

Normalcy Taskforce

Trafficking Subcommittee

Consensus Document

This group was formed to make recommendations on the implementation of the [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act \[Public Law 113-183\]](#) related to the prevention of trafficking provisions of the act, and how enhancing normalcy for youth in out-of-home placements can prevent trafficking. The group agreed to begin its work by examining prevention for youth who are missing from care or at risk of going missing from care. The group's intent is to share sample best practices with the rest of the system to support the prevention of trafficking for all youth who are system involved or at risk of being trafficked, beginning with best practices for youth who are missing from care.

Foundational Principles

- 1. All youth in out-of-home placements have the right to be free from exploitation and experience as much normalcy as possible.** The backbone of trafficking prevention efforts should be to increase and promote normalcy **striving for youth to have love, belonging, and empowerment; which is what a trafficker is offering.** The more normalcy a youth experiences, the more supports will be available to prevent the youth from going missing from care, decrease the amount of time the youth is missing, and ensure that the youth has access to needed services after returning.
- 2. Promotion of a change in culture and practices around youth missing from care from fear based and punitive to one of safety and understanding. Youth should feel empowered to access necessary services, activities and supports without fear of judgement.** Stakeholders should consider each youth missing from care as if the youth were their own child. **Foster homes, case managers, and child welfare workers are committed to the dignity of all youth and families. Youth have the right to access to safe and affirming home environments where they can thrive, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.** Purposeful transition from the use of "runaway," language to "missing youth," encourages stakeholders to consider the youth's internal experience of care and reasons for going missing rather than viewing only the youth's external actions.
- 3. Agencies should work toward cross-systems information sharing and eliminate silos in order to create a coordinated response to youth who are missing from care.** Most youth who are system involved touch a number of programs, and when a youth goes missing, numerous agencies and systems become involved. Increased information sharing and communication will allow for a faster, more coordinated and effective response to youth who are missing from care.

Recommendations

- 1. Create and implement best practice responses for when youth go missing from care, and address practice and policy barriers within organizations.**
 - a. Create a written process for caseworkers when responding to youth who are missing from care.** A streamlined written process will allow caseworkers to respond quickly and appropriately to youth who return after being missing from care. The time immediately following their return is important, and care needs to be taken to ensure that the youth receive the services and support they need.

- b. **Practices surrounding youth returning from missing status should include an interview from a trained Forensic Interviewer at the CAC, wraparound services and supports and be focused on creating a safe space where youth can disclose information about the time spent missing from care.** The written process created for caseworkers should be clear that the intention is to support the youth, not to punish, and allow the caseworker to have a flexible response to the youth that takes into account the youth's experience, values, strengths, and risk factors. **These cases should also be considered for staffing in 1184 MDT teams.**
 - c. **Stakeholders should be trained to recognize high risk youth for prevention along with the signs of trafficking and appropriate responses to trafficking and youth missing from care.**
 - i. Stakeholders should be trained to recognize the groups of youth who are at a greater risk for commercial sexual exploitation, such as:
 - ii. Youth who have been sexually abused (studies have estimated upwards of 70%+ of commercially sexually exploited adults were sexually abused as children),
 - iii. Youth who are homeless (estimates indicate over 1/3 of homeless youth engage in survival sex), and
 - iv. Youth who self-identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (estimates indicate LGBT youth are 5 times more likely to be trafficked)
 - v. Training for youth should include peer-to-peer training, such as "My Life, My Choice." Training should also include information on who to call and what their options are if they or someone they know have been trafficked.
 - vi. Training for public, parents, caregivers, and individuals who work with youth should include the signs and indicators of trafficking
 - d. **Caregivers and parents should be educated on how the culture and levels of control in a home can affect youth and runaway behavior.** Additionally, training on Reasonable Prudent Parenting Standard (RPPS) activities should include a wide spectrum of involvement such as employment, various support groups, and youth councils.
 - e. **A screening tool should be created and implemented to determine if a youth may have been trafficked.** Nebraska Youth Councils should have the opportunity to review the screening tool and provide input, so that the screening criteria reflects the experience of youth. All vulnerable youth are screened for sexual exploitation upon entry into any system.
 - f. **Address policy barriers within youth serving agencies that prevent youth from accessing information and supports.** Many youth serving agencies and facilities prohibit staff and youth from communicating after the youth leaves care. Loosening this restriction would allow youth to access safe and supportive relationships, information, and resources.
2. **Normalcy and access to activities is the backbone of youth trafficking prevention.**
- a. **Normalcy activities should go beyond extracurricular activities, and should include acquiring life skills, such as driving, job skills and experience, and social activities such as prom and homecoming dances.** Normalcy activities that provide youth with life skills will allow the youth to create and envision a healthy future. Life skills are necessary for

the youth to create a safe and successful life in which the youth has access to education, employment, and healthy friendships and relationships.

