

Children and Family Services 2023 Annual Report

Promoting the safety, stability, healthy development and well-being of children and youth in Hennepin County is our north star.

This report illuminates our ongoing commitment to preventing child maltreatment and reducing racial disparities in the child protection system. By centering our efforts on authentic partnerships and family engagement, we strive to empower families and build resilient communities.

We value transparency, accountability, and data-informed decision making in our work. This year we expanded on system data trends and analysis with a look at children who were the subject of a report in 2023 and how our system responds to support whole families.

What the data tells us is clear: Prevention works, and there is more work to do to reduce disparities. Together with community members, schools, providers, courts and many others, we are working toward a future where all children and youth are thriving in safe and stable families.

The future of Children and Family Services will be family focused, trauma informed and culturally responsive to eliminate disparities and prevent unnecessary child welfare involvement. We are grateful for the many voices within, across and outside our system who embark on this journey with us.



In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kwesi Booker". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light gray rectangular background.

Kwesi Booker
Director, Children and Family Services

Child protection by the numbers

Child protection reports increased slightly. There was also a small increase in the volume of reports screened in and the number of children who entered out-of-home placement. As the community adapts post-pandemic, two factors play a role in this shift: Children had more contact with providers who make the most reports at school and in the community, and many state and federal pandemic-era supports for families expired. Still, the total number of reports

remains far below the volume we received before 2020, as does the number of children currently in out-of-home placement.

Continued focus on prevention and collaboration across systems. We want to see children safe at home, in healthy, stable families. Many trusted partners share our vision for reducing racial disparities and promoting child and family well-being. We look forward to intentional partnerships to advance these goals.

Measure	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total child protection reports (intakes)	13,850	13,874	13,323	13,756
% of total child protection reports coming from mandated reporters	78.4%	76.1%	77.8%	77.5%
Reports warranting investigation (total intakes screened in)	6,724	6,265	5,782	6,045
% reports warranting investigation (total % intakes screened in)	48.5%	45.2%	43.4%	43.9%
Intakes % screened in — Family Assessment track	58.6%	63.0%	62.8%	63.6%
Intakes % screened in — Family Investigation track	39.1%	34.5%	34.9%	33.9%
Intakes % screened in — Facility track	2.3%	2.6%	2.4%	2.5%
Out-of-home placement entries	815	604	656	735
Out-of-home placement exits	1,037	941	751	683
Out-of-home placement, unique child count	2,542	2,113	1,833	1,812

Note: To track complete intake volume, Hennepin County child protection report counts include all reports received. State reporting methodology excludes some of these to avoid duplication of reports across counties.

Child protection reports by allegation type

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total child protection reports	13,850	13,874	13,323	13,756
Neglect allegation	48.0%	47.5%	48.4%	48.9%
Physical abuse allegation	26.3%	28.6%	29.4%	30.9%
Sexual abuse allegation	16.5%	17.1%	16.9%	17.2%
Threatened injury allegation	23.9%	23.7%	21.9%	21.5%
Mental injury allegation	4.7%	5.8%	5.9%	5.5%

