



**Handle With Care Michigan
Implementation Guide**

INTRODUCTION

The Handle With Care Implementation Guide was developed for communities interested in implementing the Handle With Care Model. The guide provides a description of the Handle With Care Model, the required model components, a step-by-step guide for planning and implementing the program and resources for use in any community. The guide is based on the work of Handle With Care programs in Jackson, Washtenaw and Eaton counties, where Handle With Care has been successfully implemented. This is not a “one size fits all” approach but rather a menu of options that can be used to fit the circumstances of the diverse communities across the state. It highlights basic program requirements as well as variations in program implementation that reflect the differences among communities in Michigan. The guide is meant to serve as a template for communities to use to determine the best approach for implementing their own program.

The guide was developed with input from the Michigan Handle With Care Advisory Committee members – Amanda Burch (Eaton County Department of Health & Human Services), Kevin Caldwell (Michigan State Police), Kyle Guerrant (Michigan Department of Education), Elmer Hitt (Jackson Police/Fire Department), Zoe Lyons (Jackson County Department of Health and Human Services), Mary Mueller (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services), Shannon Novara (Washtenaw Intermediate School District), Robert Sheehan (Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards), Carrie Tarry (Michigan Department of Health and Humans Services), and Lynda Zeller (Michigan Health Endowment Fund).

More information about the Handle With Care program as well as a variety of training resources is available at the Handle With Care Michigan website (www.michigan.gov/handlewithcare).



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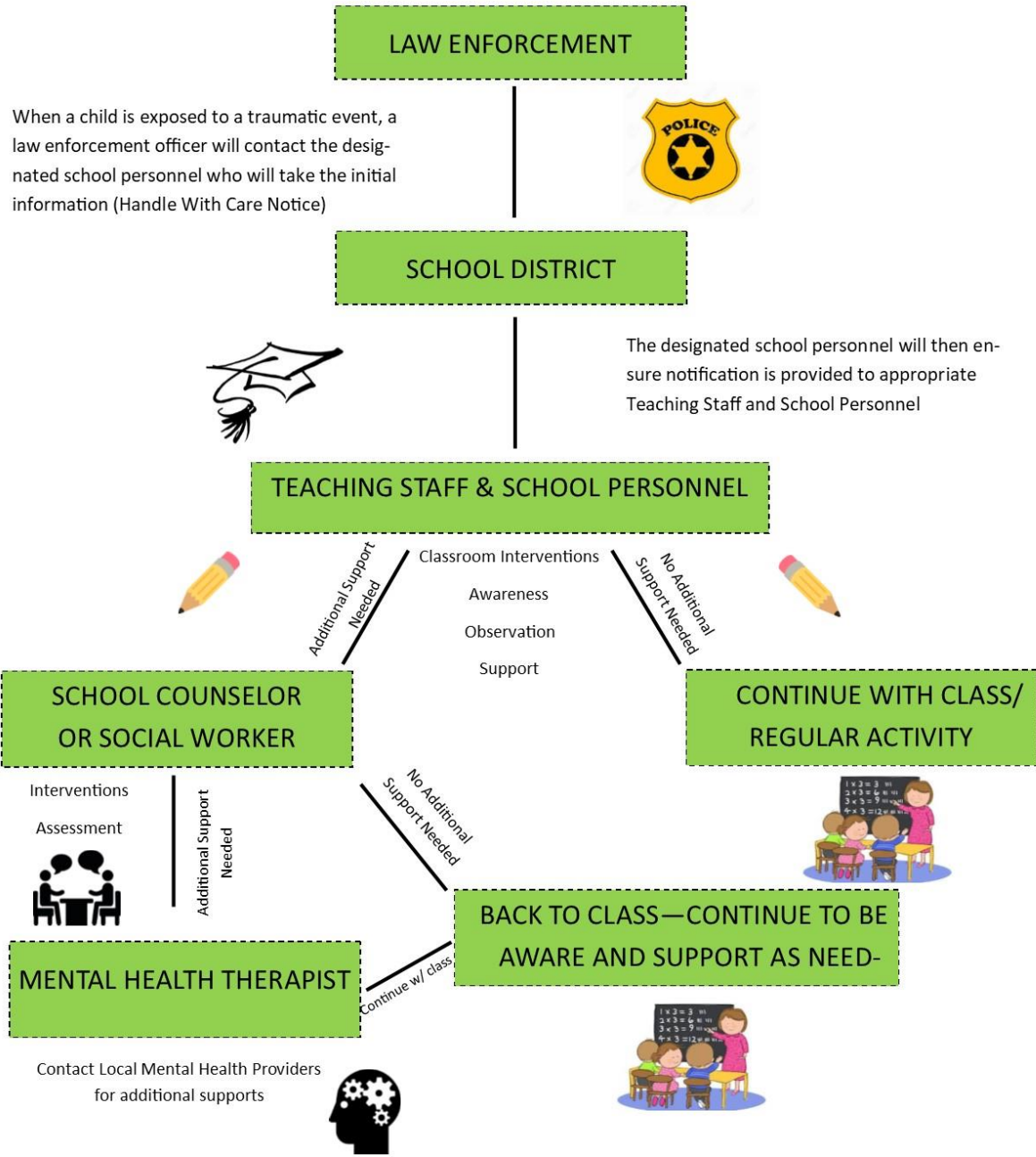
HANDLE WITH CARE MODEL

