



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

**Meeting Minutes -- Prevention Subcommittee Discussion**

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

Prevention Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants: David Lee, Trace Faust, Brandon Miller, Stephanie Villafuerte, Jana Zinzer, Jenna Coleman, Ashley Chase, Dr. Renee Marguardt, Kevin Lash, Dennis Desparrois, Michelle Bradley, Chelsea Hill, Bryan Kelley</li> <li>• Trace Faust welcomed and thanked the group for their hard work last time. They provided the note catcher for folks to add their thoughts. Trace said that they will highlight themes and other thoughts. They asked for questions and asked for an introduction to the materials.</li> <li>• Bryan Kelley explained the materials that he gathered about the policies in other states; the states are GE, NV and WI in which once a child runs away and has been returned, the state develops an understanding of why they ran away including if the motivation was to something or away from something. This information would help adjust the care to prevent the next run away from happening. He also included IL which has an assessment user guide for preadmission screening to find out what the needs are for the child to prevent them from running away. He explained that he is not endorsing these state policies but is offering them as something to sink teeth into.</li> <li>• Trace asked for questions. Stephanie asked Brandon and David for their comments since they have to leave early.</li> <li>• Brandon said that screening tools are great tools and that CO has underdeveloped, if any, tools. He is an advocate for these tools and individualized plans. He said that the more information the better around adverse behaviors. He also commented that people often try to figure out the motive to why children run away but he said that, in his world, there is not always a motive; children sometimes do not know why they are running and it is more of a trauma response so we should not assume there is always a motive. Trace thanked him and mentioned putting a pin in it for the trauma informed aspect since that is one of the upcoming topics.</li> <li>• David said that he is hoping that CO's future potential tools are validated (meaning that they identify what they are looking for) and are useful. He thinks that a lot of agencies already assess children that are at risk to run away. He is wondering if the tool will tell him something he doesn't know rather than the obvious risks. He said that since so many children are at high risk, he wonders how the tools will prevent runs. He guesses that over 90% of children in out of home placements are at risk to run away. He said prevention, to him, includes collaboration and transparency between agencies to prevent children from running away and when they do run, providing the resources so they don't run again. Trace thanked him for his comments and asked him to add his notes to the note catcher.</li> </ul>
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- Brandon expanded on that and said that many organizations evaluate risk of running just by numbers of runs but he thinks this is the wrong measurement. He said that what an assessment tool can do is find the right information to help figure out the correct treatment. There is not always the correct information in the referral, such as only the number of runs, so a facility could deny a child treatment when in reality those run attempts are a response. He also said that there are better ways to figure out which kids are going to run away.
- Bryan said that- for many of the states- the assessment was step 1 and step 2 was individualizing a plan. It is not just the assessment but also about using it in treatment.
- Jana Zinzer- foster parent- said that many kids do not have a motive that they know of but once they grow up, they do know why they ran away. She is suggesting going to the older children after they are able to process what they went through. She detailed a story of a young man who was a chronic runner; he said he ran since his placements did not fit his needs. She thinks this is a theme of people accepting subpar placements by saying it's the best they can do. She also recounted a foster family that was found to be abusive but got more foster children. She thinks we need to prioritize quality placements. She said that sometimes when she got foster children they displayed opposite behavior than what they were screened for so she suggested that kids respond to their environment. Trace thanked her for her perspective and asked her to include it in the note catcher to make sure that we capture it. They brought out her mentions of screening for fit and quality foster homes.
- Trace highlighted that there is not a lot of time left so it is important to use the note catcher to get all the group's thoughts down. They explained how to use it; first, write all the opportunities and then move to the challenges. The important thing is to add all their thoughts so the group can have some recommendations. They directed the group to the note catcher.
- Trace brought the group back and mentioned Stephanie's comments in the note catcher. They mentioned 3 pieces; education and training for folks doing the screening, the mandate in either law or regulation, and the fiscal note. Stephanie elaborated that it would have to be a law or a regulation to cover the costs of developing the tool, the roll out of the tool and, the monitoring of the tool. She mentioned that we don't have to operationalize this but to conceptualize it. However, that is how she sees the costs as a second step. Trace asked about a pilot roll out of the tool. Stephanie said yes, and that people should ensure that every tool is the right tool but rolling out a pilot project. She brought up an example of legislation involving QRTPs with another issue and the strategy included a pilot project. She mentioned that this was recommended as a best practice by the University of Denver Policy Lab.
- Dr. Renee Marguardt said that she thinks assessments and screenings are very different tools. Trace said that this is something the group can spell out to make sure these things don't get lumped into one. They asked if she had any elements about both kinds of tools that would be helpful for success in CO. Renee said it is hard for her to think of assessment and screening