Reasons for entering out-of-home placement

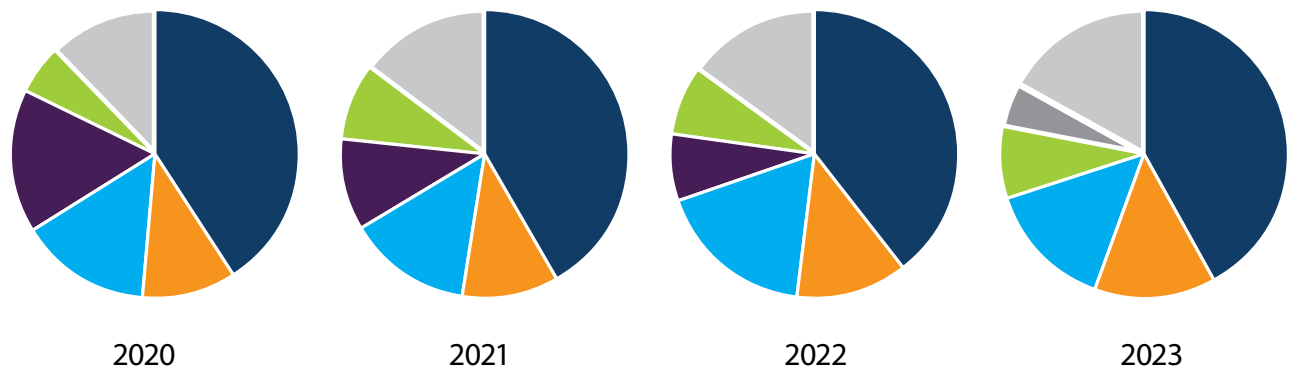
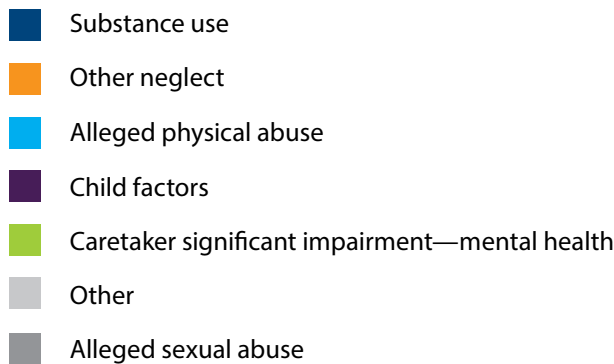
Responding to complex challenges.

Parental substance use remains the most common reason children enter out-of-home placement, accounting for 42% of entries in 2023. Children who enter foster care because of parental substance use are less likely to be reunified with their parents and experience adoptions and transfers of legal custody more frequently. We continue to collaborate with system partners to keep families safe and together whenever possible, including providing in-home support for parenting and recovery.

A shift in our response.

While the number of children entering out-of-home placement due to parental substance use is going up, the number of children entering out-of-home placement because of alleged physical abuse is going down. This points to a bigger shift happening in how our agency responds to families while keeping children safe: As more resources and innovative practices exist to keep families whole, healthy and stable, the need for more intrusive interventions declines.

Reasons for entering out-of-home placement, by number of entries



Note: 2023 is the first year alleged sexual abuse has appeared among the top five reasons for entering out-of-home placement. In previous years this data was included in the 'Other' category.

Reasons for leaving out-of-home-placement

Fewer adoptions and an increase in transfers of custody. Our goal is to safely reunify families whenever possible, and reunification remains the most common outcome for children. In 2022, Minnesota statute changed to identify “permanency placement with a relative” as the preferred permanency option for children when reunification is not possible. This explains part of the increase in Transfers of Permanent Legal and Physical Custody (TPLPCs) to relatives we see in the data, as well as the decrease in adoptions finalized. TPLPCs happen without terminating parental rights — an important way to preserve family ties. Relatives and kin willing to serve as a permanency resource may prefer this path over terminating parental rights, and our ICWA team and tribal partners advocate for transfers of custody to help preserve children’s ties to their culture and relatives.

Preserving family ties. The data also shows this transformation has been building for years thanks to our focus on kinship care. Children in out-of-home placement in 2023 spent 72% of their time placed with relatives and kin. For children who left out-of-home placement in 2023, 75.2% achieved permanency through transfers of legal custody, adoption by relatives, or living with a previously non-custodial parent. Last year, 71.7% of all adoptions were by a relative.

Reasons for leaving out-of-home placement

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Reunification with parents/primary caretakers	52.7%	43.8%	42.1%	36.9%
Adoption finalized	18.0%	23.0%	24.1%	17.6%
Transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative	12.4%	15.8%	15.6%	27.4%
Reached age of majority or emancipated	8.2%	7.7%	12.8%	10.1%
Living with other relatives	5.0%	5.0%	3.7%	2.9%
Residing with non-removal parent/guardian*	-	-	-	4.1%

* New category in 2023
 Note: These are the six most common exit reasons from 2020–2023

Exits to a relative vs. non-relative

Number (N) and percentage (%)	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reunification with parents/ primary caretakers	547	52.7%	412	43.8%	316	42.1%	252	37.0%
Adoption or transfer of legal custody — relative	248	23.9%	288	30.6%	245	32.6%	273	40.0%
Reached age of majority or emancipated	85	8.2%	72	7.7%	96	12.8%	69	10.1%
Adoption — non-relative	68	6.6%	77	8.2%	53	7.1%	33	4.8%
Living with other relatives	52	5.0%	47	5.0%	28	3.7%	20	2.9%
Residing with non-removal parent/guardian*							28	4.1%

