

# **Division of Child and Family Well-Being**

# **Child Fatality Prevention Team:**

# **Board of Health and County Commissioners Cumulative Report 2021**

## **Purpose**

Local Child Fatality Prevention Teams (LCFPTs) consist of multidisciplinary members who spend time and effort reviewing the death of children, ages 0-17 years, who died (not of suspected abuse and neglect with Division of Social Services history) as a resident of their county. The local Child Fatality Prevention Teams (CFPTs) are required to advocate for system improvements and needed resources where gaps and deficiencies may exist and through the submission of a report annually to their local county commissioners (CC) and boards of health (BOH).

LCFPT review coordinators and chairs were asked to submit their reports provided to their local BOH and CC to the LCFPT program coordinator in May 2022. The following report reflects all submitted reports and summarizes the findings.

### Data

## **Report Submissions**

Fifty-three (53) counties responded to the request for submission with attachments of their reports to their local BOH and/or local CC. In addition, three counties responded that they did not report to local BOH and/or local CC and, therefore, did not provide supporting attachments. Although outlined as a requirement in NC General Statute 7B as well as the agreement addendum with each county, forty-four (44) did not respond to the request for submission. Of the 44 non-responses, it is not known whether reports were made to their county leaders.

The data below reflects the responses from the 53 counties who submitted attachments of local BOH and/or local CC reports.

## Number of 2021 CFPT Meetings

Of the responding counties, a total of 72 meetings were reported to be held in 2021 for CFPT reviews. Of note, not every county's report to their CC/BOH included the number of meetings held by their team. However, this shows a fraction of the time and hard work that goes into the review of child fatalities.

## Cause of Deaths Reviewed

Although a sample outline is provided for county reports to their local BOH and local CC, LCFPTs have discretion over what they include in their report. Considering all submitted reports, the following data presented on Graph 1 displays causes of death ordered by frequency in counties, while Table 1 displays causes of death in alphabetical order; both represent the same data. This data only represents a fraction of all local CFPTs and what they chose to share with their local BOH/CC leaders.

Graph 1. North Carolina, 2021 causes of death by the number of counties reporting

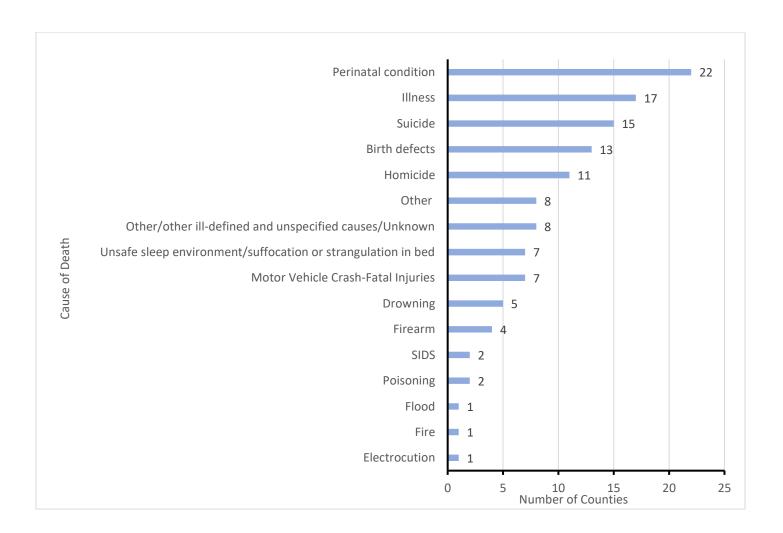


Table 1. North Carolina, 2021 causes of death alphabetically, with number of counties reporting

| Cause of death reported by local CFPT reviewers                         | Number of counties reporting cause of death among their reviews |
|---|---|
| Birth defects   | 13  |
| Drowning  | 5   |
| Electrocution   | 1   |
| Fire  | 1   |
| Firearm   | 4   |
| Flood   | 1   |
| Homicide  | 11  |
| Illness   | 17  |
| Motor Vehicle Crash-Fatal Injuries                                      | 7   |
| Other (choking, substance use while pregnant,                           | 8   |
| strangulation not self-inflicted, not noted)                            | _   |
| Other, other ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality OR Unknown | 8   |
| Perinatal condition (examples: Preterm Delivery, Premature Infants)     | 22  |
| Poisoning   | 2   |
| Suicide   | 15  |
| Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)                                     | 2   |
| Unsafe sleep environment/suffocation or strangulation in bed            | 7   |

In addition to the number and types of deaths noted in the reports from LCFPTs, teams also shared identified problems, recommendations, and actions from their reviews as well as overall team accomplishments. These outcomes are noted in the following sections:

- A. System Problems
- B. CFPT Recommendations and Actions
- C. CFPT Accomplishments

## A. System Problems

A summary of identified system problems noted by LCFPTs in their reports to local BOH and CC are noted below. System problems identify a lack of; or a need identified during the review of a specific child death review. Many similar system problems were noted by multiple teams.

