

01

INAUGURAL ISSUE
MAY
2021



BUILDING FOR CHILDREN

Your Supporter Newsletter from Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota

SPRING 2021



THIS ISSUE

*Welcome from Rich
Legislature Makes Progress on Child
Protection Issues
Volunteer Advocates: The Power
of Safe Passage
and More!*

OUR MISSION

The mission of Safe Passage for Children is to strengthen the Minnesota child welfare system so children are safe and reach their full potential.

OUR VISION

There will always be a group of Minnesota citizens who advocate on behalf of victims of child maltreatment and hold counties and the state accountable for good outcomes for these children and their families.

OUR GOAL

A Minnesota child protection and foster care system in that continuously improves the lives of children, as demonstrated by objective, measurable outcomes. If the system is working well, children's outcomes will improve over time.

safepassageforchildren.org

WELCOME SUPPORTERS!

Welcome to the first edition of our supporter newsletter! In our newsletter we will discuss our legislative work and offer an in-depth picture of our programs. This edition takes a look at the 2021 state legislative session, highlights our outstanding volunteers, our webinar series, our 2021 partnership with Emiliani Coffee, virtual house gatherings, and more. If you have any feedback or ideas for future articles, please email us at contactus@safepassagemn.org. Save the date for our fall fundraiser on Wednesday October 13th!

-- On behalf of Minnesota's most vulnerable children, thank you. -
Rich Gehrman, Executive Director



LEGISLATURE MAKES PROGRESS ON CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES

The 2021 Minnesota State legislative session is expected to adjourn on May 17th. While final outcomes are not yet known, progress has been made on a number of important issues.

Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota's 2021 bill would require counties to: a.) Interview children separately from and prior to adults during the initial visit, b.) Interview foster children over four years old separately from foster parents, c.) Stop giving parents advance notice of child protection visits, d.) Train child protection workers in fact-finding before assigning cases to the investigative or Family Assessment track, and e.) Put information in case notes, providing a reference for future workers who may investigate the same children and families. The bill did not get a hearing in 2021, but we succeeded in getting it introduced in both the House and the Senate. Chief authors are Sen. Julie Rosen (R-Fairmont) and Rep. Heather Edelson (DFL-Edina), with House co-authors Rep. Kaoly Her (DFL-Saint Paul) and Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn (DFL-Roseville). The bill received support from seven members of the Persons of Color and Indigenous (POCI) Caucus;

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

three of whom offered to also co-author the bill. Their names can be added in the 2022 legislative session.

The case for this legislation has become stronger over the past year. Thirteen states have ended the practices recommended in our bill due to high profile child fatalities. Although research indicates that no more than 33% of cases be referred to programs for low risk cases like Family Assessment, in Minnesota that figure is 62%. Several national experts are currently working with Safe Passage to promote this legislation, and with the help of our volunteers we believe we have a realistic prospect of getting it passed in 2022.

In addition Safe Passage is supporting an important foster care licensing bill which was developed by the Center to Transform Child Protection at Mitchell-Hamline Law School with support from many other organizations as well. Safe Passage worked with the Center to help get hearings in the Senate. The measure removes numerous felonies as automatic barriers to becoming a licensed foster parent, substituting instead a consistent process for evaluating prospective caregivers. These criteria help address the disproportionate impacts of arrests and prosecutions on people of color. The measure will enable applicants for foster care licenses to be more objectively evaluated according to their ability to parent a child. As of this writing the bill has reached the floor of the Senate for a vote and is included in the omnibus Health and Human Services bill in the House.

STAY IN THE KNOW

Stay up-to-date on the most pressing issues affecting vulnerable Minnesota children by subscribing to our email list! Sign up on our website to receive our weekly child welfare policy blog, free webinar invites, and more directly to your inbox! safepassageforchildren.org



VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES: THE POWER OF SAFE PASSAGE

As an organization, Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota promotes state legislative reforms and improved policies and practices in Minnesota child protection and foster care through the involvement of our compassionate and committed volunteer child advocates. Are you concerned about abused and neglected Minnesota children, and do you want to help us improve their lives? You can help today by signing up to volunteer with us! As a volunteer child advocate, we train you on the issues and provide specific opportunities to communicate with your state legislators to encourage them to support child focused legislation in Minnesota. It is amazing the difference that one volunteer can make!

Speaking of volunteering, a celebration is in order! As you may know, we are finishing up our annual spring child advocacy events at the Minnesota state capitol. This year, because of the coronavirus, instead of visiting the capitol in person, we successfully hosted several ongoing and safe Virtual Child Advocacy Weeks during February and March 2021. To make this a successful effort for our volunteers, we provided free online training for all volunteer child advocates to prepare to meet with their state legislators to learn about our legislative work and how to meet with their legislators. We also provided almost 24/7 support connecting volunteers with their legislators, with the goal of setting up one-on-one meetings coordinated with our volunteers' and their legislators' schedules.

Though we had never held a "virtual" child advocacy event before this year, it was a resounding success for both our volunteer child advocates and for our communications with legislators! 39 of our energized and compassionate Safe Passage volunteer child advocates from many of Minnesota's districts met with their state legislators during our Virtual Child Advocacy Weeks. Minnesota state legislators around the state enjoyed many opportunities to learn from our volunteers about the current challenges facing abused and neglected Minnesota children, and they learned how their legislative voice and vote could help improve the lives and the futures of Minnesota's most vulnerable children.

