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Children's Cabinet : report to the



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# Children's Cabinet

## Report to the Legislature



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**February 1995**

**Minnesota Planning** is charged with developing a long-range plan for the state, stimulating public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinating public policy with state agencies, the Legislature and other units of government.

This report was prepared by Susan Roth, in response to the 1994 Minnesota Laws, Chapter 631, Article 12, Section 6.

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## Summary

In May 1994, the Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation requiring the Children's Cabinet to study ways to promote, support, protect and nurture the family, and to recommend changes in public and private programs and state laws to encourage family preservation.

The Children's Cabinet has undertaken several major initiatives in the past three years to demonstrate how the state can improve the lives of its children and families on a broad scale. Many of these activities involve a partnership of state agencies and local communities.

In 1991, the Children's Cabinet and Action for Children developed a vision for children and youth based on input from hundreds of Minnesota's citizens. Action for Children then designed recommendations and strategies to create this vision, which it outlined in its 1992 report, *Kids Can't Wait: Action for Minnesota's Children*. The Children's Cabinet assumed responsibility for implementing the recommendations and strategies in partnership with Action for Children and its Youth Advisory Council. Recent efforts have been guided by two documents, Action for Children's 1994 progress report, *First Steps: Kids Can't Wait*, and *Voices of Minnesota Youth: A Report of the Listen '94 Kids Can't Wait Conference*, by Action for Children's Youth Advisory Council.

The Children's Cabinet adopted as its mission the improvement of the well-being of children and families in Minnesota. All activities of the Children's Cabinet reflect its strong commitment to this mission.

Many of the goals and indicators of progress identified by Action for Children in its report were included in the report of *Minnesota Milestones*, a long-range plan for the state created by its citizens. The 1993 *Minnesota Milestones Progress Report* documents achievements in moving toward the vision identified by Minnesotans.

An on-line customized children's services report card has been developed for every community in the state. The report card is available at many public libraries on DATANET, an electronic network developed by the Land Management Information Center at Minnesota Planning. Using the report card, communities can measure how their children are faring on 21 important indicators. Over time, the report card can help identify which efforts work and how to best use resources to shape the future for Minnesota's children.

Other key activities of the Children's Cabinet include:

- Distributing \$8 million in incentives for communities through the family services collaborative grant program to plan and implement major service delivery reforms for children and family services. Fifty-one planning and implementation grants were awarded in 1994. Efforts in these communities will reach more than 80 percent of Minnesota's children ages birth to 18.

- Working with the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families to conduct a study of state-level governance options for children and family services. The study was completed in February 1994 and includes recommendations on the core elements, functions and

capacities of a state-level governance body.

- Preparing a plan for an integrated children's services data base. The plan defines a long-range vision and an approach that will set the direction for developing information resources to support systemic change in the delivery of services to Minnesota families and children. The report on this plan is to be submitted to the Legislature in 1995.

- Providing leadership for Minnesota's intensive planning work for The Pew Charitable Trusts Children's Initiative. The Children's Cabinet was responsible for ensuring the completion of statewide planning activities and preparation of the written application. These efforts garnered a \$1.5 million grant to implement strategies designed to improve outcomes for children and families in four areas: improved child health, school readiness, child development and family functioning.

- Creating a set of service delivery principles for developing or evaluating programs and policies, and ensuring that they focus on the child and family.

- Working with the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families to develop a family impact statement for determining whether proposed legislation or policies adhere to family-support principles.

The Children's Cabinet also prepared integrated budgets for children's services during the 1993 and 1995 budget cycles. Included in these budgets were priorities for funding children's services. Governor Arne H. Carlson's budget for the next bien-

nium released in January 1995 identifies an array of funding sources that can be integrated at the local level to support families and children. Underscoring Governor Carlson's commitment to integrating services is his proposal for creating a Department of Children and Education Services.

