

Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Services

Report on the 2002 survey of reporters

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Summary

Survey methods

The staff at Ramsey County Community Human Services was interested in learning more about the quality of child protection intake services. More specifically, they were interested in evaluating the screening process of their intake services hotline, and receiving feedback from those who use this hotline to report alleged cases of child maltreatment. Working with the staff at Wilder Research Center, county staff designed a sample telephone survey in order to assess reporters' opinions of the intake process.

Staff from Ramsey County and Wilder Research Center defined the criteria for inclusion in the survey by creating two separate samples for the mandated and non-mandated reporters who contacted the child protection hotline between September 9, 2002 and October 4, 2002. The survey center within Wilder Research Center conducted interviews with 84 percent of mandated reporters (108 of 128), and 75 percent of non-mandated reporters (43 of 57). The most significant barriers to completing interviews were issues related to contacting reporters by telephone (disconnected or wrong numbers, no phone, etc.), accounting for 85 percent of the incompletes in the mandated sample and 79 percent of the incompletes in the non-mandated sample.

Overall satisfaction

A clear majority of both mandated and non-mandated reporters were satisfied with Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Services, with over two-thirds of reporters from both samples indicating that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with how their reports were handled by intake screeners. While 61 percent of the reporters' cases were not accepted for investigation, this did not have a strongly negative effect on the reporters' perceptions of county intake services. In no case did a majority of respondents report a negative perception of the services they received.

In separate questions related to general satisfaction, reporters were asked whether or not they would be comfortable making another report if maltreatment was suspected again within the same family, or within a different family. In both instances and in both samples, the vast majority of reporters reported that they would indeed feel comfortable making another report. All but two reporters from the mandated sample and one reporter from the non-mandated sample reported that they would be comfortable reporting on a case in the same family, and only seven reporters (all from the non-mandated sample) indicated that they would not be comfortable making a report on a different family (16%).

Satisfaction with screening experience

Reporters from both samples gave the screening experience consistently high marks. Nearly all mandated reporters (95%) and most of the non-mandated reporters (82%) indicated that reaching a screener had been either “very easy” or “somewhat easy.” All but one of the reporters surveyed (150 out of 151) felt that the screener had treated them respectfully. Over four out of five mandated reporters (82%) and two out of three non-mandated reporters (67%) expressed agreement with the screeners’ decisions. The most commonly cited reasons for agreeing with the decision included acceptance that reporters must use the criteria they are given to make decisions, reporting that they had placed their calls primarily seeking advice or information, and explaining that the case had been relatively simple to assess.

Beyond simply agreeing or disagreeing with the screeners’ decisions, reporters gave screeners high marks for communication. All but nine reporters (94%) felt that the screener had adequately addressed their questions. For those whose cases were accepted for examination, a majority of reporters (71% of mandated reporters and 60% of non-mandated reporters) indicated that the screener had clearly described to them why the report had been accepted. A strong majority of mandated reporters (85%) and non-mandated reporters (91%) reported that the screener had clearly explained what would happen next. For those whose cases were not accepted, a large proportion of respondents from both samples (87% of mandated reporters and 71% of non-mandated reporters) indicated that the screener had clearly described the reasons for not accepting the report, with more than half of both mandated reporters (57%) and non-mandated reporters (60%) indicating that the screener had clearly described to them the steps they could take to make another report on the case in question.

Screening criteria

Out of all of the facets of the intake process, reporters were the most critical of the intake screening criteria itself, and understanding of the criteria varied considerably. Less than half of both mandated and non-mandated reporters (36% and 45% respectively) felt that the criteria for examination was “about right,” with the same proportion of non-mandated reporters (45%) and a considerably larger proportion of mandated reporters (54%) indicating that they felt the criteria were too restrictive. A relatively small proportion of both samples (7% of mandated reporters and 6% of non-mandated reporters) felt that the criteria were “not restrictive enough.”

A majority in both samples (85% of mandated reporters and 61% of non-mandated reporters) indicated that they had at least an “OK” understanding of the maltreatment criteria. Nearly three out of four mandated reporters and just over half of non-mandated

reporters indicated that they understood the reasons behind the screeners' decisions either "somewhat well" or "very well." Two mandated reporters (<2%), and nearly a quarter of non-mandated reporters (24%) indicated that they did not understand the criteria at all.

