionally plan, connect, and support work that involves the foster parents with the child's birth parents.

Other practice and system improvements

- Train and support Hennepin County staff to do more outreach and intentional, authentic relationship building with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.
- Focus on responsiveness and communication.
- Appoint a systems change champion that leads efforts to integrate recommendations from multiple sources and initiatives and follows up with communities about reform progress.
- Assess data collection systems and practices to ensure that data is accurate, real-time, and useful for everyone involved in the foster care system, from leadership to case workers to foster families.
- Use data to proactively plan for recruiting the pool of foster families that match the needs of Hennepin County children.

At our September meeting, the settlement subcommittee discussed the broad themes of the Wilder Research report and discussed the need to address data issues to allow for real time analysis and responsiveness to meet needs of children and families. Addressing trauma and mental health needs are also viewed as essential. Plans to support foster families, resources for relative placements, data on maltreatment in foster care, licensing issues, the need for timely information provided to potential foster parents about a child, a range of supports for families and children, training and mentoring for foster parents were also discussed as a non-exclusive list of items the settlement subcommittee will pursue with Hennepin County as part of a work plan to address the findings and recommendations of the Wilder Research report.

In October the settlement subcommittee began the discussion relating to current work underway in Hennepin County that addresses the issues identified in the Wilder Research study and the development of specific work plan, a discussion that continued in November and will result in a specific work plan for 2022 and beyond.

Re-envisioning shelter care

With the closing of St. Joseph's Home for Children, Hennepin County has redesigned the process of entering out of home placement with less use of shelter to provide an initial foster care placement for most children. Shelter care now encompasses a wide range of facility types, with placements responding to several service needs, not simply foster care entry. The County has identified three categories of children and youth who experience shelter placements in Hennepin County.

- Category 1: In need of immediate safety, often as they enter placement on a protective hold or court order;
- Category 2: Behaviors contribute to their need for safety so that enhanced care is indicated; or
- Category 3: Complex behavioral and mental health needs that may include cross-system involvement and specialized care.

Hennepin County has developed a Coordination Center to seek less restrictive settings and working with more foster home options. Shelter use overall is declining. Use of shelter facilities for children under twelve is rare, and most frequently associated with keeping sibling groups together in shelters in residential homes or behavior that needs awake care around the clock. Other factors that make shelter facility use more likely are behavior or mental health needs that are addressed in a shelter-based assessment program and tribal preference for a tribal shelter pending a tribal foster home being identified.

Hennepin County continues its work through the Coordination Center to enhance the match of child needs and foster home abilities and provide access to more support services for foster homes, especially relative caregivers. Consistent with the Settlement Agreement and concerns expressed by members of the settlement subcommittee regarding the tension between the desire for quick placements into foster care and the need for relevant and timely information regarding the child and their needs to potential foster families, Hennepin County is also considering how to best provide relevant information about a child more

quickly to potential foster parents to allow for more informed and rapid initial foster care placements and minimize the risk of placement disruptions.

The settlement subcommittee will continue to monitor and discuss shelter trends and Hennepin County's efforts to promote stable placements for children, including both initial placements and any subsequent placements.

Trial home visits

Pursuant to Section 5(b)(xv) of the Settlement Agreement, Hennepin County had an obligation to develop and implement protocols and practice standards regarding trial home visits. Hennepin County has developed trial home visit protocols and practice standards and has conducted staff training. The focus of Hennepin County's work is to plan for services and support to be in place prior to the transition home, and for families to have more assistance as they reestablish their relationships and responsibilities. The settlement subcommittee will be receiving regular updates on Hennepin County's work on trial home visits and will continue to monitor compliance with the trial home visits practice standards and protocols and related data regarding the impact of these changes in leading to timely and stable reunification.

Other areas outlined in the Settlement Agreement

The settlement committee continues to track all items outlined in the Settlement Agreement. Some items are being monitored through written reports and discussion as needed. Other items are included on our agenda for more substantive, regular discussions. A summary of our meeting topics and discussion during 2021 is included as Attachment A to this report. The status of our work on all items in the Settlement Agreement is included as Attachment B to this report.

