

## Strengthening West Virginia's Children and Families



As Cabinet Secretary for DHHR, I have a passion for our state's children and am thankful for the services we provide through our Bureau for Children and Families. Child Protective Services and Youth Services Workers and Supervisors in West Virginia strive to protect children from harm, and at the same time, keep children with their parents and strengthen the family unit.

When that is not possible, children may be placed into foster care. West Virginia has approximately 4,000 children in foster care at any given time. Currently, more than 1,000 children are legally adoptable and are waiting for permanent and loving families. These children enter DHHR's custody when parents or guardians are unable to provide appropriate environments. They are in need of a family to provide as much support and normalcy as possible.

That is why we are determined to improve our child welfare system and serve our children in their home communities through the Safe at Home demonstration project. Safe at Home will provide West Virginia youth and their families the opportunity for safe, successful and healthy lives by providing wraparound services to children, family members, caregivers and foster parents to support them in developing and maintaining a stable and loving environment.

Currently we have six workgroups with more than 300 individuals across the state working toward our pilot implementation on October 1, 2015, in Berkeley, Boone, Cabell, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Mason, Morgan, Putnam and Wayne counties. The long-term goal is to serve all children in the state's 55 counties over the course of the next two years.

In addition, the Department is working to recruit more foster and adoptive parents through awareness events, social media and advertisements. I encourage all those interested in foster care and adoption opportunities, as well as progress with the Safe at Home project, to connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and [dhr.wv.gov](http://dhr.wv.gov).

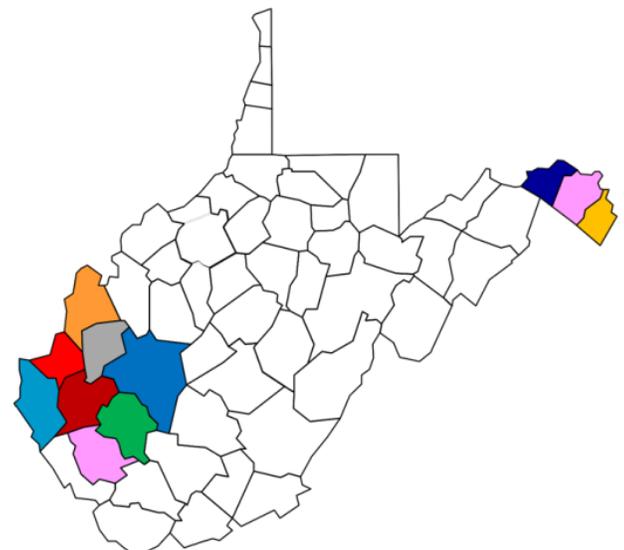
## Profile of the Safe at Home Demonstration Target Population

When the Safe at Home WV demonstration project begins this fall, it will target eleven counties in DHHR's Region II and part of Region III.

The Region II counties, Boone, Cabell, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Mason, Putnam and Wayne, were selected for this demonstration project due to their preparedness for initiating a fidelity wraparound model. Through past experience in Community Based Treatment (CBT), these counties have partnerships in place for successful wraparound services.

The Region III counties, Berkeley, Jefferson and Morgan, were selected to allow for the development of services in the eastern panhandle. These counties have a high number of children placed in out-of-state care due to their location on the borders of West Virginia.

"We believe that successfully creating infrastructure in the eastern panhandle for wraparound services will provide a model



*continued*

## PROFILE, continued

for the process to be replicated throughout the state,” explained Lisa McMullen, Project Director of Safe at Home West Virginia.

The Bureau of Children and Families, in partnership with the Regional Summits and Community Collaboratives, has been completing community needs assessments for the core wraparound services. The Collaboratives will use this information to determine what services need to be developed within their communities. A wraparound oversight committee will provide technical assistance and help with problem solving.

Youth chosen as Safe at Home demonstration project participants must be between the ages of 12-17; reside in one of the eleven selected counties; and be currently in or at risk of entering congregate care. The success of the wraparound model with these youth will strongly rely on the family engagement that DHHR social service staff, care coordinators and providers develop with the family. It is expected that these youth will have a much better rate of successful reunification into a family setting due to receiving wraparound services.

Safe at Home will provide many youth with the opportunity to receive quality treatment services within their own homes or foster home situations and will reinforce the values of the family system through empowerment of the youth and families.

## The Importance of Informal Services within a Community



“Informal resources are the "goodies" in a community that can be supportive to families, and that do not cost money to get. They occur both within a family and their friends and within communities.” (VanDenBerg, 2008)

Informal services play a large part in the success of a wraparound service model. These services fill in the gaps left by formal services and provide a safety net for times when formal services are unable to be in the home. Informal services can sometimes be more effective than formal because they are provided by people or organizations that have a vested interest in creating strong citizens for their community. By providing mentorship, values, tutoring and other needed investments in a child on a long-term basis, an informal service can help create lasting change.

Informal services can be provided by a variety of sources including churches, businesses, families, schools and sports programs. Churches often have youth leadership groups who work to mentor adolescents through their teenage years as well as provide safe and stable relationships that can last a lifetime. Businesses can be approached to purchase school supplies, computers or other items that might help the family’s wraparound plan be successful. Many schools require high school students to complete a number of volunteer hours to graduate, which could provide opportunities for tutoring and mentoring. Sports programs also can provide the opportunity for children to engage with peers, follow rules and help them understand how to behave within society.

Locating or developing informal services within communities starts with an assessment of the local community. Many services may already exist but are not utilized to their full potential. Most communities have a resource center such as the Family Resource Network that tracks services within their community. The goal of these agencies is to identify and advertise services within the community that can help families to identify and target areas of improvement, which can result in stronger communities.

Communication with local politicians and community leaders is also key to the development of informal supports within a community. Through collaboration, decision makers can provide guidance, which can be invaluable to the success of this demonstration project.

The development of informal services is essential to the Safe at Home WV demonstration project. Informal services can mean so much to so many - from helping create peer relations to simply having an after school program for children with working parents. In creating informal services, stronger children, stronger families and stronger communities are built.

VanDenBerg, J. (2008, January 3). Informal Resources. <http://cecp.air.org/wraparound/informal.html>

