



Vulnerable Adult Act (VAA) Redesign: Community Conversations about Adult Protective Services

Minnesota's adult protective services system receives reports of alleged abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of vulnerable adults within the state. The system responds to those reports and provides social services when needed to ensure that vulnerable adults remain safe, independent, and protected from future maltreatment. The system in Minnesota is complex, with the state Department of Human Services, the state Department of Health, and Adult Protective Services (APS) within counties each responsible for different pieces. The system also requires close collaboration between community members, state agencies, local governments, law enforcement, court systems, and social services.

There have been recent changes to parts of the system to ensure it is achieving its intended goals, specifically related to some licensed care facilities. However, a broader review of the system has not been undertaken, with a specific focus on Adult Protective Services (APS). APS is currently managed by county governments and currently the majority of reports of alleged maltreatment of vulnerable adults are referred to APS.

This packet will walk you through the process of gathering and amplifying the voices of people who have been, or could be, impacted by APS. The community conversations process is designed so that anyone who wants to participate can, regardless of their current knowledge of the complex adult protective services system.

The community conversations that we invite you to engage in will help identify what community members across Minnesota, especially those who have interacted - or may in the future interact - with APS, think should be the outcomes of the system and the values that should drive a redesign of the system.

There are three main steps to follow:

- 1. Meet:** Gather a small group of people whose voices should be central to helping decide how the adult protective services system could be improved. That might be people who are or could in the future be considered a vulnerable adult, people who have or had family members who are vulnerable adults, people who are caregivers for vulnerable adults, or others.
- 2. Read the stories and discuss:** Choose one or more of the stories, which are included later in this packet, for the group to read and discuss. Lead, or have someone in the group lead, the conversation about the selected story/ies, using the enclosed Facilitator's Guide. You'll want to plan on the discussion taking at least 30 minutes per story.
- 3. Share:** Have someone capture the group's thoughts by filling out the [online "Our Thoughts" form](#) as the conversation is happening. You can also choose to complete the enclosed "Our Thoughts" form by hand during the conversation, and have someone type it into the online form afterward. Submit the thoughts from your group conversation by **Friday, November 15**.

The goal of this stage in the redesign process is to collect input from at least 60 community conversations. That means we need interested people to organize conversations about at least three of the seven available stories. You are free to use the same or different groups of people to talk about the three stories you select.

We also want to invite you to attend, and to bring along one of the people you engaged in a community conversation, to an in-person summit where you'll have a chance to review the input from all of the community conversations and help refine what will ultimately be used during the rest of the VAA redesign. The summit will be held on November 22, in the Twin Cities. More information will be posted in October to the VAA Redesign website: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/adult-protection/vaa-redesign.jsp>

Facilitator's Guide

Before the conversation:

- Secure a location that is quiet and comfortable. Invite a small group of participants.
- Review the stories at the end of this packet and select which story (or stories) the group will discuss (pages 5 - 11). Print out copies of the selected stories, if you would like participants to have their own copy. Practice reading out loud the story or stories you plan to discuss with the group.
- Print copies of the example value words (page 4), if you think those will be helpful to participants as they answer the questions.
- Decide who will take notes. Decide whether notes will be taken directly in the [online "Our Thoughts" form](#), or taken on paper and typed into the online form afterward. (You can print and use page 3 to take notes).
- Be prepared for what you will do if a participant talks about something that should be reported as potential maltreatment of a vulnerable adult or is an emergency:
 - * If you suspect that a vulnerable adult has been abused, neglected, or financially exploited, contact the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC) toll-free 24/7 at: 1-844-880-1574.
 - * If there is an emergency that requires immediate assistance from the police or sheriff, fire department, or an ambulance, call 911 first, and then submit your report to MAARC.

