State of Missouri
2017 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity
Executive Summary

Project or Team Name: Signs of Safety Jackson County Practice Implementers

Nominator: Tanya Keys

Nominating Department: (Nominations must include names of all agencies/departments/organizations/ businesses, etc.)

Department of Social Services Children's Division

Category: Customer Service

Executive Summary: (Executive Summary page must be 500 words or less, 12 point, Times New Roman font, and left justified. **Attach the Executive Summary to the front of the nomination.)**
In the spring of 2015, the Jackson County and Central Administration of Children's Division (CD) within the Department of Social Services commenced a transformative practice with Signs of Safety model. There was need to strengthen conversations and engagement with families and their safety networks when child abuse and neglect is alleged or another need for protection or prevention related service was present. We want families to experience our division with consistency across child protection investigations, in-home services and foster care.

This child welfare approach is new to Missouri and emerging - bringing forward deliberate, relatable, and appreciative techniques into conversations with families to focus on child safety. The core purpose is to learn from the family what's going well, what are we worried about and what needs to happen. The family experiences their safety network in an exceptional manner – each with a voice about a child's safety to present their worries to everyone and move forward in concert for the best outcomes. Our exceptional team implemented the model approach thoughtfully with positive and promising impact.
April 2015 saw extraordinary orientation and information sessions for about 300 community partners and agency team members. A county implementation team created documents and training schedules and tested technology applications (apps) for IPads so workers had flexible resources to create, draw, color, or type their assessments and safety plans. Initial implementation training was staged over six weeks for 250 direct line workers and supervisors. To support transition and implementation, personal outreach and informational meetings were led by team members with multiple hospitals, law enforcement agencies, community service providers and family court.

October 2015 proudly achieved all Jackson County CD workers and supervisors consistently using methods in their work alongside families. Family court was so supportive of the new approach they changed their protective custody docket from the morning to afternoon hours so teams could gather information using the new approach before entering afternoon court hearings. Feedback in parent surveys, conducted in the summer 2016, was positive. Sustainability and transfer of learning is achieved through tele-web conference coaching for cases with the developer, advanced training and other learning events.

In the past two years, team members have enthusiastically dedicated themselves as ambassadors and catalysts of this approach through coaching, mentoring, scheduling, developing additional tools, presenting in panels or peer review locally and at state conferences and at a learning exchange with New York City child welfare officials. As the approach is phased across the state, Jackson County team members trained other regions and traveled to Springfield and St. Charles to accompany workers in the field as they experienced the approach for their first time. Much of this work has been accomplished in addition to regular duties and all completed with joy and pride. Benefits to families are clear, purposeful interactions that show appreciation for their family and

circumstances. This team supports a ready workforce so families and customers are connected to meaningful resources and positive efforts to reduce the need for foster care.

State of Missouri – 2017 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity

NOMINATION FORM

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Department: Department of Social Services

1. **Project or team name:** Signs of Safety Jackson County Practice Implementers

2. **List the name of all team members, job titles, state agency department, and/or other organizations including public, private sector or business:** *(Please list alphabetically by last name – 2 to 20 team members maximum.)*
   1. Brittnee Backman, Children's Service Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   2. Devin Bruns, Children's Services Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   3. Christy Collins, Policy and Practice Coordinator, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   4. Alisa Connelly, Children's Service Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   5. Andrew Couch, Children's Service Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   6. Laura Jerabek,Children's Service Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   7. Tanya Keys, Regional Director, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   8. Heidi King, Program Manager Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   9. Angela Mullins, Program Administrator, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   10. Nathan Porter, Children's Service Supervisor, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   11. Tara Beth Price, Professional Development Specialist, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   12. Cara Ramsey, Program Manager, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   13. Alison Smith, Children's Services Supervisor, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   14. Jennifer Stults, Children's Service Worker, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   15. Kelsey Vujnich, Attorney for the Juvenile Officer, Jackson County Family Court
   16. Brian West, Field Support Manager, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division
   17. Kara Wilcox-Bauer, Program Development Specialist, Dept. of Social Services Children's Division

3. **Nomination Category**: *(Check only one.)*

   ☐ INNOVATION ☒ CUSTOMER SERVICE

   ☐ EFFICIENCY / PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

4. **Explain why you selected this category:**

The projects has transformed direct practice engagement, conversations and customer service with families. Through this initiative our work is consistent across our programs and relatable to agency partners and courts.

