

**Final Report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee  
Evaluation of Milwaukee County Child Welfare (Reports 06-1 & 06-2)  
February 1, 2007**

The Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW), in the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), is responsible for protecting children at serious risk of abuse or neglect in Milwaukee County and strengthening the ability of their families to care for them safely. The State of Wisconsin has had this responsibility since 1998.

The Legislative Audit Bureau released two reports on the finances, management and program performance of BMCW in February 2006. The Auditors recommended and the Department agreed to report on program performance improvements in February 2007.

The BMCW has made significant improvements in the quality and efficiency of service delivery to families. However, some challenges still remain for BMCW and the families that we serve. The Department will continuously review and evaluate our services to ensure they are the most appropriate and are adequately provided to the children and families who are involved with our system.

The specific items requested by the Legislative Audit Bureau and the Joint Legislative Audit Committee are detailed below with Department progress reports on each item. This report supplements earlier reports that we have made to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on progress in other areas. The Department appreciates the interest of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee in this critical work to protect children and strengthen families.

*1. Comment on results from the efforts to assess and address program participant needs collaboratively with the Department of Workforce Development.*

As reported in the October 2006 interim report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, the Departments of Workforce Development (DWD) and Health and Family Services joined together through the Families Forward Initiative to improve outcomes for families involved in child welfare and W-2. DHFS and DWD are committed to continuing these efforts and finding additional ways to support families so they may increase their economic security and keep their children safe and well.

Each agency has instituted new requirements with its private contract agencies to coordinate services with families. These requirements apply county-wide to families involved in both systems. Two pilot site partnerships are advancing our work in the Families Forward Initiative: Maximus/YWCA and Children's Family and Community Partnerships on Milwaukee's north side, and UMOS and La Causa on the south side.

The following are two case summaries describing the collaboration between UMOS and La Causa on the south side:

- A 36 year old, female client is the single parent of two children with a minimal support system who participates in W-2. This client also has a significant child protective services history in both Milwaukee and Illinois. She was referred to the La Causa safety services program for assistance in securing appliances and beds for her children, obtaining a restraining order against the children's father, enrolling in a computer course to acquire employment and accessing child care.

The assurance of safety for the children and the client was paramount. The La Causa safety services program provided the client with various resources to meet her needs and ensure the safety of her children in their home. Appliances and furniture were provided and housing assistance was offered. A Safety Services Case Manager was assigned to provide weekly contact with the family in their home. The client was able to obtain a restraining order against the children's father and was referred for domestic violence counseling. The client also completed a computer class to increase her employability skills.

The La Causa safety services team and the UMOS Financial and Employment Planner have remained in close communication. The UMOS planner participated with the La Causa staff in Coordinated Services Team meetings with the family to identify services that would be put in place by each agency and to ensure that all needs are adequately met for keeping the children safe. Due to the planner being located at La Causa, the client was able to meet with the planner and the Safety Services Case Manager at the same location and was able to access services in a timely manner.

- A 24 year old woman was referred to the La Causa safety services program by the state initial assessment social worker following the birth of an infant who tested positive for amphetamines. At the time of the referral, the client and infant were living with the client's cousin. Based on an assessment conducted, the mother was in need of AODA treatment, basic parenting assistance, financial assistance/employment, and stabilized housing. The strongest natural support that this client had was her significant other, who was also the infant's father.

The Safety Service Manager monitored and addressed the baby's safety and well-being, and provided referrals for the mother to substance abuse assessment and treatment services and UMOS's W-2 program. The Safety Service Manager and W-2 planner collaborated to ensure the client's needs were being addressed as expediently as possible. The client was appreciative of the convenience of having both services located in the same office.

The planner opened the case in W-2 and placed the client on the Case Management for a Caretaker of a Newborn status. While waiting for financial assistance, the Safety Service Manager assisted the client in applying for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program for the infant and securing essential baby items such as a crib, clothing, bottles, etc. The client's significant other also played a strong support role by providing items for the infant.

