



ADYC COMPLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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By Sadie Hart, ICWA Compliance Monitor

Q4 2021

Welcome to the New Ramsey County ICWA Manager

In June 2021 the Ramsey County Social Services Department welcomed Bobbi Jo Potter to the newly created ICWA Manager position. Potter brings 16 years of experience in child protection to the position and was most recently the Indian Child Welfare Unit Supervisor in South St. Louis County (Duluth area), Minnesota. Potter is a citizen of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, a parent, and a foster parent. We interviewed her to learn more about this new role and the experiences and perspectives she will bring to Ramsey County.

Potter's child protection career path did not begin in ICWA despite her mother and sister both working as social workers for tribal nations. She recalls touching on ICWA in her undergraduate program but noted that it was often not given the attention it needed. When she first started in child protection, she was often asked why she was not working in ICWA. The frequency of this question sparked something inside of her to learn more about ICWA and why people thought she should be an ICWA worker;

being an Indigenous woman could not have been the only reason. This led to a journey of self-discovery and reconnection to culture.



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“It wasn't until the Master of Social Work program at the University of Minnesota Duluth when I started learning more about who I was as an Anishinaabe person and the important role that culture plays in our healing as an individual and as a community.” It was the first time in her professional or educational career that she was in an environment where it was not only ok to be Indigenous but it was welcomed. She recalls this experience as being a turning point in her life.

Potter's perspectives about the child welfare system influence her work and focus: “Through my work and learning about the system, I think it is really broken, from a sense of it is working exactly how it was meant to work – that's what the system was structured to do. But it's broken in that we aren't supposed to remove kids, we are supposed to help families stay together and provide services and supports. I would like to change the community's experience that they have with social services.” She would like the system to be a place that she could and would turn to if she needed help. Potter believes that the community should be able to trust that their children and families are being treated like they are relatives of the social worker working with them and that honoring connection to culture is high.

Ramsey County ICWA Manager (Continued from page 1)

As she settles into the ICWA Manager position, Potter has the opportunity to be part of that change. This is a new position for the agency with room for creativity and the support to transform ICWA work in Ramsey County. She has been busy learning about what child protection looks like in Ramsey County, community services, building relationships internally and within the community, and stabilizing and building on the team of ICWA workers that she has joined in moving this work forward. It is her goal to create a space where it is not only ok to be Indigenous, but also normal to be Indigenous; a space where people passionate about working with American Indian people want to be and brave discussions are held to focus on the impact to families for generations to come.

“We can’t change the system without the perspective of those experiencing the system.”

Community engagement is a top priority, and Potter is excited to step into a system that values community collaboration: “I’ve joined an agency where community collaboration is important and is actually happening. Often our community’s experience is that we are invited to the table after the fact to meet a requirement and provide a rubber stamp. I think for Ramsey County it’s more important than checking a box. It’s a value we carry – I’m not saying that we get it right all the time, it’s a big system and there are going to be a lot of bumps in the road, but I think genuinely we are showing up and wanting to collaborate with community. I’m excited about the Transforming Systems Together work. That’s a huge community engagement project that has been happening for a while that is creating major change. We also have the American Indian Partnership which led to the creation of my position and changes made to the hiring process that placed value on Indigenous culture and experience. We can’t change the system without the perspective of those experiencing the system. We need community to hold the mirror for us, let us know how they are experiencing our work, and to provide their guidance and expertise on what we need to do differently.”

Community is important to Potter. She attributes this to her childhood experience growing up on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. “The reservation was broken up into smaller communities separated by geographic location. In these smaller communities everyone was like family. We celebrated birthdays, weddings, and deaths together. We had volleyball teams, baseball teams, etc., and would play against the other communities. Everyone looked after each other’s kids and helped each other out when needed. One summer I ended up cooking all the summer meals for the community kids because the mission worker didn’t show up and we needed someone to do it. I was a young person myself at the time and remember how good it felt to serve my community. I get that feeling doing this work today.”

“If we don’t know the past, we are going to repeat it and I think that that has continued to show throughout history.”

