

La Crosse County



Building Our Village for Families

Presented by Gerald Huber, Human Services Director

September 26, 2008

La Crosse County Human Services At-a-Glance

Our Mission

We are dedicated to working with individuals and families within La Crosse County in order to enhance their self-sufficiency and quality of life. We will offer protection, prevention, intervention, treatment, education and support, within our local, state, and federal guidelines, and with respect for the dignity of each person served.

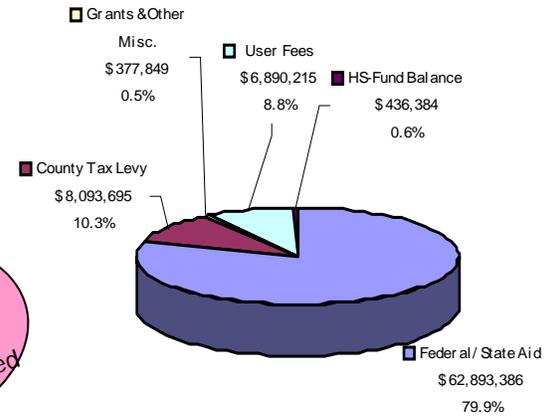
Our Mandates

WI Statutes
Chapter 46 Social Services
Chapter 47 People with Disabilities
Chapter 48-Children's Code
Chapter 49 Public Assistance
Chapter 51 Behavioral Health
Chapter 54 Guardianships & Conservatorships
Chapter 55 Protective Service System for Adults
Chapter 301 Corrections
Chapter 938 Juvenile Justice Code

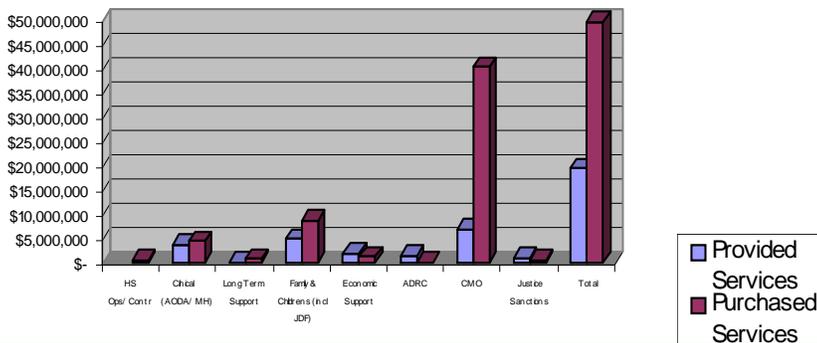
Our Core Values
Relevant
Responsive
Results Orientated
Reintegration Focused

Our Staff
74 Non-Bargaining
158 Professional Union
102 Paraprofessional Union

2007 HUMAN SERVICES REVENUE BY SOURCE
Total Revenue Received \$ 78,691,529



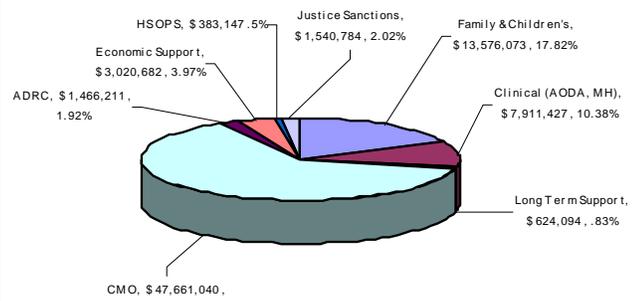
2007 PURCHASED VS. PROVIDED SERVICES



Who We Serve (Current Month December 2007)

ADRC-WW—656 contacts
Clinical Services—2,832 cases
Western Wisconsin Cares—1,825 cases
Economic Support—8,973 cases
Family & Children's—663 cases
Justice Sanctions—525 cases

2007 HUMAN SERVICES EXPENDITURES BY SECTION
Total La Crosse County Resident Services and Benefits = \$76,183,458



HHS 2008 Board Members
Under 46.23 of WI Statutes
Sharon Hampson, Chairperson
Jill Billings, Vice-Chair
Margaret Wood
Bill Brockmiller
Robert Erickson
Tammy Gamroth
Loren Kannenberg
Dr. James Glasser
Al Thompson

