

# Child Well-Being Annual report to the board



December 2022



# Introduction

In our work with children and families, we're driven by our values and what we know to be true: Families are the best place for children. Families want to protect their children. Racial disparities affect our residents' quality of life and their experience in the child welfare system.

Our vision for child and family well-being means reducing those disparities so Hennepin County families can thrive.

There was a time when our system was experiencing profound challenges. Thanks to investment from the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and guidance from the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, we have stabilized, improved, and indeed transformed that system. The way we work looks very different than it did in early 2017.

In this year's report, we start in the child protection system with a look at children coming into care and how our system responds to support families. This priority area has been the focus of major system and practice changes, and we're seeing clear results.

We know community crises, trauma and injustices continue to affect the families we serve. Above all, we want to see children safe at home, in healthy, stable families. The rest of the report highlights the major strategic and programmatic work underway this year across Hennepin County and within Human Services to achieve our vision for child and family well-being.



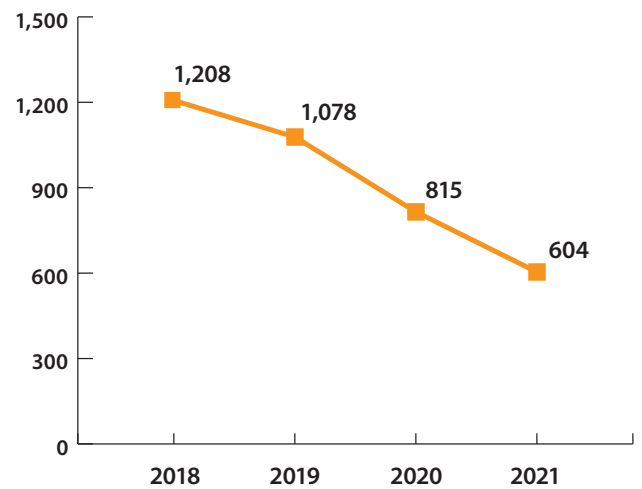
# Staying the course on what we know

Hennepin County's investment in children and family well-being has made a difference, and is reflected in the continued decrease in the number of children in out-of-home placement. The reduced system volume during the pandemic has been a factor, but overall, we've seen half as many children enter placement over the last four years.

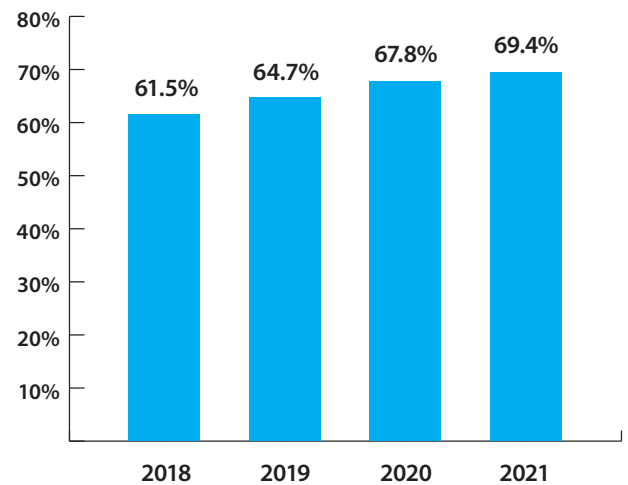
Our first goal remains keeping children safe in their homes whenever possible. For children who must be separated from their parents, our goal is to reduce trauma by placing them with relatives.

Our focus now is preventing a return to pre-pandemic out-of-home placement numbers. As the number of children entering care declines, we continue to shift our resources to preventive, upstream work with the families we serve.

### Out-of-home placement entries



### Relative care



## Trauma-informed approach

In its second year of operation, our Coordination Center is growing and evolving. More than just a placement function, the Coordination Center embodies our trauma-informed approach: Teams coordinate placements to make intentional matches between kids and providers, and then support and stabilize those placements in the critical early days. This continues our work to reduce disruptions and the associated trauma whenever possible.

The Placement Support Team launched in January 2022 to support children in initial placements by helping meet immediate needs. This includes concrete supports, especially for relative foster providers, and ensuring children can access comfort items from home. With practices such as initial foster care phone calls and icebreaker meetings, we're establishing early connections between parents and foster providers, and ensuring early visits for kids and parents. Centered around children's needs, these approaches reduce trauma and are associated with successful reunification.

We're continuing to build out the Coordination Center, informed by best practices and what we're learning. For example, we've successfully worked to increase relative placements in recent years, reducing trauma for children who must be separated from their parents. But through that shift, we're seeing how relative and kin caregivers need different support than licensed nonrelative providers. In the future, peer support parents will help fill that gap and offer the invaluable support and knowledge that comes from lived experience.

## Caseloads and staff turnover

With the reduced system volume of the pandemic, our point-in-time caseload measures remained at the upper end of our target range through the end of last year. This year, in an era of workforce challenges and consistent with nationwide trends in child welfare, our median caseload has drifted upwards. We also saw turnover increase to 7.8% in 2021, though this number remains well below national averages.

In 2022, we've focused on hiring, onboarding, and retention, as well as staying flexible to shift staffing and support where needed in critical situations. Hiring priorities included child protection social workers as well as reducing the supervisor-to-staff ratio in several areas. We aim to build a diverse workforce reflective of the community we serve, and we expanded our recruitment efforts this year.

Longer-term work will bring greater structure and depth to staff development, and a retention plan will continue into 2023. These efforts will strengthen our workforce, leading to increased support for the families we serve and more positive outcomes for children.

## Caseloads per worker

Measure	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ongoing child protection case management	13	13	10	10
ICWA* ongoing child protection case management	11	12	9	8
Child protection assessment/investigations	9	12	7	7

Note: Caseloads in December of each year  
\*Indian Child Welfare Act

# Moving work forward

Families are at the center of our work. To reduce racial disparities in health, justice, education, and other domains, we are building a proactive, responsive system. That starts with upstream prevention and supports, but also carries through to deeper-end interventions. At every level, our system must be oriented to child and family well-being.