A recent national survey of the incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to violence and trauma revealed that 60% of American children have been exposed to violence, crime or abuse. Forty percent were direct victims of two or more violent acts. Prolonged exposure to violence and trauma can seriously undermine children's ability to focus, behave appropriately, and learn in school. It often leads to school failure, truancy, suspension, or expulsion, dropping out, or involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Handle With Care programs promote safe and supportive homes, schools and communities that *protect* children, and help traumatized children *heal* and *thrive*. Handle With Care promotes school-community partnerships aimed at ensuring that children who are exposed to trauma in their home, school or community receive appropriate interventions to help them achieve academically at their highest levels despite whatever traumatic circumstances they may have endured. The goal of Handle With Care is to help students succeed in school. Regardless of the source of trauma, the common thread for effective intervention is the school. Research now shows that trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships, and function appropriately in the classroom. Handle With Care programs support children exposed to trauma and violence through improved communication and collaboration between law enforcement, schools, and mental health providers, and connects families, schools and communities to mental health services.

The Handle With Care Model: If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, that child's name and three words, **HANDLE WITH CARE**, are forwarded to the school before the school bell rings the next day. The school implements individual, class and whole school trauma-sensitive strategies so that traumatized children are "Handled With Care." If a child needs more intervention, on-site trauma-focused mental healthcare is available at the school.

HANDLE WITH CARE



PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Minimum key stakeholders include schools, law enforcement agencies, and mental health providers. Teams are encouraged to include other key stakeholders; i.e., child protective services workers, victim advocacy programs, community programs, parent organizations, etc.
- Commitments from local leaders (county school superintendent, principal, police chief, sheriff, mental health provider).
- Team Leaders/Champions: school, law enforcement and mental health providers should designate a person to serve as the Team Leader/Champion for their organization. The Champions act as liaisons between key stakeholders.
- One organization/individual must serve as the coordinator for the initiative.



TRAINING



- Law enforcement supervisors, teachers and school staff and mental health partners should jointly attend a one-hour presentation providing an overview of the impact of trauma on children, the impact of trauma on learning, key elements of HANDLE WITH CARE, and strategies for successful implementation.
- Schools must conduct a book study or training session(s) to identify and assess issues impacting their students and specific trauma sensitive individual, classroom and schoolwide interventions.
- Law enforcement supervisors must provide training to patrol officers on department policy to identify, document and report children encountered on the scene of calls. Officers must be familiar with appropriate on-scene response when children are present to ensure the impact of trauma is minimized.
- Mental health providers should be trained and certified in Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. For more information about TFCBT certification. go to www.tfcbt.org.

FORMS & PROCESS

- Key stakeholders must develop protocols and MOUs utilizing examples of existing agreements and protocols developed by the West Virginia Children Exposed to Violence Initiative.
- Schools must develop and utilize required forms (HANDLE WITH CARE form, parental permission to treat, student handbook notification, brochures, etc).



SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

- School commitment to provide space at school for mental health counseling.