Visit us at <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/HumanServices/>

Find our [Annual Report](#) under Agency Information-Reports

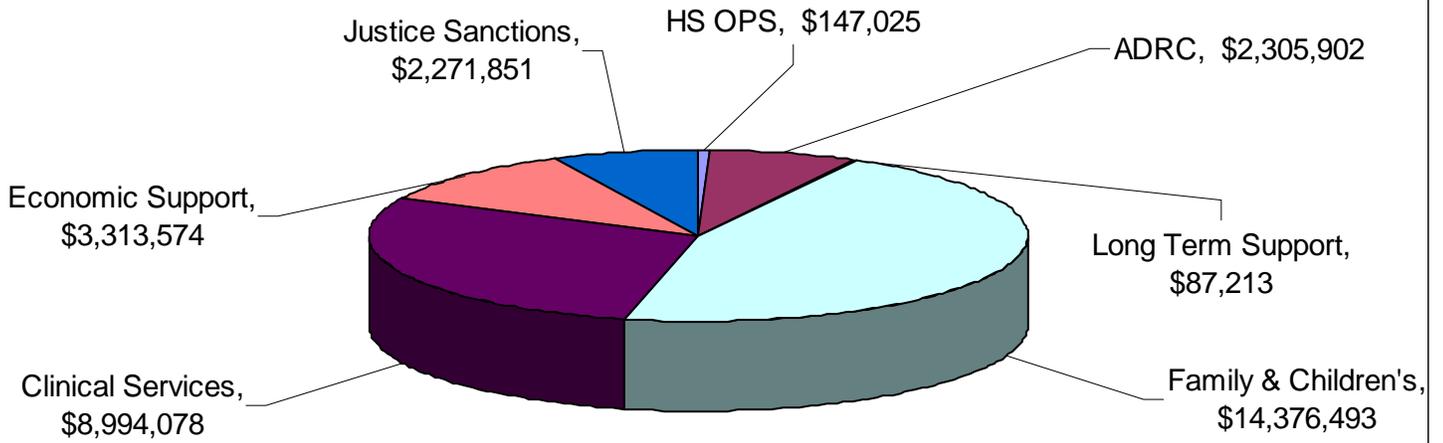
Or contact [Jerry Huber](#), Director at 785-6095

Our Structure

Clinical Services—Bill Adams, Manager 785-6093
Economic Support—Lorie Mueller, Manager 785-6061
Family & Children's—Mary Ellen Prinsen, Manager 785-6076
Justice Sanctions—Jane Klekamp, Manager 785-5547
Western Wisconsin Cares—Maryellen Paudler, Manager 785-6171
Aging & Disability Resource Center WW—Dean Ruppert, Operations Administrator 785-6108

2009 HUMAN SERVICES EXPENDITURES BY SECTION

Total La Crosse County Resident Services and Benefits
\$31,496,136



La Crosse County and Federal Policy On Strengthening Families

“Do less for more and more for less”

- Limit CPS involvement to more egregious cases and then “go deep” with families and children in the system
- “Stretch” the continuum of care and services to “touch” more families earlier and build community capacity



Department of Social Services
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Gerald Huber



WHERE IT ALL STARTED

CWDRP-Dakota County, MN-Project Point

“Clean my closet”

“Fix my toilet”

How to meet families “Where they are” to
motivate them to change”



TOO MANY “DOORS” FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



THE SYSTEM OF SERVICES WAS TOO “DEFICIT BASED” AND REACTIVE

- There had to be a “disability” or “diagnosis”
- The family had to have a “deficit” of some kind to be eligible for services
- The child had to commit a “delinquent” act to be eligible for services through Juvenile Justice



THE SYSTEM OF SERVICES WERE TOO FRAGMENTED

- Numerous “doors” or “silos” for families to enter
- Approach to services and treatment depended on which door a family entered
- No comprehensive “System of Care” connected to the community



