9/23/22

Colorado Department of Human Services' Audit Summary prepared for

Arapahoe County Department of Human Services

Background

A former social caseworker (Social Caseworker) in Arapahoe County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) was charged in May, 2022 with a felony attempt to influence a public servant and misdemeanor false reporting of child abuse after allegedly calling in a known false report of child abuse against her partner's ex-employer. Out of a desire to further assess whether other activities of the Social Caseworker were fraudulent, CDHS immediately developed and performed an independent review of referrals made by the Social Caseworker, a random sample of contacts entered into the Trails system as completed by the Social Caseworker, and incidents brought forth through the CHDS complaints process in order to determine whether the scope of this fraud was isolated or more of a pervasive issue with the Social Caseworker.

Part 1: Administrative Review Division Review of Referrals and Contacts for Social Caseworker

Referrals

CDHS Admininstrative Review Division staff reviewed and evaluated referrals made by the Social Caseworker to review the thoroughness of the referral screening process and any subsequent assessment, as well as the sufficiency of evidence to support any resulting substantiations of child abuse and/or neglect.

CDHS conducted a search of the Trails system for referrals where the Social Caseworker was listed as the reporting party by name. A total of four referrals were identified. As two of the referrals were made prior to the Social Caseworker's tenure within the child protection system, they were excluded from review as they were made as a private citizen and not related to their duties as a social caseworker.

A qualitative review of the information available in Trails for the remaining two referrals noted that the referrals were appropriately managed. ACDHS sent one referral to another county for screening due to potential conflict of interests. The other referral was screened, assigned to a caseworker, and the allegations substantiated as supported by information gathered through the assessment.

Contacts

This review process attempted to verify contacts on assessments where the Social Caseworker had been assigned as the primary caseworker, and the contact occurred in the last six months of their tenure with ACDHS. As the Social Caseworker's tenure ended in early May 2022, a final decision was made to include six full months, plus the first few days of May. This decision was

made to maximize the value of the review process by increasing the likelihood of reaching individuals (i.e., in case they changed phone numbers, etc.), and the likelihood that they would be able to recall sufficient details to verify contacts occurred and the content of the contact.

Review Sample

The population eligible for the review included:

- Contacts documented as having been made by the caseworker between November 1, 2021 and May 3, 2022 (the date of the last contact entered by the worker), and
- The contact was on an assessment where the Social Caseworker was listed as the primary caseworker, and
- The contact was documented as "Completed", and
- The contact was not with a child (i.e., an individual less than 18 years of age)

No further filtering of contact type (e.g., email, telephone call, face-to-face, etc.) occurred. The population of eligible contacts consisted of a total of 236 eligible contacts.

Using the software SPSS, a random sample was extracted from the Trails system. Using a 95% confidence level with a 10% interval, a sample size of 69 contacts was determined to be required for review. A 15% oversample (11 contacts) was also pulled in the sampling process in the event that contacts in the primary sample were unable to be reviewed. The application of this sampling technique means that if the entire population was reviewed, there is a 95% likelihood the results would be consistent with the findings of this review (with a margin of error of 10%).

Table 1 (top of next page) shows a comparison of the types of contacts in the population compared to the sample identified for review.

Table 1: Comparison of population and sample contacts

Contact Type	Population		Sample	
	N	%	n	%
Telephone Call To	81	34.3%	25	36.2%
E-mail	73	30.9%	26	37.7%
Face to Face (Client's Residence - Home)	35	14.8%	7	10.1%
Face to Face(Failed Attempt)	17	7.2%	2	2.9%
Text	12	5.1%	4	5.8%
Telephone Call From	9	3.8%	3	4.3%
Face to Face (Community)	4	1.7%	0	0.0%
Other	2	0.8%	2	2.9%
Face to Face (School)	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
Face to Face (DSS Office)	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
Face to Face (Clients Residence - Facility/Institution)	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
Total	236	100.0%	69	100.0%

Review Process

The CDHS review team consisted of 3 staff from the Administrative Review Division. Staff were excused from their normal work duties to participate in this review. Sample contacts were printed and organized by assessment type (High Risk Assessment and Family Assessment Response), sample type (sample and over-sample), case, and contact sequence number (which should align with contact dates in an ascending order). The report also showed the type of contact, date and time of the contact, contact participants, and contact narrative.

ACDHS provided one intake administrator who was partnered with one of the CDHS staff members. This allowed the administrator to have direct contact with the individuals as part of the overall management of the assessment, while the CDHS staff person was responsible for verification of the sampled contacts.

The review started in ACDHS on Monday, July 25, 2022. ACDHS staff had previously been briefed on the background, scope, and purpose of the review. The ACDHS intake

administrator and CDHS staff pair reviewed the contacts needing to be verified to create a work plan and schedule. CDHS had committed to working around the ACDHS administrator's schedule and responsibilities to make ongoing child safety decisions. ACDHS cleared the administrator's schedules to make them available to focus their time and efforts on this project.