These levels of understanding may be partially explained by the degrees of exposure to the intake process in both cohorts. Just over half of mandated reporters (55%) indicated that they had received training by Ramsey County staff in the past five years regarding reporting possible cases of maltreatment. For the non-mandated reporters, the three most commonly cited ways that they knew to call the intake hotline were: the phone directory, experience as a mandated reporter, and referrals from other community agencies.

Suggested areas for improvement

There was no single area of improvement cited by either mandated or non-mandated reporters that emerged as an exceptionally prominent concern. In fact, when asked what they would improve about child protection intake services, the most common response was a non-response; 29 percent of mandated reporters and 40 percent of non-mandated reporters either indicated that they could not think of something that needed improvement, or that there was nothing about the process that needed to change. The most common suggestions from the mandated sample included modifying the acceptance criteria, having more intake workers on staff, and looking into more cases. For the non-mandated reporters, more communication and follow-up with the reporter, a more in-depth investigation, and modifying the criteria were the most commonly cited areas in need of improvement.

Collectively, the data also suggests that there may be needed improvements to communication in the intake department. Over half of non-mandated reporters and nearly a third of mandated reporters indicated that they had not received notification about the outcome of the investigation that resulted from their reports. Around a third of reporters whose cases had been accepted for investigation reported that their screeners had not clearly explained why the case had been accepted. Over a quarter of non-mandated reporters indicated that they did not believe that the screeners' decisions had been correct. These points suggest that some additional communication to the public concerning the child protection intake process may be warranted if fostering understanding of the child protection intake process in the community and for potential reporters is a goal of Ramsey County Community Human Services.

Background

How child protection screening works in Ramsey County

In Ramsey County, reports of potential child maltreatment are received through a central screening number. County staff-members called ‘Screeners’ receive the phone calls and faxes from those contacting the hotline – called ‘Reporters’ – to determine the nature of each call, and the allegations being made. Some reporters are required by law to report possible cases of child maltreatment based on their employment as professionals working directly with youth, including school officials and social workers. Reporters who are required to contact County Child Protection Services are referred to as ‘Mandated Reporters,’ those who are not required to do so are ‘Non-mandated Reporters.’ Reports based on hearsay are not acceptable, and anonymous reports from non-mandated reporters are permitted, but not encouraged. Without the name and contact information of reporters, no follow-up contact can be made, and the assessment process is complicated. By law, mandated reporters may not report anonymously.

During calls from reporters, screeners will decide whether or not to refer the case in question on to a Child Protection Intake Worker for a Child Protection Assessment – a more rigorous examination and determination of maltreatment. The criteria employed by Ramsey County screeners in making these decisions are designed to comply with Minnesota Statute 626.556, Subd. 10, and are described in the section that follows. For reporters who provide insufficient information about the case in question, or who are seeking information about how to make a report, screeners will advise the reporters on the steps that he or she can take to make a subsequent referral and increase the likelihood that the report will be accepted for assessment. It is this initial screening and intake process that forms the focus of this evaluation.

Beyond the scope of what is covered in this evaluation, County Child Protection workers respond to cases that meet the eligibility criteria in a variety of ways. Initially, all cases that meet these criteria will receive an assessment, which includes three components: A Safety Assessment, which evaluates the individual child’s current safety; a Risk Assessment, which ascertains the level of risk to the child in the future; and a Family Strengths assessment, which determines how assets within the child’s family can be used to promote a positive end result. County staff has 45 days to make a formal determination of maltreatment and up to 90 days to conclude the assessment, with most assessments completed within 50 to 55 days.

During the assessment period, both Ramsey County staff and outside agencies under contract to the county may provide a wide variety of services. If the determination is

made that the family will need ongoing services to assure the safety of the child, the case will be referred to a Child Protection unit. Generally speaking, these cases will be families in which the risk of maltreatment remains high, and where multiple service-needs exist concurrently. Child Protection cases will generally receive 12 to 15 months of service, with the eventual goal being either to maintain the child in his or her home safely or to establish an alternate permanent family living situation if placement in the home is not a reasonable option.

Child protection intake screening criteria

As mentioned above, Ramsey County Child Protection Intake screeners use criteria specified by statute to determine which reported cases are accepted for further examination by county Child Protection Intake staff. Reports are assessed solely on referrals concerning persons with a significant relationship with the child in question, principally by blood, marriage, or adoption. This includes family members of all kinds, persons who live intermittently or regularly in the child's household, and those performing a caretaking role for the child (e.g. daycare providers, foster parents, etc.). Reports for persons with a significant relationship with the child in question are assessed when a case of child abuse or child neglect is alleged within the past three years. In brief, cases are assessed by the following criteria for child abuse, child neglect, and other circumstances of concern, all of which can be found in greater detail at the Ramsey County Community Human Services website [www.co.ramsey.mn.us/hs/screening.asp].

