

Washington County Citizens Review Panel
April 21, 2020, 5:00-6:30pm
Virtual Meeting

Attendance

Members present:

Jan Hayne, Chair	Nissa Knutson, County Representative
Jody Koch	Pam Clifton
Laurie Gravelle	Sarah Amundson, County Representative
Mary Doyle, State Rep., DHS Liaison	Susannah Barnes

Members absent:

Amy Berge	Teri Bottum
Ann Mozey	

Snacks: to each her own!

Minutes: Pam

- **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Jan at 5:15

- **Approval of February and March Minutes and today's agenda**

Jan moved to approve February and March Minutes, Laurie seconded the motion and they were approved by all.

- **Old Business**

Adapt our projects for the year where needed based on possible restrictions.

- ~~Child Abuse Prevention Month~~

Done and gone due to Coronavirus Stay Home MN. The good news is that we are totally prepared for next year!

- Rollout of the Citizen Review Panel File Review 2020. Should we put on hold or attempt virtually?

The panel decided to put this initiative on hold for now. We really need to meet together to work through the first review with guidance from Nissa and there is so much paperwork involved with each file that it would be impossible and possibly not secure to do via fax.

TO DO: Sarah will inform us when the government center re-opens and is able to accommodate a meeting for us following social distancing guidelines.

- CRP membership during lock-down

Nissa and Sarah had two interviews scheduled in March for prospective panel members, but the pandemic forced them to put the interviews on hold. Although they could have interviewed virtually, Nissa felt that it was not a good time to bring new members on board.

- Distribution of CRP Brochure and Washington County Info Cards

We can't distribute the brochure and info cards as we had planned at this time. Sarah stated that the media has shown interest in child protection during the pandemic so discussion took place regarding submitting some of the cards/some of the info on them to local newspapers for publication as a prevention activity. This should include specific resources for parents, i.e., Crisis Response Unit, COVID 19 mental health site, etc.

TO DO: Jan and Pam to write up a short submission from the CRP for publication
Mary to forward resources to add to the publication
Once submitted to Nissa, she will work her magic to get it published

- Pizza project: We had discussed hosting pizza parties in several County locations. Should we change it back to pizza vouchers for this year?

CRP will review this initiative after our July break. If social distancing is still in force we will go back to pizza vouchers for this year. There is concern however, that the pizza places might not economically be in a position to help us as much this year.

TO DO: Revisit our approach at our August meeting.

Additional Jan thought after the meeting - Could we create kits for foster families to cook/bake something together at home? (i.e. spaghetti dinner, homemade pizza, cookies, bars, bread, mac-n-cheese dinner, taco dinner, etc)? Perhaps partner with local restaurants and/or grocery stores? Or create art kits to do together?

- Sex trafficking: Is Community Services staff member still attending the Washington County seminar? We were going to wait for his/her feedback to determine if we needed to further explore.

The seminar was cancelled but Sarah and Nissa talked about the coordinated County response to trafficking and that Lizzy, a County investigator would probably be very willing to meet with us virtually next month.

There have been two trafficking cases screened in recently.

TO DO: Nissa will contact Lizzy and ask if she can meet with us on May 19

- Develop a CRP partnership with CONNECT Washington County regarding adolescent drug use and life choices.

Ran out of time- not addressed

- The Panel would like to work with Children's Services to ensure all stakeholders have consistent and relevant information. We were considering a half-day training symposium later in 2020 with a possible panel, speakers, and vendors. Is this still plausible?

Ran out of time- not addressed

- **New Business**

- Most discussion took place around Child Protection during COVID-19

KARE 11 Investigates: COVID-19 puts kids more at risk for abuse, exploitation

Teachers are on the front lines of spotting abuse, but with schools closed, mandated reporters can't keep their eyes on at-risk kids.



Author: A.J. Lagoe, Brandon Stahl (KARE11), Steve Eckert
Published: 5:31 PM CDT March 24, 2020
Updated: 4:44 AM CDT March 25, 2020

With schools closed and mandated reporters such as teachers not able keep their eyes on at-risk youth, child advocates say kids are at higher risk for abuse and exploitation. "If they're not seeing the kids, they're not reporting it," said Rich Gehrman, executive director of [Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota](#), which advocates for child welfare.

Teachers are often the first people to see signs of abuse.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nationwide, [one in every five child maltreatment reports](#) comes from teachers and other educational professionals.

Mandated reporters such as teachers and doctors make up about 80 percent of all child abuse reports in Minnesota, according to the data from the state Department of Human Services.

