

Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
January 1-December 31, 2017

Name of Panel:	Polk County Citizen Review Panel
Contact Person & Title:	Betsy Byker, Coordinator

Briefly describe the panel's meeting schedule – including number/types of meetings, and schedule of any subcommittee and workgroup meetings held in 2017.

The Polk County Panel meets monthly for one hour on the first Thursday of each month from 8-9 am. In 2017, 11 meetings were completed.

Two subcommittees were also convened to plan Blue Ribbon Events in April and a local DEC training in November. Both groups met once in 2017.

Please provide a summary of the panel's activities related to:

1. Evaluating the extent to which the State and the local child protection agencies are fulfilling their child protection responsibilities.

The panel was presented with data regarding the rise in the number of children being taken into protective custody. The changing needs and role of County CPS Services were evaluated on numerous occasions specifically, regarding;

- a. **Rising numbers of children being taken into care.**
- b. **Age of children being taken into care.**
- c. **Drug involvement in CPS cases.**
- d. **Case load of individual social workers and how they are personally being affected.**
- e. **Attention to the child protection department by local journalists.**
- f. **Support of County Board.**

2. Evaluating local and State progress under the State CAPTA Plan.

The panel continues to recruit new members and develop procedures for vetting and interviewing those interested. In 2017, the Polk County Panel added 3 new members; two are citizens not working within the child welfare system, the other member represents the Head Start Community.

All members subscribe and receive public disclosure reports of child abuse and neglect. The panel is beginning the process of reviewing cases.

3. Activities related to public outreach and comment to assess the impact of current child protection procedures and practices on children and families in the community.

1. **Annual Foster Care Banquet: The panel provided support for our local foster care program via a cash donation which was used to provide a training and foster care banquet for all foster families in Polk County. The training/banquet was held to coincide with the holiday season. The topic of**

training was self-care, connections and interpersonal relationships during the holidays. Foster families were then treated to a nice dinner, crafts, and activities hosted by the CPS unit. The foster families praised the event and responded with thanks for the opportunity to engage with foster families from throughout the county. Approximately 70 people were in attendance. This banquet represented further community collaboration, for support of the foster care program, as a local church donated facility space for the event.

2. The panel submitted and received a Children's Justice Act Mini-grant for 2017. The training was held November 6th, 2017. The training consisted of a presentation by Dr Budzak, Director of Gunderson Child Advocacy Center in La Crosse, WI. She presented on the effects of drug use and drug-endangered environments on children as well as medical testing that leads to successful prosecution of such cases. The presentation was followed by an action planning session facilitated by CRP members. Thirty-eight people attended, representing several different county departments and agencies in the area.

Evaluations indicated that most people were interested in continuing the conversations regarding DEC and the procedures in place to help them. Action planning discussions centered on the communication between departments and plans to improve said communication.

3. A "Hands Across the Courthouse" ceremony was held on April 28th along with a resource fair, "In plain Sight" demonstration and presentation by BACA (Bikers Against Child Abuse).
4. BACA and CRP sponsored a table of information and children's activities at the Polk County Fair, July 2017.
5. The Panel also supported a countywide presentation for all adults and students grades 5th-12th grade focused on Drug and Technology Awareness. Approximately 300 individuals attended, representing all 8 school districts in Polk County. The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation was represented by 2 speakers as our presenters for the adults. The students heard 3 presentations; Adult and Teen Challenge of MN, Kari Hoein, a technology speaker and Brian Cole, an addictions recovery counselor and pastor.

Did the panel conduct any reviews of CPS cases, child fatalities and near fatalities? If yes, please describe.

The panel is currently reviewing a Polk County Case involving an egregious incident involving a medically fragile infant. This is the first attempt by the panel to review local cases. Plans are made to continue the review of cases with CPS social workers.

Please describe any other panel activities or issues addressed in 2017.

Three panel members attended the National CRP Conference in Anchorage, Alaska. A proposal was submitted and accepted for local BACA members who also serve on the Polk County Citizen Review Panel to present at the conference. Local BACA members collaborated with St Croix County, WI as well as Alaska in representing Bikers Against Child Abuse.

Please describe activities planned or held in 2018.

- **Resource Fair in conjunction with Community Trauma-Informed Care Events**
- **Attend on-going community meetings gathering to discuss the needs of drug-endangered children,**
- **Blue Ribbon Events are being considered, collaborating with local school districts**
- **Changes in meeting schedule are being considered to better facilitate successful review of CPS cases.**
- **Presentation on secondary trauma, self-care and burn-out.**

Panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the local level:

The panel recommends that the CPS department take the lead in facilitating communication between, law enforcement, CPS and School Districts. Steps have already been taken to establish points of contact at all 8 Polk County School Districts. “Handle with Care” procedures are being considered to support children who have experienced a traumatic event that may affect them during their school day.

Panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the State level:

The Polk County CRP recommends that the state consider revising the follow-up letter sent to mandated reporters following a report that is subsequently screened-out. The panel asks that wording be added that encourages reporters to continue reporting and that indicates that “information will be kept on-file should subsequent information arise.”

Optional/additional information or comments:

Please submit the **completed CRP Annual Report** and the **panel's current membership list** to the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families by e-mailing to Jamie Gennrich at jamie.gennrich@wisconsin.gov. The annual report and the DCF response to each report will be posted on the DCF Citizen Review Panel web page at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/prevention/crp>. Thank you.