In the legislative arena, an agenda has been pursued that has created funding opportunities for local collaboratives to build comprehensive systems of services for children and families; enhanced the state's capacity to gain additional federal reimbursements and invest these funds in locally determined services; increased programmatic flexibility in critical services; and given greater authority to the Children's Cabinet and the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and their Families.

At the same time, the Children's Cabinet has identified Minnesota's federal priorities for children and family services, and sought waivers on specific regulations to make service delivery more responsive for children and families.

Now underway is a statewide community-based needs assessment to develop a comprehensive five-year state plan to strengthen the way supports and services are provided for families. The Department of Human Services has received federal incentive funds for this effort and is working with a statewide committee to develop a plan that promotes family strength and stability, enhances parental function and protects children by providing family support and preservation services.

Finally, a state-level Children's Interagency Technical Assistance

Team was created in 1994 to develop a plan for providing technical assistance to the family services collaborative grants communities. Since then, the team has gone on to work with other interagency teams and state agencies involved in systemic change through collaborative efforts. Its efforts reflect a shift in the state's role from monitoring to providing technical assistance to communities. New focus teams, comprised of state and local community representatives, are working together to respond to technical assistance requests in the areas of governance, service delivery, information management, evaluation, and funding and finance.

## Introduction

In May 1994, the Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation requiring the Children's Cabinet to study ways to promote, support, protect and nurture the family, and recommend changes in public and private programs and state laws to encourage family preservation.

The Children's Cabinet has been engaged in such activities with state and local partners since its creation in 1992. Most of these activities have been documented in reports disseminated to the public or are being documented as part of statewide initiatives.

This report, therefore, does not reexamine strategies and recommendations for changes in public and private programs and statutes already developed by the Children's Cabinet. Instead, it provides a comprehensive overview of activities initiated under the leadership of the Children's Cabinet that are designed to promote, support, protect, preserve and nurture families.

## Children's Cabinet and Action for Children

Governor Arne H. Carlson created the Action for Children Commission shortly after he took office in 1991. Commission members, chosen from a broad range of backgrounds and disciplines, reflect the Governor's strong belief that when it comes to children, government cannot "do it alone." The private sector, nonprofit organizations, children's advocates, legislators and government officials must work together to improve the well-being of children and families.

Action for Children spent its first year developing a vision for children and families in Minnesota and examining the state's service delivery system. Its report, *Kids Can't Wait: Action for Minnesota's Children*, outlines this vision:

Our vision for children and youth sees individuals, communities, neighborhoods and institutions around the state devising strategies and goals to enhance their support of families. Every community in Minnesota should adopt and work toward the vision that every child:

- Experiences reciprocal, positive human relationships.
- Feels valued as a family member and a community member.
- Lives in a safe, secure, stable environment.
- Realizes his or her potential for good health.
- Learns to his or her utmost ability.
- Participates as a responsible community member.
- Values and respects his or her community, the world and the diversity of its people.

This vision recognizes the development of healthy children as a top priority and the important role families and communities play in supporting and strengthening children and youth.

It also is based on a new way of thinking about and working with children and families. The state must be an active, visionary leader. It must work with communities to set policy, provide basic funding and establish a developmental framework for service that acknowledges that all families at some time need help in doing some things. This universal approach requires a multistrategy plan that recognizes state government cannot do it all: parents, individuals, communities, schools, churches and businesses must all participate in the effort.

The state's role must be to continue to create policies, secure ongoing funding for successful programs beyond their demonstration stage and help develop programs that give high priority to children and families. State government must strengthen its ability to support local communities in their efforts on behalf of children, youth and families. As a social worker quoted in *Kids Can't Wait* said, "The most effective and cost-effective resource for children is families. The more we support parents, the better off children will be."

Action for Children also made six broad recommendations and outlined dozens of strategies to achieve the vision outlined in *Kids Can't Wait*. It said, for example, that Minnesota should:

Overhaul the state service delivery system to produce better results for children and families. Require

improved coordination of local, county, state and federal government programs. Make programs and services more accountable for results. Discontinue ineffective or inefficient services, and support services that produce results.