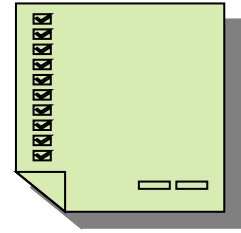
COLLABORATION:



- Team Leader/Champions must routinely meet to assess gaps/barriers in the program and needed improvements.
- Law enforcement will develop and improve positive relationships with students by routinely visiting, eating lunch, and interacting with students in a non-crisis situation. (Best Practice).
- Ongoing collaboration between the key partners – law enforcement, schools and mental health providers.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The following steps offer a suggested path to implementing Handle With Care. They are meant as a guide and should be adapted to meet the needs/circumstances of each individual community. See Appendix G for additional information about implementing and sustaining Handle With Care.



Step 1. Determine Interest in Handle With Care in Your Community

- A. Potential organizer(s) or interested parties research and gain understanding of Handle With Care model.
- B. Consider embedding/connecting Handle With Care with an existing multi-system organization in your community (e.g. Trauma Collaborative, School/Justice Partnership, Great Start Collaborative, Human Service Coordinating Body, etc.).
- C. Reach out to school, law enforcement and mental health leaders (e.g. superintendents, chiefs of police, mental health agency directors). Provide basic information about Handle With Care and determine interest in learning more.
- D. Reach out to other human service and community leaders to determine their interest in participating.
- E. Secure commitment from identified leaders to participate in planning process and designate a staff person to participate on the implementation team.

Step 2. Create Implementation Team

- A. Implementation team membership.
 - a. Team leader/champion(s) from school systems (e.g. ISD, local districts, public school academies, private schools, preschools).
 - b. Team leader/champion(s) from law enforcement agencies (e.g. city/county police or sheriff departments, Michigan State Police).
 - c. Team leader/champion(s) from mental health providers (e.g. community mental health agency, private/nonprofit mental health providers and existing school mental health staff).
 - d. Team leader/champion(s) from other human service organizations (e.g. MDHHS, youth development, health care, early childhood care/education).
- B. Implementation team responsible for:
 - a. Determining feasibility of Handle With Care for your community.
 - b. Identifying and inviting partners to participate in project.
 - c. Meeting regularly to plan logistics of implementation.
 - d. Monitoring implementation and addressing barriers and challenges.

- C. Select implementation team leader/coordinating organization.
 - a. Considerations include well respected leader who can reach out to potential stakeholders and has organizational resources available to support the work of the implementation team.

Step 3. Identify and Invite Key Partners

- A. Identify & invite partners from law enforcement, schools, and mental health providers to participate.
 - a. Develop presentation for partners. See Appendix A.
 - b. Meet with leaders from partner organizations to provide information about Handle With Care and secure commitment to participate. (Meetings may be individual or group, may use PPT or verbal/written communication).
- B. Identify potential barriers and challenges.
 - a. Seek input from counties who have implemented Handle with Care.
 - b. Address concerns raised by stakeholders (e.g. parental resistance, distrust of law enforcement, overburdening police or schools, privacy concerns, etc.).
 - c. Consider developing FAQ or other mechanism for addressing concerns/barriers.
- C. Consider development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among partner agencies to define roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

Step 4. Develop Program Processes and Forms

- A. Develop process for gathering and sending law enforcement notifications to schools.
 - a. Develop Handle With Care notification forms and processes. Process options include paper form, email, call, online form. See Appendix B.
 - b. Identify who is responsible in law enforcement agency for gathering/sending notifications (this may vary across agencies, but the implementation team must be aware of each agency's process and responsible person(s)).
 - c. Identify who is responsible for receiving notifications at the school and how and to whom notices will be distributed (again this may vary across school districts or individual buildings but implementation team must be aware of the process and responsible person(s) for all schools).
 - d. Develop spreadsheet/contact list for all participating law enforcement agencies and schools. See Appendix C.
- B. Develop process for referring to providers.
 - a. Develop forms for managing Mental Health referrals (e.g. referral form, parental consent, feedback form, etc.). See Appendix D.
 - b. Identify list of contact persons for participating mental health providers.

- c. Verify that MOUs are in process or completed between community mental health providers, private mental health providers and schools/districts.
- C. Develop process for gathering data about notices sent from law enforcement to schools and from schools to mental health providers.

