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Child Abuse Hotline Team Summary and Recommendations March 2012

Team Overview

The Child Abuse Hotline fields an average of 138,000 calls each year. Approximately 75,000 of those calls will require an interview and assessment by a Child Protective Services (CPS) Specialist at the Hotline and 35,500 will become a report that must be investigated by a CPS Specialist (investigator) in the field. Currently, the Hotline does not have the capacity to answer all calls in a timely manner causing wait times and abandonment rates to increase. A team was formed to review feedback from key customers of both the documentation and the call, review workflows, and recommend efficiency ideas that would allow the Hotline to increase capacity.

The ideas contained within this report would increase capacity by over 20% annually, recapturing nearly 30,000 work hours for Hotline Specialists during both regular and peak volume. These process changes should not only reduce wait times and abandonment rates, but also improve the reporting and transition from Hotline to field staff. The changes also save investigator time in the field by over 94,000 hours by reducing the number of non-safety, non-risk reports that require a full investigation.

While the core work of the Hotline remains the same, the recommendations contained within are a departure from traditional call center management. These ideas do not focus on scheduling or adding lines as much as changing how the core work is accomplished to meet customer needs and regain the capacity to take calls and spend adequate time assessing allegations of child maltreatment. This report is presented to the team's sponsors for review and final approval of some or all of the ideas in order for the team to begin action planning.

The Interview and Assessment

The vast majority of CPS' first contact of alleged abuse comes in the form of a call to the Hotline. Each day approximately 300 calls are answered by Specialists who interview the caller for vital information, then assess the situation to determine if a report meets the statutory criteria for a CPS report, and complete the required documentation. Each interview lasts approximately 30 minutes with the assessment and documentation requiring an additional 30 minutes.

The interview is guided by a questionnaire designed to solicit the maximum amount of information needed to assess the current risk and safety factors, and also to provide data to the investigators who may have to meet with all the parties involved. Unfortunately, many callers do not possess the information being requested, while others have a long history with the family (such as a grandparent) and want to share more than the requested information. This wide range of information to be gathered often leads to frustration trying to complete the documentation and balancing the amount of time on the phone.

The type of assessment and volume of documentation is the same for each call as well. A call that is a clear CPS report and requires an investigation takes as long to complete as a call that is a clear non-report and requires no further action. The need to document the same amount of information stems from the knowledge that many times we have multiple calls concerning an individual or family and prefer to have some record of alleged abuse, even if the incident does not meet the legislative standard of abuse.

Because the interview and assessment require an hour of work, and the volume of calls has increased more than the Hotline's capacity, many callers end up holding for a Specialist or abandoning the call to try back at a time more convenient for them. This is particularly an issue for mandatory reporters including law enforcement, hospitals and schools where time is not always available to wait on hold. Mandatory reporters make up 23,000, or 65%, of the total calls taken. With such a large portion of abuse allegations coming from these sources, making the Hotline convenient for them has become a priority.

During the interview and assessment, many calls meet the legal definition requiring an investigation, but have no current risk or safety threat associated. For example, an expecting mother who tells her physician that she has had marijuana exposure is a clear risk and as a mandatory reporter the hospital is required to report the findings, even if the mother explains it was prior to her knowledge of the pregnancy and has had zero exposure since. An investigation only validates what the doctor already reported, but by statute a report is required and thus a full investigation is completed. Based on the Investigation Team report, we know that completing a full investigation takes an average of 22 hours of actual work time which amounts to between 178 to 203 days of elapsed time

to complete. At the current volume of receiving 2 to 5 new reports requiring investigation each week, investigators are able to close just one. Each week they receive a new workload, they fall further behind in their ability to close the report properly. It is estimated that annually, nearly 7,000 of the 35,000 reports have no present risk and safety threat.

The team developed 5 key ideas to improve efficiency during the interview and assessment portion of the process.

IDEA 1: Provide improved online reporting options for mandatory reporters reporting allegations and non-emergency calls. A robust, secure, easy to use, online reporting mechanism for mandatory reporters could gather information quickly and be available to mandatory reporters on their time schedule. The assessment would still have to be done, but if half of the mandatory reports could come in online, over 5,500 phone hours could be saved and free up lines for non-mandatory callers and mandatory callers without access to the internet or with calls that require immediate intervention.

Time Savings: 5,500 hours

IDEA 2: Develop multiple scripts for various reporting groups. Many of these groups cannot complete the entire current questionnaire, or may have other types of information that would benefit the assessment and/or the investigator. Specific questionnaires can both cut phone time, but also reduce the frustration of reporters being asked questions they have little chance of answering. Since many calls may start simple and turn complex, the team was uncomfortable compiling time savings with this idea, but felt the convenience to various reporting groups and the ability to lessen the time on many calls made this worth recommending.

Total time savings: Unknown.

IDEA 3: Change the written report that goes from the Hotline to the field. The information in the current report format is not as useful to the field as previous versions and it is more time consuming for Hotline staff to complete. By revisiting the previous version of the report, or adapting the report to match the new investigation needs based on the Comprehensive Child Safety and Risk Assessment (CSRA) currently being piloted in offices, it is estimated we can cut the time to produce the reports from 30 minutes to 15 minutes.

