



### Resources

Do you know people who need resources? View the [Washington County Community Resource Guides web page](#) for information on basic needs, resources, and assistance for adults/people with disabilities, children, and families.

### Prevention Services Team Mission

To collaborate with families, communities, and partners in providing proactive, compassionate, and resource-rich services that prevent child protection involvement, promote family well-being, and support families to thrive independently.



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Prevention Services Team  
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### A Note from the Prevention Team

As we enter the new year, the Prevention Team within the Children's Division reflects on where we have been and where we would like to go. In 2025, the team made new efforts to engage with the community and spread the word on services available to families in Washington County. We attended 26 community-organized events, 10 back-to-school events, 15 meetings with schools or school districts who reviewed the truancy and education neglect diversion program, as well as hosted 16 events. Although it is hard to define the success of our work, there are some glimmers of impact: These efforts are reducing the number of families experiencing child protection court interventions and helping increase voluntary services such as the Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP).

Although there are many uncertainties in the world, it seems very certain that community connections are more important than ever. The Prevention Team looks forward to increasing our opportunity to connect with families, strengthen relationships with community, and increase opportunities for partnerships.

### Events Held

Although there are fewer community events during the winter months, here are a few we were either invited to participate in or hosted through the Family Resource Connections (FRC):

Sept. 18 **Tech-Savvy Parenting** | Oakdale Library  
Hosted by FRC in partnership with Youth Services Bureau.



Left to right: Jerry Klebsch, FRC program coordinator/senior social worker and Megan Roy, Prevention Team supervisor.

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Oct. 9 **PIT Stop Event** | Cottage Grove  
Hosted by several local groups who support individuals experiencing housing instability and homelessness.

Nov. 7 **Family Law Information Session** |  
Cimarron Community Center, Lake Elmo



Hosted by a collaboration between the Community Engagement Team, FRC,

Rasices Latinas, SoWashoCo School District, and Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS).

Dec. 8 **Family Law Information Session** |  
Nuevas Fronteras, St. Paul Park  
Hosted by a collaboration between the Community Engagement Team, FRC, SoWashoCo School District, and SMRLS.

Jan. 15 **Families Learning Together Resource Fair** |  
Liberty Ridge Elementary, Woodbury  
Hosted by SoWashCo Community Education.

Jan. 28 **PIT Stop Event** | Stillwater  
Hosted by several groups who support individuals experiencing housing instability and homelessness.

## News from the Team

### Introducing Kennedy



Kennedy Harty

Hi everyone! My name is Kennedy, and I am a senior social work student at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls. I am currently completing my internship with Washington County Community Services, where I have had the

opportunity to work on the Diversion Team under the supervision of Megan Roy. I have been with the team since September and will be completing my internship in May. I am passionate about my education and plan to pursue a Master of Social Work degree after graduating in May!

During my time here, I have gained valuable experience working with the Truancy Team, the Parent Support Outreach Program, the Family Resource Connections, and other county teams. This experience so far has helped me better understand the real-world impact of social work and the responsibilities that come with serving families. I am grateful to everyone at Washington County who has contributed to my learning and growth, and I look forward to continuing to develop my skills as I move forward in my social work career.

Written by: Kennedy Harty, social work intern.

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## Big News on the Horizon for Family Resource Connections!

We're thrilled to announce a new partnership with the Department of Corrections that will give Family Resource Connections its very first dedicated home base! The space is located at the Cottage Grove Service Center, where the former PLACE program operated from. Corrections will continue to use the space for groups and drop-in space and it will be a shared-space model with the FRC. This shared-space approach is common among family resource centers and allows for collaborative service delivery. The space has many desirable qualities, including:

- Separate entrance.
- Large classroom/conference room.
- Activity room.
- Kitchen.
- Ample storage.



This will mark a major milestone—our very first space to call home! While this new location will provide a central hub for FRC hours and services, rest assured that we'll continue to meet families where they are, in community spaces like libraries throughout Washington County.

Join us on **Saturday, April 25** for a grand opening celebration that will double as a family-focused event Recognizing April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. The Family Advisory Board is hard at work planning this event. Check the [FRC website](#) for updates on events and opportunities.

