

## **Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting 17**

**May 1, 2024**

### **Intervention Subcommittee 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 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.

#### **Panelist Discussion Regarding Temporary Placement Practices**

Doris Tolliver facilitated the Intervention Subcommittee discussion regarding temporary placements. The subcommittee began with a panel discussion featuring three members: Michelle Bradley, Beth McNalley and Lynnette Overmeyer.

The panelists provided insight into the challenges of operationalizing temporary placements, based on their unique professional experience. Some of the challenges discussed include:

- Placements are typically made on an emergency basis or during crises.
- It can be difficult to find placements willing to accept youth for short periods (24 to 48 hours).
- County departments of human services sometimes are forced to ask case workers to sit with the youth, leading to concerns about caregiver training and liability issues, particularly regarding medication administration.
- Some facilities, like motel rooms, are reluctant to accommodate these placements due to safety and liability concerns.
- In the past, there were shelter placements for adolescents, which were eliminated but served a purpose in providing structured settings.
- Douglas County prioritizes kinship placements and utilizes community resources such as schools, counselors and coaches to find safe enough environments for 24 to 48 hours.
- The Family Resource Pavilion offers respite beds but requires extensive documentation.
- Emergency foster homes may also be utilized, albeit with limited availability for teenagers.
- In some cases, Douglas County has paid for parents to stay in hotels with their children.
- Hospitals can also become the last resort for youth without safe placements.
- In Denver, there's an agreement with Urban Peak to accommodate runaway youth temporarily, but there are limitations on capacity and duration of stay.

- Denver also partners with other shelters, but certain centers may not accept youth from out-of-home placements.
- Emergency placement options include mixed buildings housing various agencies, which can be harmful for youth, especially during forensic interviews.
- There are challenges with emergency foster homes, especially for high-risk or frequent runaway youth.
- Kinship placements may also pose risks, such as placing youth in homes with a history of domestic violence.

Overall, there's a delicate balance between ensuring safety and meeting the needs of the youth, especially when their preferred placements may not always be the safest option. Despite challenges, collaboration with local resources has been helpful in addressing immediate needs.

## **Discussion**

### ***Shutdown of Temporary Shelters***

Kevin Lash raised concerns about the federal government's shutdown of temporary shelters and shared his experience with an Arizona shelter. The closure was influenced by the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), aiming to eliminate shelters due to concerns about lacking programming and support services for youth, leaving states like Colorado without emergency options.

Laurie Burney, who was serving as a proxy member, provided insights on licensed homeless youth shelters and host homes in Colorado, available for non-child welfare youth. She clarified that shelters must notify the county department if a child welfare youth seeks refuge. She also discussed ongoing efforts to establish respite services and the potential use of respite care for runaways.

### ***Programming***

Many homeless youth shelters lack programming, or the programming is voluntary for participants. There are challenges in providing consistent programming in shelters due to the uncertainty of how long a youth will stay there.

Norma Aguilar-Dave expressed a desire for the system to create something different, referencing the need for shelters with programming that effectively utilize the time spent with children. She mentioned that shelters without programming are not in line with the principles of the Family First legislation.

Lynette highlighted the collaborative efforts between the shelter on the Western Slope and their agency. Lynette mentioned that while the shelter provides essential services, the youth are not in their custody, which prevents them from utilizing these services directly.

Norma inquired about the outcomes for these youth and whether providers track their progress. Lynette mentioned that while she doesn't have specific data, previous tracking efforts showed reductions in recidivism and placements in higher levels of care. This suggests positive outcomes resulting from the collaborative approach between the shelter and agencies like hers.

There seemed to be a consensus that a more structured and comprehensive approach to programming – with clear goals and expectations – could yield better outcomes for the youth staying in these shelters. Using the time constructively to engage with the youth and address their specific needs, including their relationship with their family, and identifying the best long-term placement options was stressed as being important. Beth advocated for strategic, purposeful programming tailored to each youth, highlighting the opportunity for shelters to serve as prevention interventions by understanding the reasons for the youth's runaway and planning for their future.

Laurie emphasized that homeless youth shelters provide more than just basic amenities like meals and a bed. She encourages members to refer to specific rules and regulations governing these shelters, such as Rule 12 CCR 7.715 for homeless shelters and Rule 12 CCR 7.721 for host home family care, which outline programming requirements. Laurie clarified that these shelters offer essential services and safety for youth at risk of homelessness and exploitation, such as human trafficking. She suggested inviting shelter representatives to the table for discussions to better understand the services they provide and address the gaps in the system.

### ***Communication and Collaboration***

Michelle highlighted the importance of effective communication between shelters and child welfare agencies, especially in cases involving youth with significant mental health issues or substance abuse.

Beth highlighted the partnership her office is developing with Urban Peak regarding high-risk youth and human trafficking. They inform Urban Peak when a high-risk youth is identified, allowing for outreach efforts. Urban Peak does not disclose if the youth is present but facilitates access to services if the youth consent. This collaboration aims to provide support for vulnerable youth at risk of human trafficking.

