

Signs of Safety in Minnesota

Early indicators of successful implementation in child protection agencies

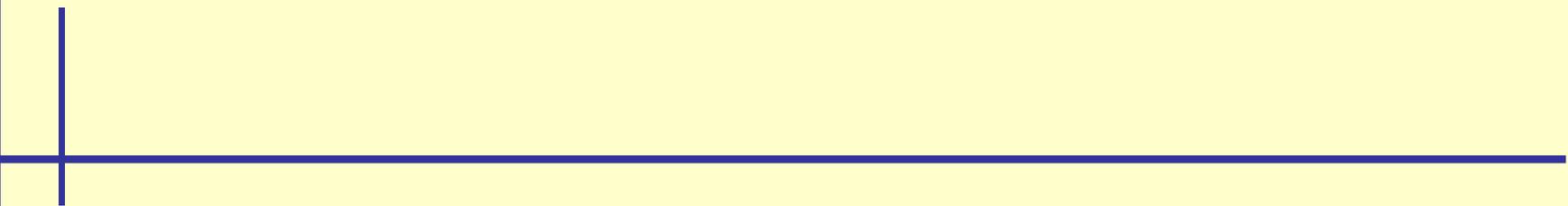
**Terry Besaw, Minnesota Department of Human Services
Maggie Skrypek and Greg Owen, Wilder Research
Dan Koziolk, Carver County Child and Family Services**

Child Welfare Evaluation Summit, August 30, 2011



Overview of presentation

- What is Signs of Safety? Dan Koziolk
- Minnesota Context and Training: Terry Besaw
- Research presentation: Greg Owen
 - Evaluation objectives and methods
 - Findings: early benchmarks of implementation
- County view of benchmarks: Dan Koziolk
- Lessons learned from training: all
- Discussion



PROJECT BACKGROUND: WHAT IS SIGNS OF SAFETY?

Brief Description of Signs of Safety

- Innovative Strengths-Based, Safety-Organized approach to Child Protection.
- Originated in the 1990's in a project with over 150 Australian social workers led by Andrew Turnell and Steven Edwards.
- Focus is on rigorously attending to safety in partnership with parents.
- **Signs of Safety**; a solution and safety oriented approach to child protection casework, 1999.



Signs of Safety

Constructed around a comprehensive risk assessment framework incorporating harm/danger, existing strengths/safety and future safety

Practiced from a Stance of **Humility** about what we think we know

A **Questioning** not an Expert Approach

| Signs of Safety "Map" | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Harm/Danger/Worries | Strengths/Safety | Goals/Next Steps |
| | | |

Given the information about safety and danger, rate the situation on a scale of 0-10 where 0 means a recurrence of similar or worse abuse/neglect is certain and 10 means there is sufficient safety for the child(ren) to close the case. (Put different judgment numbers on the scale for different people e.g., you, parents, relatives, GAL/CASA, Judge, etc.)

0 ← → 10

Informed by Practice Principles from Research and by Analyzing Good Practice

Two Implementation Strategies for Practitioners

Using the Framework in the work, in supervision, and in management.