But KARE 11 Investigates discovered those reports are plummeting. Last week, the number of child abuse reports across Minnesota dropped 30 percent, according to DHS.

"The abuse is still happening, it's just not being seen," Gehrman said. He worries that without attention paid by child protection, abusive situations will only get worse.

"I think the biggest risk is that there will be an increase in actual maltreatment. But less of it will be seen because children are not out in the community where teachers and childcare workers and other professionals will pick up on it," Gehrman said.

When child protection does get a report, workers are trying to make sure that they're able to safely investigate the complaint without being infected with coronavirus, said Kim Cleminson, Ramsey County's director of Child and Family Services.

Child protection workers will call the homes when they can to see if anyone in the family is sick or been exposed, try to practice social distancing when meeting and talking outside when possible.

She said so far none of her workers has become sick.

Kids home from school are also at an [increased risk of online exploitation](#), the FBI warned on Monday. With more time to spend on the internet, they're more prone to be lured in to providing sexually explicit images or developing inappropriate relationships with adults.

"There is a lot of downtime for kids and young adults to be online without supervision," said FBI spokesman Kevin Smith. "The message from us the FBI today is simple: be aware of what your children are doing online and with whom they're communicating."

For FBI's recommendations on preventing online exploitation and spotting signs of abuse, [click here](#).

Gehrman said with kids out of school for a prolonged period due to the COVID-19 emergency, it's incumbent upon Minnesotans to speak up if they spot signs of abuse.

"I think that puts more responsibility on family, friends, and relatives who see child abuse to report it themselves," he said.

- Brainstorm ways to educate our county; supporting at risk families during the pandemic, identifying child abuse, reporting child abuse, etc. What materials could we use? How would we disseminate information?
 - In addition to getting some of our Washington County Information cards/info published in local papers, we discussed asking food shelves if they could include them and/or "Parent Survival Tips" (from Minnesota Communities Caring for Children) with their food packages. There are six primary food shelves.

TO DO: Laurie emailed a copy of the brochure to CRP members and will contact MCCC about getting hard copy brochures. Once we have brochures and a parent resource list, Jan will contact food shelves identified by Nissa/Sarah (Valley Outreach is one) to see how we might include this info in the bags of food they put together.
 - Susannah questioned whether the County could post info on social media and then the panel could reference and share it. Nissa said that would be possible but not sure about tech staff availability during pandemic.

TO DO: Jan/Pam will see about adapting piece for newspaper publication to one or several shorter, succinct pieces for County social media use.

- Jody suggested members that belong to a neighborhood watch could offer their services as a resource to parents to 1) check on their kids and 2) be a safe person for the kids to contact when parents are at work. She said rather than give out her personal number, she has a Google number she gives out to her students which, when called, transfers to her phone. Mary and Jan mentioned they are part of their local Next Door groups, Pam that she is part of Neighbors of Water's Edge, and Laurie said she will do this through her neighborhood group.
 - How do we review reconsiderations?
Not addressed
 - **Update from Washington County (Sarah, Nissa)**
 - CRP Annual report to the County Commissioners was emailed to all CRP members with the April agenda. Sarah submitted the Annual Report to the County Commissioners on March 24, 2020.
 - Nissa reported that the number of child protection reports screened dropped by ½ the first part of April; a few more the last couple of days. There has been a few lack of supervision reports (mostly due to pandemic issues regarding childcare) but most of them have not been regarding "little ones." There has been an increase of domestic abuse/violence and alcohol and chemical use.
 - Community services, pantries, food, basic needs continue to be utilized.
 - Planning for child placement when an identified Covid case prevents them from going to foster care:
 - Susannah updated members on the impact of the pandemic on Evolve services for foster parents and Nissa discussed placement availability through the County. She said the majority of her cases currently are relative kin.
 - Jody mentioned Concordia dorm rooms as potential temporary placement space and Sarah said the County is looking at several potential places. She also stated that, prior to the pandemic, she had agreement from people to take Covid positive kiddos but is not sure that they are still willing to do so.
 - Five of Sarah's staff got N95 fit tested for dealing with Covid cases.
 - **Update from DHS (Mary)**
 - At the Federal level there is an initiative to obtain PPE for Child Protection Workers as they are deemed essential workers.
 - Mary had previously emailed CRP members information and guidelines for Child Protection visits.
 - **Next VIRTUAL Meeting:** May 19, 2020
- TO DO:** Jody will schedule and coordinate
Snacks: On your own!