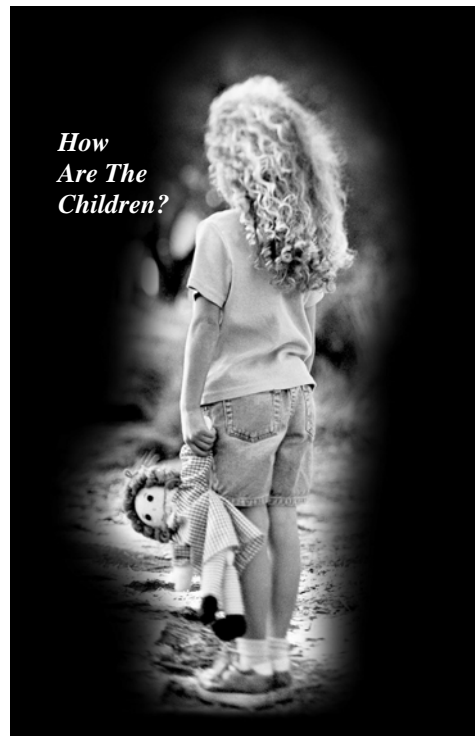


A Response to Child Abuse in Mesa County



Ensuring that individuals, agencies, organizations, partnerships and the community have the skills and knowledge needed to prevent child abuse and neglect in Mesa County.



Town Hall Meeting

A Response to Child Abuse in Mesa County

Background

Between January of 2006 and June of 2007, just 18 short months, six Mesa County children died as a result of child abuse or neglect. All of them were under the age of three. Three of them were beaten to death. The citizens of Mesa County believe this is completely unacceptable. As upsetting as it is when a child dies from abuse, it is perhaps even more upsetting to think about the children that must continue to live in abusive and neglectful homes.

Study after study shows a direct connection between child abuse and most other social problems. In the vast majority of cases of juvenile delinquency, high school drop outs, drug and alcohol addiction, and adults in the criminal justice system, there is a clear connection to a history of child abuse or neglect. If we focus on preventing child abuse, our children's quality of life could be greatly improved and billions of tax dollars could be saved in criminal justice and welfare services.

Child abuse is ugly and people don't want to look at it or think about it. But our children are being abused all around us. We can't turn our heads away any longer.

With a goal that "Not One More" child should die from abuse, Mesa County hosted a Town Hall meeting on Child Abuse in October of 2007. Local leaders and citizens from all across Mesa County came together to identify the causes of child abuse in our community. Several critical areas of concern and opportunities for improvement were identified and citizens self selected into breakout groups in order to begin the process of developing a strategic plan. Goals and objectives were identified at the Town Hall meeting and were further refined and defined through several follow up meetings. This paper documents those goals and objectives.

Plan

The work of this Child Abuse Prevention Initiative will be included in the *Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families*. The work will be carried out through four ongoing committees or work groups and an Executive Committee composed of the committee chairs and other key individuals. The Co-Chairs of the Executive Committee are:

Treva Houck, DHS Child Welfare Division Director	248-2809 treva.houck@mesacounty.us
Donna Bennett, Community Member	639-2224 silverislet@bresnan.net
Deb Eisemann, DHS Family Preservation Program	256-2412 deb.eisemann@mesacounty.us
Janet Rowland, Mesa County Commissioner	244-1606 janet.rowland@mesacounty.us

The Executive Committee meets the first Thursday of each month at 4:30 pm at the Old Courthouse-544 Rood Ave, in Training Room B.

The four committees, their goals, their co-chairs and meeting times are documented in this paper. In order to avoid duplication of services the goals of this initiative will not involve working directly with families, but rather we will facilitate the development of new services or increase the capacity of existing services through existing agencies and organizations. For individuals who wish to be more involved and work directly with families, many opportunities will be identified and shared through the Community Outreach Committee.



Education

Increase capacity of parent education to serve all caregivers of children in Mesa County.

Background

Mesa County is fortunate to have parenting classes provided by several agencies in the community. A comprehensive list of ongoing classes is maintained through InfoLine and updated quarterly. A copy of that list can be obtained by calling 244-8400 or e-mailing info@mesacounty.us

However those that could benefit most from those classes either don't know about them or choose not to access them. Additionally there are gaps in some types of classes such as those for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, or basic conflict management skills training. And in other cases there are long waiting lists, such as those for parenting classes for teens or in-home parent training.

One concern that was raised at the Town Hall meeting was the need for a place that was safe and non-threatening from which parents and other caregivers could access parent education or other services. Another suggestion that was raised was to consider ways to provide parents with information other than the traditional classroom setting. Alternative venues that were suggested included a MySpace page, other web based methods or television and radio. One suggestion that perhaps offered the most opportunity was to insure that all parents of newborns receive parent information and referrals for other services before ever leaving the hospital.

