



2020

**Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel
Annual Report**

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

**Name of Panel: Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County
Panel Contacts: Connie Raether, Panel Co-Chair**

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Submission Information

Please submit the completed report and a current panel membership list to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families by emailing both documents to Sarah Hanson at sarah.hanson1@wisconsin.gov by **February 1, 2021**.

Notes:

If you wish to review any portion of the State CAPTA Plan and its most recent updates in formulating your response, a copy of the Plan is attached to this report, and the 2020 updates are available through the following link: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/cqi-cfsr/pdf/report/apsr.pdf> (see page 14). If you wish to access any of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Standards in formulating your response, they are available through the following link: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy?accactive=0>.

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> no later than six months after receipt of each report.

Section 1: Report of 2020 Activities:

- 1. Please describe the panel's 2020 meeting schedule, including the frequency and type of panel meetings; and the frequency and type of any subcommittee and workgroup meeting.**
 - Our panel meets bi-monthly, starting in January, for 1 ½ hours, and has been meeting via zoom since March of 2020. We also hold two case reviews, one in February and one in October, and those are two hours. We use the first hour for the presentation, then the next hour for discussion.
 - At this time we have five task groups, retention and resiliency, outreach, guardian ad litem, and "Period of Purple Crying."
 - **Retention and Resiliency:** After the CRP Social Work Support Task Group led focus groups with Outagamie County social workers in 2017, it was determined that there were some issues that were leading to turnover. The findings were discussed with the Division of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) management and as a result, a consulting group, Blue Spiral Consulting, was hired to assist in working on the issues. CYF formed the Retention and Resiliency (R and R) group. Two members of the CRP serve on that committee and Co-Chair Larry Creamer serves on the R and R Sponsorship Committee. The Sponsorship Committee is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations brought forth are implemented if at all possible. The R and R team meets monthly.

They are focusing on improving the culture in the Division, especially in the area of making sure employees feel comfortable speaking up, trusting, practicing self awareness and learning how people feel valued. All Division employees participated in the Real Colors training and they are working on implementing the learnings from the training. The sentiment among workers is that this 3 year long process has been instrumental in improving relationships among Division staff. The CRP has also funded some of the work of Blue Spiral. Currently they are looking at terms of members so may think of new reps from the CRP in January 2021. Trying to come up with a “buddy system” to help people develop relationships with co-workers by pairing longer term employees with new ones. Survey of workers was completed. Supervisors are working with Blue Spiral on steward leadership.

- **Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Task Group.** Several years ago, the GAL Task Group developed a brochure that was to go out to parents who have children in the system so they are aware that their child has a GAL and know what they should expect of that person. It was determined that the brochure needed updating, so the GAL Task Group updated the brochure. They are now looking at ways to ensure that it gets in the hands of people who need it. This has been made difficult due to courtrooms being closed because of the pandemic. They have also developed a survey that was sent electronically to as many people as possible who are involved in the child welfare system, ie. biological parents, lawyers, foster parents, judges, school professionals, etc. The survey has questions not only about GALs but about the child welfare system and processes. They received 129 responses. Once the results are tabulated, team will review and chunk out the issues that need attention and see if there are ways the CRP can assist
- **Period of Purple Crying:** CRP members met with the local federally qualified health center, Partnership Health Center. After a training on sentinel injuries that was facilitated by the colleague of one of our CRP members, they have agreed to use Period of Purple crying in their practice. The CRP’s shaken baby doll (doll whose head lights up if shaken) was loaned to Partnership Health Center for their use. At this time, the doll is not functioning correctly and the task group is looking for ways to get it fixed.
- **Outreach:** The outreach task group has not been able to hold any events due to covid 19. There was an event planned for spring of 2020, “In Plain Sight,” which is a 1 ½ to 2 hour community training teaching parents signs of drug use with addition of “what can you do if you find signs.” Plan was to focus discussion on ways to address this and get any help needed. This is on hold until in person meetings are considered safe.
- **Facebook and Website:** Panel continues to have both and we post articles pertinent to our issues.

2. Please describe how the panel provided for public outreach and comment in order to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community.

The pandemic has made it difficult for the panel to provide avenues for public outreach. We continue to have a website and a facebook presence. Our plan is to hold a survey of community members in 2021 to assess their perception of CYF.