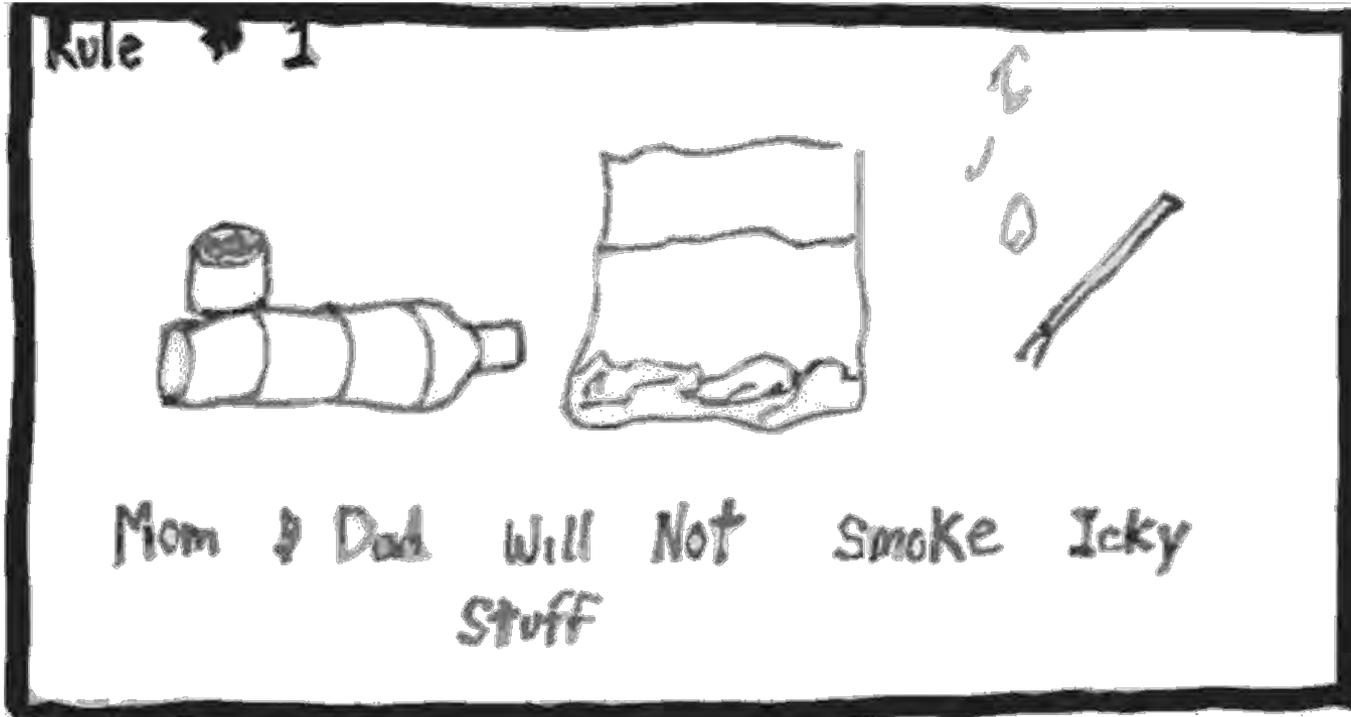
Creating a Culture for Appreciating and Learning About Good Practice