■ Child abuse

Physical abuse – Defined generally as an intentional act resulting in either a visible injury or an injury diagnosed by a physician.

Threatened physical abuse – "...a statement, overt act, condition, or status that represents a substantial risk of abuse or mental injury."

Sexual abuse – Defined by the minimum threshold of "some intentional touching of the victim's breasts, buttocks, inner thighs, groin, or primary genital area (or victim touching the perpetrator) through the clothing," and encompassing several forms of inappropriate contact beyond that threshold.

Threatened sexual abuse – Exposure to adult sexual activity, sexually intrusive behaviors, or invasions of privacy.

Failure to thrive – Defined as either a physician's diagnosis of Failure to Thrive due to parental deprivation – "inadequate caloric intake with non-organic cause" – or a nurse's determination of a child being under the 5th percentile in weight and growth.

Mental injury – “An injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of a child as evidenced by an observable or substantial impairment in the child’s ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior with due regard to the child’s culture.”

- Child neglect – “A parent, guardian, or caretaker’s failure, whether intentional or unintentional, to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, education and supervision, thus causing harm or threat of harm to the child’s health, safety, development, or education.” Child neglect also encompasses any alleged cases of illegal placement and prenatal exposure to controlled substances.
- Other – Cases will also be assessed by intake screeners in instances of children with severe handicaps, non-familial juvenile perpetrators of sexual offenses, minor mothers, and severely emotionally disturbed children.

Evaluation design

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to gain feedback from people who have contacted the Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Screeners to report a potential incident of child maltreatment. The study was created and designed in order to understand more about reporters' perceptions of county child protection intake services, including:

- Overall satisfaction with the reporting procedure.
- Satisfaction with the performance of screeners.
- Perceptions of the adequacy of criteria for accepting maltreatment reports for investigation.
- Depth of understanding of the child protection process.
- Suggested improvements in child protection intake services.

Method

Staff from Ramsey County and Wilder Research Center defined the criteria for inclusion in the population list for the reporter follow-up interviews. It was determined that interviews would be attempted from two separate samples of mandated and non-mandated reporters who contacted the child protection hotline between September 9, 2002 and October 4, 2002. At previously specified times, Ramsey County Screeners asked reporters who called in whether they would grant their permission to be included in a study. Wilder Research Center received the names of 128 mandated reporters, and 57 non-mandated reporters. An interview schedule was developed by representatives from Ramsey County as well as the staff of Wilder Research Center. Respondents were informed when contacted by telephone that their responses were confidential and that their names would not be connected to their responses.

Wilder Research Center staff conducted interviews between October 2002 and December 2002. Interviews were completed with 108 of the 128 eligible mandated reporters, for a response rate of 84 percent. Of the 20 clients that did not participate, 17 were inaccessible due to issues contacting them by telephone (disconnected or wrong numbers, no phone, etc.). Three clients refused to complete the interview, including one passive refusal (meaning that he or she was contacted numerous times and did not complete the interview). The initial sample size for mandated reporters was slightly larger than 128

participants, but this list included some duplicate cases, which were taken out of the sample. For the non-mandated reporter sample, interviews were completed with 43 of the 57 eligible reporters, for a response rate of 75 percent. Of the 14 clients that did not participate, 11 were inaccessible due to issues contacting them by telephone (disconnected or wrong numbers, no phone, etc.), and three clients refused to complete the interview.

1. Response rates for reporter interview

	Mandated	Non-mandated	Overall
Completed	108 (84%)	43 (75%)	151 (82%)
Refused	2 (2%)	3 (5%)	5 (3%)
Passive refusal (multiple contacts – no completion)	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)	1 (<1%)
Unable to contact, disconnected or no phone	17 (13%)	11 (19%)	28 (15%)
Total	128 (100%)	57 (100%)	185 (100%)

Survey results

Experience working with screeners

Virtually all mandated reporters (95%), and a clear majority of non-mandated reporters (82%) found the process of reaching a screener in order to report an incident of suspected maltreatment at least “somewhat easy,” with over half of both mandated (68%) and non-mandated reporters (54%) describing the process as “very easy.” Conversely, five mandated reporters (5%) and 8 non-mandated reporters (19%) rated the process of reaching a screener by phone as either “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult.”