3. Please describe any case reviews conducted by the panel in 2020.

- Two case reviews were conducted. In February, the case involved a parent with a significant mental illness. The child entered the system in 2009 due to allegations of abuse, and aged out of the system in 2018. The child had ADHD, bipolar disorder, sensory issues and self harming behavior. Her first placement was in 2010 with reunification in 2013 followed by re-entry into care that year. Some of the issues that arose were mom encouraging relationships between her male friends and the child, mom giving her her own medications, and mom being very resistant to any offered services. Due to the child’s severe acting out behaviors, group home care was determined necessary, but there were difficulties in developing a shift staffed home so she entered residential care, where she stayed from 2014 until 2018. The County eventually took legal custody of the child. There were many struggles between court orders and client rights for mom. Also, the child’s psychiatrist would change her meds based on mom’s recommendations.
- The case review in October involved a very high profile case as mom killed dad after years of domestic abuse. There was a generational history of DV, mental health issues, AODA and housing issues, with many children

involved. Some of the issues that arose were finding housing for a large family, counseling being offered with no follow through and lack of understanding of the effects of DV on children by law enforcement and other entities.

4. Please summarize any other panel activities or panel events that took place in 2020.

- Our Panel was asked to present at the statewide CRP meeting. Two of the Outagamie County staff (CRP members) explained our process for holding case reviews. Several other Panel members attended the meeting which was held via zoom.
- The Panel had planned to assist with the County's Social Work Appreciation Day in March by purchasing food and providing both the venue and a welcome by our Co-Chair, Pastor Larry Creamer. This was cancelled due to the pandemic.
- Pastor Larry represents the Panel on the Child Death Review Team but the team hasn't met in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- The Panel funded care packages for all county foster homes.
- The Panel funded development and distribution of flyers to serve as a community resource guide for food assistance and other assistances available during COVID. They were distributed at school food pick up locations, mailed to parents through the Appleton school mailing. The County Community response program and intake workers also provided them to families. The information was sent to foster parents. Flyers were also sent to different community agencies to have available for the public.
- Staff from the Community Connections Program (CCP), a collaboration between Outagamie County and Family Services, presented info on their program in March. CCP is supported by United Way. CCP started in 2015 with the introduction of the Alternative Response program. Prior to this, screen outs did not have any services offered. Now the case workers work with families voluntarily after initial assessment. Initial timeframe is 25 weeks of case management. In 2019, 529 referrals were made to the program and 408 families were willing to work with the program or accept resource referrals. 93 families were referred for intensive case management with 64 successfully completing their goals. CCP has 2 main objectives: to eliminate the need for ongoing services through CHIPS and to reduce the number of referrals coming in on a family. Of the 93 families referred, 52 have had no more contact with social services, 22 have had one screened out referral. Staff from community agencies can make referrals to the program by calling Outagamie County. Funding is through 2020. Currently strategizing for ongoing funding through United Way and other organizations with another grant available starting in 2022. Looking at ways the CRP can assist, possibly by endorsements of the program.
- In the course of our case studies and feedback from social workers, attorneys, and foster parents, we became aware of issues which result in children spending, what in our estimation, is too long in out of home placement without a clear path to permanency. In response to this matter, Co-Chair Pastor Larry Creamer became aware that Judge Morrison, chief judge of the Eighth Judicial Administrative District has experience in court improvement initiatives. A meeting ensued with judges Morrison and Carrie Schneider of Circuit Court 5 in Outagamie County. From that meeting Judge Schneider has provided the leadership resulting in Outagamie County now engaged in the Judicial Engagement Team. This team is facilitated by Judge Jason Rossell, chief judge of the Second Judicial Administrative District and Kristen Wetzal, Legal Advisor of the Children's Court Improvement Program. At this point the JET team is meeting every two months. The meetings include examination of the realities of issues impacting permanency for children and working toward removing barriers and improving services. On several occasions during the meetings conversations and coordination have taken place which have addressed, primarily, issues of scheduling in the courts. The Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County has a presence on the JET team as several of the people in Children, Youth and Family Services as well as one of the assistant district attorneys, a family attorney, Judge Schneider, and Co-Chair Pastor Creamer are involved in this process
- Outreach has been a problem due to covid 19. Panel is considering a survey about the perception of child protection services and currently looking at who/what organizations we might target.

Section 2: State Evaluation:

In completing the evaluation portion of this report, please examine, to the best of your ability, the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local agencies, and where appropriate, specific cases.

1. Please provide an evaluation of the following:

- a. The extent to which the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is effectively carrying out the **two below listed** child protection responsibilities assigned to it under the State CAPTA Plan, and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Standards (Child Protective Services Safety Intervention Standards, Access and Initial Assessment Standards, and Ongoing Services Standards).

