

# **Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel 2015 Annual Report**

## **Mission Statement**

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

## **Panel Members**

Mary Agnew  
Chandra Bittmann  
Lisa Deputie  
Lois Gehrman, Co-Chair  
Jill Gunderson-Gernes, Co-Chair  
John Hanna  
Tonya Long, term ended June 2015  
Barbara Otto, term ended 2015  
Tony Porter  
Michelle Steinley-Bumgarner  
Jacquie Thomas, term ended June 2015

## **Meetings**

In 2015 the Ramsey County Children's Service Review Panel (RCCSRP) met on the following dates: January 7<sup>th</sup>, February 4<sup>th</sup>, March 4<sup>th</sup> April 1, May 6<sup>th</sup>, June 3<sup>rd</sup> August 5<sup>th</sup>, September 10<sup>th</sup>, October 8<sup>th</sup>, November 12<sup>th</sup>, December 10<sup>th</sup>.

## **County and State Support**

The Panel has continued to receive regular updates from the Ramsey County Human Services Department and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Kim Cleminson and Tami Baker-Olson have represented the County in this capacity and Mary Doyle attends from the Department of Human Services. Kristen Jackelen is Coordinator for Ramsey County. She attends all meetings, prepares minutes, provides copies of documents for the Panel, recruits new Panel members and performs many other administrative tasks for the Panel.

## **Activities**

- Panel members continued to be available to attend Ramsey County Administrative Reviews of children placed in placement, however, during 2015, Panel members attended only 2 reviews. Since ensuring the safety and well-being of children in long term foster care is one of our primary responsibilities, the Panel is exploring how best to obtain the information necessary to make this determination.

- Members of the Panel monitored the work of the Governor’s Task Force on Child Protection. Members met at Tonya Long’s house on January 17 to discuss the Panel’s response to preliminary recommendations. A written response from the Panel was submitted to the Task Force. Members received copies of the final recommendations, were invited to attend briefings on the recommendations and continue to monitor the meeting of the Legislative Task Force established to monitor the implementation of the recommendations
- RCCSRP Co-Chairs, Jill Gunderson-Gernes and Lois Gehrman, attended monthly meetings of the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) which included quarterly meetings with Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter.
- The Panel nominated Kim Cleminson, Ramsey County Children and Family Services Department Manager, for the first 2015 Child Welfare Exemplary Service Award. This award was developed by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. The Panel wanted to recognize Kim for her dedication and passion for her work in our community and to show our appreciation for that work and her work with our Panel.
- The Panel also nominated Tonya Long for the 2015 Virginia McKnight Binger Unsung Hero Award. Tonya was a semi-finalist for this award; she has been and continues to be a tireless advocate for children and families.
- At the January 2015 Panel meeting, Kim Cleminson, CFS Department manager, gave an excellent presentation about Ramsey County’s Family Assessment program and approach. At this same meeting, Kim suggested that the Panel begin to explore how to partner with CFS and other community members to promote a Safe Sleep Initiative in Ramsey County. The goal of this initiative is to promote awareness of Safe Sleep practices for newborns and infants in Ramsey County.
- On April 1, we convened a well-attended meeting of community members and leaders in the field of Safe Sleep for the purpose of sharing information and exploring interests for further collaboration.
- On April 4, Tonya Long and Jill Gunderson-Gernes attended a meeting of a state wide Safe Sleep work group chaired by Michelle Chiezah, Infant Mortality Consultant from the Minnesota Department of Health.
- On April 23 and 27, the Panel reviewed the Independent Living Plans of 45 Ramsey County youth in long term foster care. This review was completed by available Panel members in the offices of the Department of Children and Family Services (CFS). Jim Langer, Permanent Connections Supervisor, provided valuable assistance with this review.
- Barbara Otto attended the National Citizen’s Review Panel conference in Portland, Oregon which was held May 18-20<sup>th</sup>.
- Lisa Deputie continues to represent the Panel at meetings of the Children’s Justice Initiative (CJI).