- Systemic racism and other biases, along with gaps in safety net services, contribute to a lack of health, safety and opportunities for children and families
- Failure to follow safe sleeping protocols including co-sleeping with adults, crowded sleep areas, etc.
- Lack of parental awareness of the causes of SIDS and evidence-based prevention methods

- Child suicide continues to be a growing issue both in NC and the US. There is a general lack of
  awareness and communication on all levels on red flags for suicide/self-harm with needs in the
  school system for recognizing signs of suicide, next steps, and written curriculum for health classes
  addressing mental health, resiliency skills, and stress management.
- Need for recognition of the impact of isolation during the pandemic on youth at risk and the need for more regular check-in and information sharing between providers on risk factors.
- Lack of timely access to appropriate mental health services for children.
- Need for gun violence, gang violence, and human trafficking prevention.
- Need for car seat and seat belt safety.
- All-terrain vehicle 4-wheeler safety and education to prevent accidents.
- Need for water safety; lack of supervision while children are near water (including pools and bathtubs).
- Lack of knowledge on relationships between substance abuse and domestic violence and risk for abuse/trauma/abuse of children.
- Need for more preventative parenting education (including dangers of cigarette smoking, opioid use, and consumption of alcohol during pregnancy) and regular and early prenatal care.
- Need for grief counseling and support group identification for parents who lose children.
- Need for prevention of firearms used with the intent to kill.
- Identified challenges associated with receiving records from out of state.

## B. CFPT Recommendations and Actions

A summary of identified recommendations and actions taken by LCFPTs in their reports to local BOH and CC are noted below. Recommendations identify a suggested pathway of addressing the system issue and an action proposes or outlines what steps the LCFPT has taken or will take to fulfill the recommendation. Recommendations and actions have been modified to de-identify the associated county.

## CFPT recommends:

- Community education promoting seat belt use.
- Establishing a process for additional support for homeschoolers to reconnect with the school system upon return to in-person learning. The LCFPT also recommends ensuring that a mental health follow-up plan is in place with involvement of the primary care provider upon release from an inpatient hospital stay.
- Local governmental agencies (e.g. County, City, law enforcement, courts, and school systems) should require and invest in Racial Equity Institute's Groundwater training (or equivalent) for their staff.
  - Action: LCFPT Team Chair to share this recommendation with leaders of these agencies, including County Health and Human Services Board, Chief Equity & Human Rights Officer, and Justice Services Director, by end of May 2022.
- County Health and Human Service and partners should review current best practice messaging on safe sleep, update local safe sleep campaign materials as appropriate, and share these materials with the community, including through trusted community messengers like community health workers & churches.

- Action: Planning for the initial meeting of the County Safe Sleep Workgroup is underway.
   Invites will be sent in June 2022.
- NC Judges School should provide safe sleep education to judges who oversee custody cases & encourage judges to order safe sleep education for non-custodial parents.
  - Action: County Judge will be speaking about safe sleep to those attending the summer and fall sessions of the NC Judges School.
- Schools, Vaya Health & County Health and Human Service should partner to share information on child suicide with parents (including data and resources about how to recognize suicide risk and what to do if there are concerns).
  - Action: County Health and Human Service, the local school systems, & health organization collaborated on a youth suicide prevention effort focused on K-12 that involved a press release, online movie screening & a social media campaign.
- If the parent/legal guardian permits, hospital social workers should inform school staff when students are hospitalized for mental health issues.
  - Action: Recommendation shared with Hospital's Director of Clinical Operations who agreed and said they would speak about this with hospital social work supervisor.
- Consider local utilization of suicide prevention expert(s) to follow & assist with management of children with histories of hospitalization for suicidal ideation.
  - Action: Recommendation shared with leadership at county health organization who said they would work with their team to determine if it is possible for staff to work with schools in these situations.
- Continued local work within the school system utilizing the program "Signs of Suicide," as well as continuing to provide students with the Mobile Crisis Unit chat/text number.
- Identified need for school counselors and social workers within all schools to implement program(s) which address the signs of domestic violence, suicide, and bullying, along with state and local resources that students can easily access and utilize to address these issues.
- Identified need for schools to provide all parents, caregivers, and teachers with a list of local community resources which includes domestic violence, suicide, and bullying prevention programs/resources.
- Continued education regarding pregnancy risk factors and importance of early prenatal care, testing, and screening.
- Continued availability of care management services for high-risk pregnancies and to families with children who have risk factors including toxic stress, medical complexities and/or mental health diagnoses.
- Identified need to provide parents/caregivers with information/education regarding choking hazards and how to prevent these in the family's native language.
- Identified need for grief counselors/grief counseling services within communities.
- Identified need for a state registry of infants/children that are born substance affected for medical and service providers to closely follow them and close any gaps in care and/or services.
- Identified need for communication and networking between medical providers and mental health professionals for shared patients/clients to close gaps in care and/or services.

