



**The Timothy Montoya Task Force To Prevent Children From
Running Away From Out-Of-Home Placement**

June 12, 2024

Prevention Subcommittee

Members: See Appendix A

Prevention Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trace Faust welcomed the subcommittee and explained the focus of the conversation; information for foster care providers when a youth runs. They welcomed the panel; Stacey Sanders, Jenna Coleman, and Renee Bernhard. The subcommittee members and the panelists introduced themselves. Trace thanked the group. • Renee Bernhard said that, when asked this question, most foster providers say there is little to no training on running; there is also little to no support once a run happens. She thinks that there is a lack of knowledge all together on how to best support children and caregivers; there is a history of a lack of support like not getting a therapy match and lack of information about the case. She explained that this information is supposed to be provided, by statute, but this practice has not trickled down. She explained that the more foster providers know, the better; until they are incorporated in the care team, the best care might not happen. She also explained that call center staff often do not have the instructions or guidance to provide to foster providers when a child runs after business hours. Trace thanked her and said that the gap sounds like it is in implementation. Renee agreed and said that case workers are trying their best but there can be so much turn over which also adds a complication. Trace thanked her. Brandon Miller asked who is responsible to provide the information and support services to foster providers. Renee said that it is the county and the CPA; the initial training is really important and it is hard to cover everything. She said that the training often does not cover everything as to not scare off potential foster parents. Trace thanked her. • Stacey said that she relates to Renee Bernhard; they work together frequently. She said that has been in child welfare for over a decade and in various counties. Her goal is to create a sense of belonging and community; no one ages out of the program so they can still connect and come together. She explained that the sibling relationship is important to this; some children run to go back to a sense of belonging. She explained that the Sibling Bill of Rights is a glaring example of statute not being addressed correctly; there is a great misunderstanding among judges and administrators about the statute. She explained that sibling relationships are given utmost importance through this law; this is to prevent runs and unsafe situations for children attempting to reunite with siblings. She explained that the system can break apart sibling relationships which creates difficult situations and most foster providers are putting together a plan of action that is piece meal; there is no collaborative support. She said that the decisions of the separate siblings goes against the law and also communicates that youth needs don't matter which can also result in more runs. She said that there are many great foster and kin providers but if they are not taught how to foster a sibling relationship or other safe relationships for a child, then a child will run or have behavior problems;
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there is research to back this up. She said that a sibling relationship is often the longest relationship someone has so it can cause lifelong harm when they are denied belonging to their family and their siblings. She recounted a story about a child in care who was separated from his siblings. Trace thanked her. Stacey said that foster and adoptive parents do not get training on what will happen if a child is cut off from their siblings; there should be an explanation of the consequences. Trace thanked her.

- Jenna said that, as a CPA, they get placement packets on children; they explain to foster providers that if a behavior is not on paper, that doesn't mean it can't happen and that teens are likely to run. She said that door chimes can help. She explained that they provide training on the policies and procedures around foster care; they are also told to call the organization to get an explanation of the procedure given the specific context of the situation. She explained 'hotspots' which are notes about a child to get an idea about a particular situation. She said that the protocol is the same; call 'on-call' and they will provide further instruction. She also explained that some families are more comfortable about AWOL; teenagers think they are invincible but it's important to talk about the dangers of running with them and their caregivers. She explained that there can be steps taken prior to a run like allowing a child to go to a trusted person's house or bringing a cell phone and shoes on a run. She said that foster parents are trained on these harm reduction techniques and more. She continued that when a child comes back, they are studying if a FAIR assessment is working well; there is evidence that it is reducing runs when the assessments are used since it can be used to understand why a child is running. She said that when a caregiver understands why a child is running, there can be plans in place to reduce runs. She said that these are the biggest things that SAFY works on.
- Ken Winn said that he is familiar with Timothy's story; this is a particular challenging issue. He explained that in the 90s, he worked in the Florida foster system and they saw a need for a different level of foster training. He electronically shared an article about this system. He explained the system particulars in Florida. He continued about the need to understand the individual motivations that a child has to run which often centers around a sense of belonging. He said that they provide training and individual support for foster providers. Trace thanked him.
- Renee Bernhard said that a lot starts at the training level; traditional foster parents are not getting a specific training for high acuity children so it will be difficult when a high acuity child is placed with a traditional foster care family. She said that she appreciates Jenna's work. She said that there is a desire for connection between other foster families; this support is really important and this is the direction they are heading at Foster Source. Trace thanked her.
- Jenna said that she wants to clarify the training; there is training for AWOL and training for prevention which comes from de-escalation. She continued that there is trauma informed training for prevention and AWOL. Trace thanked her.
- Brandon asked if the issue is funding or resources. Stacey said that the issue is a lack of awareness about what is available and what is expected, both on the side of foster and kin caregivers as well as placement agencies. She



mentioned consistency and reiterated the lack of awareness. Brandon asked if this is because of how the system is set up and if it is too chaotic. Stacey said that it is silos; everyone in the system wants to help families, the question is who is taking responsibility. She mentioned collaborative training. Renee mentioned Colorado being county administered which means that the policies are different across the state. Jenna said that there is a lot of information to tell foster parents and there needs to be more light shed on AWOL; families have to know Volume 7. Trace thanked her.

