

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies



This year, WAFCA celebrated 45 years of partnering to improve lives. We took time to look back with gratitude and remember those who laid the foundation for all that WAFCA has become.

One consistent light that continues to shine across the years—in an especially impactful way for me this year—is the passion of our people. In 2025, our newly-minted WAFCA team was graced with innumerable opportunities to work with your staff at all levels of your organizations. From our professional development program, to our communities of practice, to our ABIDE Committee and our new WAFCA Board, the talent and commitment of our 5,000-strong WAFCA community workforce shines through. Our spring Leadership Summit engaged the power of their voices for advocacy. Our virtual Member Meeting this fall achieved record attendance, engaging staff in the field alongside administrators and directors for lessons in inclusive leadership. We also took time to vision forward as our Board launched into a future-focused strategic planning process.

Amidst a shifting and uncertain policy environment, our WAFCA workforce persisted: seeking shared understanding and focusing on community needs. As new technology generated more questions than answers, our people engaged with curiosity and courage. In short, the gift of our sector is our people and their capacity to foster hope and nurture growth even amidst adversity.

As we look back through the years, practice changes, and our language evolves, but the core of the good work continues. As was noted in a recent member gathering, **“Humanity is here to stay.”** That’s a mission to carry us all forward into the next 45 years.

Kathy Markeland
Executive Director, WAFCA

Your
2025
WAFCA
team:

Sandy,
Kathy,
Allyson,
& Kyla



ADVOCATING

Elevating member voice and advancing effective systems of care were central to WAFCA's advocacy in 2025. Through initiatives like our Advocacy Day at the Capitol, strategic partnerships, and sustained engagement with state and federal policymakers, we strengthened our visibility while advancing priorities across behavioral health, child welfare, and Medicaid. Our work focused on protecting and expanding access to care, addressing regulatory and workforce challenges, and supporting providers across the full continuum of services.

Federal & State Legislative Action



Amplifying Member Voice - Advocacy Day at the Capitol.

We launched a successful "Day at the Capitol" during the state budget season, helping amplify WAFCA's profile and laying the foundation for future connections and relationships.

Creating a New Level of Care for Youth with Complex Needs. WAFCA championed passage of 2025 WI Act 9 to authorize the operation of psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF) in WI.

Navigating Shifts in the Federal Environment. We stayed attuned to the changes emerging on the federal level and curated resources for members to help guide agency decisions as administration priorities shifted.

Highlighting Liability Insurance Crisis. In partnership with national organizations, WAFCA contributed to data gathering and reporting on the unsustainable costs and restrictions emerging in the liability insurance market.

Partnering to Address Regulatory Barriers. We consulted with members on emerging regulatory changes, including issues impacting school mental health such as clinical licensure changes and emerging policies regarding therapists in schools.

Protecting Federal Medicaid. We engaged with the statewide Medicaid Coalition to support member advocacy efforts to protect Medicaid from detrimental cuts at the federal level, including significant member contributions to a briefing in northeastern Wisconsin.

Advancing New Safety Tools for Residential Providers. With support from members and key policymakers, we advanced a measure to permit video recording in RCC, group homes and shelters securing passage through the State Senate and anticipating final approval this spring.

ADVOCATING

State Agency Advocacy

Maintaining Sector Visibility. We convened regularly with leaders in DCF and DHS to coordinate on system initiatives and share provider perspectives on advances in care and treatment.

Advising Out of Home Care Rules. We partnered with DCF to rewrite & improve the foster care (DCF 56) and group home (DCF 57) licensing rules.

Enhancing Connections in Group Care Summit. In collaboration with DCF and county partners, WAFCA helped sponsor a residential care convening for a day grounded in shared goals for children and their families, addressing key issues in group care and building relationships between counties and providers.

Continuing Leadership on Provider Rates and the Continuum of Care. Amidst ongoing changes in the system of care for children & families, WAFCA provided advisory support & leadership, including on the DCF Rate Regulation Advisory Committee to sustain services and providers at all levels of care.

Consulting Partner on DSPS Behavioral Health Workforce Analysis. After fostering a strong relationship with DSPS in recent years, WAFCA has been formally engaged as a key advisor and contributor to the analysis of mental health workforce data gathered during licensure renewals. This analysis will inform future policy for our sector.

