



Does Safety Planning Endure After Case Closure?

*A Pilot Study on the Effectiveness of Signs of
Safety™ in Four Minnesota Counties*

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Executive summary

Minnesota's child protection system has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, from its adoption of a Differential Response system in the early 2000s, to the current reform efforts underway, led by the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children. These efforts highlight the growing importance of and commitment to finding the right tools and strategies for working with children and their families involved in child protection.

One strategy that is currently being used by several Minnesota counties is Signs of Safety™. The Signs of Safety model is a strengths-based, safety-organized child protection intervention strategy developed in the 1990s by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards, in partnership with 150 child protection case workers in Western Australia. One of the key features of this model is the development and use of *safety plans* by families involved with child protection. Safety plans outline professionals' and family members' concerns about and potential dangers to the children, existing family strengths, and plans for ensuring the children's safety. The development of a safety plan often involves creating a *safety network*. Child protection workers help families identify and list all of the potential adults – including relatives, friends, and other professionals – who work together to support the family and ensure the safety of their children. The goal of safety plans and safety networks is to identify specific people and strategies that will help keep the children safe.

Research questions

To help learn more about how Signs of Safety is implemented in Minnesota, and the extent of its usefulness past case closure, Casey Family Programs and the Minnesota Department of Human Services asked Wilder Research to conduct a study that addressed the following research questions:

- To what extent are safety plans and safety networks – developed within a Signs of Safety framework – used by families in child protection after their case has closed?
- What factors contribute to the activation of a safety plan and/or safety network after the case has closed?
- Does the presence of a safety plan/network at case closure prevent future child protection re-reports? Are families who use their safety plans/networks after their case has closed less likely to have a re-report?

Methodology and participation rate

To begin answering these questions, Wilder conducted telephone interviews with parents who have been involved in child protection, as well as select individuals from that parent's safety network. Interviews with parents were conducted at three and nine months after case closure, while interviews with safety network members were conducted largely at nine months after the parent's case had closed. Families who participated in these interviews came from Anoka, Carver, Scott (although Scott had to exit the study early), St. Louis, and Yellow Medicine Counties, counties that have a history of using the Signs of Safety model over the past several years.

A total of 40 parents were invited to participate in the study; of these, 29 agreed to participate, and 26 completed interviews for an overall response rate of 65 percent. Of the 26 parents who completed the three-month interview, 19 parents (73%) completed the nine-month interview. The study also included a total of 32 safety network members who completed a nine-month interview (out of 40 who initially agreed to participate, for a response rate of 80%).

Summary of findings

Despite the study's limitations, including a relatively small sample, several valuable findings emerged that can provide guidance to future practice and research efforts. A summary of these findings is presented below:

- **Good communication and giving parents a voice are critical in working with families:** Most parents and network members reported having positive experiences with safety planning. Parents were particularly satisfied with the safety planning process when they felt that their caseworker respected them and listened to their needs and wishes. Those with negative experiences talked about a lack of communication from their caseworker or feeling forced into choosing network members.
- **Parents see safety planning as stressful, but necessary:** Although it was often viewed as stressful, most interviewees ultimately felt that safety planning is an important step in building a stronger support system for parents and their children. Resistance to the safety planning process was typically due to parents not wanting to revisit the actions that resulted in their involvement in child protection and having to share some of those painful details with friends and family members. Despite some initial discomfort, however, most parents felt that the work was well worth the effort, because it helped them keep their children safe.

- **Safety networks already existed for many:** While parents saw overall safety planning as valuable, the general impression from interviewees was that the network was more important than the plan. Many of those interviewed felt that their safety network was not something new; rather, it was a formalized grouping of close family members and friends who were already heavily involved in their lives. Parents often felt that they could count on their network members to be supportive and non-judgmental, but also to be very honest. When asked why they had been included, network members responded with “because I am her grandmother” or “because I am her friend.” There was not a specific reason to be a part of the network, other than that they are close to the family and would, of course, help if the parent was in need.
- **Safety planning eases the difficulty of asking for help:** Despite the fact that many parents already had a supportive group of friends and family in place, respondents appreciated the formal process of creating a network because it somewhat removed the pressure of asking for help. Several parents mentioned that they felt good knowing there were people supporting them, where, previously, they had felt nervous to reach out for help with difficult aspects of their lives, such as mental health problems, substance abuse, or help with their children.
- **Parents place greater value on safety networks than safety plans:** Most respondents thought of the safety network as pre-existing, while the safety plan was something new and imposed by the county. Therefore, the network was viewed as a more positive, permanent mechanism for providing support and keeping children safe, while the safety plan was often seen as temporary. Most of the parents interviewed three months after case closure, and nearly all of the parents at nine months after case closure, had used their safety network; in contrast, less than half of parents had used their safety plan at three months, and about half had used it at nine months after case closure.
- **Respondents have different definitions of “using” the network or plan:** One complicating factor in analyzing the opinions and usage of safety planning is that respondents have varying definitions of what “using” their network or plan means. For several network members, “using” the safety network meant helping parents with day-to-day needs, such as babysitting or running errands. Many parents said that they used their network by simply talking to friends and family to feel less overwhelmed or stressed, whereas a few used their network or plan in an actual crisis situation.
- **Many respondents viewed the safety network as a direct support for parents, rather than a direct support for children:** The general impression of respondents is that safety planning is viewed primarily as a mechanism for supporting the *parents*, and indirectly, also helps keep the children safe. Overall, there was little discussion of engaging in activities explicitly aimed at keeping children safe, unless respondents

were directly asked. Possibly because of this sentiment, many of the network members tended to describe their role more passively, saying for example that they will “keep an eye out” for any signs of trouble. Only a couple of network members said that that they had more of a “policing” or active monitoring role, as opposed to simply observing the family.

- **Reliance on safety planning diminishes over time, but families find it helpful:** When asked during the nine-month interviews, most parents said that they use their safety network, and particularly their plan, the same amount or less compared to when they started the safety planning process. Respondents said that the diminished use of safety planning is not necessarily because they view the tools as unimportant, but rather because they are more comfortable with their respective situations. Both parents and network members appear to be in less of a crisis mode nine months out; parents say that they know friends and family are available to talk if needed.
- **Safety planning may contribute to fewer re-reports:** Of the 24 parents interviewed (for whom child welfare data were available), none had a re-report in the six months following case closure. Three parents had a re-report in the 12 months after case closure, representing 13 percent of participating parents. Although this represents a relatively small number of parents, these re-report rates are lower than rates for Minnesota overall in 2013, where there was a six-month re-report rate of 9.5 percent, and a 16.1 percent 12-month re-report rate (Minnesota’s Child Welfare Report 2013). These findings suggest that – as a whole – parents involved in the study, all of whom had established safety plans and networks using a Signs of Safety framework, were less likely to have a re-report 6 or 12 months later relative to parents across the state overall. However, again, the number of parents included in this study is small. More research with larger samples is needed to further examine the extent to which safety plans and safety networks prevent future reports to child protection.