One of Action for Children's suggested strategies was to create a Children's Cabinet, a cabinet-level policy council of agency heads from the major departments with responsibility for children's programs. Children's Cabinet functions outlined in *Kids Can't Wait* included:

- Provide continuing government leadership on issues affecting children and families and strive to realize Minnesota's vision of community concern.

- Work in partnership with Action for Children to foster public, private and nonprofit sector involvement with children's issues, to create a common work plan to achieve major policy goals and to lead a public awareness campaign to build support for Minnesota's children and families.

- Develop a state strategy and budget for children and plans for implementation. Member agencies would coordinate their efforts and identify gaps and duplication. The Children's Cabinet would oversee a regular goal-planning and assessment process within each state agency and department.

- Stimulate local commitment and action on children and family issues by communicating major goals and expectations and providing resources and incentives for communities.

Governor Carlson established the Children's Cabinet in February 1992,

on the day *Kids Can't Wait* was released. The Children's Cabinet consists of the commissioners of the departments of Education, Health, Human Services, Finance, Public Safety, Corrections, Economic Security, Transportation and Administration, the commissioner of the Housing Finance Agency and the director of Minnesota Planning. The Governor designated Linda Kohl, director of Minnesota Planning, as chair of the Children's Cabinet. One of the Children's Cabinet's first actions was to affirm the Action for Children vision and assume responsibility for implementing the recommendations in *Kids Can't Wait*.

The mission of the Children's Cabinet is to improve the well-being of children and families in Minnesota. It works in partnership with Action for Children and its Youth Advisory Council on achieving the recommendations and strategies. Recent efforts have been guided by two documents, Action for Children's 1994 progress report, *First Steps: Kids Can't Wait*, and *Voices of Minnesota Youth: A Report of the Listen '94 Kids Can't Wait Conference*, prepared by Action for Children's Youth Advisory Council.

## **Working Together for a Shared Vision**

Although Minnesota has been described as resource rich, its system of services is failing many of its children and families. The same social and political dynamics that have produced the abundance of health, education and social services also have created fragmented, nonsystematic, unevenly distributed services that tend to emphasize expensive acute programming. Minnesota's challenge is to find a way

to maintain its commitment to providing a rich array of services to children and families, while shifting resources to emphasize early prevention of poor outcomes. The goal is to develop an integrated, seamless service continuum to make services for children and families easier to use and more effective.

Significant efforts are being made to reorient and reconfigure services for Minnesota's children and families. Fundamental to these efforts is the recognition that because of service strategy and governance challenges, new forms of partnership must be forged between public, private and nonprofit sectors; the state and local communities; the service system and the families and children it serves.

Nationally and in Minnesota, attention has focused on establishing mechanisms that provide for ongoing, meaningful participation by representatives of the community and consumers; public, private and private nonprofit organizations; and state and local governments to ensure that people who need to participate in changing systems and supporting families work together.

Changing systems requires planning and implementation over a period of years. This relatively long time span means the state and local communities need to design creative governance options, policy and procedures that can contribute to a continuity of leadership and vision. Political, economic and fiscal transitions are inevitable during planning and implementation. Successfully changing systems requires continuity in leadership, consistency in approach and vision, and active participation of community representatives, families, consumers, frontline workers,

administrators, state and local representatives, and leaders from all sectors. Providing training to people newly involved in changing systems and periodically assessing performance, policy-setting and decision-making systems must be part of the process. Governance mechanisms also must adapt as the strategies for change are implemented.

Increasing numbers of human services, government and community organizations are working together to achieve mutual goals. These relationships, often referred to as collaboratives, include commitments to jointly developed structures and to share responsibility, authority, accountability, resources and rewards.

### Measuring Improvement

Minnesota is a leader among states in the use of outcome measurement to guide public policy. In 1991, Governor Carlson initiated *Minnesota Milestones*, a project to create a long-range plan for the state that has measurable goals and indicators. Thousands of Minnesotans participated in the effort to develop a vision for the state and ways to measure progress toward that vision. Minnesota Planning periodically updates *Minnesota Milestones* to keep citizens informed of progress toward the goals.

