

LOCALNEWS

Voluntary program intended to assist families

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Koochiching County social workers often get calls reporting concerns about the welfare of children living with family, friends and neighbors.

But some of those calls about children don't meet established criteria that allow for county intervention, said Terry Murray, director of Koochiching County Community Services.

"A lot of times we think there could be help provided to the families, but by federal and state statute, we're not able to," he said.

A new state initiative, Parent Support Outreach Program, will allow county staff to assist some families to avert future concerns that may avoid further intervention in the future.

"This is giving counties the opportunity to pursue these cases to provide parent support," he said of the program. "Now, when there are cases that people are concerned about we can go out and help with this program and give help to families to help keep their children at home and help raise their children," he said.

While the PSOP has not yet been implemented in Koochiching County, Murray said staff are very excited about its potential to keep families together and on the right track.

Murray said participation the program is voluntary. And that's important because some people feel like any kind of government assistance is an intrusion into their private lives. He said families who choose not to participate don't have to, but he said in other areas where the program has already been implemented half of fami-

lies offered the program took the opportunity.

"This is a positive thing," he said. "Human services is often looked at like we come when we react to a problem. We're not proactive and provide services to help. This is another program that's out to help families and not wait until it's too late and we have to remove children for one reason or another."

The Minnesota Department of Human Services will provide \$17,000 to the county for its participation, he said. And while that may not seem like a lot, he said it allows his agency to access other funding streams. The money will be used to fund a full-time child protection social worker. Murray said at one time his agency employed six child protection workers, and is now at two. While contracting some of the work out to a local service provider helped, the additional staff member will help the agency to keep up with its case loads and implement the program.

The PSOP may help to reduce future case loads by heading off family issues before they require the county's full attention, he said. In some cases, it's not unusual for his office to get reports of concern about a child on a daily basis.

Participation in the program may also allow families to tap into a "flex account" to meet costs associated with school supply needs, groceries, rent and utilities. He said that may serve as an incentive for some struggling families to participate in the program.

"This will do nothing but help us," he said of the program.

Murray recently provided the following material about the program to the Koochiching County Board.

The Parent Support Outreach Program helps families in many ways including:

■ Helps families build connections with relatives, friends and community members.

■ Supports families in their efforts to provide healthy, nurturing homes free of abuse and neglect.

■ Uses limited funds in creative ways to best meet families' needs.

■ Gives workers access to a flexible fund to help families meet their needs, sure as utility and rental assistance, car repairs, clothing and grocery vouchers, and school supplies.

■ Provides funds for therapeutic services such as in-home family counseling, or parent education, or helps pay for outpatient counseling or chemical dependency treatment.

■ Helps families pay for after-school programs for children, gym memberships, child care costs, family recreational opportunities, or other services that enhance child and family well-being.

Families are eligible if they:

■ Have two or more risks associated with child abuse and neglect.

■ Are responsible for the care of at least one child age 10 or younger.

Risk factors include but are not limited to:

■ Substance abuse

■ Domestic violence

■ Behavioral health concerns for parents and children

■ Past history of abuse or neglect

■ Homelessness

■ Most referrals for the program come from:

■ Screened-out child maltreatment reports

■ Self-referrals by parent or guardian

■ Community referrals

HEADING TO VEGAS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Local couple AJ and Courtney Knutson recently won a \$500 trip contest from BringMeTheNews, a Minnesota news story aggregator started by Rick Kupchella. They picked Las Vegas because it's the best trip for the money, Courtney said, and they hope to go by the end of May, before it gets too hot in Las Vegas. They were married in September, and plans for a honeymoon fell through after AJ lost his job at the local paper mill. On their trip, Courtney said, "we're going to walk The Strip, see a Cirque du Soleil show, see the Grand Canyon and the Hoover Dam."

MPCA seeks lake ice data

MPCA STAFF REPORT

Though it seems this harsh winter will never end, the big spring thaw has arrived across much of Minnesota. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is asking citizens to document one of the most important indicators of spring for our state — the date on which ice disappears from a lake, or lake ice-off.

Lake ice-off is an important milestone for the state each year, particularly for anglers and water enthusiasts who've been waiting all winter to launch their crafts — and themselves — into the water again. But lake ice data — the dates of both its appearance and disappearance — could

also be an indicator of changing climate trends. The MPCA collects ice-on and ice-off data and makes it available to researchers and the Department of Natural Resources' State Climatology Office. The more data available to researchers, the better they can track climate trends and their effects on lake health, local wildlife, and citizen lake use. Citizen observers make it possible to maintain records of ice data across the state on a huge numbers of lakes.

The MPCA defines ice-off as the date when ice is essentially gone from the lake. If there is some ice pushed up on shore, but the water is ice-free, the ice is considered to be out. Normally, lakes do not refreeze

in the spring once the ice has gone, but if ice does form again after the majority of it has melted, record both dates of ice-on and ice-off for the spring. The most important thing is for the observer to document their own perception of ice-off for the lake in question. For one observer, that might mean the ability to navigate a boat from one point to another; for another, it might mean that a lake is ice-free as far as they can see from their house. It is, however, critical for each observer to use consistent criteria from year to year.

All ice-off dates, any clarifying definitions, and questions can be emailed directly to the MPCA's ice data collection program at ice.pca@state.mn.us.

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Maternal Great Grandfather: **John Morrison**

Paternal Grandparents: **Dave & Joanne Amerud**

Paternal Great Grandparents: **Gordon Amerud & Jan Turban**

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