Introduction

Minnesota is one of the earliest jurisdictions anywhere in the world to begin providing support to families in the child protection system guided by the Signs of Safety™ framework. One of the key features of the Signs of Safety model is the development and use of *safety plans* by families involved with child protection. Safety plans outline professionals' and family members' concerns about and potential dangers to the children, existing family strengths, and plans for ensuring the children's safety. The development of a safety plan often involves creating a *safety network*. Child protection workers help families identify and list all of the potential adults – including relatives, friends, and other professionals – who work together to support the family and ensure the safety of their children. The goal of safety plans and safety networks is to identify specific people and strategies that will help keep the children safe.

An important but unanswered question in the field is the extent to which these safety networks endure and are useful beyond case closure. More and more jurisdictions worldwide are adopting this approach in their work with families in child protection, but little if any research has been devoted to this topic. This study was therefore developed to examine the durability and usefulness of safety plans and safety networks following case closings, as well as the extent to which safety plans keep families from re-entering the child protection system. The fact that multiple counties across Minnesota have been using the Signs of Safety approach – including safety plans and networks – for several years made Minnesota a logical region in which to conduct this study.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent are safety plans and safety networks – developed within a Signs of Safety framework – used by families in child protection after their case has closed?
- What factors contribute to the activation of a safety plan and/or safety network after the case has closed?
- Does the presence of a safety plan/network at case closure prevent future child protection re-reports? Are families who use their safety plans/networks after their case has closed less likely to have a re-report?

Methodology

The primary source of information for the study was telephone interviews conducted with parents involved with child protection, as well as select individuals from that parent's safety network. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with parents approximately three and nine months after their case was closed, and with safety network members nine months after the parent's case had closed.

All study materials and procedures were approved by Casey Family Programs' Human Subjects Review Committee.

Participating jurisdictions

Five counties in Minnesota initially agreed to participate in the study: Anoka, Carver, Scott, St. Louis, and Yellow Medicine. These counties were chosen because they were identified by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) staff as having a relatively long history of using the Signs of Safety model (at least several years). Three of the counties are located in the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, and two of the counties are located in greater Minnesota. One county in the metro area (Scott) had to exit from the study early due to competing demands.

Recruitment process

Caseworkers in the participating counties were responsible for identifying and inviting eligible families to participate. Parents were eligible to participate in the study if they met the following criteria:

- The client had an open child protection case in the county.
- The client's child protection case was open for either assessment or case management for a minimum of 30 days.
- A [Signs of Safety] safety plan was developed in collaboration with the family, including the identification of a safety network.
- The client was at least 18 years of age.
- The client's child protection case was expected to close within the next 30 days or would be considered "closed" in practice by the caseworker (i.e., the worker/county did not expect to have any ongoing involvement with the family after case closure).
- The safety plan was intended to be useful in protecting the child from harm after the case was closed.

Caseworkers were expected to invite all families who met these criteria between approximately July 2013 and April 2014 (some counties came on board later in the process and had a shorter recruitment period). Using a script provided by Wilder Research, case workers made the invitation to eligible families, explaining the purpose of the study, the content and timing of the interviews, and the gift cards they would receive as a thank you for their participation. In the case of two-parent households, workers were asked to recruit the parent they felt had the most involvement in the case; therefore, most of the enrollees represent one household each. There was one exception, in which the two parents asked for and were granted a joint interview.

If a parent agreed to participate, the case worker would then proceed to: (a) obtain the parent's written consent, and assure parents they would have another opportunity to opt-in or out of the study at the time Wilder Research contacted them by phone; (b) gather parent contact information for the follow-up interviews; (c) ask the parent to anonymously complete a brief, two-page "fidelity checklist" that gathered information about the parent's perception of their experience with their case worker (as a means of assessing the Signs of Safety approach for a separate pilot study being conducted by Casey Family Programs¹); (d) collaborate with the parent to identify approximately two individuals from his or her safety network that the case worker could invite to participate in the study (typically 1 to 3 individuals were identified per parent) and collect their contact information; and (e) give the parent a \$15 gift card to Target or Wal-Mart on the spot for agreeing to participate in the study.

Caseworkers also made the study invitation to the identified safety network members and provided similar information. If the safety network member agreed to participate, the worker also obtained his or her written consent and contact information.

Upon obtaining consent from parents and their safety network members, county workers entered the relevant information about the individuals in a secure, password-protected database that was accessible only to the individual worker and the primary researchers at Wilder Research. Wilder Research used this information to confirm enrollment numbers and schedule interviews.

All participating caseworkers and supervisors received training from Wilder Research about the study prior to extending invitations to families. The training included an overview of the goals of the study, the eligibility criteria for participating, and procedural information (including a suggested script for recruiting families) related to obtaining consent, administering the fidelity checklists, and distributing gift cards.

¹ Parents completed the checklist in private and placed the completed form in an envelope which they sealed and signed and then returned to the case worker for mailing to Wilder Research, who collected the data on behalf of Casey Family Programs.

Parent and network interviews

Participating parents were asked to participate in two interviews – one approximately three months after their case closed with the county, and a second approximately nine months after their case closed.² The three-month interview was relatively brief (ranging from 10 to 20 minutes) and provided the first opportunity to check-in with parents about their recollection and use of the safety plan and safety network since their case had closed. Parents received a \$20 gift card (to their choice of Target or Wal-Mart) for completing the interview. The nine-month interview was longer (approximately 45 minutes in length, although most ranged from 30 to 90 minutes) and asked about their perceptions and use of their safety plan and safety network in greater depth. Basic demographic information was also collected. Parents received a \$40 gift card for completing the interview. In total, parents received \$75 in compensation for completing all components of the study.

Participating safety network members were asked to participate in one interview, approximately nine months after the parent's case closed.³ The interview asked about their perceptions of the safety plan, their understanding of their role and the role overall of the safety network, their interactions with the family since case closure, and basic demographic information. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, with most ranging from 30 to 90 minutes. Safety network members received a \$40 gift card to Target or Wal-Mart for completing the interview.

The interviews were developed by Wilder Research in partnership with Casey Family Programs and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, with input from Supervisors in the participating counties.

Pilot study

A small pilot study was conducted as part of this effort in order to test the recruitment protocol and interview questions. The goal of the pilot was to include the first five parents recruited by Carver County child protection staff, since this county was among the first to participate in the study and one of Minnesota's early adopters of the Signs of Safety model. In addition to interviewing parents three months after case closure, one to two safety network members working with each of these parents was also interviewed at the three-month point. A total of four parents and seven safety network members ultimately participated in the pilot. Interviewers were unable to reach one of the five

² In some cases, it took several weeks or months to reach the respondent. As a result, some interviews were completed with parents up to 2-3 months *after* the goal date of 3 and 9 months post-case closure.

³ In some cases, it took several weeks or months to reach the respondent. As a result, some interviews were completed with safety network members up to 2-3 months *after* the goal date of 9 months post-case closure.

parents who agreed to participate in the pilot. Data from these interviews were included in the overall results for this study.

As a result of the pilot, minor modifications were made to the study protocol and interview questions. Copies of the final versions of the interview protocols are included in the Appendix.

Analysis

The interview data were largely qualitative. The two primary researchers reviewed the open-ended interview responses and identified the common themes that emerged from the interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using basic mathematical calculations in Excel (e.g., mean, median, mode).

