



**The Timothy Montoya Task Force To Prevent Children From
Running Away From Out-Of-Home Placement | Meeting 12**

Meeting Minutes -- Intervention Subcommittee Discussion

December 13th, 2023, 8:00 am-10:00 am Virtual Meeting (Zoom)
Facilitators: Keystone Policy Center (Doris Tolliver)

Intervention Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: Brian Cotter, Beth McNalley, Norma Aguilar Dave, Bryan Kelley, Elizabeth Montoya, Becky Miller Updike, Doris Tolliver, Jordan Steffen • Doris welcomed the group; she also asked for a volunteer to work with Jordan and Bryan. She recapped what that time commitment and work looks like. Beth volunteered. • Doris introduced the note catcher and welcomed members to add their thoughts. Brian asked if they should enter thoughts right into the documents and Doris said yes. • Doris brought the group back and asked Brian for an elaboration on his thoughts. • Brian said that, to him, the absconder unit would be able to pull enough heart strings to emulate some success if resources are allocated to it but he doesn't think a statewide absconder unit would be effective, thinking about prioritizing resources. In order for it to make a substantial impact, it would require many officers with special training, ongoing training, and many other pieces. It is not a turn key solution that will see success by simply putting people on it. He said that he thinks that law enforcement already has skills and training in this area so it would be more effective to put the expectation on them. For example, law enforcement was recently alerted to missing and murdered indigenous people and these expectations can make an impact. He said they can do something similar for runaway children by highlighting it at a legislative level. This will help with funding if that is needed to support officers to do this work. Doris highlighted that he named that there might be an opportunity, in lieu of an absconder unit, to build on some of the work that is already happening in CO and memorialize that legislatively. Brian continued that an absconder unit would not only require officers but also vehicles, training, and data warehouses. He said that the success of the program will depend on where it can be housed or located. He said that there is a higher need and a higher volume in urban environments. He said he doesn't see a lot of downsides to a potential until other than, since it won't be effective, that money could be spent somewhere else. He said another potential downside would be a reputation of being the runaway police and kids hiding from them but he said that he sees that now. • Jordan said that if the recommendation is that there needs to be funding or an analysis towards an absconder unit of sorts, then it can be. Funding should not be seen as a challenge in this Task Force. • Brian responded that it is hard for him to separate funding; the infrastructure and budget cannot be ignored. He said that he doesn't want to say that the absconder unit is a bad idea but he wants to balance out the resources and
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the most effective way to do this is to expand duties for the people who are already doing this. He said that outside of the funding part, he thinks there are no downsides.

- Doris highlighted Brian's point of data and knowing the volume of children that run would help inform how big the unit would be/ how much resources it would take.
- Beth asked Brain if his assumption is that the unit would be based in law enforcement. She asked him his thoughts. Brian answered that he thinks that the absconder response should be based on law enforcement. He thinks this because law enforcement is already statewide with the appropriate infrastructure and there is already a relationship between law enforcement and human services. He said there might be a better location for it especially in Denver but in a smaller community, that might be much harder. He brought up avoiding redundancies like training people who do investigations and interviews as well as access to databases. He thinks that law enforcement is already most of the way there to effectiveness and the recommendation would be to add to it rather than recreate it.
- Beth said that she is thinking of the purpose of the unit; she thinks that it should be a multidisciplinary approach. This is because the children are not 'in trouble' and keeping it with law enforcement might not be the most trauma informed approach. She mentioned a consideration of where to bring the child after recovery to prevent them from running again. She also wonders about the message it sends if law enforcement has the unit; does that mean the children are 'in trouble'. Brain said that this is a really good point; he is focused on the finding of the child rather than what happens after the child is found. How to respond after that moment is a different question to him; he is wondering how to use the tools that law enforcement already has to help find children. He is suggesting the opposite of TX where they have a unit out on its own and has a relationship with law enforcement; his suggestion is having the unit in law enforcement and building up relationships between law enforcement and other agencies to help support the unit.
- Jordan asked if she was understanding him right; she asked if he was suggesting building a curriculum for current law enforcement to act as a response unit when children run from care. Brain answered that he is avoiding saying a unit since it will look different county to county due to resources. He said that he thinks officers should have training in their response and then funding to support this. Jordan encouraged creativity and to move beyond funding. She explained that one of the directives is to determine what funding might be necessary so by inhibiting recommendations due to funding might miss the point.
- Beth highlighted that she thinks that CIT should be integrated into the academy rather than based on the officer or the department's initiative. She also suggested mandating a refresher course as well as a specific training around engaging with high risk youth.
- Norma echoed what Beth was mentioning about a trauma informed aspect. She is wondering what the purpose of this unit would be; is it just to take a child back to the facility because that is what happens now. She wants to define what this group of people would do; would it be to intervene because if



