



Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting Four

March 1, 2023, Meeting Recap

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 placement to help develop a consistent, prompt and effective response to responding to children and youth who run from care. It is also charged with assessing how to address the safety and well-being of children and youth upon their return to care.

Summary of Marcy 1, 2023, Meeting

***Directive Discussed:** Is current statewide, quantitative data regarding the experiences of children who have run away from care sufficient? (See C.R.S. 19-3.3-111(5)(a))*

Examining the Use of the Term "Runaway"

Members discussed the term "runaway" and its connotations. The group focused on understanding the reasons why youth leave care, but also acknowledges that youth may not always have a choice in leaving. They will do further exploration and engage in more discussions to find a more suitable term and agreed that this conversation is essential in defining and understanding the problem.

Overview of Federal and State Laws Regarding Youth Who Run Away

Stephanie Villafuert provided an overview of federal and state laws and regulations that determine reporting requirements and protocols when youth run from out of home placement. These requirements determine the data that is collected and reported about these incidents.

Stephanie discussed the importance of federal law in dictating state laws and regulations related to youth who run away and child welfare. The federal law requires states to develop and implement specific protocols for dealing with missing youth, such as immediately reporting and locating missing youth, as well as determining the factors that contributed to them running away and their experiences while absent from care.

Certain provisions of Title 19 of the Colorado Revised Statutes (Children's Code) and Volume 7 of the Colorado Code of Regulations (Social Services Rules Staff Manual Volume 7; Child



Welfare, Child Care Facilities) guide the response to youth who run away from out of home care. Stephanie provided the group with a list of the applicable statutes and regulations.

Some of the challenges and gaps in state law and regulations were highlighted:

- Caseworkers document all required information about a child's experience, why they ran from care, etc., in the Trails database, but it is not easily extractable because it is in narrative form. This creates an impediment to identifying patterns and making prevention efforts.
- Lack of guidance from state law and regulations on when human service cases can be closed. While some jurisdictions keep these cases open for up to a year, there have been reports of cases being closed sooner, which could result in the loss of valuable data to assess the experiences of children who run away from care. This lack of guidance on when to close cases poses a challenge to understanding the patterns of children running away and their experiences. Lynette Overmeyer clarified that although there is no rule on how long a placement stays open for a runaway youth, there is a payroll rule that only allows payment for placement for seven days when the youth is not present. Current regulations and laws related to runaway children primarily focus on anti-trafficking efforts. This creates a lack of information on other experiences that may lead to a child running away, such as exposure to criminal activity or behavioral health disorders. The rules and regulations are broad, leaving it up to caseworkers to ask the right questions and find the best solutions for the youth. However, there is a need for more distinct guidance and regulations to address the various reasons a child may run away.
- There is no duty to locate youth who run away, only to report.

Norma Aguilar-Dave explained that funding streams for providers do not allow them to look for children who have left their homes. For example, if a child who was receiving in-home services through Medicaid leaves their home, the provider has to close the case immediately. They cannot continue working with the parents to identify the child's whereabouts or prepare for the child's return. This is because there is no provision in the funding streams that would allow providers to do so.

Colorado Department of Human Services Data Presentation

Jessica Starr manages the data unit at the Colorado Department of Human Services' (CDHS) Division of Child Welfare, overseeing data collection and analysis for 64 County departments. Laurie Burney, the Provider Performance Manager, works with Dennis Desparios at CDHS to license and monitor all providers offering services and out-of-home



care, including residential providers, child placement agencies, day treatment facilities, and adoption agencies in Colorado.

Laurie provided a brief overview of Volume 7 and highlighted the fact that foster parents and facilities are also required to notify parents or guardians as soon as possible when a child runs away. She also highlighted the distinction between a runaway and a walk away is based on the amount of time the youth is gone. A runaway is defined as a youth who is gone for more than 24 hours, while a walk away is a youth who walks outside the facility for a break, but does not leave for more than 24 hours.