## Restructuring for better outcomes

Our Children and Family Services department has restructured to more effectively move key work forward. We have increased organizational and leadership capacity so we can work better together, with families and as a team.

We've had a longstanding goal to reach families earlier with upstream supports, reducing the need for later child protection involvement. We're building out a prevention service area in our restructured agency, including our Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP).

Finalized this year, our practice standards give guidance to social work practitioners, while offering flexibility based on the family's needs and each worker's style. Our practice standards also define the experience children, youth, and families will have as a result of our practice, and establish measurable outcomes that we will reach together as a department.

We are also further embedding Family Group Decision Making into our case continuum. We see this as a key strategy for improving family-centered practice and reducing disproportionality. These facilitated family meetings increase family voice at significant moments in a case, and lead to decisions shared by a team.

Our structure and the way we do our work makes a difference for families. We hope to see these efforts grow and come together, advancing our vision for child well-being and reducing racial disparities in our system.

## Community engagement

To transform our system, we must include the voices of youth and families who experience it. There is urgency and energy behind our drive to reduce racial disparities in our system, but we're learning we can't jump ahead to solutions without taking the time to listen, build trust, and create space for healing. Then, we can act together.

For almost 10 years, we have committed resources to support authentic engagement with the African American and American Indian communities. This year, that work has focused several key strategies, including community forums, a leadership coalition, and partnerships to drive key efforts to reduce disparities. In each of our engagement efforts, we identify the level of decision-making power for residents up front, building trust and authentic engagement.

In addition to building trust broadly, our work with young people has been a central focus this year. This spring and summer, we held listening sessions with youth who experienced out-of-home placement to inform a youth wellness assessment. We're also enhancing the structures and feedback loops we have with youth for stronger, ongoing connections to their voices.

This fall, we're developing a workplan to guide our engagement efforts over the next three years, aligning with department and countywide strategies. Next year, a community engagement dashboard will bring increased transparency to Human Services engagement work, enhancing trust and improving outcomes.



**120+**  
People attended  
community forums



**6**  
Community members  
meeting monthly  
as a coalition



**82**  
Listening session  
participants, including  
13 African American or  
American Indian youth



**9**  
Consultations with child  
trauma experts to inform  
wellness assessment

## Race equity in permanency outcomes

To improve race equity in permanency outcomes for families involved in the child protection system, we launched a 30-month project this year, co-sponsored by three Hennepin County departments: Adult Representation Services, Children and Family Services, and the Hennepin County Attorney's Office.

The American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law is leading this work, with financial support and governance from Casey Family Programs.

The project emphasizes family preservation and achieving timely reunification for families who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Beginning with the assessment phase and continuing through action and implementation, people with lived experience will shape how we achieve this together.

System-wide commitment is necessary to achieve systemic change. We are pleased to have enthusiastic partnership with other system stakeholders, including the Fourth Judicial District Court, the Guardian ad Litem Program, the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office, and the Indian Child Welfare Law Center.

## Sharing data to understand placement and permanency

We have begun work on a collaborative data dashboard to help all stakeholders understand the current state of out-of-home placements. The dashboard also monitors efforts toward reunification and permanency over time. Traditionally, each part of the system — child protection, the courts, county attorney's office, etc. — has held its own data, and each partner's data is slightly different from the others. By integrating that data, we can better understand the entire system and the outcomes children and families experience.

With agreements to share and protect data now in place, work on the dashboard will move forward. Together, our hope is to catalyze systems change efforts across and within each stakeholder agency.

## Foster care reimaged

Last year, an outside analysis of the county's foster care system made more than 40 recommendations for how we can improve the foster care and permanency process. In 2022, we've been developing and refining a multi-year work plan to address these recommendations, in consultation with the Settlement Subcommittee.

Reimagining foster care builds on the work we started years ago, evolving over time into the Coordination Center, our emergency response work, and supports for foster families.

Goals include improving the placement process as it is experienced by families; better supporting biological and foster families with clear information and trauma-informed services; giving children and youth information and support to allow them to have a voice in the process; and ensuring accurate, real-time, and useful data for everyone involved in the foster care system.

This year, we implemented improvements to our existing placement request data system and continue working on a comprehensive new application. We developed new resources for helping youth understand permanency outcomes, and identified existing supports and challenges to successful placement with relatives. And through the transformational work at our Coordination Center, foster providers received key information about children's needs from the Placement Support Team in 100% of initial placements.

Many other projects are planned, underway, or completed this year, including several discussed elsewhere in this report: the youth wellness assessment and listening sessions, building awareness of Family Response, and the out-of-home placement and permanency dashboard. We're seeing how these efforts are all interconnected, and come together to transform not only foster care but our system overall.



## Immediate, in-person support for youth and families

Hennepin County is building a system of care for children’s mental health: a coordinated continuum of mental health services, designed to meet individual youth and family needs in the least restrictive and most appropriate setting.

Family Response is a core service in our system of care, offering immediate, in-person support and stabilization for children or youth and their parents and caregivers. There are no required criteria to initiate Family Response — in fact, no concern is too small. Families connect with the service when children or youth are having a hard time, experiencing worry, feeling down, or showing anger.

Entering its second year, early Family Response outcomes are promising, and the service continues to grow. Through Family Response, we’re building a system that can offer true upstream support.

### Youth outcomes reported at 30-day follow-ups with families:

No law enforcement involvement	89%
No emergency department visits	89%
Living with their same caregivers	67%

In addition, 100% of families were connected to at least one community resource through Family Response.

## Education: Connect for School Success

To reduce racial disparities in education, we’re developing family-driven initiatives to support the educational success of youth in Hennepin County, especially those connected to county services. In 2021, a cross-section of county services that support youth and education came together to identify gaps and limitations in our current system, and in 2022, that work grew through close partnership with schools, families, and community stakeholders.

