



Law Enforcement and Children's Mental Health Roundtable Discussion

Executive Summary



2007

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Table of Figures	2
Introduction and Background	3
The Problem	3
The Partners	3
The Participants	4
The Process	4
What We Learned	5
Diverse Perspectives -- Same Goals	5
Successful Crisis Intervention	6
Common Core Challenges and Obstacles	6
Recommendations	7
Communication	7
Partnerships	7
Law Enforcement	8
Families and Youth	8
Mental Health Services	8
Advocacy	8
Next Steps	9
National Federation's Annual Conference 2007	9
Guide for Local Communities	9
September 25th Roundtable Participants	10

Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Roundtable Goals</i>	5
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Introduction and Background

The Problem

The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (National Federation) has long been concerned about how interventions occur when law enforcement officers (e.g. police, truancy officers, sheriffs, school resource officers) respond to children or youth experiencing a mental health crisis.

Too often, members have reported to the National Federation incidents of children and youth traumatized and otherwise injured by being restrained, yelled at, "roughed up", or detained and incarcerated. While there have also been reports of police preventing a child or youth from doing harm to him- or herself or others, providing parents with information, or helping to diffuse potentially volatile situations, the impetus to prevent trauma is paramount.

Successful strategies for law enforcement encounters with adults with serious mental illnesses have been widely promoted. Limited, highly specialized opportunities do exist, such as training for law enforcement in how to work with persons with autism, but on a broader, national scale there is relatively little work being done to ensure the highest quality response by law enforcement to those calls of help to deescalate the situation and secure the safety of everyone involved when a child or youth goes into crisis.

The National Federation approached the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to engage a number of leaders from around the nation in a dialogue about developing partnerships to discover and advance promising practices to improve outcomes of encounters between law enforcement and children and youth with mental health problems.

The Partners

The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is a nationwide nonprofit membership organization which promotes a family and youth driven approach to ensuring that all children and youth with emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges and their families have needed services and supports to grow up healthy and able to maximize their potential. With more than 120 chapters and state organizations across the country, the National Federation:

- Provides advocacy at the national level for the rights of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges and their families;
- Provides leadership and technical assistance to a nation-wide network of family run organizations; and
- Collaborates with family run and other child-serving organizations to transform mental health care in America.

The reputation of the IACP to promote policies, practices, and programs advancing sensitive, safe, and effective responses to all situations with high professional standards of conduct attracted the National Federation as a partner. The IACP is the worlds oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization of police executives, with over 20,000 members in over 89 different countries. IACP's leadership consists

of the operating chief executives of international, federal, state, and local agencies of all sizes.¹ The IACP has produced numerous best practices guides, such as one to help local law enforcement leaders fully ensure everyone's civil rights. They work to standardize best practices for police response to such issues as domestic violence, human trafficking, and violence against women. Addressing juvenile victimization, delinquency, and crime from a holistic perspective, the IACP has partnered with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide training and technical assistance across the U.S. as well as in Indian Country. They work to build multi-agency collaborations and have demonstrated effective cross-cultural partnerships. The National Federation identified the IACP to be the ideal partner with which to begin.

The IACP joined the efforts of the National Federation, committing staff, contractors, and other resources, to host a joint Roundtable discussion on September 25th and a joint working meeting on September 26th.

In addition, the U.S. Capitol Police Department volunteered to host the meeting, providing parking and supplies.

The Participants

The participants were staff and leadership from all three partner organizations mentioned above, plus leadership from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and experienced family leaders, experienced youth leaders, and law enforcement officers with demonstrated commitment to children and youth with mental health issues. Leadership from OJJDP, while unable to attend, have indicated their on-going interest in this partnership.

The Process

The process used in this Roundtable was one that has been used extensively by the IACP. Referred to as a "funnel processed dialogue", it began with broad discussion in which relationships, common ground, and clarification of the problem could be developed. Co-facilitators, representing family and law enforcement, briefly spoke to the diversity of perspectives represented at the table. The discussion was then narrowed to three specific questions:

1. What is a successful crisis intervention?
2. What are the core challenges and obstacles preventing that success?
3. What has worked well overcoming those challenges and obstacles in some communities?