1. Introduction:

- Welcome participants and explain to them the purpose the conversation. Example introduction is included below, but you are welcome to adapt it, based on your audience. This example was written to put concepts related to adult protective services in simple terms, which may not be appropriate for all audiences:

"Thank you for joining me today. There are systems and people in Minnesota who work to make sure that adults who could be hurt or taken advantage of, because of their age or because they have a disability, are safe - and if someone hurts or takes advantage of them that it doesn't happen again. We're going to read a story together. And then we're going to talk about that story and I'm going ask some questions. What our group says today will be recorded and reported back, so that they can do an even better job of keeping all adults in Minnesota safe. Your names or other private information won't be shared."

2. Read the story together:

- Read the story. We encourage you to read the story aloud.
- If participants have questions about the story that you can't answer with the information provided within the story itself, you can either: 1) Invite the participants to answer the question themselves - "What do you think?" or 2) make-up an answer that you think fits within the overall story and what you know about the system.

3. Discuss the questions:

- Each story has a unique set of three questions.
- Ask the questions one at a time and take notes on the group's responses.

(If you're using more than one story, repeat steps 2 and 3).

4. Conclusion:

- Thank the participants for being there and sharing their voice. Explain that what they talked about will be shared back with the people who are trying to improve the system that keeps adults in Minnesota safe. If participants are interested in learning more, you can refer them to the re-design project website: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/adult-protection/vaa-redesign.jsp>

Our Thoughts - Note Sheet

You can type notes directly into the “Our Thoughts” online form during the group discussion:

<https://tinyurl.com/VAA-OurThoughts>.

Or you can write notes on this sheet by hand, and enter them into the online form afterward.

Please submit any responses through the online form by midnight on November 15, 2019.

If you have trouble with the online form or would prefer to submit your group’s answers another way, please email

Lizzie.McNamara@state.mn.us.

Number of participants in your group: _____

Organization or program, if any, hosting the group: _____

Tell us something helpful about your group (*e.g. we are adults who have developmental disabilities, we are a club of older adults who meet monthly, we are all personal care assistants for adults with disabilities*): _____

Which story are you reading and discussing? _____

Refer to the story for the questions to ask during the discussion:

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

Value Examples

After you read the story, you will be asked to think about what some of the characters in the story value.

The words below are **examples of values**. You can think of your own, too!

Advocacy

Appreciation

Balance

Commitment

Community

Compassion

Confidence

Consistency

Cooperation

Courage

Culture

Customer Service

Dependability

Dignity

Discipline

Diversity

Education

Efficiency

Equity

Ethics

Fairness

Faith/Religion

Family

Fitness

Freedom

Frugality

Happiness

Harmony

Health

Honesty

Inclusion

Independence

Individuality

Integrity

Knowledge

Leadership

Logic

Love

Loyalty

Obedience

Open-mindedness

Passion

Patriotism

Perfection

Perseverance

Personal growth

Positivity

Power

Prevention

Professionalism

Punctuality

Punishment

Relationships

Reliability

Respect

Resourcefulness

Responsibility

Risk-taking

Safety

Self-determination

Sensitivity

Service to others

Stability

Support

Teamwork

Tolerance

Trust

Uniqueness

Usefulness

Wealth

Well-being

Wisdom

Story 1: Evelyn's Story

Jules is worried about his elderly neighbor, Evelyn. Lately, when Evelyn walks to her mailbox in the afternoon, it looks like she's having trouble with her balance. Jules is also concerned about Evelyn's memory. He saw Evelyn pulling flowers out of her garden when she was weeding last week. But when he asked her about it, she seemed confused. She didn't remember pulling them out herself.

Evelyn also doesn't get dressed up like she used to. Now when he sees her, Jules notices stains on her clothes, and her hair isn't ever combed.

Evelyn still drives her car to run errands once a week. But Jules doesn't think her eyesight is as good as it used to be. Last week, when he asked if she liked the color of his blooming roses, she said she couldn't see them well enough to notice, even though they were only standing about 20 yards away from the flowers.

Yesterday, Evelyn told Jules that she is feeling lonely. She said she would like to get out of the house more. Evelyn's daughter lives in a different state, and she hasn't visited Evelyn in the last year. Jules asked Evelyn if she'd been to the doctor lately, although he didn't tell her that he was worried about her balance, memory, and vision. Evelyn said she couldn't remember the last time she went to the doctor. Then she hurried to go back into her house.