Participation rate

A total of 40 parents were invited to participate in the study; of these, 29 agreed to participate, and 26 completed interviews for an overall response rate of 65 percent. However, at least one county reported that workers tended to invite those they felt would be willing to participate and not necessarily everyone who was eligible. Given the low rate of refusal in some counties, this may have been the case in other counties as well. Therefore, the actual response rate is likely lower than reported here. Of the 26 parents who completed the three-month interview, 19 parents (73%) also completed the nine-month interview.

The study also included a total of 32 safety network members who completed a nine-month interview (out of 40 who initially agreed to participate, for a response rate of 80%). Thirty of those network members represented 18 participating parents (out of 26); the other two network members interviewed represented a parent who could not be reached for an interview. No safety network members could be reached for two families. Additionally, Wilder did not attempt interviews with the safety network members for six parents who were recruited in the spring of 2014 because the interview period was slated to close before nine-month interviews could be conducted.

Two safety network members were interviewed for 12 of the parents, while one safety network member was interviewed for the remaining six parents. (In three of those cases, only one safety network member was identified and agreed to participate, while in the other three cases, two network members were recruited, but only one could be reached.)

Figure 1 illustrates the total number of interviews conducted with parents and safety network members at each follow-up period.

1. Participation by county

County	3-month parent interviews	3-month network interviews	9-month parent interviews	9-month network interviews
Anoka	5	n/a	3	5
Carver	9	7	5	11
Scott	1	n/a	1	0
St. Louis	7	n/a	7	12
Yellow Medicine	4	n/a	3	4
Total	26	7	19	32

Note: The three-month network interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study.

Research limitations

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings presented in this report:

- **Limited sample size.** The results are based on a total of 26 parents and 32 safety network members. While we believe this sample size is still sufficient to yield valuable information about the long-term benefits of safety plans and safety networks, especially given the dearth of research on this subject, a larger sample would strengthen the results and allow for within-group comparative analysis (e.g., comparison by county or type of allegation) that was not possible here.
- **Variability across counties.** While all of the jurisdictions included are counties within a single state that have been implementing Signs of Safety for several years and have received similar training on the study protocol and procedures, there exist several differences across counties. These differences include: each county’s personal history with Signs of Safety and the extent to which this approach is being implemented consistently by case workers in the county; the way in which workers within and across counties communicated with potential participants about the study and extended the invitation; and to whom the study invitation was made, as some workers/counties were more apt to invite those they perceived to be a good fit for the study and would be more “willing” to participate, despite the established eligibility criteria.
- **Generalizability of findings.** All participating jurisdictions are located in the state of Minnesota, which operates a state-mandated and county-administered child welfare system. It is possible that results are not generalizable to other states or jurisdictions that are not county-based, that have different approaches to implementing the Signs of Safety framework, or have a different child welfare population. Furthermore, most of

the participants were white and female, and results might look different if the sample had been larger and included a more representative number of fathers and people of color.

For these reasons, this study should be considered a pilot investigation. Additional research is needed to examine the long-term usage and benefit of safety plans and safety networks. Nonetheless, as the first known attempt to examine the value of safety plans following case closure, it can provide valuable guidance to future research efforts. Such efforts should include a more diverse sample as well as a broader range of jurisdictions in other parts of the country and the world where the Signs of Safety model is being implemented.

Description of respondents

Most of the parents interviewed were female (81%) and white (79%). Nearly half (47%) were between the ages of 25 and 34. Parents had between one and four children, not all of whom were in their legal custody (Figure 2). Most of the safety network members interviewed were also female (69%) and white (84%). Their ages varied, ranging from 23 to 76 years old. More than half (61%) had known the parent for more than 20 years (Figure 3).

2. Parent demographics

	N	%
Gender (N=26)		
Female	21	81%
Male	5	19%
Age (N=19)		
18-24 years old	4	21%
25-34 years old	9	47%
35 or older	6	32%
Race (N=19)		
White	15	79%
Black	2	11%
Hispanic or Latino	1	5%
Native American	1	5%
Number of children under 18 (N=19)		
1 child	6	32%
2 children	6	32%
3 children	5	26%
4 children	2	11%

2. Parent demographics (continued)

Number of children in legal custody (N=19)	N	%
1 child	11	58%
2 children	5	26%
3 children	2	11%
4 children	1	5%

Note: Responses are missing for 7 parents in the categories of age, race, number of children under 18, and number of children in legal custody, because those questions were asked only at the 9-month interviews and 7 parents were either unable to be contacted or were not included in the 9-month interview (for reasons described above).

3. Network member demographics

	N	%
Gender (N=32)		
Female	22	69%
Male	10	31%
Age (N=31)		
18-24 years old	2	6%
25-34 years old	3	10%
35-44 years old	6	19%
45-54 years old	6	19%
55-64 years old	11	35%
65 or older	3	10%
Race (N=32)		
White	27	84%
Black	2	6%
Hispanic or Latino	2	6%
Native American	1	3%
How long known parent (N=31)		
2 to 5 years	8	26%
6 to 9 years	2	6%
10 to 19 years	2	6%
20 years or more	19	61%

Note: "Age" and "Length of time known parent" was missing for one respondent each.

Defining Signs of Safety

Model description

The Signs of Safety approach is a strengths-based, safety-organized child protection intervention strategy. The approach was created by Andrew Turnell, social worker and brief family therapist, and Steve Edwards, child protection practitioner, in partnership with 150 child protection case workers in Western Australia during the 1990s. The model has evolved over time based on the experiences and feedback of child protection practitioners. It is currently being implemented in over 100 jurisdictions in 12 countries around the world (www.signsofsafety.net).

The Signs of Safety approach was designed to give child protection practitioners a framework for engaging all persons involved in a child protection case including professionals, family members, and children. The primary goal for Signs of Safety work is maintaining the safety of children. Andrew Turnell, Signs of Safety program co-developer, identifies three core principles of the Signs of Safety approach (Western Australian Department for Child Protection, 2011):

- Establishing constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves
- Engaging in critical thinking and maintaining a position of inquiry
- Staying grounded in the everyday work of child protection practitioners

The Signs of Safety approach uses a risk assessment framework that involves “mapping” four components with a family: (1) worries, including harm, danger, and complicating factors; (2) what’s working, including existing strengths and safety; (3) what needs to happen, in terms of agency and family goals for future safety; and (4) a safety judgment. Practitioners typically complete the map with the family so it is understandable to them. It is a way to help both practitioners and family members think through a situation of child maltreatment, and it is to be used to guide the case from commencement to closure. The creation of safety plans and safety networks are also a hallmark of the approach.

The Signs of Safety approach also offers a suite of specific tools and strategies for engaging children in the risk assessment and safety planning process. These tools and methods for direct child involvement have been drawn from and created by international professionals and, like the Signs of Safety approach itself, continue to evolve as caseworkers use and refine them.

Implementation across counties

It is important to note that, although the model was originally developed in the 1990s, it has evolved over time as a result of the practical experience of workers and supervisors using it in the field. The developers readily acknowledge that the Signs of Safety framework has been informed by jurisdictions trying out the model in the context of their own existing practices, policies, and leadership. As such, depending on the extent of their history with Signs of Safety, the counties may have integrated elements of the approach into their work to different degrees.