This fall, we launched Connect for School Success: a voluntary, family-driven program focusing on underlying needs that impact school attendance, increasing family engagement with school. Families are referred by our partner schools or the Be@School program. Social workers engage families to identify needs and goals, then help students and caregivers navigate and connect to county and community resources.

Connect for School Success fills an important gap in our current system, with services available for up to one year and flexible funding to assist families. The goal is to support both family well-being and educational success, using a holistic, supportive, and strengths-based approach.



## Mental health and substance use

Parental substance use disorder and child protection involvement are often closely linked. From intakes to out-of-home placement, our system's response to substance use contributes to the racial disparities experienced by American Indian and Black or African American families involved with child protection.

Children and Family Services and Behavioral Health have been working together over the last year towards a vision that brings behavioral health services closer to families involved with our system.

After starting as a pilot earlier this year, we're now connecting parents with peer recovery support specialists. As people with lived experience in recovery, peer specialists develop trust with parents and offer flexible assistance. Peer specialists use person-centered, trauma-informed approaches to support parents in achieving lasting recovery, rather than a narrow focus on short-term compliance.

Given the complex intersection of substance use and child safety, we need multiple strategies and services in place to support families. Under development this year, our In-Home Family Recovery program will offer in-home substance use disorder and mental health treatment, plus family and parenting support and case management — all while keeping parents and children together, in their own home.

By improving behavioral health outcomes for parents, we can prevent deeper-end system involvement and help children and families achieve long-lasting safety, stability, and well-being.

# Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2022

Since 2017, the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee — a group of community and child welfare system experts — has helped guide and advise county staff, and updates the county board on progress toward child safety and well-being outcomes.

October 2022

Member	Title	Organization	Term expires
Angela Conley	Commissioner, Chair	Hennepin County Board	Board
Debbie Goettel	Commissioner, Co-chair	Hennepin County Board	Board
Lola Adebara	Founder and CEO	Partnerships for Permanence	2024
June Barker	Community member and Living Skills Counselor	Connections 2 Independence (C2i)	2024
Jeanette Boerner	Adult Representation Services Director	Hennepin County	∞
Tikki Brown	Assistant Commissioner	Minnesota Department of Human Services	∞
Josephine Dorsey	Foster care provider		2024
Eric Fenner	Managing Director	Casey Family Programs	∞
Anne Gearity	Community and Clinical Faculty	University of Minnesota	2022
Nancy Harper	Medical Director	Otto Bremer Trust Center for Safe and Healthy Children	2024
April Harrison	Pastor	Church of New Life Bloomington	2023
Dianne Heins	Attorney	Faegre Drinker	Special appointment through 2024
Rosa Herrera	Resident with lived experience	Partnership Academy School	2023
Mark Kappelhoff	Judge	4th Judicial District	∞
Dr. Lolita King-Bethel	Senior Clinical Psychologist	Hennepin County Medical Center	2024
Traci LaLiberte	Executive Director, Center for the Advanced Study of Child Welfare	University of Minnesota	2024
Anne McKeig	Justice	Minnesota Supreme Court	2022
Laura Newton	Program Director	Minneapolis American Indian Center	2024
Jessica Rogers	Executive Director	Connections 2 Independence (C2i)	2024
Mike Scholl	Director	Casey Family Programs	∞
Ada Smith	Resident with lived experience		2023
Lolita Ulloa	Deputy County Attorney	Hennepin County Attorney's Office	∞

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## Child Well-Being Advisory Committee, 2022, continued

### Hennepin County staff

Jodi Wentland	Deputy County Administrator — Health and Human Services	Ex officio
Lisa Bayley	Director of Safe Communities	Ex officio
Kwesi Booker	Director of Children and Family Services	Ex officio
Susan Palchick	Director of Public Health	Ex officio
Evangeline Filosi	Staff support	Hennepin County
Lori Munsterman	Manager, Data Analytics and CQI	Hennepin County
Lori Whittier	Managing Attorney, Child Protection Division	Hennepin County Attorney's Office

# Settlement subcommittee annual report

The Settlement Subcommittee provides additional guidance and oversight for reform efforts, guided by the settlement agreement that concluded a federal class action lawsuit naming Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services over child maltreatment and child placement concerns.

The Settlement Subcommittee makes its own annual report to the board, as follows here.

## Biannual report of the settlement subcommittee

### Annual year end report

December 2022

As the court appointed independent Neutral and on behalf of the settlement subcommittee, I submit this second biannual report for 2022 as required by Section 5.d.iv of the settlement agreement in this matter. This report also constitutes the annual report of the settlement subcommittee for 2022.

Section 5.d.iv of the settlement agreement provides “The Settlement Subcommittee will report at least biannually in writing to the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee and to counsel for the Parties on the progress made to implement this Agreement, and each such report will include a section prepared by the independent Neutral addressing any compliance issues under this Agreement.”

The settlement subcommittee began meeting monthly in January 2020 and continues to meet at least monthly as required by the settlement agreement. From April 2020 meetings were held virtually through video calls. In August the settlement subcommittee resumed in person meetings. Our plan is to meet in person following the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee on months that the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meets and continue to meet virtually on the off months.

In our annual report in December 2021, we summarized our work last year and provided a preview of our intended workplan for 2022, including an ongoing focus on permanency, evaluating the results of the annual Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team report on various audits of the Hennepin County Child Protection system, Hennepin County’s Re-imaging Shelter Care work and the development of trial home visit protocols and practice standards.

As this report indicates, we have continued to engage in detailed analysis and discussions on each of these

topics and developed a new framework in 2022 to guide our work and expand the depth of our efforts. A monthly summary of our work in 2022 is contained in Attachment A to this report.