Question 1. If Jules thought Evelyn wasn't safe, what do you think Evelyn and Jules would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Jules reported to someone that Evelyn wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to Evelyn and Jules? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping Evelyn?

Imagine that Jules made a report about Evelyn, because he is concerned for her safety. Adult Protective Services does not open an investigation into Evelyn's safety, because there is no evidence that Evelyn has been harmed. Jules gets a letter in the mail telling him that an investigation won't be opened into his report. Jules calls to ask for more information, but he is told that because of limits on sharing data or information that is considered private, all they can do is notify Jules of whether the allegation is being investigated or not.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to Evelyn and Jules? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 2: James's Story

James is paralyzed from his chest down, due to an accident. After spending many months in a hospital, James's adult son, David, assumes responsibility for James's care.

Before James was released into David's care, hospital staff taught David how to use a mechanical lift to get James into bed. About a week after James went home from the hospital, he was brought to the emergency room with a broken leg and other serious internal injuries. James fell while David was using the mechanical lift to move James.

David tells hospital staff that it was an accident, and he did not mean to hurt his dad. However, the hospital staff believe that David wasn't following the instructions for how to safely move James, and that is why James fell.

Question 1. If the hospital staff thought James wasn't safe, what do you think James, David, and the hospital staff would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If the hospital staff reported to someone that James had been hurt and wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to James, David, and the hospital staff? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping James?

The hospital staff are mandated reporters, meaning they legally have to make a report when they think a vulnerable adult has been harmed. Imagine that the hospital made a report about James, because they believe James's caregiver, David, is responsible for James's injuries. Adult Protective Services opens an investigation into David for caregiver neglect. Eventually, the investigation finds evidence that David's actions led to James getting hurt, because David did not follow the instructions about using the mechanical lift, even though he did not intend to hurt his dad by operating the lift incorrectly.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to the James, David, and the hospital staff? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 3: Althea's Story

Althea has severe arthritis, uses a wheelchair, and needs help with everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning herself. Althea's son, Ronald, lives with her and helps with her care. Althea believes that they need one another; Ronald takes care of her, and she helps him.

Althea called her sister, Rose, last week because Ronald pulled Althea's hair and yelled at her. Althea called Rose from Althea's locked bedroom, and she had to whisper to Rose, because Althea was afraid that Ronald would hear her. This wasn't the first time that Rose heard about Ronald hurting Althea. Rose told Althea to call 911 if she was afraid of Ronald, but Althea did not want the police to come to their house. She is afraid of what they might do to Ronald. She made Rose promise not to call the police. Even though Althea is afraid of Ronald, she wants to maintain a relationship with him. If he didn't live with Althea, she believes Ronald would be homeless.

Question 1. If Rose thought Althea wasn't safe, what do you think Althea and Rose would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Rose reported to someone that Althea wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to Althea and Rose? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping Althea?

Imagine that Rose made a report about Althea, because she is concerned for Althea's safety. Rose calls to make her report on the weekend and says that she is concerned about Althea's immediate physical safety. This prompts a notification for emergency protective services. Because Rose makes the report on the weekend, outside of regular business hours for Adult Protective Services in their county, the report is sent to the sheriff's department, as the after-hours designee. A sheriff's deputy goes to Althea's house to conduct a welfare check on Althea.

