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Child Protective Services: Advocating for Safety for Battered Mothers and their Children Together

Rose Thelen, Praxis Rural Technical Assistance Partner and Jessica Nelson, Wright County, MN Child Protective Services

November 15, 2017

Good afternoon everybody. This is Rose, I am with Praxis international, we are talking about child protection services : advocating for safety for battered mothers and their women -- children together. Before we begin, do you want to take us through some logistics?

I will. Hello everyone . We are glad that you are with us. I would like to point out a couple of details relative to how this webinar will work today. You will notice that there are captions rolling at the bottom of your screen, and with real-time captioning, it is possible that mistakes occur, if that happens, we just ask you to bear with us and not be distracted by that. The phone lines will be muted for the whole presentation today but we encourage you to utilize the Q&A box that you see at the top of your screen. That will be the best way for your comments and your thinking to get passed along to the presentation today. They will respond within the platform itself. So, feel free to chime in and use that Q&A box at any point. I would also like to let you know that all of the boxes you see on your screen are adjustable to your own preferences for this setting. If you click on the light gray icon on the far right, it will allow you to adjust the settings. This session is being recorded, and it will be available in the next couple of days. It will be posted on the rural recording archives webpage on the Praxis international website. Also, if you are connected with your audio through your computer, and you notice that the sound becomes unstable, or inconsistent, you are welcome to call in by telephone at any time. That would be the best quality for you. Just know that that is a possibility. And, finally, if you have any technology issues, don't hesitate to send your questions to the webinar host, Patricia , and she and I will do our best to help you troubleshoot the issues. With that, Rose, I will ask you to back up a little bit and get us introduced to the session and to welcome and introduce Jessica.

Thank you. And thank you all for joining us today. I should let you know that I am on this webinar from a hotel room in Wyoming, where we are doing a training with the coalition for domestic and sexual violence , and one of the presentations we would be doing this on the very same topic we will be talking about today. Unfortunately, my Internet connection is not

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good in the hotel, so I'm going to be asking Liz to advance the slides as I look at them on my laptop computer. It'll be a little clumsy, but hopefully it won't interfere too much with the topic that we are going to be presenting today. As I mentioned, I am pleased to have Jessica Nelson, the child protection supervisor with us today to discuss this topic from the perspective of child protection services. I got to know Jessica when I was a Wright County Commissioner, we were on boards together and task forces and committees, and I got to know that she and many other people in the child protection agency were very open to new ideas and innovators. So, when Praxis was looking for a test for the assessment tool it was developing which would examine domestic violence and child protection, I approached the county to see if they would be willing to test this tool and make recommendations for the final product. And, they agreed to do it. So, it has been really fulfilling process. I'm still working with Jessica and Praxis in terms of looking at some of the implementation recommendations that we came up with through the use of this tool. We are going to be referencing and talking about some of the excess, activities in the tool today. Because, whether you decide to do a full assessment in your area, we should do this assessment, or whether you just look at it, to look at some of the activities within it. I think the guide provides some of the best tools for coming together as advocates and child protection to find a common purpose. As everybody on the line knows, there has been some historic tension between advocacy programs and child protection, but really there is much more that unites us because if you care about children, you will naturally care about their mothers and if you care about battered women, in the advocacy program, you are going to care about their children. We are all invested in the same outcome which is to put – protect the mothers and children together. The emphasis here is that we want the violence to end, we don't want to just protect the women and children, but we want to end it. This is all part of doing that. And of course, I want to advocate that it can be a powerful alliance to figure it out. If you have questions, feel free to type them in, because we want to be able to address some of those as they come up for you. And at a certain point, Liz will let us know if there are questions, I am also available for follow-up about this and I think Jessica has agreed to be available as well. I will be the main contact, and I can put you in touch with Jessica. So, Jessica, do you have any opening comments you would like to make at this point? And welcome.

Good afternoon everyone, I want to welcome everyone to the presentation today and hopefully they can gain some information and hopefully it will help them forward in whatever work they are embarking on in working with children and victims and offenders in the world of domestic violence.

Thank you, Jessica. So, can you move us forward on the slides here, Liz?

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Yes. We are ready for you.

