

Children and Family Services 2021 Annual Report

This community cares.

As the new Children and Family Services director, I've seen such passion for children's well-being expressed by community members, partners, and our team.

With that passion comes accountability. Our work is to promote safety, stability, healthy development and well-being of children and youth in Hennepin County. Examining and sharing our data shows how we're progressing on the promise we made to our residents.

The global pandemic has made the last few years tumultuous. Our commitment to transformation and reducing racial disparities has been steady throughout, and now it must accelerate.

As director, I've named specific priorities for our work: becoming less reactive and more strategic, stabilizing our workforce, decreasing the number of children entering care, improving family-centered practice, and engaging our community — especially individuals with lived experience. We bring an equity lens to those priorities and build it into the fiber of all we do.

Trust is at the heart of our work. Every day, we work to build trust with the families we serve. I'm also here to earn your trust as community members and important partners. Thank you for caring about our children and families.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kwesi Booker". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Kwesi Booker
Director, Children and Family Services

Child protection by the numbers

COVID continues to affect system volume. For another year, we received considerably fewer child protection reports compared to pre-pandemic. The share of reports by mandated reporters — people who work with children in education or health-care settings, for example — decreased with ongoing service disruptions. Reports are screened by a multidisciplinary team to assess whether they meet criteria for child protection involvement, and the percentage of reports “screened in” decreased as well.

Supporting families with a strengths-based approach. Screened-in reports can be evaluated one of two ways: assessment or investigation. Family investigation is used when children are in serious and immediate risk of harm. Other reports are assigned for family assessment, a strengths-based approach that connects families to the resources and services they need to reduce the risk of child maltreatment. For comparison, about 62% of reports statewide received a family assessment response in 2020.

Measure	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total child protection reports (intakes)	18,005	17,361	13,850	13,874
% of total child protection reports coming from mandated reporters	82.6%	81.9%	78.4%	76.1%
Reports warranting investigation (total intakes screened in)	8,872	8,719	6,724	6,265
% reports warranting investigation (total % intakes screened in)	49.3%	50.2%	48.5%	45.2%
Intakes % screened in — Family Assessment track	56.2%	60.9%	58.6%	63.0%
Intakes % screened in — Family Investigation track	40.7%	36.6%	39.1%	34.5%
Intakes % screened in — Facility track	3.1%	2.5%	2.3%	2.6%
Out-of-home placement entries	1,208	1,078	815	604
Out-of-home placement exits	1,341	1,181	1,037	941
Out-of-home placement, unique child count	3,106	2,862	2,542	2,113

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

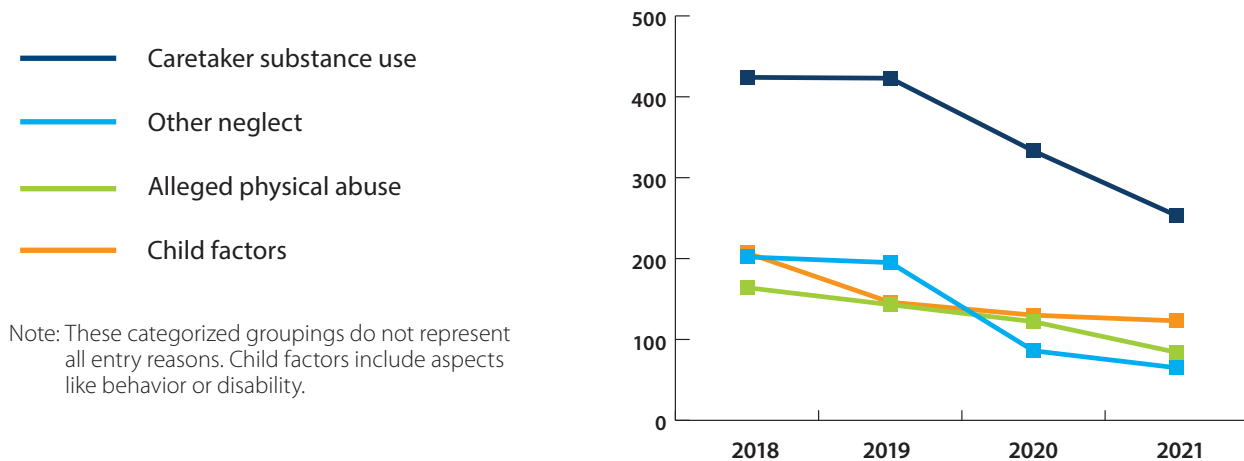
Measure	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total child protection reports	18,005	17,361	13,850	13,874
Neglect allegation	46.7%	46.2%	48.0%	47.5%
Physical abuse allegation	34.8%	27.5%	26.3%	28.6%
Sexual abuse allegation	14.9%	15.1%	16.5%	17.1%
Threatened injury allegation	12.4%	22.6%	23.9%	23.7%
Mental injury allegation	3.6%	3.5%	4.7%	5.8%

Out-of-home placement and preserving families

Fewer children are entering care. We've seen an encouraging year-over-year decline in the number of children entering out-of-home placement — a 50% decrease from 2018 through 2021. While the reduced volume during the pandemic is a factor, the trend also demonstrates the county's commitment to child and family well-being. Whenever possible, we're keeping families together and providing case management without placing children in foster care.