NO WRONG DOOR FOR KIDS



SAME PHILOSOPHY OF CARE

- Focus on family strengths
- Focus on individualized services – wraparound models
- Focus on “Community Systems of Care” that are comprehensive in design



SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY

- No wrong door
- Administrative “umbrella” for services under Family and Children’s
- Consolidated funding
- Continuum of services



CURRENT CHILD WELFARE “PYRAMID”

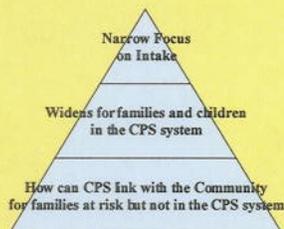


NATIONAL INNOVATIONS IN CHILD WELFARE

Inverse the Pyramid
Focus on Community Partnerships
“Private/Public Collaborations”
Alternative Response in child welfare
Focus on Prevention



NEW ROLE IN CPS?



A Reframing of Child Welfare

Community Response as part of the “continuum of care” for families & children

- Part of the federal and state’s attempt to redefine CPS
- Built on belief in family's strengths to protect and provide for their children
- Less adversarial than traditional CPS
- Allows CPS to focus on more egregious CPS referrals and focus on federal CFSR outcomes
- Evidence-based models in most states

La Crosse’s experience

- Generation 1 — Community Response
- Generation 2 — Community Response Plus

La Crosse Area Family Policy Board

The Family Policy Board allows policy makers in La Crosse to work collaboratively together on key issues involving the health and welfare of families and children within the county, including

- coordination of services and resources to achieve outcomes;
- an opportunity for local agencies to communicate on issues and concerns and exchange information; and an opportunity to report critical issues involving families and children and make policy recommendations to the various governing boards represented on the councils.

Approximately 40 local agencies are represented on **The Family Policy Board**, which is split up into two groups, the Governing Council and the Management Council. The Governing Council is more policy focused, and the Management Council is more implementation focused. The Governing Council provides leadership and guidance to the Management Council along with regular feedback regarding their activities, projects and recommendations.

The Governing Council meets bi-monthly, the Management Council meets monthly, and both Councils join together every few months for a joint meeting.



**REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION
TO THE LA CROSSE COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES BOARD**

DEPARTMENT: Human Services _____ REQUIRED REPORT
SECTION: Family & Children's _____ X APPROVAL/DENIAL
SUBJECT: Development of Community Response
Plus – A Proposal to the State _____ REQUIRES FURTHER APPROVAL
PREPARED BY: Gerald R. Huber _____ County Board
REVIEWED BY: Gerald R. Huber _____ Other (identify): _____
IMPLEMENTATION DATE: _____
FILING ID: _____

Background:

The Department for several months has been planning and sharing with the Board a proposal for the state to consider regarding how child protective services are provided in La Crosse County. The proposal involves a strategic plan for how to build up our continuum of services model within the Family & Children's Section of the La Crosse County Human Services Department.

The Community Response Program in child welfare was developed four years ago to address the needs of families referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) but were screened out. This service has been contracted through Family Resources and has provided a "light touch" to assist families on a voluntary basis.

The Next Generation:

The Department has suggested to the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) what we term "Community Response Plus". This program will expand community response as we currently have it by allowing less egregious referrals of child maltreatment to be diverted from CPS into the Community Response Plus model (see attached).

The Department feels this approach to child welfare meets the federal policy direction of "doing less for more and more for less" for child maltreatment cases and offering families resources that are less adversarial and more that build on the strengths families already possess.

Next Steps/Action Needed:

The La Crosse Family Policy Board has recommended this model of Community Response Plus to the HHS Board and to the state. Secretary Bicha of DCF asked the county to submit a proposal to them regarding this model. The Department asks the HHS Board to authorize its staff to pursue the implementation of the model with the state. Other agencies such as the Children's Trust Fund, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA), and Wisconsin County Human Services Association (WCHSA) have been approached to get their endorsements also.

The Board is encouraged to look at the federal resource on Community Response (also known as Alternative Response or Differential Response) which will be posted under the Family & Children's Section of the La Crosse County Human Services website.