* New category in 2023

Caseloads

The median caseload among ongoing child protection case management workers increased in 2023. We continue to intentionally vary caseload distribution among newer and more experienced workers to support retention with gradual onboarding that allows for capacity building and skill development. Implementation of a continuous hiring model has helped reduce vacancies, particularly for our Ongoing units supporting families with case management.

We have also reviewed our internal practices to reduce the burden of paperwork so workers can spend more time in the field. Significant effort was undertaken over the past year to improve the Pre-Hearing Report within the governance of Minnesota Juvenile Protection Procedure Rule 27. Redesign efforts involved close partnership with the courts, the county

attorney’s office, tribes and tribal partners, and staff to produce a report that was more useful, timely, consistent and inclusive of family-centered, high-quality services.

These strategies have contributed to lower attrition and larger teams, which means more support for social workers and positive engagement with families. With strong retention, we hope to see the caseload range become more balanced in the future.

Caseloads per worker

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ongoing child protection case management	10	10	10	11
ICWA ongoing child protection case management	9	8	10	9
Child protection assessment/investigations	7	7	7	7

Note: Caseloads in December of each year.

State and federal performance measures

Steady, sustainable progress.

We still have work to do to meet state and federal benchmarks for performance, but we are seeing steady improvement in our response time and maltreatment recurrence over time. In 2023 we met the state standard for caseworker visits — a sign that our efforts to balance caseloads and reduce paperwork creates more time spent with families.

Our use of relative care continues to increase, and more children achieved permanency in the 12- to 23-month timeframe while fewer resolved in less than 12 months. Of the children who achieved permanency in 12 to 23 months, 23% achieved permanency in months 13, 14 or 15.

State measures	2020	2021	2022	2023	Statewide performance*	Performance standard
Overall timeliness	77.4%	81.3%	80.4%	82.8%	82.8%	100%
24-hour response timeliness	80.1%	80.8%	81.1%	82.7%	82.4%	100%
120-hour response: family investigation	82.6%	83.3%	86.0%	86.5%	90.4%	100%
120-hour response: family assessment	75.4%	81.2%	79.6%	82.6%	87.2%	100%
Caseworker visits	89.5%	92.4%	91.4%	95.8%	88.2%	95% or greater
Relative care	67.8%	69.4%	71.1%	72.0%	63.2%	35.7% or greater
Physical health	64.3%	59.4%	59.4%	57.4%	54.6%	70% or greater
Maltreatment re-reporting	18.9%	17.0%	17.3%	18.5%	18.0%	15.2% or less
Aging out of foster care	69.2%	80.3%	84.1%	80.8%	72.9%	70% or less

Federal measures	2020	2021	2022	2023	Statewide performance*	Performance standard
Maltreatment recurrence	6.3%	4.4%	4.8%	4.6%	4.6%	9.1% or less
Maltreatment in foster care	7.0	10.6	12.2	12.8	12.8	8.5 victimizations or less per 100,000 days in care
Foster care reentry	16.3%	10.6%	10.4%	11.9%	11.9%	8.3% or less
Permanency: 12 months	40.5%	39.4%	37.2%	34.6%	48.7%	40.5% or greater
Permanency: 12–23 months	48.8%	57.7%	63.6%	64.3%	59.6%	43.6% or greater
Permanency: 24 months	36.7%	42.1%	40.0%	42.1%	42.3%	30.3% or greater
Placement stability	3.20	2.89	3.10	3.10	3.5	4.12 moves or less per 1,000 days in care

*2023. Data as of August 4, 2024.

For explanations of these measures, see the [Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Welfare Data Dashboard](#).

Hennepin County priorities

Focusing on up-stream efforts to reduce entry into the child protection system. We continue to invest in our prevention service area to mitigate toxic stressors and support families with the resources they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives. Our Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) focuses on increasing well-being and decreasing risk through voluntary services and a strengths based approach.