## Partnership Spotlight

The Children's Prevention Team partnered with Washington County's Community Engagement Team and SMRLS to coordinate two separate information sessions on a variety of family law topics. Both events were presented in Spanish and offered participants information on common family law topics and a chance to ask questions to an attorney and paralegal from SMRLS.

The sessions were developed in response to a Spanish-language resource fair that was held earlier in the year in Cottage Grove. Here, the Immigration Law Center provided legal information to attendees and was a very popular stop for fair attendees. Since the legal resource table was so popular, the planning team decided to host events that allow families to learn more about family law and available resources.

The first event was hosted in November in the Cimarron Youth Center in Lake Elmo where 22 adults attended the presentation. The event was a partnership with the agencies listed above and additional coordination support from Raices Latinas and Family Means.

The second presentation included additional coordination support from Washington County's Public Health and Environment (PHE) and South Washington County Schools. PHE donated boxes of food that families could take home. This event was held in Saint Paul Park at Nuevas Fronteras Spanish Immersion School, where 36 adults, representing 24 families attended. This session included a family law presentation, information on student attendance requirements, and offered participants a chance to ask questions, through an interpreter.

Both information sessions received very positive feedback from attendees. Families received dinner, gift cards, and activity space for children in attendance at each event.

Written by: Jerry Klebsch, FRC program coordinator/Senior social worker.

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## Donation Spotlight

We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of our community partners and donors who continue to support children and families in meaningful ways.



This year, our Holiday Program served well over 250 individuals, made possible through the support of several Washington County units, community members, community organizations, and individual Washington County staff who participated in our toy drive.



Our ongoing partnership with Fostering Love Project plays a significant role in the success of our holiday efforts each year. We would also like to recognize ReStored Thrift Store, New Life Church, House of Prayer, Frandsen Bank, Cottage Grove Lions Club, St. Peter Lutheran Church (Afton), New Perspective Senior Living, and the Kelly/Fred Rashaw Group (Scentsy Buddies) for their generous contributions and continued support.

Recent donations have included essential items such as diapers, pajamas, and family supplies. Many of these items were distributed through The PIT Stops and directly to families in need, helping ensure parents had access to basic necessities and vital resources to support their children.

A heartfelt thank-you goes out to our individual donors, community members, and partner organizations who stepped up to meet these needs. Your generosity continues to make a tangible and lasting difference for families in our community.

Thank you for helping us show families they are supported, valued, and not alone.

Written by Rachel Mlinarcik, family service worker.

## Resource Spotlight

Washington County's Community Engagement Team is a collaborative effort between Public Health and Environment and Community Services. Through the work of community health workers, the team helps connect diverse residents to essential health and social services. Their mission is to:

- Link residents with programs that promote health and well-being.
- Identify meaningful community opportunities and foster partnerships with local organizations.
- Inform and empower communities to stay active and engaged.

If your family would like support from a community health worker — or if your agency is interested in partnering with the team — visit the [Washington County Community Engagement website](#) for more information and to access the [referral form](#).

## Prevention Team Impact in 2025

In 2025, the Prevention Team continued to make a meaningful difference for families across Washington County through programs with a long-standing record of success. Here is a breakdown:

- **Diversion Program (2024–2025 school year):** Supported 199 youth through truancy intervention and assisted 109 families in overcoming barriers that put children at risk of educational neglect.
- **Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP):** Served 137 families with early intervention and resources to promote stability.

- **Family Unification Program (FUP):** Provided housing stability services for 13 families through additional vouchers.

The Child Protection Intake Team observed encouraging trends in 2025, including a 9% reduction in reports from mandated reporters and an 8% decrease in reports screened out for a child protection response. These outcomes reflect the positive impact of community engagement efforts across the Children’s Division.

## Key Initiatives

### Connecting Parents with Parent Cafés

The Family Resource Connections (FRC) team is excited to begin planning our first virtual Parent Café which will be open to local parents and caregivers. Parent Cafés were developed by [Be Strong Families](#) as a peer-to-peer learning process for families to work together to grow stronger. Cafés blend small-group sharing and larger-group learning that allows participants to learn parent-to-parent in safe and structured conversations centered on [The Five Protective Factors](#), which have been described as “the ingredients we need for families to be successful”.

