

New Jersey's Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan

Executive Summary

The New Jersey Task Force on
Child Abuse and Neglect

April 2002 – April 2005

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Introduction

Following the tragic and very public death of Faheem Williams, a great deal of focus has been placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of New Jersey's child welfare system. Recent developments in the Children's Rights lawsuit have further bolstered advocates hopes for meaningful change.

In order to fully realize a brighter future for New Jersey children, their families, and our society as a whole, we need to embark on prevention efforts at every level of the continuum. While we need to continue to invest in quality intervention, protection and treatment, the implementation of a comprehensive, community-based prevention plan will reduce the need for these services. If we are willing to make the initial investment in prevention efforts, the end results will be substantial long-term human and financial savings. Society as a whole will benefit when all children grow up in safe communities. Fostering local programs and building an infrastructure for stronger social relationships within communities creates a healthier environment for families and children. The New Jersey Statewide Prevention Plan seeks to do just that.

The following is a brief description of the Statewide Prevention Plan, how it was developed, its goals and objectives, and the next steps necessary to ensure its meaningful implementation.

Origin of the Prevention Plan

In the spring of 2001, a working group was charged with the responsibility of developing a statewide child abuse prevention plan, based upon the shared understanding of prevention developed through a series of symposia sponsored by The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglectⁱ, Rutgers University, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), and the Division of Youth and Family Services. Attendees from the public and private sectors represented every aspect of child abuse prevention services, including juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, substance abuse, education, health, mental health and foster care.

After agreeing on the vision for the state plan, the Prevention Subcommittee was charged with developing the plan and bringing it back to the Task Force for its approval. The plan was accepted on March 22, 2002 and is currently being implemented by both private and public entities.

The Prevention Plan

A comprehensive statewide effort to prevent the abuse and neglect of New Jersey's children starts with an integrated system of primary prevention programs and support for all families. It is supported by secondary prevention that targets at-risk or overburdened families, and tertiary prevention to prevent the recurrence of abuse. These services are most effectively delivered at the most local level, closest to the family's community.

Based on the premise that many people, agencies, and organizations in a community can contribute to strengthening and supporting families, the Prevention Plan promotes local planning and

ⁱ The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect was established by Public Law 1994, chapter 119 effective December 31, 1996 to study and develop recommendations regarding the most effective means of improving the quality and scope of child protective services provided or supported by State government. The Task Force has three subcommittees covering protection, prevention, and communication.

implementation, engages the public in understanding child abuse and neglect and what they can do to prevent it, strengthens service providers, develops local connections, and connects local efforts with State planning and support. Every community will articulate a continuum of primary and secondary prevention programs that meet the Standards for Prevention Programs adopted by the State of New Jersey.

New Jersey's Prevention Plan has four primary goals:

1. Further develop New Jersey's ability to prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs, decreasing the number of children requiring Protective Services.
2. Survey existing programs and resources that meet the Standards for Prevention Programs to identify strengths and areas of need to be utilized in the development of local planning.
3. Provide parents and social service providers with the means to locate local prevention programs and other relevant services.
4. Ensure that current and future public and private resources are used in the most effective and cost-efficient manner possible to provide a continuum of prevention services that meet the Standards.

Note: Due to the relationship of each goal to the others, each objective meets multiple goals and the objectives are listed in no particular order.

Objective 1 - Establish child abuse and neglect prevention program standards and encourage their usage through funding mandates and education and support to professionals. The Department of Human Services has copyrighted the Standards for Prevention Programs and they are being distributed nationally by Family Support America with a grant from Robert Wood Johnson.

Objective 2 - Empower County Commissions on Child Abuse and Missing Childrenⁱⁱ, or their designee to:

- ❑ Identify local resources and needs,
- ❑ Develop a community prevention plan that prioritizes local funding and service needs and sets benchmarks for progress,
- ❑ Coordinate county planning with state planning through the Office of Child Abuse Preventionⁱⁱⁱ,
- ❑ Make local resources known and accessible to the public and professionals, and
- ❑ Serve as a multi-disciplinary information exchange through the representation of all relevant community stakeholders.

Note: Implementation may be necessary on a pilot or phase-in basis.

Objective 3 - Enhance the Office of Child Abuse Prevention to reflect the expanded supportive role it will provide to County Commissions. Such support will include but not be limited to:

- ❑ Establishment of standards and guidelines,
- ❑ Monitoring of compliance and evaluation,
- ❑ Technical support,

ⁱⁱ County Commissions on Child Abuse and Missing children address the problems of child abuse and missing children by arranging for educational programs for parents and children, providing information concerning the available services in the county and coordinating the provision of services in the county.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Office of Child Abuse Prevention provides staff support for the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect and the Children's Trust Fund.

- ❑ Approval of county plans,
- ❑ Funding,
- ❑ Establishment of a reporting system;

In addition to:

- ❑ Disseminate of prevention program standards,
- ❑ Resource development,
- ❑ Advise the Governor's Cabinet on Children's Services,
- ❑ Coordinate child abuse prevention services and efforts across departments and disciplines, and
- ❑ Support to other efforts, current and future, intended to coordinate State services for children and families.

Objective 4 - Develop and implement a communication strategy, involving public and private entities, to engage and educate the public, utilizing the slogan "A Person Who Cares Can Prevent Child Abuse".

Objective 5 - Increase funding for child abuse and neglect prevention through both increased State funding for prevention and technical assistance to County Commissions on Missing and Abused Children, their designees, and private entities.

Action Steps

The Office of Child Abuse Prevention and the Prevention Subcommittee of the Task Force have established detailed strategies for attaining the Prevention Plan's objectives and reviews their progress monthly. Members of the subcommittee actively engage in the implementation of the Prevention Plan, bringing their agencies' resources to bear on it success. However, several key strategies require the support of the Department of Human Services, the Executive and the Legislature.

- ❑ Provide significant funding for the County Commissions on Missing and Abused Children, or their designee, the Children's Trust Fund, and the Office of Child Abuse Prevention.
- ❑ Increased funding for child abuse and neglect prevention programs to respond to locally identified needs.
- ❑ Ensure that prevention is a focus of any State plan to address issues in the child welfare system.

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