Step 5. Provide training and communication materials for partners and community members

- A. Develop program and/or school flow chart. See Appendix E.
- B. Develop PPT for use with partners and the community. See Appendix A.
 - a. Share PPT presentation with school, law enforcement and mental health leaders.
- C. Share implementation strategies with key partners to help them successfully launch the initiative. See Appendices H, I, and J.
- D. Develop press release and dissemination plan to announce launch of Handle With Care. See Appendix F.

Step 6. Prepare for Launch

- A. Determine launch date. Consider avoiding a launch immediately after a school break, e.g. September or January. It is better to wait a month to allow school staff to “settle in”.
- B. Determine when/how to send press release, if using.
- C. Notify all participating partners (schools, law enforcement, and mental health providers) of launch date.
- D. Test Handle With Care notification process with “fake” notices. In other words, if notices are sent by email, send test email. If sent via online form, test that it is working as planned.
- E. Provide coordinator contact information for questions/follow up.

Step 7. Ongoing Monitoring and Follow Up

- A. Sustaining/Coordinating team (may be same or different members than Implementation team) meets monthly.
- B. Review data regarding notices sent to schools.
- C. Review data regarding referrals sent from schools to MH providers.
- D. Review and address barriers encountered by partner agencies. For example, if law enforcement notices are not happening or decline, consider follow-up training, strategies to remind officers, etc. If school staff are not distributing notices or are not sure how to respond to notices, consider follow-up training. If problems in processing mental health referrals, consider reviewing MOU between schools and mental health providers, revising processes, etc.

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS

The following PowerPoint presentations are examples that can be used to educate community stakeholders about the Handle With Care initiative. They can be downloaded and modified to meet the needs of your community.

[Handle With Care Presentation](#)

This presentation was developed by Jackson County Handle With Care.

[Handle With Care Presentation for Partners](#)

This is a longer and more detailed presentation developed by Jackson County Handle With Care

[Washtenaw Handle With Care Training Slides](#)

This presentation was developed by Washtenaw County Handle With Care.

APPENDIX B

HANDLE WITH CARE NOTIFICATION FORMS

[Jackson County HWC Notification Form](#)

The Handle With Care fillable notification form was developed by Jackson County.

[Washtenaw Steps for Law Enforcement](#)

Online description of Handle With Care notification system used in Washtenaw County.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE SCHOOL PARTNER CONTACT LIST

[Sample School Partner Contact List](#)

The sample contact list was developed by Jackson County.

APPENDIX D

FORMS FOR MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH REFERRALS

These sample forms are used by Jackson and Washtenaw counties to initiate and manage mental health referrals.

[Sample Mental Health Referral Forms](#)

[Sample Referral Status Update Form](#)

[Sample Therapist/Teach Communication Form](#)

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE FLOW CHARTS

Flow charts can be useful when educating Handle With Care partners

[Handle With Care Model](#)

[Washtenaw HWC Process Flow Chart](#)

[School Flow Chart](#)

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

[SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE](#)

Press releases can be useful when launching the Handle With Care initiative.

APPENDIX G

HELPFUL HINTS FOR IMPLEMENTING HANDLE WITH CARE

Generating Interest in Handle With Care

- Build on existing relationships in your community. Identify individuals who work well with superintendents, law enforcement and mental health providers and ask them to contact these key partners.
- Determine the best way to connect with key partners. Get on the agenda of standing meetings (e.g. superintendents, chiefs of police).
- Keep your message brief and to the point. Consider a brief PowerPoint presentation.

The Implementation Team

- Members must represent all the key Handle With Care partners **and** be enthusiastic champions of Handle With Care.
- Members do not have to be high level administrators but should be appointed/approved by the administrator and have influence in their organization.
- The team leader's positive relationships with key partners are helpful in moving the project forward.
- The team leader must have strong support from his/her organization.

Financial and Other Resources

- Handle With Care can be easily integrated with the current work of all partners. It does **not necessarily require separate funding**.
- However, partner organizations must:
 - Allow implementation team members to participate in planning meetings.
 - Provide opportunities for staff training.
 - Support staff to implement their part of the initiative, i.e. sending notices to schools, distributing notices to appropriate school staff, implementing student supports, and facilitating referrals for mental health counseling, etc.
- Partner organizations may incur minimal costs associated with printing forms or managing and tracking the flow of referrals.