- There was consensus around the need for a Safe Sleep Initiative in Ramsey County but financial support to develop programs was extremely limited. On the advice of Kathleen Fernbach, Director of the Minnesota Sudden Infant Death Center at Children's Hospital in Saint Paul, and Ellie Hodgkinson from Ramsey County Public Health, the Panel decided at the May meeting to use its own limited CAPTA funds for 2015 to purchase books for distribution by Ramsey County Public Health and also dvds for placement in selected areas such as for education purposes. Currently, one is placed in the lobby at 160 E. Kellogg Blvd. and one is placed in the courts.
- At our October meeting, we invited members of the DHS Adolescent Services Unit to meet with us to discuss the recommendations we had made to DHS in our 2014 annual report as well as some of the finding of 2015 review of ILP's. Steve Vonderharr, Jill Von Holtum and Kathleen Hiniker were present from DHS, as well as Jim Langer, Supervisor of the Permanent Connections Unit for Ramsey County.
- At our November meeting, Anne McInerney, Homeless Education Supervisor, and Cindy McGowan, Saint Paul Public Schools social worker, gave a presentation on Project Reach and Fostering Connections, a Saint Paul Public School program for homeless and foster youth.
- On November 10, John Hanna, Lois Gehrman, Jill Gunderson- Gernes and former Panel member Jacquie Thomas attended an annual meeting sponsored by DHS with members of other CRPs, Child Mortality Review Board members, DHS and County employees, parent partners, Roxy Foster from Minnesota Communities Caring for Children and other individuals involved in child welfare in Minnesota to review the implementation work of DHS on the Governors' Task Force on Child Protection.
- On November 11, Jill Gunderson-Gernes and Lois Gehrman presented the 2015 annual report to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. Also in attendance were Panel members John Hanna, Chandra Bittmann and Lisa Deputie.
- In addition, the Panel partnered with Ramsey County in sponsoring a Safe Sleep training for Ramsey County Social Workers. This training was held on December 8, 2015 and was also videotaped for future use.
- On December 30, new Panel members attended a training and orientation for new members. This training was offered by DHS and presented by Anita Keyes. Those panel members attending were Tony Porter and Mary Agnew. John Hanna was not able to attend, but will participate in a later training. All three new members were appointed to the Panel by the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The Panel continues to actively recruit new Panel members. The Panel wishes to thank Jacquie Thomas, former Panel member, for her recruitment efforts.

## **Committees**

The Panel has 3 active committees: Child Welfare Finance, Safe Sleep and the Administrative Review.

### **CHILD WELFARE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

The Child Welfare Finance committee has been involved at the County level to advocate against further cuts to programs serving children and families, as well as advocating for increases in funding for these programs. The Panel continued its work by monitoring the Governor's Task Force on Child Protection and its budgetary ramifications.

### **SAFE SLEEP COMMITTEE**

The Safe Sleep Committee has been involved at the County level in promoting Safe Sleep practices in Ramsey County and will continue this work.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Administrative Review committee's concentrated its efforts on Year Two of the Case File Review Project and this was the Panel's primary focus. This involved the review of 45 case files involving youth ages 16 to 19; 23 cases were reviewed for the second time from Year One of the Case File Review Project and 22 were new cases. This project began in May 2013. A similar project was completed in 2005 by the Citizen's Review Panels in Minnesota and this project was viewed as a follow-up to that project. In addition, because Panel members were no longer performing many Administrative Reviews, Panel members felt that it wasn't possible to answer the question, "How are the children doing?" Thus, it was determined that the Panel review Independent Living Plans in these 45 cases. This review took place on two separate afternoons in April and Jim Langer, Supervisor of the Ramsey County Permanent Connections Unit, was available during the review for additional questions from Panel members. The Panel also surveyed youth and caregivers in these cases. The Plan also includes revisiting these same youth and others in the same age group in 2016. This age group was selected because of the Panel's concern about youth in transition or youth who would be "aging out" of the system soon.

The purpose of the case file reviews was to determine,

- how the youth was doing in placement,
- what kind of services were offered/and utilized by the youth,
- whether the youth is making progress towards realistic goals as stated in the Independent Living Plan (ILP) and
- what the County was doing to prepare this youth for living independently.