Okay. We wanted to do a little background on this for starters. We will proceed to that, then we will get directly into some of the activities that you and your child protection agency may want to do or you and your advocacy program, depending on who is on the line and my understanding is that they were quite a few people registered who were interested in this topic. I know it is a hot topic so, taking a look at some of the tools in that guide that you might be able to use in talking to you in the end also about recommendations for getting together, for breaking the ice, and getting together to solve these problems. As everybody probably knows, children are at greater risk of physical harm when they are living in the homes, and all of these statistics are quite old, but unfortunately, they still remain to be fairly current and that we are still seeing a huge problem with the linkage between child maltreatment and domestic violence. We also know that a lot of times, the violence against the mother negates violence against the child. And sometimes,

the violence against the child begins to occur, and that is when the woman will be at added risk as she tries to figure out what to do and looks for help and sometimes gets into trouble with child protection because her case has become known to them. So, we want to make sure that we can work together to strengthen the relationships among battered women, domestic violence programs, and child protection. Do you want to say a little bit about the overlap in Wright County?

Sure. There is always a spectrum, there are cases where we see specifically just domestic violence and violence against the mother. And, the kids have an emotional impact on them, typically in those situations, but there has been no violence toward the children, and there are situations on the other end of the spectrum where the children are intervening regularly. Calling 911 and inserting themselves into the situation or they have been physically harmed because they are trying to protect their parent, or that the violence toward the parent leads to violence toward the child. They are physically getting harmed. So, it can vary. Typically, there is an impact on the child, so when we are looking at situations of domestic violence, we have to determine, what are the protective factors in place, and what is the impact, and is the involvement going to do more good or more harm? So, what is the overlap, and where does the domestic violence and where does the child maltreatment begin? How did those two

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Sometimes you get child maltreatment cases and you didn't know, either, whether there was domestic violence that might be compounding the situation, and the capacity of the mother is to assist or take action that you wanted her to take.

Yes, definitely.

So, let's talk about the gaps, and if you could move us forward on the slide, that would be great. Some of the gaps that we see in child protection workers, do you want a child protection services working with the battered mother, do you want to give us some background? I know you mentioned, at one point your intervention might make things worse. Can you tell us the gaps that you see.

Sure, that is one of the things that we have discovered going through this process, is that unfortunately, we are not perfect. Or even as a child protection worker, and not as individuals, but, we need some improvement. We need to have better account for the dynamics of intimate partner violence, battering, domestic violence course of control, and what the batter does or how the behavior does or doesn't impact the child and or adult victims, and what that dynamic

does and the impact it has on the long-term relationships, and the parent-child relationship. Our practice was designed to work where one adult or parent was not treating the child, and the other was the non-offending parent, so we would work with the non-offending parent most often and make that decision to have that parent make sure that the child is safe. A lot of times, we are only working unfortunately with the non-offending parent, and not even making contact with the batter or the alleged perpetrator. The person who is doing the battering. So, when we are going through this process, one of the things that stood out the most is that we were almost re-victimizing the victim by making her accountable for making sure that she and her child were safe. And holding her accountable versus holding the offender accountable for their behavior. And making the mother and child unsafe. So, that was one of the biggest gaps. And, still, I think a lot of areas, and at times, still have had to place children in foster care because they are not safe. And a parent isn't able to provide safety for the child. Unfortunately, there are situations where the offender might be able to access that parent and that parent is able to respond because they freeze. So, what can we do, if they are not able to provide those protective factors? How can we help them? And we weren't doing that as well. So, that is one of the big gaps that we noticed.

One of the things that we see across the country is that it is assumed that if she leaves, that she might be safer, right? Without the understanding that sometimes that may make her