Results

The following presents the key themes that emerged from the parent and safety network interviews.

Good communication and giving parents a voice are critical in working with families

When asked to think back to the early stages of safety planning, most parents and network members reported having positive experiences. Parents felt that they were able to work successfully with everyone involved – caseworkers, co-parents, family members, and friends – and network members were willing and happy to participate.

Parents were particularly satisfied with the safety planning process when they felt that their caseworker respected them and listened to their needs and wishes. Many respondents talked about having “power” or “control” in their safety planning, or not feeling pushed.

*I liked that [the county] really listened to my concerns. They didn't just tell me how they did things and how it was going to go. I felt like I was always heard.
– Parent, 3-month interview*

[My caseworker] was a great communicator, via emails, phone calls, text messaging. If I had any questions, she was right there to answer them. – Parent, 3-month interview

Giving us the choice of who we wanted in the network [worked well]. Our workers were open with us; we were open with our network; everyone was open – so you were on the same page, and if you had questions, you were free to ask.” – Parent, 3-month interview

Having the power to choose who would be on our network [worked well], rather than having them picked for us. – Parent, 3-month interview

I appreciated the idea [of safety planning]. I felt like it was in my control. I felt my worker was comfortable with going with my wishes and wasn't pushing me into anything, so it was a good experience.” – Parent, 3-month interview

Parents also appreciated the team approach to safety planning, which they felt kept everyone on the same page. Most people involved in the safety network remembered having a formal meeting at the beginning of the process and said they had met the parents' case worker at least one time.

Having everybody together was definitely necessary. Having everybody in the same room helped with open discussion. – Parent, 3-month interview

What worked well were the people who were part of the team who were willing to do [safety planning] and be available to do it, which made it easier. And that the worker worked with everybody, not just the home, but also the safety team, in figuring out what could be done. – Parent, 3-month interview

*“[Safety planning] went pretty well, because we were involved in every step. That is the key to it being successful and not dreaded. It was all a group decision.
– Parent, 3-month interview*

For those who had a negative experience, the reasons most often cited were a lack of communication from their caseworker or feeling forced into choosing network members. A couple of those same parents also mentioned that the lack of communication was due to having more than one caseworker, or switching caseworkers part way through their case. In those instances, parents felt that workers did not communicate well with each other, which ultimately resulted in the parent feeling that they were receiving mixed messages about what to do.

With my first [caseworker], the communication was sorely lacking. I didn't know where I stood; if things could have been communicated at the get-go, I think that would have made it better. – Parent, 3-month interview

There was a lot of confusion... [The county workers] seemed to not know what each other had said; there was miscommunication between them. – Parent, 3-month interview

I asked for help and [my caseworker] said she would talk to her supervisor, but she never got back to me...I was doing everything I was supposed to be doing...I was on the top of my game. [My caseworker] should have been helping me and she wasn't...There were no phone calls telling me how things were going. – Parent, 3-month interview

It was very stressful. [The caseworker's] personality was very strong, so I felt very stressed and condemned. I was caught off guard, so it was hard – the feeling that I was a horrible person. I doubt she intended it to come across that way, but that was what the non-verbal [communication] said to me. – Parent, 3-month interview

Parents see safety planning as stressful, but necessary

One of the major themes to come out of the parent interviews was that safety planning, while stressful, is an important step in building a stronger support system for parents and their children. Resistance to the safety planning process was typically because the process required parents to examine the actions that resulted in their involvement in child protection and to share or revisit some of those painful details with friends and family members.

While safety planning was viewed initially as an uncomfortable process, most parents felt that the discomfort was well worth the effort because it helped them refocus, evaluate their priorities, and keep their children safe.

[Safety planning] was stressful and it was good. It got me where I should be. [It was stressful] knowing the fact of what I did when I was pregnant. [It was good because] it got me on the right track and got me sober and got me to treatment.

– Parent, 3-month interview

In the beginning, I thought [safety planning] really sucked and I didn't want to do it. But in the end I realized that it was a really good experience that helped me to keep my children safe. – Parent, 3-month interview

At first, it was like, 'Are we just jumping through hoops? Do we have to do this?' But it works, and it was a long...process, but ultimately it works. And, without it, I don't know where we would be at this point. – Parent, 3-month interview

[Developing a safety plan] was pretty hard – I have to have everything down in writing in order to have my kids safe. But it was OK afterwards, because it was kind of an awakening for me. It was kind of like a light bulb came on in my head...I needed to make better decisions for my kids and not for me, because they are the ones that are important.

– Parent, 3-month interview

[Safety planning] made me realize that if you have your network...it really helps. It helps avoid anything that could possibly happen to my kids. – Parent, 3-month interview

It was kind of stressful, because I'd been using for so long and I'd shut those people out of my life and just getting in contact with those people again and hurt some people. It was difficult but I needed to do it. I hadn't talked to them [in a] while; I was really deep into my addiction. – Parent, 3-month interview

It was just hard to take people from all those different parts of my life and have to explain my mental illness to them...It was a little intimidating, but it was worth it.

– Parent, 3-month interview

Safety networks already existed for many

While parents saw overall safety planning as valuable, the general impression from interviewees was that safety planning is more about the network than the plan. Parents talked about the importance of having close family members and friends in their lives, and network members were eager to support the parents and children. At the nine-month interview, all of the parents interviewed remembered talking to their caseworker about creating a safety network, while a couple could not remember making a safety plan. Similarly, several network members could not recall having seen a safety plan, whereas almost all understood that they were involved in the network (in a couple of cases, there was confusion about what the safety network was or if the respondent was a part of it).

Part of the reason that parents placed a greater emphasis on the network is that many of those interviewed felt that their safety network was not something new; rather, it was a formalized grouping of close family members and friends who were already heavily involved in their lives. At the nine-month interview, when asked who was on their network, most parents identified family members – particularly mothers, sisters, and aunts – and friends. Networks also included parents’ partners, religious leaders, AA sponsors, and daycare providers. The average number of people on a network was just over six (Figure 4).

4. Number of people in the safety network

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode
2 people	20 people	6.53	5	5

When asked why they had contacted these particular people to be a part of their safety network, most parents said that network members were the people who were closest to them, who were the most involved in their lives, and who knew their children the best. Parents also said that they could count on their network members to be supportive and non-judgmental, but also to be very honest.

[Setting up the safety network] was easy for our family, because it was either family or close friends, people we talk to on a regular basis. – Parent, 3-month interview

I am very close to my family; my family wants the best for us, no matter what. They will be there for me and my family. I can count on them. – Parent, 9-month interview

They are the ones most involved in our life right now. – Parent, 9-month interview

They are the closest ones to me and they could identify if there were any problems, like if anybody was using, as far as chemicals. They were available 24/7 if I needed somebody to talk to. They were usually nearby, so they would be able to identify any unusual behavior. – Parent, 9-month interview

They were people who were honest with me and could see things more clearly than I could or the caseworker could; they were honest and very supportive; they weren't condescending or judgmental. – Parent, 9-month interview

*I trust them, and they live close by...They knew the family situation.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

Network members were most often asked to be a part of the safety planning process by the parents involved in child protection; several were also asked by the parent’s caseworker. In discussing why they were included, network members responded with “because I am her grandmother” or “because I am her friend.” There was not a specific

reason to be a part of the network other than that they are close to the family and would help if the parent was in need.