With the assistance of the recorders and facilitators, group responses were synthesized and categorized and offered back to the group to prioritize. Finally, the dialogue was brought to a narrower focus (the spout end of the funnel) and specific recommendations were elicited for the partnering organizations to consider.

¹ www.theiacp.org

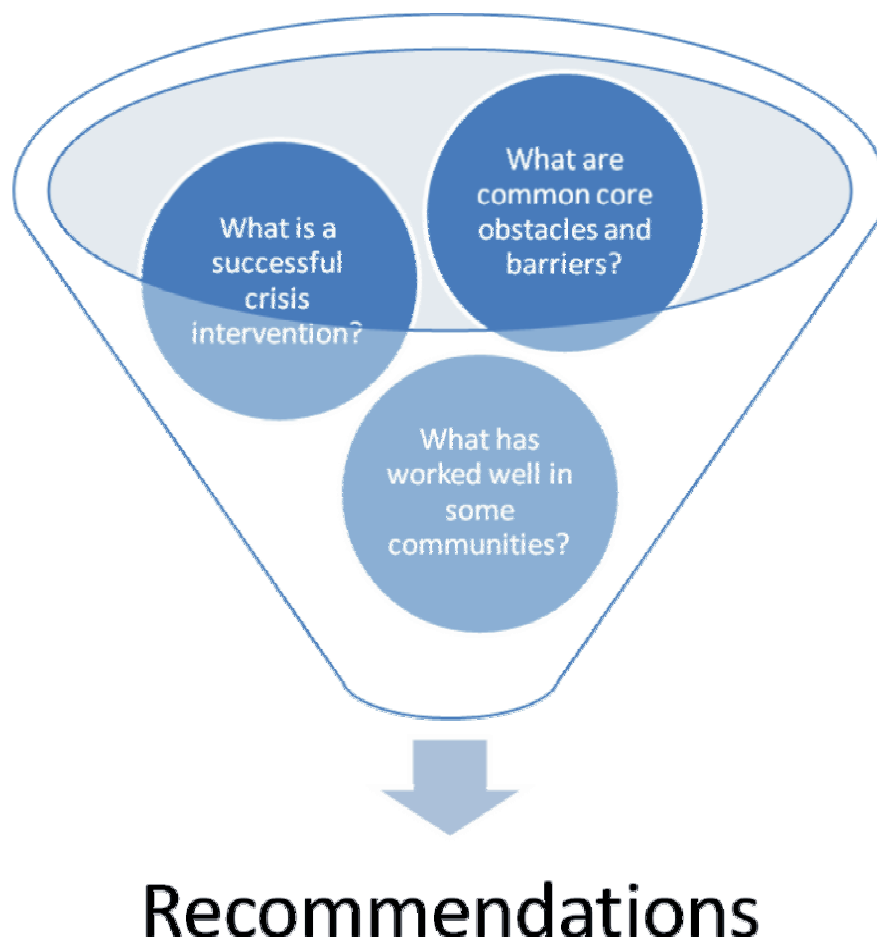


Figure 1: Roundtable Goals

What We Learned

Diverse Perspectives -- Same Goals

Law enforcement officers are generally trained to be action oriented, aiming to solve problems quickly. When called to respond to a situation, they have a certain amount of information and a particular set of tools at their disposal. They also have federal, state, local, and/or tribal regulations, laws, and policies that guide and mandate their actions.

Children and youth with mental health challenges and their families have been impacted by the stigma surrounding mental health and are often isolated. Police arriving at their door likely means more negative attention from the community, fear of losing control of their family's situation, and even more distrust and anger at the systems which have failed to help them.

One youth at the Roundtable told a sergeant seated next to him, "You show up and I don't know what you are going to do." The officer responded in kind, "And, I don't know what you are going to do."