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less safe. And the other thing is that, it is almost assumed that if she is staying that she is not protecting those children when in fact, she might be doing all kinds of things to protect the children. That was one of the things that we looked at when we were looking at the right response, and as you mentioned, it wasn't a problem of the worker themselves, but of the institution which really hadn't considered some of the complexities of domestic violence, where that

offender stands between you as a child protection worker and your capacity, or I should say the victim's capacity to do what you might think is best in that particular situation. So, I think that is a piece that we saw as being better able to figure out, first of all, the disputes, and what is the situation where she is doing what she can give her the context of the violence, and a third might be that she can't do anything because the violence is so extreme. What does child protection do and how does advocacy come into play there? And I think working with you, Jessica, and the child protection system in Wright County, it was so rewarding to be able to say, yes, there are gaps, and because there are gaps, there are places where we can obviously implement some solutions to close those gaps. So anyway, moving on to the next slide. What I wanted to talk about was these advocacy efforts to close some of these gaps. I mentioned we were recently involved in working through this Praxis assessment in child maltreatment and domestic violence, but there has been advocacy efforts for quite a while, as people try to grapple with what is going on here. I am going to mention a few of these because if you need to get more information on them, it'll give you some guidance for discussing the issue together about what is up. So, the first one on the slide is Nicholson versus Williams, and if you haven't seen or heard of this case, Google it because it was a federal class action case and a battered mother's

success story was able to challenge the New York City administration of children services for bringing proceedings against the battered mothers because they were battered, and mothers had not done anything to maltreat the children but, the assumption again was because they were battered, they must be bad mothers, they weren't protecting the children, they should have left. And, therefore they were threatened with, and or some of the mothers lost their children because they were the victims. So, if you look at some of the testimonies in this case, one of the things that the court decided in that case was that the child protection services were not examining the very real risk to the child and the damage that was done by placing them in foster care and the court said that the child protection services had to demonstrate that the harm of removing that child was not as bad as the harm on staying with the batterer. It is a nuance look at, it is not really a good outcome to have to take the child and put them into foster care, and what do we need to consider about this batterer and how much the better is the person who is harming the child, and harming the mother's capacity to protect themselves? So anyways, it is worth looking up. It was sparked on the expert testimony on all of that, and you can find it online as well. The

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other advocacy efforts on this are the green book project, which is something that was done by the national Council juvenile Family Court judges, you can Google that, too. It was a seminar work on putting together what might be some guidelines for policy and practice. They came up with a number of principles and as a result, there was a number of demonstrations and initiatives that were done around the country, like five of them. To figure out, what policy protocol procedural changes can we do to make a difference? The next one on the list is this safety and accountability model from David Mandel and Associates. That was a tool that was developed to see if we can look at enhancing our capacity again. Again, Center for social policy did a number of institutional analysis of child welfare practices and finally again, you see this guide that was developed with partnership with the national Council of juvenile and Family Court judges, the Center for social policy, and office on violence against women. That is the assessment tool that Jessica and I and others got together to take a look at, when we were working to enhance the capacity of child protection and advocates to work together. So, take a look at some of these pieces. I bring these up because when you think about advocating for the safety of battered mothers and their children together, one of the things to do is to just start to have your conversations with each other about what has been done. What might be some of the gaps? Maybe you will reference them to listen to this webinar, but to start to just look at what has been out there, what is available, what are people thinking about? Because, the child protection system, working with advocates around the issue of the overlap of domestic violence is a work in progress.

There are different efforts in different places trying to do something about this. If you look at the guiding principles for the intervention which is on the next slide, you will see that there are common principles that are a guide in some of these efforts and our ways to measure what you are doing against what might be

some foundation of best practice principles. So, Jessica, I wanted to bring you and and ask you, before using this assessment guide and participating, have you seen these guiding principles before? Do you agree with them? How important are they for guiding how you think about the work, and I know I am asking you a series of questions so feel free to ANSI - answer any and all of them. Do any of them stick out to you as being particularly important?

Well, yes. I do think they are important. I haven't seen them necessarily all put together, or that I have recalled, but they certainly are things that are discussed, maybe not all at the same time, but at different points, or different situations, when you are working on case regard in domestic violence. Not every situation is the same, so it is hard to say exactly what is going to be the most important thing at that time. So, at any given time during a family situation, one factor or another may be more important than another. Overall, in my

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opinion, safety well-being and stability for children and families is the most important. What that means is different for every family situation. The safety and well-being and stability for this family and children could be different than what it looks like for this family and children. So, staying in an intact family in one situation, while the children and the victim all reside in the same home, and creating a safety plan for that family might be what's best for their well-being and stability. Whereas, in a different situation, it might be making sure that the children in the victim relocate into a safe house. It is different for every situation. So, really, what we have drawn in going through this process is that we really have to look at every individual situation differently, and as we have gone down the road, being specific with domestic violence cases, is that not only is domestic violence unique in and of itself, we are looking at control and coercion, but there are also multiple mitigating factors such as mental health and chemical use, and unfortunately a lot of times, custody issues are pulled into these cases as well. Control and coercion being brought into it that lead to domestic violence. So, we have to piece out all of that before we get to what is going on and what can we do to work with the family to get them what they need?