The work ahead

As we move into 2022, the settlement subcommittee is working on a detailed work plan for the year.

We will continue to focus on permanency issues, using information gained from the Hennepin County Out of Home Placement Power BI report, Continuous Quality Improvement team ongoing work, the high-level review team and other sources to identify root causes of delay in achieving permanency for children, identify service gaps, offer suggestions for developing or improving effective services and solutions and addressing disparities in the system. We are hopeful that the permanency dashboard scheduled to roll out in 2022 will assist with our analysis as well as serve as a valuable resource to all child protection system stakeholders. We are also hopeful the facilitated disparity reduction effort will yield positive results for children and families and we will carefully monitor that work.

We will provide input to Hennepin County on a detailed workplan to address the findings and recommendations of the Wilder Research foster care needs analysis and plan to actively participate in discussions to improve the foster care system as part of our 2022 workplan.

We will continue to monitor Hennepin County's work to re-envision shelter care, work on trial home visits and other items outlined in the settlement agreement.

We will also focus on issues that cut across several areas of child protection such as the need to address trauma experienced by all children in the system, the need for mental health services and the need to provide timely, accurate information about a child to prospective foster parents or adoptive parents to minimize placement disruptions and avoid further trauma to the child.

A good deal of our work in the last two years has been learning about work by Hennepin County to address issues identified in the Settlement Agreement and providing a baseline for our future work. In 2022 and 2023 we look forward to pushing forward with system reform initiatives that will benefit all child and families.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Stanoch

Chair and Independent Neutral, Settlement Subcommittee

On behalf of the settlement subcommittee

Attachment A

Summary of monthly settlement subcommittee meeting topics

January–December 2021

January

- The settlement subcommittee held a virtual meet and greet with Hennepin County Commissioner Angela Conley, the new Chair of the Child Well Being Advisory Committee and Commissioner Debbie Goettel, who continues as Vice Chair of the CWB Advisory Committee.
- Reviewed and provided comments on proposed SSIS language regarding visits with a foster child outside the presence of a foster parent.
- Reviewed the status of the Wilder research foster care needs analysis. The final report will be issued in August rather than July. The settlement subcommittee requested that Hennepin County provide Wilder Research with supplemental information on children placed outside Hennepin County or outside family foster care in Hennepin County to provide a comprehensive view on the needs of children in placement.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on permanency work. The County has engaged system partners in a conversation about permanency and other child protection issues.
- Received an update on development of a permanency data dashboard. The County and courts have been looking at data and trends and will obtain input from other system partners.
- Received an update on case standards training and protocols. Training for new hires has started and training for all employees will begin in April.
- Received an update on training regarding child interviews outside the presence of an alleged offender during investigations. Training for staff was completed in December and the requested SSIS changes are in place.

February

- The settlement subcommittee held a de-brief on the February CWB Advisory Committee meeting. The subcommittee held a discussion on staffing of ICWA cases and caseload sizes and will continue to monitor.
- Discussed development of a written reporting template for items the subcommittee continues to monitor.
- Received and discussed the quarterly shelter review report. Entries to shelter are down but long stays are more likely for youth with complex needs, which will be further studied and discussed in the next quarterly review. Hennepin County is also working to establish a family mobile response to respond immediately to avoid shelter placement.
- Received an update on the state ward audit report. Hennepin County conducted an internal review of the Minnesota Department of Human Services audit and is engaged in ongoing discussion with DHS to discuss and resolve inconsistencies. Hennepin County will provide the settlement subcommittee with an update on those discussions at the March meeting.
- Held additional discussion on proposed SSIS updates relating to interviews with children in foster care outside the presence of foster parents. This is an ongoing discussion.
- Received a permanency update from Hennepin County. Conversations with the juvenile court continues and there is agreement on the importance of positive outcomes for children, reducing disparities that exist within the system and how to support family preservation. The Hennepin County Juvenile Court is working with the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota on improving efficiencies such as scheduling. A

workgroup has been established through the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) to work together on kinship engagement.