2. Reporter’s rating the ease of the process of reaching a screener to report suspected maltreatment

“How easy or difficult was it for you to reach a screener on the phone to report this incident of suspected maltreatment?” N=151	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very easy	73	68%	23	54%	96	64%
Somewhat easy	30	28%	12	28%	42	28%
Somewhat difficult	3	3%	8	19%	11	7%
Very difficult	2	2%	0	0%	2	1%
Total	108	100%	43	100%	151	100%

For this sample, 30 percent of reported cases were accepted for assignment to a caseworker for investigation, with the rate being slightly higher for mandated reporters (31%) and slightly lower for non-mandated reporters (26%). A notable minority in both cohorts – 7 percent of mandated reporters, and 12 percent of non-mandated reporters – were not aware of the disposition of the reported case.

3. Dispositions of reported cases

“Did the screener accept your report for assignment to a caseworker for investigation?” N=150	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	34	31%	11	26%	45	30%
No	66	61%	26	62%	92	61%
Don’t know	8	7%	5	12%	13	9%
Total	108	100%	42	100%	150	100%

For those whose cases were accepted for assessment, roughly two-thirds of respondents from both cohorts combined (68%) indicated that the screener had clearly explained why he or she had accepted the case, and a greater majority (87%) reported that the screener had explained to them what would happen next. The majority of mandated reporters (62%) and 5 out of 11 non-mandated reporters had heard back from screeners about the outcome of the investigation, most typically either in written form or by phone.

4. Reporter's rating of descriptions provided by screeners to explain case disposition

"Did the screener clearly describe to you why he or she accepted your report for investigation?" N=44	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	24	71%	6	60%	30	68%
No	10	29%	4	40%	14	32%
Total	34	100%	10	100%	44	100%

5. Perceptions of the clarity of the screener's descriptions of what would happen next

"Did the screener clearly explain what would happen next?" N=45	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	29	85%	10	91%	39	87%
No	5	15%	1	9%	6	13%
Total	34	100%	11	100%	45	100%

6. Notification of disposition of reported cases

"Did you receive notification about the outcome of that investigation?" N=43	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	21	62%	5	45%	26	58%
No	11	32%	6	55%	17	38%
Don't know	2	6%	0	0%	2	4%
Total	34	100%	11	100%	45	100%

7. Forms of notification for reporters of case disposition

"How did you receive this information?" N=26	Mandated		Non-mandated		Overall	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
In written form	14	87%	1	14%	15	83%
By phone call from a caseworker	12	75%	3	43%	15	83%
Face-to-face contact with a case worker	3	19%	0	0%	3	19%
OTHER - Had to call the case worker	0	0%	1	14%	1	6%
OTHER - By phone call from the screener	1	6%	0	0%	1	6%

Note. The totals from these columns exceed the number of respondents, as a small number of mandated reporters received the information in multiple ways.

For those whose cases were not accepted for assessment, 87 percent of mandated reporters and 71 percent of non-mandated reporters indicated that the screener had explained why the case would not be accepted. As a follow-up question, these respondents were asked if the screener had clearly described the steps the reporter could take to make another report on the same family, and roughly 58 percent of both cohorts reported that he or she had done so.

8. Perception of the clarity of the screeners' explanation of the case disposition

"Did the screener clearly describe to you why he or she did not accept your report for investigation?" N=87	Mandated		Non-mandated		Overall	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	55	87%	17	71%	72	83%
No	8	13%	7	29%	15	17%
Total	63	100%	24	100%	87	100%

9. Perception of the clarity of the screeners' description of how another report could be filed on the same family

"Did the screener clearly describe to you the steps you can take to make a second report on this child or family?" N=85	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	34	57%	15	60%	49	58%
No	26	43%	10	40%	36	42%
Total	60	100%	25	100%	85	100%

When asked whether or not the screener had adequately addressed any questions that the reporter may or may not have had, 96 percent of mandated reporters and 88 percent of non-mandated reporters indicated that their questions had been addressed. In a separate question, all but one of reporters indicated that the screener had treated them respectfully. The only respondent who indicated that he or she had not been treated respectfully by the screener was a non-mandated reporter.

