

**Washington County Citizen Review Panel
2015 Annual Committee Report**

Submitted by the Following Panel Members:

Deborah Eckberg	LaJuan McIntyre
Martha Gerkey (retired)	Guy Sederski (retired)
Margaret Hart (retired)	Bonnie Treacy
Dawn Hyland	Julia Welter
Gina Kuchenmeister (leave of absence)	Nancy Zupfer
Michael Laughton	

Mission Statement: Citizens partnering with child protection services, advocating to keep children safe.

Meetings

With the exception of July, the monthly meetings were held on the third Tuesday of the month from 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm at the Washington County Service Center in Woodbury. (In August, we met on the second Tuesday to accommodate the chairperson's schedule). Several panel members attended additional meetings to represent the panel.

Overview

In 2015, we said goodbye to four members, three who served their full number of years on the board, and one who needed to take a leave for personal reasons. We recruited one additional member, but are currently trying to recruit more. Although this was the second year in a row of significant turnover on the panel, we are proud of the work we have accomplished this year despite the fact that we have been few in number during most of it.

Activities

Reconsiderations

The panel conducted 16 reconsiderations for the county in 2015.

Presentations

John Nalezny from Washington County Social Services presented to the panel with an update on foster care re-entry data in August.

Also in August, one of the panel members presented to the group about her own personal experience in the foster care system when she was a child.

The panel also heard a preliminary presentation from Nissa Knutson from Washington County Social Services, regarding panel member training that is specific to Washington County. Nissa will present the full training to panel members in January 2016.

Focus: Community Outreach

The activities we have engaged in related to community outreach are as follows:

1. Created a brochure* (attached) with short biographies and pictures of group members, along with an explanation of our mission. We have created this brochure with the intention of bringing it with us to meetings with community groups, churches, etc.
2. We have reached out to a number of community groups and hope to make presentations in 2016. Our purpose is to partner with community groups on projects that would best serve children affected by abuse and neglect.

* The panel would like to thank April Gard-Durow and Minute Man Press (Oakdale) for designing and printing the brochures.

Project: Duffel Bags

Based on a suggestion from Washington County Social Services, the panel decided to take on a duffel bag project. With the help of generous donations from the community*, along with some from panel members themselves, we have been creating duffel bags for children who are abruptly removed from their homes. Children in the foster care system who are abruptly removed from their homes do not have an easy way to carry their belongings with them. Frequently, they are shoving things into a garbage bag, as they leave home to enter foster care and move somewhere unfamiliar. Our aim is to make this transition easier for these children by providing them with their own duffel bags filled with personal items. We have started with children 10+ years old, but hope to eventually expand the project to include younger children as well. We have created some bags that are more appropriate for females, some more appropriate for males, and some which are gender neutral. The letter we used to solicit donations is attached to this report.

As of the writing of this report, the panel has collected the following:

50 duffel bags, filled with the following:

1. Deodorant
2. Hair care products
3. Dental products
4. Cosmetic projects
5. Socks
6. Blankets

Washington County Social Services plans to equip workers with these duffel bags to give to older children as needed.

*The panel would like to thank the following individuals and groups for their donations to the duffel bag project in 2015:

- Church of St. Michael faith formation group (Stillwater)
- Dr. James Koller, DDS (North St. Paul)
- Dr. David Kelley, DDS, Integrity Dental (Cottage Grove)
- Dr. Ruth Rustad, Advanced Dermatology (Stillwater)
- Senior Living Campus (Woodbury)
- Sam's Club (Woodbury)
- Nancy Zupfer (panel member)

Additional Meetings/ Trainings

Panel members participated in the annual statewide meeting of Citizen Review Panels, Child Mortality Review Panel, Parent Leadership Group, and the Children's Justice Act Task Force on November 9, 2015 at the Washington County Service Center in Cottage Grove.

Acknowledgements:

The panel commends the staff members of the panel who retired this past year: Marty Gerkey, Maggie Hart, and Guy Sederski. The panel officially thanked and celebrated with these retiring members at our June 2015 meeting.

Planning for 2016

The panel plans to continue with the duffel bag project, hoping to make more duffel bags available, and eventually targeting the younger children entering foster care.

The panel plans to focus even more on community outreach next year, by attempting to schedule presentations with church and community groups, submitting columns to local newspapers, and possibly creating an event for April in honor of Child Abuse Awareness month. The panel is planning to use a portion of the January 2016 meeting to brainstorm around these ideas and plans.

Attachment 1: Washington County CRP brochure.

Attachment 2: Letter to solicit donations for duffel bags.