Seeing the Warning Signs

A Cross-System Child Wellbeing Warning Framework to Strengthen Communication, Accountability, and Early Protection

ACCEPTED FORMATIVE POSTER ABSTRACT

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About the Project

Children do not always fall through the cracks because no one noticed a warning sign. Sometimes, multiple professionals recognize different concerns, but those observations remain disconnected across systems.

Seeing the Warning Signs is an interdisciplinary educational project designed to strengthen communication, shared responsibility, and coordinated responses when concerns arise about a child's safety and well-being.

The project brings together perspectives from healthcare, education, behavioral health, social work, child welfare, law enforcement, courts, disability services, domestic violence advocacy, tribal partners, and community organizations.

Recognizing a warning sign is important. Connecting the warning signs across systems can be essential to protecting a child.

The Cross-System Warning Framework

The project introduces an eight-step framework to help professionals move from isolated concerns toward coordinated action.

1. **Notice the Signal** — Recognize an emerging concern.
2. **Connect the Pattern** — Consider how observations across systems may relate.
3. **Trigger Team Review** — Engage the right people to review and assess.
4. **Clarify Roles** — Identify professional responsibilities and appropriate actions.
5. **Communicate With Structure** — Share relevant information using clear communication tools.
6. **Assign Next Steps** — Establish responsibility for specific actions.

7. **Document Follow-Up** — Record concerns, decisions, actions, and timelines.
8. **Close the Loop** — Confirm that assigned actions occurred and determine whether additional follow-up is needed.

Interactive Learning Experience

The project uses a fictional child well-being case to help learners explore how different systems recognize and respond to warning signs. Participants consider what their profession might notice, what additional information they need, which actions fall within their responsibilities, and how to communicate with other professionals.

Ask–Clarify–Link encourages professionals to share observations, explain their significance, and connect their perspectives to the team's understanding. SBAR organizes communication using Situation, Background, Assessment, and Recommendation.

Interprofessional Education and LEND Connections

The project integrates interprofessional education principles, including role clarification, communication, team-based decision-making, and shared accountability. It also incorporates family-centered practice, disability awareness, access considerations, advocacy, and systems-level thinking.

The goal is to help professionals understand that effective child protection requires more than individual expertise. It requires coordination among the systems serving children and families.

Evaluation and Formative Feedback

The proposed pilot learning activity includes pre/post reflection surveys, observation of team communication behaviors, and a structured debrief. Formative feedback will help evaluate the appropriateness of the case scenario, the professions represented, the effectiveness of communication tools, and opportunities for additional subject-matter review.

The project is intended to strengthen learners' understanding of interdisciplinary collaboration. Its effectiveness in improving real-world child safety outcomes has not yet been established.

Moving From Awareness to Accountability

The framework emphasizes that accountability is not about assigning blame. It is about making sure concerns are communicated, responsibilities are assigned, actions are documented, and follow-up is confirmed.

Notice. Connect. Clarify. Assign. Follow up.

That is how systems move from parallel work toward shared protection.