And one of the things that really causes the incapacity of the system, without having some of these interagency linkages developed, the capacity will hold that offender accountable and require them to participate, for example, in a batterers program. We will get to that as we talk about these key activities that are coming up. So, skip to slide 10. It talks about the key activities. I just want to run through some of these.

Okay, we had a question. So, someone, one of the listeners asked that, when we talk about differential response being available, are we saying that across the board, it is not available unless there is an open investigation? >> So, in Minnesota, for us, when we are reviewing, and we will talk about it when we talk about the mapping process, I don't know if you want to flip to the mapping slide a little bit. I think that is the next slide.

Yes, why don't we hold on to that question and we will answer it when we get to the mapping.

Okay, Cindy will take that up more specifically in a moment or two. Okay.

Okay, I just want to talk about some of these key activities and I will read an overview and we will go over these in more detail. As Jessica mentioned, one of the first ones is going to be mapping, we will get to that in a second. The second key activity is discussion series where it outlines a series of topics together, it will give your commonalities, and another activity is to talk with the victims themselves, what is going on in their lives, how does the

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intervention impact them, did the batterer use the child protection system to further their control over them? Another activity was examining the various policies, procedures, protocols, etc. that organize how the child protection operates. We also looked at case files and under case files, we will talk more about that, and ultimately, we made recommendations for change. So, let's go through the next couple of slides. The next one is the mapping. So, Jessica, talking about the mapping, did you want to answer the question from Cindy?

Sure. This has a lot of information on it. But, when we receive, ultimately, law enforcement receives a call regarding violence that's going on in the home, intimate partner violence, and they go out and they address the situation. They forward the report to Health and Human Services after they have mediated the situation. From there, we reviewed the report and child protection and determine if we are going to intervene. Now, if it meets criteria for a differential response or an investigation based on the level of violence, it helps us make that determination or the involvement of the child. So, a differential response would be less violence in the home, at the time of the incident, and if there is more violence, then it is an investigation. If we don't screen that report in for assessment, we still have the option of referring the report to our child welfare response called parent support outreach where one of our workers would still reach out to the mom or the victim and the child offering services. Those are voluntary services. They could choose to participate in this. I know sometimes differential response means it happened in general, but it can look different in different places, so I wanted to make sure that was clear. They are two different tracks for child protection. It is still child protection but, in differential response we are not making a final treatment.

When that is preferred, that is what the flight is saying, and it is preferred that services are going to be available when there is in it – an open investigation, right?

Typically, we are doing them as a differential response in Minnesota, we call it a family assessment case. We are doing them as a differential response.

Right. When you do this mapping, for me it was like as you mentioned, you can't make out much but, it covered a whole wall, it just proves how complicated the system is and how many steps are involved. When we did the initial test on the Praxis tool, we took the discussion series before we did the mapping, but then in the final tool that we made recommendations about putting the mapping first because we spent so much time during the discussion series trying to figure out what it was that you did and in what order, and

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how all the moving parts work together. I know that your supervisor, Marianne, she always emphasizes how valuable she thought the mapping was for her, too. And, how about you, Jessica, did you think that was a valuable process to engage in?

I do. It was very valuable because a lot of times there are questions from other agencies about our agency, and what different things mean, what does differential response mean, and what makes one thing right at that level or not that level, and the complexity. For me, I felt like it really built the foundation in understanding between our agency and the other agencies that were participating in this process. It helped build that understanding of how decisions are made between our agency and, so they can see what our process is like. It took away that mystery of our world and it provided more transparency and being transparent was very helpful for others to see what it looks like. It was a lot easier for them to see the process and they had a better understanding.