In order to consider a contact verified, the ACDHS intake administrator and CDHS staff pair confirmed both that the contact occurred, and that the individual(s) verified the content (i.e., summary of the contact entered into the Trails system). Contact verification occurred through various processes, often depending on the type of contact and information available at the time of the review. Examples include:

- Emails: ACDHS pulled copies of emails directly from the server and provided these to CDHS staff. One of the CDHS staff compared the email records received against those pulled in the sample to try and locate the email. For many emails, the Trails Record of Contact (ROC) note included the date/time stamp from the email (as it was copied and pasted into the ROC note). Other emails appeared to be a typed summary. For the typed summaries, an email was considered to be verified if the CDHS staff person could locate an email with similar contact on or around the date the contact was listed to have occurred in the Trails ROC note.

- Telephone Calls: The ACDHS administrator and CDHS pair called the individual(s) identified in the contact to verify the telephone call. In instances where nobody answered, an attempt was made to leave a voicemail requesting a return call. Situations that resulted in contacts being dropped from the sample and replaced from the oversample included:
  o Nobody answered the phone call, and a voicemail could not be left. This included voice message systems that had not been setup, or were full and would not accept another message.

  o Voicemails were left, but after several days, no return call was received.

  o An individual would answer the call, but indicate that it was an incorrect number (i.e., they were not the person listed in the contact, nor did they know them).

  o The telephone call was listed as a call to an agency (e.g., hospital, school, etc.) but did not list a specific individual. If possible, attempts to call the agency were made to determine if they had a phone log that might help identify if a call was made, and to whom, prior to dropping the call.

  o No phone number could be located for a listed individual. This included attempts at finding a phone number through other available systems.

- Face-to-face: The ACDHS administrator and CDHS pair called the individual(s) identified in the contact to verify the face-to-face contact. If individuals could not be reached, the contact was dropped and replaced from the oversample. Reasons for not being able to reach an individual(s) were similar to those listed above, under "Telephone Calls."

- Other: Two contacts were entered under a category of "Other." These referenced materials being gathered for a meeting and a referral being made for services. Efforts to verify were made by reaching out to other individuals, when possible, to confirm if activities had occurred (e.g., was a referral for services made). If there was no way to verify the information, the contact was dropped and replaced.

  A decision was also made to drop contacts that were part of assessments that resulted in a case being opened, where the case remained open at the time of the review. Additionally, ACDHS made a bilingual supervisor available to assist in any calls that required translation services.

  Contacts were placed into one of three categories:

- Verified: A contact was considered verified if:
  o The individual listed as contacted (e.g., face-to-face or telephone call) was able to confirm that the contact took place, and confirmed information described in the narrative summary of the contact.

  o Emails were considered verified if the specific email matching the exact date and time was located, or an email with the same information summarized was located around the date the contact was listed to have occurred in Trails. For example, some contacts in Trails included the entire email thread copy and pasted it into the ROC note. This allowed the specific verification. Other ROC notes were a typed summary of the content of an email. For these, if an email close to the date listed in Trails (i.e., the ROC note entered into Trails was listed as 2/5/2022 but the email found from the county email server was dated 2/4/2022) was located with the same content, this was considered verified.

- Not Verified: The nature of some contacts was such that they could not be definitively confirmed nor refuted. For example, several contacts that were listed as "Completed" were attempts to the home where nobody answered. It was indicated that the worker left a business card in the door. When the individual was contacted, they indicated they did not find a business card in the door. However, it is possible a card was left that fell out, someone else took the card first, etc.

- Denied: A contact was considered denied if the listed individual was reached, and denied the contact type occurred, and/or that the discussion described in the contact did not occur. Additionally, if an email could not be located, it was placed in this category.

Results

A total of 35 contacts needed to be dropped from the sample and replaced with a contact from the oversample. Table 2, below, shows a breakout of the types of contacts dropped, while Table 3 displays the reasons for dropping contacts from the sample.

Table 2: Contact Types Dropped from Sample

Contact Type	
Telephone Call	13
Email	17
Face-to-Face	4
Other	1
Total	35

Table 3: Reasons for Dropping Contacts from Sample.

Drop Reasons	
Open Case	24
Unable to leave voicemail/no answer	5
No identifiable individual (e.g., hospital, agency)	3
No return call	3
Totals	35

Due to the large number of contacts that needed to be dropped, and replaced, the entire oversample of 11 contacts was used. Additional replacement contacts were identified by choosing the next randomly selected contact of the same type (e.g., telephone call, face-to-face) from the original sample file. Only one contact ("Other") was not replaced with the same type of contact. In this instance, the next contact available on the randomly generated list was selected as the replacement.

As displayed in Table 4, of the 69 contacts reviewed, 56 (81.2%) were verified as having occurred and the summary of the contacts in Trails was supported. There were 11 (15.9%) contacts across 9 different assessments where contacts were denied (10) or not located (1 email). Two contacts were categorized as Not Verified. These 9 were referred to DCW and reviewed as indicated in Part 2.