La Crosse County Community Response Programs

La Crosse County Human Services has a long and successful history of being on the forefront of changes in child welfare. As practitioners we recognize the ever evolving face of social work in child welfare and the need to make changes and update practice in order to not only protect children, but help provide for their well-being, and family stability.

In 2005, La Crosse County implemented the "Community Response Program". Community Response is a voluntary program contracted through La Crosse's Family Resources. Housed at La Crosse County Department of Human Services, two community response workers collaborate with the Initial assessment unit to provide resource referral and support to families who have had a referral made to CPS, but the referral is screened out.

Referrals appropriate for Community Response are those that do not meet criteria to be screened in for a CPS initial assessment (no present danger threats to safety), however there are still concerns regarding the potential for the situation to worsen.

Community Response first sends a letter to the home stating that a CPS referral was received and screened out, however they would like to meet with the family to discuss these concerns and make any necessary referrals to community services. At the first face-to-face meeting families are given a folder containing resources and community services. The concerns in the Protective Services report are discussed, as are appropriate community resources and supports to help deal with these issues before they become more significant.

Community Response is completely voluntary; if workers do not receive a call back after the letter, they attempt home visits. The family may refuse to meet with Community Response, or simply choose to talk with them over the phone. Workers may visit a family one time, or do some short-term case management for 30-60 days making referrals and providing support to the family.

This program has about a 50% acceptance rate and in 2007 approximately 165 families utilized this program. Community Response has enabled La Crosse County to serve a population that was traditionally not being served. Screened out cases were not addressed unless they were re-referred and screened in for a traditional initial assessment/investigation. These families are now able to be connected to community resources in an effort to circumvent another referral to CPS.

Community Response Plus

La Crosse would like to expand the Community Response program in an effort to continue, create, and strengthen our partnerships with families and community agencies in order to keep our children safe.

Community Response Plus is based on the Alternative Response/Differential Response Model began in Minnesota and successfully repeated in many other states.

"Differential response is a form of practice in child protective services that allows for more than one method of response to reports of child abuse and neglect." (Merkel-Holguin, 2005).

Differential response focuses on screened in cases and uses an assessment and strength based approach to respond to potential safety threats rather than a forensic, investigative response.

With differential/alternative response the focus is not on making a finding of abuse, as it is in traditional investigation, in fact no finding is made. The focus is on alleviating any potential safety issues in the family through working with the family and providing services. Several states have implemented Differential response programs, including: Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. Although these states do have some differences in the way that these programs have been implemented, there have been similar outcomes in all states.

Re-response

Overall findings from past studies cited by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). Indicate that differential/alternative response programs do not compromise safety. Also, children involved in them are less likely to experience subsequent reports or investigations. This could be attributed in part to the fact that these are children that have already been identified as being at lower risk. However, to address this, a study done in Minnesota randomly assigned comparable families to receive either assessment or investigation. In this study, assessment cases (27%) were still less likely than investigation cases (30%), to be re-reported to CPS. In the La Crosse Community Response program, statistics are similar to those out of Minnesota's study. Here, only 25% of families who were offered Community Response services had a screened in report in the following year. (May 2005-Jan 2007 stats)

Placement

In most states, with the exception being Missouri, children who have been assigned to a differential/alternative response track are less likely to have a child placed in out of home care due to abuse or neglect than families assigned to traditional investigations.

Services

This study, as well as others, demonstrates that families who receive an assessment through an alternative response program are more likely to receive other services in addition to case management than families who are involved in a typical investigation. In Minnesota and Mississippi, families in the assessment track received assistance in meeting basic needs such as food, employment assistance, housing, etc. In Minnesota, it has been found that the early provision of services offered in assessment cases has been effective in improving children's safety and preventing further maltreatment.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

Benefits of Alternative Response:

This body of research, compiled in 2008, lists further benefits of Differential/Alternative Response programs. It notes that having an alternative response program may serve more families overall than a traditional model. In La Crosse, for example, cases are assigned to alternative response when they otherwise would be screened out and receive no contact or services at all. The Gateway has noted that many cases that would be screened out in a traditional model later reappear with more serious allegations. When cases are referred to alternative response at the first report, there is opportunity for earlier intervention and prevention efforts.

