



- Training for professionals
- Support for families
- Education for communities

Better Protection for PA's Children: Increasing the Quantity and Quality of Reports to Child Protective Services

Presenting Problem:

Events of the last year, including the unprecedented and exciting formation of the Task Force on Child Protection has shown us very clearly that our *challenge remains getting reports from those who work with children and have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse to the child welfare system* as the primary step to increasing child protection efforts in Pennsylvania. It is the action of placing a call to ChildLine that sounds the alarm for a child who is not safe in their environment.

Though mandated reporters of child abuse per PA's Child Protective Services Law continue to make the largest number of all referrals for substantiated reports (78% in 2011 per the Department of Public Welfare's 2011 Annual Child Abuse Report) we know that many children remain in harm's way because reports are not made. Realizing that there are many changes to both policy and practice that would enhance child protection we have prioritized a few suggestions that we feel would make the largest positive impact. PFSA applauds the Task Force on Child Protection for their thorough work and comprehensive list of recommendations which are largely supported by PFSA.

Research:

A study conducted in 2000 found that 65% of social workers, 53% of physicians and 58% of physician assistants were not reporting all cases of suspected abuse (Steven Delaronde, et al, Opinions Among Mandated Reporters Toward Child Maltreatment Reporting Policies, 24 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT 901, 905. 2000.) Furthermore, we see in the 2011 Annual Child Abuse Report that out of the thirty-four children who died as a result of abuse and neglect nearly half had no prior involvement with child welfare.

A recent study entitled *To Report or Not to Report: Examination of the Initial Primary Care Management of Suspicious Childhood Injuries* completed by Boston University School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center examines primary health care provider's assessment of whether an injury was caused by abuse and the provider's decision to report. The study showed that although physicians identified injuries as being caused by suspected child abuse they only reported 21% of the cases that experts with a background in primary care would have reported. So, if physicians struggle with reporting suspected child abuse, we know that most certainly other mandated reporters of child abuse struggle with reporting as well.

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Since 1995, PA Family Support Alliance has trained thousands of mandated reporters of child abuse and have heard them provide the following reasons as barriers to reporting: 1) Confusion or uncertainty about reporting responsibilities; 2) Uncertain about physical and behavioral indicators of child abuse and neglect; 3) Fear of an inadequate response from children and youth agency; 4) Fear of becoming involved; 5) Fearful of repercussions; 6) Concerned that reporting may violate professional obligations and 7) Fear that reporting will “make things worse” for the child.

Solutions:

Recommendation #1

Mandated reporters of child abuse must be trained! Teachers, day care providers, doctors, social workers and all others who work daily with our children are pivotal to child protection. In order for them to adequately fulfill both the legal mandate and ethical obligations to report suspected child abuse, it is essential that they receive accurate training **before they enter their professional positions**. Child protection training cannot and should not only be part of on the job training. If these professionals fail to report suspected child abuse and neglect, our children are unprotected.

Education is the key to addressing the barriers and our children simply cannot afford for us to continue with business as usual in this area. Rather, it is time to put the “horse before the cart” and adequately prepare students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Part of the curricula for educating people to work with children must include recognizing child abuse and what to do when one suspects abuse. Instruction on ethics must also be clearly addressed. Time and time again, our office has heard from teachers and child care professionals who have reported suspected child abuse to their supervisors only to learn that no report was made by the supervisors.

Licensed or certified professionals should be required to receive training on child abuse identification and reporting as part of their licensure or certification. Likewise, mandated reporters already working in the field must be provided with **ongoing training as part of their ongoing professional development**.

PA Family Support Alliances strongly encourages the establishment of a training requirement for all mandated reporters. Appropriations must be provided for this mandate. It is not enough to require people who work with children to receive training; we must provide funds to ensure professionals have access to quality, accurate training.

Appropriations could be made through a \$2 increase in the fee for child abuse history checks. The Department of Public Welfare currently charges \$10 for each clearance process except for those clearances for the purposes of volunteering with Big Brother/Big Sister or rape/domestic violence volunteers. This fee has never been increased and the money raised is deposited into the general fund. A \$2 increase could result in nearly \$1,000,000 in additional funds that could be used to train mandated reporters. (501,890 total number of clearances in 2011 – 4,130 fee-exempt clearances= 497,760). Employing a combination of on-site training, train-the-trainer training and interactive, instructor-led webinar training, PA Family Support Alliance could train an additional 75,500 mandated reporters per year by utilizing the additional clearance funds. The training cost per person totals \$13.18.