The client moved into an apartment and the Safety Service Manager worked with her to obtain household items. The client continues to participate in substance abuse services and maintains sobriety. She has followed through on all medical appointments for the infant and has actively participated in parenting assistance which has focused on areas of child development and nurturing. In addition, the client's significant other continues to provide her and her infant with ongoing support.

In these two examples, the key to ensuring that both the W-2 and child welfare systems were able to provide the maximum benefits with the minimum amount of barriers to a family was strong collaboration and coordination between staff. In both examples, the risks impacting the children were addressed immediately, while staff worked to ensure the families' basic needs were met and the parent(s) were able to address their long-term financial issues.

W-2 workers have also been trained by BMCW in the Coordinated Services Team model and are invited to all team meetings involving their cases. Direct service workers from both agencies have participated in training on each other's systems. BMCW and W-2 agencies and the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership for Professional Development are collaborating to determine what additional cross-training might be needed to improve collaboration between the two systems. In addition, a guidebook is currently being developed to offer fundamental information about both systems.

An external evaluation of the Families Forward Initiative found that service integration efforts at the pilot sites were successful in initiating change, and that lessons learned should influence future collaborative efforts. In addition, areas where collaboration was successful will continue being integrated into the daily operations of the child welfare and W-2 systems.

After learning from the experiences in the Families Forward Initiative pilot sites, DHFS and DWD, in partnership with the Department of Corrections, created the Milwaukee Family Services Integration Office. This collaborative effort is designed to assist families at risk who may benefit from services provided from the three departments.

The Family Services Integration Office operates under the general direction of the Secretaries in each department. The Office is charged with facilitating improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families in Milwaukee through collaboration and coordination of state-administered services. The focus of the Office will be to improve outcomes for families served in W-2 and child welfare programs, and families of offenders and ex-offenders re-entering the community.

2. Update the Committee on any additional federal Settlement Agreement performance measures from which the Bureau has been released.

On December 31, 2005, the BMCW reached the conclusion of the third year of the Settlement Agreement between Children's Rights, Inc., on behalf of the plaintiffs, and the Department of Health and Family Services, and other State defendants. Since that time, BMCW has continued to work diligently on meeting the performance requirements on the remaining enforceable provisions under the Settlement Agreement.

Consistent with Section V.A of the Agreement, when defendants are in compliance with Article I requirements at the end of Period 3, and have been in compliance for the most recent two consecutive six-month intervals, that requirement is no longer subject to enforcement although monitoring will continue until the entire Agreement is terminated.

Plaintiffs and defendants agreed that the Article I provisions as listed below were no longer subject to enforcement because defendants were in compliance with the provisions at the conclusion of Period 3 and for the most recent two consecutive six-month intervals.

The BMCW was released from the following provisions based on agreement with plaintiffs counsel:

- §I.B.1. Negotiation with Milwaukee District Attorney
- §I.B.3. Belated compliance with Adoption and Safe Families Act requirements
- §I.C.2. Timeliness of processing referrals to independent investigator
- §I.C.3. Timeliness of making case assignments and completing investigations
- §I.C.4. Timeliness in making determination of independent investigations
- §I.D.3. Contract hold-back for monthly face-to-face contacts
- §I.D.4. Monthly face-to-face contacts
- §I.D.8. Seek increase in foster parent reimbursement rates
- §I.B.4. Length of stay in out-of-home care
- §I.D.1. Caseloads not exceed an average of 11 families per case-carrying manager

Currently, the following provisions remain enforceable under the Settlement Agreement:

- §I.B.2. Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timeliness requirement, timely filing of TPR petitions
- §I.B.6. Reunification within 12 months of entry into out-of-home care

- §I.B.7. Adoption within 24 months of entering out-of-home care
- §I.D.9. Placement stability – children will have three or fewer placements while in out-of-home care
- §I.C.1. Substantiated maltreatment of children in out-of-home care

In addition, the following three provisions remain enforceable, according to Children’s Rights, Inc.; however, BMCW has met all the requirements for each of these provisions and are currently in negotiations with Children’s Rights regarding release from these items.