II. BACKGROUND

1. **When did the team begin its work?**

April 2015

2. **What date did the team initiate the implementation phase of the project?**

October 2015

3. **Is the project:**

   ☐ Time Limited ☐ Completed ☒ Ongoing

III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Why was the project necessary?**

Children's Division (CD) needed a common practice model to improve engagement and information gathering with children, parents and safety networks when our agency comes to know a family as a result of a report of

child abuse, neglect or other need for service. A practice model across interventions of child protection investigations, in home services and foster care would consistently engage families, stakeholders, and communities.

2. What were the primary goals of the project? *(150 words or less.)*

Improve the identification of safety concerns including worries, harm, and danger for children by increasing communication with said children and their families. Once key areas have been identified, CD workers, families and partners can develop the strongest safety plans and safety networks for the children interact.

3. Describe the project: *(200 words or less.)*

This project consisted of planning, coordinated implementation, transfer of learning, and monitoring of a foundational child protection approach, Signs of Safety. This novel approach was developed by Resolutions Consultancy and is supported in the United States by Safe Generations (SG), a national child welfare training and consultant group, through partnership with Casey Family Programs (CFP), a national foundation dedicated to child welfare. This approach engages families and their networks in meaningful and effective conversation about the harm and danger children/youth are or may be exposed to that resulted in the CD's attention; conversations related to reports of abuse, neglect, or other need for safety and preventative services. The project plan evolved over 18-24 months to include activities of exploration, partner conversations with local child welfare agencies, hospitals, schools, and family court. Training was provided to line practitioners and supervisors to teach them how to implement the new approach. Document tools were developed and support for supervisors was amplified. Meetings with a county wide implementation team, feedback surveys from parents, webinar case consultations involving the developer and catalyst roles were held to help sustain and transfer knowledge locally and across the state. Jackson County CD was selected by SG and CFP to showcase implementation efforts to 20 New York City and Missouri public welfare officials to demonstrate successful implementation of the Signs of Safety approach.

4. What technology, if any, was used in the development, implementation, maintenance or measurement of the project? *(150 words or less.)*

Planning and implementation of this project supports the use of tele-web conferencing for case staffings within and between four Jackson County CD offices through Adobe Connect via desk top computers or meeting rooms. Web conferencing is accessible to over 100 line practitioners through their IPad devices. Document tools to use alongside families were flexibly created in multiple media for easy access. Anything created or written with the family is easily photographed or scanned through agency supported applications (apps) on the IPad. Families are immediately provided a copy of all our work and safety plans either by leaving a hard copy at the home or emailing the information to the family while still at the house. SG provided pracitioners and families mobile access to a new app, My Three Houses. This app offers a colorful, child friendly drawing tool to engage conversations about a child's worries and safety planning.

5. Explain how the accomplishment of the team exceeds its regular duties and responsibilities. *(150 words or less.)*

Team members participated in a local workteam, in addition to their normal job duties, with other stakeholders to engage in outreach to schools, hospitals, family court, and law enforcement. Many members worked outside their regular work hours to test accessibility of documents, prepare training materials, complete homework to become certified as a trainer for other jurisdictions, and participate in panel discussions and presentations explaining how this new approach has helped them with conversations with families. Trainers and practitioners took on additional duties and overnight travel on multiple occasions to present training materials or accompany practitioners in other parts of the state in their field work to assure quality implementation of the new approach.

