

PEP TALK!

ILLINOIS PERMANENCY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT (PEP)

PROMISING PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY-ENGAGED CHILD WELFARE



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CURRENT ISSUE:

**LAW-ENFORCEMENT/SOCIAL WORK PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES:
PROMISING PRACTICES**

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INTRODUCTION

Studies show that **Law Enforcement Personnel** are a primary source of child abuse and neglect reports across the nation (DHHS, 2011). 911 calls to police departments for domestic violence, substance abuse and criminal activity often result in a subsequent hotline call and a later decision to remove a child from the home. In 2005, 13% of child welfare cases in which law enforcement were involved resulted in a foster care placement (NDCAN, 2005). Moreover, research suggests that emergency child removal is more likely when police responded first (Cross et al., 2005).

While protective custody may be necessary in severe cases, there is growing concern that some children may be removed from their homes prematurely, without families having the benefit of social workers and law enforcement jointly assessing safety and without the option of in-home services to keep the family intact (Pelton, 2008). These concerns have prompted communities across the nation to develop new approaches to protecting children and preserving families through innovative **law enforcement and human service partnerships** that can serve to reduce the likelihood for unnecessary placement of children into out-of-home substitute care.

To ensure effective child protection services that will make positive (and lasting) differences to children and their families, the **Illinois Permanency Enhancement Project (PEP)** offers **Issue 1 of PEP TALK!- a Guide to Promising Practices** in joint community law enforcement and child welfare services.

Our goal is to provide information to help increase the collaboration and response capacity of community law enforcement agencies and child welfare professionals. This issue outlines three **Promising Approaches** to law enforcement-social service partnerships guided by what is known about preserving families while ensuring child safety in the midst of a crisis. We offer specific **Strategies for Success** to help make interagency efforts on behalf with families more fully informed and therefore more effective.

Typical emergency placements to ensure child safety involve a variety of decision makers including: law enforcement first responders, child protection workers, youth and families, schools, and possibly medical providers. Yet, each of these professionals is trained via particular philosophies, values, and intervention approaches, which makes it difficult to work as a seamless unit when making the critical decisions that impact the life of children and their families. This dedication to planned and well-designed collaboration will improve and sustain critical family support services in the local community, as evidenced in the attached **Documented Outcomes** and **Case Example** sections (both available online at <http://adoptionresearch.illinoisstate.edu/PEP/action-teams/central/>).

Three Promising Approaches that Can Be Implemented In *Your Community*:

✦ APPROACH 1: POLICE SOCIAL WORK

Police Social Work can be viewed as a hybrid between community policing and social work. Community policing allows law enforcement officers to build relationships, establish communication, and develop partnerships with the communities they serve. Similarly, **Police Social Work** provides an avenue for community linkage and partnership through the use of an “in house” social work *and* law enforcement expert who is knowledgeable about the community and who has established partnerships with community stakeholders and service providers. A police social worker generally takes on the role of a problem solver, conflict manager, information gatherer, resource locator, and community liaison when individuals and families face a crisis that involves safety issues. To achieve this level of partnership, the “traditional hierarchical and authoritarian organizational structures” of law enforcement must be replaced with “democratic management styles, at least in part” (Maguire & Wells, 2009, xxi). [Visit: <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e080925236-ImpCP-Lessons.pdf>].

✦ APPROACH 2: SOCIAL WORKERS HOUSED WITHIN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

- In cases where a police social worker position cannot be supported financially by a law enforcement organization, a collaborative partnership can be implemented through a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** whereby a social worker from a child welfare or other social service organization is “on loan” full time or part time to be housed at the police department facility for the purpose of consultation with officers on cases involving children and youth issues, ride-alongs, home visits, court appearances, and telephone troubleshooting. [Contact Alan Puckett of Casey Family Programs, apuckett2005@yahoo.com for examples for using MOU’s].

