

Arizona's Children's Justice Act Task Force  
2021 Three-Year Assessment

## **Overview of Arizona's CJA Task Force**

The Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment (CSFE) was established in July 2015 through Executive Order 2015-08. The Council is administered by the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family (GOYFF) as a multi-disciplinary body that is designed to align, leverage, and coordinate faith-based and community resources to address challenges faced by vulnerable children and families within the child welfare system. The Council has also focused on reducing and preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and ensuring that ACEs prevention and trauma-informed care are the standard for supporting children across Arizona. The Council is comprised of individuals appointed by the governor and consists of several workgroups that meet regularly to address community needs and systemic challenges with the purpose of identifying best practices and providing evidence-based solutions that further facilitate what is outlined in the body's Executive Order. In February 2020, the governor signed Executive Order 2020-05 to include the Children's Justice Task Force as a subgroup of the Council. The Task Force was formerly associated with the Arizona Juvenile Justice Commission.

The Arizona Children's Justice Task Force is responsible for conducting a comprehensive review of the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and to make training and policy recommendations in each of the three categories in CAPTA Section 107(e)(1). The Task Force is also responsible for the development of a three-year plan that addresses training and policy recommendations in the following three areas:

1. Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, in a manner which reduces the additional trauma to the child victim and the victim's family and which also ensures procedural fairness to the accused;
2. Experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches and techniques which may improve the prompt and successful resolution of civil and criminal court proceedings or enhance the effectiveness of judicial and administrative action in child abuse and neglect cases, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, including the enhancement of performance of court-appointed attorneys and guardians ad litem for children, and which also ensure procedural fairness to the accused; and
3. Reform of State laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures to provide comprehensive protection for children from abuse, including sexual abuse and exploitation, while ensuring fairness to all affected persons.

The development of a three-year assessment was discussed with the Task Force, and staff were instructed to move forward with completing this task.

## **Overview of 2018 CJA Assessment**

In 2018, the Arizona Juvenile Justice Commission conducted a comprehensive review of the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and made training and policy recommendations in each of the three categories in Section 107(e)(1). The approach involved two main components. The first phase was the distribution of a survey to the state's six Children's Justice Coordinators (CJCs). Overall, the 2018 survey responses demonstrated that protocols are crucial for effective collaboration and additional buy-in was needed in some areas to improve communication and expedient case processing. The information provided by the CJCs presented the Task Force with helpful feedback to develop recommendations that addressed joint-investigations and county-wide collaboration. The second phase involved a Task Force planning retreat, which hosted two presentations. Representatives from the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) and the Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network (ACFAN) provided updates on their agencies' involvement with the state's handling of child abuse and neglect cases, including criminal conduct cases. Each presentation provided a comprehensive overview of their efforts to increase effectiveness by implementing measures that have led to improved outcomes and collaboration.

The 2018 recommendations are still relevant today and will continue to be used to guide future work that improves the state's response to child abuse and neglect. The Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family (GOYFF) oversees the Children's Justice Task Force and monitors the state's progress related to the recommendations included in the 2018 Three-Year Assessment report. Highlights that demonstrate accomplishments made include, but are not limited to:

**Child and Family Advocacy Centers:** The Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network (ACFAN) has produced guidelines based on the National Children's Alliance (NCA) to aid the development and maintenance of multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) throughout the state. Due to different jurisdictions having various approaches for the coordination and administration of MDTs in their counties, this information is meant to provide basic guidelines on successful implementation. Since 2018, the number of Child and/or Family Advocacy Centers in Arizona has grown from 19 to 24 in 2021. Additionally, through support provided, the number of child and family advocacy centers that are accredited by the National Children's Alliance (NCA) continues to increase throughout the state. The Children's Justice Task Force will continue to serve a supportive role in aiding the development of county-specific protocols as requested, and provide technical assistance in collaboration with ACFAN to address needs. **[Recommendations 1, 3, and 6]**

**Children's Justice Trainings and Advanced Forensic Interview Training:** The Arizona's Children's Justice Training and Advanced Forensic Interview Training programs were established with a subcontract to a not-for-profit training provider, Prevent Child Abuse Arizona, Inc. (PCAA). PCAA, in collaboration with experts in relevant fields, evidence-based practice

studies, and child abuse service providers, established multiple child abuse awareness, investigation, and prosecution centric trainings. These trainings are provided upon request and free of charge to Arizona's law enforcement, child welfare professionals, and court organizations, largely focused on rural counties. Since 2018, PCAA has doubled the number of rural counties in Arizona that receive these trainings. The Advanced Forensic Interview Training (AFIT) is a four-day (32 hour) experiential course that teaches investigators how to forensically interview both children and adults. It is open to DCS investigators, detectives, designated forensic interviewers, tribal CPS, and prosecuting attorneys. **[Recommendations 2 and 4]**