The amount of PSOP referrals coming from outside the child welfare system has increased steadily since 2018 — a sign that PSOP has become a valuable prevention resource in the community. More than 44% of referrals came from schools, community organizations or self-referrals in 2023.

PSOP served more than 2,700 individual residents last year, and their outcomes continue to demonstrate that prevention works: 81.1% of families who completed services did not experience a future screened-in child protection report and 98.2% did not have a future child maltreatment determination.

Families served in PSOP, by race

Number (N) and percentage (%)	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
American Indian/Alaska Native	86	3.4%	70	2.9%	121	4.8%	81	2.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	133	5.3%	173	7.1%	101	4.0%	45	1.6%
Black or African American	1,552	61.7%	1,295	53.1%	1,336	52.6%	1,558	56.1%
White	392	15.6%	457	18.8%	460	18.1%	512	18.4%
Multiracial	260	10.3%	280	11.5%	372	14.6%	395	14.2%
Unknown	94	3.7%	162	6.6%	151	5.9%	186	6.7%
Total	2,517	100%	2,437	100%	2,541	100%	2,777	100%

Continued commitment to family meetings, with room for growth.

Increasing the use of family meetings is essential for engaging families in strengths based, family centered and culturally relevant services. We use these collaborative meetings at critical moments in the case continuum to give families a true voice in planning for the protection and safety of their children. While the number of meetings increased slightly last year, overall engagement of paternal relatives declined. When we began collecting systems-level data on

our use of facilitated family meetings in 2020, we collaborated with community stakeholders and state partners to develop a training infrastructure that would imbed family and father engagement in our practice. With training and a contract for technical assistance from the Kempe Center planned in 2024, we hope to see continued growth in our collaboration with families.

Family meetings and father involvement

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total meetings that took place	306	539	483	490
Father/paternal relatives invited	72%	60%	62%	60%
Father/paternal relatives attended	64%	54%	55%	51%

Strengthening and supporting relative care.

Relative placements can reduce trauma for children and help them maintain their core sense of family, belonging and identity. The performance measure on page 7 represents the percentage of days a child spends with relatives out of all days in foster care. Additionally, the point-in-time measure included in the table below provides a picture of how many children are placed with relatives or kin at a given time. Looking at both measures can help us better understand the experience of the individual child.

Our work to stabilize relative placements continues to expand. In 2023, we launched a peer support program that pairs relative foster parents with experienced foster care providers. These Peer Support Parents (PSPs) build trusted relationships with relative providers, offering them guidance and emotional support for the crucial role they play in children’s lives.

Youth in relative placements

	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In relative placements	949	58%	753	53.1%	723	54.7%	617	56.7%

Note: Youth in relative placements on June 1.

Racial disparities

To understand racial disparities in the child protection system, we typically compare the population we serve with the total child population in Hennepin County. This same approach is used to show disparities experienced elsewhere in our community, like in housing, employment and criminal justice involvement.

To take a closer look at how racial disparities are experienced by children and families within our system, the tables below examine data related to children who were the subject of child protection reports in 2023. With this view, we can learn what happens for those children as they move through the system — and measure the effectiveness of our work to reduce disparities.

12,909 individual children were the subject of reports.

Children in child protection reports, by race

American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black or African American	White	Multiracial	Unknown
4.6%	2.3%	33%	23.4%	17.5%	19.3%

The variation among racial groups reported to child protection was 30.7%

When a child protection report is made, we know the least about children and their families. As they progress in the system, the portion of cases where the race of the child is unknown decreases significantly. Of reports that included the race of the

child, 71% were children of color. Among children who were more than one race, 77.4% included at least one race of Black or African American and 53.4% included at least one race of American Indian or Alaska Native.

