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Unique Foster Care Funding Structure Provides 'Hope to Work Better and Smarter for Kids'

By Kristyn Peck, CEO of West Michigan Partnership for Children

One year ago Michigan launched its first performance-based, case rate funding model through a five-year pilot project run by [West Michigan Partnership for Children](#) (WMPC). The goal of the project is to improve outcomes for children in foster care and their families.

“WMPC is a groundbreaking and pushing-the-envelope opportunity to get child welfare to rethink how it does business and provide better decisions for child well being and family healing and restoration,” said Judge Patricia Gardner of the Kent County Circuit Court - Family Division. “It gives us the hope to work better and smarter for kids. Performance-based funding speeds the case assessment and waiting time for service referral approvals, and it allows for a faster response to the case barriers while allowing better tracking of outcomes.”

Since launching on October 1, 2017, WMPC has led and empowered a collaborative consortium of five private-licensed child-placing agencies that provide foster care in Kent County, Michigan: [Bethany Christian Services](#), [Catholic Charities West Michigan](#), [D.A. Blodgett-St. Johns](#), [Samaritas](#), and [Wellspring Lutheran Services](#).

“The flexibility and front-loaded funding the model provides puts us in a unique position to be able to introduce new services to positively impact the almost 900 children WMPC is serving in foster care throughout Kent County,” said Sonia Noorman, the chief operating officer of WMPC.

West Michigan Partnership for Children celebrated the launch of its new case rate foster care funding model pilot by holding a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Downtown Market Grand Rapids with its partner agencies

Evaluating the Needs of the Current System



There are an estimated [13,000 children in foster care in Michigan](#) according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). In Kent County, WMPC is serving almost 900 children in foster care, and the average stay is 2.4 years, or almost 29 months.

“When examining this length of stay, we found that 12 percent of children in foster care were placed in residential settings - a setting that can prolong a child’s path to permanency,” said Beth Caldwell, WMPC director of care coordination. “We knew we needed

to develop a solution that increased community-based, trauma-informed placement options in family-like settings that meet the needs of these foster youth.”

Creation of Enhanced Foster Care to Address Needs

In order to reduce placement of foster youth in residential settings, and increase placement in least-restrictive, community-based settings, WMPC launched a new service called Enhanced Foster Care.

One of the goals of Enhanced Foster Care is to reduce the placement of Kent County children in residential settings by providing the right level of training and support to caregivers. WMPC is already seeing a dramatic reduction in residential placements. As of August 24, 2018, eight percent of youth are placed in residential settings—a four percent decrease.

Many local officials believe in the benefits of Enhanced Foster Care and hope it will send a ripple effect throughout the state of Michigan.

“The best thing about Enhanced Foster Care is the ability to save placements,” said Judge Gardner. “Judges across the state know that one of the hardest issues is multiple placements for kids who are in the system, and we often hear about changes in foster homes or residential placements being very difficult on children. This program allows for immediate support for relatives or Enhanced Foster Care homes to prevent a placement break by offering additional counseling, education, respite, and support. It swiftly brings to the table what the caretaker and child needs to reduce/eliminate placement breaks and overall has been a tremendous success.”

This level of support is possible because MDHHS pays WMPC a semi-annual case rate that allows WMPC to be innovative in creating services that meet the needs of children and families. The case rate amount decreases the longer a child remains in care, thus incentivizing safety, permanency, and placement stability. Most other traditional child welfare funding models pay contracted agencies for how many days the agency provides services to children and families.

The case rate funding model reinforces positive outcomes in various ways, including:

- Finding children a permanent home more quickly through reunification with their families or adoption if it is not safe for them to return home
- Higher levels of family reunification
- Better child functioning in all domains
- Stronger family connections

The Details of Enhanced Foster Care

In order to create a program that would support both children in foster care and foster families, WMPC researched foster care models nationwide and elicited feedback from its community on the benefits and challenges of different models.

“We learned many foster parents feel they don’t have the capacity and support needed to care for children with complex needs—adding stress to both the children in foster care and foster parent,” said Caldwell.

Therefore, WMPC designed Enhanced Foster Care to follow the child and grow the capacity of caregivers by increasing their knowledge and skills to effectively nurture a child with trauma-induced behavioral and emotional needs.

“Enhanced Foster Care stabilizes children with high level trauma and allows for further assessment and treatment with laser focus,” said Judge Gardner. “ It is similar to a child welfare emergency room that is able to diagnose and treat immediate problems offering support to the primary caseworker. It works.”

Children in foster care and caregivers receive Enhanced Foster Care services in their current foster care placement. Services are tailored to the child and based on a three-level system. Children with the highest intensity of needs are provided with level three services, while children stepping down from Enhanced Foster Care services are deemed a level one.

Through Enhanced Foster Care, foster parents and other caregivers are provided the right level of training and support by clinical case managers and behavioral specialists at the moment it is needed. This could include individualized training for the caregiver, development and implementation of behavior plans, and regular support from both a clinical case manager and a behavioral specialist. Parents and caregivers are also provided an additional daily rate to support their efforts. An Individual Service Agreement, outlining the specific needs of the child and interventions required by the foster parent, is developed between the foster care agency and the foster parent that identifies what the foster parents will do as part of the Enhanced Foster Care treatment team.

From the time Enhanced Foster Care was launched on January 1, 2018 -- August 20, 2018, WMPC has enrolled 66 children in Enhanced Foster Care. Of those enrolled, WMPC was able to divert 38 children from placement breaks in their foster home and return 13 children back into the community from residential placements. Many of the children receiving Enhanced Foster Care services have already experienced multiple disruptions in placement since their time in care. Enhanced Foster Care aims to stabilize and equip the current caregivers to prevent this from occurring again.

For more information on WMPC’s Enhanced Foster Care programming, visit: wmpc.care.



Kristyn Peck moved to Michigan from Washington, D.C. to help launch West Michigan Partnership for Children (WMPC), a new Kent County organization piloting a performance-based funding model to improve foster care outcomes for families and children. As Chief Executive Officer, she provides strategic leadership for WMPC’s organizational vision, mission, goals, strategies, and plans. She is chief motivator for a high-performing team of 14 who oversee the placement and care of more than 800 children in foster care in Kent County, in partnership with more than 40 sub-recipient private agency providers of child welfare services.

Ms. Peck most recently served as Associate Director of Children’s Services for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ department of Migration and Refugee Services. In that capacity, she oversaw residential, foster care, and family reunification services for unaccompanied children in collaboration with a national network of more than 225 community-based sub-

recipient agencies. She also served as the Chair of the Vulnerable Minors Working Group of Refugee Council USA; presented on best practices for serving refugee and immigrant children at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) annual meetings in Geneva, Switzerland; and developed child protection policies for a program that served Burmese refugees in Malaysia. Ms. Peck earned an M.S.W. from the University of Maryland-Baltimore and a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Maryland-College Park.