Opportunities

- 1- Increase parenting information and referrals for family support for all parents of newborns through discharge planning at the hospital.
- 2- Develop parent education for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.
- 3- Increase capacity of parenting and/or family classes for teens.
- 4- Increase capacity for teaching conflict resolution skills.
- 5- Create a safe and non-threatening place for families to access help and support.

Contact Information

This workgroup is co-chaired by Vicki Snook and Gunnison Hunt. For more information call Gunnison at 210-1576 or or e-mail gunngreenfield@yahoo.com



Family Support

Services will be in place to support families in order to avoid reaching a crisis point.

Background

One barrier that seemed to reach across all areas discussed at the Town Hall meeting was public awareness of services available to support children and families. As with parent education, Mesa County is also blessed with a variety of services to support struggling families. However, the families that need help the most are often not aware of the services. Additionally, some families don't reach out for help until they are at their breaking point, and at that time, they need immediate help.

Suggestions for addressing these issues included a parent support line and a place for parents to temporarily drop off their children at the point of a crisis. Currently in Colorado there is a Parent Help Line that is available Monday through Friday 8 am to 10pm through Families First. This line has a toll free number and could be available to Mesa County families. This would be a good place to start with the ultimate goal of a "hot-line" that would be available 24 hours a day.

For ongoing family support that seeks to prevent a crisis situation from arising in the first place, home visitation programs were identified as a great tool. There are several programs currently offered through the Mesa County Health Department and Hilltop, but there are waiting lists. Seeking out ways to increase capacity, either through volunteers or additional funding for paid staff was identified as a good opportunity.

Opportunities

1. Work with the Community Outreach committee to increase public awareness about services currently available for family support
2. Increase the capacity of existing statewide parent "warm line" and consider development of a local parent crisis hotline for stressed parents and caregivers.
3. Develop a short term crisis nursery for over stressed and at risk parents and caregivers.
4. Increase capacity for home visitation programs such as those offered by the Nurse Family Partnership and Families First.

Contact Information

This workgroup is co-chaired by Carrie Over and Robin Ragland. For more information call Carrie at 245-1616 or e-mail cover@arielcpa.org.



Community Outreach

Develop a comprehensive communication plan to support the efforts of child abuse prevention.

Background

One of the issues that was heard repeatedly at the Town Hall meeting was a need to insure the community at large is informed about child abuse and neglect. The specific areas identified ranged from how to identify and report abuse and what happens after a report, to how to know what services are available to support families and how citizens can get involved and volunteer for or donate to various non profit agencies.

The Mesa County Meth Taskforce's Drug Endangered Children's (DEC) Committee also identified the need to inform the public about how to identify and report child abuse as a priority and in fact included this goal in their 2008 Strategic Plan. DEC has published a booklet that provides clear information on this very subject and would be a good tool to use to inform the public. DEC is also working on producing a TV commercial, to encourage the general public to be aware of children who are abused or neglected and to report it. The Community Outreach Committee would do well to partner their efforts with DEC when working to inform the general public and professionals who are mandated reporters.

With respect to informing people how they can volunteer with agencies that support families and prevent child abuse, the Community Outreach Committee should partner with the Human Services Council, DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies), and the Partnership for Children and Families.

Opportunities

1. Develop a comprehensive communication plan that will inform the public about:
 - How to identify and report child abuse;
 - What happens after child abuse or neglect is reported;
 - Services that are available to support families;
 - What individuals can do to prevent child abuse; and
 - How people can volunteer for agencies that support families and prevent child abuse
2. Work with Systems Committee to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to educate professionals about how to better recognize and report child abuse or neglect. This effort would improve communication between the reporting parties and DHS and improve the understanding of the child protection system.

Contact Information

This workgroup is co-chaired by Wendy Duak, Marty Garvey, Amalia Medina and Jason Bartholomew. For more information call AmaLia at 245-7145 or e-mail at

AmaLiam@bresnan.net



Systems

Identify and resolve barriers to communication pathways between agencies / systems.

Background

One of the challenges identified at the Town Hall meeting was communication between all agencies that work with children and families. Of specific importance was communication between Child Protective Services and all other agencies, especially those who make reports to the Child Protection Hotline.

The specific needs in this area were far too numerous and broad reaching to identify completely in a 45 minute breakout session. Therefore the first goal for this group is to convene a meeting of all the agencies that serve children and families in order to better identify challenges, obstacles and opportunities.

Opportunities

1. Work with Community Outreach to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to educate professionals about how to recognize and report child abuse or neglect. In doing so, improve communication between the reporting parties and DHS and an understanding of the child protection system.
2. Convene agency leaders to define and prioritize challenges and opportunities.
3. Define a clear communication pathway across all agencies for cases involving children who have been or are at risk of being abused and neglected.

Contact Information

This workgroup is co-chaired by Jody Tate and Pam Stumpf. For more information call Jody at 640-2976 or e-mail at jodytate@mesa.k12.co.us