In January, five representatives from Washington County attended Be Strong Families’ Parent Café training virtually: Jerry Klebsch, Rachel Mlinarek, and three local parent volunteers. With this training, the Washington County Parent Café team can host virtual cafés and hope to lead

the first session by early spring. Our first Café offerings will be virtual, but the team is hopeful to begin offering in-person Cafés later in the year.

Parent Cafés are an opportunity to bring families together to connect and learn from one another. The need for more opportunities for families to build social connections was identified as a key takeaway from the Community Needs Assessment (CNA), which was conducted by Community Services in 2023. During community listening sessions conducted for the CNA, participants from nearly every group stated the need for families to have more opportunities to build social connections. We are hopeful that Parent Cafés help participants to feel inspired, energized, excited, and better connected to other parents. We hope to see you there!

Written by: Jerry Klebsch, FRC program coordinator/senior social worker.

## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Every April, communities across the United States come together to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month. This month is dedicated to raising awareness about child abuse and promoting proactive steps to protect children and support families (PCA, 2025). April was first designated as National Child Abuse Prevention Month in 1983 as part of a national effort to highlight the importance of prevention and family well-being (CPGN, 2026).

### Why April?

In nature the month of April symbolizes renewal, hope, and growth, making it an ideal time to focus on ways we can help children thrive in safe, supportive environments. This month encourages reflection on what we can do as individuals, neighbors, and organizations to prevent child abuse before it starts (CPGN, 2026).

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### **What Does Prevention Look Like?**

While awareness is essential, prevention is most effective when backed by education, support, and community engagement (CDC, 2024). Child abuse prevention means offering families access to resources before crises occur and ensuring that every child has a safe, nurturing home. Showing up for families, whether through a check-in, a referral, or simply being a reliable presence, can be a powerful form of prevention in itself (CDC, 2024).

### **Community in the County**

#### **Pinwheels for Prevention — All April:**

A common way to participate in raising awareness during April is through the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign, a national effort originally introduced by Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA) in 2008 (PCA, 2025). The pinwheel was chosen as a symbol because its bright, playful appearance represents childlike whimsy and the vision of a world where all children grow up happy, healthy, and prepared to succeed in supportive families and communities (PCA, 2025).

Community members, schools, and businesses are encouraged to display blue pinwheels and awareness signs throughout April as a visual reminder of the community's commitment to preventing child abuse and neglect; underscoring that everyone plays a role in keeping children safe. To get these pinwheels you can contact your local PCA state chapter, many chapters coordinate pinwheel orders or can point you to local supplies each year. Some chapters sell them directly or include them in awareness kits you can purchase (PCA, 2025). Another option that is more accessible in the community is making your own pinwheels.

The [Prevent Child Abuse website](#) offers instructions on how to make your own Pinwheels. (PCA, 2025).

#### **Wear Blue Day**

In previous years to show awareness a community-wide Wear Blue Day has been organized as part of the awareness effort. Individuals, offices, schools, and groups are encouraged to wear blue to show solidarity and support for child abuse prevention (PCA, 2025). In 2025 the PCA organization designated specific days to wear blue; they have not posted any dates yet but keep an eye out for #WearBlueDay (PCA, 2025). Prevent Child Abuse America.

#### **Washington County:**

Washington County Community Services promotes child protection resources throughout the whole year. The [Child Protection web page](#) offers guides and support materials for both reporting and preventing abuse.

#### **Family Resource Center (FRC):**

Washington County's FRC is currently planning a community event in honor of Child Abuse Prevention Month!

Written by: Kennedy Harty, social work intern

#### **Citations:**

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2024, May 16). [Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#).
- Child Protection Global Network (CPGN). (2026, January 8). [April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#).
- Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA). (2025, April 11). [CAP Month](#).
- Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA). (2025, July 18). [Pinwheels for Prevention](#).

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## **Legislative Updates and Washington County's Commitment to Family-Centered Support**

Effective July 1, 2025, Minnesota law introduced significant changes to how school attendance concerns are addressed. These updates emphasize early, supportive interventions rather than immediate child protection involvement—an approach that aligns closely with

Washington County's long-standing practice of partnering with families and schools to reduce barriers to education through voluntary services.

