



A Detailed History of Washburn Center for Children

Mill Beginnings

The rich history of Washburn Center for Children goes back more than 134 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.

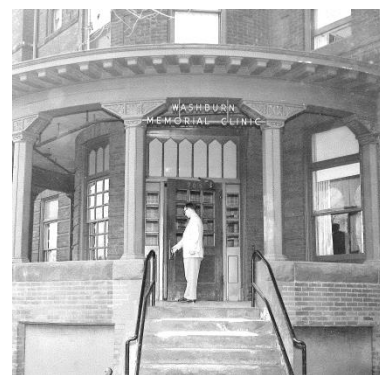
During the 1950s and 1960s, there were long waiting lists because the Washburn Memorial Clinic was the only agency of its kind. Recognizing the community's needs during the turbulent years of the late 60s, the Board of Trustees decided to make some plans for the future. Clinical services were increased 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 Center moved to 24th and Nicollet in Minneapolis.

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. 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, and the agency's community-based services continued to grow. In 2007, the agency was re-named Washburn Center for Children. Today, Washburn Center has three sites in Hennepin County and more than 20 school-based therapists serving the Eden Prairie, Minneapolis and Bloomington school districts.



A New Facility for Children to Grow and Heal

From 2007 – 2012, Washburn Center doubled the number of children it served, resulting in the need for an expanded space to better meet the community's mental health needs. Washburn Center launched a capital campaign in 2011 and successfully completed the \$24.5 million campaign in 2014. The first clients were welcomed to the LEED-GOLD certified, state-of-the-art children's mental health center in December 2014.

With the help of a significant grant, the agency also expanded its training efforts in 2014 by launching the United Health Foundation Training Institute at Washburn Center for Children. The Training Institute provides training to mental health clinicians, interns and professionals working with children, both nationally and internationally. Equipping professionals with the best practices of children's mental health will enhance the emotional health of children and families across the nation.



After 30 years of leadership, Steve Lepinski retired in February 2017, and Tom Steinmetz was named Chief Executive Officer.

Looking ahead

Today, Washburn Center for Children is a leading resource in Minnesota for children with social, emotional or behavioral problems. We are committed to increasing access to quality mental health services for children, and to providing training in the best practices of the field. As we look to the future, the agency continues to uphold the inclusive vision of Cadwallader Washburn to serve children without question or distinction as to age, sex, race, color, or religion.