- Received an update on the establishment of a permanency dashboard. The Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Adult Representation Services and Hennepin County Children and Family Services staff have continued to provide information on barriers for each case included in the cohort study. A next step will be to determine what data points will be most useful from the court to incorporate into the data dashboard.

March

- Reviewed and discussed the first bi-annual report regarding children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. Hennepin County staff leading this process identified benefits in further analysis and direct problem solving for situations that are not progressing well. The subcommittee also noted the high incidence of mental health concerns as a barrier for children and youth post-TPR. The subcommittee will continue to review the report and engage in further discussion with Hennepin County during the year.
- The proposed SSIS changes relating to interviews of children in foster care outside the presence of foster parents were approved by DHS and will go live in June.
- Received an update on the Wilder research foster care needs analysis and timeline for the report. Wilder research anticipates providing drafts of their report to the settlement subcommittee in August and September, with the final report to be presented the CWB Advisory Committee meeting in October.
- Received an update on the DHS state ward audit. DHS is working with Hennepin County to revise the report in time for the April settlement subcommittee meeting.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on permanency. The County is working with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Adult Representation Services, and the Fourth Judicial District Juvenile Court to explore contracting with a national organization to work together on permanency system improvements

that would reduce racial disparities and shorten the length of time children spend in foster care. The County will continue to provide the settlement subcommittee with updates on this effort.

- Received an update on establishment of a permanency dashboard. Substantial work has been completed to identify data needs from each user area, defining the data elements and assessing privacy considerations, communication, and training for all users. Hennepin County estimates this work will be completed by the second quarter of 2022.
- Received a written update on Hennepin County Attorney's Office consultation for maltreatment re-reports. The settlement subcommittee requested that the number of maltreatment re-reports where parents were not engaged in services be included in future reports.

April

- The settlement subcommittee held a de-brief on the April CWB Advisory Committee meeting
- Continued the March discussion relating to the biannual report regarding children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. Hennepin County discussed how it is using the findings of the report, noting the prevalence of specific barriers calls forward gaps in services. The County is using the data to dig in and do more problem solving. The settlement subcommittee requested that the next biannual report be accompanied with information outlining actions to address themes identified in the first biannual report, including a more nuanced discussion of the duration of placement to capture change in practice over time.
- Received and discussed a report from Hennepin County on the first audit findings regarding child interviews outside the presence of an alleged offender. The subcommittee suggested that the next quarterly report distinguish results by ages 0–2, 3–5 and 6–17.
- Received a permanency update. Discussions continue with Hennepin County child protection system partners and an outside national organization regarding a project to examine the Hennepin County child protection system and reducing racial disparities.

- Received a permanency dashboard update. A draft charter has been circulated to child protection system partners regarding cross-system data collection. Responses received to date have been positive.
- Received an update on the multidisciplinary team screening approach.

May

- Received and discussed the Hennepin County Continuous Quality Improvement team report. Hennepin County will consider ways to provide updates on items from the report as part of the work plan for the next year.
- Received and discussed the re-envisioning shelter report. With the closing of St. Joseph's Home for Children, Hennepin County has re-designed the process of entering out of home placement with less use of shelter. A coordination center has been established to seek less restrictive settings and working with more foster home options. Shelter use overall is declining.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on Trial Home Visit Practice Standards and training.
- Received a permanency update and reviewed a draft scoping document for the proposed child protection court improvement project titled "Disparity Reduction Effort in Out of Home Placement for Children in the Child Protection System". Discussions are underway to review a draft proposal from a potential vendor to facilitate this work.
- Received an update on the permanency dashboard. Substantial progress was reported, with a charter of the workgroup approved, a work plan developed, a project steering committee membership finalized, and a first meeting of the committee scheduled for June.

June

- The settlement subcommittee held a de-brief on the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting.
- Held a deep dive on date dashboard trends from May 2020–May 2021. The report contained data related to maltreatment re-reports, assessment and investigations, and permanency data.

- Received a report from Hennepin County on potential adoptive parents receiving all information about a child. The County is taking steps for supervisors and managers to work with adoption workers to improve the process and quality of information provided.
- Received a report from Hennepin County on foster parents receiving all information about a child.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on a proposed permanency project.
- Received a permanency dashboard update.