Do you want to make a difference for vulnerable Minnesota children? You can, and it will not cost you a dime. Become a volunteer child advocate today to help us speak up for abused and neglected Minnesota children! Just send us an email or give us a call to let us know you would like to sign up to volunteer.

WEBINARS OFFER RESOURCE ON CHILD PROTECTION AND FOSTER CARE

In April 2020 Safe Passage for Children initiated a biweekly webinar on matters related to child protection and foster care. The attendance has grown significantly for most sessions, with peaks at 45 or 50 participants for panel discussions and presentations by national experts. Many of these webinars have showcased outstanding programs or agencies in Minnesota, such as CornerHouse, St. David's Child Development Center and the Child Welfare Training Academy to name a few. Some of our most popular webinars have been panel discussions including adult survivors of child abuse, and current and former foster parents. Additional webinars have been informational in nature such as a preview of the upcoming legislative session, and an introduction to child welfare for people new to the field.

Please join us at an upcoming webinar! Find out about upcoming webinars on our website, following us on social media, and by subscribing to our email list. If you have suggestions for future webinar topics, or if you would be interested in presenting at one of our upcoming webinars, please send us an email or give us a call.

LIKE COFFEE AND HELPING KIDS?

Emiliani Coffee was built to bring kids home. For every bag of their ethically-sourced organic coffee sold, they give \$1 to nonprofits and organizations that are fighting for kids in the foster care and adoption system. Safe Passage for Children is honored to be one of their 2021 nonprofit recipients. The coffee is absolutely delicious. You can grab your bag at www.emilianicoffee.com.



HOST A VIRTUAL HOUSE GATHERING

The pandemic has created the opportunity for nonprofits to dig deeper into creative ways to continue raising the needed financial support for their work. Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota is no different, and we've been thankful as a staff to see our supporters here for the long haul.

One opportunity we've begun to try is virtual house gatherings. We've sent messages to many of you asking if you'd introduce us virtually to your network and we've been grateful for the responses ready to dive into the need. Dr. Mark Nupen, one of our stellar supporters, pioneered this project and hosted our first gathering of the year. Together, we invited his network via email, had an engaging conversation and presented the need for our continued advocacy to a small group of Mark's colleagues completely new to our work. It was a success, and we are looking for more of YOU to join us for this opportunity.

Our Director of Development, Avivah Luehr will handle all the logistics including the invitations, agenda, follow up after the meeting and even more fun and creative ways to engage your guests. Are you interested in hosting a virtual or in-person house gathering with us in the fall? If so, please send an email or give us a call.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

Our 2020 Annual Fall Fundraiser was a great success. Last fall we joined virtually and heard from a dynamic lineup of speakers including Dr. Marti Erickson, Dr. Kathryn Piper, Nalee Vue, and Debbie Reid. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Marti Erickson is an early childhood development pioneer and "Mom Enough" podcaster. She powerfully shared her work encouraging parents in what she describes as the "looking back and moving forward" method which includes acknowledging the pain of the past, choosing what you want to repeat as you parent, and choosing what you'd like to leave behind to build a better future. It is with this strategy that parents receive the support needed to build a better future and fight against child maltreatment so that children are safe and reach their full potential. Our guests raised a total of \$22,000 enabling us to continue our essential work even during the pandemic crisis. Thank you for your incredible support in helping us move forward. If you missed the event, you can watch the interviews on our YouTube channel. **Save the date for our next annual Fall Fundraiser, on Wednesday October 13th!**



WATCH OUR VIDEO: "TAKEN TOO SOON"

Since 2015, there have been at least 63 child deaths in MN as a result of child maltreatment. Even when authorities know about violence against children, they frequently leave them unprotected. We encourage you to watch this compelling Safe Passage for Children video which demonstrates that reality with stories of seven Minnesota children who were killed by their parents:

<http://bit.ly/takentooosoon> These children and many others have been taken too soon. They are gone but they will not be forgotten. These deaths were preventable and are an important reminder of the crucial nature of our work in speaking up for Minnesota's most vulnerable children.

Follow Us on Social Media!



fb.com/safepassagemn



[@safepassage4childrenmn](https://www.instagram.com/safepassage4childrenmn)



[@safepassagemn](https://twitter.com/safepassagemn)



Safe Passage for Children



Safe Passage for Children

CONGRATULATIONS RICH GEHRMAN!



The Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota Board of Directors and staff are excited to announce that our Founder and Executive Director, Rich Gehrman, has been awarded Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Minnesota's 2021 Mark Proctor Hero for Children Award. "Through his work with Safe Passage, Richard has brought transparency and accountability to the Minnesota child welfare system," CASA stated. Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota is a citizens' group that advocates for improvements in Minnesota's child welfare system. Learn more about CASA MN at <https://casamn.org>

**Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota
a 501c3 nonprofit organization**

**Give to support our work, sign up to volunteer, and more at: www.safepassageforchildren.org
Connect with us via email: contactus@safepassagemn.org
Give us a call: 651-303-3209**