10. Rating of caliber of answers provided by screeners to their questions

“Did the screener adequately address any questions you may have asked?” N=147	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	103	96%	35	88%	138	94%
No	4	4%	5	13%	9	6%
Total	107	100%	40	100%	147	100%

11. Reporter’s determination of whether or not they were treated respectfully by their screener

“Did the screener treat you respectfully?” N=151	Number
Yes	150
No	1
Total	151

Perceptions of screener’s decision

When asked whether or not they believed that the decision that the screener made was correct, 82 percent of mandated reporters and 67 percent of non-mandated reporters replied that they agreed with the decision. Open-ended follow-up questions were asked to see why respondents did and did not agree with the screeners’ decisions. The most commonly cited reasons for agreeing with the screener’s decision were that the screener made the decision based on the assessment criteria, and that he or she had principally called seeking advice or information. Mandated reporters also frequently cited that the case was believable (for cases that were accepted for assessment), it was the correct decision based on the situation, and that there was not enough evidence to support the case (for cases that were not accepted). Responses that were mentioned multiple times in both cohorts for not agreeing with the screener’s decision included: the severity of the

case warranted further examination, the criteria were inadequate, and that there was no follow-up on the case.

12. Reporter’s agreement or disagreement with decision made by screener

“Do you believe the decision the screener made was the right one?” N=148	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	86	82%	29	67%	115	78%
No	9	9%	12	28%	21	14%
Don’t know	10	10%	2	5%	12	8%
Total	105	100%	43	100%	148	100%

13. Reporters’ reasons for agreeing with the decision made by screeners

Most frequent responses to open-ended question, grouped by theme N=112 respondents	Mandated (n=86) Number	Non-mandated (n=26) Number
Screeners make decisions based on their guidelines	18	9
Called seeking information/advice	18	7
The case was believable/abuse was obvious/ it was a crisis	16	2
Correct decision based on the situation	11	4
Not enough, or only circumstantial evidence	8	2
Called to clarify what the criteria are	7	-
Called to document the case, in order to build a case later on	6	-
There was a history in this home	5	1
Screeners make the right decisions, in general	4	1
The process became unnecessary/there was a misunderstanding	2	2
Total	95	28

14. Reporters' reasons for disagreeing with the decision made by screeners

Most frequent responses to open-ended question, grouped by theme	Mandated (n=8) Number	Non-mandated (n=11) Number
Severity of case warranted further examination	4	2
Criteria were inadequate	3	3
Nothing was done/there was no follow-up	3	7
Disagree with decision, but understand that the screener was just doing his/her job	1	1
Too much time lapsed between call and investigation	-	2
Total	11	15

Reporter perceptions of process and criteria

In order to determine the level of familiarity with the intake process, mandated reporters were asked whether or not they had been provided with any training by Ramsey County staff in the past five years regarding the reporting process – just over half (55%) reported that they had received some training. Towards a similar end, non-mandated reporters were asked how they had come to know about the Intake Hotline. The most common responses were: previous experience as a mandated reporter, a referral from another government agency, and the phone directory.

15. Number of mandated reporters who have received child maltreatment reporting training from Ramsey County in the past five years

“In the last five years, have you been provided with any training by Ramsey County staff regarding reporting possible child maltreatment?” N=107	Number	Percent
Yes	59	55%
No	48	45%
Total	107	100%

16. Methods of exposure to the Intake Hotline for non-mandated reporters

“How did you know to call the Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Hotline?” N=43	Number
Phone directory	13
OTHER – Previous experience/knowledge – Am/Was mandated reporter	13
Referred by other community agency	11
A friend, relative or neighbor	6
OTHER – Government agency	3
OTHER – Miscellaneous	5
Referred by First Call for Help	0
Overall	51

Note. Respondents could give more than one response.

When asked how well they understood the reasoning behind accepting some maltreatment reports and not others, roughly three-quarters of mandated reporters (74%) and just over half of non-mandated reporters (54%) replied that they understood the criteria at least ‘somewhat well.’ One out of four non-mandated reporters (24%) indicated that they did not understand the criteria at all. In a separate question, reporters were asked their opinions of the eligibility criteria. Just over half of all respondents (52%) indicated that the criteria was not inclusive enough, 38 percent felt that the criteria are about right, and five out of 137 of all reporters (4%) felt that the criteria were not restrictive enough.