- §I.D.5. The use of shelter placements shall be phased out entirely. The BMCW phased-out shelters as required in CY 2003.
- §I.D.6. By December 31, 2003, and thereafter, no child shall be placed in a shelter. Since December 31, 2003, no children have been placed in a shelter.
- §I.D.7. Diagnostic/Assessment Centers. This provision states, “By December 31, 2003, BMCW shall develop special diagnostic/assessment centers for children over 12 years of age who need further assessment in order to determine the appropriate placement. Placement in such centers shall not exceed 30 days, or 60 days if the placement is extended in accordance with applicable state law.” BMCW has created and is utilizing assessment centers for children over 12 years of age.

3. Describe the changes to the 2007 contracts, including financial incentives and performance expectations.

The BMCW partnership is committed to ensuring all children in care of the child welfare system are safe, that children achieve a safe and permanent home in the shortest time possible, and that children in care are healthy and performing well in school. These are challenging goals for any child welfare system but they are the right ones. The BMCW, in collaboration with our partner agencies, developed a contract process that encourages and rewards these positive outcomes for children and families.

In October 2006, BMCW implemented outcome based performance contracts for the Milwaukee County child welfare system. This initiative rewards participating agencies for achieving positive performance on behalf of children and families in the system. The partners of the BMCW have already achieved significant results on behalf of permanency for children in foster care. These efforts will assist BMCW partners in sustaining improvements in safety, permanency and well-being for children in the foster care system.

The performance expectations for Ongoing Case Management services as identified in the agencies' contracts are listed below. The BMCW believes that the three outcome measures are the first steps to meeting the existing Settlement compliance requirements and moving beyond. The baseline figures were derived from three years of actual data from the agencies.

Outcome I

Children in out-of-home care will have stable placements.

- a. 82% or more of children who entered out-of-home care within the last 12 months will have no more than 2 placements within their first 12 months in out-of-home care.

Outcome II

Children will be safely and timely reunified with their families when possible.

- a. 71% or more of children who entered out-of-home care within the last 12 months in out-of-home care will be reunified within 12 months.
- b. 95% or more of children will not experience a substantiated allegation of maltreatment within 12 months of reunification.
- c. 70% or more of children who are reunified will not re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of returning home.

Outcome III

Children who cannot be safely reunified with their family will have a safe, permanent home.

- a. 75% or more children in out-of-home care more than 15 of the last 22 months will have a timely TPR filed with the Assistant District Attorney (ADA) or documented exception.

The performance expectation for Safety Services as identified in the agencies' contract is as follows:

Outcome I

Children will remain safely in their homes.

- a. 80% or more children who enter out-of-home care will not have had an open Safety Services case within the last 12 months.

The BMCW monitors performance on a monthly basis and reports overall performance on a quarterly basis. If a performance outcome does not meet or exceed the performance baseline, BMCW may require the Ongoing Case Management/Safety Service agency to develop a Corrective Action Plan. If the agency fails to meet or exceed the baseline while under the Corrective Action Plan, BMCW may restrict the use of reserve funds to accomplish the goals of the plan.

4. Improve the timeliness of the investigations of child abuse and neglect.

The Legislative Audit Bureau identified areas of concern regarding BMCW's response time for investigating child abuse and neglect, specifically that BMCW's investigation time exceeded the 60 day statutory limit. BMCW understands the importance of timely investigations and is committed to the prompt completion of quality initial assessments to ensure child safety.

As reported in the October 2006 interim report, BMCW reviewed the initial assessments that exceeded the statutory time limits. In the review, BMCW identified 253 child abuse and neglect referrals open greater than 180 days. Although it is unacceptable that these initial assessments were not timely, it was determined that child safety had been assured in each of these cases and it was the documentation in the case file that was not completed in a timely manner.