*I'm her mom and she was scared; she didn't want her baby to be taken away.
– Network member, 9-month interview*

Because I am one of his closest friends. – Network member, 9-month interview

*Because I have been a part of my granddaughter's life since she was born.
– Network member, 9-month interview*

I've known her since we were in the 3rd grade. – Network member, 9-month interview

*As soon as she got in trouble I was called and asked to be part [of the safety network].
They called me and told me they were going to have a meeting...I was very concerned
about my daughter and granddaughter. – Network member, 9-month interview*

*I was asked because she's my niece and she just wanted help in trying to keep her
children. – Network member, 9-month interview*

*I know her situation and know what kind of trouble she was in and knew how I could help
out with that. – Network member, 9-month interview*

Safety planning eases the difficulty of asking for help

Despite the fact that many parents already had a supportive group of friends and family in place, respondents appreciated the formal process of creating a network because it somewhat removed the pressure of asking for help. Several parents mentioned that they felt good knowing there were people supporting them. Previously, they had felt nervous to reach out for help with difficult aspects of their lives, such as mental health problems, substance abuse, or help with their children.

It helped to establish the safety network and to think of who in our lives could actually be helpful. And it ultimately created a plan that worked. – Parent, 3-month interview

Before I got myself in trouble, I always wanted to know, 'If I got into trouble, could I call someone?' Once [my caseworker] came along, it worked out perfectly. It was the same people I had wanted to call. She gave me more confidence to just ask them, because I am someone who doesn't ask people for help. – Parent, 3-month interview

Sometimes it can be awkward to ask for help, and [safety planning] took that out of the way. Just the other day, my son was having a really cranky day, driving me nuts; and I could call my boyfriend's mother and ask her to watch him for me for a couple of hours. It took away that 'asking for help' thing. We know that they are someone we can count on for help. – Parent, 9-month interview

*It lets you know you're not by yourself...It's an experience I could've never imagined...
I just know I've never been so happy. It all came from the bad experience. I have
experience with child protection, but they gave me a fair chance unlike anybody else.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

Parents place greater value on safety networks than safety plans

As mentioned previously, most respondents thought of the safety network as pre-existing, while the safety plan was something new and imposed by the county. Therefore, the network was viewed as a more positive, permanent mechanism for providing support and keeping children safe, while the safety plan was often seen as temporary. That is not to say that respondents had negative opinions of their safety plan; they were simply more comfortable with and reliant on their network.

In addition, since the safety network involves people who know the parent well – know their behaviors and history with substance abuse, mental health, or other issues – parents felt that the network was well-equipped to recognize a crisis if one should occur.

Most of the parents interviewed three months after case closure, and nearly all of the parents at nine months after case closure, had used their safety network; in contrast, less than half of parents had used their safety plan at three months, and about half had used it at nine months after case closure.

*I haven't used [the safety plan], but I do have those people around me.
– Parent, 3-month interview*

*I haven't had to use my safety plan. All of the requirements made around the safety plan...
aren't a concern anymore. But if any of those things were to become a problem again, I
don't see the safety plan not being facilitated. – Parent, 3-month interview*

*Once or twice we did use it; not so much the whole plan, but the safety network we have
used a lot. – Parent, 3-month interview*

*[The safety network] is a nice thing to have in place, if it is ever needed. But [the safety
plan] is not something I have had to use as often as the network.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

*Everybody still involved [in my safety network] is very helpful and I think that's perfect, but
the safety plan itself is based around a crisis: me relapsing; so without relapse, I haven't
had to use it. – Parent, 9-month interview*

*We have never had to use [the safety plan]. There haven't been any incidences. We
haven't used it at all. It is pretty cut and dry working with the network.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

*The network, in the end, was very helpful. I'm glad we have it and glad we had built it.
The safety plan was pointless – it never worked. – Parent, 9-month interview*

*I don't know that there is a plan since the case was closed. There is no contact with the
county anymore. – Network member, 9-month interview*

*I honestly can't remember what the plan consisted of. I know it included contacting people
from the safety network for help. But much further than that, I can't really remember.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

At both the three- and nine-month interviews, respondents were asked to rate their safety network and safety plan on a scale of 1 to 10, with higher scores indicating higher levels of confidence in the plan/network. As shown in Figure 5, the average score for all types of interviews is seven or higher, and the most common response (mode) is 10. In terms of the 10-point rating scale, there is not much difference between safety plans and networks; however, as seen in the open-ended comments above, safety networks seem to be more highly valued. For those who reported having actually used their network, ratings were seven out of ten or higher; for those who had used their safety plan, ratings were five or higher.

5. Safety network and safety plan ratings

Type of interview	Ratings (range from 1 – 10)		
	Mean	Median	Mode
3-month PARENT interviews (N=26)			
Safety network	8.42	10	10
Safety plan	8.35	10	10
9-month PARENT interviews (N=19)			
Safety network	8.00	10	10
Safety plan	7.89	10	10
9-month NETWORK interviews (N=30)*			
Safety network	8.03	9	10
Safety plan	7.77	9	10

Note: Ratings are based on responses to the following question: Overall, how would you say your safety plan/safety network is working for you today, on a scale of 1 to 10, where “1” means you think it was a worthless hoop you had to jump through to get child protection out of your life, and “10” means you feel 100 percent confident that it will help you keep your child safe?

* Two network members responded “don't know”

Respondents have different definitions of “using” the network or plan

One complicating factor in analyzing the opinions and usage of safety planning is that respondents have varying definitions of what “using” their network or plan means. For

several, “using” the safety network meant helping parents with day-to-day needs, such as babysitting or running errands. More generally, parents said that they used their network by simply talking to friends and family to feel less overwhelmed or stressed.

[My partner’s] parents would give us rides to get to any appointments. My mom is there if I just need someone to talk to; I can always talk to her. – Parent, 9-month interview

[The network’s role was] to help [the parent] when he was struggling with childcare. – Network member, 9-month interview

Babysitting, resources for diapers, wipes, etc. Concerns like when I notice something and asked them for help or suggestions. – Parent, 3-month interview

I’m just a backup if I need to have the baby for a couple weekends or a couple times during the week – just someone who could help her babysit. [Interviewee was asked about keeping the children safe.] No – safety wasn’t an issue. – Network member, 9-month interview

If I have a problem come up, I will go and talk with a safety team member, like have coffee and talk with them about stress and things like that...they are all friends. – Parent, 3-month interview

My mom watches the boys for me while I work, which has been awesome. A couple of friends on the safety network...help me by hanging around other sober people and introducing me to other sober people. – Parent, 3-month interview

[The safety network] is a support to make sure [the parents] are not overwhelmed. – Parent, 9-month interview

When I’m frustrated or upset I call somebody on the network. We talk and I settle down. It’s a much more constructive way of dealing with things. – Parent, 3-month interview

[I have not used the safety plan] in any action terms, but I have been able to lean on people for support. I can talk to them, and they check in on us to see if we continue to be happy. I see them as ongoing support people. – Parent, 3-month interview

[My friend] has been there a lot when I’m having a bad day...sometimes you just need a break – to have someone take the kids to the park and having them be there to talk to and keep in touch to make sure everything is okay. – Parent, 9-month interview

[My role was] to be part of the team to make sure that [the parent] was doing what she was supposed to be doing and to be there if she needed us. [Interviewee was asked about keeping the children safe.] It’s all about the kids and making sure that [the parent] did what she needs to do for the safety and wellbeing of the children. – Network member, 9-month interview

When asked how often they would use their safety plan, about half of parents said they plan to (or currently do) use it on a regular basis, while the other half said they would use

it only in a crisis situation. This reiterates the previous point that, for many, the safety network is seen as a permanent, more useful tool than the safety plan.