Table 4: Results

Results	N	%
Not Verified	2	2.9%
Denied	11	15.9%
Verified	56	81.2%
Total	69	100.0%

Based on the sampling methodology applied, the results indicate with 95% confidence that the true percentage of all contacts occurring between November 2021 and May 2022 that would be denied would be within the range of 6% to 26%.

Part 2: Division of Child Welfare (DCW) Review of Assessments for Child Safety

Assessments
Based on the results of the fraud review, ARD referred the 9 assessments in the sample with denied contacts to the Division of Child Welfare (DCW) for verification of child safety. DCW determined that 8 of the 9 be reopened to assess for child safety. One assessment was not required, as the alleged victim at the time of the initial referral was over the age of 18 (i.e., no longer a child) by the time of the review. A non-involved Colorado county department of human services conducted these re-assessments.

Based on the estimated percentage of possibly fraudulent contacts entered into Trails, DCW along with one ACDHS staff pulled all assessments (investigations of child abuse and/or neglect) from the Trails system where the former Social Caseworker was assigned as the primary caseworker since July 2017 to perform a detailed paper review for possible child safety concerns.

Case and Assessment Review Process
Between August 1 and August 9, 2022, DCW staff conducted an evaluation of all 196 assessments, or investigations of alleged child maltreatment, in which the Social Caseworker was assigned as primary since July 2017, in addition to a secondary review of 7 cases in which the Social Caseworker had continued involvement after an initial assessment. The review consisted of four DCW assessment reviewers working with two Arapahoe County case reviewers.

Reviewers initially pulled and reviewed assessments, or investigations of alleged child maltreatment, from Trails, including the assignment, narrative, reporting party, interviews/contact notes, collateral information, findings, and assessment closures. Based on the initial paper review of Trails records, staff triaged assessments into two groups. If it was determined that other collateral agencies performed assessments, a family had a subsequent assessment or open case with a different staff member, or if an alleged victim was over the age of 18, the involvement was not fully re-assessed. If there was no assurance that a collateral entity was

involved or an intervening factor occurred, it was determined that a secondary review was needed.

An ACDHS case reviewer conducted an initial evaluation of all 73 cases, or open involvements past the assessment phase, in which the Social Caseworker was listed as a primary and identified 7 in need of secondary review.

All cases and assessments reviewed as noted above are included in a Google Sheet titled "Audit," with restricted shared access. Determinations made on each assessment are color coded as follows:

- Turquoise indicates follow up re-assessment by a different Colorado County Department of Human Services as determined from recent ARD random sample assessment contact review.

- Green indicates one or more of the following applies and there is no recommendation for re-assessment at this time:
  o Other forms of assessment occurred - law enforcement, medical, forensic, or other collateral involvement;
  o The family has had a subsequent assessment since the one conducted by the Social Caseworker - with same alleged victim(s);
  o The family has had ongoing child welfare involvement; and,
  o The alleged victim is 18 years of age or older as the county would no longer have jurisdiction to assess child protection allegations.

- Yellow indicates a need to determine next steps and possible contact verification and/or re-assessment. Yellow highlight does not necessarily indicate concern for falsification, it may be that one or more of the "green" highlight factors above did not occur. Without another intervening factor unable to determine if safety or risk alleged was adequately assessed and/or mitigated.

Yellow highlighted assessments were referred to ACDHS for a secondary review. DCW staff completed a secondary review of cases on 8/26/22.

Results
Based on a review of cases and assessments, CDHS staff did not identify any additional unresolved child safety concerns. We did find and discuss with ACDHS our concerns related to the conduct and practices performed by the Social Caseworker, as well as the supervision and oversight of the Social Caseworker's performance.

Overall Practice Concerns
Practice concerns by the Social Caseworker include the following, which were shared with ACDHS on 8/9/22:

- Minimal interview/contact notes.
- Minimal or no recorded efforts to contact a non-custodial parent(s).
- Minimal or no recorded efforts to contact the alleged Person Responsible for Abuse or Neglect, even when a "founded" disposition is entered.
- Cross-reporting to law enforcement - either lack of documentation occurred or contact did not occur.
- Verifying information with collateral contacts - lack of documentation occurred or the contact did not occur.
- Overall findings selected as Program Area 4: Youth in Conflict - No Finding when assessment is Program Area 5: Child Protection.
- Overall finding disposition in some instances lacks clear reasoning and is not necessarily supported by documentation.
- Listed family as "unable to locate" after failed home visit attempts without documenting attempts to contact alleged victim(s) at school or verify if child/youth enrolled in school to make attempted contact.
- No detailed interview contact notes from forensic interviews in many assessments.
- Minimal documented attempts to contact collaterals other reported professionals involved, and minimal or no verification of statements made by parents.
- Questions about supervisor approval regarding all of the above outlined concerns.
- A number of individuals contacted indicated not having any sense of the conclusion of the assessment. No information regarding findings, closing out assessment, etc.
- In some contact with agencies, a lack of documentation of specific individuals who were spoken to. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to confirm information.