BMCW has implemented corrective strategies to monitor and track the timely completion of initial assessments. BMCW is still in the process of resolving fundamental data reporting and quality issues. During this interim period, while we are refining the design of the report, we have implemented safeguards to reconcile and verify data at each region that allows us to track and monitor case closure by supervisor unit and the safety of each child involved in an initial assessment case.

5. Improve the timeliness of services ordered for each family when a child is removed from the home.

When a child is removed from their home, BMCW contract agencies are responsible for identifying and implementing the services, prior to the Service Implementation Hearing that will enhance the protective capacity of the parent to provide every opportunity for safe reunification. The Children's Court monitors this process for individual families.

On a monthly basis, the BMCW Program Evaluation Managers review the information submitted by the private partner agencies documenting the timeliness of services implemented for each family. The purpose of this review is to:

- ensure that services are provided timely that enhance the protective capacity of a parent;
- ensure that families are engaged in developing their case plan and are agreeing to participate in these services;
- identify barriers to timely service provision;
- verify any findings with the private partner agency based on information submitted;
- determine the need for the private partner agency to develop, implement and monitor corrective action plans to be evaluated by BMCW Program Evaluation Managers; and

- determine and apply any fiscal sanctions on the private partner agencies for failing to implement services in a timely manner. Agencies must implement 90% of the identified services by the Service Implementation Hearing.

The Program Evaluation Managers review consists of verification of the information provided by the private partner agency and a calculation based upon the number of services implemented prior to the hearing as compared to the number of services identified.

Based on results of the analysis thus far, BMCW and the private partner agencies have implemented the following corrective strategies to improve timely service as well as to assure that the services are in progress and are facilitating the desired outcomes in the lives of the children and families we serve:

- Prioritize certain critical services that enhance the protective capacity of a parent;
- Provide training and technical assistance to private partner agencies regarding timely service provision, including revising the reporting format, improving data tracking and increasing monitoring;
- Provide additional oversight to the Service Implementation Hearing process by the Program Evaluation Managers;
- Identify strategies to increase service provider capacity and accessibility to quality services;
- Continue regular meetings with BMCW staff and private partner agencies to streamline the reporting process for timely service; and
- Implement fiscal sanctions for failing to meet the 90% threshold for outcome measures. Based on an analysis of the data submitted by our private partner agencies for the months of July – December 2006, BMCW imposed fiscal sanctions for specific months when the agencies were not in compliance.

In 2007, BMCW, the private partner agencies and community stakeholders will be exploring the feasibility of streamlining service authorizations as well as assuring quality service. The desired outcome is to eliminate barriers in securing quality services in a timely manner and build additional capacity and accessibility to culturally appropriate services.

6. *Reduce the time children spend in out-of-home care.*

The federal Settlement Agreement required BMCW to monitor performance on the length of stay in out-of-home care (no more than 25% of children in out-of-home care shall be in care for more than 24 months). During the first six months of 2006, BMCW achieved a performance level of 18.8% of children who were in out-of-home care for more than 24 months. BMCW successfully met the baseline performance measure as required in the Settlement Agreement for two consecutive six month periods, and was released from court oversight of this item by mutual agreement with plaintiffs' counsel in October 2006.



Beyond the Settlement Agreement, BMCW has been aggressively working with children who have been in care for 24 months or more. As a result of these efforts, the actual number and percentage of children in out-of-home care 24 months or more has decreased. The percentage of children who have been in out-of-home care for 24 or more months declined to 37% from 62.8% between January 2003 and June 2006. Data for the last six months of 2006 will be reported out to the community in the spring of 2007.

In August 2006, the BMCW began permanency staffings for all children in out-of-home care in an effort to expedite permanency in a safe manner. Permanency staffings are convened on behalf of each child with a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) court order to ensure the achievement of a child's permanency plan. Between August and November 2006, BMCW staff monitored and discussed the permanency efforts for 583 families and 992 children.

7. Ensure the adequacy of safety services.

The Department believes that Safety Services have offered a viable and positive program option to keep children safely in their own homes. The Department recognizes the concerns identified in the Legislative Audit Report and has taken measures to improve the Safety Services program.

