



Wayne County Children Services Board

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The CONNECTION

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2008 YEAR IN REVIEW

By: Randall B. Muth, Executive Director

No review of calendar year 2008 would be complete without some discussion of the impact the recent economic downturn has had. As I value completeness, this review will be no different. However, before we get to that, I would like to take a moment to draw your attention to some successes which the Wayne County Children Services Board has enjoyed over the past year.

We believe that when children must be removed from their parents, kinship placement with other capable family members, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles is better for children rather than being placed with foster parents who, though well meaning and loving, are total strangers. Research indicates that the transition from birth parents to extended family members in kinship placement is often less traumatic for these children because often times, the children will have had a previous relationship with the family member. Further, children in relative placement experience fewer placement changes than children placed with non-kin foster parents. Significantly, children who reunify with their birth parents after kinship care are less likely to re-enter foster care than those who had been in non-relative foster placements or in group care facilities.

In recognition of the benefits associated with safe, appropriate relative placement, we have dedicated one social worker to do nothing but facilitate these types of placements. We have seen great results. The statistic we use to measure our success in this is the relative bed days compared to foster care bed days. Over the past year, we have seen an increase of around ten percent in favor of relative care. At any given time, approximately 46% of our traditional out of home placements are with relatives. That translates into a savings of almost \$102,000.00 to the County. Our goal is to hit 55% of our children in relative placement. If that happens, we anticipate saving the county an additional \$100,000 in placement costs.

Another area in which we achieved success in 2008 is with reducing the case load sizes in our on-going department. For the past several years, we have consistently operated at ten to twenty percent above state recommended case loads. In July of 2008, after approximately a year and a half of effort, I had the pleasure of announcing that none of our 16 on-going case workers had a case load size above recommended levels.

The reduction in case load sizes is not, unfortunately, due to a reduction in need. In fact, the number of cases we investigated last year was up slightly from 2007. Nor was this the result of us reducing the services to the community. We achieved this goal by implementing cutting edge techniques that resulted in a reduction in the time it took to remedy the problems that led to our involvement with a family or, when the problems could not be remedied, achieving a permanent placement for children.

As I promised, I do need to inform the community of the impact which the economy has had on our agency. We have been able to maintain the previous high level of service which we provide to the community. However, to do so, like

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everyone else, we have had to make some sacrifices. We have cut our discretionary spending by almost 26 percent. We had to eliminate our tuition reimbursement program, training incentives, health incentives, raises for management staff and even water coolers.

In the grand scheme, those sacrifices are relatively minor and we are happy to make them if it means continuing the services to the children of Wayne County. What is a little harder to accept is that we had many plans to expand and improve the services we provide. For example, we had hoped to have funding available to support our new increase in relative placements. We realized that our parenting program has not changed significantly since 1992. We had hoped to expand and improve that as well.

But, if there is a silver lining to all this, it is that we have renewed our appreciation for the tradition of communication and cooperation between our sister agencies, other governmental entities in Wayne County and the private sector. As we continue to face economic challenges, it will be important to rely on the support and cooperation of our many community partners and citizens.

Therefore, I would like to thank the Wayne County Prosecutor for providing excellent representation of our Agency in the Wayne County Juvenile Court, the Children's Advocacy Center which provides services to victims of sex abuse locally, the Family and Children First Council which provides services including team meetings to develop collaborative treatment plans with families with the goal of service delivery in the least restrictive environment, the multiple mental health and substance abuse recovery agencies which provided various treatment interventions to address issues for both parents and children, our local schools who have worked closely with the agency to ensure children are in the most appropriate educational system, and the many prevention, early intervention, and collaboration efforts occurring in Wayne County. But, mostly, I would like to thank you, the citizens of Wayne County, for making services to families a priority as evidenced by the investment you have made in our multi-systemic approach to reducing child abuse.

I am firmly convinced that child protection truly takes a community. So, as you read this, please take a moment to reflect on how you may help build a community where all children can thrive, develop character, and learn to be responsible citizens in an environment of security and love. By honoring our obligation to support and protect our young people, we all have an opportunity to make a positive difference in the life of a child and build a brighter future for our community. I encourage all citizens of Wayne County to recognize that child abuse prevention starts with each one of us.

To review our entire 2008 Annual Report, please visit our web-site at www.waynecsb.org.

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