I use [the safety plan] almost all the time, especially since I'm so close to [my safety network]. They know my life and routine and my son's life and routine...They'll call me and ask how things are going; they're also keeping up to date on things.
– Parent, 9-month interview

[I use the safety plan on a] regular basis because whenever I'm going through something, no matter what kind of day, I'm going to call and reach out. – Parent, 9-month interview

The person I had an Order for Protection on showed up at my house and we had to follow it. The safety plan was carried through perfectly. – Parent, 3-month interview

I don't think about [the safety plan] much. I just do what I have to do, and everybody else knows what they have to do, so it is not on my mind. But if something were to happen, it absolutely would be the first thing I would think about. – Parent, 9-month interview

I'd say [the safety plan] is used more in a crisis, because things don't get to that point anymore, but it's nice to know that it's there. – Parent, 9-month interview

[The safety network was] able to be there and help deescalate me. At this point, the network isn't [as helpful]. It's always nice to have that, but I'm learning new skills on how to cope with stress and that's far more important. I felt like the safety plan was a temporary fix. If I applied that only, it would be like putting a Band-Aid on a gash; I needed some other things to make this more long term. – Parent, 9-month interview

Many respondents viewed the safety network as a direct support for parents, rather than a direct support for children

The general impression of respondents is that safety planning is viewed primarily as a mechanism for supporting the *parents*, and indirectly helps keep their children safe, rather than a mechanism for directly keeping children safe. Overall, there was little discussion of engaging in activities explicitly aimed at keeping the children safe, unless respondents were directly asked. Therefore, many of the network members tended to describe their role more passively; only a couple of network members said that they had more of a “policing” or active monitoring role, as opposed to simply observing the family. Rather, many talked about “keeping an eye out,” or getting involved “if the parent calls me,” rather than proactively assessing children’s safety.

I'm not being overbearing, but being aware. And [the parents] know that I will bring to their attention anything that seems out of whack. – Network member, 9-month interview

[My role was to be] another set of eyes to see if things I noticed are changing or out of the ordinary; just to keep another set of eyes on [the family].
– Network member, 3-month interview

[My role is] to keep an eye out and notify [child protection] if I notice anything that would be a threat or harmful to the children. – Network member, 9-month interview

*To keep an eye on them or keep in contact if we felt something was going wrong or any danger was there for the kids; more or less being a watchful eye.
– Network member, 9-month interview*

[The safety network's role was to] make sure I was getting the help I needed and first and foremost they wanted to make sure the kids were safe and getting what they need while I was getting what I needed. They supported the whole family. – Parent, 9-month interview

*[The safety network's role was to] check in with our family, see how the kids are doing, see if everyone's thriving and doing what we're supposed to be doing.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

[My role is] taking the kids out of a situation that could lead them to be scared or maybe be a pawn in an argument between the parents... [The overall network is] to catch things before they escalated. – Network member, 9-month interview

[The safety network] has actually gone through the house many times to make sure that everything is in order. – Parent, 9-month interview

*Policeman; I'm the person who checks in on things to make sure it's staying kosher. I'm there for [the child], so she knows she has a safe place. If she needs to get out of the house, vent, needs a place to stay...I would be a source for all that.
– Network member, 9-month interview*

Reliance on safety planning diminishes over time, but families find it helpful

In an open-ended question at the 9-month interviews, most parents said that they continue to use their safety network, and particularly their plan, the same amount or less compared to when they started the safety planning process. Respondents said that the diminished use of safety planning is not necessarily because they view the tools as unimportant, but rather because they are more comfortable with their respective situations. Both parents and network members appear to be in less of a crisis mode; parents say that they know friends and family are available to talk if needed. A couple of people mentioned that time and geographic distance are reasons for losing contact with safety network members.

[The safety network] hasn't left or anything, they are still highly available but just not as much as was needed before. – Parent, 9-month interview

*When we didn't need them as much anymore, they kind of laid back. They all call every once in a while. And we still know that, if we ever need them, they are still there.
– Parent, 9-month interview*

It's about the same, but the relationship has evolved. I'm still in contact with people. I still give them regular updates. But now it's not crisis mode, where I have to talk with these people otherwise something bad could happen. – Parent, 9-month interview

When the safety plan was active, they would have to come in every day to check on us. Now it has changed to weekly or less, whenever they have time.
– Parent, 9-month interview

They are less involved as far as policing everything going on, it's not really necessary anymore; but they are more involved emotionally. It has brought us closer together. We do a lot more family activities now and hang out quite a bit more.
– Parent, 9-month interview

Ultimately, parents felt that their network and plan will continue to support them and keep their children safe. Network members felt similarly, but often with the caveat that safety planning will only work if families are willing to put in the time and effort.

I really feel it is going to work. I still keep in contact with these people and they are willing to do whatever it takes, so that if I do feel the urge, I have a place for my kids to go.
– Parent, 9-month interview

I believe that if the family really wants the change [safety planning] is a very good thing. It is just like any program...it depends on what people are looking for. I think my sister had truly hit rock bottom; she needed a change and she used the program for what it needed to be: to get healthy. – Network member, 9-month interview

The role of safety planning in preventing re-reports

In order to examine the extent to which the presence of safety plans and safety networks prevent future re-reports to child protection, re-report data was examined for 24 of the 26 parents who completed interviews (two parents could not be matched within the state's child welfare database). There were no re-reports in the six months following case closure, but three re-reports in the 12 months following case closure, representing 12.5 percent of participating parents. This relatively small number of re-reports within the study sample are lower than rates for Minnesota overall in 2013, where there was a six-month re-report rate of 9.5 percent, and a 16.1 percent 12-month re-report rate (Minnesota's Child Welfare Report 2013).

To further examine whether those who actually used their plan/network were less likely to have a re-report, parents were categorized into two groups:

- “High” plan/network users (n=11): those who reported having used their safety plan and their safety network after case closure.
- “Low” plan/network users: those who reported having used neither the plan nor network (n=8), or used only one (n=7) since case closure.

Of the three 12-month re-reports, two were “low” plan/network users, and one was a “high” user. Given the small sample and re-report rate, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the relationship between re-reports and plan/network usage. However, these findings suggest that – as a whole – parents involved in the study, all of whom had established safety plans and networks using a Signs of Safety framework, were less likely to have a re-report 6 or 12 months later relative to parents across the state overall. Because the number of parents included in this study is small, more research with larger samples is needed to further examine the extent to which safety plans and safety networks prevent future reports to child protection.

