SIGNS OF SAFETY APPROACH to CHILD PROTECTION CASEWORK

1

1 This approach is not a one size fits all

- Using the ideas presented today you will be evolving the approach
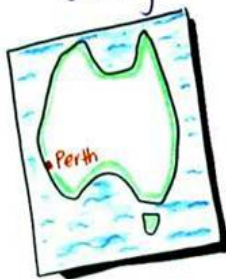
Here's an idea

How you do the work

With

not to... it is not an easy context to do this work in

2 The MODEL has come out of mine & Steve Edwards journey

sense of if we want something to happen we do it ourselves.

Perth

Given a whole region with 60 case workers to use the model

1983
Graduated as social worker

Youth work - could develop relationship with kids but realised I needed to be able to work with families

FAMILY THERAPY BOOTCAMP

1988 Parent Teen Link programme.
– using BRIEF THERAPY approaches.
... it's not about deep analysis but get in and help family.
– Met Steve

DIVE IN

RIGOUR ✛ GRACE

clear idea of knowing why you are doing what you are doing

have a relationship... a sense of connectedness

⭐ If what you are doing is not working do something DIFFERENT

⭐ MIRACLE QUESTION
– Your questions are your tools ...
Use carefully / thoughtfully

STEVE Anthropology graduate.

HALLS CREEK

Child Protection Officer

"I've no clue about what child welfare work is about!"

⭐ THE THEORY PRACTICE GAP ← THEORY → WORK

People who could do the work couldn't explain it.

How did you do that?

Brief Therapy Work ✛ Child Protection Work

↓

SIGNS OF SAFETY

1992 worked with other child protection workers ⇒ TRAINING & FOLLOW-UP

WORK-BOOK

If the workers use it it's in the model. If they don't it's out.

SIGNS OF SAFETY
SUMMARY OF THE PRACTICE APPROACH, EVIDENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

The
development of Signs of Safety began in the 1990's drawing on solution---focused therapy and the direct experience of effective practice by child protection workers and the experiences of families. It is now a comprehensive and mature approach being implemented in over 100 jurisdictions in 17 countries around the world.

Signs of Safety continues to evolve within its core framework reflecting innovation by child protection workers in the international Signs of Safety community, the experiences of families and adaption in varying jurisdictions.

Jurisdiction wide implementations have highlighted the centrality of Signs of Safety in organizational transformation as policy, learning and leadership become aligned to support effective front line practice with children and families.

DESCRIPTION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY PRACTICE

Signs of Safety is an integrated framework for how to do child intervention work --- the principles for practice; a range of tools for assessment and planning, decision making and engaging children and families; the disciplines for practitioners' application of the approach: and processes through which the work is undertaken with families and children, and including partner agencies.

Signs of Safety practice enables child welfare intervention to be the catalyst and method that initiates behavior change by families and empowers them to make these changes.

Principles – underpinning the approach

Working relationships are fundamental, with families and other professionals
Relationships must be forged and maintained in the face of the coercive nature of child protection intervention, biases towards pre---judgment of families and different perspectives of professionals.

Stance of critical inquiry – always being prepared to admit you may have it wrong
As Eileen Munro observes, "the major source of error in child protection is not being prepared to admit you may have it wrong". Child protection investigations need to take a questioning approach and remain open minded. They cannot be the formulation of a hypothesis and fitting the evidence to support that hypothesis.

Landing grand aspirations in everyday practice
Families and front line practitioners are the arbiters of whether practice works. This "practice led evidence" has informed the development of Signs of Safety and continues to be the engine of learning for practitioners and to drive innovation and evolution of the approach.

Practice Tools

Assessment and planning tools are used for "mapping" the worries, strengths and required safety, all in plain language. The map encompasses the four domains for enquiry:

The *"three columns"*:
• What we are worried about (past harm, future danger, complicating factors)
• What is working well (existing strengths and existing safety)
• What needs to happen (family and child protection authority safety goals and next steps for future safety)

And the *scaling question* to make judgments about how safe the child is, from the perspective of the child protection authorities, the family, their networks and other professionals, to bring the case to judgment, develop understanding between the parties and to drive change.