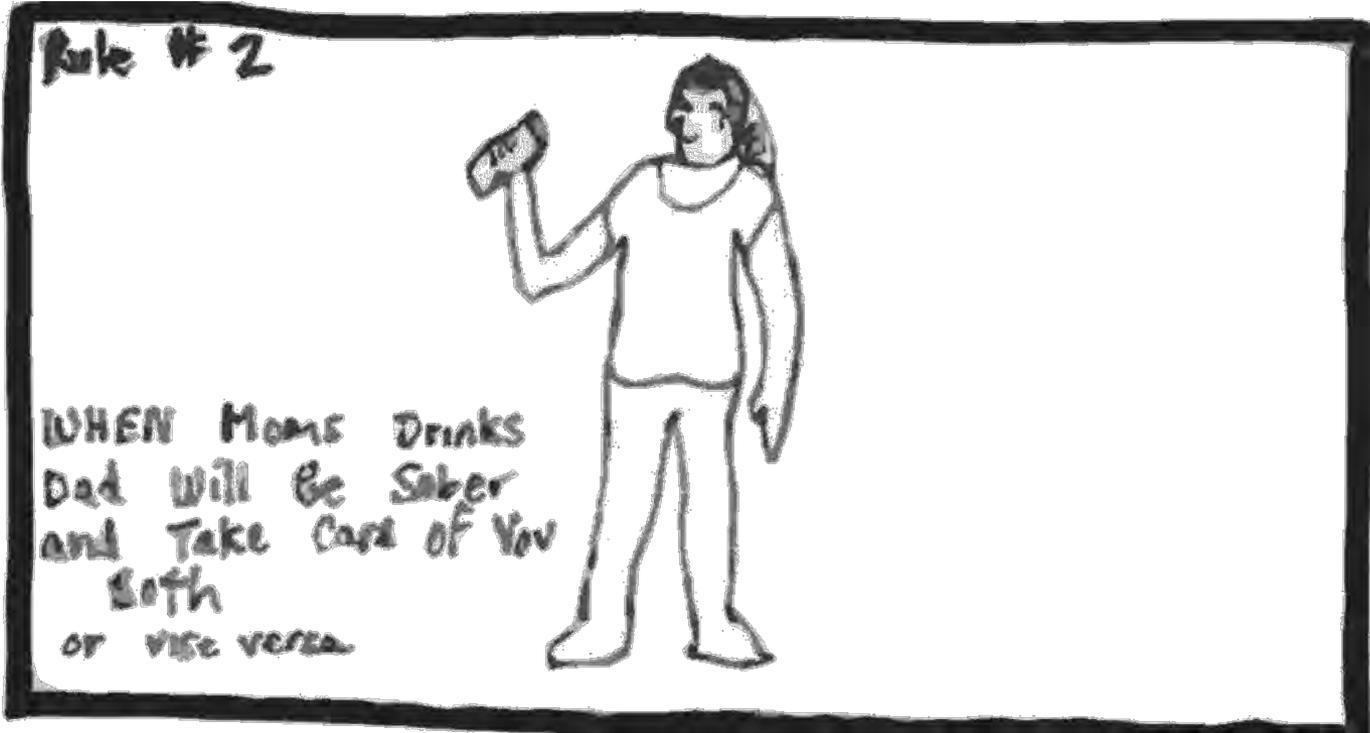
| What's working well? | What are we worried about? | What do we need to do? |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mom called law enforcement when the gun was discharged in the home. • Son sees a therapist. • Dad receives medical care for his pain. • Dad receives medication management services. • Don is scheduled for a neurology exam. • Dad voluntarily removed the weapons from the home. • Family had 3 network members present at their home during the investigation. • Dad has already completed a chemical dependency evaluation and has agreed to start outpatient treatment. • When Son was living with relatives he went to school regularly. • Mom and Dad are looking into an alternative school for Son in order to try and find a school setting that can help with his depression. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCCSS received a report from Law Enforcement on 8/4/11 that Dad was intoxicated and shot a loaded gun through the ceiling of the home. Dad's 16 yr. old son and wife were in the home when the gun was discharged. Dad was taken to detox. • It worried CCCSS that Mom and Son seemed so accepting of Dad's drinking. • CCCSS is concerned about how often Dad combines alcohol with prescription medications including Oxycontin, Ambient, Cymbalta, Tramadol and blood pressure medications. • CCCSS is worried because Dad didn't reduce his alcohol use after his first trip to Detox. • Son has a history of educational neglect and truancy reports in 2004, 2006, 2009, and again in 2011. • Son reports that his medication keeps him from getting to school. | <p>Agency Safety Goal 1: Carver County will be satisfied that Son is safe in the home with Dad when the safety network, treatment providers and mental health providers are confident that Dad is no longer mixing prescription medications, alcohol and guns.</p> <p>Agency Goal 2: Carver County will be satisfied that Son's educational needs are being met when he attends school daily unless he is vomiting, has the diarrhea, or a fever, or has a doctor's note.</p> |
| | <p>Worry Statements and Bottom Lines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCCSS is concerned that someone could be injured or killed if Dad is intoxicated and has his guns out and the guns are discharged. • CCCSS is concerned that Son's educational needs are not being met due to his lack of attendance. This could lead to a lack of positive peer relationships and not graduating high school. | <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guns will be removed from the home and stored at Mom's parent's home for safety purposes. • If Dad mixes alcohol with prescription medications Mom and Son will leave the home and go Brother/Uncle's home. • Dad will participate in a chemical dependency evaluation, follow recommendations. CCCSS will help coordinate as necessary to break down barriers to attendance. • Dad will continue with his medications as prescribed. • Dad will continue with medication management. • Dad will see an individual therapist as recommended by his doctor. • CCCSS and Dad will discuss proper and safe storage and handling of firearms. • CCCSS will help the family figure out when Mom and Son can safely return home each time they need to go to Brother/Uncle's house. • Son will continue his individual therapy. |