Sustaining Handle With Care

- Develop a coordinating/sustaining team that monitors the ongoing implementation of HWC. Members may be different from the implementation team but should include representatives from the each of the key partners.
- Address challenges and barriers as they arise, such as low numbers of notices, difficulty communicating with appropriate school personnel, etc.

- Law enforcement may need periodic reminders to initiate HWC notices. Strategies include signs in prominent places, brief in-services, reminders sent to administrators, etc.
- School may need to anticipate staff absences and turnover for those who receive and distribute HWC notices. Identifying more than one contact person is helpful.
- Law enforcement and schools will need a plan to orient new staff to Handle With Care.
- Periodically acknowledge the efforts law enforcement and schools are making to support students. Strategies include anniversary celebrations, articles in the local newspaper, etc.
- A PowerPoint presentation is available that may be helpful for those interested in [Sustaining Handle With Care](#).

APPENDIX H

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Questions and Answers for Law Enforcement

- **What kinds of incidents are appropriate for a Handle With Care notice?** It is never a problem to initiate a notice. If you are asking the question, go ahead and send the notice.
- **What if I forget to send the notice before the next school day?** It is best to send notices as soon as possible but it is never too late to send the notice.
- **Are notices sent when schools are closed?** Hopefully, the schools will continue to receive notices during school breaks and will make staff aware after school is back in session.
- **Do I need to get permission from parents to send a HWC notice?** No, you are only sharing publicly available information and therefore permission is not required. Many parents are happy to hear that the school will receive a notice and be prepared to support their child.
- **Can other organizations such as child protective services or child advocacy centers initiate HWC notices?** Other organizations should not initiate notices because that would be a breach of confidentiality. If they are partnered with law enforcement or schools in their work, they could request that a notice be initiated by one of those partners.
- **Will HWC notifications be submitted if federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are engaging with families?** Federal ICE Agents are not involved in the Handle With Care initiative; however, federal ICE Agents usually notify local law enforcement (i.e. the county sheriff's office or local police department) if a raid will occur and therefore the local police department is often present at the incident or after the incident and can send HWC notices for children affected.

Questions and Answers for School Personnel

- **Will law enforcement provide information about the type of incident the child witnessed?** No. You will not receive and do not really need any information about the incident. Your role is to be aware that something occurred involving law enforcement and that the child may have experienced trauma. That information is enough for you to observe the child's behavior and provide supportive interventions.
- **Should I ask the child about the incident?** No. Your role is to observe and listen to whatever the child shares. You can be supportive without having detailed information about the incident.
- **What if a staff person is aware of a potentially traumatizing incident that did not involve law enforcement?** For example, a CPS worker comes to school to interview a child or a child or parent shares information with a staff person. School staff can initiate an internal HWC notice. The notice will contain the same information (i.e. child's name and "handle with care") as a notice coming from law enforcement.

- **Should I accept inappropriate behavior from a child who has a HWC notice?** No, an HWC notice does not condone inappropriate behavior in school. However, it does provide context for the child's behavior. This information can enable staff to prevent inappropriate behaviors. It also allows staff to respond in ways that acknowledge that the behavior may be the result of trauma and teach the child more appropriate ways to express feelings.

Questions and Answers for Mental Health Providers

- **Must mental health counseling be provided in the schools?** The Handle With Care model stresses the importance of providing mental health counseling in the schools so that it is readily accessible to students. However, if a parent or student prefers that services be provided elsewhere, that is acceptable.
- **What are possible sources of mental health services?** Mental health may be provided by public (community mental health) or private organizations. They may also be provided by school-based child and adolescent health centers or mental health providers hired by school districts.
- **Can mental health interns be utilized to provide counseling?** Some programs have utilized interns to provide mental health counseling under the supervision of licensed mental health providers.

APPENDIX I

RESOURCES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Trauma Training for Law Enforcement

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Children Exposed to Violence and Childhood Trauma, International Association of Chiefs of Police, <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/enhancing-law-enforcement-response-to-children-exposed-to-violence-and-childhood-trauma>

Videos

Handle With Care for Law Enforcement (you must register before viewing this video)
<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/7648938862177054215>

Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents Training, <https://youtu.be/ir2xA6XniSA>

Handle With Care: Roll Call Video,
<http://handlewithcarewv.org/docs/Handle%20With%20Care.mp4>

APPENDIX J

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Trauma Training and Strategies

[Trauma Sensitive Strategies for Schools](#). A list of resources for training educators as well as classroom strategies.