Recommendation #2

Volunteers often hold key positions within many not for profit organizations serving our children and youth. Considering the vast number of volunteers who interface with children through Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters **we strongly encourage amending PA's Child Protective Services Law to include volunteers who have frequent and ongoing contact with children as those required to report suspected child abuse and neglect.**

Recommendation #3

PA's Child Protective Services Law is complex and during testimony before the Task Force in May, 2012 PA Family Support Alliance provided a list of recommendations for change. **We believe that the following amendments- supported by the Task Force on Child Protection would have the largest impact on increasing the submission of quality reports to child welfare.**

- Provide clear and specific protections for mandated reporters when reporting families in need of General Protective Services as well as suspected child abuse cases. Additionally, existing protections need to be strengthened so a mandated reporter is clearly protected from civil and criminal liability and discrimination in the workplace when they make a report of child abuse themselves because the person in charge or designee fails to do so.
- Hold school personnel to the same standard as all other child serving facilities, organizations or institutions whose employees would be considered perpetrators of child abuse by eliminating Student Abuse from the CPSL. Furthermore, align the process for school administrators to make the require reports to ChildLine and PA Dept. of Education.
- Increase the penalty for willful failure to report suspected abuse from a third to a second degree misdemeanor
- Professional licenses must be revoked for failing to report suspected child abuse
- Expand information sharing by breaking down the statutory barriers regarding child abuse investigations and outcomes with all individuals involved in child protection such as physicians and psychologists, mandated reporters and investigating law enforcement to name a few.
- Maintain all reports of suspected child abuse AND general protective services indefinitely.
- Require child abuse clearances for volunteers in certain programs and expand the grounds for denying employment in child care settings and programs serving children to include commission of additional crimes.
- Require multidisciplinary investigative teams for all counties.

Recommendation #4

The Task Force on Child Protection recommended the establishment of a training academy to provide statewide training for mandated reporters. PFSA believes that a well established system already exists for training this group of professionals through face to face training, a Train the Trainer program and various web based applications. **The need is for additional funds to expand the foundation of services that has been supported through extensive research and evaluation efforts.**

PA Family Support Alliance has provided expert training on child abuse recognition and reporting for more than seventeen years with our state of the art training delivered by some of Pennsylvania's most knowledgeable child welfare professionals. Program evaluations conducted by a senior research analyst

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with Johns Hopkins University show that mandated reporters of child abuse across all professions demonstrate a level of knowledge on child abuse identification and Pennsylvania's reporting process to be extremely low—42 percent. After training, participant knowledge of the Child Protective Services law and reporting requirements elevated to 81%. As a result of our extensive experience working with mandated reporters of child abuse, PFSA has worked diligently to advance training requirements for these professionals who hold a key role in our state's child protection efforts.

In July, 2012 Act 126 became law establishing a training requirement for school personnel on child abuse recognition and reporting- the first training requirement for mandated reporters in our state. Since its passage, PA Family Support Alliance has talked with hundreds of school guidance counselors, administrators, superintendents and nurses. Many have commented on this law being long past due.

The statewide training program administered by PFSA continues to be viewed by the Office of Children, Youth and Families as the training standard for mandated reporters. More importantly, PFSA's training program has consistently received excellent reviews from mandated reporters across professions. An ever increasing number of not for profit child serving organizations, programs and educational institutions turn to PFSA for technical assistance as they place their child protection policies under the spotlight of review as they consider risk management issues. Quite simply- PFSA is viewed statewide as the "go to expert" on training and supporting mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. We have responded to the needs of the professionals and their employers by introducing web based applications that facilitate ease of training while providing quality training curriculum under the direction of professional trainers.

We at PA Family Support Alliance remain dedicated to the protection of our Commonwealth's children through supporting and educating parents, professionals working with children and members of local communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angela M. Liddle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Angela M. Liddle, MPA
Executive Director