Cross System Collaboration Between CPS and Tribal Child Welfare Agencies:

- Outagamie County staff are going to be trained in ICWA by DCF Tribal Liaisons in March, with four 90 minute virtual training segments. There is recognition that because of the number of new staff, receiving this training is important at least once every 2 years. The training will be offered to the legal partners as well, including the DAs GALs, and Judges. It is being coordinated by Kristen Wetzel from the Children’s Court Improvement Program. Pastor Larry, Co-Chair of the CRP, serves on the Judicial Engagement Team. Recognition of that need surfaced as part of work on that team.
- DCF provides updates to the Tribes bi-monthly on State initiatives as well as Child Welfare related legislation, process, trends, funding, training and collaboration opportunities. The majority of this information is also information that has been provided to the County agencies as the DCF Tribal Liaison and DCF Tribal Specialist attend the WI joint county Child Welfare meetings. They offer a bridge between County and Tribes.
- In addition, in fall 2020, DCF sponsored a facilitator to host Organizational Effectiveness to work on strengthening the relationships and working partnerships between the County and Tribal agencies. The goal is to work to identify our desired state, identify root causes/gaps and to develop sustaining solutions.

Training for Guardians ad Litem:

GALs are required to complete training under Supreme Court Rule Chapter 35: <https://www.wicourts.gov/sc/scrule/DisplayDocument.pdf?content=pdf&seqNo=1078>. The CLE credits are self-reported by each attorney to the Board of Bar Examiners (BBE). Everyone sponsoring the training will have records of the sign-in sheets in the event BBE needs to confirm an attorney’s attendance. In addition, when an attorney takes a GAL appointment, circuit court form JD-1798B has a place for the attorney to affirm that he/she is in compliance with Supreme Court Rule 35.01. Each training is different as far as any testing, polling, or surveys involved. The CCIP E-Learning online training modules have a Test Your Knowledge section at the end of each learning activity, but the results are not tracked.

The Children’s Court Improvement Program offers several training events for judges, attorneys, social workers, and other stakeholders. Many of the training events are open to guardians ad litem and have been approved for GAL-Minor continuing legal education (CLE) credits. For example: Conference on Child Welfare and the Courts: A 2½ day conference held biennially. It is co-sponsored by CCIP and the Department of Children and Families. It is a multi-disciplinary training covering issues that impact both the child welfare and the court systems.

Together for Children Conference: This annual conference is organized by Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin through the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin: <https://chw.org/childrens-and-the-community/community-partners-professionals/child-abuse-prevention/prevent-child-abuse-wisconsin/together-for-children-conference>. The Children’s Court Improvement Plan provides some financial support with the requirement that the conference qualify for CLE credits, including at least one attorney ethics session. The conference is multi-disciplinary and attendees include attorneys, social workers, school personnel, law enforcement, and child advocates.

The Children’s Court Improvement Plan also provides training for guardians ad litem and other stakeholders throughout the state, including multiple training sessions on the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act and Child Safety Decision-

Making. There have been trainings in the past that covered early child, child, and/or adolescent development, but it is not covered in every training.

Finally, while GALs and other attorneys cannot earn CLE credits, the CCIP E-Learning Project is available as a resource: www.wicciptraining.com. It is a tool that GALs can use at any time to obtain information on conducting key court hearings in child welfare cases, including statutory requirements, applicable case law, and recommended best practices. There are currently a total of 19 learning activities falling under the following three categories: child in need of protection or services (CHIPS), termination of parental rights (TPR), and specialty topics. In addition, the State Bar of Wisconsin also holds an annual GAL Training. The training is not required by the Children's Court Improvement Program. Currently training on domestic violence is required of Family Law Lawyers but not those appointed for child welfare cases, though all lawyers are welcome to attend. Requiring DV training for child welfare GALs would be a positive step in ensuring that children are protected in cases involving domestic violence.

Outagamie County staff are going to be trained in ICWA by DCF Tribal Liaisons in March, four 90 minute virtual training segments. The training will be offered to the legal partners as well including the DA's GAL, and Judges. It is being coordinated by Kristen Wetzel from the Children's Court Improvement Program.

- b. The extent to which the DCF is effectively complying with any other criteria that the panel considers important to ensure the protection of children (e.g., the extent to which the State child protective services system is coordinated with foster care and adoption programs; a review of child fatalities and near fatalities):**

Section 3: Local Evaluation

In completing the evaluation portion of this report, please examine, to the best of your ability, the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local agencies, and where appropriate, specific cases.