Alleged neglect and substance use challenges remain primary factors. Some feared a potential increase in physical abuse during the pandemic. But neglect remains the most common category, in nearly half of reports. Neglect includes allegations involving parental substance use. While the overall number of out-of-home placement entries is decreasing, substance use persists as the most common factor affecting child safety and family stability.

Reasons for entering out-of-home placement



Racial Disparities

Substance use disorder is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to an inability to control substance use. Racial disparities in health and multiple other areas contribute to untreated or poorly managed substance use disorder, exacerbating racial disparities in child protection involvement.

Ending out-of-home-placement

Fewer children and parents reunified. While the declining number of children entering foster care is a positive trend, the share of them returning home afterwards is also declining — and that is a major concern. When children are in out-of-home placement, our goal is to work with families to resolve safety issues and reunify. When that happens less frequently, we need to understand why. It could be more deeply entrenched issues, like access to services or severity of dynamics that brought children into care. It could also be simple association with fewer kids entering care, or a short-term trend that will reverse as the pandemic eases. Data and case analysis is underway to understand all possible contributing factors.

Keeping family ties with alternative permanency outcomes. Whenever possible, we seek permanency resources within the family. While still secondary to adoption overall, transfers of legal custody are increasing — in fact, more children experienced a transfer of permanent physical and legal custody to a relative in 2021 than an adoption by a relative. Because transfers of custody can occur without terminating parental rights, we see this outcome as an important way to preserve family ties.

Reasons for leaving out-of-home placement

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Reunification with parents/primary caretakers	59.1%	53.6%	52.7%	43.8%
Adoption finalized	17.5%	19.0%	18.0%	23.0%
Transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative	8.0%	9.1%	12.4%	15.8%
Reached age of majority or emancipated	6.0%	6.9%	8.2%	7.7%
Living with other relatives	5.7%	6.9%	5.0%	5.0%

Note: These are the five most common exit reasons from 2018-2021.

Racial Disparities

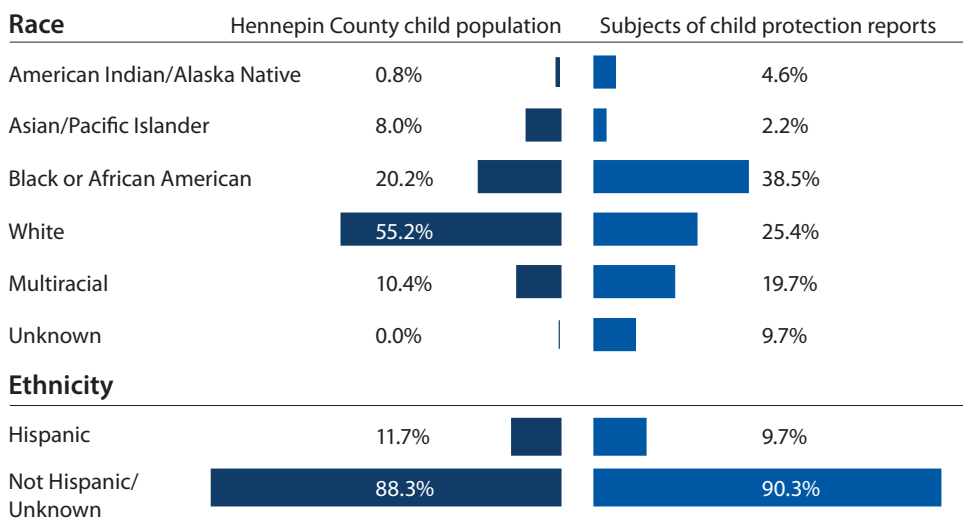
Even within the lower overall rate of reunification, the impact is not felt equally: In 2021, only 33.1% of American Indian/Alaska Native children were reunified, while about 45% of children of all other races were reunified.

Racial disparities

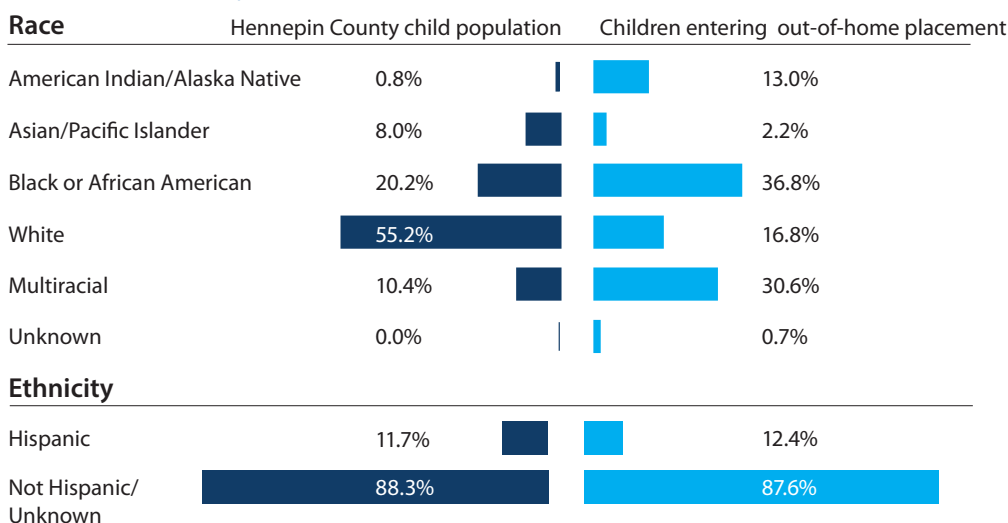
Monitoring our system with a disparity reduction lens. As we work to reduce racial disparities, disaggregating data is essential to understanding how people of different racial identities experience county systems. Beginning with the reports we receive from the community and continuing through our system to out-of-home placement, children of color continue to be overrepresented in child welfare.