Action for Children also realized the importance of establishing measurable goals for children's services. It proposed 17 milestones for children in its 1992 report, *Kids Can't Wait*. These milestones were further refined and ultimately incorporated into *Minnesota Milestones: A Report Card for the Future*.

In 1993, the state began integrating outcome measurements from *Minnesota Milestones* into the state budget process. The goal was to begin moving to performance-based budgeting for all state agencies — including those with major responsibilities for children's services — so that agency funding is tied to producing desired outcomes. Minnesota believes that performance-based budgeting, coupled with regular reporting on outcomes, can ensure public accountability for results.

Both *Minnesota Milestones* and Action for Children attempted to create an integrated set of indicators that looked at children and families holistically, rather than from the perspective of a single program or agency. The Legislature acknowledged the importance of outcome measurement in two laws it passed in 1993:

■ Applicants for grants under the family services collaborative grant program are required to establish clear goals and outcome measures for addressing the health, developmental, education and family-related needs of children and youth. Several outcome measures are specified, including the number of low birthweight babies, the infant mortality rate, the number of children who are adequately immunized and healthy, and the number of children requiring out-of-home placement or long-term special education services.

■ State agencies, including most Children's Cabinet agencies, are required to develop strategic plans and performance measures and submit them to the Legislature.

Once outcomes are agreed upon, strategies must be developed to achieve those outcomes. One strategy

will be to link performance on outcomes to funding decisions. On the state level, agency funding is linked to performance through performance-based budgeting.

As described in the *State Budget Manual*, a performance-based budget should answer two questions: 1) Is the state doing the right things? and 2) Is the state doing these things right? Outcome measures are designed to establish what the "right things" are. Performance and quality measures are designed to establish whether agencies are "doing things right."

Outcome measurement holds tremendous potential to build public will for major systems change. To begin to tap that potential, Minnesota Planning developed an on-line "children's services report card" for every county in the state. The report card is available at many public libraries though DATANET, a computer network operated by the Land Management Information Center at Minnesota Planning.

The children's services report card provides up-to-date demographic information and outcome data on children's services by county and statewide. Communities can use the report card to see how their children are faring, compared with other counties or the state as a whole, on 21 important indicators. Over time, the report card can help identify what efforts work and don't work and how to best use resources to shape the future for Minnesota's children.

Communities can use the report card to mobilize community support for action on behalf of children and families. The report card can be shared with the general public,

community meeting participants, elected officials and government representatives, technical experts and media representatives.

The 21 children's indicators that make up the report card cover children from birth to age 18. While each indicator describes one aspect of children's well-being or quality of life, together they can show what progress has been made for Minnesota's children and families. Indicators include children in poverty; children on AFDC; runaways; juvenile apprehensions; abused or neglected children; children placed out of home; 12th-grade dropouts; infant mortality; newborns, low birth weight; births, no prenatal care; births, mothers under 18; and a series of indicators adapted from the Minnesota Student Survey, which is given to sixth-, ninth- and 12th-grade students every three years by the Department of Education.

### **Tasks Assigned by the Legislature**

The 1993 Legislature formalized the Children's Cabinet's membership and provided \$400,000 in funding over the biennium. The Legislature also assigned the Children's Cabinet several significant tasks, including:

■ Distributing the \$8 million in incentives for communities through the family services collaboration grants to plan and implement major service delivery reforms for children and family services. Planning grants are intended to help collaboratives develop a community plan to improve results for and design better ways to provide services to children and families. Implementation grants are for communities that have developed measurable goals and a comprehensive plan to improve services for

children and families. Implementation grants must be used to provide direct services to children and families. Each collaborative is required to establish clear goals for addressing the health, developmental, educational and family-related needs of children and youth and use outcome-based indicators to measure progress toward achieving those goals. Fifty-one planning and implementation grants were awarded in 1994. Efforts in these communities will reach more than 80 percent of Minnesota children ages birth to 18.