In the first two years of our work, we were focused on ensuring that each area of responsibility assigned to the settlement subcommittee was being addressed. This work resulted in demonstrable progress in several areas that allows us to address key issues, develop a better understanding of how the Hennepin County child protection system is performing, identify trends, address current and emerging issues, address current and emerging needs, address system improvements and the need for sustainable system changes. As mentioned in our first biannual report for 2022, some examples of our efforts in 2020 and 2021 included work to ensure that the following requirements of the settlement agreement were implemented:

- Establishment of a data dashboard that allows us to monitor and track key performance indicators in real time.
- Completion of the Wilder Research Foster Care Needs Analysis, “Assessing Gaps and Needs for Children and Families Involved in Hennepin County’s Foster Care System” that has led to the Hennepin County Foster Care Re-imagined initiative and workplan.
- Implementing a review team for children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition.
- Implementing a multi-disciplinary screening team approach.
- Implementing county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services.
- Implementing case plan protocol and practice standards.
- Implementing trial home visit protocol and practice standards.
- MNIT database modifications that allow tracking of the number of child interviews being conducted outside the presence of alleged perpetrators and foster parents.
- Assessment of efforts to provide foster parents and potential adoptive parents with better information about a child’s needs before placement.

These are just some of our many efforts to comply with the terms of the settlement agreement. A more complete summary of the progress on each of the settlement agreement requirements is found in Attachment B to this report.

As the settlement subcommittee considered our work in 2021 and 2022 and our future work plans, we determined that 2022 was the time to move from our original emphasis on putting data systems and other new systems in place and focus on ways to build on this work to address key issues and address the need for sustainable system change on known issues.

To organize our 2022 work, we decided to divide our work into three components:

1. Intake
2. Foster Care and
3. Permanency

We decided to devote each monthly meeting to one of these specific topics, to go deeper on key issues relating to each topic, and to rotate topics each month. This approach has allowed us to pivot from our initial approach of ensuring technical compliance with each requirement of the settlement agreement to a more comprehensive and substantive discussion of key issues.

This report summarizes our 2022 work on each of these topics, which includes each of the items identified in our December 2021 annual report.

One overarching initiative that has been essential to all our work was the development of a Hennepin County child protection data dashboard. This has allowed us insight into key issues and trends based on facts and touches on multiple areas of our work. We commend Hennepin County staff for developing a robust dashboard and encourage Hennepin County policy makers to ensure this vital data effort continues and expands in the future.

The importance of data work extends beyond Hennepin County. For example, changes to the Minnesota IT services (MNIT) reporting system have helped to improve provide insight to the number of children being interviewed outside the presence of alleged perpetrators and outside the presence of foster parents absent “exceptional circumstances” by allowing us to track the number of “exceptional circumstances” indicated and evaluating the basis for the exceptional circumstance departure.

## Intake

- Continued to review screen out/track assignment audit results and associated data dashboard information. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) continues to review and audit at least five percent of Hennepin County's cases screening decisions. According to a report received by the settlement subcommittee in July 2022, over the previous thirteen months DHS reviewed a total of over 1,000 reports from Hennepin County. Of those, 430 cases were screened in and 603 were screened out. DHS had no concerns or disagreements with the Hennepin County screening decisions.
- Continued to work on ensuring that child interviews are conducted outside the presence of an alleged perpetrator absent "exceptional circumstances". The percentage of interviews conducted outside the presence of the offender or other person with a personal or familial relationship with the offender has increased from 73% in the first quarter of 2021 to 78% to date in 2022. Data are reviewed for children 0–2, 3–5 and 6–17. Children ages 0–2 continue to be the significant majority of children who are not interviewed or observed outside the presence of the alleged perpetrator, and the Department of Children and Family Services has stated that additional training will be provided to better assess these youngest children. Improvements to the MNIT system allow Hennepin County and the settlement subcommittee to track and analyze "exceptional circumstances" where the interviews are not occurring outside the presence of an alleged perpetrator.
- Implementation of multi-disciplinary screening teams, including Hennepin County inclusion of community providers over the past year and work to expand the number of participating community providers. Intake review teams continue to meet five days a week from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1 to 4:30 p.m. The review team includes a county attorney, an intake social worker, a PSOP social worker, an intake supervisor, and a community provider three days a week. A new community provider is being brought on board the IRT meetings in November to provide a fourth day of community provider coverage. The IRT screened 93.1% of all reports received in the third quarter of 2022 that were not automatically screened in or out.
- Monitored county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services. This requirement of the settlement agreement is currently in the monitoring compliance phase. Reviews by the settlement subcommittee have shown regular and consistent compliance and a review by the Children and Family Services Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) workgroup has confirmed that compliance. The CQI workgroup will continue to review a list of closed cases on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing compliance. The most recent review showed that from July 1–September 30, 2022, 157 families closed their child protection cases, with zero cases closed with non-compliance following a maltreatment re-report.
- Provided feedback and monitored the Hennepin County -Revisioning shelter care initiative and workplan. The settlement subcommittee received a comprehensive update on the roll out and implementation of the "one placement" model and work of the Coordination Center in August. The One Placement Model was implemented in January 2022 and eliminated the use of shelter foster homes, moving to a model that works to move placing children directly into long-term placements with relatives and non-relative foster providers. A placement support team was also established. The settlement subcommittee will continue to review this new initiative in 2023.

- Received quarterly shelter review reports and provided commentary. The most recent shelter data review in August showed that shelter placements increased slightly between the first and second quarters of 2022, with a decrease coming in June at the end of the quarter. In the second quarter, there were 40 total active shelter placements, with 24 new admissions (20 unique youth). There were 28 discharges from shelter (23 unique youth) in the second quarter. Length of stay in shelter decreased between the first and second quarter of 2022, from 44 days to 32 days. Of the 28 discharges, 46% were in shelter less than 30 days, 18% were in shelter 90 days or longer.
- Continued assessment of quality and timeliness of information made available to prospective foster parents regarding a child’s needs and ensure the prospective foster parents can meet the child’s needs. This discussion has resulted in system improvements to improve the information provided. The Hennepin County IT Department has begun development of an out of home placement application with the goal of creating a child information form that will require significantly fewer duplicate data entry and allow for more accurate tracking of this work. A power BI report has been developed to track the work the child information forms being conducted by Coordination Center staff. For the second quarter of 2022, the form was provided 61.8% of the time, not provided 33% of the time and 5.2% unknown. This compliance is up year over year, but down slightly from the previous quarter. Minnesota Social Service Information (SSIS) limitations continue to pose challenges to the tracking process and manual data entry poses additional challenges. Hennepin County is working to address with these issues pending full development of the out of home placement application longer term solution.

