



**Respite Care Association of Wisconsin (RCAW)**  
**Focus Group Summary Report**  
**June 8, 2021**

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## **Project Overview, Design, Objectives**

In an effort to explore potential strategies to provide caregiver support for individuals and families caring for abused and at-risk children in Wisconsin, the Respite Care Association of Wisconsin (RCAW) and the University of Wisconsin (UW) Oshkosh, Center for Community Development, Engagement and Training (CCDET), recently collaborated to design a forum to gather input from individuals currently working in the respite care industry in this state.

Specifically the project sought to solicit professional expertise and insights to identify gaps and needs related to how respite care can support families in crisis. The ultimate objective was to cultivate specific ideas on program development dedicated to families in crisis to minimize the impact on children at risk of abuse or neglect.

To accomplish this, UW Oshkosh CCDET designed and implement two virtual focus group sessions intended to identify needs, wants and concerns and to brainstorm specific ways to provide support. The focus groups would accommodate up to 20 participants per session.

The target audience for the focus group sessions was those who have a role in helping children at risk of abuse or neglect or who provide support for families in crisis.

In addition, UW Oshkosh CCDET would compile this final summary report to capture and evaluate information provided by participants during the two focus group sessions.

## Focus Group Sessions, Participants, Agencies, Regions

Two focus groups sessions were conducted virtually. The first session took place on April 29, 2021 from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and the second session took place on May 6, 2021 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The sessions were facilitated and recorded by UW Oshkosh CCDET.

Prior to the focus group sessions, RCAW sent out an invitation to the target audience along with registration instructions, information about the upcoming sessions and a series of focus questions to help participants prepare for discussion during the sessions.

A total of eight participants took part in the two focus groups (three on April 29, 2021 and five on May 6, 2021). Participants included representatives from County Departments of Human Services, Kinship Program, Wisconsin Adoption and Permanency Support and Wisconsin Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Counties represented included Bayfield (two participants), Eau Claire, La Crosse, Marathon, Monroe (two participants) and Ozaukee.

While the participant numbers were less than anticipated, participants for both sessions were highly engaged. They offered a volume of meaningful and detailed information about the current state of respite care in Wisconsin, existing needs and challenges, as well as useful ideas and suggestions for RCAW to develop strategies to provide caregiver support to those caring for abused or at-risk children.

This report summarizes those findings, and (in the Appendix) includes the full text of facilitator notes from the two sessions and a link to session recordings.

# Summary of Focus Group Feedback, Themes, Priorities

Wisconsin faces a pressing need for support for those providing care for abused and at-risk children. Many elements have contributed to the current circumstances. These include, but are not limited to: evolving demographics, cross-cultural challenges, language challenges, generational factors, lack of IT access and/or equipment, lack of transportation, poverty, inadequate resources and/or lack of awareness of existing resources.

RCAW is to be commended for stepping forward to address the need for caregiver support for those who care for abused and at-risk children. Given the wide range of factors that contribute to the current reality, RCAW would be well served to take a longer view and formulate a comprehensive strategy to make the most of available resources and funding moving forward.

Participants of the two recent focus groups identified many potential benefits of having adequate respite care and resources in Wisconsin, as well as the many current challenges that exist today. They went on to offer thoughtful, detailed suggestions for RCAW's consideration. Following is a brief summary of the themes and priorities that focus group participants discussed.

## 1. Importance of adequate quality respite care

There are numerous important ways that adequate, quality respite care can help those caring for abused and at-risk children. Some of the comments offered by focus group participants included:

- *Gives family a break from caring for the child, and gives child a break from family.*
- *Can provide time for therapy, training.*
- *Provides breathing space and allows caregivers to get other things done; gives the kids someone else to interact with.*
- *Provides a physical break for elderly grandparents and time to recharge.*
- *Can provide support in case of subsidized guardianship.*
- *Allows for time for appointments and for focus on individual child living in multiple children situations.*
- *Allows for couples to have time to refocus, reconnect.*
- *Allows time for personal reflection, recoup, recover, relieve stress.*

## 2. Challenges and obstacles

While recognizing the importance of adequate quality respite care, participants went on to detail challenges and obstacles that are faced by those providing care for abused and at-risk children.