Potter also noted the importance of integrating culture and understanding historical trauma in the American Indian community into the work. “If we don’t know the past, we are going to repeat it and I think that that has continued to show throughout history. My community has experienced years of extermination policies and genocide tactics that have impacted all aspects of our lives present and past. I think knowing and understanding this will help people be more compassionate. Most of the time the people we are working with have trauma responses and are out here trying to survive. I remember what it was like, trying to survive. I also remember what it was like when I learned that my culture and spirituality gave me the tools to thrive. Our families have a right to that same cultural knowledge and access to traditional healing practices.”

“Culture is important because that’s where healing happens, that’s where we find ourselves in all of those attempts to exterminate us. I can’t imagine that if we are truly trying to change how we are working with families that these things aren’t integrated, not just for the families, but for the people who are doing the work – I think there’s a piece of needing to create a space within a county system where people can be Indigenous, so that also means welcoming our traditional practices into the workspace so that the people who are serving our people can also get the healing and connection that they need. It’s important that we honor the Indigenous ways of knowing and being and connect families back in order for them to live a good life.”

“I’ve always believed that in order for a system to work for the people it serves, it must be grounded in the values of that community.”

Potter indicated that creating these changes within the agency can improve how workers interact with families: “I would like to see a different way that we engage families. The work going on at Miskwaagamiwiizaaga’igan (Red Lake Nation) resonates with me. They look at and treat the people they serve as relatives. It aligns with what I’ve been taught and have grown to know. We are all related. When we look at the world through that lens, we are more compassionate, caring, and able to look to the future. Changing how we view the people we serve is only one piece of the puzzle. I’ve always believed that in order for a system to work for the people it serves, it must be grounded in the values of that community. We’ve got an amazing opportunity to decolonize a system and build it on a

new foundation where American Indian culture can be interwoven throughout. In order to do this we need our community to be at the table guiding the process.”

Potter recognized the hard work that justice partners have done to uphold the spirit of ICWA as well as room for improvement. “I think for the most part people are attempting to follow the spirit of ICWA. Part of me feels like we’re not fully there yet, but I also have to acknowledge that I’m looking at it through an Indigenous lens so when you’re fully embracing the spirit of ICWA, things look and feel different. I would like to see us get to a place where we all are actively engaging in the decolonization process and breaking down how the system and certain thought processes impact the outcomes that we have. This will take deliberate and intentional work until we get to a place where it is second nature. The system is still *that* system, and we have to all collectively work to change that in order for us to reach the outcomes we want. Anytime we are posed with a decision we must also consider the impact on future generations. We must remain focused on how our decisions impact the families we serve. It’s easy to focus on what makes our job easier or more efficient. However, easier and more efficient doesn’t always equal easier, more efficient, or better outcomes for families.”

For Potter, the ideal child protection process would be less punitive and focus on prevention. “I don’t know what things were like pre-colonial contact as far as how these things were managed. Ideally the child protection process would reflect the restorative practices that are present in our culture. We need our elders, knowledge keepers, and others who know to help us integrate the past with the present. Growing up I watched how my community took care of each other. Those who were struggling were treated with compassion and understanding. They weren’t forced to work harder or asked to jump through hoops. People came to their door and brought food, cleaned their house, mowed their lawn, sat with them, watched their kids, etc. Depending on what the struggle was they were connected to elders or ceremonies. Everyone was taken care of and there was no shaming. I’d like to get to a point where our preventative and supportive community services are voluntarily accessed by many and prevent families from entering the system across the board. If a family entered the system, they would experience a wraparound community response where all the immediate needs of the family are met and there is an elder present, in addition to helpers who can address mental and chemical health needs on the spot. The focus is to stabilize the family unit using culture as the building block.”

“For our community these changes can’t come fast enough. We’ve got a long history of mistrust and abuse that we have to overcome.”

“For our community these changes can’t come fast enough. We’ve got a long history of mistrust and abuse that we have to overcome. Historically the American Indian community has experienced higher rates of removal. This remains their experience and will continue to be the experience if we continue to function within the system that has gotten us to where we are. Words are not enough. We have to demonstrate through our continued interactions that we are here to help. We will know we are headed in the right direction when our community consistently experiences our work with a family preservation focus. Their view of us will begin to shift and trust will begin to form. But first we must show the people we serve that we are worthy of their trust.”