Understanding the multiracial category. In our data, the “multiracial” category simply includes children who identify as two or more races. This represents a large number of children in our system — most often, children with African American or American Indian identities — and so is important context for seeing the overall impact on children and families of color.

Child protection reports



Out-of-home placement



Caseloads

Steady, but uneasy. These point-in-time caseload measures remain at the upper end of our target range, established to support our social workers' positive engagement with families. While the number appears stable, that's not necessarily been the experience of our staff through these difficult years. Reduced intake volume during the pandemic has helped hold caseloads where they are. We're placing new energy on employee recruitment, onboarding, and retention amid a nationwide child welfare workforce shortage.

Caseloads per worker

Measure	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ongoing child protection case management	13	13	10	10
ICWA ongoing child protection case management	11	12	9	9
Child protection assessment/investigations	9	12	7	8

Note: Caseloads in December of each year.

State and federal performance measures

Another year of pandemic impacts. So much of our system has continued to be affected by the pandemic. That includes known impacts, like waivers and legislative program changes, as well as effects we can't yet see definitively.

Points of strength and areas to improve. We've prioritized use of relative care in recent years, and our data shows how focused practice changes can make a difference for children. We're seeing encouraging trends as we work towards meeting other measures, such as maltreatment rereporting and caseworker visits. Permanency continues to be a major area of focus, particularly around racial equity in permanency outcomes, though our 12-month measure slipped in 2021.

State measures	2018	2019	2020	2021	Performance standard
Overall timeliness	83.3%	81.3%	77.4%	81.3%	100%
24-hour response timeliness	85.0%	80.9%	80.1%	80.8%	100%
120-hour response: family investigation	83.9%	84.5%	82.6%	83.3%	100%
120-hour response: family assessment	82.5%	81.0%	75.4%	81.2%	100%
Caseworker visits	90.2%	89.2%	89.5%	92.4%	95% or greater
Relative care	61.5%	64.7%	67.8%	69.4%	35.7% or greater
Physical health	75.3%	72.3%	64.3%	59.4%	70% or greater
Maltreatment re-reporting	23.1%	20.1%	18.9%	17.0%	15.2% or less
Aging out of foster care	64.9%	75.6%	69.2%	80.3%	70% or less
Federal measures	2018	2019	2020	2021	Performance standard
Maltreatment recurrence	13.4%	7.0%	6.3%	4.4%	9.1% or less
Maltreatment in foster care	10.5	11.6	7.0	10.6	8.5 victimizations or less per 100,000 days in care
Foster care reentry	15.1%	17.3%	16.3%	10.6%	8.3% or less
Permanency: 12 months	42.0%	40.4%	40.5%	39.4%	40.5% or greater
Permanency: 12-23 months	54.0%	48.9%	48.8%	57.7%	43.6% or greater
Permanency: 24 months	35.0%	33.6%	36.7%	42.1%	30.3% or greater
Placement stability	3.90	3.60	3.20	2.89	4.12 moves or less per 1,000 days in care

Note: Data as of June 2, 2022.

Hennepin County priorities

Increasing use of facilitated family meetings, with room for growth. We started collecting system-level data on our use of facilitated family meetings in 2020. Increasing use of these meetings is a key priority as we grow in family-centered practice. Meetings engage family members, including paternal relatives, and identified support people in planning and decision making.

Continued commitment to relative care. As one of our priorities over the last several years, we examine our use of relative care in multiple ways. This point-in-time measure complements the performance measure on page 7 as we seek to better understand the experience of an individual child. Placement with relatives and kin can reduce trauma and help children maintain their core sense of family, belonging and identity.

Family meetings

Family meetings and father involvement	2020	2021
Total meetings that took place	306	539
Father/paternal relatives invited	72%	60%
Father/paternal relatives attended	64%	54%

Note: Data only available from 2020 going forward.

Relative placements

Number (N) and percentage (%) of youth in relative placements	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In relative placements	995	52.4%	939	56.4%	949	58.0%	753	56.0%

Note: Youth in relative placements on June 1.



Hennepin County

Human Services

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