17. Reporter’s depth of knowledge of maltreatment determination criteria

“How well do you understand the reasons why Ramsey County Child Protection accepts some maltreatment reports for investigation and does not accept other maltreatment reports for investigation?” N=149	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very well	43	40%	14	34%	57	38%
Somewhat well	37	34%	8	20%	45	30%
OK	12	11%	3	7%	15	10%
Not very well	14	13%	6	15%	20	13%
Do you not understand this at all	2	2%	10	24%	12	8%
Total	108	100%	41	100%	149	100%

18. Reporter’s perceptions of maltreatment determination criteria

“Based on your understanding of the reasons for accepting reports for investigation, do you feel these reasons are...” N=137	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Too restrictive: the county does not take cases it should take	57	54%	14	45%	71	52%
About right	38	36%	14	45%	52	38%
Not restrictive enough: the county takes cases that it does not need to take	4	4%	1	3%	5	4%
Don’t know	7	7%	2	6%	9	7%
Total	106	100%	31	100%	137	100%

Reporter satisfaction

A clear majority of both mandated and non-mandated reporters – 89 percent and 66 percent, respectively – described themselves as either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with how their reports were handled by intake screeners. Roughly half of both cohorts (54% of mandated reporters, and 50% of non-mandated reporters) described themselves as “very satisfied.” However, satisfaction was notably less universal with non-mandated reporters, with roughly one third of respondents (35%) describing their satisfaction as being either neutral or worse, compared with only 11% of mandated reporters in that range.

19. Reporters’ overall satisfaction with the screeners’ handling of their report

“Overall, how satisfied with out with how this report was handled by the screener?” N=149	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very satisfied	57	54%	21	50%	78	52%
Satisfied	37	35%	7	16%	44	30%
Neutral	8	8%	7	16%	15	10%
Dissatisfied	3	3%	5	12%	8	5%
Very dissatisfied	1	1%	3	7%	4	3%
Total	106	100%	43	100%	149	100%

Measuring the reporters’ levels of comfort with the intake process from a different angle, almost all mandated and non-mandated reporters (98%) indicated that they would feel comfortable making another report on the same family if maltreatment was suspected again. In response to a similar question, this time asking whether the reporter would feel comfortable reporting a suspected case of maltreatment in a different family, all of the

mandated reporters (100%) and most of the non-mandated respondents (84%) indicated that they would feel comfortable. Seven non-mandated respondents (16%) either said that they would not feel comfortable, or did not know whether or not they would feel comfortable.

20. Reporter’s comfort level with the possibility of reporting a similar situation in the same family

“Would you feel comfortable making another report on the same family, if you suspected a child was being mistreated?” N=149	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	105	98%	41	98%	146	98%
No	2	2%	1	2%	3	2%
Total	107	100%	42	100%	149	100%

21. Reporter’s comfort level with the possibility of reporting a similar situation in a different family

“Would you feel comfortable making another report on a different family, if you suspected a child was being mistreated?” N=150	Mandated		Non-mandated		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	107	100%	36	84%	143	95%
No	0	0%	3	7%	3	2%
Don’t know	0	0%	4	9%	4	3%
Total	107	100%	43	100%	150	100%

Suggested improvements

When asked in an open-ended question how they would improve Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Services, the responses of both mandated and non-mandated reporters varied considerably, with no individual suggestion being cited by more than 15 percent of the respondents from both cohorts. The most common response to this question was, in fact, a non-response: 31 out of 108 mandated reporters (29%) and 17 out of 43 non-mandated reporters (40%) mentioned either that there was nothing they could think of to improve upon, or that there was nothing that needed to be changed. The most common suggestions from the mandated reporters included: to modify or expand the eligibility criteria, which was cited by 17 respondents, to have a larger staff (13 respondents), to look into more cases (11 respondents), to receive more funding and/or have more resources (11 respondents), and to do more marketing of child protection services (10 respondents). The most common responses from non-mandated reporters were more

communication or follow-up with the reporter (8 respondents), a more in-depth investigation (6 respondents), and to loosen or modify the acceptance criteria (5 respondents).

Responses coded as ‘Other’ in the following table from the mandated reporters included individual requests for: more bilingual workers and interpreters, less subjectivity in the screening process, emphasizing the importance of each call to the screeners, articulating the criteria more clearly, collecting more collateral information, letting people who are willing to help get involved, and continuing to train community members. From the non-mandated reporters, the responses coded as ‘Other’ included: re-evaluating the entire intake process, making the reporting process as anonymous as possible, emphasizing the importance of each call to the screener, and letting people who are willing to help get involved.