Comments included:

- *No time away, no breaks.*
- *Caregivers may have “old school” approaches, need education with current information.*
- *Financial stress.*
- *General stress – feeling overwhelmed, especially for single parents.*
- *Need for support outside of family group.*
- *Lack of current availability for getting respite resources.*
- *Respite workers need adequate training and expertise.*
- *Generational factors – poverty, skill sets, and cyclical issues in families.*
- *Relative caregivers may have conflict about their multiple roles, e.g., caregiver, grandparent.*
- *Stressful, overwhelming for ALL family members.*
- *Hard to figure out needs of children, diagnose situations, school issues.*
- *Drug use, homelessness, alcohol, mental health.*

### 3. Suggestions for RCAF

Focus group participants were very interested in any support and resources that RCAF could potentially offer. They embraced the concept of RCAF serving in a strategic role and offered a wealth of suggestions. Several key areas of priority are described below:

#### 3A. Create a comprehensive plan to generate statewide infrastructure to address and respond to respite care needs.

*Participant comments included:*

- *RCAF could provide a “comprehensive plan”.*
- *Priority for RCAF: develop the respite care resource.*
- *RCAF should indicate what other resources are available – look at bigger picture – what are the resources available to address “parallel gaps” that children/families experience.*
- *Coordinate efforts with other agencies.*

#### 3B. Develop a strategy to generate recruitment and development of a capable, well-trained respite care workforce.

The pressing need for a capable, well-trained respite care workforce was the number one priority expressed by focus group participants. This need exists across the state and has been further exacerbated due to the pandemic.

Rural communities face an additional challenge. With an increasingly older population (some counties with nearly half of their population aged 65 or older) and a decreasing population of potential care workers – it has become impossible to find, recruit and train enough respite care workers to begin to meet the existing need.

Pool/share funding/resources across and between counties (i.e. urban counties with more resource help rural?), Develop best practices and training.

Comments from the focus group sessions include:

- *Huge shortage of caregivers. Funding often exists, but there is no one to do the work. How do we recruit and train respite workers?*
- *Develop effective ways to recruit and train respite care givers.*
- *Ensuring that respite providers exist and are available – trained and ready to go.*
- *Service providers must exist – resources need to be available.*
- *RCAF should make sure the services they are promoting are really available.*
- *Promote respite care opportunities as a way to help children.*
- *Pay rates are VERY important to recruit/retain caregivers – state sets the pay rates.*

Focus group participants offered suggestions for possible sources of individuals to be recruited and trained to provide respite care:

- *College campuses, universities, technical schools – respite caregivers can gain experience, learn new skills, win-win situation.*
- *Pre-adoptive families – already approved, waiting for placements – provides families with practice, hands-on experience before adoption – win-win situation.*

### **3C. Serve as a clearinghouse to provide outreach and access to essential information and resources for those providing respite care, for families and members of the public.**

Focus group participants expressed a strong interest in learning more about RCAW and suggested others would as well. Less than half of the focus group participants were aware of RCAW prior to receiving the invitation to take part in the focus group sessions.

Participants emphasized the importance of “getting the word out” and offered that RCAW could serve an important role as a respite care clearinghouse.