Ramsey County ICWA Manager (Continued from page 3)

“I would love to see access to traditional healing practices expanded. Coming from a more rural area it was a little easier to access cultural and spiritual practices, which made it easier to connect people. I’m new to the area and still learning what’s available. However, a theme I continue to hear is that people want to access their culture but aren’t aware of where to go or have other barriers that make it hard to access the practices available in tribal communities outside of the metro area. Our culture, language, and spirituality hold within it everything we need to know to as Indigenous people so that we can live a good life. Connecting people to this is not only their inherent right but a tool that can help people create the life they want to live.”

Finally, Potter expressed her excitement for the future of ICWA in Ramsey County and the opportunity to create change through collaboration. “I genuinely in my heart get excited about the opportunities that are before us. I look at the work that has already been done and the sacrifices that have been made by community and workers and can’t help but get emotional. It feels like the stars are aligning and creator is orchestrating it all. People keep showing up to the table and having the hard conversations. I appreciate that because nobody’s expecting everyone to have all the answers or to be perfect. It feels more like a collaborative approach. We’ve got a community and supports in place to make this happen because we value it. I like to see action and I’m seeing action here.”

“I genuinely in my heart get excited about the opportunities that are before us.”

“As far as the community goes, I would love to get to know the community more. They are my community now and I want to be involved and have that same sense of community that I had growing up. We are changing things together and I look forward to where we go. I’m ok hearing the hard feedback – it is hard, but I’m open to hearing it. I can’t make any promises outside of that I’m going to do my best to decolonize and change the system so that our community stops experiencing the system in the traumatic ways that it has. This is more than a job to me, it’s personal and I am committed to this work. It’s an honor to be here working for and with all of you.”

Miigwech to Bobbi Jo Potter for answering our questions and welcome to the Ramsey County Indian child welfare community!

American Indian Intertribal Youth Advocacy Council

Congratulations to Sheri Riemers, Interim Executive Director at the Ain Dah Yung Center, who recently received the Steve O’Neil Outstanding Organizing Award at the 2021 Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) Annual Conference. The award honors those who exemplify O’Neil’s passion and drive for organizing social and policy change.

Riemers was nominated for the award in part due to her work with the American Indian Intertribal Youth Advocacy Council (AIYAC). AIYAC is comprised of American Indian youth aged 16 to 24 that share a common desire to create change within government systems. The youth also share common lived experiences within child protection, foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice systems and utilize these experiences to advocate for change. Instead of adults making decisions for youth, AIYAC gives youth the opportunity to amplify their voices within systems by providing space for youth to act as liaisons on issues that impact them at city council meetings, Ramsey County board meetings, and the state legislature. “Young people need a voice in our systems,” Riemers explained. “They are the most invisible and underserved in our systems.”



AIYAC grew through support from the Regional Expert Network (REN), which is a partnership between the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative (HHMFC), the Pohlad Foundation, and several Minnesota organizations.

American Indian Intertribal Youth Advocacy Council (Continued from page 4)

The REN believes in building an empowered peer-led community with current or past lived experience to advise localities and policymakers on best practices to prevent and end homelessness and to ensure decision making spaces are dedicated for those who have lived experience. The MCH partnered with the Ain Dah Yung Center to create opportunities for American Indian community members with lived experience with homelessness to have a seat at decision making tables and provide strategic guidance to Minnesota's homelessness response system stakeholders.

Policymakers will also collaborate with youth by attending AIYAC council meetings to build relationships, empower youth to advocate for themselves and their communities, and help them refine their advocacy skills. As AIYAC continues to grow, these relationships will allow opportunities for youth to partner with policymakers and advocates, develop policy agendas, testify, and tell their own stories.

Congratulations, Sheri, and we look forward to seeing the American Indian Intertribal Youth Advocacy Council grow!

Liaison Lowdown: Holiday Fun

By Mariah Smith

Mino-Oshki-Biboon, Happy New Year from Ain Dah Yung Center to you and your loved ones!



Holiday bags included ornament kits, gingerbread house kits, ready-to-go cookie jars, and gift cards.

Oyate Nawajin had a busy December helping plan the Annual Community Holiday Party. For the second year in a row, we were not able to hold the event in person due to COVID-19. Ain Dah Yung Center worked in collaboration with Department of Indian Work, St. Paul Indian Education and American Indian Family Center for this event.