- Identified need for appropriate upkeep and maintenance of public and private roads, as well as appropriate reflective identification markers to be visibly placed on the property or home for EMS and first responders to have clear and accurate access to dwellings.
- County should provide gun and gang related violence education and human trafficking education to the community.
  - Action: LCFPT chairperson reached out to Chief of Police who confirmed that the county is participating in DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), Project Safe Neighborhood, and GREAT (Gang Resistance Education and Training). Chairperson reached out to Christine Long with NC Courts and requested education on human trafficking. Human trafficking (including sex & labor trafficking) educational materials, recommendations, and national hotline number for reporting was provided to all LCFPT members for educational purposes and to share with other community members and alliances. CFPT recommends that county leaders will continue to advocate for and support the need for the county to participate in these programs to educate the community regarding drug, gang, trafficking, and gun violence issues.
- Continue providing car seat safety checks and seat belt education.
  - Action: LCFPT chairperson contacted Safe Kids Coalition. There are currently 4 local fire departments that provide car seat safety checks. Safe Kids Coalition hosts 3 free events each year to advertise/promote car seat safety in the community. Safe Kids Coalition also uses social media and provides brochures and packets to local daycares and schools. Every 1st grade class in County is taught "Kid Tips Training" for child passenger safety. Law enforcement periodically has "click it or ticket" check points. LCFPT team recommends continuing all these activities.
- County should provide education to children and families regarding ATV/4-wheeler safety and recommendations.
  - Action: LCFPT chairperson reached out to Safe Kids Coalition and was provided with resources and educational materials regarding ATV /4-wheeler safety. Chairperson shared with County Public Health Center's educational department. These resources and recommendations were shared on the County Public Health Center's Facebook page and Instagram page to educate the public. LCFPT recommends continuing to share this education to the public on a regular basis via social media networks. Chairperson also distributed these resources and educational materials to all members of the LCFPT team to share with others in the community.
- Bring awareness to parents about SIDS. Have online trainings available for parents to review before
  and after the infant is born. Share the link safesleepnc.org, where they can find the information on
  safe sleep practices and other available materials.
  - Action: County health department will provide detailed training for parents concerning SIDS; Educational sessions will take place during the third trimester and infants 2-5-day visit; Offer parents the safe sleep flyer with the website and app information; Give parents the after-hours number to reach a Local Health Department Public Health Nurse that is available when the office is closed.
- Increased trauma informed training and awareness for the community, especially parents and those close to youth; Recognizing and sharing information on risk factors and behaviors and ensure appropriate assessments and interventions are available; Discussions with primary local mental

health hospital-based provider and health care providers to remove barriers to adolescents in need of services; DSS will assess and if needed provide additional training for EMS staff on CPS referral process.