**Children's Justice Coordinator Symposium:** In 2018, the Arizona Juvenile Justice Commission established a Children's Justice Committee that hosted a one-day training event targeting Children's Justice Coordinators (CJCs) and included representatives from agencies involved in child abuse investigations. This symposium brought together teams, along with advocacy center directors, to learn best practices on how to lead MDTs, receive training that CJCs offer to their communities, and other practical topics that will improve MDT performance and build important relationships between partnering agencies. **[Recommendation 5 and 2]**

### **Overview 2021 Three-Year Assessment Process**

The approach used for developing the 2021 assessment involved two main components. The first was the distribution of a statewide assessment survey to child welfare agencies, police departments, county attorney's offices, child and family advocacy centers, and private organizations involved in child abuse and neglect cases (see Attachment F). The survey was created through a review of previous Arizona CJA assessments used and examples from other states' child welfare assessments. Those solicited have direct experience and knowledge regarding the status of joint-investigations, the effectiveness of the MDTs around the state, and the judicial handling of cases. The survey was completed and returned by 461 stakeholders. The information extracted was used to develop recommendations and priority areas for the current report.

Responses to the survey indicate:

- Greater access to training opportunities is needed in both urban and rural communities
- Consistent communication between multidisciplinary team members fosters positive and productive working relationships
- Clearly written and up to date joint-investigation protocols are helpful for facilitating well-coordinated and successful handling of cases that decrease retraumatization
- Increased collaboration between law enforcement and DCS is desired

Overall, the survey responses demonstrate that county protocols are crucial for effective collaboration and additional buy-in is needed in some areas to improve training and communication for expedient case processing. The information provided by the survey presented the Task Force with helpful feedback to develop recommendations that address joint-investigations, county-wide collaboration, and training.

The second phase involved presentations to the Task Force at monthly meetings. Two key presentations were from the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) and the Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network (ACFAN). Both presentations provided updates on their agencies' involvement with the state's handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Each presentation provided a comprehensive overview of their current and planned future efforts to increase effectiveness by implementing measures that have led to improved outcomes and collaboration.

Highlights from the DCS presentations include:

- *Impact of OCWI:* The Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) within DCS expanded efforts to increase capacity by solely responding to reports and handling all aspects of criminal conduct cases and advancing training for law enforcement officers and DCS workers to increase collaboration. In addition, OCWI has improved DCS intervention options based on recent legislation that OCWI follows and different leveled protocols based on severity of cases. OCWI also assists field staff in locating missing and potentially endangered children with a high success rate.
- *Mandatory Reporter Training Curriculum:* In 2019, DCS employed a Curriculum Development Specialist to address reports DCS has received that community members and mandated reporters are not properly trained. These reports have indicated that there are inconsistencies in mandatory reporter training throughout the state and have led DCS to begin standardizing training offered by the state.

The Executive Director of ACFAN provided a presentation on the current status of the Child and Family Advocacy Centers in Arizona. ACFAN supports the establishment, sustainability and improvement of child and family advocacy centers throughout the state. They also promote a standardized, coordinated multi-disciplinary response to victims of child abuse, sexual assault, and family violence. Highlights of the presentation include:

- *Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Centers:* Child and family advocacy centers provide support for victims in a one-stop shop environment. These utilization centers are a best practice model for responding to allegations of physical and sexual abuse because it reduces the amount of trauma experienced by victims by minimizing the number of people the victim must disclose to. In addition, advocacy centers house representatives

from several disciplines (i.e., counselors, law enforcement, doctors, and nurses) to more efficiently address victims' needs, saving time and travel to meet with them separately. The presentation noted that there are currently 24 child or family advocacy centers in Arizona, with plans for additional centers to be opening in the next year.

- *Multi-Disciplinary Teams:* Multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) are utilized to staff challenging child abuse cases and include representation from many disciplines and agencies associated with the investigation. This team typically includes law enforcement, prosecution, medical, mental health, advocacy, and DCS representation. MDTs are an essential component of child abuse investigations within the state, not only for addressing difficult cases, but for formulating healthy working relationships between independent agencies that leads to sustainable and efficient teamwork.
- *Challenges in training and protocol management:* Success at advocacy centers relies on having appropriate resources available for victims, including mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, and properly trained representation for MDTs. Arizona's FACs have experienced challenges regarding training staff and joint-investigation protocol management.

Both presentations included data that described the current status of child abuse and neglect investigations through statistical achievements. The data compiled by DCS demonstrated reduced caseloads for DCS workers, reduced open child abuse and neglect reports, increased safety assessment completion, and increased achievement of desired response times to reports of suspected abuse. Data provided by ACFAN included the 2019 Arizona statistical report, which accounts for demographic information on the number of children served by advocacy centers based on age, race, and gender of victims; type of abuse reported by the victims; and type of services received (i.e., medical, counseling, and forensic interviewing).

