Timothy Montoya Task Force

June 12, 2024, Meeting Recap – Intervention Subcommittee

Overview

The Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children from Running Away from Out-of-home Placement is legislatively charged with analyzing the root causes of why children and youth run from out-of-home care to help develop a consistent, prompt and effective response for when children and youth do run. It is also charged with assessing how to address the safety and well-being of children and youth upon their return to care.

Run Prevention Education and Safety Planning

After briefly convening as a whole for introductory matters, the task force then broke into its two continuing subcommittees on Prevention and Intervention.

The Intervention Subcommittee meeting began with a focus on education related to safety planning and run prevention within the context of foster care.

Leveraging National Model to Enhance Support and Safety Measures for Youth

Bryan Kelley presented resources on run prevention from the National Runaway Safeline (NRS). NRS operates the 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and provides online chat, email, text, and message board services. They offer a trauma-informed 16-module life skills curriculum aimed at youth aged 12-20, covering topics like communication, relationships, and stress management.

NRS offers additional services like an intermediary message service, three-way calls, and referrals to resources. They provide a program called Home Free in collaboration with Greyhound, offering free bus tickets for youth returning home.

Statistics from Colorado in 2022 show that most youth contact NRS via live chat, with significant numbers considering running away due to family dynamics and abuse. Demographics indicate a majority of contacts are female, with a notable age distribution towards older youth. According to Sam Gillis, Chief Program Officer at NRS, investing in early family support to improve family dynamics could prevent many youth from running away.

Beth McNalley asked about the length of the curriculum and the usage numbers among youth. Bryan explained that due to the freely accessible nature of the curriculum, exact usage data isn't well-tracked by NRS.

There was discussion about the potential for integrating NRS curriculum into regular practices, especially in out-of-home placements where youth have a higher risk of running away.

Overall, the subcommittee acknowledged the potential value of NRS's resources for preventing run situations among youth, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances. There was interest in exploring how to integrate the curriculum into existing practices to enhance support and safety planning for youth in out-of-home care.

There was a question about whether the curriculum specifically addresses youth in foster care or out-of-home placements. Bryan mentioned that while there wasn't detailed data on usage in those settings, National Runaway Safeline (NRS) does have tailored presentations for these audiences. The subcommittee expressed interest in exploring the potential value of systematizing the use of NRS resources within facilities and out-of-home placements. This would involve integrating the curriculum into existing educational practices to better support and educate youth at risk of running away.

Module Walk-Through

Bryan provided an overview of Module 6 from the NRS curriculum, "Runaway Reality." It includes learning goals such as understanding why youth run away, exploring alternatives, and safety planning. The module is designed for a 75-minute session with various activities and discussions.

There was a discussion about policy recommendations related to educating parents, guardians, and family members about preventing run incidents. This stems from the understanding that familial conflict is a significant reason why youth may run away.

The NRS resources are not only for youth but also for concerned adults, including parents and guardians. They can access resources, referrals, message services, and FAQs to support youth or address concerns about potential run situations, Participants expressed interest in exploring how NRS resources could be integrated into existing educational practices within facilities and out-of-home placements to enhance safety planning and education for vulnerable youth.

Norma Aguilar-Dave highlighted its potential usefulness in foster care and residential settings, suggesting initial exposure for new arrivals and revisiting the material with high-risk youth. She emphasized the importance of individualized rather than group-based education to avoid glorifying the behavior of running from care among peers. Norma concluded that such resources, while not extremely detailed for caregivers, can provide essential support without causing harm.

Bryan mentioned another resource, a podcast titled "Let's Talk," aimed at service providers, parents, caregivers, and adults. The subcommittee discussed potential ways to integrate the resources from the "Let's Talk" podcast and other training modules into their services. There was interest in making these resources more widely available and known, possibly incorporating them into specific recommendations or implementing them as part of standard procedures for youth entering facilities. Ideas included:

1. *Tailoring Training for Youth*: Exploring the possibility of implementing a tailored training session on safety for all youth upon entry into a facility. This session could focus on empowering youth to keep themselves safe.

2. *Use in Intake Processes*: Considering the use of resources like handouts during intake processes.
3. *Partnerships and Collaborations*: Exploring partnerships with organizations like Third Way and the Denver Child Advocacy Center to introduce relevant curriculum components, such as online safety, into their existing programs.

Overall, there was enthusiasm about leveraging these resources to enhance support and safety measures for youth, though practical implementation details and stakeholder collaboration were acknowledged as crucial next steps.

Methodologies

Jordan Steffen highlighted the challenge of selecting effective methodologies for delivering services to youth. She emphasized the importance of considering practicalities such as accessibility to phones for text-based options and the transient nature of youth in care, which complicates the use of physical materials like paper or videos that require specific times for viewing.

Janelle Goodrich mentioned a successful past campaign by the council that used posters and QR codes at high-risk locations like train stations and 7-Elevens to raise awareness about resources for youth who have run.

Beth suggested adopting a model similar to what the laboratory for human trafficking has done, which involves creating a comprehensive resource guide. This guide would list all available resources within counties, detailing their limitations and regularly updating the information through annual checks and meetings. She emphasized the importance of making this database accessible to facilities, case workers, foster parents, and others involved with young people, ensuring they have up-to-date information on available supports. Beth also highlighted the need for proactive dissemination of this information to families and youth, possibly through tools like QR codes or informational cards. She stressed the importance of ongoing training and oversight to maintain the accuracy and relevance of the resource guide over time.