Conclusions and issues to consider

Little research exists about the role of safety networks and safety plans after case closure and the extent to which they help maintain the safety of children over the long-term. Although this study examined a relatively small number of parents, the findings include insights about how safety plans and safety networks are established as well as opportunities for enhancing their use with families to ensure they are used to keep children safe after their child protection case has closed. The preliminary results also suggest such tools may contribute to reduced re-reports to child protection.

The following presents issues to consider in developing safety plans and safety networks with families:

- **Connect network members.** Throughout the interviews, there was a noticeable lack of discussion about network members reaching out to and communicating with each other. All members talked about the support that they provided to the parents, but almost no one discussed the broader network as a whole, unless prompted. Having network members set up regular check-ins with one another – either in person, by phone, or through web conferencing – may help them to better understand their roles and responsibilities and, ultimately, create a stronger safety net for the children.
- **Be mindful when matching families with caseworkers and emphasize relationship-building skills with staff.** When asked what could be improved in the safety planning process, most of the suggestions involved improving the relationship between the parent and their caseworker, particularly the communication. Parents who had the most negative opinions about the safety planning process tended to be those who had a difficult relationship with their caseworker, those who had more than one caseworker, or those who felt bullied into choosing their network or plan elements.
- **More clearly define the safety plan for parents and network members.** Many respondents were unclear about what the plan entailed and how long they were supposed to use it; almost no one talked about the specific elements of the plan (e.g., Words and Pictures, Three Houses). Case workers should go into greater detail with families about what the plan involves, as well as its overall purpose and how long they are expected to use it. As mentioned in the detailed findings, many families felt that it was something they would only use in a crisis, and therefore, commitment to safety planning diminished over time.
- **More clearly define the role of a safety network member.** Most network members defined their responsibility in relatively vague terms such as, "being aware", "keeping

an eye out", or "seeing how the kids are doing." It may be that network members need more guidance, and some specific strategies, for how they might fulfill their obligation. This is particularly important given the finding that few network members described any proactive strategies they had taken to ensure a child's safety.

- **Follow up with families after case closure.** In order to prevent diminishing use of the safety network and plan after case closure, caseworkers, or someone at the county level, should follow up with families every few months to check in on their well-being. In the end, nearly all families felt that safety planning was useful in helping keep children safe and providing strong support for parents. It was natural that the more time that had passed since case closure, the less often parents thought about the formal process of safety planning. If counties want the safety plans to endure over time, it will be necessary to do periodic check-ins and reminders about the importance and usefulness of this model.

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Appendix

Parent 3-month Follow-up Interview Guide

for “A study of the activation and use of safety plans and safety networks after case closure for families involved in Child Protection” (submitted by Wilder Research)

Introduction:

Hi, may I please speak with _____? My name is _____ and I am calling from Wilder Research. We received your contact information from your caseworker from _____ County. I am calling today because a few months ago, you agreed to let us contact you about participating in a couple of telephone interviews regarding your recent child protection case. As your caseworker explained, we are interested in learning more about how families are doing after they leave child protection, and where they get support when they need it. We want to schedule a time to interview you that is convenient for you. This will be the first of two interviews. These interviews last about 10-15 minutes, although the length will depend on what you choose to say. To thank you for participating in the first interview, you'll receive a \$20 gift card to your choice of either Target or Wal-Mart. You will receive a \$40 gift card after you complete the second interview.

The telephone interview is completely voluntary, so you decide whether you want to participate or not. We could even do the interview right now, if you'd like. Is now a good time, or would you like to schedule the interview for a later date?

If yes: Proceed

If no: Thank you so much for your time today. Have a great day. Goodbye.

If later date, schedule day and time on face sheet.

[INTERVIEWER: At the time R agrees to participate, please read the following]:

Before we begin, I am required to tell you a few important things about this interview and the study:

- Your County has only provided us with enough information to know that you were involved in Child Protection and when that involvement began and ended. We do not know anything about the circumstances, and we do not need to know anything about the circumstances.
- If you choose to participate in the interview, you decide how much you want to share.
- You may experience some minor stress by recalling your experience with child protection during the interview. If there are any questions you don't want to answer, though, we can skip them, including any questions that you are uncomfortable with. If you want to stop the interview at any time, we will stop.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your status or relationship with the County, the Child Protection system, or any other systems.
- Your responses to the interview questions will be kept private and will be summarized with the responses of other parents and safety network members. Your answers will not be seen by anyone except the research staff working on the study. Exceptions to this are possible. For example, we may not be able to keep your information private if a court orders us to release it, or if you make a threat of harm to yourself or others. All information you share will be stored in locked cabinets or on secure, password-protected computers and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- If you would like more information about the study, you may contact Wilder Research or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. Would you like this contact information?
 - You can either contact Monica Idzelis at Wilder Research at 651.280.2657 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Co-Chair at 206.378.3396.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Before I get into the interview, I just want to make it clear that you do not need to share ANY specifics about the circumstances that brought child protection into your life. We do not need any of that information in order to complete the interview. BUT, we DO want to know how things have been going since your case closed and have some questions about that...

1. Thinking back to when you were still involved with child protection, do you remember talking with your worker about creating a **safety network**? This is basically identifying family members or friends who might be able to help you keep your child(ren) safe. [IF NO, PROBE: Do you have someone who you can call when you need help keeping your children safe? IF YES: Who? IF STILL NO, SKIP TO Q2]
 - a. Did you help identify who would be in the network? How did you help? [PROBE: Who identified your network members? You, your worker, someone else?]
 - b. What was your experience like setting up your safety network with your worker? [IF NEEDED, READ DEFINITION AGAIN: Remember, a safety network is a group of family members or friends who might help you keep your child(ren) safe.]
 - c. What worked well in the process of setting up the network? Is there anything your worker could have done differently to make it a better experience?
 - d. How do you feel your safety network is working so far? Have you used/relied on your safety network since your case closed? How so/who was involved?

2. Thinking back to when you were still involved in child protection, did you and your caseworker develop a **safety plan**? This may have been a written document describing what you would do to help keep your children safe. It may have also included specific roles for people in your safety network. [IF THEY ANSWER "NO" TO BOTH Q1 AND Q2, TERMINATE]
 - a. Did you help make the plan? How did you help? Who else was involved?
 - b. What was your experience like developing your safety plan with your worker?
 - c. What worked well? Is there anything your worker could have done differently to make it a better experience?
 - d. How do you feel your safety plan is working so far? Have you used/relied on your safety plan since your case closed? How so?

3. How would you say your safety network is working for you today, on a scale of 1 to 10, where "1" means you think it was a worthless hoop you had to jump through to get child protection out of your life, and "10" means you feel 100 percent confident that it will **help you keep your child safe**? _____ Why did you give it that rating?
(Probe: How is it, or is it not, helping keep your child(ren) safe?)

4. How about your safety plan? How would you rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, where "1" means you think it was a worthless hoop you had to jump through to get child protection out of your life, and "10" means you feel 100 percent confident that it will **help you keep your child safe**? _____ Why did you give it that rating?
(Probe: How is it, or is it not, helping keep your child(ren) safe?)