Comments about the functions of a clearinghouse included:

- *Networking*
- *Support groups*
- *Training*
- *Recruitment*
- *Funding – salaries currently paid to respite workers is not adequate.*
- *Links to other resources.*
- *Develop community resources – church organizations, community organizations.*
- *Create support groups to connect with other families.*
- *Provide support to families via support groups, social media, internet, and phone.*
- *Share case scenarios to build on success and learn best practices. (What did others do? What resources did they use?)*
- *Expanded registry – with background info, skill sets, expertise, training, bi-lingual.*
- *Connect directly with county agencies – state sends out RCAW info but can get “lost” in the multitude of email messages from state.*
- *ZOOM session – to describe what RCAW is and what RCAW does.*
- *Link to RCAW website.*
- *Paper brochure to distribute – include in application packet.*
- *Address the need for multi-lingual contact, information, care workers and resources.*
- *Public outreach, e.g., billboards, mass marketing.*
- *Social media promoting public involvement.*
- *What grants are available from RCAW for respite when other resources have been exhausted?*

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- *Funding charts – how funding overlaps, what’s available.*
- *Funding updates throughout the year.*
- *RCAW grant application process is EASY – be sure people know this.*
- *Address pay rate inconsistency. Pay for caregivers for adults is less than the rate for teens. \$40 - \$45 per day at county level for caregivers. When client moves from teen category to adult, the caregiver’s earnings decrease.*
- *Pay rates are VERY important to recruit/retain caregivers – state sets the pay rates.*
- *Is there the opportunity for small counties to piggyback with larger counties who have more resources?*
- *Develop outreach strategies to educate the public about RCAW.*

Comments about who RCAW might reach out to included:

- *Social service agencies/organizations*
- *Each Wisconsin County Department of Human Services*
- *Private agencies*
- *Native American Tribes in Wisconsin*
- *ADRC’s*
- *Autism Society*
- *Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Care Needs (five in state)*

### **3D. Generate development of training and education for families, respite care providers and the general public.**

There was significant discussion about the importance of training for care providers, families and members of the public. Comments included:

- *Offer training to care workers and family.*
- *Address the need for trauma-informed training for caregivers.*
- *Align caregiver training with parenting goals so all are on the same page.*
- *Modelling different approaches that can work.*
- *Respite care workers need adequate training and expertise.*
- *Generational factors*
- *Skill sets*
- *Cyclical issues in families.*
- *Ensuring that respite providers are trained and ready to go.*
- *Skill sets, expertise, training, multi-lingual*
- *Cultural and generational challenges*
- *Hybrid schooling*

## Conclusions

This project was a success in soliciting professional expertise and insights to identify gaps and needs related to how respite care can support families in crisis. The focus group venue successfully captured specific ideas on program development dedicated to families in crisis to minimize the impact on children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Clear priorities were identified in creating a statewide strategy to respond, both reactively and proactively, to the current gap in adequate respite care resources for those caring for abused and at-risk children. Suggestions included:

- *Create a comprehensive plan to generate statewide infrastructure to address and respond to respite care needs.*
- *Develop a strategy to generate recruitment and development of a capable, well-trained respite care workforce.*
- *Serve as a clearinghouse to provide outreach and access to essential information and resources for those providing respite care, for families and members of the public.*
- *Generate development of training and education for families, respite care providers and the general public*

In an effort to obtain and analyze critical input in time for consideration for the 2022 fiscal year, the focus group sessions were deployed on a tight timeline. While it was clear the turnaround times on the registration would be short, the choice was made to forge ahead with the effort to solicit important information in time to incorporate into the 2022 fiscal year budget planning.

This may have resulted in the lower than anticipated participant numbers – though the choice was still a success in terms of the volume of useful information that was collected during the sessions.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to offer their perspective. They suggested that similar sessions in the future could further market RCAW and its services as well as provide outreach, education and information to a broader audience about RCAW and its work.

## Appendix #1

### RCAW Focus Group Facilitator notes, Thursday, April 29, 1921

*Things you would like to mention as we start the focus group:*

- Need “trauma-informed” training for caregivers.
- Align caregiver training with parenting goals – on the same page – aligned.
- Need respite care for kids living at home with challenging behaviors, with challenging parent situations.
- Respite caregiver expectations should be aligned with real life situations, anticipate and be prepared to deal with challenges, understand issues.