Also noted is that an assessment approach recognizes that a “one size does not fit all approach” is helpful in the following ways, and aids agencies to:

- Be more flexible in responding to child abuse and neglect reports
- Recognize that an adversarial focus is neither needed nor helpful for all cases
- Understand better the family issues that lie beneath maltreatment reports
- Engage parents more effectively to use services that address specific needs

What CPS staff says about Alternative Response:

- Many states have found that their workers like the alternative response approach. In particular, it has been noted to be more respectful to families.
- Large caseloads and limited resources have been challenges to the program in some areas
- Training has been needed to educate the workers and the community on the new models.

In order to implement Community Response Plus several changes need to be made.

At this time, La Crosse County is requesting a waiver from the Department of Children and Families for conducting traditional investigations on certain cases. Currently, any Protective Service report that is screened in for response must follow the Wisconsin State Initial Assessment standards, which means conducting a full investigation following investigative protocol. While sometimes necessary to preserve the integrity of the information that is being gathered, this is often an intrusive process, creating an adversarial dynamic between social worker and family. Research has also shown that with traditional investigation only the cases that are more “severe” are provided services. The “rate of services provision is low, 30% nationally” (Yuan, 2005). It is the position of La Crosse County, which is supported by the research from programs in other states that this type of investigation is only needed in the more egregious/high risk situations.

Using the Community Response Plus model, safety is still the primary focus, however this can be addressed by partnering with the family in a manner which maximizes their strengths and involvement in the decision making process. By focusing on family empowerment and participation social workers are able to partner with the family to alleviate concerns. Social workers work with the family to gather the necessary information regarding safety, strengths, and challenges, and then make a plan for possible courses of action to control for safety issues if present.

Protective S reports would be placed into one of two “tracks” if screened in. Cases involving sexual abuse allegation of any kind, serious injury to a child, serious neglect, and/or cases likely to result in criminal charges would be screened in for a traditional investigation.

Cases that allege less serious injury, neglect or risk of neglect, or other forms of abuse may be assigned to Community Response Plus. Many cases that are currently screened in for 5 day response would be assigned to CR Plus. Workers would make contact with the family by phone to schedule a meeting or a home visit if this did not work, within a 5 day timeline. At the initial meeting, all of the family members are talked to and the concerns in the referral are discussed. Family functioning, strengths and challenges are also assessed. The family is involved in identifying their strengths and challenges.

Safety is still the primary concern, and is addressed through a safety assessment and family managed, or agency managed safety plan. During this process a strengths tool is completed as is a safety assessment and Initial assessment.

There will be times that there will only be one or two contacts with families as there may not be any maltreatment or any concerns can be addressed through referrals to other community resources.

Other cases may have safety concerns and the worker will work with the family to establish a safety plan. If there is a need for formal services this will also be assessed, and ideally a decision made with the family. In such cases, an informal or consent decree may be appropriate if formal case management services are necessary to ensure for safety of the child(ren).

At any time, a CR Plus case could "switch tracks" and be referred back to Initial Assessment if safety could not be controlled through a safety plan. Additionally, if the family was not working with the plan and safety was escalating and could not be controlled, or if the concerns were more egregious that first reported the case could be referred back to Initial Assessment. Similarly, a traditional investigation could be moved to Community Response Plus if the concerns were did not warrant investigation however, services needed to be provided.

Potential Outcomes

Across the board the research has shown that not only does a Community Response Plus type model does not compromise child safety, and more families are actually being served. Services are being provided to a greater proportion of families that receive Community Response Plus services than traditional investigation. Families are able to be provided services earlier in the case planning process rather than waiting for dispositional services to be implemented through a court order.

There is no indication that families who participated in some kind of Differential response/Alternative Response services had a greater re-referral rate, or greater risk of victimization, and studies have shown that these numbers have dropped in comparison to families working with traditional investigation (Loman, Siegel, 2005).