Norma emphasized the importance of early intervention and proactive engagement with youth entering residential programs. She suggested that within the first 24 hours of a young person's arrival, staff should sit down with them to discuss resources like the one provided by 1-800-RUNAWAY. Norma highlighted that typically, signs of a youth potentially running away are observable beforehand, making it crucial to initiate these conversations preemptively. She advocated for revisiting these discussions periodically, especially when there are indications that the youth might be considering running away. Norma emphasized that these conversations should serve as preventive measures rather than reactive responses to crises, aiming to keep the option of accessing resources at the forefront of the youth's mind.

Doris Tolliver outlined a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of young people running away, suggesting three main areas of consideration:

1. A broad campaign aimed at providing resources to young people who may run away, such as informational flyers with contact details for assistance.

2. The importance of educating those who work with young people, both in and out of care, about available resources, including educational support to help prevent youth who have run away from care.
3. The need for targeted interventions for young people with a history of running away, aiming to reduce the likelihood of future incidents through personalized support.

Overall, she stressed the importance of a multifaceted strategy to ensure the safety of young people and mitigate the risks associated with running away.

Danielle Gauthier suggested using a resource she's familiar with, findhelp.org, which functions as a search engine for resources based on zip codes. She supported the idea of using QR codes in high-traffic areas like bus stops, making resources easily accessible via smartphones. Bryan underscored the importance of leveraging modern, visually engaging materials with digital features like QR codes to enhance accessibility and appeal to youth.

Safety Planning

Guest speakers Mallory Zalla and Danielle Gauthier shared their respective approaches to safety planning and provided current practices for the subcommittee to consider when formulating recommendations.

Safety Planning in Denver's Runaway Outreach Notification and Intervention Team

Mallory Zalla introduced herself as a Youth Outreach Specialist on Beth McNalley's team, the Runaway Outreach Notification and Intervention Team (RONI) under Denver Public Safety Youth Programs. She explained that their team consists of an intake team and an outreach team. The intake team handles calls about youth who have run from the Denver Police Department, assesses safety risks, and determines the level of risk for each youth. When a youth is deemed high-risk, the outreach team steps in to meet with them and their community, providing resources, setting goals, and implementing interventions as needed.

Mallory highlighted their involvement in the Denver multidisciplinary team, particularly in cases of trafficking victims, focusing on identifying needs and providing support. She emphasized the importance of safety planning and using harm reduction techniques tailored to each client due to their high caseload and specific client needs. Their team has developed three general guides to safety planning and safety agreements, which are personalized tools that youth can carry with them and refer to as needed.

Common situations for safety planning include human trafficking, domestic violence, running behaviors, mental health issues, suicidal ideation, and substance use, reflecting the diverse challenges their team addresses in their daily work.

Mallory shared a detailed overview of the safety planning process used by her team, emphasizing their tailored approach to various situations such as trafficking, domestic violence, substance use, suicidal ideation, and mental health crises. She highlighted the importance of assessing immediate needs and developing action steps both for the

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youth and their team, ensuring a safe environment and access to necessary resources like Narcan in critical moments.

Mallory stressed the significance of understanding what safety means to each youth individually, adapting discussions to their unique experiences and preferences. She discussed the use of harm reduction techniques, respecting the youth's choices without judgment, and building a robust support network involving family, friends, and community resources.

Safety Planning in Denver's Sex Abuse Intervention Team

Danielle Gauthier introduced herself as the ongoing lead case worker on the Sex Abuse Intervention Team at Denver Department of Human Services. Her team specializes in sex abuse cases, including trafficking, and takes a holistic approach involving the entire family unit. They collaborate extensively with various entities such as law enforcement, the Multidisciplinary Team, and community organizations like the RONI project.

She outlined the process when they receive a trafficking case involving a youth in their care or on their caseload. This includes initial assessments to understand the circumstances of the youth, coordinating with law enforcement, and ensuring safety assessments are conducted. Danielle highlighted the challenges of maintaining communication with youth due to trust issues with government agencies but emphasized leveraging trusted relationships like those with mentors or legal guardians for updates on the youth's safety.

Danielle discussed the practical aspects of safety planning, such as discussing substance use, safe sex practices, and ensuring youth have access to emergency resources like emergency rooms or emergency contacts. She emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment where youth feel safe to communicate their needs and whereabouts, even if they are on the run. Danielle concluded by stressing the need for ongoing communication and support for youth involved in trafficking situations, utilizing community resources to supplement the department's efforts.

A short discussion exploring key aspects of safety planning for youth involved in trafficking or at risk of running away from care followed the guest speaker presentations. Highlights from the discussion:

- Danielle and Mallory discussed how youth come to their attention, primarily through hotline referrals, court orders, or through their respective teams' specialized focus on sex abuse and trafficking cases.

- Lynette Overmeyer raised concerns about the disparity in resources across different regions, highlighting the need for adaptable safety assessment tools and support systems that can function effectively even in areas with fewer resources.

- There was a suggestion to leverage virtual or online resources such as hotlines or support services accessible via phone or text, which could supplement physical resources in less resource-rich areas.

- Mallory explained that safety agreements are filled out with youth in the field and then uploaded to their tracking system. Safety plans are tailored to individual needs and are used by youth as a reference during crises.
- Lynette and others noted the lack of specific training requirements for case workers handling youth involved in juvenile justice or child welfare, suggesting an opportunity for broader education on effective safety planning strategies.

As the discussion wrapped up, participants were encouraged to explore further resources shared by Bryan and to communicate any additional thoughts or recommendations to Bryan and Jordan.