*How do you think respite can benefit a family in situations where children are at risk of abuse or neglect?*

- Respite is a way to remove children from abuse and neglect situations.
- Provide positive examples, more supportive, more functional.
- Providing a break for caregivers can reduce abuse and neglect.
- Many situations do not have support systems that other families may have
- Reduce parental stress.
- Modeling different approaches that can work.
- Seeing child from a different perspective.

*What do you think are factors that may result in child abuse, neglect, maltreatment?*

- Providing care for the caregiver to take care of personal, emotional and physical health needs, to get therapy.
- Financial stress
- General stress – feeling overwhelmed, especially for single parents.
- Need for support outside of family group.
- Lack of current availability for getting respite resources.
- Respite workers need adequate training and expertise.
- Generational factors -- poverty, skill sets, and cyclical issues in families.

*What do you think RCAW's role can be in reaching and supporting families in a **proactive** sense?*

- Ensuring that respite providers exist and are available – trained and ready to go.
- Service providers must exist – resources need to be available.
- RCAW should make sure the services they are promoting are really available.
- Develop resources – church organizations, community organizations.
- Promote respite care opportunities (not just foster care) as a way to help children.
- Develop effective ways to recruit and train respite caregivers.
- Priority for RCAW: develop the respite care resource.
- Huge shortage of caregivers. Funding often exists, but there is no one to do the work. How do we recruit and train respite workers?
- \$40 - \$45 per day at county level for caregivers. Pay rate for caregivers for adults is less than the rate for teens. When client moves from teen category to adult, the caregiver's earnings decrease.
- Pay rates are VERY important to recruit/retain caregivers – state sets the pay rates.

*What do you think RCAW's role can be in reaching and supporting families **reactively**?*

- Social workers (and their agencies) are the primary users of RCAW registry, use it to search for options. Families do not directly access RCAW.
- Respite provider options must be available and ready to go.

*Impact of COVID Pandemic*

- Severely limits the number of people willing to provide respite care. No guarantees that the children (clients) they work with do not have COVID. People not willing to expose themselves and their families.

*Can you identify some specific supports RCAW should consider?*

- Training
- Recruitment
- Funding – salaries currently paid to respite workers is not adequate.
- Links to other resources – in addition to respite, RCAW should indicate what other resources are available – look at bigger picture – what are the resources available to address “parallel gaps” that children/families experience; RCAW could provide a “comprehensive plan”.

*Who should RCAF provide information on the programs it has to support families with children at risk for abuse of neglect?*

- Social service agencies/organizations, e.g., Catholic Charities, Kinship
- Each Wisconsin county Department of Human Services
- Private agencies
- Native American Tribes in Wisconsin
- ADRC's
- Autism Society, other associations and networks
- Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Care Needs (five in state)
- Public outreach, e.g., billboards, mass marketing
- Social media promoting public involvement

*Urban vs. Rural*

- Northern Wisconsin counties (north of Highway 8) severely lacking in respite care resources.
- Sparse populations, aging populations, predominantly baby boomers.

*Possible Resources*

- College campuses, universities, technical schools – respite caregivers can gain experience, learn new skills, win-win situation.
- Pre-adoptive families – already approved, waiting for placements – provides families with practice, hands-on experience before adoption – win-win situation.
- RCAF could be a “clearinghouse” for resources; develop “systems” to support at-risk children.

*Would you ever reach out to RCAF or any other source of support?*

- Yes – have used RCAF website to search by county and by child/adult for respite care.
- Include more background, detail about the respite care worker available: referrals, experiences, profiles, emotional and behavioral skills.

*Other notes*

- RCAF used to have display tables/info at statewide meetings.
- Important to do outreach for RCAF in northern counties.
- “DESPERATE” for respite caregiver’s.
- Do more focus groups, to identify needs/gaps, discuss resources with others, share ideas/concerns.
- Schedule one-hour focus groups (instead of 2-hour meetings) to make it easier for people to commit to participating.
- Provide more lead time to sign up for focus groups.