Yes, and I think as a recommendation for people on the line, this is a really good thing to do together. Just because it is nondefensive, just tell us how a case goes through the system. We are talking about that relative to other agency efforts at the conference today, too, getting together with somebody and saying, tell me about your system. It can be very valuable. You can do it both ways. The advocacy system is going to be much less complex than this mapping process was a very valuable system to understand what makes you go to that level versus this level. In the next slide, it discusses the

series, this was probably my most valuable series. I think there are six different topics that are in the guide that provide you with formats for discussing them. And, it has a way to talk about things like, what is safety? What is safety for the child? What is safety for the battered mother? What is safety for the family? And who is the family? Is it the mother, child, and batterer? One thing that really stood out to me was in fact that everybody agreed, I think it was a real bond. The only way you can guarantee safety, is if you can get the batterer to stop. And, that is the age-old question again, how do you get this batterer to stop, and how can we get better accountability and how can the legal system give us what we need as well? How can the child protection system work with the legal system if there is interest so that the legal system knows that we are looking at this case, too, and we are finding problems with this child maltreatment going on. So, that was very good, and the other think – topic about the protection strategies, there was a lot of agreement in the room. A lot of things

that she was doing that might historically look like it was not protective, like going back to the abuser, that may be a protective strategy, we are going to find out what is going on, what kind of things prompted that? How much risk is there? That was a very valuable series. It is another thing that I recommend if you are looking to approach this, let's start

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talking about what is going on here and how can we work together to get the battering to stop and to protect both the children and their mother and be allies amongst all of us to do something to change what happens here. So, the next one we want to look at is this text analysis. Jessica, do you want to describe what that activity was?

Sure. When we were looking through the tool, we had the opportunity or took the opportunity, or part of it was that we are going to look at all of our policies and forms and checklist that we had in place that would help us in addressing domestic violence, or what was in place. What were the things that we were looking at, what was guiding us in working through our cases of domestic violence or identifying domestic violence in the work we were doing. What was guiding our practice? Were there policies in place? Were some of the gaps that we identified there? What regulates the social workers in the work they are doing on these cases? So, the tool guided us in that, so we took a look at the policies that were in place, we looked at some of the state laws and guidelines, we looked at some of the training regarding domestic violence cases. Some of the tools that other agencies are using, as well as what questions we were asking families. Did we have any of the questions in our reporting forms, and were we asking any of the questions during the regular assessment process, and what were staff required to report as well? Then, in looking at all of those things, what did we determine? Did we do a good job of assessing domestic violence? In other cases as well. There is a piece that says we are required to assess domestic violence in all cases, and were we doing a good job of this? That was one of the things that we were looking at as well. So, we looked at, do we have solid procedures and protocols, and are we looking at all of the necessary services and compliance and affective practice?

This is the thing I kept harping on because you know, I found that like you and Marianne are pretty savvy and well-informed about domestic violence, but I always said, what if you got hit by a lumber truck next week, where does all your information go. She would say, what if they win the lottery, that was much more positive. We want to make the work of child protection to be embedded in some sort in the forms and policies and guidelines. When we did the mapping, we looked at all of the forms, guidelines, procedures, protocols that organized what the worker did at each of those steps in the process, and then examined them to see whether we were asking questions about protective strategies or risks, or the way they were manipulating the mother. What was the impact on the child? Was there any resiliency factors? And I know you agree with this but, we didn't see a lot of direct explicit guidance for child protection workers to add a particular question and to document it. That was where we looked to sustain changes to put those things into a text somewhere. So,

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these are some of the things we were looking at on the next slide, it talks about the things we were looking for as we went through the case. In some cases we saw there was a mention of domestic violence, and it wasn't really saying a lot about who was the perpetrator, they were just arguing instead of who was doing what to whom with what impact. We wanted to look at protective strategies again, and secure the safety of the children together. Liz, are you on slide 15 that has the case notes? >> I have the slide with the four boxes.

Moved to the next one. Sorry [Laughter] so Jessica, this is just an example, this is when we started to look at case files themselves, right? In addition to looking at the text, we also looked at the case files to see whether they referenced the protective strategies, etc. Do you want to talk a little bit about this visual here, it is kind of busy but, it is a good example of what we found and the change that you made as a result of that, right?