In July 2006, BMCW began to refer families at risk of child abuse and neglect to Safety Services. A family "at risk" is one that faces potential threats to the safety of children that are not imminent, but are likely to occur without some form of intervention. It is our hope that by engaging families in these voluntary services, before an incident of abuse or neglect occurs, we can prevent harm to children in the future. Between July and December 2006, risk cases made up 18.3% of the total referrals to Safety Services.

The BMCW Program Evaluation Managers are conducting reviews of risk-referred cases on a bi-monthly basis. Preliminary findings of the risk case review suggest that poverty is one of the reasons why risk cases are referred to Safety Services. Reviews indicate that families lack a connection to W-2 and require assistance with basic resources such as food, housing, furniture and adequate clothing. As part of their involvement in the program, the families' needs are assessed, and a service plan is developed and tailored to meet their needs so that safety of the children is assured. Based on the review, the Program Evaluation Managers found that as families received services, the risk of harm to their children was greatly reduced, their situations were stabilized, and they were able to make it on their own. As reported earlier in this report, BMCW and our private partner agencies are collaborating with W-2 to improve cross-system efforts in providing services to children and families.

BMCW acknowledges the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) finding that some Safety Service cases may have been closed prematurely. Based upon the recommendation by the LAB, BMCW changed the method in which its private partner agencies are reimbursed, which went into effect October 2006. Rather than receiving a fixed-rate

reimbursement for a maximum of four months, agencies now receive the fixed rate for every month that a case remains open.

BMCW and our private partner agencies have established procedures and protocols regarding oversight and approval of cases in order to ensure that each family receives the services it needs while avoiding the risk of premature case closure. BMCW and our private partner agencies established and implemented criteria for cases remaining open longer than 3 months. BMCW and our private partner agencies determined that families would benefit from continuing safety service involvement for stabilization of the family and maintenance of the family in following the safety plan that was developed to meet the families' needs. This protocol includes an internal staffing of each case and also ensures the oversight of financial resources through monthly monitoring of safety service caseloads and their associated costs.

The Qualitative Service Review conducted from October 16 through October 27, 2006, reviewed 3 Safety Services cases in each of the three regions. The results of the review, regarding the Safety Services cases, were positive and indicate that Safety Services are a valuable resource for families needing to address child safety issues. The review did recommend that BMCW ensure a common understanding between Safety Services and Initial Assessment and what constitutes an appropriate response to ensure child safety. As part of the Qualitative Service Review quality improvement plan, BMCW and our private partner agencies are working together to train and provide technical assistance to their respective staff regarding the response to failed safety plans or new reports of maltreatment.

8. *Ensure that all children in out-of-home care receive annual medical and dental examinations.*

BMCW is committed to ensuring all children involved in the child welfare system receive adequate and appropriate health and dental care.

In June 2005, 68.8% of children in out-of-home care were current with their annual medical examination. In this same period of time, 63.3% of children in out-of-home care were current with their annual dental exam. In 2006, BMCW improved in its performance in assuring that children in out-of-home care received annual medical and dental examinations. Between January and October 2006, 85.5% of children in BMCW were current with their annual medical examination and 78.2% of children were current with their annual dental examination. We are aware that additional provider capacity is needed in order to serve all children in foster care in Milwaukee County.

The Department of Health and Family Services is implementing a voluntary Medical Home Partnership Model for serving BMCW foster children using a common network of medical home providers, designed to facilitate the coordinated delivery of physical, mental health and dental services to children in foster care. The process of enrolling foster children in either an HMO or Fee-for-Service medical home is being phased in gradually and is based in part on medical home provider capacity. The model's design

maintains continuity of care for foster children while they remain in out-of-home care and at the time of reunification or permanency placement. BMCW anticipates a phased-in voluntary enrollment of those children with an existing managed care relationship as well as any new foster children beginning in 2007. A medical director from the Department has been reassigned to lead this effort in Milwaukee.