At this time, given the current numbers of Initial Assessment workers in La Crosse County, using statistics provided by Olmsted County, MN which our program would be most closely modeled after, there is not a need for additional staff. Community Response Plus and Traditional Initial Assessment cases can be handled within Family Services Unit I. Training necessary on engagement, and family teaming is already being provided to the Family and Children's Section,

so no additional training needs are projected at this time. The fiscal impact of Community Response Plus at this time is not totally known, however within the Minnesota Alternative Response program after an initial rise in cost because of more service provision, costs were lower per family as there were fewer re-referrals to CPS, and fewer children were later removed and placed outside of their homes. "Savings achieved by experimental families later more than offset investment costs incurred during the initial contact period." (Loman, Siegel, 2005). Another potential fiscal benefit could be the possibility of some formal supervision services being provided by the worker, as they would be spending more time and thus supervision with the family.

References

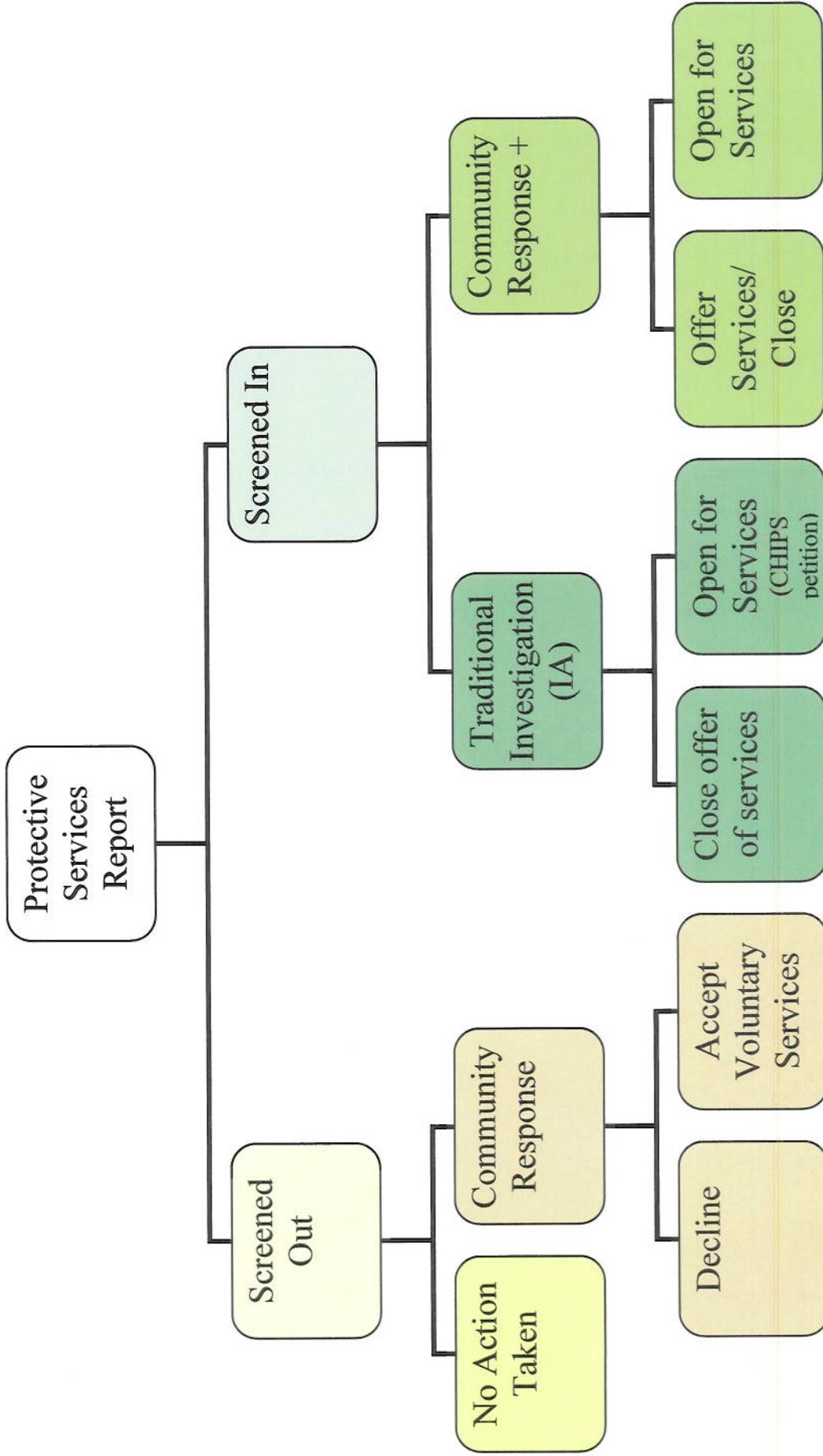
Child Welfare Information Gateway 2008. www.childwelfare.gov