Yes. One of the things that really stood out for us when we were looking through the cases among one of the things that really stood out, is that we were using really passive language when we were describing domestic violence. As you can see in the middle column labeled CPS and take notes, how we were describing domestic violence. It was reported that child was present during domestic between mother and father. Or, it was reported that child was punched in the knee while intervening during a fight between his parents. So, that was a very passive language that was be utilized within our agency to describe the incidences that were occurring in the home. If we look at the police report of incident in the far left column, we have an anonymous complaint stated that a female was being hit and was drug inside the residence. The victim was reluctant to speak about anything due to the suspects criminal past. So, that is what the police report stated. So, the new language that we have changed to and we are trying to make sure we are adhering to, states, the child was present and observed the father hit the mother and drag her in the house, the mother is reluctant to speak about anything in the suspects past. So, what exactly happened, not that the child was present and there was a fight. That doesn't tell you anything. In the second one the police report, the victim told me the suspect was being mean and punched me six times in the right knee yet I was on the recliner in the living room and it tipped back as I was being punched. My son stood up for me and told the suspect not to hit me, so the suspect hit my son in the leg. So, hitting the parent six times

and falling backwards, and the son was getting hit as well versus the child was punched in the knee while intervening, two different things. The revised version, boyfriend punched mother in the knee six times in front of the child. The child intervene and the boyfriend punched the child in the leg. You can see the impact on the child. It is not as passive, it is very specific.

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You can see who is doing it, too. There is domestic violence between them, it really sounds like there is someone responsible for this damage to the child versus only one person who is the aggressor, right, and that person should be named. Of course, you probably, if you are just approaching child protection, you are probably not going to sit down the first time you get together and let's look at some case notes, this is a fairly labor-intensive process for you, Jessica. Telling you to get all of these case files together, and for us to organize them in a way that we could review them and look for particular things. But, looking at the case file, we were able to see, okay, this is the end product, and this is the lived experience that other people might see, right? As it does go to custody or,

if there is some other legal action that takes place, and the importance of being specific about who is doing what to whom and with what impact, I think that is a place where we saw there is a combination of all these efforts. How can we make this reflect the lived experience of the child and the mother, and what is being done to them? So, that was an outcome that I think you started to change right away, to get the staff and say no, we need to be explicit here about what is going on, right?

Right. Absolutely. It was easy to implement either way, we could certainly change the language that we were using. So, some of the changes were a lot easier to implement than others.

That is a good segue to the next slide which talks about the outcomes in Wright County. Are you there?

Yes.

Okay, Jessica, sorry for interrupting you but I thought it would be a good time to bring this up where we can talk about some of the changes that resulted.

Yes. I think it is also important just to say that some of the other things that we noticed, that we missed is making sure that some of those connections were being made. That was one of the things that we noticed in doing the assessment, is that we weren't making some of those connections with the advocates and probation agents if the batterer was being arrested or charged. So, one of the outcomes has been that we are making some of those connections and those linkages and making sure the domestic violence worker has those relationships and with those other partners. And on every case, they are making a connection with the probation agent, and they made a better connection with the batterer and intervention program, even if it is not court ordered, even if they are not charged with

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domestic violence or an assault, that they are able to get into that program. Before, it was a little bit more challenging. We are working with those systems where they are able to provide those systems to the better – better, so that is a huge change as well. And a huge outcome. And currently with our domestic violence worker, constant contact with the batter, which is having better outcomes for the children because they are having contact with their children in the air – they are seeing the children and the children are healthier and happier and the well-being is being littered – consider. They are building healthy relationships versus damaging relationships. We are seeing significant improvement to families.

So, when you talk about the batter being involved with the children more now, and that is if they are participating and cooperating with the services that you are recommending?

Yes, definitely. Just working with the domestic violence worker and the services that are recommended are following through. If there is substance abuse, that is an issue as well, following through with that or following through with probation recommendations, or whatever is being recommended. So, they are able to work with that program and repair the relationship with their children or address whatever issues might be present, and working to be the healthy parent that they can and should be in order to have regular visits with their children. >> How do you work with the mother in that case? Is she on board with this? Is the violence against her so exciting? Say something about that.