- Action: LCFPT members have already increased education in the community on risk factors and trauma informed care; LCFPT has circulated communications to all members of the community collaborative on the need for Child and Family Team meetings and use of release of information forms; Streamline referral process for services upon discharge from the ED; LCFPT is working with partner agencies and a local broadcaster on a social media campaign to address youth suicide from a community perspective.
- Education for parents, coaches, teachers on interpreting cries for help; Increase access to mental health services (virtual and on site) in the schools and community; Expand implementation of the SPARCS (Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress) Program; Include private providers in education and outreach.
  - Action: During the pandemic, the student services telephone hot line was reactivated as a 24-hour crisis line for support to students and families; Continued training in the school in partnership with the hospital, on Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale; The school has implemented on-site mental health services in several schools; School Based Care Review programs are expanding and will continue to be a major resource for services and supports.
- Continue all initiatives related to safe sleeping; emphasize to parents the additional risks of cosleeping with a sick child; educate all providers who go into homes to be alerted to sleeping arrangements for infants and provide educational materials to all caregivers.
  - Actions: Continue to distribute safe sleep materials in the community. Purchase Safe Sleep magnets as an additional tool to distribute in pediatrician offices, day care, businesses, churches, LCFPT has continued to purchase and distribute Pack-N-Plays.
- Develop education and public awareness campaign in the community on water safety include businesses that sell pools, swimming locations in community (pools, splash pads).
- Publicize need for families and others to identify process for a "watcher" to always watch children around water-filled objects.
  - Action: Follow-up on formal distribution of water safety materials developed by Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in the community - include having them available at community events (recreation and parks, lakes, swimming pools, vendors of pools).
- Encourage pediatricians, health departments, and in home service providers to educate parents on safety when children are bathing.
  - Action: Provided information on supervision of children at all times.
- Educate community on domestic violence and increased risk for maltreatment; Drug screens should be used as tools to assist social workers in thoroughly assessing extent of parental substance abuse risk/use, and issues involving child safety.
  - Action: Continue training for community and use of drug screens as needed by DSS;
     Collaboration with substance abuse providers on risk factors.
- Continued interagency/partner (doctors, day care community, etc.) training programs to raise awareness about unsafe sleep/co-sleeping.
  - Action: Action plans to reduce child deaths due to unsafe sleep/co-sleeping have been implemented.

- To increase access to services, most of which are centrally located, the county should develop and expand the public transportation system to include stops in parts of the County (transportation inside the City limits has been established with limited van/mini-bus stops).
  - Action: Data was collected in 2021 regarding transportation needs as it relates to Child Protective Services (CPS) calls. Of the cases/families reported through CPS intake, 45% of cases/families did not have means of transportation at their disposal. We would like to thank the Commissioners for their attention to the transportation issues and understand that this is a costly and difficult issue to address. A committee was established and had been meeting prior to the COVID-19 pandemic impact.
- To increase the number of families who can participate in parenting classes or counseling services, additional funding is needed to assist indigent families, especially those at or just above the poverty line who are not eligible for Medicaid and who cannot afford the fees. Eligibility criteria would need to be implemented and sessions paid for based on attendance.
- To increase capacity of services needed in the community (i.e. drug and alcohol assessments, domestic violence services, sex offender services and specialty medical pediatric needs). The United Way will be doing a community needs assessment in April 2022 to identify gaps in services. Also, a Substance Use Prevention Coordinator has been hired through the County Health Department.
- To increase awareness of the potential hazards of golf cart misuse and prevent deaths/injuries in minors, Community Child Protection Team/LCFPT is still gathering data to recommend that children 15 years old and younger be properly restrained while riding in golf carts.
- Safe sleep initiatives, activities, and recommendations for the prevention of sudden unexplained infant deaths (SUIDS) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
  - Action: The LCFPT was able to promote safe sleep education through community collaboration with The United Way, who provided funding for onesies that had a safe sleep message on the front and back of infant onesies. The County Health Department home visiting nurse will be distributing the onesies to newborns. These are available in English and Spanish.
- Contact Vaya Health to learn about training they offer on suicide prevention; discuss with School
  Health Advisory committee incorporating mental health education into the health class, also skills
  on resilience-stress management; develope a call list for teachers or guidance counselors/bus
  drivers to call and touch base with students if they are doing long term remote learning.
  - Action: The school in conjunction with Vaya Health has already started the Question,
     Persuade, refer training monthly for staff and community members; Health Department will bring up the importance of resiliency skills, mental health and stress management with Health Teachers and call list with School Health Advisory Committee.
- Provide education regarding firearm safety, settling altercations without the use of firearms or other weapons.
- Promote programs targeting teens regarding firearm safety and resolving altercations without the use of firearms or other weapons.
- To raise awareness of the impacts related to ATVs while unsupervised.
  - Action: Prepare and implement a campaign on ATV safety targeting teens and parents.
     Share on all media outlets to ensure target audience is reached.