together since they are very different. Trace highlighted Renee's point of spelling out the tools as different.

- Trace asked for any other comments about what people are excited about. They asked Dennis for his thoughts and he said that he is already thinking about the operationalizing of it and Trace named an appreciation for that.
- Renee said that it's not only about gathering the information but about what you do with the information so this needs to be a piece of it too.
- Dennis said that he is working on initiatives to help operationalize this so it might not be as daunting as it looks. For example, they are developing a training academy for child welfare providers. Another example is developing a universal referral form and the tool could be attached to the form. Basically, he thinks this is doable.
- Stephanie said that it is important to list these initiatives as to not make redundancies. As another example, she mentioned that there is federal legislation potentially coming about stopping children from running so this could help as a guide and provide funding to states that are working on these things.
- Trace thanked the group for these comments and directed them to the note catcher again.
- Trace brought the group back and mentioned the importance of not getting too into the weeds. They named a theme of trauma informed training for the people administering the tool and the possibility for harm if there is a lack of trauma informed training.
- Michelle Bradley said that caseworkers fill out 15 referrals for each child before placement so she is wondering what is different between the screening tool and the referrals since she does not want caseworkers to do more work. Trace asked if these referrals are specific by county or at a state level. Michelle said that she has to send usually about 15-20 pages to each placement and each packet is different for each placement. She is not wanting to duplicate the work and wants to be intentional about what the tool looks like. Trace said that they hear her say that tools are not bad but we need to make sure we understand what is already in place before we make new things. Michelle agreed and also brought up that many children go out of state for placement so that is another consideration. Trace summarized that the recommendations should not be a new policy that just makes more work for case workers.
- Dennis said that his team is making a universal referral form and that they can add the screening tool to it. He said that placements cannot accept a referral if it is not the universal one. Michelle said that this is amazing!
- Stephanie said that the question today- conceptually- is, 'is a tool like this effective?'. The operationalization of it brings all these considerations into a law. She mentioned assessing what is already in place and filling in the gap because there is a gap.
- Renee said that to go off Dennis' point that the tool could look like an initial screening for risk assessment and then a post recovery assessment that includes a process flow map. A process flow map could be a way to make sure the tool fits in well.



- Trace said that they are looking to the members to name all the considerations and they asked for other comments.
- Jenna said that post run interviews can sometimes take up to 2 hours so she is wondering about incentives to get trained on these tools to mitigate burn out and staff shortages. Trace thanked her for her comments and asked for more comments. Jenna followed up and said that in foster care there are no restraints or hardware so there are different things to look at for prevention.
- Kevin Lash asked how often kids run from foster care; Jenna said nightly and that they have a lot of AWOLs. Kevin said he is confused by a runaway risk child being in a foster home. Jenna said that since they have closed so many beds there is nowhere else for them to go. The children usually come back after a night which is great but they have a high safety risk so they need to assess that to put the best plans in place. Dennis said that this is a common problem and that the sheer number of children in foster care lends itself to high levels of runaways.
- Trace asked for a volunteer to work with Jordan and Bryan to bring this conversation to the large group. This includes summarizing as well as action steps. Ashley Chase volunteered. Trace told the group to look out for new materials for the next subcommittee and highlighted that the next meeting will be recapping these conversations and deciding on some recommendations.