

Family Resource Center Overview

Background

In 2019, Dakota County Community Services and various community partners identified “one-stop shop” resource centers as a promising concept worth exploring further. Those discussions were paused during the pandemic but resumed in 2022 with a renewed focus on how co-locating various services could improve access and outcomes for county residents. Over the past several months, a One-Stop Shop Workgroup made up of county and community partners has met to define the concept further. This has included researching similar models across the country and conducting preliminary community engagement to define resource gaps.

Family Resource Centers

One model that has shown promise nationally is Family Resource Centers. According to the *National Family Support Network*, Family Resource Centers are community or school-based hubs of support and opportunities that reflect community needs and interests. Specific resources offered vary by community, but Family Resource Centers share some common goals, including:

- Supporting families to be strong, healthy, and successful
- Contributing to family economic success
- Reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect

Many states and counties across the country have invested in Family Resource Centers as a strategy for improving child and family wellbeing and reducing involvement in deep-end human services such as child protection. A study in Orange County, California found that Family Resource Centers provided a \$3.65 savings for the child welfare system for every dollar invested. A similar study in Teller County, Colorado found a 63% reduction in child abuse cases.

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) was recently awarded a grant from the Sauer Family Foundation to establish a network of Family Resource Centers in Minnesota. Dakota County’s One-Stop Shop Workgroup has identified Family Resource Centers as a model to explore further.

Community Engagement*

To inform development of a draft program design, community organizations participating in the one-stop shop workgroup conducted preliminary community engagement in the fall of 2022. Community feedback was gathered through surveys and community meetings, with a focus on identifying the most pressing resource gaps that Family Resource Centers could address. In total, 54 surveys were completed, and four community conversations hosted by partner organizations with an estimated 100+ attendees in total. The following are key themes from surveys and community conversations:

- Community members want better information about where to go for help and resources.
- A simplified system is desired where people don’t have to repeatedly tell their story or complete endless paperwork to receive support.
- People want support in ways and places that are culturally responsive.

- Transportation is a major challenge when seeking support, especially when resources are dispersed between multiple locations.

Many different resources were identified as gaps areas, but the following were the top five areas of greatest need based on surveys and community conversations:

- Health
- Education and training
- Childcare
- Housing
- Income

*Preliminary community engagement intended to inform initial program design. Additional community engagement and data collection will be needed if program development proceeds.

Draft Program Concept

Based on information gathered to date, the One-Stop Shop Workgroup has developed the following program concept for Family Resource Centers in Dakota County.

Who would be served? Target population would be children, youth, and families in Dakota County, especially those with greater likelihood of involvement with child protection, such as people of color, people experiencing poverty, etc. Though programming would be designed with this target population in mind, anyone could access resource centers.

What would be provided? Co-located services and culturally responsive “navigation” assistance to help families access support needed to be healthy and well.

Where would resource centers be located? 3 locations across the county as well as virtual options to support access for residents of various cities and communities; recommend focusing on geographic areas with greatest resource gaps which will require additional research, and piloting concept at existing partner site(s) first.

When would resource centers be open? Resource centers should have hours of availability that meet the needs of the families and communities they intend to serve; in the short-term, resource centers could be piloted 1 – 2 days per week with more limited daytime or evening hours, and expanded later based on feedback from the community.

How would resource centers work? Resource centers would be designed as welcoming hubs for families to build connections and get support. Various partners would provide services in areas identified as resource gaps. Examples may include low or no-cost primary care clinics, workforce training, childcare assistance, parenting support, housing support, or other services. Designated organizations would provide culturally responsive navigation assistance to help families access the

right resources to meet their needs. Family Resource Centers would be overseen by a Family Advisory Council which would provide leadership and oversight of the program. One organization (to be determined) would coordinate overall partner calendars and programming, including supporting the Family Advisory Council in its role.

Why is this important? Resource centers would be designed to support improved outcomes for children and families, such as:

- Reduced reports of child maltreatment or neglect
- Reduced instances of housing instability for families
- Families report improved health and wellbeing
- Improved educational outcomes for children (collaborating with schools and colleges)
- Increased family income and/or employment outcomes (providing community-based workforce solutions)

Next Steps

Dakota County and its partners are well positioned to pursue state or foundation funding to pilot the Family Resource Center concept, as those funds become available. Any pilot or program implementation would likely require some investment of county resources as well, though it isn't clear at this point whether that could be providing direct funding or in-kind support. County staff will continue to work with partners to refine the program concept and design, based on feedback from the County Board and other important stakeholders, and will bring forward potential funding opportunities for Board consideration as they become available.