Loman, L. Anthony, Siegel, Gary L. (2005) Alternative Response in Minnesota: Findings of the Program Evaluation. *American Humane Association*, 20, 78-92.

Merkel-Holguin, Lisa (2005). Differential Response: A Common Sense Reform in Child Welfare. *American Humane Association*, 20, 2-7.

Yuan, Ying-Ying T. (2005). Potential Policy Implications of Alternative Response. *American Humane Association*, 20, 22-31.

La Crosse County Human Services Community Response





Family Policy Board

Our Mission: The La Crosse Area Family Policy Board is a community collaboration working to develop new initiatives and enhance community capacity for creating an environment that is safe and rich with opportunities for families and children to improve their lives.

300 4th Street North
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

September 3, 2008

Big Brothers Big Sisters
Boys & Girls Club of Greater La Crosse
Congressman Ron Kind
Coulee Children's Center
Coulee Council on Addictions
Couleecap
County of La Crosse
• Circuit Court
• Corporation Counsel
• County Board of Supervisors
• District Court Administrator
• Family Court Commissioner
• Health & Human Services Board
• Health Department
• Human Services Department
• Mediation & Family Court Services
• U.W. Extension
Domestic Violence Intervention
Family & Children's Center
Family Resources
Franciscan Skemp Healthcare
Garrison Counseling, Inc.
Great Rivers 2-1-1
Great Rivers United Way
Gundersen Lutheran
Hmong Mutual Assistance Assoc.
Holmen School District
La Crosse City Council
La Crosse Community Foundation
La Crosse Police Department
La Crosse School District
Mental Health Coalition of La Crosse
Neighborhood City Church
New Horizons
Onalaska Police Department
Onalaska School District
Options in Reproductive Care
PATH
Stepping Stones
University of Wisconsin - La Crosse
West Salem School District
WI Council on Children & Families

Health & Human Services Board
c/o Sharon Hampson, Chair
300 N. 4th Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Dear Board Members:

This letter is written in strong support of the proposal from the La Crosse County Child Protective Services (CPS) Unit to develop Community Response Plus - an alternative, duo-track response to reports of child abuse and/or neglect.

As members of the reporting community, we welcome this new approach to child welfare services. We believe that a two track system of response will improve services to families as well as outcomes for children because the services will better align with the concerns within the family. Traditional CPS response focuses on investigation and substantiation - an aggressive, negative approach that is only appropriate for the most egregious reports of child abuse and neglect. Community Response Plus will add a second response option for less concerning reports of abuse and neglect that will focus on family engagement and strength-based services that will address the underlying issues that initiated the report.

Our greater concern is that our community has a variety of supports, resources and services that engage families in positive ways to make improvements for the health, safety and well-being of children. We have reviewed the Community Response Plus proposal and are confident that staff have logically drawn upon successful programs in other states to develop a well thought out plan that will not compromise child safety. This is a well-studied and well-thought out proposal that will greatly enhance the parenting success system that all of us are a part of.

We believe this innovative program will be a dramatic step in improving services to families who need it the most and we encourage you to support the implementation of Community Response Plus.