The Panel received 24 surveys from youth and foster parents/caregivers. There were 11 from youth and 13 from foster parents or caregivers. In the area of independent living, 7 out of 11 youth had begun planning to live independently. As to education, the youth were asked if they

would be graduating with their class and 10 youth replied yes which included 2 who had already graduated. Further, 7 out of 11 youth had plans for secondary education. Nine of these youth had specific career goals. In the area of Permanent Connections, 10 out of 11 youth had a permanent connection to an adult. That permanent connection was a relative in 6 cases, a friend in 1 case and a brother and grandmother in another case. Only 1 out of 11 cases did not have a permanent connection. In the area of Money Management, the question was "Do you have your legal documents?" 7 youth had legal documents which could include their Social Security card, birth certificate, MN ID passport and birth records. Only 3 youth had a Driver's License. The Panel also asked if the youth knew how to fill out financial forms such as their FAFSA for financial aid for college and 7 out of 11 knew how to do this. In the area of Medical and Health Insurance, 4 out of 11 youth had their health insurance and copy of their medical history. In addition, only 5 out of 11 made their own medical appointments and only 2 out of 11 knew how to update their Medicaid application. 9 out of 11 youths had gone to the dentist within the last year. In the area of employment, 6 out of 11 youth had been employed but only 2 currently had a job. In the area of transportation, most youth were comfortable using public transportation.

The case file review revealed that the majority of these youth face difficult challenges and have very complex needs. Many of these youth have mental health issues. Our Panel has been learning about brain development and the effect of trauma. There were 27 females and 18 males. There were 13 Caucasian, 5 Biracial-Black and Caucasian, 2 American Indian/Alaskan Native/AA, 2 American Indian/Alaskan Native, 21 African American (also identified as Black and Black/African American), 1 Black/African American/Sudanese and 1 Asian. The Case File Review revealed the following in the area of education: 29 of these youth were attending high school, 2 were working on their GED, 6 had graduated from high school, 4 were attending post-secondary education, 1 was on the run, 1 was in a day treatment program and 1 was enrolled in a 6-month construction training program. In addition, the Casey Life Skills Assessment was administered in almost all cases, in addition half of these youth had 2 or more assessments which could include Educational testing, Mental Health Screening, Chemical Health/Dependency and Vocational Testing.

The Panel identified the following strengths: 1.) Independent Living Plans were in place and that Ramsey County was working hard to set individual goals for youth in this Plan. The ILP should be updated at least every 6 months; Ramsey County's response to the 2014 annual report stated that this was their goal and are working with Casey. This has led to an updated Casey Life Skills Assessment tool that will enable workers and youth to improve and inform the Independent Living Plan, using strength-based goals. 2.) There is more communication between SELF and the Fostering Connections Unit and are working closely with Saint Paul Public Schools and Guardian Ad Litem. This includes working with Project Reach. 3.) The majority of youth had received at least one assessment.

**Ramsey County Citizen's Review Panel  
2014 Recommendations**

**To Ramsey County Human Services Department and  
Minnesota Department of Human Services**

**Based on a report presented to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners on November 10,  
2015**

**CHILD WELFARE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Recommendation #1 – This recommendation to Ramsey County has been made in previous Annual Reports. The Panel wishes to reiterate its desire to be financially literate as it relates to Child Welfare financing in Ramsey County.**

**To Ramsey County,**

- The Citizen's Review Panel requests an annual executive summary of the Child Welfare/Ramsey County budget at least 2 months before any public hearings on the budget each year. This should be organized every year by county staff. The Citizen Review Panel will also receive any executive forecasts and summaries for the biennium and the supplemental budget should be made available to the Citizens Review Panel on an annual basis or as published. The Panel will use the information:
  - to track any changes in the Child Welfare budget, especially cuts to critical programing and
  - the Panel will also use the information to prepare testimony for the County Board at budget hearings.
  