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## Key Legislative Changes

### 1. Child Welfare or Community-Based

#### Response Required

For children under 12 with seven or more unexcused absences, local welfare agencies must first provide child welfare or community-based services before initiating a child protection response (Minn. Stat. §260E.291).

### 2. Clarification of “Habitual Truant”

The definition now aligns with legal presumptions:

- a. Children under 12 with seven unexcused absences may be considered habitually truant only if there is clear evidence the absences are not due to parental failure (Minn. Stat. §260C.007, subd. 19).

### 3. School Notification for Extended Absences

Schools must notify local welfare agencies when a student is dropped from enrollment after 15 consecutive unexcused absences (Minn. Stat. §120A.24, subd. 4).

### 4. Focus on Family-Centered Support

The law encourages culturally responsive, whole-family approaches and collaboration with community partners to address systemic barriers such as housing instability, transportation, and access to care.

## How Washington County's Approach Aligns

For years, Washington County has prioritized voluntary interventions to help families resolve attendance issues before they escalate to child protection or court involvement. Our diversion programs reflect this philosophy.

## Truancy Diversion Services (Ages 12–17)

When a student is referred to the Truancy Diversion

Program, a Washington County social worker provides intervention services before a child protection referral.

This collaborative process includes:

- A meeting with parents and school staff to identify barriers and create a support plan.
- Involvement of the county attorney for students 16 and older.
- Goal: Address attendance issues without court involvement through services and accountability measures.

## Educational Neglect Diversion Services (Ages 11 and Younger)

For younger students, attendance is primarily the responsibility of parents or guardians.

When concerns arise:

- Schools make a mandated referral.
- A social worker coordinates a meeting with the family and school to develop a plan for regular attendance.
- Attendance is monitored and resources provided throughout the school year.
- If absences persist, Child Protection may be notified for further assessment.

## Why This Matters

These legislative changes reinforce what Washington County has always believed: Keeping children in school requires proactive, supportive measures, not punitive actions. By working together—schools, families, social workers, and community partners—we can help students thrive and reduce unnecessary involvement in the child protection system.

Written by: Megan Roy, Prevention Team supervisor

## Washington County Children's Division to Bring Back Collaborative Work

The Washington County Children's Division is excited to announce bringing back its collaborative work focused on strengthening services for children, youth, and families across the community. We are starting up Integrated Collaborative (Family Service and Children's Mental

Health Collaborative). This effort marks the return of a countywide partnership model that once played a key role in supporting children's mental health services.

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Washington County previously had a Children's Mental Health Collaborative, which was active until the early 2000's. The collaborative dissolved after state funding was reduced, creating significant roadblocks that prevented the program from continuing. Despite its closure, the need for coordinated, cross-system support for children and families has remained strong.

Over the past several months, the project team has been working diligently to evaluate and reestablish the collaborative framework and start-up process. The Division has officially recruited all mandated partners, including five local school districts within Washington County, a mental health agency, Community Corrections, Public Health, the Community Action Program (CAP), and Washington County Community Services. The collaborative held its first official members meeting last month and is now preparing to submit its formal application to the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The goal of the collaborative is to create a community-driven partnership that ensures the needs of children, youth, and families are met while addressing service gaps. By promoting efficient and coordinated programs and services, the collaborative seeks to respond to the complex needs of families and improve outcomes across systems. A central focus of the initiative is building and supporting trusting community partnerships that strengthen families and communities.

In addition, the collaborative plans to generate funding through participation in the Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) random moment activities, which will help sustain and expand services.

Written by: Ayantu Feyissa-Yadassa, Children's Division senior planner

## Partnership Opportunities

The Prevention Team is available to present to your organization or group on any of the services and programs we offer. We are also available to table at community outreach events and resource fairs.

Please [email Megan Roy](#) if you are interested in having the Prevention Team and other services offered by Washington County Community Services at an event.

## Upcoming Events

- **Grand opening of the new Family Resource Connections shared space in Cottage Grove:** Saturday, April 25
- [Mental Health in Motion Calendar of Events](#)  
Remember, May is Mental Health Awareness Month.

## Prevention Services Team

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