✦ APPROACH 3: SOCIAL WORKERS AS LAW ENFORCEMENT LIAISONS

- In cases where a police social worker position is not feasible, a third approach would be to enlist a social worker from a local human service agency to serve as the **Law Enforcement Liaison**, who is on call to accompany law enforcement officials on targeted cases. The Law Enforcement Liaison would be available as an “on call” expert for cases involving children and youth issues, ride-alongs, home visits, court appearances, and telephone troubleshooting. The Liaison would be expected to complete specified trainings for law enforcement personnel and the Liaison can also be used to plan and implement in-house training and professional development to law enforcement personnel. [Contact Bernie Newman, Temple University, School of Social Work, Bernie.newman@temple.edu]

✦ Implementation Tips:

When implementing a law enforcement/social work model where the goal is to impact foster care placement rates, protocols can be established whereby a police social worker or liaison attends to specific kinds of calls (e.g. domestic violence, substance abuse; parent-child conflict) to assess child safety, observe family dynamics, and connect families with community-based resources to prevent child removal. These activities can also be done in partnership with traditional child protection agencies.

- Implement a TRAUMA RESPONSE PROTOCOL in which the police social worker or liaison responds to a domestic violence or abuse scene within 30 minutes and partners with the child protection worker to address the needs of the child. A portable “response kit” is brought to the scene and contains referral information for parents, booklets about the effects of violence on children, and play therapy materials for the child to be engaged during the initial investigation.
- Implement a RIDE-ALONG PROTOCOL in which the police social worker or liaison accompanies police officers for the purpose of community engagement and child safety assessments when needed. During ride-alongs, social workers can see the kind of calls police respond to and see the community from the eyes of the police officer. It is also a way for social workers to be one of the first responders and help reduce potential trauma experienced by families in crisis, as in the case of domestic violence calls. Moreover, the social workers can help respond to emergency placement of youth, while police can more effectively de-escalate a crisis situation
- Implement an ON SIGHT SOCIAL SERVICE REFERRAL PROTOCOL whereby the police officer, police social worker or liaison can make an onsite electronic referral for social services through a pre-loaded cell phone or iPad at the time of the law enforcement intervention. These referrals can be prioritized for follow-up from the appropriate service provider (e.g. substance abuse treatment, domestic violence, parent mentoring, etc.). Even in cases where child protection needs to be called, the on sight referral process can engage the family in services with a more immediate response. Families are more likely to engage in services during the first critical hours of an emergency call or intervention.

Police social workers or liaisons would be expected to complete specified trainings with law enforcement staff. Additionally, the social worker could be used to plan and facilitate in-house training/professional development for law enforcement personnel around issues of risk assessment and child safety, family dynamics, diversity, cultural responsiveness, and effective community engagement.



BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

✦ Small Strategies that Work

- Develop written agreements, or memorandums of understanding (MOU's), for protocols that specify details such as:
 - ✓ Goals of child protection-law enforcement joint responses
 - ✓ Joint notification procedures / Internal cross-reporting procedures
 - ✓ Conflict resolution strategies
 - ✓ Communication protocols to facilitate interagency communication
- Develop common professional language and terminology
- Ensure that interagency efforts are a priority for administrative and executive level staff in each organization
- Be Persistent. Sometimes persistence by one or both agencies is necessary to make collaborations work.
- Use social media and outreach to gain support from key community stakeholders
- Provide joint training for law enforcement and child welfare/child protection
- Implement intervention and prevention strategies grounded in evidenced-based practices.

✦ Potential Obstacles to Overcome

- Philosophical/mission differences
- Conflicting priorities
- Communication barriers
- Differing mandates, protocols, and intake requirements
- Conflicts over case control
- Insufficient training of staff
- Rigid personnel policies that prevent changes in roles
- Lack of political will to make changes or devote resources
- Different financial or management systems
- Lack of resources

Partnerships in Action: Case Examples

- Violence Intervention Program: In New Orleans, a mental health team partnered with the police department to reduce children’s trauma at the scene of a call (Osofsky et al, 2004.) After a period of 7 years of the New Orleans police department partnering with the mental health team to learn how to reduce children’s trauma at the scene of a call, officers reported that if a child was at the scene of a homicide, they would be more apt to “remove the child”, “remove them from the scene”, “show sympathy”, “fulfill duties/arrest”, “refer to agencies”, and *less likely* to “do nothing”. Moreover, the officers report that having been provided with information increased their awareness of child and family trauma, and that their “informed” intervention at the time of the incident made a difference for the children. Law enforcement continues to cooperate fully with the mental health agency as collaborative partners in building programs to benefit children exposed to domestic and community violence. One drawback of this approach, however, is due to worries about intervening in trauma, officers may have removed more children than necessary, resulting in additional trauma for the child (by having been placed in foster care) over the long run.