### ***Intake Assessments***

Norma emphasized the importance of conducting thorough assessments when youth enter shelters to determine their needs and potential length of stay. She does not believe that treatment should be provided in shelters due to the transient nature of stays and suggests focusing on assessment and programming instead.

The discussion also considered the value of leveraging existing assessments to avoid redundancy and ensure a comprehensive understanding of their needs. By building upon existing information, providers can more efficiently determine the necessary support and services for the child without subjecting them to unnecessary assessments.

### ***Medication Access***

Part of the discussion centered on concern about potential gaps in care and the impact on a youth's well-being. Instances were highlighted in which youth did not receive medication. Kevin shared his experience with his son's detention, highlighting instances in which his son's medication prescription ran out and no new prescription was provided, leading to his son going off medication without any intervention.

Lynette suggested involving Dave Lee, who is part of the Western region Division of Youth Services (DYS), to address questions regarding barriers related to medication in detention.

### ***Eliminating Disqualifiers***

In brainstorming ideas for temporary placement options, the group discussed the need to reconsider disqualifiers that prevent youth from accessing these placements. Factors like prior criminal charges, history of running away, lack of progress in prior treatment and aggression should not automatically disqualify youth from accessing temporary placement options. All youth in need of temporary placement should have access to suitable options for their safety and well-being.

Norma emphasized the importance of being cautious about implementing policies like "no reject" or "no eject" for providers, expressing concern that such mandates could lead to providers feeling forced to accept children who may not fit their typical services. She suggests that having a variety of placement options available, each specializing in certain areas, would allow for more thoughtful and purposeful placements based on the individual needs of the child.

### ***Focus on Stabilization***

Lynette emphasized the need for the temporary placement option to focus on stabilization and recommendations for next steps rather than long-term therapy. She suggested that therapists involved should specialize in crisis intervention and short-term stabilization. She proposed conducting the required assessments for a new program admission within the same timeframe to streamline the process and ensure all necessary evaluations are completed.

Laurie highlighted the importance of implementing trauma-informed safety plans and de-escalation techniques, which research shows can prevent runs when applied correctly. Additionally, she emphasized the need for formalizing assessments that consider the child's background and individualized – rather than standardized – assessments that focus on the here and now. These points are crucial for ensuring effective temporary placements for youth.

### ***Safety Planning***

Beth highlighted the importance of safety planning as a crucial post-run intervention for high-risk youth. She emphasized the need to build rapport and trust with the youth while collaboratively developing a safety plan that addresses their basic needs and outlines strategies for outreach and recovery.

### ***Allowing for Developmental Considerations in Placement***

Kevin shared his frustration with the reactive nature of the system, noting that it often waits for problems to escalate before providing the necessary level of care. He highlighted the challenge of navigating barriers such as insurance limitations and the lack of available placements or treatment options. He also expressed frustration with the notion of giving up on youth too soon, emphasizing the need to allow them time to grow and develop.

Doris echoed Kevin's point about youth not always being ready for treatment initially, emphasizing the frustration when they later express readiness but are denied.

### ***Mandating Beds Available for Temporary Placement***

Sergeant Brian Cotter emphasized the importance of having timely and accessible placement options for runaway youth, especially during critical moments like late-night responses. He expressed his frustration when encountering barriers to placing youth back in facilities, especially when facilities close their beds after a runaway incident. He suggested ensuring that there are facilities available and ready to accept youth when they are encountered by law enforcement or other responders.

Doris posed a question about whether there are any current requirements or potential regulations that could mandate holding a bed in a placement facility for a period of time when a youth runs away. This approach would allow the option of returning the youth to the same provider if they are found within a certain timeframe, ensuring continuity of care and stability for the youth while also addressing the practical challenges faced by law enforcement and service providers during runaway incidents.

Kevin's experience highlights the challenge when a placement facility doesn't hold the bed for an extended period, especially when a youth's runaway behavior persists for weeks or even months. This underscores the need for flexibility in policies to accommodate varying circumstances and ensure the safety and well-being of the youth.

Mandating that facilities have a set number of free beds available at all times to serve as temporary placements for youth in crisis was also suggested. These beds would be designated for immediate use when a youth needs a safe place to stay while their situation is assessed.

### ***Need for Systemic Approach for Youth Who Run from Out of Home Placement***

Establishing clear protocols and accountability measures can ensure a more coordinated response and better support for the youth when they reappear. This approach emphasizes continuous engagement and support for the child's well-being, regardless of their current whereabouts.

The goal of this immediate intervention is to ensure the prompt and safe location of the missing youth, followed by the provision of appropriate care, support and services to address their needs and promote their well-being.

### ***Data***

Lynette expressed concern about the high number of youth in stop-gap measures, noting that 79 kids per month are in various temporary arrangements, enough to fill four Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs). She also sought clarification on how many of these youth are runaway youth, indicating her intention to bring up this question in an upcoming meeting.

