

Brighter Futures

A Better Community Through Prevention

Website: <http://milwaukeebrighterfutures.org>



Meeting Summary • Nov. 18, 2008

Child welfare process told

In abuse, neglect cases, the issue is: Can a family properly care for safety of child? BMCW reps outline system

One of the state's goals for Brighter Futures is the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and that topic was featured at the November meeting. Suzanne Zipperer, communications specialist for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, provided an abbreviated version of an instruction program the agency offers to inform all interested persons and programs about the procedures and policies involved in the reporting and handling of possible cases of maltreatment.

The child protection services in Milwaukee County are performed under the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, of the State's Department of Children and Families. It operates as a public-private partnership with La Causa, Children's Family and Community Partnerships and the Childrens Service Society of Wisconsin, she said.

Persons may call in reports of abuse or neglect to 220-SAFE (220-7233) which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. From midnight to about 7 a.m., calls go to an answering service.

"When we go out to investigate, we're looking at the parental capacity to protect the child," Zipperer said. "Does the parent know how to protect the child? Is the parent able and willing to protect the child?"

She suggested persons interested in knowing what to look for in reporting potential cases go to the BMCW website for information at <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/bmcw/>.

The three types of issues that are reportable include



Part of the audience at November's Brighter Futures meeting at Aurora Family Service

physical abuse, emotional abuse ("which is the hardest to prove") and neglect, she said. "We want to insure that poverty is not the cause of removing the child," she said, and that child protection workers provide resources to families to assist them in meeting their daily needs in cases where there are issues of child safety.

Calls to the SAFE line go to one of nine social workers and are either screened in or out based on whether they meet the level of abuse or neglect, she said. She called attention to a sheet that provides the tips for making reports, and it calls for providing as much information as possible. A trained social worker will take the caller through a series of questions, Zipperer said.

Mandated reporters, including many at the meeting, should be notified of the disposition of the case, she said.

If a case is "screened out" as not meeting the level that the state considers child abuse and neglect, she said,

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Milwaukee Brighter Futures is a coalition of 80 organizations whose mission is to develop strategies geared toward preventing child abuse and neglect, inspiring greater hope for youth, building stronger families and creating better neighborhoods. The Milwaukee Brighter Futures Initiative is funded by the State of Wisconsin. Contact information: Racquel Bell, Coordinator, 4906 W. Fond du Lac Ave., Milwaukee 53216. 414-449-4777. email to:

Key question: Is child safe?

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that does not mean you should not call the same type of incident in again. All calls are taken as part of the larger picture about that family, she said, sometimes there will be various reports about a family indicating that there may be something needing investigation.

“Don’t feel that you have to make the judgment as to whether a situation is abuse or neglect. Let us make the judgment,” Zipperer said.

When a call comes in and meets the standards, BMCW assessment workers will go out to investigate, talking to many persons, including the person who reported the incident if it is a mandated reporter, she said.

The first point to determine is whether the child is safe. She said the BMCW staff will have an immediate response (within two hours) if there is an indication that the child is unsafe at the time. If physical abuse is in progress, the reporter should call 911. “We work with the police,” she said.

There is also a 24 hour response for less immediate cases and a 5 day response for non immediate cases, such as cases of past abuse or ongoing neglect.

Zipperer said that mandated reporters will get a notification of the results of the investigation. “If you don’t receive the information within 60 days, call us back at 220-SAFE,” she added.

She described the process: If the child is unsafe, BMCW will move the child into out-of-home care, she said. If there is an impending danger, but family and the assessing social worker feel they can control for the safety of the children, BMCW will put the family in the Safety Services program. The Safety Services manager will be with the family at least once a week. In cases where there is no immediate danger to the children and standards of abuse or neglect are not reached, the Bureau will provide information to the families to assist them in facing their problems if needed and close the case.

There are about 32,000 calls each year to the SAFE line, she said, and about half are for services, and the callers are referred appropriately. Some 16,000 calls are to report child abuse and neglect, of those some 7,000 receive a family assessment. At any given time there are from 2,500 to 2,800 children in out of home care.

Zipperer stressed that there is a need for foster homes,

and urged potential foster parents to call 264-KIDS. She said foster parents need not be a married couple and can be single, renters and working fulltime, since “we do provide child care.”

“We have problems placing infants and sibling groups and teens,” Zipperer said. “Not all teens are runaways, and some of them are really, really good and may be working.”

“You set the parameters” as to what kind of child you wish to care for, she said. “You don’t have to accept any child you’re uncomfortable with,” she said.

If persons feel they have a problem with the way the Bureau handled a case, she urged persons to follow the complaint resolution process. “Almost all complaints are resolved at the supervisor or case manager level,” she said.

It is important to help with identifying and to articulate carefully the issue behind the complaint, Zipperer said. Another option in such complaints is to call the Ombudsman, which offers an independent review of cases that cannot be resolved by the Bureau, she said.

She said there are coordinated service team meetings set up for families that involve all people whom the parent wishes to participate in the discussion about the child.

“We see you as a partner and as a partner with the children and families,” she said.

In answer to a question, Martha Johnson, also of BMCW, said Safety Services is a voluntary program for families, but it is only optional in the sense to keep your kids in the home; if the kids are not safe, and family refuses to accept Safety Services, the children may be removed, or the case could go to court where the court will order the family to participate.

Johnson said the BMCW is being scrutinized due to the recent death of a 13-month old boy. She said she couldn’t talk about it since it was a current case. “We’re always looking for ways to improve our practice,” she added, “But tragedies still happen.”

Johnson urged that reports on urgent situations may be made to the police, noting that “we have a joint protocol with MPD.”

Lt. Greg Moore, of the Police Department, said that if people are having continuing concerns over the welfare of a child that they may call the police and ask for a child welfare check. Such cases will be handled based on their seriousness, he said.