Within these domains of enquiry are the risk assessment analysis categories that involve defining the harm, defining the danger, identifying existing safety and developing safety goals to address the danger statements, all in succinct plain language.

The Signs of Safety map, setting out the four domains of enquiry and the seven analysis categories is set out below.

When we think about the situation facing this family:		
What are we Worried About?	**What's Working Well?**	**What Needs to Happen?**
Harm	**Existing strengths**	**SAFETY GOALS**
DANGER STATEMENTS	**Existing safety**	**Next steps (for future safety)**
Complicating factors		

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means thinhgs are so bad for the children they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? (If different judgements place different people's number on the continuum).

0 ←——————————————————————————————→ 10

Tools for *engaging children,* bring the child's voice into the assessment, and most critically as a catalyst for change, to the family. The *three houses* (good things, bad things, dreams) is a child's version of the three columns to capture their experience.

Words and pictures explanations are used for parents to explain what has happened and what is happening to the children, and if applicable, set out the safety plan. Words and pictures serve as both the explanation that children need to understand their situation and as a catalyst for change for families.

There are variations and additions based on these core tools that have been developed by practitioners to suit specific needs and cultural settings.

Moreover, Signs of Safety assessment and planning is adaptable across the continuum of services, from more prevention and family support oriented services through youth at risk to fostering and adoption services. The appendix, *"Signs of Something" --- Adaptations of the Signs of Safety across the Continuum of Service*, sets out how the adjustment of the analysis categories of harm, danger, existing safety and safety goals, enable the framework and the methodology to be applied in all service settings.

Disciplines – guiding workers' behavior and application of the approach

Clear distinction between past harm (the harm that has actually occurred, not what we are frightened about), ***future danger*** (on the basis of the past harm, what child protection authorities are worried could occur if there is no change in the families' behavior), ***and complicating factors*** (the circumstances of the family that lie behind the neglect or abuse, most commonly such as mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and family violence).

Clear distinction between strengths (positive aspects of the family such as their love for the children) ***and protection*** (actual behaviors that demonstrate a capacity to protect the children, such as removing dangerous adults from the household, or occasions when the parents felt as if they could but did not harm the child).

Plain language that can be readily understood by families, in all verbal and written communication.

Statements focusing on specific observable behaviors, avoiding meaning laden, imprecise and poorly understood labels and diagnostic descriptors.

Skillful use of authority, using the statutory authority of child protection but giving families choices about how to work with authorities and finding ways that work for them.

Assessment is always a work in progress, although this cannot preclude taking action.

Processes

Child protection practice is neither linear nor formulaic as the principles and disciplines illustrate. Notwithstanding this reality, the core processes of *Signs of Safety* practice involve the following elements set out in the notionally sequential order:

- Mapping the assessment and plan, doing so with the family and their network (extended family, friends and professional agencies with whom the family is engaged and who share a concern for the children).
- Being as committed to identifying what is working well --- and identifying the strengths demonstrated as safety, the 'signs of safety' --- as being clear about the worries.
- Narrowing the key factors and conclusions into succinct and clear statements of past harm and future danger.
- Making a judgment about how safe the children are.
- Developing safety goals that address the danger statements.
- Building a safety plan with detailed actions to achieve the safety goals, drawing on a safety network comprising particularly extended family and friends, and also professionals.
- Engaging the children, both bringing their voice into the assessment and parents explaining to them what is happening.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE AND STUDIES

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation and research, and administrative data from implementing jurisdictions around the world, consistently indicate the following outcomes:

- Families feel more empowered and are more able to understand and address the concerns and requirements of child protection authorities.
- The number of children removed from families reduces relative to the number of families with whom authorities work more intensively to build safety around the children.
- Practitioners report greater job satisfaction due to the clarity of the approach, the usefulness of the tools and the impact for the children and families.

In considering these outcomes, it is important to remember that the goal of practice is to improve children's safety not to keep families together as an end in itself.