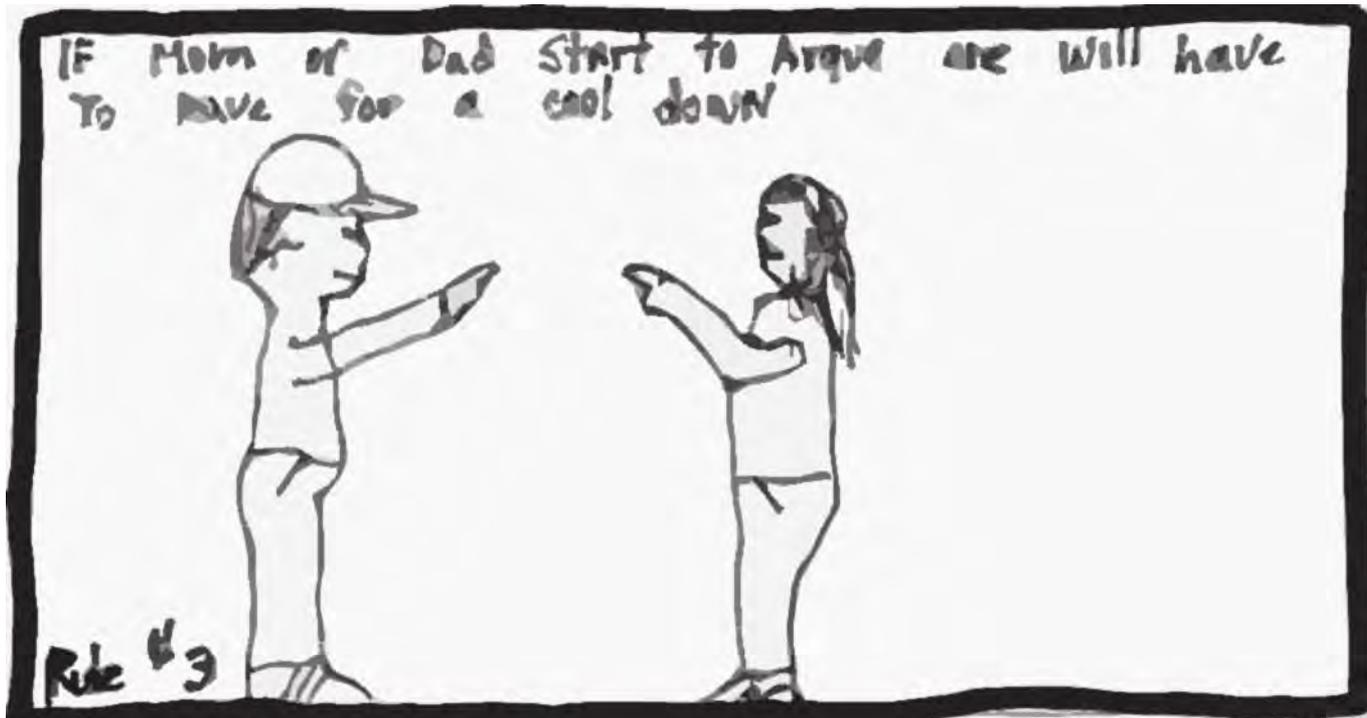
| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Some people are worried that Dad's use of firearms, medications, and/or alcohol alone or in any combination could cause someone to be hurt.</p> | <p>0  10</p> | <p>Everyone is confident that dad is always able to manage his prescribed medications, his guns, and any desire for alcohol so that none of these things create any risk whatsoever to the family members he loves so much.</p> |
| <p>Some people at the school and CCCSS are worried that Son continues to miss school without a good reason.</p> | <p>0  10</p> | <p>Everyone is confident that Son is always in school when he can be and doing his school work to his best ability.</p> |

Bottom Lines:

1. Weapons will remain out of the home until CCCSS, the family's safety network, mental health providers and chemical dependency providers all agree that it is safe for the weapons to return to the home.
2. Dad will attend outpatient chemical dependency treatment.
3. Dad will not mix alcohol with prescription medications.









Community Social Services



IF house Rules Are Broken

1. if mom or Dad Smokes Icky stuff or
will TELL Anty or Grandma
2. if mom or Dad Start Yelling or
will call Grandma or Anty To Pick
Them up
If there is no phone leave to grandmas or aunts



Family Safety Circle

Who knows everything about what we are worried about here?

Who knows some things about these worries?

