

Screening reports of child abuse:

- St. Louis County Children and Family Services believes screening reports of child abuse at the local level offers many advantages including information and referral to community reporters and parents. It also provides the opportunity to provide education to the callers about resources or refer to voluntary programs. Finally, our county reviews mandated reports of a facility with our licensers and county attorney; state-wide screening eliminates this effective practice.
- Statewide screening criteria SHOULD be used as the primary resource.
- State should provide quarterly training opportunities for those that screen and review difficult screening scenarios. Counties could submit questionable calls or share the calls that they review where there may be questions.
- State should provide more clarification in the screening guidelines regarding jurisdiction and if reports are received on old maltreatments.
- State should provide a “hotline” number so screeners to call in questions that need attention in 24 hours.
- There is current statute allowing sharing of information with mandated reporters which seems to be sufficient. We recommend more training about this piece of statute to the counties.
- Counties should have discretion for time to respond (24 hour to 5 day) based on known immediate safety factors regardless of the track. Examples include a threatened sex abuse where a registered predatory offender does not have access to the child or the offense occurred many years ago.
- Our law enforcement agencies feel overwhelmed in reviewing the screened in reports that are sent to them and added screened out reports for their review would create a resource issue. Rather, guidelines should state social services should refer any ruled out reports that may be a criminal matter.
- Offering examples of substantial child endangerment to the current statute and offering training to the counties on this topic would be sufficient.
- A report of child maltreatment report in and of itself should meet criteria. If it is a close case, what is KNOWN to the agency may be used.
- Further training is recommended to law enforcement on cross notification to social services as reports from law enforcement intervention that meet child protection criteria do get missed.

- Extended screening may be appropriate in certain circumstances but the report in and of itself must meet criteria. Initiating an interview with the child should only occur once a case is disposition for assessment or investigation.
- A family's past child protection information should be considered when making decisions about a case including the appropriate case track, if a petition should be filed, if a case should be closed, etc.

Family Assessment Response and adequacy of resources:

- Child safety is paramount in ANY child protection response. Family Assessment cases are maltreatment.
- St. Louis County believes that Family Assessment provides effective response in many cases and should continue to be an option. The state could provide clarity to counties about the practice of Family Assessment. For example, there are times when the SW will choose to make contact with a child first without the parent's knowledge. Language in statute related to this should be changed to suggest that the first contact with the child should be related to the safety concerns. Also, if a family is not willing to engage, the social worker will continue their involvement until they believe enough safety is established. Consultation with the county attorney should occur if the social worker feels they cannot establish enough safety. A process should be in place that allows for this to occur.
- Social workers are often concerned about a case where the original report is concerning, parent is marginally cooperative, there is not "evidence" that supports a CHIPS petition, and the child is too young or unwilling or unavailable to talk with the social worker. Without changes in reasons to file a CHIPS petition, it is difficult to make traction in these cases. At the very least, consultation with the supervisor and then county attorney should occur.
- Other legal options should be explored for cases where there is a lack of cooperation and inability to assess for safety.
- Technology such as laptops or iPads where SSIS could be used remotely will significantly increase efficiency. Clients should be able to electronically sign documents in the field. The state should provide this resource as they are putting the documentation requirements on the counties.
- SSIS allegation detail should line up with state wide screening criteria and state statute. This will promote consistency in practice
- If we want to influence a family's wellbeing, we must have enough time for the social workers to practice social work and be a change agent. Caseload sizes and documentation requirements have grown to the point where the worker does not have enough time to build a trusting relationship with children and their families. There should be state recommended case load

maximums that will allow social workers to do the face-to-face contact with families and collaterals in attempt to ensure safety. Geographic travel requirements should be taken into account with this recommended case load size. The state should assist financially with these resources as county resources are variable.

- Documentation requirements from DHS should be streamlined and minimized to reduce duplication freeing time for social workers to spend in the field with clients.
- Social workers should have access to financial resources for families for immediate needs. This could be a small but very impactful resource such as in place for PSOP.

Child welfare training and supervision:

- Historically, there has been cross training by the BCA for law enforcement and child protection social workers assessing or investigating child maltreatment. Law enforcement, social workers and their supervisors, and county attorney's need more intensive team training before going out in the field and should complete an "academy" for weeks before going out on their own. There should be state resources to provide this training. This training would focus on identification of maltreatment, comprehensive safety and risk assessment training that is research based, corroborating maltreatment, understanding the legal thresholds, skilled training on interviewing offenders, report writing that meets the court needs, engagement with families to create change, assessing capacity for change, and understanding when placement is needed or a voluntary alternative is appropriate. This could be a progressive training similar to the existing Child Welfare Foundation training.
- Currently training is difficult to get scheduled in a close geographic area and falls to already maximized co-workers and supervisors.
- There needs to be sufficient opportunity for case consultation with the supervisor, especially in high risk case and with newer staff. Due to the nature of the work, this needs to be available upon short notice. There should be a recommended supervisor to social worker ratio that is able to meet the worker's training needs.
- It is recommended that there be regional supports for emergency case or screening consultation, perhaps formalized as a "hotline".
- DHS could support county social worker practice by offering the regional communities of practice and joint law enforcement/ county attorney/ and social worker training once a year, throughout the state. DHS could provide for practice sharing in each region.
- State should provide quarterly training opportunities for those that screen and review difficult screening scenarios. Counties could submit questionable calls or share the calls that they review where there may be questions.

- While offering more focused training is needed, it is essential we have more social work staff in order to allow them time to attend trainings and have cases covered.
- Rich and ongoing training on culturally competent practices should be provided regularly for social workers and supervisors.

Early Intervention and/or Prevention Services:

- Smaller case load sizes enable more community safety planning and prevention of out of home placement.
- Extra time for workers to collaborate with culturally appropriate resources could support healthy child development and promote safety in families.
- PSOP services should continue.
- Continued services for children birth to age 3 is essential in child protection prevention (Headstart, Public Health home visiting, Early Childhood Special Education, Childcare Licensing, etc).
- Parenting education for high school students to ready them for parenthood could prevention child protection in the future.
- Gaps in existing local services include family foster care, treatment homes for high risk children, community mental health services, trauma focused services, and other supportive in-home parenting programs.
- Technology to assist in making training available to help clients, social workers, and other providers in rural areas would be beneficial.

Transparency:

- Providing the public more general information about child protection work such as what a social worker does, the parameters of the screening guidelines, the complexity of the case and systems, the volume of work, the individuality of each case, and other such topics would increase awareness, understanding and engagement of the community.
- The primary concern regarding increased transparency of the child protection system would be privacy for families.

- State reviews should include a look at case load sizes and workload demands as they related to the desired outcomes.