The more we talked about how different we were, the more we learned we were alike.

More than one Roundtable participant remarked at the unexpected commonalities that existed around the table, specifically that each person was deeply committed to the safety and well being of all children and youth.

Families and youth spoke about the experiences and impact of stigma, discrimination and isolation in their lives. Police responded with empathy, saying they understood because they are so often labeled and characterized negatively when the public hears only horrific stories related to the inappropriate behavior by a few police officers. The media fails to cover the many positive contributions law enforcement provides to our communities.

Youth with mental health challenges, their families, and law enforcement officers share the experience of bias, misunderstanding, and the misperceptions of others.

Successful Crisis Intervention

The dialogue brought Roundtable participants to agree upon the following working definitions:

- *A crisis situation* is when there is significant risk to life, property, harmony, or safety beyond the control of the caretaker at home, in school, or on the street.
- *A successful crisis intervention* is a safe de-escalation that provides immediate access to a tailored, comprehensive approach addressing current issues, and includes follow-up to prevent or minimize future crisis.

Common Core Challenges and Obstacles

- Youth may not want to have their mental health diagnosis shared with others.
- A child or youth may not be able to explain that his or her behavior is related to a mental illness.
- Parents or other responsible adults may not know what information to share – or how to share it -- when the police arrive.
- The stigma surrounding mental illness prevents many children and youth from seeking the services they need. It keeps many families isolated from resources and people in their community. And, the stigma may result in some police officers not knowing that mental health challenges in children and youth are real and are not the fault of their parents.
- Bias, misunderstanding, and misinformation may result in mistrust and fear of law enforcement officers.
- Institutional racism and the overrepresentation of children, youth and adults of color in the justice systems may lead the general public to believe racism is prevalent among police.
- Mutual mistrust sometimes exists between children and youth with emotional, mental, or behavioral disorders, their families, and law enforcement.

- There are significant cultural differences amongst people in this country. Mental health issues manifest differently in different cultures and may, therefore, be misinterpreted by anyone not of the same culture.²
- Critical mental health resources do not exist in every community. Serious mental health workforce shortages exist, especially in rural communities. Only the largest metropolitan areas have specialized services such as mobile crisis units.
- Police are available and may respond to mental health crises around the clock however mental health services are usually available only during standard work hours of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- Youth and families may not know the mandates and policies law enforcement officers work under. Simply put, they may not know what police can and cannot do for them.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made during the afternoon discussion. They are preliminary in nature and do not include strategies.

Communication

- Address stigma related to mental illness: e.g. SAMHSA's "What a Difference a Friend Makes" campaign
- Address stigma related to law enforcement
- Develop guidelines for families and youth to communicate their needs to law enforcement

Partnerships

- Promote strategies for cross cultural experiences: e.g. Ride-along programs, Citizens Police Academies, family organization sponsored picnics for first responders
- Promote partnership strategies for families, youth, law enforcement, other first responders, child-serving agencies, and mental health service providers, including emergency rooms and crisis units: e.g. Cross-training and community mapping
- Develop model Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support sharing information and resources
- Develop partnerships top down: e.g. the IACP and National Federation model and promote working partnerships to state and local member associations or chapters of each
- Research and mine strategies from model partnerships: e.g. Anderson Police Department and Indiana Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.³

² One example of this is the many ways depression is expressed across cultures and gender. An adolescent white female may appear withdrawn and sad while an adolescent male of color may appear agitated and active.

³ Roundtable participants Sgt. Paul Boulware of the Anderson Police Department and Judi Turpen of the Indiana Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health represent a partnership that has grown to include multiple stakeholder groups and has developed strategies, policies, and products enhancing police encounters with children and youth with mental health issues.