Suzanne Zipperer of BMCW outlines process

Racine County BF program offers seven strategies

The Racine County's Brighter Futures program was outlined by Hugh Griffith supervisor for that county's family support unit, special needs unit, emotionally disturbed unit and the coordinator of state programs. Racine County is one of nine other counties (or tribal units) in the state that have Brighter Futures programs.

Referring to the earlier child welfare discussion, Griffith said workers must do three things when the county or the worker may be facing liability. First, document everything; secondly, report back to the person who reported; and, thirdly, make a recommendation as to the disposition of the child. "Once you do all three of those things your liability as a child welfare worker is greatly reduced," he said.



Racine County has seven BFI programs. Twice a year, the County brings all of our providers and agencies that serve children together and seek to determine the gaps there are in the County in the programs.

All seven BFI programs not only get BFI dollars, but they all leverage other funds, he said. The programs include:

1. **Why Gangs Program.** Alternative to Detention Class. Any time a child commits a crime in Racine County, they go to Saturday programs rather than to prison. Also the program involves visits to the parents to involve them.

"When you focus on kids alone, it does not work. You must focus on the whole family," he said. The program is helping to prevent delinquency and educating parents, he added.

2. **Teen parenting program.** Racine County has highest infant mortality rate in Wisconsin and perhaps even the United States. The program targets all the schools. Any child that might be pregnant or has potential to get pregnant is referred to the program. The program is really geared "to make sure they continue in school and don't drop out."

3. **Life Skills Program.** It is a program that seeks to reverse a child's delinquent behavior, such as their associations with troubled environments. He said it is a very successful program.

4. **Independent Living.** This is for children who need shelter. It works with youth, assisting them in job seeking, doing resumes, developing budgeting skills and other abilities to handle life's daily challenges.

5. **Families Smart, Kid Friendly.** The program deals with any adult who is pregnant or has children through age 6. The program identifies families that are going through stress and sends home visitors to the home to provide parenting skills and to take away the tendency to abuse a child.

6. **True Focus.** The program handles prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse. The agency goes into schools where kids are having problems with substance abuse, and tries to identify them and pull them into the anti-drug programs.

7. **Parent Mentoring.** When families have stress, they may strike their children. When the program identifies a home with such problems, the program enters the home to offer needed services.

Hints on Relieving Holiday Stress

Jan Buchler, of The Parenting Network, asked for hints from the group about ideas to relieve holiday stress. Here are some of the suggestions that arose from the participants:

- Think about who is missing from the family, and find a way to acknowledge the missing person.
- Hold a drug-free holiday kick-off as a way of giving children something to do for the holidays.
- The Milwaukee Urban League offers a celebration for families that have lost loved-ones.
- Talk about rituals the family likes to do!

She said The Parenting Network has posted ideas on their website to highlight ways to alleviate stress. Go to http://www.theparentingnetwork.org/pdf/holiday_stress.pdf

*Ho! Ho!
Ho!*

*Happy
Holidays
to all*



Visit our website:

<http://milwaukeebrighterfutures.org>

**November 2008 Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance
(Listed by Agency)**

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Tanya	Torres	Abri Health Plan
Eva	Spencer	Agape
Janeen	Boone	Agape Community Center
Priscilla	Neal	Aurora Family Service
Cyndie	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Christina	Treiber	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Natalie	Cooper	Boys & Girls Club
Sandy	Malone	Boys and Girls Club
John	De Mott	Center for Peacemaking - Marquette
Danielle	Luer	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Andrea	Kurth	COA Youth and Family Centers
Kim	Theno	COA Youth and Family Cen- ters
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
May	Vang Vue	Dept of Children and Families
Wendy	Mc Carty	Dept. of Children and Fami- lies
Peggy	Neal	Heartlove Place
Bob	Waite	IMPACT
Duncan	Shrout	IMPACT Inc.
Maria	Kolda	IMPACT, Inc.
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Joel	Nelson	Journey House
Anita	Cruise	Kids Matter
Reyna	Gengler	La Causa
Jamie	Sharifan	La Causa Family Res. Ctr.
Laura	Wojciuk	Lad Lake Inc.
Jackie	Arroyo	Latino Community Center
Janeen	Ottow	LGBT Program Coord. CSSW
Paul	Gannaway	Milw Family Services Inte- gration Off.
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Capt. Greg	Moore	Milwaukee Police Dept. Comm. Serv. Div.
Norma	Madison	Milwaukee Urban League
Terry Lyn	Grazer Hilden- brand	Milwaukee Youth Theater Neighborhood House
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Kayla Kenyatta	Murphy Sinclair	New Concept Self Dev. Ctr. Next Door Foundation
Pam David	Matthews Scholl	Ombudsman Ombudsman
Patrice	Knox	Parents Plus, Inc.
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Lisa	Gumm	Pathfinders
Marge Tiffany	Kreuser Stark	Perez-Pena, LTD Rep. Tamara Grigsby
Joseph Anthony	Kubisiak Mc Henry	Safe & Sound Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Tony Jody	Phillips Ebbinger	St Ann Center TABS North
Theresa Megan	Post Struve	Task Force on Family Violence Task Force On Family Vio- lence
Gwendo- lyn	Altheimer	The Human Development Ctr., Inc.
Jan Wendy	Buchler Collins	The Parenting Network United Health Care
Shaunte Kelly	James Young	Urban League Vincent Family Center
Mary Pat	O'Hara	Walkers Point Youth and Fam- ily Ctr.
Joanne	Luedke	WAWM Family Resource Cen- ter

**Please send any corrections to
keng@communityadvocates.net
NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend
monthly MYFDA meetings, according to their contract.**