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## Appendix #2

### RCAW Focus Group Facilitator notes, Thursday, May 6, 1921

*Things you would like to mention as we start the focus group:*

- Kinship – not a lot of options to get resources for families in Monroe County.
- Foster care licensure with relatives.
- Support kinship – respite care for families.

*How do you think respite can benefit a family in situations where children are at risk of abuse or neglect?*

- Gives family a break from child, and gives child a break from family.
- Respite care can provide time for therapy, training.
- Breathing space – allows caregivers to get other things done; gives kids someone else to interact with.
- Physical break for elderly grandparents, time to recharge.
- Subsidized guardianship – what respite resources are available?
- Respite care allows for time to go to appointments for individual kids living in multiple kid situations.
- None of the participants currently use RCAW registry – not aware of it.
- Respite care allows for couples to have time to refocus, reconnect.
- Time for personal reflection, recoup, recover, and relieve stress.

*What do you think are factors that may result in child abuse, neglect, maltreatment?*

- No time away, no breaks.
- In kinship cases, caregivers may have “old school” approaches, need to be educated with current information.
- Relative caregivers may have conflict about their multiple roles, e.g., caregiver, grandparent.
- Stressful, overwhelming for ALL family members.
- Hard to figure out needs of children, diagnose situations, school issues.
- Drug use, homelessness, alcohol, mental health.

*What do you think RCAW's role can be in reaching and supporting families **reactively**?*

- Having respite resources.
- Creating support groups to connect with other families.
- Providing support – via phone, via groups.
- Discussing case scenarios – what did others do, what resources did they use?

*Can you identify some specific supports RCAW should consider?*

- Expanded registry – with background info, skill sets, expertise, training, bi-lingual.
- Support groups
- Connect directly with county agencies – state sends out RCAW info but can get “lost” in the multitude of email messages from state.
- ZOOM session – to describe what RCAW is and what RCAW does.
- Link to RCAW website. Note: one participant looked at the RCAW website for the first time during the break in the focus group.
- Paper brochure to distribute – include in application packet.
- What grants are available from RCAW for respite when other resources have been exhausted?
- Funding charts – how funding overlaps, what’s available.
- Funding updates throughout the year.
- RCAW grant application process is EASY – be sure people know this.

*Who should RCAW provide information on the programs it has to support families with children at risk for abuse of neglect?*

- Directly to counties – might not pay attention if info is included in email coming from the state.
- Strategies to educate the public – outreach.

*Urban vs. Rural*

- Smaller county agencies lack staff, lack resources.
- Marathon County – large geographically, few resources outside Wausau, challenges include transportation, affordable housing, Spanish-speaking residents.
- Need Spanish-speaking respite care providers.
- Need for collaboration between counties.

*Possible Resources*

- Facebook groups – to connect, share info.
- Social media
- Small counties piggyback with larger counties who have more resources.
- Multi-lingual needs for information.

*Would you ever reach out to RCAF or any other source of support?*

- Would use RCAF to find a respite care provider in their geographic area, do a search for families who need respite care.
- RCAF could provide caregiver training – for families, children.
- Use RCAF to find resources – clearinghouse, network – refer to someone who can meet needs.
- Cultural and generational challenges related to using technology, e.g., hybrid schooling.

*Other Comments*

- Exciting to find out about RCAF and possibilities for resources.
- See what might be possible.