■ Working with the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families to conduct a study of state-level governance options for children and family services. In an unprecedented example of collaboration between the executive and legislative branches, the Children's Cabinet and the commission agreed to fund a staff position to conduct the study. The study was completed in February 1994 and includes recommendations on core elements, functions and capacities of a state-level governance body.

Legislation passed in 1993 also requires several Children's Cabinet departments to report back to the Legislature in 1995 with a joint study on an integrated children's services data base. The plan defines a long-range vision and an approach that will set the direction for developing information resources to support systemic change in delivering services to Minnesota families and children. The Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families is working with state agencies on this study.

Preceding the drafting of legislation creating the collaborative grants, the

Children's Cabinet also provided leadership for Minnesota's intensive planning work for The Pew Charitable Trusts Children's Initiative. The Children's Cabinet was responsible for ensuring the completion of statewide planning activities and the preparation of the written application, *The Minnesota Children's Initiative: Implementation Planning Application to The Pew Charitable Trusts*. These efforts garnered a \$1.5 million grant to implement strategies designed to improve outcomes for children and families in four areas: improved child health, school readiness, child development and family functioning. Documentation prepared for The Trusts has been used extensively by communities around the state.

### Service Delivery Strategies

Strategies for reconfiguring service delivery focus on the child and the family. A reconfigured service delivery system will:

- Provide health, education and social services in ways that promote early identification and prevention of problems;
- Integrate and manage funding and other resources to achieve identified outcomes;
- Coordinate and integrate services and reduce fragmentation;
- Build on family and community strengths;
- Promote respect for all families and children; and
- Offer families service choices whenever possible.

The state can play a significant policy role by developing a vision and consistently reinforcing it through setting standards, helping to build capacity and providing incentives. The state can lay out the broad

outline for service strategy, but counties will choose the means of implementation.

In 1992, the Children's Cabinet, assisted by state agency staff, developed a set of service delivery principles to guide discussions when developing or evaluating programs and policies to ensure that they focus on the child and family. These principles include evidence of:

- family focus and involvement
- efficacy of approach (outcome data or proven strategies)
- cultural sensitivity and diversity, and an absence of bias and discrimination
- being community-based or having community involvement
- customer input into design, maintenance, evaluation and review
- a comprehensive approach that offers help in several areas or a planned way to link people to services
- appropriate intensity or length of time to achieve state goals
- accessibility
- providing for personal or public safety
- commitment to broad vision and goals

Analysis and testing of existing children's programs against these principles was part of the state agency budget development process in 1993.

The Children's Cabinet is also working with the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families to develop a family impact statement that will serve as an assessment tool to evaluate proposed legislation or policies and whether they adhere to family-support principles. Action for Children's Issues Committee and members of the Youth Advisory Council will use the assessment tool during the 1995

legislative session to examine bills as amendments are added or language is deleted.

### Budget

As part of its work, Action for Children's Service Delivery Committee attempted in 1991 to identify all state-funded programs administered by 33 different state agencies, commissions, boards or other organizations. During the 1993 budget cycle, the Children's Cabinet used this list as the basis for an integrated children's services budget. This required discussion and creation of service delivery principles and a set of standards by which priorities for funding could be made. This budget was further refined so that a more complete picture can be presented in future budget cycles. The Governor's budget for the next biennium again emphasizes the importance of the state's role in supporting children and families through an array of funding sources that can be integrated at the local level.

### Children's Agency Proposed

Underscoring Governor Carlson's commitment to children and families is his proposal to create a Department of Children and Education Services. The new department would replace the Department of Education and bring together policy coordination of programs that are scattered in several state agencies. The Governor first proposed this department in his 1993 State of the State speech, which was devoted almost entirely to children's issues. He renewed his call for creating a Children's Department in his 1995 State of the State Address.

The proposed department would help local communities work to meet the



challenging graduation standards that will be implemented next year. It also would be a resource to help local schools and communities solve problems.

