



**The Timothy Montoya Task Force: To Prevent Children From Running Away From Out-Of-Home Placement | Meeting 11**

***Meeting Minutes -- Intervention Subcommittee Discussion***

November 1st, 2023, 8:00 am-11:00 am Virtual Meeting (Zoom)  
Facilitators: Keystone Policy Center (Doris Tolliver)

<p>Intervention Subcommittee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Task Force Members: Beth McNalley, Dennis Desparrois, Anna Cole, Jana Zinser, Norma Aguilar-Dave, Brian Cotter and Jenelle Goodrich.</li> <li>● Facilitators: Doris Tolliver</li> <li>● Presenters: Demaris Nicholson, Program Specialist, Special Investigations Division, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Greg Eakens, Director of Special Investigations, Special Investigations Division, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services</li> <li>● Members of the Public: Jordan Steffen</li> <li>● Doris welcomed the subcommittee and introduced the speakers.</li> <li>● Greg opened the discussion and shared a slide presentation with the group. He stated that the unit manages several divisions and the special investigators are part of child protection investigations. The unit works statewide and is regionally managed. Sometimes they may operate at the county level. In 2025, the Texas legislature recognized there was a need for law enforcement experience to help locate youth and children who run away from care. Often the professionals working to locate these youth do not have that type of investigatory background. Currently there are about 300 employees in the child protection investigations, and about five regional directors. Texas comprises 254 counties.</li> <li>● Special investigators support several areas of child protection, this includes child fatalities. However, a big responsibility is working to locate youth and children who are missing from care. Greg showed a map of Texas and the seven regions they serve. He stated the regional model has been an effective models for the special investigators unit. The unit has allowed for the coordination of statewide, regional and local professionals when attempting to locate a missing youth or child.</li> <li>● There is an attempt to maintain continuity between the special investigators and the child they work with. The same special investigator will typically work with the same child or youth if they run away from care. Ideally this will help the child perceive the special investigator as another resource or trusted adult. There are several children who run three to four times a day.</li> <li>● Demaris noted the amount of time and the resources required to locate a youth missing from care. She shared an example of a youth who ran from care and the efforts to locate that youth. The presenters then opened the time up to questions.</li> <li>● Jenelle clarified the number of staff dedicated to the special investigators unit.</li> <li>● Beth asked what training is provided to investigators, particularly when they are engaging with high-risk youth.</li> <li>● Greg stated that the law enforcement backgrounds of the staff help when it comes to communication with families. This training has also helped when looking at communication among professionals as well. There is no set training for youth engagement.</li> <li>● Jana said she could see the advantage of hiring former law enforcement to do this work. However, she stated she was concerned about trauma informed</li> </ul>
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training and the perception that gives the youth being served.

- Greg stated that they often find the youth will engage with the special investigators because they are not their parents. Investigators encourage that connection.
- Jordan asked the presenters to discuss how the unit is able to address the urgency of a youth who runs away from care, even if the circumstance does not meet the criteria of a traditional missing persons case.
- Greg stated that the investigators help to raise the urgency by working around the traditional law enforcement response. Investigators are able to connect with caseworkers and other community members to start looking immediately for the youth and with an urgency that would not be used by law enforcement. The investigators do what law enforcement would do in a missing person case. They also use that information to help locate the youth if they run away multiple times. This includes recovery interviews with children and youth after they are recovered. This is also information used to improve systems.
- Doris asked if the unit is only involved when the child is in out-of-home custody.
- Greg stated that if the youth is in state custody, the unit is absolutely involved. Otherwise they may become involved if the youth is missing in other circumstances as well. Under Texas law, you cannot kidnap your own child, so the unit does not become involved in those cases.
- Betho asked what the recovery interviews involve.
- Greg said it is focused on re-engaging the youth. Often they may not want to speak immediately after they are found, but the investigator will come back and try again. Sometimes child advocacy centers are involved, if not the investigator is able to do the interview themselves. If there is a belief the child was exposed to trafficking, then the unit works to have a forensic interview completed.
- Jenelle asked if the unit has a standard assessment tool. Jana also asked what happens if a youth or child refuses to come back -- what steps are taken and what force is deemed appropriate.
- Greg stated that investigators do not put hands on the children or youth. Their response is still different from that of law enforcement. The investigators may have to consider getting law enforcement involved if it is a concerning placement or living situation for the youth. Sometimes they will leave the youth where they are if they feel the child is safe.
- Jana asked if the police are always with the investigators.
- Greg stated that it depends on the case and the circumstances.
- Doris asked if the unit has MOUs with law enforcement across Texas.
- Greg stated that they do have MOUs with some law enforcement who are frequently called in. Work to get as standardized a response as possible. It is key to make sure as much information is shared as possible and create expectations around that.
- Beth asked how the unit has overcome communication barriers.
- Greg said it's really been accomplished on the ground level. They've worked to meet law enforcement directly and work through issues one-on-one, department by department.
- Demaris stated that every agency has a specific goal and they want to challenge the status quo with those ideas. We want stakeholders to have an understanding of the work and to be mindful when considering boundaries among agencies.
- Doris asked what the percentage of work will focus on youth who run away from care?
- Greg stated that it may depend on the day. But when there is a need, the unit responds quickly.