Althea calls Rose later, asking why Rose called the police. Rose is confused because she didn't know that the law enforcement would show up at Althea's house. The sheriff's deputy interviewed Ronald and Althea, and left after Althea would not cooperate. The next day, Adult Protective Services staff comes to talk to Althea. Althea will only talk to them because Ronald is not home. She says she is afraid of Ronald, but also still feels like they need each other. She doesn't know who would take care of her, if he didn't. Adult Protective Services staff tells Althea about other options for getting in-home care, and Althea says she will think about it. In the meantime, Ronald receives a letter saying that the investigation by Adult Protective Services found that he maltreated his mom. Since then, Althea has refused to talk more with Adult Protective Services staff when they come to her house and call her.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to Althea and Rose? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 4: Wesley's Story

Wesley lives by himself. His memory loss and impaired judgement make it hard for him to take the medicine he needs for his high blood pressure. In the past few months, his doctor, Dr. Yang, has been called several times when Wesley has ended up in the emergency room because of complications from high blood pressure. Dr. Yang is really concerned about Wesley. The problems with his blood pressure are a serious risk to Wesley's life. He could die if he continues to not take his medication as prescribed.

Dr. Yang and emergency room staff have tried to convince Wesley to get home care services, which is support that would help make sure he's taking his medication and help him with other daily living tasks. But Wesley has refused, saying he doesn't want to pay for it.

The last time Wesley was in the emergency room, Dr. Yang tried again to convince him to get home care services, but Wesley still refused. Dr. Yang asked Wesley if she could call his adult children, because she has their contact information, but he said that he didn't want their help. He made her promise not to call them. Wesley told Dr. Yang that his children will want to move him out of his home into a facility, take away his independence, and get hold of his money.

Question 1. If Dr. Yang thought Wesley wasn't safe, what do you think Wesley and Dr. Yang would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Dr. Yang reported to someone that Wesley wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to Wesley and Dr. Yang? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping Wesley?

Dr. Yang is a mandated reporter, meaning she legally has to make a report when she thinks a vulnerable adult has been harmed. Imagine that Dr. Yang made a report about Wesley, because she is concerned for his safety. Dr. Yang is afraid that Wesley will die if he continues to not take his medication as prescribed. Adult Protective Services opens an investigation into self-neglect, because the neglect is alleged to be causing Wesley harm. After interviewing Wesley and Dr. Yang, Adult Protective Services staff finds enough evidence to substantiate Dr. Yang's allegation of self-neglect. Wesley receives a letter in the mail telling him of the result. Adult Protective Services staff works with Wesley and also offers available services, but he refuses them. Social services are voluntary, meaning it is Wesley's choice whether to accept them, unless a court were to decide that Wesley is not able to make his own choices.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to Wesley and Dr. Yang? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 5: April's Story

Every week, April comes to the coffee shop where Marco works. April has Down syndrome, and her care assistant, Megan, brings April to the shop. April is funny and likes to joke around with Marco. She is a regular customer, and most people in the shop know her.

Sometimes Marco notices that Megan, April's care assistant, is mean to April. Marco has heard Megan call April fat and stupid. He has even heard Megan threaten to leave April in the shop alone and force her to walk home. When Megan says things like this to April, April usually starts to cry. Megan just laughs at April.

Marco wants to help April, but isn't sure what he's supposed to do. He doesn't think it's a crime to be mean to someone, and he thinks that the police would think it was silly if he called 911. He doesn't feel like he knows April or Megan well enough to talk to them about it.

Question 1. If Marco thought April wasn't safe, what do you think April and Marco would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Marco reported to someone that April wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to April and Marco? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping April?

Imagine that Marco made a report about April, because he is concerned for her safety. A week later, Marco gets a letter from Adult Protective Services in the mail, telling him that his report about April will be investigated. Several weeks go by and Marco notices that April doesn't come to the coffee shop anymore. Marco calls Adult Protective Services to try and find out what happened, like whether April has a new care assistant or what happened to Megan. Adult Protective Services staff can't tell Marco anything more about the investigation or what happened, because it is private information about April that they can't share. Marco asks if he can get April's phone number, so that he can call her, but the staff person says they cannot give it to him because that is also private information.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to April and Marco? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 6: Cedric's Story

Quinten's dad, Cedric, has dementia and requires 24-hour care at a specialized care facility. Cedric has two adult children, Quinten and Shauna. Quinten lives several hours away from their dad's care facility, and Shauna lives in the same town as the care facility. Shauna is Cedric's power of attorney, so she has been paying the facility for Cedric's care, using Cedric's assets. Cedric has over \$1 million in assets.