- Stephanie Villafuerte asked if there is a standard statewide training. Jenna said that there is not about AWOL but there is one being developed however nothing is standard. Stephanie asked about counties that are more advanced in handling AWOLs and preventions. Jenna said that it can depend on the response of the police or the sheriff. Stephanie thanked her. Trace thanked them and brought up inconsistency; they moved the conversation to the 'so what'.
- Renee Bernhard said that foster and kin caregivers need to be connected and that there needs to be a change in the perception of foster and kinship parents; everyone is working for the same good so they should be empowered. She said that foster parents are told to not speak and they are denied voicing their perspective; there is a myth that foster parents want to take black and brown babies from their families. She continued that the reality is that foster parents want to work with the families. She continued that foster families should be empowered to be a part of the team; they are here to help make reunification happen but that cannot happen if they are not listened to. Trace thanked her.
- Stacey said that by not listening to foster parents, then it disregards what is happening to the child. She said that her dream is to have a checklist that a case worker goes through that outlines everything that a family needs to consider to keep a child regulated and make the transition smooth; she wants universal language to understand the needs of the child. She said this will make it easier for the foster parents. She also brought up follow up training about what to do when a challenge arises; it would be a continuing education on the topics a foster family was trained on initially but needs more information on. She also explained connecting foster families together in a support group. Trace thanked her.
- Brandon said that the job has become very complex, so much so that foster parents are asked to be clinicians. He brought up practices to take away the complexity to allow direct care folks to focus on direct care; he mentioned creating lanes to have someone else take care of specific things for foster parents since training can only take someone so far. Stacey said that the focus on one child's needs that foster parents can bring needs to be taken seriously; it's important that all folks are heard. She also said that it is also important to listen to what behavior communicates. Trace thanked her.
- Renee Bernhard said that, when she was a foster parent, she wished she had what Jenna described. She mentioned a standardized support number to reach someone who knows what to do. Trace thanked her and mentioned this support being provided regardless of the situation like urban and rural or the age of the child. Renee Bernhard said that, in her interviews with foster



parents, she heard a lot about blame being cast on foster parents when a child runs. Trace thanked her.

- Jenna said that foster families do not get support from the counties; there needs to be small cohorts of people on call to provide support to foster families. She said that this is to help foster families feel less blame and feel supported. Renne Bernhard said that this is a funding issue. Jenna said that there might not be a funding issue; the on-call team can be after hours and the on-call team can be rotating. She continued that statewide training for foster homes and residential facilities go into the root cause analysis; the layers are the training, best practices and prevention plans. Trace thanked her and asked for comments from the subcommittee.
- Stephanie asked about the issues a foster family sees when a child returns. Jenna said that it depends on why the child ran as well as reactions after a return. Trace asked if there is standardized training about return protocol. Jenna said that the foster parent should notify the caseworker; there is also an assessment required by volume 7 for CPAs. She said that there are not many things that are standard protocols. Trace asked if this is something that would help. Stacey said that a standardized approach would be helpful and there should be appropriate consequences after a run. She mentioned a paradigm shift and a language change away from punishment. Renee Bernhard said that some foster parents use a run as a way to build trust and a way to explore different coping mechanisms. Trace thanked them.
- Renee said that one foster parent is switching to a CPA and prioritized someone having their back. She mentioned the perception of foster parents and the importance of foster families feeling like someone has their back when they have to make decisions. Trace thanked her.
- Stacey said that asking about connections and who is important to the child is very important; it is also important to make plans for them to still be able to connect with who is important. She also mentioned a plan for when a child returns. Trace thanked her.
- Jenna said that training should highlight runs; training should not be sugar coated. She said that it should not be the scariest stories but it needs to be realistic about what AWOL is. Trace thanked her.
- Trace thanked everyone on the subcommittee and the panel.
- Stephanie asked Renee Bernhard if she had any more comments from foster parents that she wanted to share. Renee said that, to name a few, it's important to watch for triggers and talk to the child about triggers. She mentioned boundaries being set but also not having too many rules. She mentioned children running because they need a break and they lack coping skills. She also mentioned children trying to understand how much an adult will put up with. She mentioned that most foster parents are great but some are not ready for stressful situations and high acuity children should not go to new families. She stressed patience since these children are used to people giving up on them. She also brought up allowing a child to run away; let them know the consequences, give them a time to come back home, give them a watch and a bag with snacks, make sure it is age appropriate, and show them safe places to go. She said that running might not be a wrong thing; it could be coping and expressing themselves. She stressed building trust when a



	<p>child returns, helping them find other coping skills, and allowing them to use the coping skills; it's important for foster parents to always take the child back. Stephenie thanked her and mentioned that the task force examined state and federal laws about foster parents; she asked if people are aware of these protocols. Jenna said there is a full training on protocols and they are provided with the links to reference; they can always call with questions. Stephanie thanked her. Stacey said that the answers differ by county when they call their case worker so there should be consistency on what is being trained to case workers. She also said that youth do not always have the words for their triggers but they could maybe express themselves through art. Stephanie thanked her.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trace asked for any last questions. Renee said that fostering brings up a foster parent's struggles so she encourages them to get a therapist. Stacey said that is a great way to wrap around support; fostering brings up a lot. Trace thanked them and the subcommittee for their thoughts.
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Appendix A:

- Jenna Coleman
- Elizabeth Montoya
- Stephanie Villafuerte
- Renee Marguardt
- Jana Zinser
- Brandon Miller
- David Lee
- Kelly Abbott