Supporting Medicaid Rate Increases for Behavioral Health. In collaboration with members, we gathered data and stories with a particular focus on adolescent day treatment to support advocacy to increase reimbursement rates.

Coordinating Member Voices on Children's Long Term Support Program. In response to significant changes in CLTS and the waiver renewal process, WAFCA convened members to gather insights into challenges & opportunities.

Coalitions & Partnerships

Leading Role in Mental Health Action Partnership. We continued our leadership in the Mental Health Action Partnership (MHAP) as an outgrowth of the WAFCA Future of Human Services initiative. Our strengthened connections through MHAP promoted coordination with NAMI Wisconsin, WI County Human Services Association, WI Hospital Association, and WI Primary Health Care Association, among others, on legislative agendas to elevate shared priorities.

Supporting the Center for Mental Health Implementation Support. This SAMHSA project focuses on sustainable implementation of effective mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery practices. WAFCA is part of the Midwest CMHIS Hub, disseminating information and providing input on needs.

Hosting a Legislative Briefing on Mental Health. WAFCA joined with DHS and representatives of the MHAP to contribute to a briefing for legislators and staff on mental health policy, system design and current challenges.

Contributing to Milwaukee Youth Behavioral Health Care Delivery Redesign. We contributed to this youth mental health-focused collaboration through the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership, resulting in the release of a white paper on youth with complex needs.

Advancing School Mental Health. In partnership with schools, parents, advocates and providers, we sustained our active engagement with the Coalition for Expanding School-Based Mental Health In Wisconsin.

Elevating Workforce Needs. We shared policy and practice challenges facing WI's behavioral health workforce as part of a national panel with Social Current.

INFORMING

CONTINUING EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



12 live CE events for
over **2,600 participants**

9 webinars | 3 in-person

CRISIS DE-ESCALATION

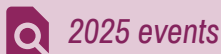
NEURODIVERSITY

SOMATIC HEALING

COUPLES COUNSELING

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

AND MORE



Online Learning System



26 on-demand courses
with **2,066 CE credits**
earned this year by a
growing number of users

CE “Quick Guides”



13 downloadable guides
with need-to-know
information from CE events



Collaborative Process

Our WAFCA-CE line-up is
developed with the support of
a **planning committee** of
WAFCA Member Agencies.

Each workshop is a
collaborative effort between
host and presenter to ensure
an **engaging** experience.

Shared Learning

We proudly supported & attended
seven great events in 2025:

- Multicultural Mental Health (Anesis)
- Youth Care Workers (WACYCP)
- State Assns. for Children (NOSAC)
- County Human Services (WCHSA)
- Wisconsin Owns Wellbeing Summit
- Childhood Behavioral Health (AHW)
- Healthy Workplace Cultures (SPARK)

INFORMATION SHARING



12 newsletters,
each reaching over
2,000 recipients

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COALITION FOR EXPANDING SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH IN WISCONSIN



**Neurodiversity & the
Nervous System**
engaged over 475
providers, school staff,
and family members.



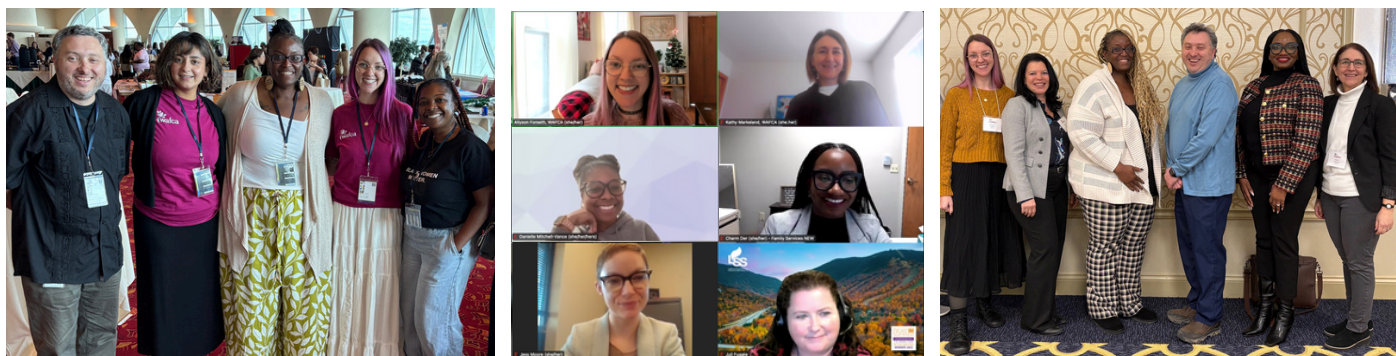
**Somatic Experiential
Play Therapy** convened
over 150 learners for
this interactive, in-
person workshop.



