Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting 12
December 13, 2023, Meeting Recap
Prevention 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.

Prevention Subcommittee

Bryan Kelley with the CPO provided a brief overview of the resources discussed in prior conversations. He mentioned the positive response to the speaker from Vermont who talked about creating specialized response plans to prevent youth from running away. The resources prepared focus on regulations in Georgia, Nevada and Wisconsin, addressing what happens once a youth has run away and been returned. The goal is to understand why they ran away and adjust their care to prevent future incidents. Additionally, Illinois was mentioned for having an assessment user guide at the beginning, involving pre-admission screening to determine the needs of the youth and create a plan to prevent them from running away. Bryan is not endorsing any one state's policies but believes that useful insights can be drawn for adapting strategies in different contexts like Colorado.

Brandon Miller expressed his support for screening tools, emphasizing the importance of individualized plans related to screening tools. Brandon acknowledged the challenge of deciding which screening tool to use but believes that having more information is beneficial, especially regarding ADV (Antisocial, Delinquent, or Violent) behavior. Brandon added that understanding the motives behind runaway behavior can be complex. He suggests that, in his experience in the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) world, many times the motive for running away is unclear, and assuming specific motives may not be accurate. Brandon encourages a broader perspective and cautions against limiting discussions to assumptions about why kids engage in such behavior.

David Lee urged the team to consider whether screening tools had been assessed and that they actually work. With populations that are high risk for running away, it seems like the screening tools won't tell agencies anything they don't already know. He is looking for something that helps agencies coordinate better and provide the tools and resources so that youth do not continue to run away from care.

Jenna Coleman expanded on David's point, expressing concern about the current method of evaluating the risk of running in facilities and organizations based solely on the number of runaway incidents. This approach is flawed because kids may act out in various ways, such as aggression or a fight-flight-freeze responses. She advocates for finding or creating the right tool to ensure that facilities don't overlook kids who may not be a problem with the right treatment. Jenna highlighted the need for accurate information, as relying solely on the number of runaways may lead to denying treatment for kids who need it or overlooking underlying issues.

Bryan mentioned that in many states, the assessment process is considered the first step, followed by tailoring individual treatment plans. An example from Illinois involved authorizing the use of physical restraints on a youth based on information gathered during the assessment. The interest lies not only in gathering information but also in how assessments inform strategies like stop orders for physical prevention. The emphasis is on applying the gathered information to tailor the care that youth receive in these states.

Jana Zinser, a foster parent, shared her perspective on understanding why kids run away. She suggests seeking insights from older individuals who have processed their emotions and behaviors, particularly those in their 30s or late 20s. Drawing from her experience, she highlights that, over time, these individuals often come to know why they ran away. A young man Jana spoke with identified the primary reason for running away as unsuitable placements where he felt uncared for and misunderstood. She emphasized the need for a focus on creating a wider range and better quality of foster homes and

placements rather than accepting substandard options. She expressed concern about instances where reported abuse leads to additional foster placements for the same family, deeming it unacceptable. Her call is for a focus on quality placements, accountability for bad behavior, improved screening, and enhanced training for foster parents.

Trace then gave the committee time to fill out the Note Catcher and highlighted some of the themes.

- Education and training for screeners
- Need for a mandate/requirement
- Fiscal implications for developing and implementing a tool, evaluation

Dr. Renee Marquardt pointed out that the conversation seems to be addressing two different types of tools—screening and assessment. She distinguishes screening as determining if someone is at risk and to what level, while assessment focuses on identifying reasons, building individualized plans, and preventing future incidents. The conversation acknowledged the distinction, and there's a recognition of the importance of clarifying these differences.

Dennis Desparrois offered that there are current efforts that might make the operationalizing part less daunting. For example, the Colorado Department of Human Services is working on the development of a child welfare training academy for staff and facilities, which could be utilized to train providers. There is also work being done on a universal referral form for placements, so the tool could be attached to the form. Overall, Dennis believes that the operationalization of these efforts is achievable.

Stephanie Villafuerte wants to track all the infrastructure already in place as well as other initiatives that complement the task force's work so there isn't redundancy. She also mentioned that Congress passed a law that is called Stop Children from Running from Foster Care which will have money for states to implement many of the things the task force is talking about.

The group then discussed some of the challenges.

Efficiency/Effectiveness

- Not duplicating or adding work for caseworkers. What information is the screening tool requiring versus what's already in a referral? Now, information has to be shared depending on the facility. Caseworkers also have to fill out the HRV tool and enter information into Trails.
- How will the tool work with out-of-state placements?
- (Dennis mentions the creation of the Universal Referral Form)
- The idea of a process map to identify gaps in information is mentioned.

Time/Resource/Staff Capacity Restraints

- Assessments take time

Ashley Chase volunteered to work with Jordan and Bryan to share the subcommittee's discussion with the larger group in January.