- The LCFPT recommends community education on safety regarding leaving children unattended in vehicles.
- County DSS staff sleep ambassadors can provide safe sleep and feeding training for free.
  - Action: County DSS safe sleep ambassadors can provide training for free to childcare centers, churches, and parent education classes.
- Work on relationships to improve access to death information, particularly when no Medical Examiner's, Law Enforcement or EMS reports are provided.
  - Action: To encourage our State CFPT to work on any agreements necessary to facilitate getting on National Database in order to receive records from Out of State.
- We will continue to support the YMCA/School Partnership providing swim lessons/water safety to 2nd graders. Will also advocate for affordable swimming lessons made available to the public as that is not currently available to our community for youth/child outside of 2nd graders.
  - Action: Advocacy for access to swimming lessons/water safety education through collaborative partnerships with stakeholders such as Health Departments, Schools, City Recreation Departments, and YMCAs to ensure that income is not a factor in accessing this valuable training/information. We recommend that the state replicate the program we have in the County.

# C. CFPT Accomplishments

Within reports to the local county board of health and county commissioners, some local CFPTs decided to include their team's accomplishments throughout the year. Select accomplishments are listed below:

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, CFPT meetings continued via Zoom and were very effective with good attendance by team members.
- Reviewed the 2021 NC Data Card for their respective county.
- Due to COVID, meeting participation was limited. The team focused on mental health and suicide prevention.
- Various team members continued partnering with Overdose Prevention Coalition as schedules permitted.
- Safe Sleep information was posted on the Health & Human Services Facebook page in October.
- Two team members, who are members of the Resiliency Task Force, led a discussion on Adverse Childhood Experiences relating to teen suicide and the tools and resources available to those who work with children.
- Health Educators from the health department attended a CFPT meeting to lead a discussion on how they can help to educate the community on suicide prevention resources available.
- The team purchased and distributed 21 Pack 'n Plays with fitted sheets to the County's Nurse-Family Partnership Program and Mountain Area Health Education Center's Project CARA (Care that Advocates Respect/Resilience/Recovery for All) for distribution to families in need of safe sleep environments for their infants.
- County Social Work Investigations Supervisor presented the Safe & Together™ Model to the team. A goal of this model is to move child welfare systems from Domestic Violence Destructive to Domestic Violence Proficient, supporting the survivor and holding the perpetrator accountable.

- Suicide Prevention and Mental Health resources were the 2021 focus project due to the ongoing pandemic. A billboard was designed to share resources. Donated billboard reads: "Your Mental Health Matters. We Can Help." Contact information was displayed.
- Health Department will provide detailed trainings for parents concerning SIDS. Educational sessions will take place during the third trimester and infants 2–5-day visit.
- LCFPT chairperson participated in two Intensive Child Fatality Reviews.
- LCFPT members, both individually and as a group, participated in webinars sponsored by the Office of Chief Medical Examiner as well as other state/community training events. This includes activities focusing on human trafficking of youth, which is correlated with other illegal behaviors, gun violence, gangs, and risks for suicidal ideation.
- In response to having many new employees in agencies, particularly those who respond to child deaths, the LCFPT suggested that we request training on Child Death Scene Investigations. This training was offered several years ago and many of those staff are no longer in the same or similar positions. This training will be available to personnel in military as well as community staff. Contact has been made with OCME and we will be offering this during the next year.
- The LCFPT welcomed some new members due to people leaving agencies or changes in duties and responsibilities within an agency. New members have been integrated into our processes and will continue to receive mentoring and guidance as they experience the Team activities.
- Purchased 50 Pack 'n Plays, 40 baby monitors, and distributed 40 asthma extenders. The latter
  were made available to the school social workers to extend the time period the inhalers are
  functioning. We have had no deaths or serious medical concerns since these have been made
  available to families.
- Through our partnership with Army Community Services, we were able to receive 196 child safety kits. These were distributed by Team members not only to their children but made available to other agencies working with vulnerable children (Salvation Army shelter).
- Meetings were held virtual and face-to-face. The last case reviewed included several agencies collaborating to provide services for the family.
- Continue to give Safe Sleep Brochures to women at their initial Medicaid application visit.
- Continue distribution of Pack-N-Plays (while supplies last) to families identified as having a need to provide safe sleep option for infant.
- Distributed Pack-N-Plays to two local Pediatrician offices, local city police departments, and local School Readiness program for families identified as having safe sleep needs.
- Health Department started providing Triple P program Positive Parenting Program Giving strategies to help parents build healthy relationships and manage their children's behavior.
   Health Department provided coloring pages and crayons to all the kindergarten classes within the County. These coloring pages were used to educate the children on safety in efforts to help decrease accidents.
- Awarded My Sister Susan's House (Youth Focus) with a \$1,000 grant to assist with buying cribs.
- Featured 5 articles in the Daily Record newspaper Jan-Dec 2021; Approximately 16 Posts were featured on the Health Department's Facebook page January July 2021; People Reached/"Likes" = 6,373
  - Topics included:
    - 1. National Poison Prevention Week is March 21-27