so, then law enforcement might not be the best place for this to happen since children generally see law enforcement as not their friend. It's going to be hard for children to trust the unit so it'll be important to figure out what this group should do. She asked if it would be a training for whoever recovers these children to take them back to a certain place or to do a certain intervention to understand why they are running to prevent the cycle from continuing. This is because, normally, when children run, they do it more than once. Jordan thanked her for her comments and said that this is the meeting to define things. Doris brought out Norma's points; she said that maybe this is the unit that responds when a youth runs from care and there can be various interventions used like a standardized assessment, prevention to stop future runs, interviews to figure out motive, etc. This group would decide who should make up the unit and what they want the unit to do. Norma agreed and said that with all due respect that she thinks housing this unit with law enforcement might not make sense. There are many ways this unit could respond and the actions that Doris named are all important so the people would need to be trained on many things to use in their 'toolbox' to best fit the needs of the child.

- Bryan said that the group can think about other units beyond TX and think about DC and TN where the unit works with law enforcement but not in law enforcement.
- Elizabeth said that she wonders if the unit would look similar to the crisis response teams that she is familiar with which partners law enforcement with a therapist to come out to safety/ mental health calls. Doris thanked her for her comments and said that the unit can look like however the group wants it to look.
- Becky said that she agrees with what Elizabeth just said about having a mental health professional involved. She wants to see this not as a 'gotcha' mechanism but a resource for providers to stabilize and keep people safe. She echoed the points of children being afraid of law enforcement. She also wants to collect data and use it effectively (while partnering with an action lab perhaps) to make sure whatever is learned from this can be used later. Doris thanked her for her comments.
- Norma said that she wonders if there is a way to partner with hospitals since there might be times when a child is having a mental health issue and needs to stabilize in the hospital. This is not available right now; they need to be homicidal, suicidal, or psychotic to be admitted to a hospital. This would not be a long term stay but maybe just a night to assess their mental health. Doris thanked her for her comments.
- Brian said that when he thinks about an absconder unit, he is thinking about boots on the ground searching for children. He thinks of these other aspects presented as prevention. His question is about how to intervene when the child is gone. To him, when the child is recovered, the support provided is about prevention. He wanted to reiterate this to clarify his perspective. Doris thanked him and said that his law enforcement centric perspective is about responding and finding children (either an absconder unit or an activity of law enforcement). She also thinks that there are more opportunities for policies and practices to increase services and support. She mentioned Beth's



comments about the unit that she is imagining; the unit is not only about locating the child but engaging with them which often intersects with other agencies. It is a multidisciplinary approach to intervention.