## Foster Care

- We devoted significant time in 2022 to discussions with Hennepin County staff about the Foster Care Re-imagined initiative resulting from the Wilder Research foster care needs analysis. The settlement subcommittee reviewed the County’s proposed workplan in February and approved goals and measurable benchmarks for this work. In August, the settlement subcommittee agree to Hennepin County’s proposed changes to the approved work plan considering significant staffing changes in Children and Family Services. Strategic planning will now begin in the first quarter of 2023 with a new completion date of the end of the second quarter in 2023. The settlement subcommittee will continue to be deeply engaged in this work and monitor future progress as a core part of our 2023 work plan.
- Participated in data dashboard reviews of foster care information and trends. As in previous reports, the most recent report shows that out of home placements have remained stable and the most common placement setting is relative foster care.
- Continued to work to ensure that child interviews are conducted outside the presence of foster parents, absent “exceptional circumstances.” Compliance with this requirement continues to increase and a staff development team is working to create a training related to meeting individually with very young children as well as refresher trainings.



# Permanency

As discussed in our previous reports, persistent issues exist regarding permanency in Hennepin County. While the number of children in out of home placement has decreased in recent years, the median length of stay has increased. Further, most of the children placed in out of home care in Hennepin County are young and are children of color.

We continue our work to better understand the root causes and develop recommendations to achieve better outcomes.

One important initiative underway was referenced in our 2021 annual report. Hennepin County and key stakeholders are involved in and American Bar Association court protection court improvement project titled “Disparity Reduction Effort in Out of Home Placement for Children in the Child Protection System.

Hennepin County Child Protection, the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, Hennepin County Adult Representation Services, the Fourth Judicial District Court, and other child protection stakeholders are involved in this effort.

The scope of work of the ABA project includes identifying and analyzing barriers to stabilizing BIPOC families in achieving permanency, identifying barriers to earlier reunification, identifying drivers of racial disparities in placement duration and permanency outcomes, developing reforms that employ pre-petition preventative services and post-petition services to allocate needs for removal and reducing time in care through safe reunification or other timely permanency options.

In addition to the institutional child protection stakeholders, the ABA project is also including other community voices. Including listening sessions with Native American and African American communities

and research on youth and trauma, specifically for African American, Native American and transition age youth.

The settlement subcommittee commends all child protection stakeholders for involvement in this important initiative. The settlement subcommittee has also met with the ABA team leading the project and receives monthly updates on work in progress.

We are also encouraged by the planned release in 2023 of a child protection permanency dashboard. As indicated in our earlier comments, we believe that real time collection and analysis of what is happening in the child protection system is a vital tool to address issues and trends and address disparities. We have been strongly supportive of the development of a permanency dashboard and look forward to having the associated information as another resource to guide our 2023 work.

An additional component of our permanency work and focus this year has been the identification and analysis of key known permanency barriers: trauma, addiction, and mental health. The settlement subcommittee has been engaged in a discussion with Hennepin County staff about programs in place to address these issues, service quality and gaps and new initiatives to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Other settlement subcommittee work on permanency to date in 2022 included:

- Review and analysis of review teamwork relating to children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. Data are broken down by state adoption exchange status, type of recruitment efforts provided, barriers to permanency, number of permanency barriers identified, barriers to reunification and the number of barriers to reunification that were identified. Hennepin County noted that it is working with providers on how to improve services for youth,

## Exit foster care to permanency

	Federal Standard	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>12 months or less</b>	40.5% or greater	40.4%	40.4%	39.4%	TBD
<b>12–23 months</b>	43.6% or greater	48.9%	48.5%	57.7%	TBD
<b>24 months or more</b>	30.3% or greater	33.6%	36.7%	42.1%	TBD

- increase the number of step-down services that are available and address challenges with waitlists for services.
- Review of new case plan protocols and practice standards through regular reports to the settlement subcommittee. The new case plan process has been completed and will be included in the 2023 Continuous Quality Improvement Annual Report. In August, Hennepin County reported that the work was coming along at a slow pace due, in part, to challenges with full staffing. Children and Family Services leadership is working to shift resources to support this work and six new supervisors for the on-going units were recently hired. Hennepin County plans robust onboarding and training to help support these supervisors with this work.
  - Review of the annual DHS state ward audit results. In May, as part of the Continuous Quality Improvement team annual report, the settlement subcommittee review the most recent DHS state ward audit results. The settlement agreement requires DHS to audit at least 10% of the state wards for whom Hennepin County is the Commissioner's agent and for whom no adoptive resource has been identified within 24 months after the child was placed by court order under the guardianship of the Commissioner. 86 children fit these criteria and 12 cases were selected for the audit. The report identified several strengths pre-guardianship and post-guardianship and key areas for growth and recommendations. Hennepin County is working to address the recommendations.
  - Monitoring of new trial home visit protocol and practice standard implementation. In the most recent report in September, Hennepin County reported that for all children reunited with their parent or guardian after being in out of home placement for 180 days or more, 75% had a trial home visit prior to reunification, 25% did not. In terms of reunification rate, of all trial home visits that ended in reunification, 86% were reunified, 14% were not. Hennepin County continues to work on updates to the Power BI reports and trial home visit data set to include additional length of stay in out of home placement information as well as data on race, age, ethnicity, ICWA status and primary removal condition.
  - Ongoing work to improve the timeliness and quality of information to potential adoptive parents about a child before pre-adoptive placement to ensure they can meet the child's needs. Compliance with this provision of the settlement agreement is monitored through a Power BI report. For the most recent reporting period of June–August 22, there were 52 pre-adoptive placements. Of these 52 placements, 3 were not in full compliance with case documentation, relating to one sibling group of three. Hennepin County followed up with the supervisor and social worker on the 3 cases to ensure future full compliance. In addition, Hennepin County continues to refine the Power BI report to reduce or eliminate the need for manual reviews and data cleaning.
  - A comprehensive discussion of the Continuous Quality Improvement Team Annual Report on program audit results pertaining to multiple areas of Hennepin County Child Protection, including permanency related audits. The CQI Data Unite has continued to conduct all reviews mandated in the settlement agreement and has continued building out processes and supporting tools for further analysis.

