

# April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month



By Nicole Names, Pope County Human Services Director, MACSSA President-elect and Eric Ratzmann, MACSSA Director

During the month of April, counties across Minnesota will be taking steps to educate citizens and stress the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect, and to promote the social and emotional well-being of children and families in Minnesota.

In Minnesota there are 1,282,412 children, ages 0-17, who make up 23% of our population (2015 Kids Count Demographics). 75,624 child maltreatment reports were received in MN counties in 2016. Local agencies screened in and completed 30,936 assessments or investigations, or 40.9 percent of all reports. There were 39,736 alleged victims who had at least one screened in child maltreatment report in 2016. Since 2009, there has been a 79.7 percent increase in screened in reports; despite this increase in the volume of work, funding levels only recently returned to 2002 levels. (Minnesota's Child Maltreatment Report, 2016; Minnesota DHS)

Child safety and well-being is a priority for Minnesotans. We all want our children and grandchildren, and our neighbors' children and grandchildren to be safe, healthy kids. The MN DHS website states: "Children's safety and well-being is paramount, and preventing harm is the best way to achieve that goal." The Minnesota Department of Human Services is working with communities, parents and local government agencies to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect by promoting family and community health and well-being across the state. The combined efforts of abuse and maltreatment prevention, and promotion of community and family well-being reduces the likelihood of chronic health problems, premature mortality, lowered education achievement, lost productivity, mental illness, violent crime, substance abuse and addiction, and the cycle of familial abuse and neglect through generations."

Minnesota county human services agencies, along with the MN Department of Human Services, Minnesota residents, numerous state and community partners and in partnership with the MN Legislature and the Governor's Task Force for the Protection of Children will continue to strive for increased safety for children and decreased abuse and maltreatment through strong partnerships and improvements to the child welfare system.

For more information, please visit:

Annie E. Casey Minnesota Kids Count Report: [www.cdf-mn.org/research-library/MN-kids-count/kc-mn-databooks/2017/2017-minnesota-kids-count.pdf](http://www.cdf-mn.org/research-library/MN-kids-count/kc-mn-databooks/2017/2017-minnesota-kids-count.pdf)

Minnesota's Child Maltreatment Report, 2016: [www.mn.gov/dhs/assets/2017-10-child-maltreatment-report\\_tcm1053-321461.pdf](http://www.mn.gov/dhs/assets/2017-10-child-maltreatment-report_tcm1053-321461.pdf)

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month** and an excellent time to educate ourselves, and others, about what mental illness is and is not. Mental illness is a medical condition disrupting a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning.

Did you know that mental illness is common? One in five adults in the US experience mental illness in a given year. One in four people will develop a mental illness in their lifetime. Most mental illnesses can be treated effectively with medication, therapy, diet, exercise, and support. It is very important to know that recovery is possible.

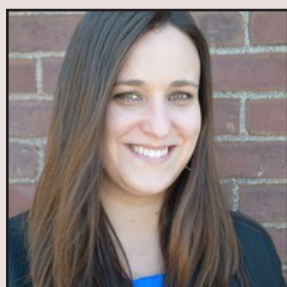
County human services agencies and local Mental Health providers work every day to support and assist both children and adults in need of mental health services and supports. County Case Managers play an important role through engaging with people in need of services, their support systems and MH Providers in establishing a team that will support and assist people living with a mental illness so they can reach their goals for safety, stability and wellness.

Ramsey County Board Chair Jim McDonough notes that despite progress made in recent years, there are still many Minnesotans living with mental health issues who don't seek help. "People need to know that there is help readily available and it is effective," says Commissioner McDonough. "Helping people regain their mental health and well-being is something everyone needs to care about and play a role. It starts by listening, caring, building social connections and referring people to the professional help that is available in our communities."

So how can you help? Be supportive of those experiencing a mental illness and be a part of reducing stigma by talking about mental illness in your communities. ■

For more information about mental illness and ideas about how you can help to reduce stigma around mental illness in Minnesota, please visit the Make It OK website at [makeitok.org](http://makeitok.org) or the National Alliance on Mental Illness at [www.nami.org/About-NAMI](http://www.nami.org/About-NAMI).

## LPHA Welcomes New Director



The Local Public Health Association (LPHA) is pleased to announce that Kari Oldfield has accepted the LPHA director/legislative liaison position, starting April 16.

Kari has worked most recently as the Legal and Community Outreach Coordinator at the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR). She has nearly four years of tobacco control experience. She was involved in the passage of policies increasing the price of cigars, regulating sales of flavored tobacco products, increasing the tobacco sale age to 21, and restricting the use of electronic cigarettes in indoor public spaces.

Kari maintained coalition partnerships with a diverse range of community organizations, including with youth serving organizations, community coalitions, and neighborhood organizations. Kari also oversaw the development of a Tobacco 101 curriculum that has been used throughout the state.

Kari received her JD from Hamline University School of Law where she focused on health law and health care compliance and her BA from Coe College focusing on communications and political science. ■