- The Panel respectfully requests a written response from the County Finance and Budget Department as to time lines for budget decisions and appropriate person to contact within the finance department.

**To Minnesota Department of Human Services,**

- The Citizen's Review Panel requests regular updates as to Child Welfare financing at the state level. This includes legislative initiatives related to the Task Force recommendations.

**PANEL CASE FILE REVIEW OF THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PLAN**

**Recommendation #2**

**To Ramsey County**

**Overall**

- Independent Living Plan (ILP) – As stated in the 2014 report, the goals set in the ILP should be realistic and tailored to the individual youth especially regarding the youth's development which can be disrupted by trauma. The ILP should be updated at least every 6 months; Ramsey County's response to the 2014 annual report stated that this was their goal. In the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives article entitled "Foster

Care Extended to Age 21, it cites the Midwest Study that evaluated youth in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin as they “age out of foster care and transition into adulthood found that those who stay in care to age 21 have better outcomes....homelessness is reduced and educational attainment is increased, thus resulting in higher lifetime earnings.” It also states that “Extending foster care to age 21 could be designed to merely provide three more years of housing and services to young people, hoping that they are better off on their own at age 21 than they would have age 18. However, in order to truly improve the lives of young people, extended foster care must provide permanency planning designed to ensure that they leave foster care at age 21 with families and/or permanent caring adults in their lives, in addition to providing the full range of transitional services and safe housing. Extended care must provide young adults with resources that can help them continue to build social capital – a network of supportive and permanent relationships designed to last a lifetime. Permanency planning must continue in earnest with the young adult taking the lead and caring adults supporting the young adult in the planning process.” Further, The Jim Casey Opportunities Initiatives launched Success Beyond 18 in May 2013. This is a national appeal to create a better path for young people in foster care who are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. One of the goals of this program is “Greater accountability leads to more positive outcomes. Success Beyond 18 deems agencies and state courts responsible for young people in foster care, and as their “legal parents,” must support their unique and evolving needs, just as parents offer guidance and nurturing to their teenage children as they enter adulthood. Quality oversight and accountability ensure that developmentally appropriate supports and services lead to positive life outcomes for all young people in foster care...”

- As stated in the 2014 Annual Report, the Fostering Connections program should be expanded to reach more youth. This program needs more staff and additional funding to support youth to stay in care until age 21.

## **To Minnesota Department of Human Services**

### **Overall**

- This recommendation was made to Ramsey County in the 2014 Annual Report that the Fostering Connections program should be expanded to reach more youth. This program needs more staff and additional funding to support youth to stay in care until age 21 and Ramsey County responded that extended foster care has not been expanded but DHS relaxed the requirements for SELF/ALS services, to now include all children age 14 and older who have been or are currently in foster care for 30 or more consecutive days. Youth from Delinquency, Adoption, CMH and YEP now qualify for these services, but DHS did not expand funding for the Chaffee funds or for additional staff. The Panel

recommends that DHS increase funding so that Ramsey County can serve these youth to assure that these youth are properly prepared for independent living.

- Information gathered from the case file reviews should be used by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to update the Independent Living Plan (ILP) form, improve training for social workers re: the ILP and to review current policies and strategies re: youth transitioning from placement to independent living. The Panel did meet with the Adolescent Services Unit this fall to discuss the Panel's Annual Report recommendations and the ILP. If DHS is working on updating and improving the ILP, the Panel wishes to work with DHS on doing this.
- The Panel requests a written response from the Commissioner or Designee concerning the above recommendations by the end of the second quarter of 2016.