July

- Provided a demonstration of the Relative Search Application that Hennepin County has developed for use by Kinship Social Workers. This application is a valuable new resource that allows for quicker identification of relatives and kin, contacts with them and other placement resource considerations in one integrated location. Many of the information capabilities were only available manually in the past.
- Discussed way to align the settlement subcommittee's work to follow up on key findings of the Continuous Quality Improvement team reports between annual reports. Hennepin County will ensure that work identified in the annual CQI reports are integrated into existing related agenda items.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on a proposed permanency project to be facilitated by the American Bar Association.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on work to establish a permanency dashboard.
- Received an update from Hennepin County regarding reviews of legacy youth. The number of legacy youth reviewed in the second quarter of 2020 was 260, compared to 160 reviewed in the second quarter of 2021, a decrease of 100 youth or 38%, many in the 0-5 year old age range. Hennepin County will provide more information addressing the reason for the decline.
- Received an update on the Wilder research foster care needs draft report to be presented at the August meeting.

- Received follow up information on potential adoptive parents receiving all information about a child. Items discussed included not waiting for APA signature to document, discuss and provide all information about a potential adoptive child to an adoptive parent and concerns about foster providers needing to make quick decisions with limited information because of the county effort to place children in foster homes rather than shelter. Hennepin County indicated that the ongoing Coordination Center work will address this concern.

August

- Received a presentation from Wilder Research staff on the draft findings and recommendations from the Foster Care Needs Analysis. Subcommittee members engaged Wilder Research in a Q&A session and provided feedback on the draft report.
- Received written reports from Hennepin County on the quarterly shelter review, re-envisioning shelter care work in progress, interviews with children outside the presence of an alleged offender, the proposed ABA disparity reduction permanency project and development of a data dashboard.

September

- Discussed the Hennepin County review team bi-annual report regarding children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. The Continuous Quality Improvement team identified five barriers to permanency that are highlighted in the trend report presented: learning disabilities, youth declining adoptions, children's mental health and developmental disabilities case management, chemical health of parents and death of a parent. Hennepin County will present these factors to the high-level review team looking at trends in these cases for further analysis and discussion for inclusion in the next trend report. The subcommittee is also interested in further discussion on work to help children address and heal from trauma and address mental health issues.

- Discussed the findings and recommendations of the Wilder research foster care needs analysis report. Reviewed and discussion the out of county placement report prepared by Hennepin County to supplement the Wilder research report and provide a comprehensive view of the needs of Hennepin County children in placement. Hennepin County has begun work on a work plan to address the findings and recommendations of the Wilder research report.
- Received a report from Hennepin County of contracted services to pilot services for older legacy youth and the 24 month plus in placement with no permanency children to address trauma and relationship building in a culturally responsive way.
- Received a report about hiring at the Hennepin County Coordination Center as part of Hennepin County's re-envisioning shelter initiative.
- Received a status report on the proposed ABA permanency project.
- Received an update from Hennepin County on the out of home placement and permanency dashboard.
- Receive a written report on Hennepin County Attorney's Office consultation on maltreatment re-reports. This item is in a monitoring phase by the subcommittee.
- Provided an update on interviews of children outside the presence of an alleged offender. The subcommittee requested some additional data refinement to provide insights into reasons why children are declining interviews.

October

- The subcommittee held a de-brief on the Child Well Being Advisory Committee meeting and the Wilder Research presentation to the Advisory Committee.
- Engaged in a discussion with Hennepin County staff regarding a draft workplan to address the Wilder Research Foster Care Needs Analysis findings and recommendations.
- Received a demonstration on the Hennepin County Out of Home Placement Power BI report, which reflects data on all children in placement broken down by age groups, race, gender, ICWA status, and ethnicity, as well as length of stay, primary removal conditions and placement settings. The data and metrics can be tracked over time by month and year.

- Hennepin County indicated they are nearing completion of a contract with the ABA to facilitate the stakeholder permanency project.
- Received an update on Multi-Disciplinary Screening team work.
- Reviewed a draft six month work plan for the subcommittee's future work.