The evidence and theory base for *Signs of Safety* has developed substantially within action research, collaborative and appreciative inquiry, or broadly "practice based evidence", and means the approach is built from what is probably the strongest single knowledge base of what works in actual child protection practice (see for example: Christianson, and Maloney, 2006; Teoh et. al., 2003; Turnell 2004; 2006; 2007; Turnell and Edwards, 1997; 1999; Turnell, Elliott and Hogg 2007; Turnell and Essex, 2006; 2013; Turnell, Lohrbach and Curran 2008; Turnell, Vesterhauge‐‐‐Petersen and Vesterhauge‐‐‐Petersen, 2013). The *Signs of Safety* community has also begun to publish on effective leadership and implementation (see Turnell, Munro and Murphy, 2013; Salveron, Bromfield, Kirika, Simmons, Murphy and Turnell 2015).

Significant quantitative practice data sets and research undertaken or underway since the 2000s include:
- Minnesota, USA outcomes ‐‐‐ Casey Family Services and the Wilder Foundation http://www.wilder.org/Search/Pages/Results.aspx?k=signs%20of%20safety
- Ontario, Canada ‐‐*The use of mapping in child welfare investigations: A strength‐‐‐based hybrid intervention* (Versanov, *Child Care in Practice* in press 2014)
- England ‐‐‐ The NSPCC studies (DSCF 2009; Gardner, 2008) summarized in Turnell 2012 and NSPCC 2013
- Netherlands – outcomes study by TNO and ZonMw – more information at http://www.signsofsafety.net/signs‐‐‐of‐‐‐safety‐‐‐research/

Two major research efforts inform the development of meaningful measures of practice and its impact for both performance management in organisations and outcome research:
- Fidelity measures ‐‐‐ Casey Family Programs through an international program ‐‐‐ for families on practice, workers and supervisors and practice, and all staff on organisatonal culture and fit http://sofs.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/131207%20The%20Signs%20of%20Safety%20Fidelity%20%20Research%20Project%20S%20of%20S%20Website.pdf)
- Theory of change (results logic) ‐‐‐ Australian Centre of for Child Protection (AACP), University of South Australia, research is defining the essential elements of practice leading to the outcomes for children and families http://www.signsofsafety.net/2920‐‐‐2/)

IMPLEMENTATION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY

"Implementing a practice framework, Signs of Safety, is fitting a complex social system into a complex social system" (Munro echoing Pawson 2006).

Implementation science indicates that a persistent and comprehensive approach, that is also agile and responsive to circumstances and progress, is required for effective implementation. While outcomes are apparent quickly, widespread and sustainable adoption and outcomes take time. Experience implementing the Signs of Safety has suggested the following four domains and key components of implementation:

- **Leadership** including a clear and focused organisational commitment to Signs of Safety; with strong, visible and engaged senior management demonstratively focused on practice; managing and leading the organisation in ways that model the practice approach; critically, fostering a safe organisation (building confidence that workers will be supported through anxiety, crises and contention); and building distributed leadership.

- **Learning** including basic training for practice and all other staff; advanced training for supervisors and other key positions as practice leaders; a two year formal trajectory for practice leaders development; deliberate workplace based learning; and individual and group supervision aligned to Signs of Safety.

- **Organisational Alignment** beginning with a steering committee, an implementation plan and a 'charter' or policy expressing the organisational commitment; policies, procedures and forms to match practice; strong intake and assessment capacity; development for key areas of service and adaptation to services along the continuum such as fostering and adoptions or prevention; deliberate and formal partner engagement; and national and international engagement for resources, learning and research..

- **Meaningful Measures** including quality assurance consistent with Signs of Safety results logic and fidelity studies; monitoring case trends across the agency with a core set of data; and aligned case recording with, in time, a compatible information management system.

APPENDICES

Signs of Safety ⸱⸱⸱ Comprehensive Briefing Paper. Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (3rd edition, 2014)

The comprehensive briefing paper provides a more detailed description of the approach and framework including its history, the supporting evidence base, the practice methodology, learning strategies and implementation.

'Signs Of Something' ⸱⸱⸱ Adaptations of Signs of Safety across the Continuum of Service (Resolutions Consultancy, 2015)

This paper charts the key aspects of the Signs of Safety approach that are applied unchanged and those that are adapted across the continuum of service, with examples to illustrate.