### **To Ramsey County and Minnesota Department of Human Services Regarding the Independent Living Plan, Specifically**

#### **Housing**

Housing for youth planning for independent living and homelessness for youth who have been in the system remains a serious concern for the Panel. In the 2014 Annual Report, the Panel recommended that Ramsey County staff seek additional good housing options for youth leaving care or staying in care until age 21. DHS applied for a federal grant aimed at decreasing the number of youth who leave care and become homeless, but DHS did not get this grant. Ramsey County's response was that more youth are staying in care until age 21 and that the County's concern was that these youth have less time living independently with supports before they age out of the system. The Panel encourages Ramsey County to build in more supports for older youth to assist them in achieving independence. The Adolescent Services Unit at DHS provided data on homelessness as it relates to youth who have been in foster care. A Wilder Study of youth ages 14 to 17 year old between 2006 and 2012 showed that 149 out of 625 youth in Ramsey County (out of 4721 statewide) experienced homelessness by age 21. There is a lack of affordable housing in Ramsey County, particularly. There are many barriers to youth obtaining housing and obtaining and or using a Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher: 1.) youth cannot have a roommate, 2.) something in youth's background check or credit report and 3.) lack of affordable housing in Ramsey County. Project Reach in collaboration with Saint Paul Public Schools works with youth who experience homelessness. In Project Reach/Fostering Connections most recent newsletter, it stated that 1001 students were eligible for services (McKinney Vento). Out of those students 454 were in grades 1-5 and 399 were in grades 6-12. 618 students "doubled up" with family or friends due to lack of housing and 266 students live in shelters. Project Reach works with these students and families on a variety of issues including housing, transportation to and from school, referral to community and local agencies and educational supports. This program should be expanded to adequately address the needs of such a large population of homeless youth and families. There is a lack of shelter or temporary housing in Ramsey County and there is nearly always a waiting list to get in these facilities.

These issues must be more comprehensively addressed and should include housing for families. The Panel would be glad to advocate for better housing options.

### **Driver's Education and driver's license**

Only 3 youth in our case file reviews had a driver's license and only one had access to a vehicle, but had no car insurance. This continues to be an issue because the caregiver is either unable or unwilling to pay for auto insurance for this youth. In the DHS response to the Panel's 2014 Annual Report, DHS stated that it has worked on this issue in the past but will follow up with the Panel with additional research by fall of 2015. The Panel requests that there be a follow-up on this issue from DHS.

### **Health Insurance**

This was an issue identified in Year One of the Case File Review and it remains an issue. Youth currently in care don't appear to have a good understanding of their current coverage, do not have copies of their medical history, and do not know how to annually update Medicaid or how to make medical appointments. In addition, youth leaving care have been awarded MA coverage until age 26 under the Affordable Care Act, but don't have a good understanding of their coverage, how to continue it and what do when they leave the system.

- The Panel would like more efforts made to educate youth currently in the system about their health care which includes their coverage and how to maintain it without interruption, assistance and guidance in making medical appointments and obtaining a copy of their medical history and/or records.
- The Panel would like to see Public Service Announcements educating youth in foster care and former youth who were in foster care re: the Affordable Care Act and their access to it. This was discussed with the Adolescent Services Unit at the October meeting and there were several suggestions besides PSAs which included the use of Spotify, Instagram, Snapshot, Facebook and Vine. The Panel would like to see these efforts go forward to educate youth about ACA.

### **To Ramsey County**

The Panel respectfully requests a written response from the Director of Family and Children Services to the requests and recommendations made above by the end of the second quarter of 2015.

### **To the Minnesota Department of Human Services**

The Citizen's Review panel requests a written response from the Department of Human Services by the end of the second quarter of 2015.

### **Looking Ahead:**

1. The Panel will consider whether to complete the third and final case review which will include the Independent Living Plan and additional documents as recommended by DHS. These additional documents are the Notice of Foster Care Benefits to Age 21 form, the 90 day Transition Plan and the Out of Home Placement Plan.
2. The Panel will continue to work on Safe Sleep Initiatives in Ramsey County.
3. The Panel may consider a review of older Ramsey County youth who have been involved in Sex Trafficking.
4. The Panel's Child Welfare Finance Committee will continue to monitor the budget and advocate for additional funding to benefit children and families. The Committee will increase its advocacy and legislative efforts.
5. The Panel will look for ways to assist the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children.
6. The Panel will look for additional opportunities to collaborate with the Ramsey County Department of Children and Family Services.
7. The Panel will explore whether Panel members are able to participate in a future Permanency Roundtable in Ramsey County.

### **Acknowledgements**

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