November

- Continued a discussion with Hennepin County staff regarding a draft workplan to address the Wilder Research Foster Care Needs Analysis findings and recommendations.
- Participated in a data dashboard review on foster care and permanency matters.
- Discussed the year end biannual report for 2021 in preparation for the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners special meeting on child protection in December.
- Received an update on Hennepin County work on case plans.
- Discussed the quarterly shelter review report and Hennepin County re-visioning shelter work.

December

(Agenda per settlement subcommittee work plan).

- Review presentation to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners special meeting on child protection matters.
- Review progress and results on trial home visits.
- Review full disclosure of information to potential foster and adoptive parents.
- Discuss top 5 identified permanency barriers, review work in progress to address barriers.
- Permanency and permanency dashboard updates.
- Finalize settlement subcommittee work plan for the first 6 months of 2022.

Attachment B

Settlement subcommittee work plan status

November 2021

1. Data dashboard.
Status: Dashboard established and monitored on an ongoing basis with a “deep dive” every 6 months to examine and discuss trends.
2. Screen out/track assignment audit.
Status: Audits ongoing and results provided to settlement subcommittee.
3. Implement child interviews outside presence of alleged perpetrator during investigation.
Status: MNIT database modifications reviewed and in place and exceptions reported to settlement subcommittee. Subcommittee actively monitoring “exceptional circumstances” standard.
4. Implement child interviews outside presence of foster parent.
Status: MNIT database modifications reviewed and in place, exceptions reported to settlement subcommittee. Subcommittee actively monitoring “exceptional circumstances” standard.
5. Quarterly shelter use report and recommendations.
Status: Quarterly reports being provided to settlement subcommittee. Subcommittee discussing results in concert with Hennepin County initiative to re-envision shelter care.
6. Implement review team for children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition.
Status: Review team established and meeting regularly. Observations and issues reported to settlement subcommittee for review and discussion. Subcommittee has received first readouts of barriers and will continue deep dive on barriers.
7. Implement multi-disciplinary team screening approach.
Status: Multi-disciplinary team screening established. Status reports provided to settlement subcommittee.
8. Implement county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services.
Status: County attorney consultation occurring. Status reports provided to settlement subcommittee.
9. 3rd party contract: Foster Care Needs Analysis.
Status: Wilder Research report “Assessing Gaps and Needs for Children and Families Involved in Hennepin County’s Foster Care System” presented to settlement subcommittee in September, 2021 and to Child Well Being Advisory Committee in October, 2021. Settlement subcommittee working with Hennepin County staff to develop a detailed work plan to respond to findings and recommendations of the report. Expected to be a major focus of subcommittee work in 2022 and 2023.
10. Implement case plan protocol and practice standards.
Status: Protocols and practice standards developed and reviewed by settlement subcommittee and staff training in place. Status reports to be provided to settlement subcommittee.

11. CQI audit report.
Status: First annual CQI report audit report provided to settlement subcommittee. Hennepin County and settlement subcommittee exploring how to keep informed on improvement strategies and status updates between annual reports.
12. State ward audit.
Status: First annual DHS audit completed and reviewed by settlement subcommittee.
Settlement subcommittee will receive and discuss future audit findings.
13. Re-envisioning shelter care.
Status: Hennepin County has made significant progress in efforts to re-envision and operationalize shelter care. Settlement subcommittee has provided feedback on Hennepin County efforts and will continue to receive status updates and address identified concerns.
14. Implement trial home visit protocol and practice standards.
Status: Trial home visit protocol and practice standards developed and reviewed by settlement subcommittee. Status reports to be provided to the settlement subcommittee.
15. Implement use of Minnesota PPAI to manage recruitment for children under guardianship more than 12 months.
Status: Implemented. Settlement subcommittee will be kept updated.
16. Implement potential adoptive parents receiving all information about child before pre-adoptive placement and are able to meet their needs.
Status: Progress and information to be provided reviewed by settlement subcommittee.
Settlement subcommittee to receive and discuss ongoing reports on effectiveness of changes.
17. Implement foster parent receiving information about a child's needs.
Status: Progress and information to be provided reviewed by settlement subcommittee.
Settlement subcommittee to receive and discuss ongoing reports on effectiveness of changes.
18. 600 additional hours.
Status: 600 additional hours of settlement subcommittee data work directed to help child protection system partners in development of permanency dashboard.