- b. Involve the youth's SFA advocates in notification of a youth who goes missing from care.** Nebraska's Strengthening Families Act allows a youth to designate an individual as an advisor and advocate for the child with respect to the application of reasonable and prudent parenting standard and for the child on normalcy activities. This advisor should be notified immediately when the youth goes missing. The advisor will have significant knowledge about the youth's interests, values, and relationships, and can help locate the youth.
 - c. Stakeholders involved at the individual case level should promote normalcy and have conversations with the youth about his or her interests, hobbies, and relationships.** Getting to know the youth's hobbies can help in locating the youth when they go missing from care, and create a relationship where the youth feels comfortable and supported in disclosing information. This information can help locate youths who go missing from care and connect them to pro-social activities and beneficial services.
- 3. Data should be collected on any youth being commercially sexually exploited, and then analyzed to make changes and improvements in practice.**
 - a. Data concerning areas where trafficking and recruiting occurs should be collected.** This information can allow law enforcement to identify patterns and to assess and prevent the risk of a youth missing from care to become a victim of trafficking.
 - b. Data concerning where the youth went when they were missing from care, and why the youth went missing from care should be collected.** This measure may be difficult to track, as it requires youth to feel comfortable talking about their experience and inner thoughts and emotions. Collection of this data point will need to be handled with sensitivity and reflect a trusting relationship between a youth and worker.
 - c. Data concerning the number of youth who need medical attention when they return to care, and the number of youth who receive medical attention when they return to care should be collected.** This measure will also require a close and trusting relationship between the youth and worker.
 - d. The number of caseworkers that a youth who has gone missing from care has had should be collected.** More caseworkers on a case is associated with decreased outcomes for youths. Tracking this information will help determine the situations in which youth are at risk for going missing from care.
 - e. Data related to disparities in the youth that go missing from care should be collected.** Data should be collected to determine if disparities exist in the populations that are more likely to go missing from care, including youth of color, gender, and LGBT youth.
 - f. Data capturing how often law enforcement receives data on youth missing from care from DHHS should be collected.** This data point will allow systems to determine if communication is prompt and adequate, and make plans for improvement if necessary.
 - g. DHHS should have a picture on file of all state wards on the Nebraska Family Online Client User System (NFOCUS).** This will allow for communication about youth missing from care to include a picture, to assist in the immediate return of the youth to care.
 - h. Agencies should identify the best practices for collecting the above data.** Many youth who go missing from care are experiencing a difficult time in their lives, and will not want

to disclose to a stranger or someone with whom they do not have a pre-existing trusted relationship. Agencies should determine best practices for a de-briefing process when a youth returns from having been missing from care.

- i. **Data should be analyzed by DHHS internally, and jointly with a group of individuals who are knowledgeable about trafficking.** DHHS-CFS currently has a mechanism for internal data review, the Continuous Quality Improvement Process, and plans to collect and analyze data related to trafficking with this process. Data should also be analyzed with external stakeholders who have knowledge about trafficking in Nebraska.
4. **Create efficiencies in sharing information across systems by removing barriers, sharing data while maintaining privacy, enhancing cross system communications, and strengthening partnerships with communities on out of state borders.**
 - a. **Remove system barriers to expedite action and increase communication.** Agencies should put processes into place so that when youth missing from care move between counties, system response is not delayed and youth can be returned as quickly as possible. Additional barriers relate to the age of majority. When a youth who is eighteen years old goes missing from care and crosses state borders, often the law enforcement in the other state are unable to help return the youth, due to laws related to the age of majority.
 - b. **Share information about youth missing from care immediately while maintaining privacy.** Agencies should identify how much information can be shared without infringing on the youth's privacy, and try to share as much relevant information as possible.
 - c. **Enhance cross system communications.** DHHS should be able to notify other agencies, including schools, other places that the youth frequents, including places such as the YMCA, community centers, the youth's work, and notify third parties as much as possible while maintaining respect for the youth's privacy.
 - d. **Strengthen partnerships with communities across State of Nebraska borders where youth are likely to cross the state border.** Strengthening relations with these communities will assist in returning youth who have gone missing from care and crossed state lines. These partnerships should include reciprocal notice of youth who have gone missing from care, and communication between agencies and organizations that youth missing from care often access.