- 1. Please provide an evaluation of the following:**

- a. The extent to which local child protection agencies are effectively carrying out the two below listed child protection responsibilities assigned to them under the State CAPTA Plan, and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Standards, referenced above.**

Cross System Collaboration Between CPS and Tribal Child Welfare Agencies:

According to Jennifer Berg-Hargrove, Oneida Tribe Family Services Director, Outagamie County staff have been always been open to meeting with Tribal staff, upon request. The two systems worked closely in 2019 to develop a MOU and 161 agreement and have picked up to renew those documents and to review process. Plans made for joint meetings were cancelled due to covid 19. Both Tribal and County staff hope to have more consistent collaboration opportunities as we progress through 2021.

Training for Guardians ad Litem:

Outagamie County DCF currently does not offer trainings for GALs.

- b. The extent to which local child protection agencies are effectively complying with any other criteria that the panel considers important to ensure the protection of children (e.g., the extent to which the State child protective services system is coordinated with foster care and adoption programs; a review of child fatalities and near fatalities).**
- Outagamie County has a child death review team, and Pastor Larry Creamer, co-chair of the CRP, sits on that team. They have not met since spring due to covid 19.

- The case reviews that have been conducted by the CRP are evidence of the deep concern the staff of Outagamie County Division of Child and Family Services have for children and families in the county. Each review covers issues that both positively and negatively impact cases and the Panel finds that the staff are constantly seeking new ways of meeting the challenges they face. The county is looking at implementation of a parents as peers program that will allow a parent who has been through the child welfare system to act as a mentor to a parent currently in the system. They have also undertaken a two year long process to improve the culture of the Division and address any issues that could lead to turnover of staff. Staff turnover and the time it takes to successfully onboard someone new result in delays in finding permanency for children.
- Despite the incredible difficulties of the past year, staff have risen to the challenges of covid and continue to provide care to all the people involved, children, foster parents, and biological parents.

Section 4: Recommendations

1. Please list any panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the State level.

- The Panel recommends that the state offer an option for counties to develop a level five home for children with behavioral problems. Currently we are only (with State Committee and oversight) able to build this type of resource for a child that meets long term care needs such as a cognitive, physical or developmental disorder. The goal is to have children with disabilities remain in their community. Oftentimes through no fault of their own parents cannot take care of their child. It should not matter if the child meets a functional screen to allow a county to build a resource that keeps our youth in Wisconsin and in their community. We do not have the resources to care for some very highly dysregulated youth and they are going to Residential centers in other states. It is not only very expensive financially but difficult emotionally to send children with trauma backgrounds to Youth Villages, Boys Town or Mill Creek. The counties also need reimbursement for start up costs for level 5 homes through a waiver.
- Need parenting classes for parents with personality disorders
- Need incentives for training for counselors
- Needs to be changes in reporting options. In some states, 3 reports in one year of DV require that a case be screened in and this could be implemented in Wisconsin.
- There is a state statute that requires there to be an adoptive resource available before a TPR is filed and in some cases that isn't possible so there are more delays in permanence for the child.
- The legislative issue the Wisconsin Court needs to address is removing trial as an option for contested matters. The process of termination of parental rights is a civil matter and currently a parent, if they contest, can have a trial in front of a Judge or request a jury trial. If the trial option is removed there will be less congestion in the courts. As it stands 90 -95 % of TPR's in Outagamie County go by default or voluntary.

2. Please list any panel recommendations to improve child protection services at the local level.

- Outagamie County has a huge need for more foster homes, including treatment foster homes.
- We need to do everything possible to get buy in from the community, especially law enforcement, attorneys, judges, that DV is serious and that children living in homes with DV experience serious effects. Very important to have a better working relationship with Law Enforcement on early notification and collaboration. Conversations with the folks that make up the Domestic Violence Intervention Treatment team from DCF are in the early stages.
- Social workers need more training on recovery services available in the community.
- There is a huge need for more court time and more public defenders to represent parents. Often these two issues cause long delays.
- Outagamie County lacks affordable housing, especially for large families, which can cause delays in getting children home.
- Need more support for children of domestic abuse, especially after a parent dies. There have been some adverse effects as a result of Marcie's Law. We need to find out how this is impacting cases. Marcie's law verbiage and state law don't match. Need to keep watch on this for the future.

3. Please list any additional information or comments that the panel wishes to share.