Usually, the domestic violence worker is working with her as well, through the advocate and programming with her through a different therapy resource, and making sure that they are getting their needs met as well. Those are usually situations where they are not together, and when they are in the same home, making sure that they are both working in the program to meet – together. So, it depends on the safety plan. If they are exchanging, make sure that it is a safe exchange, and they are not using control against her, and maybe having a third-party provide that or doing it in a safe location, or working through the program if necessary to make sure we have a safety plan in place if that exchange needs to be addressed in the safety plan.

Okay. I was going to say that in terms of some of the outcomes as well, there's been a lot of attention by the state, at the state level, the coalition of battered women is calling for the state Department of human services to take a look at what has been done in Wright County and replicate it in other areas and also to provide some assistance to Wright County, to further advance its implementation activities. The other thing that is an assessment tool that they develop, this is an assessment for determining the level of risk to the child and mother

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and what is going on in the family to use in custody situations. They have been working with them to [Silence]

I can jump in. They have developed a tool that was designed for custody cases, so we are looking at modifying the tool to see if we can utilize it in child protection cases to see if it fits into domestic violence cases to assess the domestic violence and determine what the level of violence is and what the outcomes of the case can and should be, or what the level of intervention needs to be, what the visits should look like, if they need to be supervised or what the safety risk is, with the level of violence is, and what the trajectory is for the family and the family system. So, we are looking at that assessment tool and it has been a neat experience because it is a tool we are not familiar with and we are finding it is all encompassing of domestic violence, and it is going to be very helpful.

Yes, can you hear me? Were you not hearing me for a second?

We lost audio for you. It was getting interrupted. We are glad you are back.

All right. Thanks for jumping in, Jessica. Let's go to slide 19. Let's go to 17 I guess. Let's go to the next one very quickly and get to the one that talks about recommendations for people getting together on this, okay? So, I think that we don't have to say too much about this because it is in the guide, if you go to the guide, it talks about what you need to do to be ready. If you are strangers to each other, there are certain things you can do, if you are antagonistic, things to do about that. How to figure out how to approach each other in that regard is in the guide. I'm going to give some time to Jessica to talk about what she thinks might be valuable. Then, there is also going to be activities that you can engage in which is discussed in the assessment tool as well about what it's going to take, timewise, and if you look at the next slide, which is the commitment. I think this is a piece – do you have anything about this from your perspective, Jessica, about the commitments, for example, the opening is – openness and willingness?

I think you have to be open and willing to be transparent, I talked a little bit about that earlier. You have to be willing to let others look closely at your work and not be defensive about it, that was the one thing that we really had to examine our work. Our focus is on improving our work and looking at, what does our work look like? Because we noticed, there are strengths, we didn't just notice gaps and all bad work. We identified several strengths as well.

But, what are some of the gaps and where is improvement needed? So, we wanted to focus on the improvement and continue the good work as well. But, what are the gaps and

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where can we improve? You have to be open to allowing others to look at your work and be open and honest about your work and making those improvements. Also, you have to be willing to dedicate the time and half the time be very committed, because you can't commit yourself to doing this and then halfway through say, okay, I don't have the time for this anymore because it definitely takes the commitment. You have to think through if you want to make sustainable change. We are still working on it. It is almost 3 years later. It takes time. We don't always have the staff or the resources, so we are still working through it. And then we have turnover, so then you sometimes have to take a couple steps back. We are still working through it.

But you are committed. Yes. One of the things that is a response, which provides resource to guide into this to really make some additional work like on this assessment tool, and also to take a look at formalizing the protocol between law enforcement, probation, programs, and the courts. So, as much time and commitment as it took, your agency is almost known in Minnesota as being understaffed and overworked with high turnover because the pay isn't as high as some other counties, but you managed to do it. That is to your credit, and I think you mentioned something important, Jessica, because import – yesterday at this conference there was a cop from Duluth talking with his chief – chief, and the chief was saying, we can't do this, it would look bad. And for this cop, what could be bad about wanting to improve our response? That is going to be a positive thing in the community. We aren't going to look bad, we are going to be looking good because we have the foresight and we are innovative and we are making the changes that are necessary. So, moving to the next slide, I just wanted to ask you if you have any other recommendations for how to approach advocacy programs or any recommendations for CPS? You've already touched on it, but do you have anything to add?