[Handle With Care for School Personnel](#) Register before viewing video.

APPENDIX K

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Handle With Care model was developed in West Virginia by the WV Children’s Justice Task Force and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the South District of West Virginia. The two organizations formed a subcommittee in 2011 to explore programming to look at the problem of children’s exposure to violence and to look for programming that could help mitigate the negative effects of trauma on children.

The West Virginia Defending Childhood Initiative, commonly referred to as “Handle With Care,” was tailored to reflect the needs and issues affecting children in West Virginia. The Initiative, a result of a collaborative effort of key stakeholders and partners, builds upon the success of proven programs throughout the country. The goal of the Initiative is to prevent children’s exposure to trauma and violence, mitigate negative affects experienced by children’s exposure to trauma, and to increase knowledge and awareness of this issue.

Michigan’s Handle With Care initiative was started in Jackson County when a core team of community stakeholders agreed that what they were doing in W. Virginia would be a great fit for their community. Handle With Care seemed to complement a variety of collaborative efforts that were already taking place in Jackson County. The goals and the work of the program allow children and youth to remain in school and in their classrooms for better learning, which is supported by the Jackson County School Justice Partnership and Cradle to Career network. It allows for all members of our community to understand and respond to trauma in a positive manner, which is a goal of the Trauma Support Network; and it provides for the possibility of on-site mental health services in the schools, which is supported by work with Project AWARE in Jackson and Hillsdale counties.

The Handle With Care Implementation Team in Jackson, Michigan, comprised of law enforcement, educators, mental health providers and the MDHHS director, spent the last half of 2016 working together to create a plan for implementation. Review of Handle With Care occurred and the agency administrators and chiefs of law enforcement agencies approved the project.

Handle With Care gains more and more interest every day from all over the state of Michigan and all over the nation. In June 2017 and again in the winter/spring 2019, members of the Jackson County Handle With Care team provided training sessions about “How to Bring Handle With Care to your Community” all over the state. In July of 2017, the Handle With Care Michigan website was launched by Jackson County, which was done in collaboration with West Virginia and mirrored their website.

In October of 2017 Eaton County launched their Handle With Care program and in February of 2018 Washtenaw County did the same.

In 2018, a statewide coordinator for Handle With Care was established within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Adolescent Health. The coordinator's role is to provide support and resources to all Michigan communities that wish to implement Handle With Care.

In 2019, a Handle With Care Statewide Advisory Committee was created to provide input and expertise to the initiative and work on long term sustainability.

KEY EVENTS FOR HANDLE WITH CARE IN MICHIGAN



APPENDIX L

HANDLE WITH CARE RESULTS IN MICHIGAN

- ❖ *School interventions sufficient for 90% (or more) of identified children.*
- ❖ *10% (or fewer) identified children referred for mental health services.*
- ❖ *Law enforcement routinely interacts with the schools.*
- ❖ *Teachers better able to address classroom issues.*
- ❖ *Mental Health providers see children interact in the school environment.*
- ❖ *Increases access to mental health services.*
- ❖ *Handle With Care is an invitation to collaboration.*
 - *Encourages agencies to work together.*
 - *Builds community trust with all partners – law enforcement, schools, and mental health providers.*
- ❖ ***Most importantly Handle With Care helps children struggling with the effects of trauma.***

APPENDIX M

HANDLE WITH CARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Michigan Handle With Care Advisory Committee was convened in 2019 and includes representatives from fully implemented HWC programs as well as state and local level stakeholders. The Advisory Committee encourages and supports HWC implementation across the state and monitors program fidelity and outcomes. Membership is likely to grow in the future.

Current Advisory Committee Members

Amanda Burch, Eaton County MDHHS

Kevin Caldwell, Michigan State Police

Ross Fort, Michigan Department of Education

Kyle Guerrant, Michigan Department of Education

Elmer Hitt, City of Jackson Police and Fire

Zoe Lyons, Jackson County MDHHS

Shannon Novara, Washtenaw Intermediate School District

Christopher Robinson, MDHHS, Division of Child and Adolescent Health

Robert Sheehan, Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards

Carrie Tarry, MDHHS, Division of Child and Adolescent Health

Lynda Zeller, Michigan Health Endowment Fund

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