9. Continue to work to improve the retention of child welfare staff, including an analysis of the number of contract staff who have elected to pursue masters-level training at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that was at least partially paid for with child welfare funding, and the number who have or have not fulfilled all terms of their education contracts.

The Department has identified a comprehensive program to reduce the turnover among child welfare staff, including the provision of educational and other training opportunities. The number of case management staff hired during 2006 was 26 as compared to 132 during 2005. The turnover rate for 2006 was 25.5% as compared to 30.1% in 2005.

As part of the overall strategy to retain qualified workers, BMCW established a Workforce Steering Committee in December 2005 which developed an action plan in response to the recommendations in the Child Welfare League of America Workforce Report. The committee is comprised of state and private agency direct service staff, supervisors and managers and is co-chaired by supervisors from two BMCW private agencies. Four staff workgroups were formed: 1) training and staff development; 2) mitigating compliance, standardizing practice and motivation; 3) morale, staff recognition, organizational culture and climate; and 4) workload, documentation, and efficiency. The staff recommendations were approved by the CEOs of the private partner agencies and presented to the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council and are well on their way to implementation. Several of the staff recommendations that are currently being implemented include:

- a) Professional Development Plans for staff to assist in the transfer of skills learned in the classroom to actual job responsibilities. Supervisory training on the use of the plans is scheduled for the first quarter of 2007, and will be incorporated in all BMCW foundation courses;
- b) Use of training teams to train and prepare newly hired staff. New case management staff will spend 4-6 months in training teams after they are hired and before being assigned primary responsibility for cases;
- c) Multi-disciplinary Partnership Teams across program areas to enhance communication, collaboration and consistency. These teams will begin meeting in January 2007;
- d) Staff morale and recognition plans aimed at creating a supportive team environment by identifying and recognizing specific achievements; and
- e) Use of case aides to assist case managers with specific duties. Hiring of aides is expected to take place in the first quarter of 2007.

In addition, BMCW continues to work in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Helen Bader School of Social Welfare to implement both part-time and full-time Master of Social Work (MSW) programs. The part-time program is designed exclusively for state and private agency BMCW staff who want to earn their MSW degrees while continuing to work full-time in Milwaukee child welfare. Staff who are admitted receive full tuition (subject to continuing availability of federal Title IV-E funds) plus an allowance for books. There is also a two-year, full-time MSW program option for BMCW staff. Participants in this program receive a stipend and a book allowance and must sign a contract to return to BMCW for at least two years after receiving their MSW.

This program appears to be successfully meeting its goals. Since 1993, 124 students have graduated from the full-time MSW program. There are currently 12 students enrolled in the full-time program expecting to complete their studies in August 2007. Additionally, there are 10 students in their third year of the part-time MSW program; 9 students in their second year; and 3 in the final stages of admission.

UW-M tracks participating students to ensure they remain employed with BMCW for the contracted period. Of the graduates, 104 have paid off their obligation through employment with BMCW; six have paid or are in the process of paying off monetarily; two have legal action against them for non-payment; two were never offered employment and did not have to reimburse as the contract stipulates; and six are still paying off through employment.

The Department, in the 2007-2009 biennial budget, requested funding for continuing base salary increases for ongoing case managers and supervisors. A career ladder was incorporated into the salary increases. This ladder provides a pathway for workers to advance in pay and seniority depending upon educational degrees earned, longevity, and other factors.

### **Summary**

The Department believes that all of the items identified in the Legislative Audit Bureau's evaluations of Milwaukee Child Welfare are areas that, as we continue to improve upon, will strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of services for children and families. BMCW continuously monitors many of these items through our own internal mechanisms, as well as through the Settlement Agreement. As we build the Qualitative Service Review model into our regular evaluation of BMCW, we will be able to continuously enhance and, if necessary, redesign our services to meet the complex needs of our families. There are many individuals and agencies in Milwaukee that share BMCW's commitment to children and families involved in the child welfare system and those families who need our assistance to keep their children safely at home. With this shared commitment, we believe BMCW will continue to make great strides in our efforts to improve our programs and the way we deliver our services.