- Beth said that the first interaction is really important. The unit is about locating the children but also about talking to them about motive and preventing future runs. It can also be about a safety plan if they decide to run again. She reiterates the multidisciplinary approach since locating the children and putting them back will not solve anything. She also mentioned Norma's suggestion of using the hospital for the high risk cases; she also mentioned an opportunity for another safe place to stay rather than just putting them right back to the facility that they ran from. Norma agreed and said that there should be a conversation about where to place children after a run since it is sometimes not in the best interest of the child or the facility to put them back. Doris thanked them for their comments.
- Elizabeth said that she sort of agrees with Brian but that if all law enforcement officers are trained in trauma informed and can recover children, she is concerned about runaway children not registering as a priority for them. This is why she thinks it needs to be a team with mental health providers. She also asked if the post recovery location is going to be fleshed out more in future sessions. Doris said yes; it will be the temporary placements conversation.
- Jordan seconded Doris's comment about the upcoming temporary placements conversation. She also said that recommendations can encourage the General Assembly to research topics more closely. This is to provide some flexibility so the group is not so focused on the yes or the no.
- Doris said that the group knows that this is complex so there probably will not be a solution to fully fix the thing. It could be a multilevel approach. For example, bigger communities can have an absconder unit and smaller communities can have partnerships and roles to provide a framework that ensures a consistent approach. There are lots of opportunities to flesh out what the recommendation is.
- Brian said that he agrees with Elizabeth and that there is a need to have more detailed missing persons cases, generally. He is talking about the missing persons investigators that already have a focus on this topic. He mentioned that the law enforcement infrastructure supports these actions. He said that there should be a close partnership between law enforcement and human services. There should not be friction here like there is now. His view that these officers can instill a culture to show that this is not a back burner topic. He said that this is helped along by a legislative declaration to facilitate missing persons investigations. He thinks that there is a way to do better that is not walking away from centuries of infrastructure that support these investigations. Doris thanked him for his comments.
- Bryan said that the group can consider regionally differential approaches like TX which is regionally based. The recommendations do not have to be the same for every county.
- Doris said that the group is almost at time and ran through a quick summary of the note catcher challenges section. Doris asked for any more downsides.
- Elizabeth said that if there were teams in the Denver area immediately responding to runaway children, she wonders what that would look like. She



was not notified of Timothy's run until about 9:37 PM when he ran at 4 PM. The accident was at 9:34 PM. In the 4 hour period, there was a police report so she is wondering if this unit would have responded in time. She said that it's hard to know. Doris thanked her for saying this.

- Doris said that she thinks it is presumptuous and maybe even offensive to say that the unit would not have made a difference; the group can make recommendations about this. For example, the unit should respond in X amount of time and the response should look like Y. This can include necessary notifications to the family. Basically, the unit can be what the group decides it to be. They can consider what would have made a difference in this situation. That is the task of this group.
- Beth said that the group has already talked about doing a screening before a placement to determine level of risk and to break down a tiered response. If it is high risk, then require an immediate report in. This is something to discuss as well.
- Jordan said that the screening tool for both pre and post run is being talked about in prevention right now. These will intertwine and combine in the next meeting.
- Elizabeth said that one of the key parts of the immediate response is that once the police report is taken, then it is in the national database for missing children. In her situation, she is not sure if that happened. For 20 hours, they could not identify Timothy in Wheatridge CO. He was identified after posting pictures of him on Facebook and a classmate identified him. She said that making sure all the information is input in the correct system at the correct time is crucial. Doris said this can be something the group considers.
- Doris asked for anything else that is not yet included.
- Anna said that she wants to bring up that the absconder unit is one piece and all of the other pieces being talked about go into the standard response; the standard response may or may not include the absconder unit. Doris thanked her and said that this is an important consideration. Talking about the absconder unit is the initial response when a child runs away; all the other units of the response are functions that would fall outside of the initial response of locating the child and making sure they are not re-traumatized by who locates them. The rest is the standard response that outlines the policies and practices as well as who carries them out. Anna said that maybe we should name it the initial response since the unit is not fully fleshed out. She also said that it seems like it is not determined yet if the unit would be the initial response but rather a seek to find. Jordan said she hears her and that the prevention subcommittee topics will come into play here.
- Doris said that the group is going back to the main room. Brian said that to him the whole conversation is an immediate response and they will need to lean on law enforcement for the immediate response in a timely fashion but within an hour would be hard.
- Doris directed the group to go back to the main room.