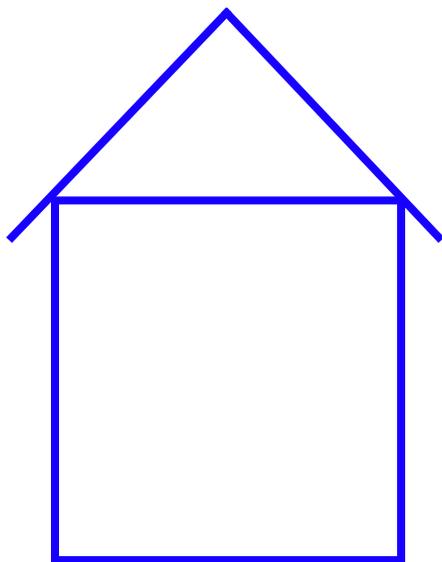
Who knows nothing about these worries, but should?

Compliments:

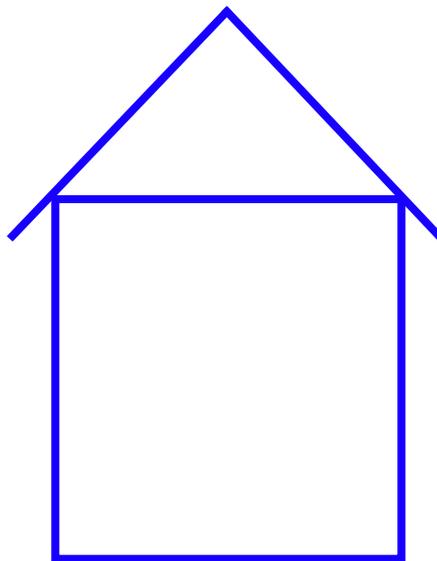
- Wow! How did you find the courage to tell that person?
- You told all these people? Where did you find the strength to do that?
- Who was the hardest person to tell?
- What helped you tell that person?

**'Three Houses' Child Protection Risk Assessment Process to use with Children
and Young People**
Created by Nicki Weld, Wellington NZ

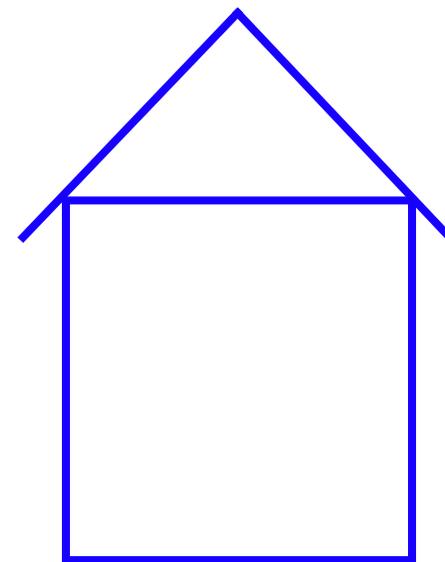
Children's Version of the Signs of Safety Map



House of Worries



House of Good Things



House of Dreams

On 3 separate pieces of paper draw with the children their experience and vision of each house. Use these drawings with the adults in deepening the assessment and planning process.

So what exactly is SofS?

- Others have brought solution-focused techniques into child protection casework.
- Family Group Decision Making and Wraparound Casework also use family's informal resources.
- Many skilled social workers have been able to partner with families on safety.
- My definition: staying focused on what works and doing more of it.



Signs of Safety in Minnesota

Minnesota context and
Training overview

Terry Besaw, Minnesota
Department of Human Services



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

Minnesota Model

- Published in 2009, the Minnesota Model summarized the principles and values that guide our practice including safety through the collaborative engagement of families and their strengths.
- The values were derived from successes and lessons learned from our experience with:
 - Family Assessment (Differential Response)
 - Parent Support Outreach Program
 - Family Group Decision Making

SofS Beginnings-Assets

- Successful history with engagement based family work via the Minnesota Model
- Strong grass roots county staff interest –
 - 2009 Carver County story
- Local experts “on the ground, doing the work”
 - Carver County, Olmsted County and Connected Families
 - Dan Koziolk, Carver County Manager
- Casey Family Programs Partnership
- Research collaboration with Wilder Research

2010 SofS Intensive Learning Initiative

- Goal – Provide intensive learning over a one year period
- Method – Closed circuit TV broadcasts
- RFP Process – 18 counties 1 tribe
 - Voluntary staff participation
 - Agency commitment/Communication w/ partners
 - 80% attendance
 - \$3000 grant

2010 Training Design

- 18 six hour VPC broadcasts
 - 1 per mo. supervisors
 - Every other month for workers
 - Eventually combined sessions to 1 monthly broadcast for all