She provided a link to [Volume 7 Rules](#) and to [Publicly Available ROM Data](#).

Jessica presented the data collected by CDHS. The data presented focused on critical incidents of runaways reported by licensed providers in the child welfare system from 2018 to 2022. Jessica noted that there was a significant increase in reporting from 2018 to 2019 due to new reporting requirements, but from 2019 to 2022, there has been a steady decline in runaway incidents reported. The decline may be attributed to factors such as policies that were the result of the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) implementation, trauma-informed care plans and the impacts of COVID-19.

Jessica presented data on the following:

- The number of incidents of children and youth running away from care
- Total children and youth entering “runaway status” and total unique run spans
- Percentage of children and youth entering “runaway status of the out-of-home population”

Questions from task force members included:

Brandon Miller asked about data tracking for traditional or system runaways and their reasons for stopping running from one provider to another. He mentioned that there is an assumption that providers are less successful because 95% of the children and youth in their facility have a history of running away from care. He also suggested collecting data on children and youth within the Division of Youth Services (DYS) system since they are often at higher risk. Jessica agreed and recommended bringing in someone from the DYS data team to clarify any differences in their data.

Janelle Goodrich questioned the decrease in runaways and placements after the Family First was implemented, acknowledging the possibility of other factors at play and data that may not be captured in the system. She pointed out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and advocated for a longer evaluation period to accurately assess the act's impact.



Beth McNalley asked two questions:

1. Is there a mandate on a time frame when a caseworker contacts the youth upon their return?

Answer: There is no specific mandate, but the minimum requirement is to have at least monthly in-person contact with the youth.

2. Is there a set mandate on training for using the HRV tool, and have there been any efforts to expand the tool's capabilities to allow for more detailed responses?

Answer: There is no set mandate on training for using the HRV tool, and the level of detail in responses can vary depending on who is filling out the tool. Some systems force responders to give a simple yes or no answer, even if more detail is necessary. There has been discussion about potentially expanding the tool's capabilities in the future to allow for more detailed responses.

Jessica asked about capturing deeper information such as demographic data and a youth's experience while they were on the run. The Trails system has a child welfare side that contains demographic and placement information, but capturing a youth's experience can be challenging. Notes may contain this information, but text searching can give false results.

Laurie said that her team will follow up with a clear summary of the data fields that CDHS can and has filled out. Then, they will create an internal list of other potential sources of data. She also mentioned that they are collaborating with outside research institutions to gather more information on lived experiences.

Small Group Discussion of Data Presented

Link to Note Catcher:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cus25m5dy2lguuy/Note%20Catcher%20-%203.1.pdf?dl=0>

The groups provided summaries of their discussions:

- The current data on runaway children only quantifies volume and is not actionable.
- Several questions were not answered by the data, including information about a youth's experience while they are on the run, making it difficult to address the issue.
- Want to compare the volume of children in placement who run away to those who are not in placement.



- The current data did not distinguish between the types of placement, abuse, neglect, or other factors that could be analyzed.
- Need for a check-the-box analysis of the Trails database and a detailed time-limited study of every child that runs away within a certain window to gather more information.
- Lack of a statewide system for gathering uniform information or a standard tool for youth when they return from a run.
- Importance of gathering information from providers when the youth leave.
- Barriers to locking facilities and the effectiveness of trauma-informed care.
- Importance of intentional placement and location of youth, as well as establishing a plan from the start.
- Value of hearing from the youth directly and considering the effectiveness of phone check-ins versus face-to-face meetings.
- Tracking what works for caseworkers in locating youth and implementing it as training.
- Importance of sharing information between partner organizations, specifically human services departments and law enforcement.
- Importance of having data broken down by county and facility to identify themes and patterns.

Stephanie raised a point from her discussion group: how much does the data matter? Kevin Lash talked about how if we could just prevent runaway behavior in the first place, it would allow us to get to the why by making sure that kids are getting the treatment and services they need.