I think if you are an advocacy group wanting to approach child protection to look at the work that is being done between agencies or vice versa, just to improve practice across the board. Everybody can improve practice and collaboration. So we are building that relationship. Especially when the majority of our agencies have turnover because they are tough jobs. So, building those relationships from the top down is important and that is where you start. So, it is starting that collaboration. Then, you start with, I went to this webinar and this is what they were talking about. Would you ever be interested in doing something like this? Or even if you start with a discussion series or mapping. Can you tell me more about how you review your reports, and starting with the mapping.

Just starting with part of the process to have a better understanding of each other's work is huge. Once you have a better understanding of each other's work, then you can at

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least have that common ground and build the foundation to the relationship into the work that you're doing and talking about embarking on a project like this. We were fortunate because a few of our staff members have come from the advocacy, so they had those connections. And, we had built relationships over the years with some of the advocacy agency. At the time, we did not know the staff at that agency, we also had a third-party facilitator, thanks to Rose, that new both agencies, and I think that helped as well. So, if you have a person or facilitator that can bring the two agencies together, that can pick -- make it a more neutral ground.

I'm not sure where the solicitations will land this year but I know last year they said that they could be, some of these things could be using this assessment tool and it could be built into a grant. I'm not sure what they are going to come up with this year, but that may be an opportunity as well to approach the child protection agency and say, we should check this out, maybe there is some funding in there for us. But, for me, in terms of recommendations, is that I think it is really a tough job to be a child protection worker and it is a tough job to be an advocate and there has been misunderstanding. On the one hand, sometimes child protection thinks although they care about the mother, they don't care about the child. And vice versa. So, to be able to just see that as a byproduct of the work you do, I think it is very helpful. It is very nondefensive on both sides. This tool gives you a chance to step back and take it out of the personal and just look at the work and how the institution is structured. So, I think that helps as well. I think it is really valuable. I worked overtime since the early 2000 on trying to get something to help make a change in outcomes. There is work that is being done by the West Virginia coalition in conjunction with their state department of child protection, so there are resources available out there. As Jessica and I and everyone at the Department of human services try to develop these concrete tools, they also will be available to bring forward to your agency and say, look at this, this is pretty cool, he gives something to the child protection worker to really ask specific questions and find out what the protective strategies were and what the context for violence is. I think the other thing for advocacy programs might be that, I think the child protection agencies were asking questions, but it wasn't apparent by the county that the batter was using the children to punish the mother, and they would use child protection as a threat. If you call the cops again, I'm going to get these kids taken away from you. I am going to call child protection. It was a very significant hammer they had over her, so I think that was something that no child protection supervisor or worker wanted to have happen. So, I think sometimes to be able to fill in the blanks about what was the outcome of the child protection referral, what did women say about it? How did it impact their lives, or their unintended consequences that the agency wasn't aware of?

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So, moving to the next slide, do you want to take us through the next couple of them? We have my contact information on here. I know that Jessica, I think you said you would be available if people wanted to talk to you some more, is that true?

Certainly.

Okay, if you want to do this, and talk to Jessica, I can get you the other information you need. And Liz, do you have any other final comments?

Of course, just saying thank you to you and Jessica. It is all very helpful and useful information. For the listeners, in case you have not noticed, the PowerPoint is at the bottom of the screen as well as to resources, one that was referenced, a guide to assisting child protective practices, that was a resource that Rose helped to create. That is available, it will take you to a link where you can download it from the website. Also, the Wright County child protection services safety audit is available, the report is available and the link is in the web links box at the bottom of your screen if you would like to find out more specific information about their process. Other than that, when you disconnect at the end, you will be routed to an evaluation of today's session and we really rely on feedback that we get from evaluations for shaping future webinars. So, please take a moment or two and share your thoughts with us. We hope you all have a good day, we will be again with you I'm sure in January, thanks so much for your time today. Rose and Jessica, good job. Thank you. Take care.

Happy holidays. >> [Event Concluded]