### **Arizona's CJA Task Force Recommendations**

During monthly Task Force meetings, members discussed the information presented, reviewed the prior recommendations, and assessed survey responses from the 2021 assessment to determine recommendations for 2021-2024. The Task Force decided to focus on the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** Build a statewide, multidisciplinary, annual symposium to promote the exchange of ideas, build a professional network, and coordinate training opportunities. [Section 107(e)(1) (A) & (B)]

**Recommendation 2:** Develop guidelines for county joint-investigation protocols and communicate them to relevant parties in each county, encouraging revisions and determining technical assistance where needed. [Section 107(e)(1)(A)&(C)]

**Recommendation 3:** Support enhanced, standardized and statewide Mandatory Reporter Training to ensure that all appropriate personnel receive adequate and consistent training needed for reporting allegations of child abuse or neglect. [Section 107(e)(1)(A), (B) & (C)]

**Recommendation 4:** Continue to sustain and strengthen existing resources for MDTs and MRTs throughout the state, including child or family advocacy centers, children's justice coordinators, the Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network, and the Department of Child Safety to increase efficiency of investigations and improve services to victims.. [Section 107(e)(1)(A) & (C)]

### **Incorporation of New Recommendations**

Over the next three years, the Children's Justice Task Force will provide oversight for the work of the Children's Justice Act in Arizona. The Task Force will delegate responsibilities for carrying out activities that address the 2021-2024 recommendations. The Task Force, with support from the GOYFF Children's Justice Act (CJA) program administrator, will be charged with developing and implementing strategies that help improve the state's coordinated response to child abuse and neglect. Through collaboration between the Task Force, GOYFF, ACFAN, and other child safety agencies, professionals, and advocates, the state will further enhance systems to attain improved outcomes for children and families by leading the work on the following tasks:

**Children's Justice Symposium:** The Children's Justice Task Force will work with the GOYFF CJA program administrator to plan and conduct a networking and training event in 2022 for the state's Children's Justice Coordinators (CJCs) and relevant professionals. The 2021 survey provided to Children's Justice Coordinators provided a diverse list of ideas and focus areas. The Task Force will administer additional surveys to solicit suggestions from other staff and agencies to ensure a wide range of subject matter for the various disciplines in attendance. The event will also provide a forum for CJCs to network and foster relationships that are invaluable to the sustainability of MDTs. In addition, it will provide an opportunity for advocacy center directors and CJC supervisors to receive training to support their staff. [Recommendations 1 and 4]

**Task Force/ACFAN Collaboration:** The Children's Justice Task Force will maintain its collaboration with ACFAN to support counties' efforts to establish and/or maintain effective MDTs by providing needed training and technical assistance. The Task Force will also work to encourage counties to revise joint-investigation protocols and develop specific procedural recommendations that promote high-quality standards and practical data collection and practice. In addition, the Task Force will work with ACFAN to develop training topics specific to MDTs, MRTs, and county protocols to ensure stakeholders are routinely educated on best practice. Finally, GOYFF, ACFAN, and the Task Force will problem-solve to find solutions for

jurisdictions that experience substandard collaboration. These entities will utilize available resources to work with targeted sites to determine those barriers that hinder seamless agency collaboration. Jurisdictions that have reported success in cross-agency communication and participation will be requested to provide insight and share strategies that could be replicated in other locations. **[Recommendation 1, 2 and 4]**

**Arizona CJA Funding Solicitation:** GOYFF will provide funding opportunities to support the Task Force's 2021 recommendations. Arizona's CJA funding has consistently supported the coordination of MDTs in several counties, in addition to training child abuse and sexual assault investigators, dedicated forensic interviewers, prosecutors, and other specialists. This has successfully helped various jurisdictions across the state establish and maintain consistent collaborative efforts. In 2022, the state will release a solicitation that addresses these recommendations. GOYFF will work with the Task Force to explore additional incentives that will promote sustainability, such as assurances that MDTs and MRTs will be consistently maintained with a contingency plan for continuing efforts in the event of staff changes or turnover. **[Recommendation 3 and 4]**

**County Joint-Investigation Protocol Review:** The Children's Justice Task Force will assume the role of multi-disciplinary protocol oversight to provide support and guidance to counties for revising, establishing, and sustaining effective joint-investigation protocols. The Task Force will consistently engage with local MDT stakeholders, including advocacy center representation and ACFAN, to conduct the regular review of county-specific protocols, offer technical assistance, and promote best practices. Through the collaboration between ACFAN and the Task Force, recommendations for enhancing county protocols will be developed and disseminated to the counties. **[Recommendation 2 and 4]**