Although we were not able to hold this event in person, we were still able to celebrate and support our American Indian youth this year. ADYC delivered 31 holiday bags in total, serving 97 youth. Each box contained kits to keep our youth busy during the holidays. A few things inside the bags were ornament kits, a gingerbread house kit, a ready-to-go cookie jar, and a few gift cards. Staff members met at Department of Indian Work's new location in Little Canada to assemble the holiday bags and all agencies delivered the holiday bags to the families they work with.

We hold hope that next year it will be safe enough to do this event in person. Miigwech to all the agencies ADYC collaborated with for all their hard work with these holiday bags!

On a personal note, I would like to say giga-waabamin to you all as I will be transitioning into the second Family Advocate position at Ain Dah Yung Center! I look forward to continuing to serve our community but in a different way. The knowledge I've gained as the Nokomis Circle Liaison has been invaluable and it has challenged me to grow. Miigwech to all the Ramsey County ICWA workers who welcomed me into the position and helped me along the way!



ADYC delivered 31 holiday bags, serving 97 youth.

Successful Family Preservation Events

In November the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors Family Preservation Subcommittee hosted an education event for the American Indian community entitled “Truancy and Educational Neglect for American Indian Families.” Information included an overview of truancy and diversion programs, the historical causes of truancy in the American Indian community, and the importance of Indian Education programs. Parent and youth panelists also shared their experiences with truancy and the resources they utilized.

The recording of the event can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8n_PJkz7o. Previous events are available here: <https://adycenter.org/about/programs/oyate-nawajin>. To receive information about future events, please email sadie.hart@adycenter.org.



The Family Preservation Subcommittee also hosted a virtual Meet and Greet for child welfare professionals to learn more about American Indian organizations in the metro area. Over 100 people attended and were able to network in virtual breakout rooms and learn more about resources available for the families we serve.

Thank you to the Family Preservation Subcommittee for providing valuable information and resources to our community!

Court Updates

The ADYC Compliance Newsletter includes positive observations from ICWA hearings as well as highlights that demonstrate the great work happening in Ramsey County.

Observation: Guardian ad Litem Patra Siedlecki noted the great work between the parents as well as their work on their case plans to care for their children. The mother said she was grateful to be in treatment and to have the opportunity to do what was best for her kids. The tribe echoed the praise for the mother's hard work.

Observation: Children's Law Center Attorney Deb Kovats thanked Social Worker Julie Johns for her hard work on the case and for staying through the end of the adoption process to ensure consistency for the youth.

Observation: Social Worker Skye Johnson reported that she would bring Christmas presents from the child's mother to the child and that they would have a virtual visit with the mother to open presents.

Observation: At a hearing in which a trial home visit was authorized, the grandmother foster parent noted that part of why her grandson is doing so well is that he can see his mother every day.

Observation: The mother said she did not expect to log on to child protection court and hear such glowing remarks from the parties about how she is doing. Judge Smith said the praise was well deserved.

Observation: After Judge Smith and the mother had a conversation about the reason for missed urinalyses due to her mental health, the mother said she felt more comfortable with the process. Judge Smith encouraged her to reach out to the agency for help to attend the urinalyses.

Observation: Judge Smith expressed his thankfulness that the grandmother had stepped up to care for the child and is providing a loving home, noting how fortunate the child is to have her provide a loving home.

Observation: An example of safety planning shared at a recent Ramsey County ICWA Advisory Board meeting highlighted the great work being done to divert families from the court system. After a newborn tested positive for illegal substances and the hospital recommended removing the child from his mother, Intake Social Worker Shad Cook and Red Lake Nation Tribal Representative Mika Barrett collaborated with the mother to provide resources and support, visited the mother and newborn daily to ensure the infant stayed safely at home, and collaborated to form a relationship with the mother built on trust.

ICWA Violations

The ADYC Compliance Newsletter includes ICWA violations which may be from hearings held at court and/or from case files. We are blessed to have such a close working relationship with Ramsey County professionals and the judges who preside for our families. We are pleased to report that there were no violations observed during Quarter 4! We look forward to our continued partnership as we work together to find ways for our families to be successful!

Tribal Attendance

The following chart indicates the tribes involved in ICWA cases in Ramsey County during Quarter 4. The chart includes the tribes involved, the number of hearings that occurred, and the number of times the tribe attended hearings. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA hearings.