22. Reporters’ suggestions for improving Ramsey County Intake Services

Most frequent responses to open-ended question, grouped by theme	Mandated (n=108) Number	Non-mandated (n=43) Number	Total (n=151) Number
Loosen or modify the acceptance criteria	17	5	22
More intake workers	13	4	17
Look into more cases	11	3	14
More funding/resources	11	-	11
More marketing	10	1	11
Investigation should be more in-depth (e.g. a conversation with the child)	8	6	14
Investigate all reports	8	4	12
More communication/follow-up with reporter (e.g. tell them what’s going on)	7	8	15
Look at cases individually	6	3	9
Document all calls that have been made	5	-	5
Increase access to screeners/intake hotline	4	2	6
Decrease lag-time between getting case from screener to case manager	3	2	5
More professional, knowledgeable staff	3	1	4
More trainings for mandated reporters	3	-	3
Look into alternative solutions (other than anger management)	2	1	3
Other	8	6	14
Nothing/don’t know/can’t think of anything	31	17	48
Total	150	63	213

Conclusion

Overall, these results show a consistently high degree of satisfaction with screeners and the screening process for most reporters who contacted Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Services. Over two-thirds of both mandated and non-mandated reporters indicated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with how their reports were handled by intake screeners, and a strong majority of respondents reported that they would be comfortable making another report in the future.

This generally high degree of satisfaction with the intake experience aside, there are indications that more outreach and communication may be necessary for reporters to more fully understand the intake process. The reasons behind the screener’s decision were not explained to roughly a third of reporters whose cases were accepted for investigation, more than half of non-mandated reporters and one third of mandated reporters did not receive notification of the disposition of their reported cases, and nearly a quarter of all reporters either did not agree with the decision of the screener, or did not know whether they agreed or not. These findings suggest that increased communication with reporters and the public in general about the dynamics of the child protection intake process may positively affect reporters’ experiences.

The most common criticism of the screening experience offered by reporters concerned the screening criteria itself; roughly half of both mandated and non-mandated reporters indicated that they felt the maltreatment criteria were too restrictive. Although the maltreatment criteria are largely determined by statute (and therefore not open to significant interpretation or modification by Ramsey County staff), the concerns voiced are important and may provide valuable information that may help in fine-tuning the first step in the child protection process.

Appendix

Survey of reporters

Survey of reporters

CASE ID #: _____

**Ramsey County
Child Protection Intake Survey
Survey of Reporters**

Organization Code: 116-14

INTRODUCTION: Hi my name is _____ and I'm calling from Wilder Research Center. May I speak to: _____ [R].

[IF INFORMANT ASKS, WHAT PHONE CALL IS ABOUT, SAY, "We are calling about a program evaluation."

IF R NOT HOME, "When would be a good time to call back?"

ONCE R IS ON PHONE, SAY:

We are conducting follow-up interviews with people who have contacted the Ramsey County Child Protection Screeners during the past few months to report a potential child abuse and/or neglect incident. Because of your recent call, we would like to speak with you about how you feel the call was handled and any thoughts or concerns you have about the safety of children and the role of Child Protection. This study is confidential. No names will be reported with the results of this study, and your answers will be combined with the answers of others and reported in aggregate format. Would you have a few minutes now to take part in the study?

IF YES: We will not be asking any questions about the individuals involved in your report. Instead, we are interested in understanding more about how well the screening process works.

IF NO: Would there be a better time to call?
Date: _____ Time: _____

IF REFUSED: Is there any particular reason why you would prefer not to take part in this study?

CASE ID #: _____

Time: _____
(24 hour clock)

**Ramsey County
Child Protection Intake Survey
Survey of Reporters**

These questions are about your views of the conversation you had with the Child Protection screener during your most recent report. The screener is the person you would have talked to when you first called 266-4500 to report child abuse or neglect. Based on the information you provided in that call, and on their understanding of the requirements for accepting a report, the screener would decide if the report could be accepted for investigation.

1. How easy or difficult was it for you to reach a screener on the phone to report this incident of suspected maltreatment? Was it...
- Very easy,1
 - Somewhat easy,2
 - Somewhat difficult, or3
 - Very difficult?4
 - Refused7
 - Don't know8
2. Did the screener accept your report for assignment to a caseworker for investigation?
- Yes (GO TO Q. 5).....1
 - No.....2
 - Refused (GO TO Q. 7).....7
 - Don't know (GO TO Q. 7).....8

[IF NO...]