Attachment C

Assessing Gaps and Needs for Children and Families Involved in Hennepin County's Foster Care System

An Independent Review and Analysis of Data

Authors: Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, Monica Idzelis Rothe, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Melissa Serafin

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Executive summary

In 2020, Hennepin County contracted with Wilder Research (Wilder) to review and assess the needs and gaps of Hennepin County's foster care system. This independent review is the result of a Stipulation and Settlement Agreement (Settlement) in the case of T.F., et al. v. Hennepin County, et al. (2018). As part of this analysis, Wilder examined many aspects of the Hennepin County foster care system, including:

- System capacity, including the number and characteristics of licenses and available placements, requested and granted variances, and the licensure process.
- The characteristics and needs of children and youth in foster care, such as age, race and ethnicity, ICWA status, disability status, mental and behavioral health, and sibling groups.
- The experience and needs of foster families, such as provider recruitment, preparation and training, and ongoing support and communication from Hennepin County.
- Safety and stability for youth in foster care, including the number of moves youth experience, maltreatment reports, and the factors that contribute to placement instability and maltreatment.

Methods

The study used a mixed-methods approach. Wilder analyzed the following *secondary* data sources (provided by Hennepin County and representing 2017 through 2019):

- Social Service Information System (SSIS) data
- Licensing data from Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Hennepin County variance data
- Hennepin County Placement Request System data

Wilder also conducted *primary* data collection, including an online survey of Hennepin County foster providers and a series of key informant interviews with foster providers, youth in extended foster care (age 18 or older), Hennepin County staff, and local and national subject matter experts.

Overview of findings

This study highlights the complexities of the child welfare system in Minnesota's largest county, and answers (as best as possible) questions from the Stipulation and Settlement Subcommittee around Hennepin County's structure and ability to promote the safety, stability, and well-being of the children in its care. Research questions address the Settlement only and do not focus on current initiatives or changes made by Hennepin County as a result of the Settlement. Primarily, this study is an assessment of needs and gaps in the Hennepin County foster care system, showcasing opportunities for change.

To place the study in context, administrative data analyzed for the report represent a time prior to the pandemic, prior to the closure of St. Joseph’s Home for Children, and prior to the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. More recent data, through an online survey and in-depth interviews, illustrate a foster care system (like many other systems) that must reckon with long-standing systemic racism, as well as the trauma that children and families experience, both prior to (and as a result of) their involvement in the foster care system.

Overall, study findings highlight the importance of foster home preparation services that emphasize detailed youth histories, training on trauma and responding to subsequent behavioral issues, and follow-up communication. There is also a strong need for more responsive county workers who give youth and families information on each step of the placement and post-placement process, and service navigators who help foster families meet the needs of the children in their care. The project also uncovered the need for revamping data systems to better understand how the foster care system is working.

After synthesizing findings across data sources, Wilder developed the following recommendations for Hennepin County to better meet the needs of providers and children in foster care.

Improvements to child and youth-level experience

Focus on the child’s initial entry into care to ensure the best placement possible and immediate services to support that child and foster home.

- ✓ Slow down the placement process to make sure the needs of children are well understood.
- ✓ Increase interactions between the child and the foster home pre-placement.

Preventing maltreatment involves a shift in the child welfare system towards a culture that allows children to speak up, share their voice, and help them understand safe boundaries and healthy relationships.

- ✓ Prepare children and youth for each birth family visit, in the short-term, and how to develop healthy relationships with their birth family, for the long-term.
- ✓ Give children and youth developmentally appropriate information, power, and voice in an otherwise powerless situation; follow up to answer questions and address concerns.

All children in placement have experienced trauma; all foster homes need to be therapeutic and connected to mental health services and other supports.

