

Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting 12

December 13, 2023, 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.

Overview of Subcommittee Work

Trace Faust provided members with an overview of the topics each subcommittee – Intervention and Prevention – will be covering. Topics for each subcommittee are based on past surveys, discussion and note catchers. The list is not exhaustive, however, the topics listed below will be discussed. Members may choose to add additional topics.

Intervention Subcommittee Topics:

- Statewide Specialized Investigation Unit
- Statewide Standard Response Policies and Procedures
- Temporary Housing for Recovered Youth
- Education on Trauma Informed Response

Prevention Subcommittee Topics:

- Pre-Admission and Recovery Screening Tools
- Implementation of Hardwar (Fences, Delayed Locks and Electronic Monitoring)
- Use of Restraints
- Education for Youth Regarding the Risks of Running

Trace reminded members they will have access to all the materials of the subcommittee they do not select and all members may access full recordings of each meeting on the Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman's (CPO) website. Dorris Tolliver will be facilitating the Intervention Subcommittee and Jordan Steffen with the CPO will be present to support. Trace will be facilitating the Prevention Subcommittee and Bryan Kelley with the CPO will be present to support. Members then broke into subcommittees.

Intervention Subcommittee

Beth McNalley volunteered to keep track of the discussion via the summary sheet which will be developed by Jordan Steffen and Bryan Kelley with the CPO as a one-page summary of the subcommittee's discussion and will be presented to the larger group in January.

The group took time to individually enter their thoughts into the Google Sheet "Intervention Subcommittee – December 13, 2023, Topic: Statewide Absconder Units". The group then discussed what they entered, including the potential benefits of implementing a comprehensive approach, key elements involved, specific considerations for effectiveness in Colorado and what conditions would be necessary for the implementation of an absconder unit.

Doris Tolliver reminded everyone that the need for funding and resources should not be seen as a barrier at this stage of the discussions. Jordan encouraged thinking beyond traditional constraints and not allowing concerns about funding to limit bold and innovative recommendations. She reminded the group that the Task Force will need to address each legislative mandate separately, including the one identifying what resources are needed.

Jordan emphasized the flexibility and space available for recommendations, suggesting that recommendations do not have to be confined to a single definitive proposal. Recommendations may be up to a page long (for example) to explain multiple components.

Brian Cotter suggested that the absconder response should be based out of law enforcement, and he provided several reasons for this recommendation:

1. Existing Infrastructure: Law enforcement already has a statewide presence and established infrastructure.
2. Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness: Using the existing law enforcement infrastructure is more efficient and cost-effective, especially in smaller counties where having a dedicated group of people might be unmanageable and expensive.
3. Access to Resources: Law enforcement officers have access to resources such as missing persons training, vehicles, supervision, and general management. They can also enforce certain areas of law, which can aid in investigations.
4. Integration with Existing Relationships: There is already a relationship between law enforcement and county departments of human services, and leveraging this existing connection can facilitate a more effective response.
5. Avoiding Redundancy: Using law enforcement as a base for the absconder response avoids re-creating the wheel. Law enforcement personnel are already equipped to conduct investigations, including interviews and accessing various databases.

Beth emphasized the need to clearly define the purpose of the absconder unit, suggesting a multi-disciplinary approach rather than exclusively relying on law enforcement. While acknowledging the importance of trained individuals and investigations, Beth expressed concerns about the potential lack of a trauma-informed approach when dealing with youth who are running away. She underscored the importance of not solely focusing on investigations but also considering the well-being of youth and

intervening to prevent future incidents of running away from care. Overall, she advocates for a more holistic and intervention-oriented strategy that goes beyond the traditional law enforcement framework.

Norma Aguilar-Dave echoed Beth's emphasis on a trauma-informed approach and intervention. She expressed a need to define the purpose of the intervention, and what the absconder unit would do, exploring possibilities such as creating a specific intervention when children are found, beyond simply bringing a child or youth back to the facility.

Elizabeth Montoya raised the idea that the absconder unit could resemble crisis response teams where a law enforcement officer locates the child and a therapist intervenes, conducts assessments, and takes charge of the situation. The suggestion is to have a collaborative model that combines the strengths of both law enforcement and intervention specialists for a more comprehensive and effective response to safety and mental health calls.

Becky Miller Updike agreed and offered an example of how unhoused individuals are approached with the involvement of social workers. Becky envisions the intervention as a resource to providers, focusing on stabilization and safety rather than punitive measures. Additionally, Becky stressed the importance of maximizing the opportunity to collect and use meaningful data. She suggests partnering with educational institutions, such as the University of Denver's Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, to ensure that insights gained from this initiative contribute to improving future practices.

Norma suggested they could also partner with hospitals to help with an immediate crisis, or connecting youth to a safe place to go if they do not want to immediately return to a facility.

Doris helped to shape the discussion and suggested the possibility of a multi-level approach to the absconder unit, tailored to different community sizes while establishing a consistent framework for responding to runaway incidents. For larger communities, having a dedicated multi-disciplinary absconder unit might be suitable, while for smaller jurisdictions or counties, creating memorandums of understanding between partners with defined roles was proposed.

Bryan Kelley reminded the group that the Texas example is based regionally rather than using county infrastructure (namely because Texas has 220 counties).

It was also mentioned that some of the ideas this group is raising – such as a tiered response based on prior screening and whether a youth is considered high-risk – are currently being discussed by the prevention subcommittee. In the Task Force's February meeting, they will discuss a standardized response protocol and how to integrate that with the screening tool prevention subcommittee is working on now. The CPO will capture the inter-related ideas discussed and bring them together for the entire group to review.