3. Did the screener clearly describe to you why he or she did not accept your report for investigation? (PROBE: Did the screener explain the criteria on which their decision was based?)
- Yes1
 - No.....2
 - Refused7
 - Don't know8

4. Did the screener clearly describe to you the steps you can take to make a second report on this child or family?
- Yes (GO TO Q. 7)..... 1
- No..... (GO TO Q. 7)..... 2
- Refused (GO TO Q. 7)..... 7
- Don't know (GO TO Q. 7)..... 8

[IF YES TO Q. 2...]

5. Did the screener clearly describe to you why he or she accepted your report for investigation?
(PROBE: Did the screener explain the criteria on which their decision was based?)
- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

6. Did the screener clearly explain what would happen next?
- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

7. Did the screener adequately address any questions you may have asked?
- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8
- Not applicable 9

8. Did the screener treat you respectfully?
- Yes (GO TO Q. 10)..... 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

9. Could you tell me more about why you felt this way? (PROBE: What did the screener say to make you feel this way?)

Refused7
Don't know8

10. Do you believe the decision the screener made was the right one?

Yes1
No.....2
Refused7
Don't know8

11. Why or why not?

Refused7
Don't know8

12. Did you receive notification about the outcome of that investigation? For example, did you hear whether the maltreatment was determined or not determined?

Yes1
No.....(GO TO Q. 14).....2
Refused(GO TO Q. 14).....7
Don't know(GO TO Q. 14).....8

13. How did you receive this information?

	Yes	No	Ref	DK	NA
a. In written form	1	2	7	8	9
b. By phone call from a caseworker	1	2	7	8	9
c. Face-to-face contact with a caseworker	1	2	7	8	9
d. Other? (SPECIFY: _____ _____)	1	2	7	8	9

14. Overall, how satisfied are you with how this report was handled by the screener? Would you say...

- Very satisfied, 1
- Satisfied,..... 2
- Neutral,..... 3
- Dissatisfied, or 4
- Very dissatisfied?..... 5
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

15. Would you feel comfortable making another report on the same family, if you suspected a child was being mistreated?

- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

16. Would you feel comfortable making another report on a different family, if you suspected a child was being mistreated?

- Yes 1
- No..... 2
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

[INTERVIEWER CHECK FACE SHEET TO SEE IF THE RESPONDENT IS A MANDATED REPORTER:]

IF YES, ASK Q. 17

IF NO, ASK Q. 18.

17. In the last five years, have you been provided with any training by Ramsey County staff regarding reporting possible child maltreatment?

- Yes(GO TO Q. 19).....1
- No.....(GO TO Q. 19).....2
- Refused(GO TO Q. 19).....7
- Don't know(GO TO Q. 19).....8

[FOR NON-MANDATED REPORTS, ASK:]

18. How did you know to call the Ramsey County Child Protection Intake Hotline? (CIRCLE ALL APPROPRIATE RESPONSE CATEGORIES)

	Yes	No	Ref	DK	NA
a. Phone directory	1	2	7	8	9
b. Referred by First Call for Help	1	2	7	8	9
c. Referred by other community agency	1	2	7	8	9
d. A friend, relative or neighbor	1	2	7	8	9
e. Other? (SPECIFY: _____ _____)	1	2	7	8	9

[FOR ALL:]

19. How well do you understand the reasons why Ramsey County Child Protection accepts some maltreatment reports for investigation and does not accept other maltreatment reports for investigation? Would you say...

- Very well,.....1
- Somewhat well,.....2
- OK,.....3
- Not very well, or4
- Do you not understand this at all?.....(GO TO Q. 21).....5
- Refused(GO TO Q. 21).....7
- Don't know(GO TO Q. 21).....8

20. Based on your understanding of the reasons for accepting reports for investigation, do you feel these reasons are...

- Too restrictive: the county does not take cases it should take, 1
- About right, or..... 2
- Not restrictive enough: the county takes cases that it does not need to take? 3
- Refused 7
- Don't know 8

21. In what ways do you think Ramsey County can improve its Child Protection screening process?

22. Do you have any other comments about Ramsey County Child Protection screening?

Thank you for your time, that is all the questions we have.