## 2023 Work Plan

2023 will be the last year of the settlement subcommittee work as mandated by the settlement agreement. We plan to finish our last year strong, and are working on a robust work plan that will include continued monitoring of all requirements of the work plan and a deeper emphasis on work in the following areas:

- Permanency, with special focus on disparities, barriers to reunification or other forms of permanency and service gaps, along with review of the new permanency dashboard.
- Work on the Foster Care Re-imagined initiative to follow through on the Wilder Research recommendations.
- Continued work on case plan and trial home visit initiatives
- Continued analysis of the shelter revision initiative.

## Compliance Issues

I am pleased to once again report that there are no compliance issues.

As chair of the settlement subcommittee, I once again wish to express my deep appreciation to my settlement subcommittee colleagues for their hard work and deep and sincere commitment to our efforts. We will work hard to complete our work in 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Stanoch

Chair and Independent Neutral  
Settlement Subcommittee

## Attachment A

# Summary of monthly settlement subcommittee meeting topics

January–December 2022

### January

- The subcommittee met the new Director of Children and Family Services, Kwesi Booker.
- The subcommittee chair, John Stanoch, reported on his one-on-one conversations with subcommittee members regarding the 2022 workplan. There was consensus to move beyond the focus on organizing work to comply with the timeline requirements of the settlement agreement to a big theme discussion of major initiatives relating to intake (investigation and assessment), experience in foster care and permanency. The subcommittee agreed to organize our 2022 workplan around these areas, with a focus on sustainable system change.
- The subcommittee received a briefing on the proposed ABA project to address permanency disparities and outcomes.
- The subcommittee received an update on child interviews outside the presence of the alleged offender.
- The subcommittee received an update on work in progress to finalize the Hennepin County Foster Care Re-Imagined Workplan.
- The subcommittee reviewed the data dashboard screening review and track assignment results.

### February

- The subcommittee held an open discussion on matters covered during the February Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting, including the presentation from the ABA team regarding the permanency disparity project.
- The main topic of the February settlement subcommittee meeting was foster care.
- The subcommittee reviewed the data dashboard out of home placement and in home results and trends.

- The subcommittee received an update on the Foster Care Re-Imagined workplan, including proposed goals and measurable benchmarks. The subcommittee approved goals and benchmarks for the work.
- The subcommittee received an update on case worker visits outside the presence of the foster parent.
- The subcommittee received an update on the child information form for placement providers.
- The subcommittee received an update on case plan initiatives.

### March

- The main topic of the March subcommittee meeting was permanency.
- The subcommittee met members of the ABA permanency project team and engaged in an open discussion regarding the work of the team, the proposed workplan and timeline.
- The subcommittee received the bi-annual report regarding children under guardianship or in placement with no permanency disposition.
- The subcommittee received a report on trial home visits.
- The subcommittee received an update on disclosure of information on a child to prospective foster parents and prospective adoptive parents.
- The subcommittee received an update on work to establish a permanency dashboard.
- The subcommittee discussed written updates regarding re-envisioning shelter and the quarterly shelter date review that was carried over from the February meeting agenda.
- The subcommittee discussed the written state ward audit report.

## April

- The subcommittee debriefed on the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting.
- The main topic of the April subcommittee meeting was intake.
- The subcommittee received an update on the ABA permanency project and upcoming meetings scheduled with Native American and African American community groups.
- The subcommittee held a data dashboard review of screening and track assignments, with particular focus on the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) audit of Hennepin County's decisions to screen in or screen out maltreatment reports.
- The subcommittee also reviewed Initial Re-Reports and Successive Reports from the data dashboard.
- The subcommittee received a written report on the multi-disciplinary screening team approach and held a discussion with Hennepin County regarding elements of the report.
- The subcommittee received an update on interviews with children outside the presence of an alleged offender, progress being made and the need for additional information for reasons children are not being interviewed outside the presence of the alleged offender.
- The subcommittee received a written report on Hennepin County consultation on maltreatment re-reports.

## May

- The main topic of the May settlement subcommittee meeting was foster care.
- The subcommittee reviewed data dashboard information on foster care, including out of home discharge reasons, showing that in 2021 reunification with parents is down, part of a downward trend over the past couple of year. The subcommittee engaged in a discussion with Hennepin County staff about possible explanations for this trend and the county will work on learning more about root causes and bring that information to future settlement subcommittee meetings.

- The subcommittee reviewed the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) annual report and discussed each annual review and audit contained in the report.
- The subcommittee received several updates from Hennepin County, including information on the new Continuous Quality Improvement manager, impact of extended hospital stays for youth, Child Well-Being Advisory Committee membership updates, and an update on the ABA permanency project.
- The subcommittee reviewed data regarding caseworker visits outside the presence of a parent, including a discussion of "exceptional circumstances" where such visits are not occurring. This is an ongoing matter to better understand practice and results.
- The subcommittee received a briefing and engaged in a discussion about an out of home placement application form that Hennepin County staff will be using to support the placement of children in real time, a significant improvement over current practice. Hennepin County will continue to report to the settlement subcommittee regarding accurate and timely completion of child information forms.
- The subcommittee received a report on completion of case plans, an ongoing focus. The subcommittee received information on a new case review process to ensure case plan compliance.
- The subcommittee received the first quarterly report on the Foster Care Re-Imagined project.