Law Enforcement

- Adapt existing training related to crisis de-escalation for children and youth and promote their use: e.g. Verbal Judo, Crisis Intervention Training for academy and in-service training or roll-call training
- Develop training and certification programs on engagement of children and youth with mental health issues for police officers: e.g. Autism training program in Montgomery County, MD
- Develop user friendly tools for law enforcement: e.g. Police Pocket Guide developed by the Idaho System of Care; Manual for the Anderson Police Department developed by the Indiana Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Families and Youth

- Develop and promote local guidelines about when, why, and how to engage law enforcement: e.g. Include school resource officer in Individualized Education Planning
- Create forums for families and youth to engage law enforcement to learn what police can and cannot do to help: e.g. "Ask a Cop" workshop at the National Federation's annual conference provided by the Anderson Police Department and the Indiana Federation
- Learn local policies, such as those that may require police officers to make arrests if certain crimes have been committed
- Consider adapting adult consumer strategies: e.g. Advance Crisis Intervention Directives, I.D. bracelets used in Utah

Mental Health Services

- Identify gaps in services and develop strategies to overcome them at local, state, tribal and federal levels
- Develop appropriate crisis response teams: e.g. Mobile Crisis Unit in Hartford, CT
- Promote advanced crisis planning for all children, youth, and families, and engage first responders in that planning

Advocacy

- Examine local legislation and policies such as those that may mandate restraint during transportation in a police car
- Examine funding for flexibility to support partnership activities, cross trainings, and so on
- Seek funding for development, adaptation, and delivery of training for all partner groups
- Develop model policies that support positive police interventions with children and youth with mental health issues

Next Steps

The IACP, the National Federation, and many of the Roundtable participants intend to glean specific action steps out of this information, both in collaboration and in local endeavors.

National Federation's Annual Conference 2007

The National Federation's 2007 conference theme focuses on justice for children and youth with mental health issues and provides a prime opportunity for several next steps. This report will be disseminated to the nearly 1,000 conference participants from across the country. In addition, several workshops will be offered at the conference, including an interactive panel presentation during Policy Day, December 6th, by Roundtable members. A representative from the IACP's legislative department will offer an update on legislative issues related to law enforcement and mental health. The National Federation has invited the IACP President to help provide a call to action to all members of the National Federation to develop working relationships with law enforcement and other first responder groups.

Guide for Local Communities

The National Federation, in collaboration with the IACP, plans to develop a guide for local communities with "how to" steps for developing strategic partnerships between families, youth, and law enforcement. This guide is intended to provide localities with practical "how to" information for developing partnerships in their community between families, youth, and police, truant officers, sheriffs, and school resource officers that will ultimately result in safer, less traumatic encounters between children and youth in mental health crises and law enforcement.

September 25th Roundtable Participants

Marvin Alexander, Board Member, Youth M.O.V.E. National, North Miami Beach, FL

Pat Baker, Consultant and Member, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Denver, CO

Sergeant Paul Boulware, Criminal Investigations Division, Anderson, IN

Sheriff Timothy K. Cameron, St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office, Leonardtown, MD

Lieutenant Wendy Clark, United States Capitol Police and Fellow, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Alexandria, VA

Elaine Deck, Senior Program Manager, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Alexandria, VA

Sergeant Stafford Farmer-Lee, Alexandria Police Department, Alexandria, VA

John Firman, Research Center Director, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Alexandria, VA

Larke Nahme Huang, Senior Advisor on Children, Office of the Administrator, SAMHSA

Anna McLaughlin, Board Member, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Atlanta, GA

James McMahon, Deputy Executive Director, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Alexandria, VA

Peggy Nikkel, Executive Director, UPLIFT, Wyoming Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Casper, WY

Dwayne Orrick, Director of Public Safety, City Government of Cordele, Cordele, GA

Arthur Penn, Board Member, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Medford, NJ

Chief Katherine Perez, Bowie Police Department, Bowie, MD

Reyhan Reid, Youth Involvement Technical Assistance Provider, TA Partnership, Washington, D.C.

Kristine Saltarelli, Consultant, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Fairfax, VA

Elaine Slaton, Program Director, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Rockville, MD

Sandra Spencer, Executive Director, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Rockville, MD

Judi Turpen, Member, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and Indiana Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Anderson, IN