Distribution of race among multiracial children — At least one race

American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black or African American	White
53.4%	8.2%	77.4%	74.3%

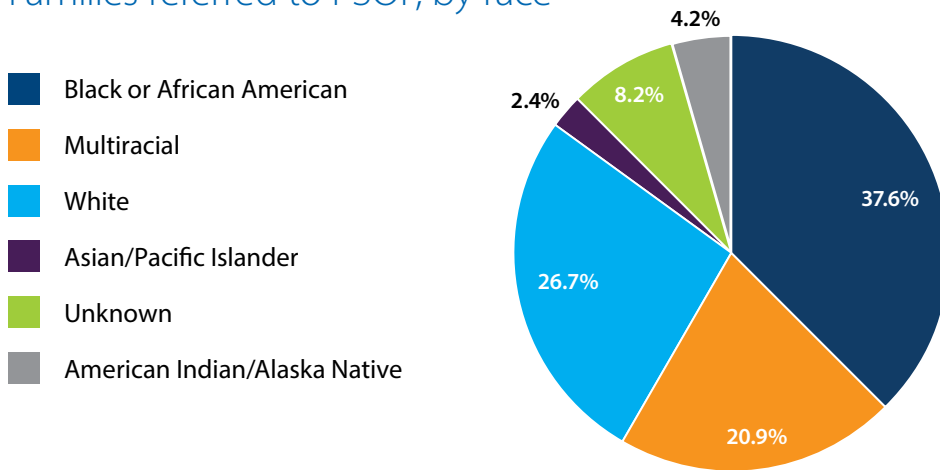
8,228 reports did not meet criteria for a child protection response.

When a report is screened out, the family can be referred to our Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) or other community resources for additional support. PSOP is a short-term, voluntary program, driven by parents' goals for achieving family stability and well-being. We contract with several culturally specific agencies for PSOP services to prevent child protection involvement and disproportionality.

The families of 1,086 children were referred to PSOP in 2023 following a screened-out report. PSOP effectively prevents child maltreatment, as none of the families who received PSOP services last year had a future child maltreatment determination as of July 2024.

With proven success, we continue to expand our county-operated PSOP unit and contract with more partners in the community.

Families referred to PSOP, by race



6,486 reports met criteria to be screened in and assessed.

This decision point is when children formally enter the child protection system. Here we see the variation between racial groups begin to narrow. At the point

of reporting, the variation among racial groups was 30.7%. The variation shrinks as reports are assigned a child protection response.

Portion of reports screened in, by race of the child

American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Multiracial	White
64.5%	52.2%	57.8%	59.7%	53.3%

The variation among racial groups of reports screened-in was 12.3%

Portion of reports assigned to investigations, by race of the child

American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Multiracial	White
38.3%	34%	37.1%	43.1%	37%

The variation among racial groups assigned to an investigation was 9.1%

Children who entered out-of-home placement, by race

American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Multiracial	White
18.5%	2.7%	5.3%	8%	2.5%

5.5% variation

16% variation

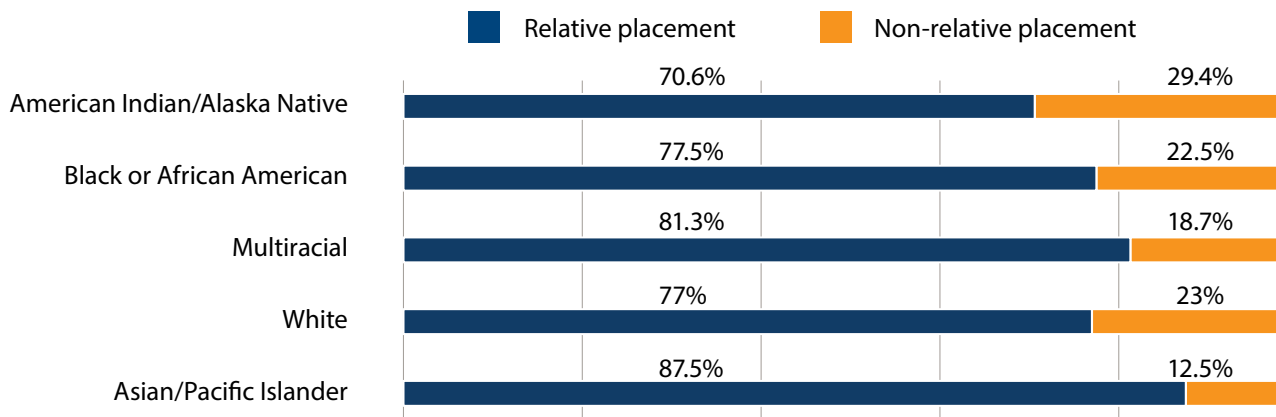
Children who are Black, Native American or multiracial experience the most significant racial disparities. While the variation between races gets smaller for Black and multiracial children as they move through the system (2.8% – 5.5%), that is not the case for Native American children in out-of-home placement (16%). Decisions to remove children from their homes are made together with law enforcement, court and tribal partners.

