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Development News

New Kent County nonprofit launches public-private pilot program for improving foster care outcomes

By Anya Zentmeyer, Development News Editor | Thursday, October 26, 2017



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The brainchild of five private Kent county foster care agencies and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the new non-profit [West Michigan Partnership for Children](#) launched earlier this week at its new 213 Sheldon Avenue SE headquarters in downtown Grand Rapids.

Operating as a consortium under a five-year pilot program that is the first of its kind in the state of Michigan, the WMPC was at least five years in the making and forged around one central question posed by both the state's MDHHS and the private foster care systems it partners with — how can we improve outcomes for the kids in foster care?

Kristyn Peck is CEO of the new WMPC, and says although she came aboard more recently back in April, the MDHHS and the five private foster care partners—[Bethany Christian Services](#), [Catholic Charities of West Michigan](#), [D.A. Blodgett-St. Johns](#), [Samaritas](#), and [Wellspring Lutheran Services](#)—have spent approximately five years working together to evaluate other models throughout the U.S. and look at the ways those states were able to transform and improve outcomes for children in their own foster care systems.

Unique in its consortium model, WMPC was created as a new non-profit charged with implementing the state-funded pilot program, with the private foster care agencies essentially acting as subcontractors who provide direct services while the WMPC serves its role as the fiscal agent.



"WMPC will evaluate partners agencies on performance and look at how we can bring more resources to these kids and families, whether that means identifying additional community services we can bring into the home to keep child with their parents or looking at what additional support foster parents need so they can support kids in the meantime while we're looking at more permanent solutions," says Peck.

She says performance-based funding models like the one being piloted by the WMPC were identified through

collaborative research as one of the core ingredients to achieving successful outcomes for families and children in foster care.

"Prior to October 1, the state paid the county the same amount of money per child for each day that child was in foster care, regardless of that child's outcomes or the length of time they were in care," Peck says. "Now the state is basically front loading the funding through the WMPC."

Now, the WMPC will get most of the average cost per child in the first year of care, while the funding amount dramatically decreases over each passing year, acting as an incentive for the WMPC and partner organizations to take a closer look at each child entering into their care and build strong case plans that evaluate and explore all possible ways a child can be moved into a permanent home more quickly.

Data-driven decisions making was determined as another major component for improving outcomes for kids in foster care systems. For WMPC, this means implementing new predictive analytic software, which will collect data from each child served by WMPC every night to identify recurring patterns. Based on patterns found in the data, the software can then create different kinds of algorithms that can then be used by the WMPC to aid in predicting outcomes for the kids with certain shared identifiers and create case plans accordingly.

Though Peck says WMPC will gather enough data for more personalized goal-setting for each individual agency, right now, the goal of the WMPC in the broadest sense is to decrease the amount of time children spend in child welfare and increase the number of children reunified with family or relatives whenever safe and possible.

Yesterday, WMPC hosted its official launch party in the greenhouse space at the Grand Rapids Downtown Market, hearing presentations by local leaders and celebrating the birth of a unique program made possible by what Peck calls a "true private-public partnership."

“It’s really our chance to celebrate our launch and really thank the amazing partnerships we have in place here in Kent County and statewide that have made this successful,” she says. “It’s been a long-time coming and it’s required a lot of educating and research on best practices and advocating from Kent County to the state to be chosen as the site to pilot this great model.”

Written by Anya Zentmeyer, Development News Editor
Images courtesy of West Michigan Partnership for Children

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