6. Which of the following describes the intended benefits of the project? (Check all that apply and provide an explanation. - 150 words or less)

- ☐ Cost Reduction
- ☐ Time Savings
- ☒ Increased Effectiveness
- ☒ Improved Process
- ☐ Other: Describe

Creating good outcomes for vulnerable children relies on depth of practice. Growing the depth of practice among all CD staff improves effectiveness and sustainability of engagement with families and placement

providers from investigations through the foster care and adoption program. The Signs of Safety approach is efficient in using concise language to determine harm, danger and safety to vulnerable children. The utilization of common tools across CD programs/units bolsters work efficiency, clarity in policy and uniformity in family experiences/interactions with CD, statewide. The Signs of Safety approach allows CD employees to collect child and family information upfront and allows for sharing of such information across programs by eliminating several legacy forms and processes; the process is streamlined with a leaner, more efficient process. Convening of a safety network about a family's circumstances creates efficiency in gathering information about worries and danger in a critical time sensitive period. The ability and flexibility in policy to use forms or draw with children using an IPad enhances capacity to capture a child's thoughts and renderings about safety – and share them timely in a meaningful way with parents. Ease and use of mobility with IPads to email or take live photographs of work with the family (for for documentation) enables CD staff to leave hard copies of documents with a family for them to have as reference and support.

IV. RESULTS / MEASUREMENT

1. Explain how the success of the project was measured and what outcomes were achieved. (Explanation should not exceed 300-500 words.)

Success was measured through process indcators of numbers in workforce trained, numbers of practioners willing to change their practice once trained, case review results reflecting presence of new tools, parent feedback surveys on their customer service experience and a few outcome measures. Jackson County was able to achieve intial training and developemnt of our workforce over an eight week period and within 90 days of initial implmentation (October 2015), 80% of families served had experienced an aspect of the new approach through a new tool or a safety meeting. In late September 2016, 255 Parent Feedback Surveys were handed out to parents. Of the 255 surveys provided to parents, 46 (18%) were returned to our quality assurence contact for tally in aggregate results. Overall, results in survey questions and additional comments provided were positive. For example, regarding the question "How often did your worker listen to you in a way that made you feel like he or she really understood your family," two thirds (66%) responded always or almost always listened to in a way they felt undestood. In surveys, parents responses indicated they felt included in conversations about their child's safety and felt they had a voice in planning for safety. Family court was so encouraged by our work they modified their docket schedule so our meetings were held prior to court hearings to maximize information with a family. Between June of 2015 and 2017, the need for foster care reduced 4% in Jackson County from 1,931 children in care to 1,860 children in care. There is preliminary indication from a July 2017 federal Child and Family Services Review by the Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Children and Families review that the practice approach was mentioned directly by the majority of families or youth interviewed during the review as a postive way they felt included and engaged in planning. Federal partners have commented that it is extraordinary and postive that families describe or report such strong a connection with a practice approach and complimented our workforce on consistent application of the approach as evidenced by how familiar families were with the approach.

2. Are the benefits derived from this project: (Check only one.)

☒ Recurring ☐ One-time

3. If recurring, how will the benefits be sustained? (Explain in 150 words or less.)

Results suggest that engaging with parents, family members, and others and providing information about a child's safety and health creates the strongest safety plan. The Signs of Safety program will be sustained and become refined through continued development of tools and support from the developer, Resolutions Consultancy and Safe Generations, and adoption by more ciruits and community partners who participate with families in safety network meetings.

V. RECOGNITION / AWARDS

1. Has this project previously been nominated for the Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity? If yes, when?

No

2. If yes, for which category was it nominated?

Not applicable

3. Has this project received any other awards or recognition? If yes, describe.

No

VI. NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

Nominating Department: Department of Social Services

Name: Tanya Keys

Signature: Tanya Keys

Telephone Number: 816-889-2509

E-Mail Address: Tanya.Keys@dss.mo.gov

VII. DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR'S INFORMATION

Name: Michelle R. Anderson

Signature: Michelle R. Anderson

Telephone Number: 573-751-9096

E-Mail Address: Michelle.R.Anderson@dss.mo.gov

VIII. DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR APPROVAL

Department Director's Name:
Steve Corsi

Signature: Jennifer McCall (Deputy Director)

Nomination must be signed ONLY by the Department Director to be eligible for consideration. Nominations not signed by the Department Director will be returned to the agency coordinator.