2011 Design Change

- Move to regional design from centralized closed circuit TV broadcasts
- Elements include:
 - Bi-monthly regional meetings
 - Bi-monthly regional VPC's
 - Individual regional/county consults
 - Workshops

Spreading the word on Signs of Safety

- Nine county practice leader regions
- 35 Counties sending some staff to regional meetings
- New tribal collaboration (3 tribes)

Practice Changes

- Common language, process, and tools
- Practice sharing regionally and statewide
- Hearing reports of good work
- Some jurisdictions reporting better systemic outcomes



RESEARCH PRESENTATION

Greg Owen, Wilder Research

Evaluation objectives

- Assess levels of Signs of Safety implementation among participating counties
- Establish benchmarks of implementation for Signs of Safety work in Child Welfare organizations

Evaluation methods

- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (N=5)
- Interviews with child protection managers and supervisors (N=14)
- Discussion groups with social workers (N=3)
- Document review and participation in training

Findings: Benchmarks

- The following 8 benchmarks indicate *early levels of success* in implementation process
- Longer term benchmarks (increases in family satisfaction, worker retention, and reductions in child protection placements and court involvement) should be considered when Signs of Safety has been implemented for 3-5 years
- Not in sequence, as it is not evident from our review that they need to be achieved in a particular order

Benchmarks

1. Evolution of Child Protection philosophy from “professional as expert” to “professional as partner”
 - Workers/supervisors believe that parents can meaningfully participate in planning and implementing safety for their children
 - Workers feel positive about releasing some responsibility for case outcomes.

Challenge: Workers equate services with safety

Benchmarks

“We’re working harder to keep kids in their home using their safety networks. We’re also thinking outside the box more as far as how kids can be safer in their homes. In the past, it’s been more fear-based and reactionary.”

-Program supervisor

Benchmarks

2. Worker confidence in Signs of Safety

- Workers/supervisors believe that Signs of Safety is associated with increased safety for children
- Workers/supervisors feel they have control and autonomy in implementing Signs of Safety in their practice
- Workers/supervisors feel comfortable talking about concerns and mistakes

Challenge: Workers don't feel comfortable "trying out" new strategies before they feel fully competent

Benchmarks

3. Worker buy in

- Practice change is perceived as positive
- Workers exhibit enthusiasm, energy, and excitement about Signs of Safety

Challenge: Workers do not feel supervisors or administrators have made a long-term commitment to Signs of Safety

Benchmarks

4. Supervisor buy in

- Signs of Safety tools and strategies are used for internal purposes
- Supervisors exhibit enthusiasm, energy, and excitement about Signs of Safety

Challenge: Supervisor is not confident in the efficacy of Signs of Safety in ensuring safety for children

Benchmarks

5. Administrative buy in

- Procedures and formal expectations are revised to better suit Signs of Safety practice
- Administration demonstrates support for the framework through funds, restructuring, and using approach for internal processes

Challenge: Reduction in out of home placements are associated with increased risk for children

Benchmarks

“Our director is very much in favor of us using this approach. [The director] is so impressed that we are going to use a similar approach to try and do a management goal-setting [exercise].”

-Program supervisor

Benchmarks

6. Practice sharing

- Workers are willing and feel a sense of responsibility to share their knowledge and experiences with others outside the county
- Culture of seeking out successes and learning from them (appreciative inquiry)

Challenge: Workers are not comfortable identifying or discussing their successes

Benchmarks

7. Parallel process in supervision

- Supervisors use mapping to guide supervision with staff
- Supervisors are willing to implement Signs of Safety even before they feel fully competent in their own skill level

Challenge: Supervisors are not fully engaged in Signs of Safety learning opportunities

Benchmarks

“For the unit, I think it has provided us with a tool where we all started from the same beginning spot. We were all going to have to risk to do this work. I was going to have to risk being vulnerable to show my inadequacies with workers, and workers were going to have to be vulnerable with families....We’ve had to be okay with not doing good work right away and being patient with each other – helping each other along with this approach.”