Total time savings: 7,500 hours

IDEA 4: Simplify the documentation for those calls that do not meet the statutory criteria for a CPS report and/or are non-jurisdiction reports. Once the Hotline assessment identifies a call as a non-report, the documentation can be drastically simplified to include the purpose of the call and just the most basic

information. This abbreviated documentation will continue to capture the data desired for potential future use by CPS. Instead of the current 30 minutes needed today, it is estimated the key information can be captured in 10 minutes for approximately 39,500 non-reports

Total time savings: 6,300 hours

IDEA 5: Hotline Specialist processes reports that meet the criteria for an Alternative Investigation. Of the reports taken by the Hotline, approximately 6,720 will fall into this category. When identified, these reports could be dispositioned using an Alternative Investigation at the time of the call. When a Hotline Specialist, who meets the same minimum qualifications as a CPS investigator, recognizes that an investigation by a CPS investigator in the field does not need to be completed and no safety concern exists, the Hotline Specialist can close the report after first contact. This idea has no time savings to the Hotline, but significant savings to the field.

Total time savings: 94,080 hours to Investigators in the field.

General Operations

While the bulk of the Hotline revolves around the calls, there are several other general operation areas that keep Specialists from the phone. While duties such as contacting investigators with new communications, processing mail, and reviewing written reports from mandatory reporters are vital to maintain the integrity of the process, they deprive the Specialists of capacity to take more calls.

Supervisors are also stretched thin reviewing the work of the Quality Assurance section and working with Specialists on more difficult assessments. Supervisors have been so occupied with these functions that routine assessments and analysis of schedules and procedures give way to more pressing matters.

Many of the recommendations in this section are designed to save time and return capacity to the more core functions of the Hotline. Those ideas that do not have a time savings associated with them generally have a convenience benefit outlined in the description.

IDEA 6: Open access to all Hotline communication. By providing CPS investigators and supervisors open and easy access to hotline communications, Hotline Specialists can save time updating the field on changes.

Total time savings: 240 hours

IDEA 7: Eliminate the second review of the Quality Assurance section. Currently Hotline supervisors conduct a second review of reports after a QA Specialist has

overturned a Hotline Specialist's decision on how a particular call was handled. While less than 1% of decisions are overturned, nearly 90% of those are upheld by the supervisor. Instead of holding the process up while the second review is completed, supervisors could conduct post review decisions after QA has processed the change and the report is transferred to the field.

Total time savings: 960 Supervisor hours

IDEA 8: Empower administrative staff to process mail. Instead of pulling a Hotline Specialist off the phone to process mail, train administrative staff to process much of the incoming mail. While not all current administrative staff may have the needed skills, an open position could be used to hire staff with the needed skill level and responsibilities.

Total time savings: 1,125 hours

IDEA 9: Eliminate the need for written reports from mandatory reporters. Current law requires mandatory reporters to follow up with their phone calls with a written report within 72 hours. Because these written reports have already been called in, they rarely add benefit to the process and require Hotline Specialist time to review and assess. Many mandatory reporters do not currently send in the written report, or are inconsistent in the format and content of what is sent, and tracking down non-compliance would only add more time to the process. While the savings are significant, this would require a law change to enact.

Total time savings: 1,125 Specialist hours, 750 investigator hours, 750 hotline administrative hours, and 3,750 mandatory reporter hours

IDEA 10: Provide alternative work schedules for peak times. Today when call volume surpasses Specialist time and hold times increase, the Hotline has no mechanism to add capacity. This idea would enable supervisors to use remote part time or non-scheduled Specialists to answer calls from the queue until hold times are reduced to an acceptable level. While there are no hours saved for the Specialist, there is potential to reduce wait times during peaks.

Total time savings: Unknown

IDEA 11: Provide Hotline training to the Field. During the team process, staff from both areas were enlightened to the current practices being done at the Hotline and in the field. These learning moments could be recreated in a training to help bridge the gap between these two critical areas in the process

Total time savings: Unknown

IDEA 12: Revise the narrative communication types. By simplifying the number of communication types training for Specialist would be more succinct and make their work easier.

Total time savings: Unknown

IDEA 13: CHILDS Enhancements There are 5 enhancements to the CHILDS system that would improve the Hotline process and help recoup the lost capacity.

1. Allow search by name, date of birth, and address. These improved search options would cut the time needed by Specialist to do research.
2. Add sound-a-likes to name search. So many of the family names being searched have one off spellings. Currently, without the sound-a-like option Specialists feel they are missing people that are most likely in the system.
3. Provide the field alerts for second source and other communications. The alert would free up Specialist time while at the same time assuring investigators were privy to new communication.
4. Link all communication to the case regardless of when the report is dispositioned.
5. Simplify prior history at the end of reports. Currently the amount of paper printed is wasteful and contains information that is not needed by any Specialist or investigator.

Total time savings: 7,200 hours

Conclusion

The ideas contained in this summary save a total of 28,990 hours of work time for Hotline Specialists and supervisors and reduces time in the field by 94,830 hours. These hours represent building increased capacity for the Hotline and the CPS staff in the field to help provide some support for the current workload.

If approved these recommendations should reduce wait times and dropped calls and improve the handoff between the Hotline and the Field. The freed up time not only allows Specialists to answer more calls without long hold times, it gives Specialists the time to dedicate to more complex interviews and assessments. .

These ideas are submitted for your review and the team is available to discuss any of the recommendations at your convenience.