

A Detailed History of Washburn

Mill Beginnings

The rich history of Washburn Center for Children goes back over 130 years to the early days of the Minneapolis milling industry and the philanthropic spirit of one man, Cadwallader C. Washburn. The face of the city, as well as the agency, have changed dramatically over time, but Mr. Washburn's original commitment to the well-being of children has remained constant.

In 1855, a newly elected U.S. Congressman from Wisconsin named Cadwallader Washburn sensed the business opportunities inherent in the Mississippi River, and bought land on the west bank of Minneapolis and the water power rights to St. Anthony Falls. In 1874, the Washburn "A" Mill was built, the largest flour mill in the world. This event helped make Minneapolis the leading flour producer in the country by 1875. In 1877, Cadwallader Washburn formed a new partnership with John Crosby, and the Washburn Crosby Company was born. Today, that company is known as General Mills. At the Millers International Exhibition in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1880, CC Washburn was awarded the gold medal for his flour, signifying that it was the best in the world. Two months later, "Gold Medal Flour" was first used as the brand for Mr. Washburn's Minneapolis flour and continued as its trademark. In 1924, the Washburn Crosby Company bought a struggling radio station to promote its products and named it after its acronym, WCCO.



Although Flour milling was very lucrative, it was also extremely dangerous. The dust created during the milling process was highly explosive, and on the evening of May 2, 1878, an explosion at the Washburn "A" Mill killed 14 employees.

At the time of the explosion, Mr. Washburn was in Wisconsin. When he heard the news, he hurried to Minneapolis to convey his sympathies to the relatives of the millers who perished in the explosion. A fund was immediately established to benefit the bereaved families, the first sign that Mr. Washburn's commitment to families was of the utmost personal importance.

Cadwallader Washburn later suffered a stroke and on May 14, 1882, died of kidney and heart failure. In his will, he left \$375,000 for the founding and endowment of the Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum. His hope was that the institution he provided for would re-create, in some measure, a secure, caring relationship for orphaned children.



Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum

In 1883, the first meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum was held. Their first order of business was to erect the building for an orphanage on the site of 50th and Nicollet. On November 16, 1886, eight boys and one girl were admitted.

While at the orphanage, children received instruction appropriate to the times: girls were taught household work, sewing and knitting; boys were taught farming, gardening and the use of tools. By 1895, the population of the orphanage was 122, the largest number of children that would ever be housed there at one time.

In 1907, changes began occurring in the financial operations of the orphanage. The number of children at the orphanage had declined slightly, but expenditures for the maintenance of the institution continued to increase. The Board recommended that the number of children cared for at the orphanage be cut back to 50 boys and 50 girls to reduce expenses.



The Shift to Foster Care

Financial conditions at the orphanage, as well as the economic climate of the U.S. as a whole, continued to deteriorate with each passing year, and in 1920, the Board of Trustees passed a resolution stating that no more children would be admitted. The building and site were sold to the city of Minneapolis, and today, Ramsey Junior High sits on the original location of the orphanage.

At the time of the orphanage's closing, other institutions in Minneapolis were also decreasing institutional care for children. Thus, the Washburn Foster Home Placement Agency grew out of the Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum. The agency conducted psychiatric and psychological examinations, consulted about children's problems and placed children in foster homes. Up to 100 children, ranging in age from five to 18 years, were supervised in homes at any one time. The agency operated successfully under these guidelines from 1929 to 1949.

A Children's Mental Health Agency

During the 1940s, it was determined that a "mental health clinic" for children and their parents was needed. So the Washburn Foster Home Placement Agency changed with the times and became the Washburn Memorial Clinic. In 1950, Dr. Harold B. Hanson was chosen as Director and Dr. Leo J. Hanvik was chosen as Chief Psychologist.

During the 1950s and 1960s, there were long waiting lists because the Washburn Memorial Clinic was the only agency of its kind. Recognizing the community's needs during the turbulent years of the late 60s, the Board of Trustees decided to make some plans for the future. Clinical services were increased and expanded, and age limits were extended to include both preschool and older children. In 1968, Dr. Leo Hanvik became Director and the agency officially changed its name to Washburn Child Guidance Center. This name change symbolized the growing departure of mental health programs from the earlier "medical model" kind of treatment in favor of a community approach. This new name better reflected the Center's work as an agency in the field of child development.

With the change in the agency's focus, Washburn Child Guidance Center was in high demand for psychological testing services. The agency suffered noticeably from the growing pains and a need for more space to accommodate the rapidly increasing staff. In the fall of 1972, Washburn moved to its current location at 24th and Nicollet.

A New Generation of Children

In April of 1985, Dr. Leo Hanvik retired. Two years later, Steve Lepinski was hired as Executive Director. The next years at the agency were influenced by three main themes - seeing increasingly younger children, seeing children and families with more clinically complex issues, and seeing children and families that reflected the increasing diversity of the Minneapolis area. In response, Washburn Child Guidance Center increased its focus on high-risk infants and provided more services to preschool age children. The agency also strengthened its clinical focus. More staff now have Masters and Doctorate degrees, and psychiatric and clinical consultation has increased. Significant attention has been paid to understanding the impact of culture on children and families, and training to assure culturally competent services has been a priority.



Satellite offices were opened to assure accessibility for clients. Today, Washburn has three sites in Hennepin County.

Looking Ahead

Today, Washburn Center for Children is the leading resource in Minnesota for children with social, emotional or behavioral problems. The most common reasons that parents contact Washburn include behavioral or developmental concerns, attention deficit disorder, childhood depression or anxiety disorders.

We are committed to being a center of excellence in children's mental health, to increasing access to quality mental health services, and to strengthening our capacity in the area of child trauma. In recent years, we have developed a best-practice framework that includes evidence-based practices, promising practices, and new research. The agency has grown, and we have recently doubled the number of children served. We have trained almost half of our staff on trauma-focused treatments, and have refined an intensive treatment model for young children who have experienced significant trauma. Today, Washburn Center for Children is the leading provider of services for children with social, emotional and behavioral problems in the Twin Cities.

Washburn Center launched a \$24.5 million capital campaign in 2011 to build a new, state-of-the-art children's mental health center in the Harrison neighborhood of Minneapolis. As it looks to the future, the agency continues to support the century-old vision of Cadwallader Washburn to serve children without question or distinction as to age, sex, race, color, or religion.