### **Deepening the Collaborative Culture**

The work of the Children's Cabinet has shown that collaboration must become a fundamental part of each agency's mission and approach to working with families. Involving a wide array of stakeholders and diverse constituencies in systemic change efforts is critical to changing the way decisions are made. Ownership is established by involving stakeholders in decision-making about design, direction and implementation.

Minnesota is building a base for continued planning and implementation. A legislative agenda has been pursued that has created funding opportunities for local collaboratives to build comprehensive systems of services for children and families; enhanced the state's capacity to gain additional federal reimbursements and invest these funds in locally determined services; increased programmatic flexibility in critical services; and given greater authority to the Children's Cabinet and the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families.

Governor Carlson has a passionate understanding of the urgent need for the system and policy changes required to achieve successful outcomes for all of the state's children. Improving the lives and strengthening the opportunities for success of Minnesota's children has been the central organizing principle of his administration. The Governor views broad system change as an essential

element of his vision for improving the well-being of children and families.

Members of the Legislature, including members of the Legislative Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families, also have been key participants in the development of Minnesota's strategic plan for systemic change. Legislation passed in the last two years and the new funding for collaborative delivery of children's services at the local level provide strong evidence of the broad-based bipartisan support for Minnesota's children.

### **Promoting Changes in the Federal Role**

Federal requirements often restrict the ability to organize funding and service delivery consistently and logically. The federal government has the authority to waive specific regulations to make service delivery more responsive for children and families. Through its Washington, D.C., office, Minnesota is working closely with its congressional delegation to identify the need for change in how children's services are funded or required to be delivered. The Children's Cabinet will assist the Washington office in identifying Minnesota's federal priorities for children and family services.

### **Family Preservation and Family Support Services**

The Department of Human Services received federal funds (under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, subpart 2, Family Preservation and Support Services) to conduct a statewide community-based needs assessment to develop a comprehensive five-year state plan to strengthen the way

supports and services are provided for families. This legislation aims to promote family strength and stability, enhance parental function and protect children through providing family support and family preservation services. The grant represents an opportunity to assess and change state and local service delivery to be more responsive to needs of families.

As part of the needs assessment, a series of 75 focus groups and 25 town meetings is being held to gather information on which to base a comprehensive state plan for establishing a continuum of coordinated and integrated, culturally relevant, family-focused services for children and families. The goal of the plan is to achieve improved well-being for Minnesota's vulnerable children and families, particularly those who experience or are at risk of abuse and neglect. This plan must be submitted to the federal government by June 30, 1995.

Minnesota views the new federal legislation and direction as a unique opportunity to strengthen the way supports and services are provided for families. The state is committed to a thorough and inclusive planning process that reflects the diversity of families and communities served. The federal grant funds allows for the opportunity to provide statewide public education and awareness on the strengths and needs of families, and the importance of family support and family preservation services.

### **Providing Assistance to Communities**

A state-level Children's Interagency Technical Assistance Team was created by the Children's Cabinet in 1994 to develop a plan for providing

technical assistance to the family services collaborative grants communities. Since then, the team has gone on to work with other interagency teams and state agencies involved in systemic change through collaborative efforts. Its efforts reflect a shift in the state's role from monitoring to providing technical assistance to communities. New focus teams, comprised of state and local community representatives, are working together to respond to technical assistance requests in the areas of governance, service delivery, information management, evaluation, and funding and finance.

## **Next Steps**

Minnesota has undertaken major new initiatives in the past three years to demonstrate how it can improve the lives of its children on a broad scale. This work calls for the state and communities to adopt a new way of working with families, reshape service delivery systems and make the investments necessary to shift from a crisis-oriented, fragmented and inadequate approach to one of inclusion and effective supports for all children.

The Children's Cabinet has provided leadership in this arena since it was created in 1992. It has worked with citizens around the state to develop a vision, strategies and recommendations to achieve the vision, along with plans for implementing new processes to promote, support, protect, nurture and encourage the preservation of the family.