TRIBE	NUMBER OF HEARINGS	TRIBE PRESENT
Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians	2	1
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	1	1
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	2	1
Choctaw Nation	3	3
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians	1	-
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	5	5
Lower Sioux Indian Community	2	2
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	3	3
Oglala Lakota Nation	1	1
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	1	1
Red Lake Nation	9	7
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	4	4
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	2	2
White Earth Nation	5	4
Unknown*	12	-

About the Quarter 4 Data

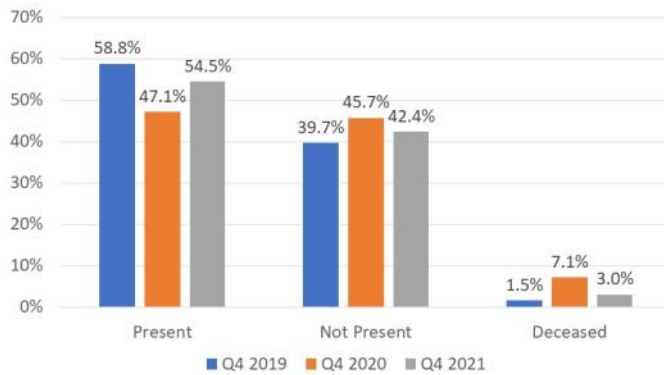
Data was collected from October 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021. This data was collected by the court monitor at hearings, talking to the parties involved, and reading case files. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA hearings.

Attendance of Mothers

Q4 2019		
Present	40	58.8%
Not Present	27	39.7%
Deceased	1	1.5%
Grand Total	68	

Q4 2020		
Present	33	47.1%
Not Present	32	45.7%
Deceased	5	7.1%
Grand Total	70	

Q4 2021		
Present	18	54.5%
Not Present	14	42.4%
Deceased	1	3.0%
Grand Total	33	

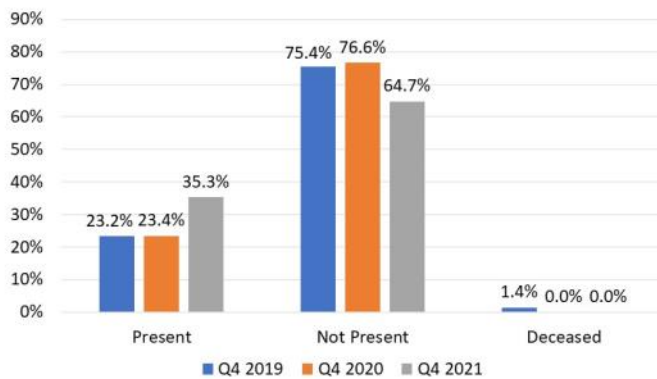


Attendance of Fathers

Q4 2019		
Present	16	23.2%
Not Present	52	75.4%
Deceased	1	1.4%
Grand Total	69	

Q4 2020		
Present	15	23.4%
Not Present	49	76.6%
Deceased	0	0.0%
Grand Total	64	

Q4 2021		
Present	12	35.3%
Not Present	22	64.7%
Deceased	0	0.0%
Grand Total	34	

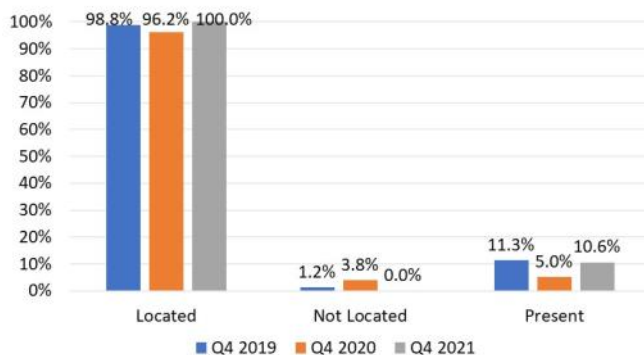


Attendance of Children and Youth

Q4 2019		
Located	79	98.8%
Not Located	1	1.2%
Present	9	11.3%
Grand Total	80	

Q4 2020		
Located	77	96.2%
Not Located	3	3.8%
Present	4	5.0%
Grand Total	80	

Q4 2021		
Located	47	100.0%
Not Located	0	0.0%
Present	5	10.6%
Grand Total	47	



Attendance

Attendance among mothers decreased from Quarter 4 of 2019 to Quarter 4 of 2020, most likely due to adjustments in attending court virtually and the need to reengage after administrative review hearings at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attendance among mothers increased to 54.5% in Quarter 4 of 2021. It should be noted that the slight overall decrease in attendance between Quarter 4 in 2019 and Quarter 4 in 2021 could be due to the significant decrease in the number of cases. In addition to the decrease in cases due to COVID-19, the agency has been increasing efforts to help families divert the court system. The cases that do appear in court may involve more parents who are unable or unwilling to engage with the agency or court at that time.

