

CUSTOMER SERVICE

SIGNS OF SAFETY JACKSON COUNTY PRACTICE IMPLEMENTERS TEAM

Department of Social Services

Team Members

Brittnee Backman
Devin Bruns
Christy Collins
Alisa Connelly
Andrew Couch
Laura Jerabek

Tanya Keys
Heidi King
Angela Mullins
Nathan Porter
Tara Beth Price
Cara Ramsey

Alison Smith
Jennifer Stults
Kelsey Vujnich
Brian West
Kara Wilcox-Bauer

Department of Social Services Children's Division staff are responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse or neglect, and for programs to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for Missouri children. In addition to investigating allegations of abuse or neglect, the Children's Division provides services to families to prevent or eliminate the need to remove a child from his/her home, and for children in foster care.

Because the engagement of families and safety networks, such as extended family members, friends, and other natural supports, allows for long-term solutions while promoting child safety and well-being, there was a need to strengthen conversations with families about past harm, current safety risks, and behaviorally specific goals related to child safety.

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 using the Signs of Safety model based on solution-focused casework that includes a clear identification of child safety risks, safety goals, the engagement of safety networks, and continuous reassessment with the use of critical thinking. This approach offers a range of tools for assessment and planning, extensive training, performance coaching, and technical support for frontline child welfare practitioners.

This child welfare approach is new to Missouri and emerging. It brings 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 is going well, and what concerns need to be addressed. The team carefully implemented a model approach.

In April of 2015, orientation and information sessions began 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 for 250 direct line workers and supervisors occurred over six weeks. To support transition and implementation, team members led personal outreach and informational meetings with multiple hospitals, law enforcement agencies, community service providers and family court.

By October of 2015, all Jackson County CD workers and supervisors completed Signs of Safety training and consistently used Signs of Safety methods in their work with families. The family court was supportive and recognized the value of the new approach. They implemented changes to allow teams to gather information from families using the new approach before entering afternoon court hearings.

In the past two years, team members 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. To phase in the approach across the state, Jackson County team members trained division employees in other regions. They traveled to Springfield and St. Charles to assist with implementation by accompanying staff in their work with families, accomplishing much of this work in addition to regular duties.

Feedback from the parent survey conducted in summer 2016 was positive. Benefits to families are clear in that this approach requires purposeful interactions that show appreciation for each family and their unique circumstances. This approach led to families being better connected to meaningful resources, and complements Children's Division efforts to safely reduce the need for foster care.

For more information about this project, contact Tim Decker at Tim.Decker@dss.mo.gov

EFFICIENCY/PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT TEAM

Department of Health & Senior Services

Team Members

Greg Backers
Amy Beussink
Jerry Greene
Dixie Hall
EJ Jackson

David Lanigan
Jennifer Moppin
Marsha Patrickus
Sarah Pfitzner
Jessica Phelps

Julie Pleimann
Jamie Roe
Will Spencer
Mindy Sweezer
Christy Thorp

The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) is responsible for provision of adult protective services to protect vulnerable adults who are elderly or disabled from abuse, neglect and exploitation. As adults that are more vulnerable become victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation by paid caregivers, there is an increased need to hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions. This critical task was added to the duties of adult protective services workers, who were primarily responsible for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of vulnerable adults. Adult protective service workers had the competing interest of focusing on a victim's needs while trying to prepare a complex criminal case for prosecution and/or an Employee Disqualification List (EDL) case.

Missouri was struggling to prepare investigations that would stand up in court or hearings to prevent perpetrators from continuing to work in the industry, victimizing Missouri's most vulnerable citizens. When providers and mandated reporters lose faith in the system, some of them may stop reporting problems because they feel that no action will be taken as a result of their report. This is especially concerning, given that perpetrators often work multiple jobs in the industry -- abusing, neglecting, or exploiting vulnerable adults in their own homes, nursing homes, or hospital settings.

The goal of this project was to improve the quality of the investigations; to improve efficiency of the investigative process by reducing redundant, unnecessary tasks; to build relationships with providers; to improve relationships with sister state agencies; to improve morale; and to ensure perpetrators were placed on the EDL to prevent further violations.

DHSS' response to these concerns was to develop specialized investigators to focus on EDL investigations. The process improvement included placing these investigators in the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) where the focus would be on the perpetrator rather than the victim. They were also supervised by staff that had extensive experience in criminal investigations. In addition, layers of reviewers were removed, and the experienced supervisor became the sole reviewer. Investigative processes were streamlined and updated to be in line with standard investigative practices, which ensured increased efficiency. On the job and outside training was also provided. By improving the process, DHSS could help ensure that perpetrators would be prevented from continuing to victimize elderly and disabled persons.

With the ability to focus solely on the perpetrators and experienced criminal investigators supervising and training the new investigators, the results were immediate. During the last full year of the old process, only 19 percent of investigations were deemed legally sufficient to act upon. However, during the first fiscal year of this new process, 99.5 percent of investigations were deemed legally sufficient to act upon. Moreover, the department has prevailed in every EDL case that has been appealed since the new process began. Further, relationships with providers, law enforcement, and other state agencies have improved. Team morale and turnover rates have also improved. Finally, these investigations have identified an estimated \$1 million dollars' worth of fraudulent Medicaid claims the state is eligible to recover.

For more information about this project, contact David Lanigan at David.Lanigan@health.mo.gov