The subcommittee discussed the work of the coordination center and the shift away from shelter care towards the One Placement model. All the benchmarks for the quarter were completed. The subcommittee agree to adjustment of two future benchmark dates.

- The subcommittee received the quarterly shelter data report, noting there were no shelter foster home placements in the first quarter of 2022.

## June

- The subcommittee debriefed on the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting
- The main topic of the June subcommittee meeting was permanency.
- The subcommittee conducted a data dashboard review of permanency information.
- The subcommittee received an update on trial home visits.
- The subcommittee received an update on information on a child provided to potential foster parents.
- The subcommittee received an update on the ABA permanency project work and the permanency dashboard.

## July

- The subcommittee welcomed Lori Munsterman, the new Data Analytics and CQI Manager with Hennepin County Children and Family Services.
- A high level overview of the Children and Family Services restructure plan was presented by Kwesi Booker.
- The subcommittee reviewed the findings of the Minnesota Legislative Auditor report on Child Protection Removals and Reunification.
- The subcommittee received an update on the ABA work, which is in the assessment phase.
- The subcommittee reviewed the Minnesota Department of Human Services audit of Hennepin County screening decisions. The last quarter results were positive, with no concerns or disagreements with the decisions made.
- The subcommittee received an update on the multi-disciplinary team screening approach. Work continues on recruiting community providers to serve on the teams along with a county attorney representative, intake social worker, PSOP social worker and an intake supervisor.
- The latest report on Hennepin County Attorney Office consultation on maltreatment re-reports showed zero cases closed with non-compliance.

- The subcommittee reviewed the most recent report on child interviews outside the presence of an alleged offender and found the trend continuing to improve, with 81% compliance in the most recent quarter.
- The subcommittee reviewed the draft Settlement Sub-Committee Bi-Annual Report to the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee.

## August

- The subcommittee received an extensive quarterly shelter data review and Hennepin County Coordination Center update.
- The subcommittee conducted a foster care dashboard review. Out of home placement numbers have remained stable, with the most common setting relative foster care.
- The subcommittee received a foster care re-imagined/revisioning shelter update. Due to staffing changes in Children and Family Services, the subcommittee approved a new timeline to begin strategic planning in the first quarter of 2023 with a new completion date of the end of the second quarter in 2023.
- The subcommittee reviewed a written update on caseworker visits outside the presence of a foster parent. The subcommittee also received updates on the ABA project, case plan work and the child information form provided to placement providers.
- The subcommittee began a discussion of key items to address in the 2023 work plan and reached consensus on a number of items for closer focus, including measuring the progress that's been made in the Hennepin County Child Protection system, promoting sustainability of those efforts and gains, identifying key metrics to track, a more robust discussion of barriers to permanency (trauma, mental health and chemical dependency), gaps in services, foster care re-imagined efforts, shelter re-design, the ABA project and recommendations for ongoing work to continue after the conclusion of the settlement subcommittee at the end of 2023.

## September

- The subcommittee conducted a permanency data dashboard review. Out of home placements continue to decrease.
- The subcommittee received a presentation on the process of full disclosure to adopting parents.
- The subcommittee reviewed the bi-annual report regarding children under guardianship of in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition. The subcommittee engaged in an extensive discussion regarding barriers to permanency and work in progress to explore alternatives and ways to reduce the barriers.
- The subcommittee received a report on trial home visits. More information on why trial home visits sometimes do not occur will be provided at the December meeting.
- The subcommittee received updates from Hennepin County on the ABA project and development of an out of home placement and permanency dashboard.
- The subcommittee had further discussion regarding the 2023 workplan and a draft workplan prepared by Hennepin County.

## October

- The subcommittee debriefed on the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting.
- The subcommittee received an update on the ABA Race Equity in Permanency Project from the ABA team.
- A data dashboard review on screening and track assignment decisions was conducted.
- The subcommittee received updates from Hennepin County on child interviews outside the presence of the alleged offender, Hennepin County Attorney Office consultations on maltreatment re-reports and the multi-disciplinary team screening approach.
- The subcommittee continued its discussion of a workplan for 2023.
- The subcommittee discussed its annual report to be presented to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners at a special meeting in December.

## November

- The subcommittee reviewed the draft annual report
- The subcommittee received written reports on re-envisioning shelter work and the quarterly shelter data review.
- The subcommittee discussed caseworker visits outside the presence of a foster parent, case plans and the child information form for placement providers.
- A foster care data dashboard review was presented.
- An ABA project update was provided, and the subcommittee continued its discussion of the 2023 workplan.

## December

- The subcommittee plans to debrief on the Child Well-Being Advisory Committee meeting and the annual child protection presentation to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners.
- The subcommittee plans to continue the trial home visit and full disclosure of information regarding a child discussion.
- The subcommittee plans to participate in a data dashboard review of permanency.



# Attachment B

## Settlement subcommittee work plan status

December 2022

This report summarizes progress on each settlement subcommittee obligation arising from the federal class action settlement

### 1. Data dashboard.

Status: The data dashboard required by the settlement agreement is in place and has been actively monitored and the results discussed by the settlement subcommittee. During 2022, the subcommittee has discussed data dashboard results, trends and issues involving permanency, out of home placement results and trends, screening and track assignment results, initial re-reports and successive reports, foster care discharge reasons and other trends.

The establishment of data dashboard and continuous review and analysis has been a significant Hennepin County child protection system improvement and has allowed the settlement subcommittee to monitor system issues, note improvements and trends and engage in an informed conversation about how the Hennepin County Child Protection system is functioning.

Hennepin County is working with system stakeholders to finalize a permanency dashboard that will allow for a deeper understating of permanency results. The settlement subcommittee commends Hennepin County and system stakeholders for this work and looks forward to including the permanency data dashboard information in our 2023 discussions.