- Doris prompted members who had not posed any questions to get their questions in.
- Brian stated that he liked the idea of having a group dedicated to these efforts. He believes a liaison with law enforcement is a great partnership that Colorado may learn from and there are similarities between Colorado and Texas.
- Greg stated that civil investigators sometimes help remove the law enforcement feel to the whole event. Sometimes it's beneficial to all parties involved.
- Doris asked what is needed to stand up a program such as this.
- Greg stated that the first thing is to remove the perception of "us vs. them." Everyone needs to understand the goal and agree with the goal of helping youth. Educating all stakeholders is extremely important.
- Dennis stated that, looking at the evolution of the program, he wanted to share that the skillset and the knowledge that the special investigators bring to the table is so valuable and we need to hear them. Colorado staff are coming in young with little experience and leaning on knowledge is important. At the same time a program like this will require a lot of resources.
- Greg stated that everything comes together. When building the program it is important to allow for a lot of latitude among stakeholders to state their needs, and give caseworkers the space they need to do their work with the investigators. Each group has to learn to speak the language of the other group.
- Jordan asked if there is proactive contact between the investigators and the youth before the youth runs away from care.
- Greg stated that generally does not happen.
- Jana asked what resources, in addition to social media, investigators use to help locate youth.
- Greg stated that family is key. Investigators will also contact attorneys involved in the youth's case. It is really case driven.
- Dennis stated that his office will often access the food stamp office and that database.
- Jana asked about whether the investigators will go to schools?
- Greg stated that most of the kids in the population the unit works with do not go to standard schools. However, there are school resource officers who may also serve as a resource.
- Jenelle stated that not everyone in Colorado has access to the food stamp database and without legislation, stakeholders will not have access to some of the resources the unit utilizes. How did Texas address these issues legislatively?
- Greg stated it came down to the evolution of leadership in Texas. When those goals aligned it became easier to move legislation through.
- Jenelle stated that Colorado cannot seem to get that kind of momentum. She said she has no issues calling a legislator today to get things moving.
- Dennis stated that is the benefit of having a state-run system, which Colorado does not have. However, he does not see Colorado's county-run system as being prohibitive to implementing a system such as this.
- Beth asked what resources are available when there are concerns that a youth was trafficked after running away from care.
- Greg stated there is a care coalition team coming together in Texas. The idea started with the Texas Human Trafficking Coalition. The intuition is to create a one-stop shop for stakeholders.
- Dennis stated that each child is unique and they once had a case where they had to rely on coalitions to find placements and help. Some extreme measures were necessary but because of relationships, it was not possible to



	<p>put the youth in a safe situation. This is why it is important to approach these cases with a trauma informed practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The group took a 15 minute break.</li><li>• Following the break, the group moved to filling out the notecater. The notcater is available in the meeting materials.</li><li>• The group was then called back into the large group for a debrief.</li></ul>
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