There seems to be a challenge in collecting data on the average length of runaway episodes for youth in Colorado, particularly for those in care. The data is often recorded as a runaway report, but after a certain period, the trail may go cold if the youth doesn't return. Additionally, if a youth remains missing for an extended period, the court may terminate their case, leading to the closure of the removal and cessation of tracking for how long they've been missing.

Including a recommendation to consistently capture data on the average length of runaway episodes for youth in care could be valuable for informing decision-making and program

development. This data could help ensure that policies and programming are designed to effectively support the needs of youth experiencing runaway episodes.

### ***Permanency Planning***

Addressing the issue of permanency planning is vital. Many youth run away because they lack stability and certainty about their future placements. While the temporary placement is indeed temporary, it's essential to use that time effectively to work towards a stable and permanent solution for the youth.

### ***Secure Facilities***

Kevin raised a point about security measures for youth, especially those prone to running away. He sees the need for a structured approach to security and safety planning, including supervision, safety alarms and regular check-ins with case workers. He also emphasized the importance of monitoring social media activity as a way to track the whereabouts of youth.

Brian raised the idea of staff-secured or secured facilities for youth who run away, particularly for those in the juvenile justice system. Lynette expressed concerns about the effectiveness of secure lock facilities, especially considering recent juvenile justice reform bills that have reduced the number of available beds for detention. She explained that it's no longer legal to put a child in a secure detention facility solely for mental health treatment, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing safety while acknowledging the challenges of finding appropriate placements for these youth.

Norma expressed the need for careful consideration to determine which youth truly require placement in a staff-secured setting, cautioning against a blanket approach that might result in every runaway being placed in such facilities.

The discussion highlighted that while there may be benefits to implementing staff-secured facilities on a small scale with clear protocols, there are concerns about how such facilities would be regulated and whether they would resemble detention centers. Norma emphasized the importance of considering the rights of children and the need to provide hope for their futures. She mentioned the need for alternative methods to address safety concerns and highlighted initiatives focused on improving quality standards and trauma-informed care within the system.

Doris emphasized the importance of considering staffing levels and utilizing a staff-secure model to keep an eye on youth in temporary placements, even if the facility is not physically locked. She suggests marrying the concept of temporary placements with the physical mechanisms discussed in the prevention subcommittee, such as locks, to both intervene in and prevent future runaway incidents.

### ***Workforce Challenges***

Ensuring that facilities can attract and retain qualified staff by offering competitive wages is essential for providing quality care to youth.

Norma highlighted ongoing efforts to train residential staff comprehensively and equip them with the tools to address the underlying issues driving runaway behavior. Laurie echoed Norma's

sentiments regarding the challenges faced by providers in the child welfare system, particularly in terms of inadequate funding and the struggle to attract and retain qualified staff. She emphasized the need to prioritize resources for the care of vulnerable children, highlighting the disparity between the funding allocated and the essential nature of the services provided.

Norma highlighted the importance of adequately compensating staff in residential facilities to ensure retention and quality care for the youth. She suggests considering innovative scheduling approaches, such as allowing staff to spend dedicated time with individual youth off-campus within their shifts, similar to respite care for parents. This approach aims to address staff burnout and provide a more enriching experience for both staff and youth.

Doris suggested that within existing placement options, there should be a specific carve-out of programming tailored for runaway youth, akin to temporary placement options. She emphasized the need for different staffing levels, allowing for one-on-one time with the youth, particularly considering the complexity of this population. Doris also highlighted the importance of staffing considerations within the broader provider array of programs, recognizing the unique needs of youth who have a history of running away.

### ***Parental Authority***

Kevin emphasized the importance of recognizing parental authority in youth placements, suggesting that if a child is placed in a facility by competent authority, they should be expected to stay there. He highlighted the role of parents in protecting their children from harm, likening it to grounding a child to ensure their safety.

Brian agreed with the sentiment of treating children as children and giving them every chance to grow up safely, acknowledging Kevin's point about the need for safety but also the complexity of the situation, particularly when children are on the run.

### ***Equitable Approaches and Intentionality***

Doris echoed Laurie's point about the need for equitable approaches in temporary placements, suggesting considerations for cultural competence, humility and fairness in decision-making processes regarding which children are returned to permanent placements versus temporary ones.

The group discussed the importance of transparent communication with youth about their placement options, even if their preferences cannot always be accommodated. Beth highlighted the significance of sharing information about youth characteristics with placement facilities to ensure appropriate support and avoid creating barriers to placement.

Michelle spoke about the difficulty of informing youth about multiple placement denials, which can exacerbate their feelings of rejection and perpetuate negative behaviors. She emphasized the importance of recognizing the impact of trauma on youth and the need for empathetic communication to support them effectively.

### ***Statewide Approach to Temporary Placement***

The subcommittee generally agreed that establishing a statewide framework for temporary placement options for youth who run away will help ensure consistency and accessibility across the

state, rather than a county-by-county ad hoc approach. Additionally, staffing and funding issues cannot be adequately addressed at the county level, especially in less-resourced counties. They concluded by acknowledging the complexity of the discussion and the importance of considering the broader ecosystem in responding to youth who run away from care.