- 2. Child Fatality Prevention Team urges Memorial Day water safety
- 3. Fireworks safety for children
- 4. Is your child's safety seat properly installed
- 5. Child Fatality Prevention Team Provides Tips for School Bus Safety
- County DSS (Child Welfare Department) will continue to partner with the County Health Department. and other community partners to promote family planning; promote early entry into prenatal care; education on Safe Sleeping; proper feeding practice and referrals to CC4C (Care Coordination for Children).
- The LCFPT participated in April-Child Abuse Prevention by handing in information placing signs and pinwheels to promote awareness of child abuse.
- We have continued to use social media to promote child safety around the home as well as in and around motor vehicles.
- The LCFPT collaborated with County Department of Health, to present, to the community, educational information to reduce Child Fatalities at outreach events. Educational information was provided to participants during the Juneteenth Celebration on topics of Driveway Safety and Swimming Safety for children.
- LCFPT funds were used to purchase 15 portable cribs to distribute to families with infants, ages
  zero to six months. Parents are instructed how to set up the cribs and are provided extensive
  education on safe sleep practices and ways to reduce sudden infant death syndrome. The
  portable cribs were distributed by Health and Human Services workers with the CMARC team
  overseeing the distribution of the portable cribs. The funding allowed cribs to be available for
  the immediate use in emergencies for after-hours Social Workers when they identified an
  unsafe sleeping environment.
- Partnered with local health department community relations to sponsor social media ads to promote safe sleep practices and suicide prevention.
- The LCFPT distributed Mental Health brochures during Red Ribbon Week at the high, middle, and grammar schools. The team supported the number of billboards that were placed along the main highway in the area displaying how to obtain treatment if feeling depressed or suicidal.
- Two car seat billboards were placed in the County.
- Two County Health Department social workers gained certification in car seat installation in April 2021.
- The LCFPT has worked on trying to develop an event centered around Child Health and Maternal Care. We are currently participating with other County agencies to help this idea come to fruition through the event called the Maternal Health Expo that will be held in the spring of 2022. This will encompass topics such as car seat safety, smoking cessation, Safe sleep, distribution of Pack 'n Plays, as well as overall wellness through healthy eating and exercise. We are also serving as a site for drop offs for the Rock-A-Bye Baby Community Baby Shower that will benefit new mothers and infants with necessary supplies.
- Child Abuse Awareness Signs (10) were created and purchased. Signs were placed at 10 locations around the County.
- Pinwheel garden and signs were displayed in front of the health department, department of social services, and courthouse to raise awareness of child abuse in the month of April.

- Several members participated in the OCME Training: Can you CAUSE a MANNER or MEAN a MECHANISM?
- County Community partners participated in a press release on child safety issues—hot car deaths as well as water safety/drowning prevention in May 2021.
- A link was shared with Members and Community partners to do an on-line training to become a safe sleep ambassador. Once training is completed you receive a certificate as a trained safe sleep ambassador. Coordinated effort from DSS to become a safe sleep agency and increase awareness in the community.
- A Child Abuse Prevention Coloring Contest was held in lieu of an in-person event, due to Covid, for children ages 4-13 years.
- Several members participated in a drive thru appreciation event held by County DSS for foster
  and adoptive parents to show appreciation for their service to children and youth throughout
  the year. Each family received a meal and some fun games and toys.
- Made community aware of a self-referred program called Baby Steps through DSS that
  promotes success in school for teen Moms and Dads. Social Workers help teens set life goals.
  Do not have to be in school to participate. Outposted a social worker at the Health Department
  which has been successful.
- Health Educators passed out pamphlets and fliers at the County Farmer's Market.
- Several members participated in the National Night Out.

Beyond the requirement to submit a report to local BOH and CC, this information feedback loop provides a greater look at the responses, activities, and work of the LCPTs state-wide. Providing system problems, recommendations, actions, and accomplishments of teams across the state allows for shared ideas and coordination between county teams. Please use this information with your LCFPTs to gain additional ideas and build upon recommendations to prevent future child deaths.