### 2. Screen out/track assignment audit.

Status: Audits are ongoing, and results are provided to settlement subcommittee. Data dashboard information is reviewed with Hennepin County staff on a regular basis and metrics are monitored by the Continuous Quality Improvement workgroup and discussed monthly. This topic is also covered in the Continuous Quality Improvement Annual Report to the

settlement subcommittee. The audits show ongoing compliance by Hennepin County.

### 3. Implement child interviews outside presence of alleged perpetrator during investigation.

Status: The MNIT database modifications contemplated by the settlement agreement are in place and compliance results on exceptions are reported to settlement subcommittee on a regular basis. The subcommittee has been actively monitoring “exceptional circumstances” where interviews outside the presence of an alleged offender have not occurred and information is being provided for results in different age groups. The percentage of children being interviewed outside the presence of an alleged offender is currently 80% for all children in every age group.

### 4. Implement child interviews outside presence of foster parent.

Status: The MNIT database modifications contemplated by the settlement agreement are in place and compliance reports on exceptions are reported to settlement subcommittee. The subcommittee has been actively monitoring “exceptional circumstances” where interviews outside the presence of a foster parent has not occurred. Data from the first quarter of 2022 shows that 76% of case notes on “exceptional circumstances” are entered correctly. The settlement subcommittee is working to develop a deeper understanding of the circumstances where “exceptional circumstances” are noted to further improve the compliance rate.

5. Quarterly shelter use report and recommendations.

Status: Quarterly reports are provided to settlement subcommittee. Hennepin County is engaged in a significant re-envisioning shelter care project and the subcommittee has been actively monitoring and discussing shelter placements, shelter discharges and median days in shelter. Hennepin County has presented a workplan for re-envisioning shelter tasks and current actions, work in progress and new or emerging challenges or trends are discussed on a regular basis by the settlement subcommittee.

6. Implement review team for children under guardianship or in placement more than 24 months with no permanency disposition.

Status: A review team continues to meet regularly. Observations and issues identified by the review team are reported to settlement subcommittee for analysis and discussion. The settlement subcommittee has received staff readouts on barriers and current initiatives to address barriers. The settlement subcommittee remains interested in an ongoing deeper discussion on the impact of trauma, addiction and mental health concerns as barriers, service gaps and plans to address each of these areas.

These barriers are also noted and discussed in our overall work on permanency. The subcommittee is also monitoring the ABA project work, which is working with Hennepin County child protection systems stakeholders to identify and analyze systemic barriers to achieving permanency for BIPOC families, drivers of racial disparities in placement duration and permanency outcomes and other important permanency related issues.

7. Implement multi-disciplinary team screening approach.

Status: As required by the settlement agreement, multi-disciplinary screening teams were established. This work is being monitored on a regular basis by the settlement subcommittee. Community providers have been involved in this process over past year, and Hennepin County is working to expand the number of community providers contributing to the intake team review process.

8. Implement county attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports where parents are not participating in services.

Status: As required by the settlement agreement, Hennepin County Attorney consultation on maltreatment re-reports is occurring. The settlement subcommittee is monitoring compliance through regular reporting of monthly data results.

9. 3rd party contract: Foster Care Needs Analysis.

Status: The Wilder Research report "Assessing Gaps and Needs for Children and Families Involved in Hennepin County's Foster Care System" was presented to settlement subcommittee in September 2021 and to Child Well Being Advisory Committee in October 2021. The settlement subcommittee has engaged in discussions with Hennepin County staff on follow up on the issues identified in the report and development of a detailed work plan to responded to findings and recommendations of the report. The settlement subcommittee reviewed the proposed Hennepin County workplan in February 2022 and approved goals and measurable benchmarks for this work. The subcommittee approved some changes to the original workplan. Progress reports and discussion of work in progress will continue to be a major focus of the settlement subcommittee work.

10. Implement case plan protocol and practice standards.

Status: As required by the settlement agreement, protocols and practice standards were developed and reviewed by settlement subcommittee and staff training has been conducted. Regular status reports are provided to the settlement subcommittee. Completion of case plans continues to be a focus of this work. The new case review process has been completed and will be included in the 2023 Continuous Quality Improvement Annual Report and program managers have been asked to develop a plan to achieve case plan compliance by August 31, 2022.

11. CQI audit report.

Status: The settlement subcommittee has received detailed annual CQI report audit reports and engaged in discussions with Hennepin County staff about audit results, including system improvement strategies between annual reports.

12. State ward audit.

Status: Annual DHS audits have been completed and reviewed by settlement subcommittee. The settlement subcommittee will continue to receive and discuss future audit findings.

13. Re-envisioning shelter care.

Status: Hennepin County has made considerable progress in efforts to re-envision and operationalize shelter care. The settlement subcommittee has provided feedback on Hennepin County efforts and will continue to receive status updates and address identified concerns.

14. Implement trial home visit protocol and practice standards.

Status: Trial home visit protocol and practice standards were developed and reviewed by the settlement subcommittee. The settlement subcommittee continues to receive status reports.

15. Implement use of Minnesota PPAI to manage recruitment for children under guardianship more than 12 months.

Status: Use of the Minnesota PPAI was implemented.

16. Implement potential adoptive parents receiving all information about child before pre-adoptive placement and are able to meet their needs.

Status: Progress and information to be provided has been reviewed by settlement subcommittee. The settlement subcommittee continues to receive and discuss ongoing reports on the effectiveness of changes.

17. Implement foster parent receiving information about a child's needs.

Status: Progress and information to be provided is reviewed by settlement subcommittee.

The settlement subcommittee will continue to receive and discuss ongoing reports on the effectiveness of changes.

18. 600 additional hours.

Status: 600 additional hours of settlement subcommittee data work was directed in 2021 to help child protection system partners in development of permanency dashboard, work that continues.



Hennepin County

Human Services

300 South 6th Street, Minneapolis 55487

[hennepin.us](http://hennepin.us)