

# 4th International Signs of Safety Gathering

**Leiden, The Netherlands**

*Building the practice,  
Building the organisation*



**Ten Years On and the  
Journey Continues:  
A Practitioner's Experience of  
Signs of Safety in High-risk,  
Long-term Casework**

**Carver County Community  
Social Services, Minnesota, USA**  
Cindy Finch

# S of S – My Journey

Minnesota, USA

Cindy Finch



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“Success is not a place at which one arrives but rather the spirit with which one undertakes and continues the journey.”

~ Alex Nobel~



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# Initial Contact

- Do you know why I am here?
- Share their story
- Reflect back
- Genogram



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- Share my concerns

- Common ground
  - Children safe
  - Case closed

- Journey together



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- Elephant in the Room
- Hold us both accountable
  - Supervisor's contact information



# Building the Relationship

- On – going process
- Honest, open communication
  - The Hard Stuff
- I don't have the answers
- I may make mistakes
- You **WILL ALWAYS** know where I am at!



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“...the whole entire case is different. You didn’t pretend to know me or my life; you listened to what I had to say – this time was better because someone believed in me and pushed me to believe in myself. My family didn’t know how to help me and when we were using, we plowed through everything we had until there was nothing; we pushed everyone out; that’s why I would think “why try”...it was so difficult to try and start over. My family didn’t know how to help me start over; and they didn’t have the patience to try. You taught them to listen and be open minded in this whole process; it was the small things...



# The Family Map

- Doing the map with the family
- Whatever form works for them!



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# Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Form

Family/Child's Name:

Worker:

Date:



**Danger**

**Safety**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Dangers /What Are We Worried About?<br/>List all aspects that demonstrate maltreatment.</p> | <p>Strengths/What's Working Well?<br/>List all aspects that indicate safety.</p> |
|--|--|



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# Olmsted County's Framework

**Danger/Harm:**  
What brought the family to the agency's attention?  
Agency history?

**Genogram/Ecomap**

**Safety**  
What strengths or group of strengths have happened over time to wrap the worries/risks with safety?

**Risk Statement(s):**  
What are we worried about?  
When are we worried about it happening?

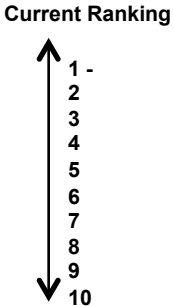
**Gray Area**

**Next Steps**  
What, Who, When ?

**Strength/Protective Factors**  
What good things are happening within the person, family, community, etc. to wrap safety around the worries/risk?

**Safety /Protection Required**  
Safety Goal/Scale

**Complicating Factors:**  
What things are making life hard for the family?



Enough Safety to Close



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# Three Columns

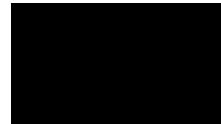
| What Are We Worried About? | What's Going Well? | What Needs to Happen? |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
|                            |                    |                       |
|                            |                    |                       |



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- The map is not a product, it is a journey.
- The same map throughout the life of the case



# Practice Principles Around Relationships

- Respect families as people worth doing business with.
- Cooperate with the person, not the abuse.



# Map Guides the Safety Plan

- Check in every visit
- Honesty about the gaps
- When enough strengths to wrap the worry...it becomes safety!!



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# Safety Planning

- With the family and the network
- With even the smallest voice
  - Gather their voice...
    - Wizards and Fairies; Three Houses
    - Safety House; Safety Hand
  - Words and Pictures



# What Families Say About SOS

- “It felt like someone believed in me”
- “I know now I can always call for support”
- “I was listened to”
- “I felt like I was finally doing something right”
- “I felt like I mattered”
- “I found out people do care what happens to my kids and me”



# What SOS Has Done For My Agency

## Data through April of 2011

### Look back of 47 months to 9 years

| Interval | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months | 24 Months | 30 Months | 36 Months |
|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|          | 0 Cases  | 0 Cases   | 2 Cases*  | 1 Case**  | 0 Cases   | 1 Case*** |

- 14-17 Months – differing allegations from what originally brought the case in
- \*\* 23 Months – same allegations; but following a permanent transfer of custody to grandparents who returned informal custody to parents
- \*\*\*36 Months – differing allegations during a custody battle



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# WHAT SOS HAS DONE FOR ME

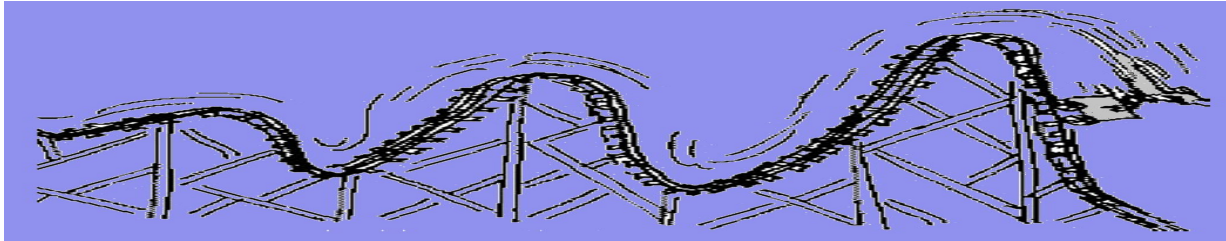
- I don't create the plan for the family; they creating their own.
- The network is responsible for the child's safety, not primarily me.
- Children are involved in their own safety planning; they are aware of the concerns and they know the plan.



- I have less anxiety because I do not have to be the expert.
- I have greater confidence that when I close the case, the family/network will continue to keep the child safe because they are aware of the concerns and have demonstrated their commitment to the safety plan.



Implementations can vary...it can be quite a ride; but even on my worst day, I would still choose to do child protection work!



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# What Keeps Me Energized?

- The pieces that touch my heart
  - Taylor – ‘And the little girl lives happily ever after’
  - Ricky – “I want better for my son”
  - Hannah – “Thank you”



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