- ✓ Assume that all children will need some mental health services, and establish a process for an immediate connection with a provider.
- ✓ Improve connections to other support services, such as navigating educational systems and opportunities to learn independent living skills.

Improvements to the recruitment and retention of foster families

Instead of focusing on recruitment of foster families, focus on partnership and retention.

- ✓ Provide a navigator or liaison to foster families, so they have a single point-of-contact.
 - ✓ Prioritize and allow time for case workers to build relationships with foster families where children are placed.
 - ✓ Ensure that foster homes have knowledge of and access to peer support (and reminders that this is available).
 - ✓ Prioritize frequent communication with foster providers and provide as much information as possible throughout the entire foster care process.
 - ✓ Improve foster parent training, beyond the basics, to be more interactive and responsive to community conditions and real world situations.
-

The best recruitment focuses on intentional and ongoing relationship building with the community and its networks, rather than focusing on individuals.

- ✓ Recruit from every chair, meaning all Hennepin County child welfare staff should engage with the communities they serve and focus on building trust.
 - ✓ Prioritize high levels of customer service and communication with foster families in order to strengthen retention and recruitment.
 - ✓ Continue to prioritize foster care recruitment that fosters connections to family, culture, identity, and existing social networks.
-

Improve the process for a family to become a foster home.

- ✓ Simplify the licensure process and provide a navigator to help families through licensure.
 - ✓ Collect data to understand why people withdraw their applications for foster care licensure.
 - ✓ Revisit concerns related to capacity limits for foster homes.
 - ✓ Continue to advocate with DHS to review licensure requirements and barriers that are entrenched in historical or systemic racism.
-

Improve the supports to keep families as a foster home.

- ✓ Streamline, and then communicate, the process for foster families to receive concrete supports, such as flexible financial support, transportation, and childcare.
 - ✓ Address issues with respite care, such as simplifying the request and payment process and ensuring providers are aware of and know how to access respite care.
 - ✓ Beyond county workers, ensure foster families are connected to community-based supports.
-

Intentionally plan, connect, and support work that involves the foster parents with the child's birth family.

- ✓ Involve foster families in the development of out-of-home placement plans.
 - ✓ Provide foster families with information and resources to successfully navigate the relationship with birth families.
-

Other practice and system improvements

Train and support Hennepin County staff to do more outreach and intentional, authentic relationship building with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.

- ✓ Further diversify county staff to represent the experiences, race, and culture of families involved in child welfare.
- ✓ Provide county staff with training around cultural responsiveness and engaging with BIPOC communities.
- ✓ Provide county staff with opportunities for community engagement.

Focus on responsiveness and communication.

- ✓ Elevate and reward a culture of responsiveness and communication among Hennepin County child welfare staff.
- ✓ Streamline the number of workers supporting a single family.
- ✓ Be crystal clear on the process of emergency removal.

Appoint a systems change champion that leads efforts to integrate recommendations from multiple sources and initiatives, and follows up with communities about reform progress.

- ✓ Identify a champion who can lead and be accountable for implementing recommendations.
- ✓ Integrate the findings from the CHAMPS analysis of best practices in diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families.

Assess data collection systems and practices to ensure that data are accurate, real-time, and useful for everyone involved in the foster care system, from leadership to case workers to foster families.

- ✓ Partner with DHS to overhaul the Social Service Information System (SSIS).
- ✓ Create a central repository for all research questions, data sources, and data output for children and families involved in the foster care system.
- ✓ Assess the number of surveys, focus groups, and other data collection efforts administered each year and look for redundancy or potential survey fatigue.
- ✓ Use and share back research and evaluation results, particularly with those who participated in the data collection.

Use data to proactively plan for recruiting the pool of foster families that match the needs of Hennepin County children.

- ✓ Assess what information is being collected about children needing placement.
- ✓ Create an accurate, easy-to-use, and secure online system that provides information about all foster homes currently being used or licensed by Hennepin County, which also includes foster homes licensed by private agencies and foster homes outside of Hennepin County.
- ✓ Collect and use data on recruitment successes and failures to determine the best strategies for placing children.
- ✓ Collect meaningful, real-time data about children involved in emergency removal and placement.



Hennepin County

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