Of the 12,909 children who were the subject of child protection reports in 2023, 4.7% entered out-of-home placement.

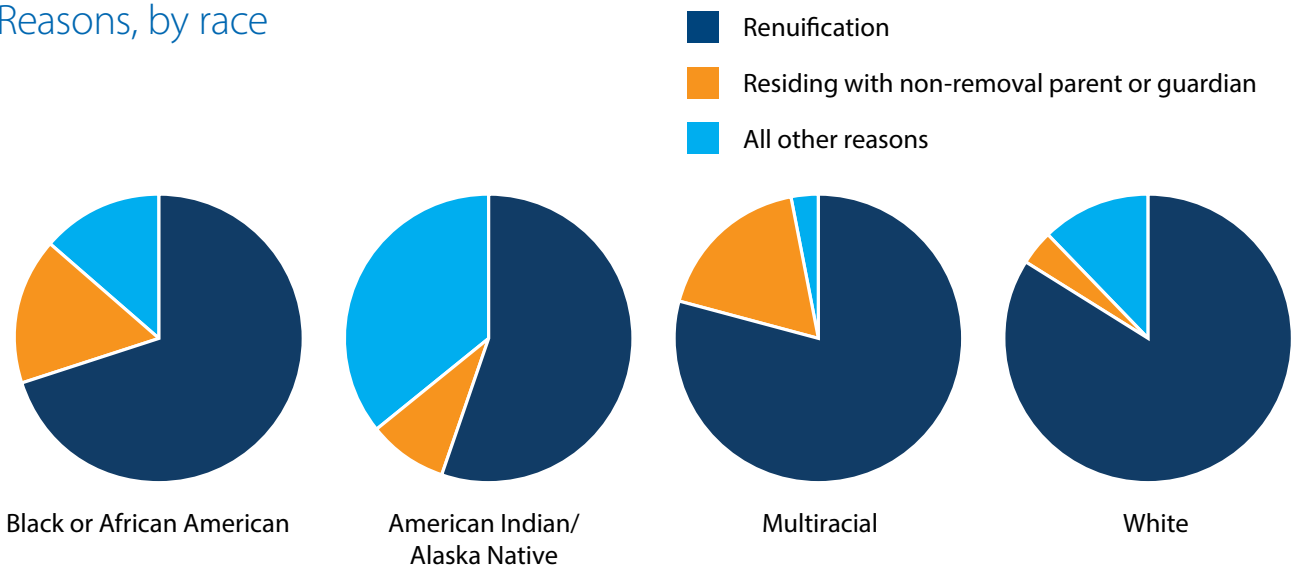
Children were most often placed with relatives (77.6% of total placements.) This was true for children of every race.

Most children who exited out-of-home placement stemming from a report made in 2023 were reunified with their parents (76%). The median amount of time spent away from home was less than 8 months (232.5 days).

Relative and non-relative placement, by race



Reasons, by race



With a closer look at how children and families experience our system, we see how strategies to reduce racial disparities and keep families whole are having an impact — and where there is still work to be done.

We look forward to intentional partnerships around efforts to reduce disparities, prevent entry into the child protection system, and wrap families in care and support with others working toward the same outcomes.

An ongoing commitment to child well-being.

This report focuses on child protection system data, trends, and analysis, but Hennepin County's work to transform county services and supports for children and families is much broader. Each year, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners receives an annual report on the county's progress to achieve our vision for child and family well-being. Presented to the county board in December each year, the Child Well-Being Annual Report covers major strategic and programmatic work underway across Hennepin County and within Human Services:

- Trauma-informed system transformation
- Disparity reduction efforts in education, health, and justice
- Engaging the community and families with lived experience
- Services for parental substance use disorder and child protection involvement

Read the [2023 Child Well-Being Annual Report \(PDF\)](#).



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