Sincerely,

FAMILY & CHILDREN'S GOVERNING COUNCIL

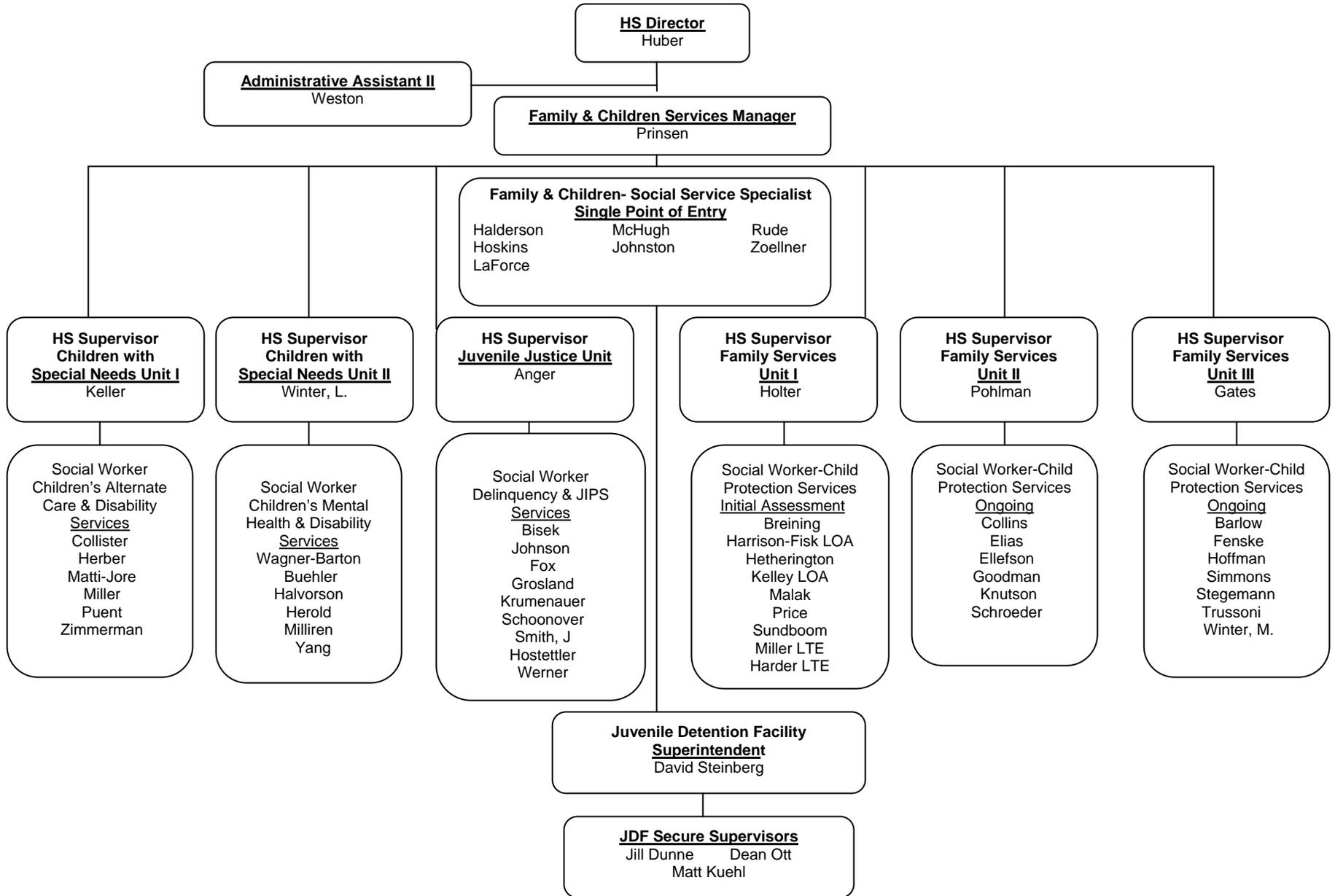
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rose M. Boesen".

Rose M. Boesen, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Burgess".

John Burgess, Co-Chair

LA CROSSE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES – FAMILY & CHILDREN’S SECTION



To access the article:

A New Start for Families and Children in Wisconsin

Follow the link below to the
La Crosse County Human Services
Web site at:

<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/HumanServices/a%20new%20start%20for%20families.pdf>

For more information on La Crosse County and how we are
building our village for families, please visit us on the web at:

<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/HumanServices/>