-Program supervisor

Benchmarks

8. Involving and educating other partners

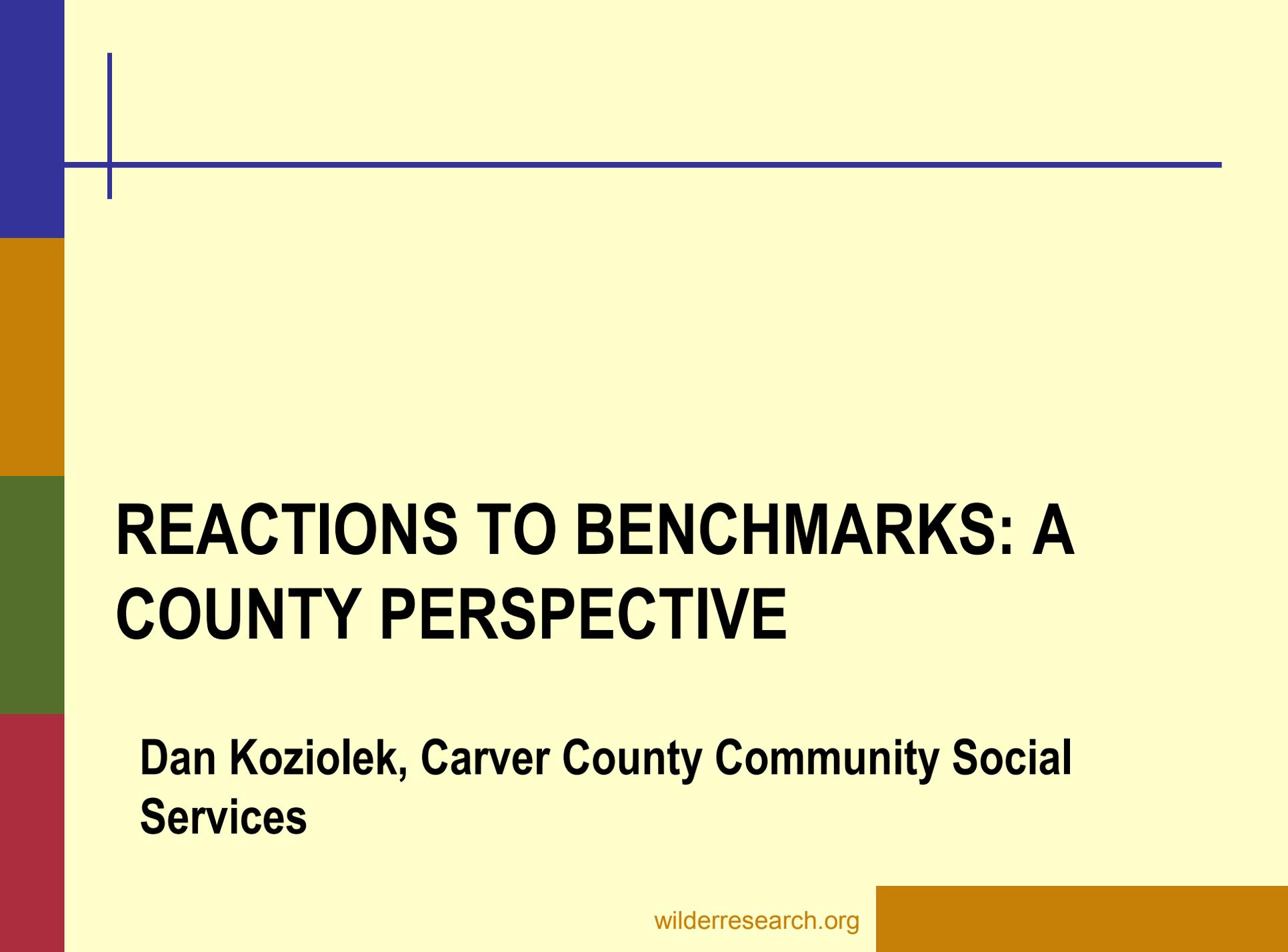
- CP agency has made a commitment to sharing all information among stakeholders including parents, children and others engaged with family
- Partners come to rely on information produced by the Signs of Safety practice framework

Challenge: CP agency does not feel comfortable enough with Signs of Safety to defend the approach when met with resistance

Benchmarks

“As we began to hear more about Signs of Safety it became an opportunity to increase our credibility, and that really resonated with staff...Certainly now staff are the drivers for the case and the communication in the courtroom in a way that wasn’t happening before. Judges and attorneys are now asking for the safety plan.”

