

Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, August 10, 2016

9:00 am- 10:00 am

Members present:

Victoria Blakeney, Department of Education

Brianne Burnside, PCA NV

Evelyn Dryer, Nevada Bureau of Public and Behavioral Health

Cindy Duffey, Family Advocacy Center Nellis AFB

Eleanor Espinoza, Department of Health and Human Services

Amanda Haboush-Deloye, PCA NV

Patricia Haddad, PCA NV

Kim Kandt, SNHD

Kirby Stolzoff, PCA NV

Jill Tolles, Candidate for Assembly

- 1) Introduction of Panelists
 - a) We welcomed our panelists, Sgt. Phil Merges from Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Juvenile Sexual Assault unit, Sgt. Dennis Carry from the Washoe County Sheriff's Department Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, and Deputy John Meyers, Police Liaison for Douglas County School District.
- 2) Questions for Panelists
 - a) To begin, panelists described the investigation process for each of their districts.
 - i) For Clark County, Sgt. Merges stated that the Southern Nevada Children's Assessment Center (CAC) is utilized as the central location for the investigation. From there the forensic interview is conducted, working with the Child Protective Services' team. Sgt. Dennis confirmed that Washoe County follows this procedure as well.
 - ii) Reports will be answered within 72 hours. If the suspect is in the home of the child then the child will be removed from the home as soon as possible. The comfort of the child is taken in to consideration and parents will be included if they are not a suspect.
 - iii) On the school level, according to Deputy Meyers, disclosures are often relayed from a teacher to the school counselor. From there the police liaison meets with the child and investigators come to the school.
 - (1) If suspect is an educator then Human Resources is involved and the child is removed from the school to the police station.
 - b) Panelists were asked to speak on the availability of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners – Pediatric (SANE-P) and its impact on investigations.
 - i) In the Las Vegas area, Dr. Sandra Cetl is the doctor who works in the CAC, as well in as in her own office at Sunrise Hospital. The best case scenario is that the investigation take place at the CAC where the rooms are designed to minimize

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- discomfort and trauma. If they are unable to conduct the examination at the CAC, then they will have to bring the child to the Sunrise Hospital emergency room.
- ii) In Washoe County the examinations are scheduled. The forensic interview and the examination are conducted at the same location therefore if an examination is unavailable they can conduct the interview in the meantime.
 - iii) Investigators in Douglas County contact Washoe for examinations. Deputy Meyers reports rarely having an issue with this method and says examinations are arranged in a timely manner.
 - iv) None were familiar with the process that rural counties use to arrange examinations.
- c) Panelists spoke on how they maintain relationships with non-offending parents and guardians.
- i) Clark and Washoe County both keep parents and guardians with the child until the forensic interview. An interview with parents is also conducted by Child Protective Service (CPS). From there they are referred to Victim Advocates.
 - ii) For Douglas County, the FBI will occasionally provide Victim Advocate services.
 - iii) Sgt. Carry stated a recurring conflict between parents and police is differing expectations of timeliness during investigations.
 - iv) Sgt. Merges says he often witnesses the complicated dynamic of a non-offending parent losing their partner especially if the offender was the main provider for financial support and resources. He suggested this might be an area in need of more community resources.
- d) Panelists discussed the considerations and challenges of interviewing juvenile victims.
- i) Children eight years old or under are not allowed to be interviewed by patrol officers.
 - ii) Detectives are trained in conducting forensic interviews and practice continually to refine their skills. CAC recently hired full-time investigators as well.
 - (1) Sgt. Merges estimates that they receive 80-100 cases monthly.
 - iii) Deputy Meyers reports interviews at the patrol level, without the proper training, often causes to leading the child during interviews. There is an initial response by law enforcement then an interview is conducted at the station; Douglas County does not have the resources for a CAC.
- e) Panelists spoke on whether their forensic interviews were trauma informed.
- i) Panelists stated that, due to the non-threatening nature of the CAC and the specialized trainings officers undergo, the majority of victims are unaware a police interview took place and believe they have spoken just spoken with a doctor or counselor.
 - ii) Deputy Meyers reported that when he first began as Police Liaison he witnessed children who disclosed at schools being made to reiterate their experience over and over to different school officials. He has stopped calls to the sheriff's office and patrol from going to the school after a disclosure to limit the number of

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times a child had to disclose. He has also trained school staff to not notify up the string of command and interview the child themselves but to instead immediately contact CPS.

- f) Panelists discussed the differences of how teacher sexual misconduct is investigated throughout the state.
 - i) In Nevada, it is up to an educator to disclose any criminal arrests or ongoing investigations that take place while employed by the school district. Individual school districts can create policies that address this; Douglas County has a policy to disclose all criminal arrests.
 - ii) There is no Nevada law that requires the removal of a teacher from their class if there is an investigation for sexual misconduct; the choice is left to the school districts. In Douglas and Washoe County, teachers will be put on administrative leave during investigation while teachers can remain in the classroom in Clark County.
 - g) Panelists described the differences between criminal and civil cases regarding CSA.
 - i) Police departments are rarely part of a civil case. Civil cases take place in family court and CPS investigators will be involved and testify. Civil cases will take place sometimes concurrently with a criminal case especially if child custody is being reviewed.
 - h) Panelists were asked to speak on the persistent belief that a majority of CSA disclosures are false accusations.
 - i) Sgt. Merges says that the majority are truthful. False accusations, especially instance of coaching a child to disclose, are easily detected and often are related to other conflicts such as custody disputes.
 - ii) Sgt. Carry estimates that 25-50% are calls are legitimate. The numbers fluctuate. That is not to say the remaining 50-75% are false accusations but unsubstantiated, misinformed, or decontextualized situations.
- 3) Updates Regarding Standards Process
- a) **Curriculum Standards Subgroup Members** have a meeting with Eddy Ableser **August 11, 2016 at 10 am** to review updated standards and move forward with presenting final suggest standards to the Board of Education.
- 4) Action Steps to Take Before Next Meeting:
- a) **PCA NV Staff** will send a reminder for next panel to task force members and a call for questions with a deadline.
- 5) **Next Meeting Date: October 12, 2016 9 am**

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