**Quarterly School
Mental Health
Convenings** explored
important themes
within the community.

BELONGING

In late 2024, WAFCA created a **new organizational statement** and formed a **permanent ABIDE Committee** dedicated to Accessibility, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity. Comprised of leaders representing nine WAFCA member agencies, the Committee navigated a nuanced and evolving landscape throughout 2025 and worked together to continue progression on our strategic goals.



2025 ABIDE Activities & Achievements

Committee Establishment & Expansion

- Convening the newly-permanent ABIDE Committee and welcomed new members.
- Opening applications and recruited five new members for the 2026-28 Committee term, with current members volunteering to mentor incoming members.

Ongoing Learning & Shared Leadership

- Engaging in foundational discussions on centering racial equity, belonging, and inclusive leadership.
- Participating in shared learning sessions on:
 - The Myth of Average
 - CLAS Standards
 - Bias
 - Inclusive Leadership
 - Belonging
- Reflecting on emerging guidance on grants and inclusive language/practice, COA accreditation, and implications for agencies.
- Focusing Member Meeting planning on inclusive leadership and centering the voices of ABIDE Committee members.

Strategic Alignment & Organizational Integration

- Integrating ABIDE into WAFCA's hiring and interviewing processes for our new Manager of Policy and Member Engagement.
- Conducting a review of core documents and the Association's website.
- Publishing the new Our Commitments webpage, featuring the ABIDE Statement and a revised Ethical Practice Statement.
- Adding ABIDE updates as a regular feature in the WAFCA monthly e-newsletter.
- Providing Committee insights to inform WAFCA's strategic planning process.

Reporting & Member Engagement

- Developing and refined a WAFCA ABIDE Survey to gather data on awareness and alignment, then reviewed survey results.
- Discussing what it means for WAFCA to become a more diverse Association.
- Providing input on DEI-related considerations for Board nominations and agency-level processes.

CONNECTING

Thanks to the WAFCA team for another great leadership event! You always do a great job of making all us feel welcomed, and it shows throughout these opportunities.

MEMBER CONVENINGS & DEVELOPMENT

- Creating opportunities for thought partnership and sharing through **Communities of Practice**:
 - Clinical Supervisors
 - Senior Financial & HR Leaders
 - CLTS Ad Hoc Consultation
 - DCF 56/57 Administrative Rule Meetings
 - Executive Coffee & Conversation
 - School Mental Health Convenings
- Gathering our community for **leadership events** focused on collaboration, organizational culture, and advancing Equity, Inclusion and Belonging:
 - WAFCA Leadership Summit (March, Madison)
 - WAFCA Institute (June, Door County)
 - Member Meeting (November, Virtual)
- Reigniting **Weekly Member Connections**, featuring timely updates on federal and state regulatory developments and emerging resources to support best practice.
- **Expanding Member Benefits** through a new partnership with OPEN MINDS.
- **Consulting on Strategic Plans.** WAFCA was pleased to gather with a number of Boards in 2025 to share emerging practice and policy trends to contribute to agency strategy efforts.

Thank You to Our Event Sponsors!



WAFCA BY THE NUMBERS

47 Member Agencies

\$50 million in philanthropy support to grow thriving families

5,000+ human services employees contributing to communities throughout the state

250,000 lives impacted

MEMBER EXPANSION

WAFCA welcomed two new member agencies in 2025!



CFI
CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENCE



THANK YOU, MEMBERS!