Attendance among fathers increased from 23.4% in Quarter 4 of 2020 to 35.3% in Quarter 4 of 2021. There has been a noticeable effort and increased discussion in court about engaging fathers throughout the court process.

While there was a decrease in attendance among children and youth in Quarter 4 of 2020, it increased in 2021. Overall attendance still remains low. Youth who are not located include those who have absconded.

Tribal Attendance

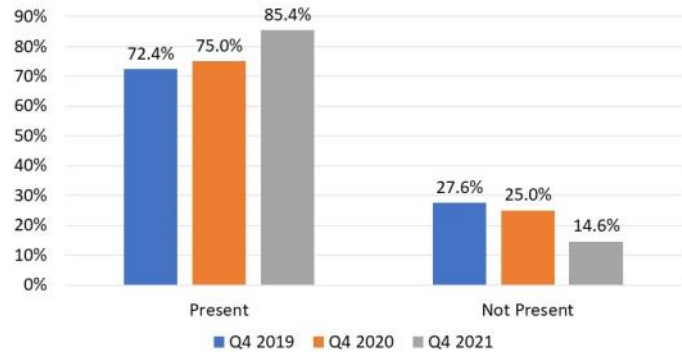
Tribal attendance has increased from 2019 to 2021. Zoom and time certain hearings have made calendars more efficient, especially for tribal representatives who attend hearings in multiple counties. This also highlights the ongoing collaboration between the agency and tribes throughout the case.

Attendance of Tribes (when identified)

Q4 2019		
Present	42	72.4%
Not Present	16	27.6%
Grand Total	58	

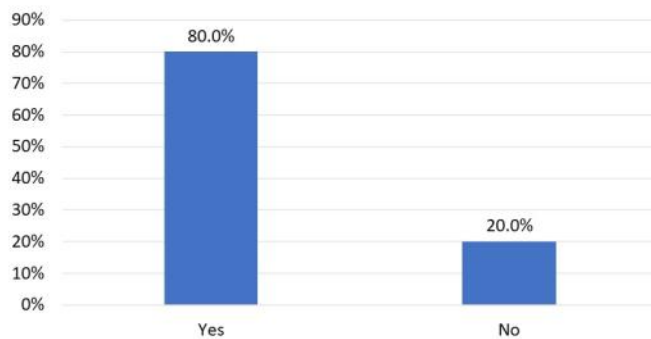
Q4 2020		
Present	48	75.0%
Not Present	16	25.0%
Grand Total	64	

Q4 2021		
Present	35	85.4%
Not Present	6	14.6%
Grand Total	41	



Did the judge find that the agency made active efforts to prevent removal or return the child home? (Does not include permanency data)

Yes	24	80.0%
No	6	20.0%
Grand Total	30	

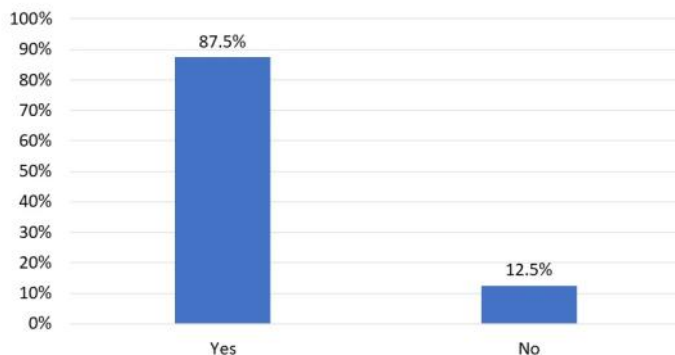


Active Efforts

During Quarter 4 the judge found that the agency made active efforts at 80% of the hearings. When the finding was not made it was because it was not required or the hearing was continued. Of those findings, 87.5% were supported by in-court testimony. Additional active efforts are included in social worker court reports.

Was there testimony to support the active efforts finding?

Yes	21	87.5%
No	3	12.5%
Grand Total	24	



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