All of the bills have been paid for Cedric's care, but Quinten found that \$10,000 is missing from his father's checking account. Quinten believes that Shauna took the money, but when he asks her about it, she refuses to tell him where it went. Quinten is afraid that Shauna is mismanaging their dad's money.

Question 1. If Quinten thought Cedric wasn't safe, what do you think Cedric, Quinten, and Shauna would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Quinten reported to someone Cedric's money had been taken and Cedric isn't safe, what values do you think would be important to Cedric, Quinten, and Shauna? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping Cedric?

Imagine that Quinten made a report about Cedric, because he is concerned for his dad's safety and believes that Shauna is financially exploiting Cedric. Adult Protective Services does not open an investigation, because the allegation has not caused Cedric harm. Quinten receives a letter in the mail telling him that an investigation will not be opened. When he calls to get more information, Adult Protective Services staff tell Quinten that they can only share the same information that was in the notification letter. Although they aren't opening an investigation, the staff person tells Quinten that Quinten should contact law enforcement if he wants to report a theft.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to Cedric, Quinten, and Shauna? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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Story 7: Joyce's Story

Kenny is a nurse who is supposed to see Joyce every week for physical therapy. Joyce has mobility limitations that mean she cannot take care of daily living tasks for herself. Joyce's adult daughter, Mya, lives with Joyce and is Joyce's caregiver. Mya's three young children also live with them.

Kenny is concerned about Joyce. She has been missing most of her physical therapy appointments, and she told Kenny that she hasn't been taking her medication regularly. Without her medication, Joyce is in a lot of pain. When he finally saw her last week, Joyce clearly hadn't had a bath in several days, and she smelled like urine. Joyce needs help from Mya to take a bath.

When Kenny asked about her financial situation, Joyce said that she pays for everything for Mya and her children, like rent, groceries, and clothing. Joyce said that Mya is still recovering from a traumatic situation with an ex-husband, and that Mya has been very stressed out lately and hasn't been able to work. Joyce complained that Mya hasn't been keeping the house clean, and that Joyce does not have enough mobility to pick-up after her grandkids.

Kenny told Joyce that he was worried about her, and that he thought Mya was taking advantage of her. Joyce told Kenny not to do anything that would get Mya in trouble, because Mya is doing the best she can. Without Mya, Joyce wouldn't have anyone to help take care of her, and she loves Mya and her grandkids very much.

Question 1. If Kenny thought Joyce wasn't safe, what do you think Joyce, Kenny, and Mya would want to happen? Would they want the same or different things?

Question 2. If Kenny reported to someone that Joyce wasn't safe, what values do you think would be important to Joyce, Kenny, and Mya? Do they have the same or different values, when it comes to someone helping Joyce?

Kenny is a mandated reporter, meaning he legally has to make a report when he thinks a vulnerable adult has been harmed. Imagine Kenny made a report about Joyce because he believes Mya is harming Joyce and that Joyce isn't safe. Adult Protective Services opens an investigation into whether Mya is neglecting and financially exploiting Joyce. When Adult Protective Services staff interviews Joyce, Joyce tells them that she wants Mya and her grandkids to live with her, but she is afraid to say anything about what Mya has done wrong, because she is afraid that Mya will get in trouble. Mya does not cooperate with Adult Protective Services staff and refuses to be interviewed, because she is angry that her ability to care for her mom is being evaluated. Adult Protective Services' investigation finds evidence of harm to Joyce because of Mya's actions, so Mya receives a letter telling her that she has maltreated her mom. This report will show up on background checks for some jobs, like if Mya applied for a job at a nursing home. Adult Protective Services staff tries to offers services to Joyce, but Joyce refuses their help, because she is angry about what happened to Mya. Joyce believes that Mya was doing the best she could and simply made some mistakes.

Question 3. Does the way that adult protective services responds sound like it aligns with the values we just said would be important to Joyce, Kenny, and Mya? Is there a different way we think the system should respond in a case like this?

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