-Program supervisor



REACTIONS TO BENCHMARKS: A COUNTY PERSPECTIVE

**Dan Koziolk, Carver County Community Social
Services**

Evolution from professional as expert to professional as partner.

- I always thought I believed in client self-determination.
- I thought I believed in people's capacity to solve their problems.
- Now I see that each day is an opportunity for an ever deeper belief.



Worker Confidence in SofS

- It's usually hard to do something with confidence the first time we do it.
- Social Workers are often excited after trying a new tool for the first time.
 - Experienced Hennepin County SW starting with strengths, worried it would negate his concerns, now thinks he will start every interview with strengths.
 - Carver worker who tried the 3 houses tool and thought it didn't work until her colleagues were blown away by how much she had learned in a single interview.



Transparent Confidence

- When workers feel confident in their own judgment about when a safety plan is “safe enough,”
- When they are confident enough to put their work in front of their supervisor and their colleagues,
- They are confident enough to be open to new ideas that might sharpen their work even more.



Beyond Buy-In and Resistance

- Buy-in is essentially about others agreeing with me. Resistance is when others don't do what I think they should.
- This sort of thinking doesn't go so well in a partnership.
- Story of partners that are bought in yet don't see our latest learning.
- Just when we think we have arrived – we're in trouble.



What's Better?

- Do workers feel more support from management?
- Do supervisors see increased skill in family interviews?
- Do workers feel they are getting better information from family members?
- Do managers see any improvement in safety and risk assessments?



CARVER
COUNTY

Community Social Services



Parallel Process

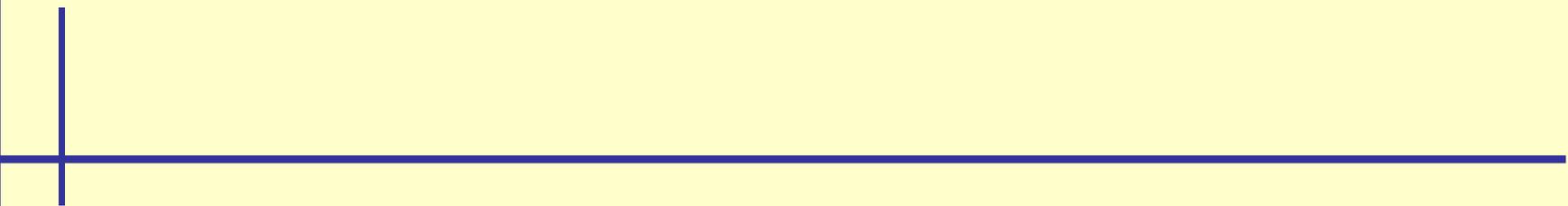
- This isn't a journey for the social workers, but rather a journey for the agency and everyone involved with the agency.
- Every participant at every level is challenged to develop their skills and confidence.
- Consistently the more any of us are able to develop our skills and confidence, the more open we are to new ideas and skills.



Involving and Educating Others

- The energy and increased commitment that comes from sharing our work has been my biggest surprise.
- I sometimes see a similar energy when families come together and truly share their struggles and their successes.
- Seeing this is what gives me the greatest hope for more partnership and for continually improving outcomes.





LESSONS LEARNED FROM TRAINING

Lessons learned from training

- More customized training, including one-to-one consultation
- Additional training on specific strategies, including Appreciative Inquiry
- Opportunities to interact with Andrew Turnell
- Suggestions on how to engage and educate other professionals (law enforcement, county attorneys, etc.)

Final thoughts

- Counties who were earliest along in implementation rated themselves furthest in terms of understanding and integration of the model
- Uncertainty about DHS's level of commitment created barriers to full program engagement for some counties
- Challenge of integrating Signs of Safety with existing practices (SDM and others)

Discussion

References

- Minnesota Model
<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-5881-ENG>
- Research results:
 - Family Assessment (Differential Response) and Parent Support Outreach Program
http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&DocName=id_001627

Contact us

Terry Besaw, terry.besaw@state.mn.us

Maggie Skrypek, maggie.skrypek@wilder.org

Greg Owen, greg.owen@wilder.org

Dan Koziolk, dkoziolk@co.carver.mn.us