- Use of Memoranda of Understanding: Alan Puckett of Casey Family Programs reports that Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) have been useful in Clark County, Nevada. MOUs clarify roles and responsibilities between the child protective services agency and law enforcement agencies in situations, such as arrests of parents, which might result in children coming into child protective services custody. In 2009, after six months of reform implementation, Clark County reported a 50% reduction in emergency removals by law enforcement agencies following implementation of these MOUs and other front-end system reforms, such as hotline and emergency removal responses. Also in 2009, both New Mexico and Oklahoma passed legislation requiring joint law enforcement/child protective services response to situations in which emergency removal is imminent or likely. Oklahoma took a direct approach to implementing their legislation by outlining guidelines in how to respond. In contrast, New Mexico’s legislation left it up to child protective services and law enforcement to determine how they would collaborate.

- San Diego County Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Program
In San Diego County, an effort to help youth exposed to drug involvement by family members lead to a strong collaboration between child welfare and law enforcement. This collaboration eventually extended beyond drug safety protection to an effort to reduce multiple placements, which lead to a placement stability (i.e., two placements or less) rate of 90%.

San Diego County has a formal Drug Endangered Children (DEC) program. In 1997 the District Attorney's Office received a three-year grant from the Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning to implement a DEC team in a portion of San Diego County. As a result of this grant funding, the child welfare system in North Coastal and North Inland Regions worked with law enforcement on a multi-disciplinary DEC response team, which responded to narcotics crime scenes. A second program, functioning from the outset without grant funding, paired a DEC Protective Services Worker (PSW) with narcotics street teams at the San Diego Department in the Central and North Central Regions. The East Region and South Region also worked conjointly with their respective law enforcement agencies to ensure a collaborative response to homes where controlled substances were found and each of these regions also established an assigned PSW for DEC investigations. These extremely successful programs have coordinated and improved the efforts of law enforcement, child welfare, medical personnel, and the District Attorney's office, and offered a prototype for countywide implementation of DEC.

After establishing the formal DEC program, the East Region decided to further strengthen their relationship with law enforcement. They encourage placement in familiar environments for children who come into protective custody. They want youth to be placed with a relative or to continue to attend their school of origin, if not both. They noticed that when children were taken to the county's emergency shelter they often did not remain in a familiar environment. Most entries into the shelter were done by law enforcement. Therefore, they decided to build partnerships with law enforcement to decrease the number of children going to the shelter and increase the number of youth who are placed in a familiar environment.

They expanded the role of DEC worker to be the child welfare-law enforcement liaison. About 5 years ago this worker started going to all of the line-ups and shift changes with the 3 different law enforcement jurisdictions that work in the San Diego region. She explained the goal of placement in familiar environment and how she could help. She passed her cell phone number out to every officer and encouraged them to call for anything related to abuse and neglect. Slowly she began to build relationships by responding to any law enforcement calls at any time of day or night, whether they just needed to consult or if child protective custody was imminent. Child welfare also introduced law enforcement to their "way station foster homes" – special foster homes that are on call 24/7 to take in youth on an emergency basis and drive them back to their school of origin until we can find the best placement for the child. Law enforcement officers themselves began taking children to the way station foster homes rather than the shelter. While building these relationships took time, the benefits have been remarkable. At the end of fiscal year 2010/2011, almost 62% of children in reunification attending their school of origin and almost 69% placed with relatives or someone they already knew, such as a non-related or extended family member. For children's first year in care they had a placement stability rate of nearly 90%, meaning the children had no more than two placements.

For more information about the San Diego partnership, contact Kimberly Giardina, Child Welfare Services Manager at Kimberly.Giardina@sdcounty.ca.gov

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