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## Appendix #4 Invitation and Confirmation

*Do you support families in crisis?  
Do you have a role in helping children at risk of abuse or neglect?*

*Respite Care Association of Wisconsin (RCAW) is hosting two Focus Groups that will be professionally facilitated by UW Oshkosh Center for Community Development, Education, & Training (CCDET)*

*RCAW wants your professional expertise and insights to identify gaps and needs related to how respite can support families in crisis. We want to prospect and cultivate specific ideas on program development dedicated to families in crisis to minimize the risk for children at risk of abuse or neglect.*

# FOCUS GROUP OPTIONS



**via Zoom**  
(Focus Group events will be recorded)

- **Thursday, April 29th from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm**
- **Thursday, May 6th from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm**

(Please only register for one - space is limited)

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS 4/27/21**

*FOR MORE INFORMATION  
OR TO REGISTER,  
CLICK THE LINK BELOW.*



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## Email response after registering for Focus Group.

Thank you for registering for Respite Care Association of Wisconsin's (RCAW) Focus Group opportunity to share your professional perspective and insight. RCAW seeks your assistance to identify gaps & needs and propose specific ways respite can be used to support families in crisis and mitigate situations that may result in children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Keep in mind that RCAW is respite-focused and can assist with fiscal resources, free training opportunities, and connectivity to respite care workers and providers. RCAW does not provide direct services, nor does it employ respite care workers. We offer programs that offer grants to pay for respite, access to trained workers listed on our free registry, and provide free training to anyone who is wishing to become a respite care worker.

Respite care services support and strengthen families at risk for child abuse and neglect. This is especially true for families experiencing challenges parenting children with special needs and new parents, young parents, or parents without a reliable support system. We are looking to strengthen programs such as child protective services, Kinship Care, and Relatives as Parents Programs to name a few.

In advance of the Focus Group, we are providing you with a list of questions that the Facilitators will pose to the group so you may give them some thought ahead of time. We will be recording both Focus Group events. You can also check out RCAW's website at <https://www.respitecarewi.org> to familiarize yourself with the programs offered by RCAW and to learn a little bit more about respite if you are not already familiar with it.

Additionally, below are key definitions contained in Wisconsin's State Statute 46.986, which is the authority that funds RCAW's respite programs.

*(a) "Abuse" means the willful infliction on a person of physical pain or injury or unreasonable confinement.*

*(b) "Caregiver" means an individual who lives in the home of a person with special needs and provides care or supervision for that person.*

*(c) "County department" means a county department under s. 46.215, 46.22, 46.23, 51.42 or 51.437.*

*(d) "Neglect" means an act, omission or course of conduct that, because of the failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care or dental care, creates a significant danger to the physical and mental health of a person.*

(e) "Provider" means an individual or agency that a caregiver selects, with input to the selection by the person with special needs, if competent, to provide respite care to the person with special needs.

(f) "Respite care" means care that is provided to a person with special needs, or a person at risk of abuse or neglect, in order to provide temporary relief to the caregiver of that person or when the caregiver is unable to provide care.

(g) "Special need" means a person's need resulting from an emotional, behavioral, cognitive, physical or personal condition that necessitates receipt of care or supervision in order to meet the person's basic needs or to prevent harm from occurring to him or her.

(h) "Tribe or band" means the governing body of a federally recognized American Indian tribe or band in this state.

**Here are some of questions that will be discussed during the Focus Group:**

- Are you familiar with Respite Care Association of Wisconsin?
- Are any of you familiar with what respite is?
- How do you think respite can benefit a family in situations where children are at risk of abuse or neglect?
- What do you think are factors that may result in child abuse, neglect, maltreatment?
- What do you think RCAW's role can be in reaching and supporting families in a proactive sense?
- What do you think RCAW's role can be in reaching and supporting families reactively? (After an incident or placement has occurred)?
- Can you identify some specific supports RCAW should consider, keeping in mind their mission is to support the family caregiver, i.e. parents, grandparents, relatives, friends?
- Who should RCAW provide information on the programs it has to support families with children at risk for abuse or neglect? Be specific.

RCAW wishes to thank you in advance for your time and expertise in helping us address respite needs of families in crisis who are at risk of abuse or neglect.

**CCDET to include Zoom information in this email.**