5. Is there anything else you would like to share at this point about safety networks or safety planning?

6. As a reminder, we will plan to call you again in about 6 months to conduct another interview similar to the one we just completed. When you complete the 2nd interview, you will receive a \$40 gift card. Is there anything we should know about changes to your phone number or address that will help us get a hold of you in 6 months? Or phone numbers for others who might be able to get ahold of you if we can't reach you? [INTERVIEWER RECORD UPDATED CONTACT INFORMATION HERE]:

End of interview

Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Thank you for taking the time to complete our interview. As a thank you, we would like to send you a \$20 gift card to either Target or Walmart. Which store would you prefer?

- Target..... 1
- Walmart..... 2

Your gift certificate will be sent by certified mail within the next two to four weeks. This means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door for someone to sign for it so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. INTERVIEWER: IF CERTIFIED MAIL IS A PROBLEM, GIVE R A CHOICE OF HAVING IT SENT ELSEWHERE OR HAVING IT SENT BY REGULAR MAIL AT HIS/HER OWN RISK. THIS MEANS THAT IF THEY DON'T RECEIVE IT, WE WILL NOT REPLACE IT.

- Certified..... 1
- Regular mail..... 2

What name and address should we send the gift card to?

IF R DID NOT WANT CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE START OF THE INTERVIEW:

If you would like more information about the study, you may contact the researcher or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. I asked you before but am asking again, now that you've heard the questions. Would you like this contact information?

- You can either contact Monica Idzelis at Wilder Research at 651.280.2657 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Review Committee at 206.378.4610.

Thank you again!

Safety Network Member 3-month Follow-up Interview Guide (for pilot study)

for “A study of the activation and use of safety plans and safety networks after case closure for families involved in Child Protection” (submitted by Wilder Research)

Introduction:

Hi, may I please speak with _____? My name is _____ and I am calling from Wilder Research. We received your contact information from [client name] and his/her child protection caseworker at _____ County because they identified you as a member of [client's] safety network. I am calling today because we are interested in learning more about how families are doing after they leave child protection, and where they get support when they need it. In addition to talking directly with families involved in the child protection system, we are trying to connect with at least two people from each family's safety network to hear directly from you about your experience as a safety network member and how you feel the process is going.

We want to schedule a time to do the interview that is convenient for you. This will be the first of two interviews, and it should last about 20 minutes, although the length will depend on what you choose to say. We will call you again in 6 months to schedule a follow-up interview. To thank you for participating in this interview, you'll receive a \$20 gift card to your choice of either Target or Wal-Mart. You will receive a \$40 gift card after you complete the second interview.

The telephone interview is completely voluntary, so you decide whether you want to participate or not. We could even do the interview right now, if you'd like. Is now a good time, or would you like to schedule the interview for a later date?

If yes: Proceed

If no: Thank you so much for your time today. Have a great day. Goodbye.

If later date, schedule day and time on face sheet.

[INTERVIEWER: At the time R agrees to participate, please read the following]:

Before we begin, I am required to tell you a few important things about this interview:

- The counties participating in this study have only provided us with enough information to know that families were involved in Child Protection and when that involvement began and ended. We do not know anything about the circumstances of the case, and we do not need to know anything about the circumstances.
- If there are any questions you don't want to answer, we can skip them, including any questions that you are uncomfortable with. If you want to stop the interview at any time, we will stop.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your status or relationship, or [client's] status or relationship, with the County, the Child Protection system, or any other systems.
- Your responses to the interview questions will be kept private and will be summarized with the responses of other safety network members. Your answers will not be seen by anyone except the research staff working on the study. Exceptions to this are possible. For example, we may not be able to keep your information private if a court orders us to release it, or if you make a threat of harm to yourself or others. All information you share will be stored in locked cabinets or on secure, password-protected computers and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- If you would like more information about the study, you may contact Wilder Research or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. Would you like this contact information?
 - You can either contact Monica Idzelis at Wilder Research at 651.280.2657 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Co-Chair at 206.378.3396.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Thinking back, how were you initially asked to be part of [client's] safety network? In case you have not heard that term, a safety network is basically a group of family members or friends who come together to help the family keep their child(ren) safe.
 - a. Was there a formal meeting?
 - b. Why do you think you were asked to do this? What is your relationship to [client]?
 - c. Did you meet [client's] caseworker?
 - d. What did you understand your role to be?
 - e. What about the role of the safety network overall? (What did you understand the purpose/role to be?)

2. Do you remember whether there was a formal process or document that outlined your role/responsibilities as a safety network member? This may have been called a safety plan.
 - a. IF YES, What is your understanding of how the safety plan is supposed to work?
 - b. IF YES, Since [client's] child protection case closed, have you carried out any of your roles/responsibilities from the safety plan? How so? Do you feel like this helped the family keep their child(ren) safe? How so?

3. Since [client's] child protection case closed, has there been a time when [client] asked for your help, but you were unable or unwilling to help?
 - a. If yes, please describe.

4. As you probably know, the purpose of both safety plans and safety networks is to help families keep their children safe and keep child protective services out of their lives for good. Do you believe safety plans and safety networks can provide this kind of support to families? Or do you feel like they are just something families are made to do so that child protection can close the case and get on to the next one?
 - b. Whether or not you have had to do anything from the safety plan yet, do you feel like your participation in the process has helped the family keep their child(ren) safe?

5. Do you have any other comments about your role as a safety network member or the client's safety plan?

6. As a reminder, we will plan to call you again in about 6 months to conduct another interview similar to the one we just completed. When you complete the second interview, you will receive a \$40 gift card. Is there anything we should know about changes to your phone number or address that will help us get a hold of you in 6 months?
 [INTERVIEWER RECORD UPDATED CONTACT INFORMATION HERE]:

End of interview

Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Thank you for taking the time to complete our interview. As a thank you, we would like to send you a \$20 gift card to either Target or Walmart. Which store would you prefer?

Target..... 1
 Walmart..... 2

Your gift certificate will be sent by certified mail within the two to four weeks. This means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door for someone to sign for it so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. INTERVIEWER: IF CERTIFIED MAIL IS A PROBLEM, GIVE R A CHOICE OF HAVING IT SENT ELSEWHERE OR HAVING IT SENT BY REGULAR MAIL AT HIS/HER OWN RISK. THIS MEANS THAT IF THEY DON'T RECEIVE IT, WE WILL NOT REPLACE IT.

Certified 1
Regular mail 2

What name and address should we send the gift card to?

IF R DID NOT WANT CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE START OF THE INTERVIEW:

If you would like more information about the study, you may contact the researcher or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. I asked you before but am asking again, now that you've heard the questions. Would you like this contact information?

- You can either contact Monica Idzelis at Wilder Research at 651.280.2657 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Review Committee at 206.378.4610.

Thank you again!

Parent 9-month Follow-up Interview Guide

for “A study of the activation and use of safety plans and safety networks after case closure for families involved in Child Protection” (submitted by Wilder Research)

Introduction:

Hi, may I please speak with _____? My name is _____ and I am calling from Wilder Research. We received your contact information from your caseworker from _____ County/Tribe. I am calling today because a few months ago, you agreed to let us contact you about participating in a couple of telephone interviews regarding your recent child protection case. As your caseworker explained, we are interested in learning more about how families are doing after they leave child protection, and where they get support when they need it.

We want to schedule a time to do the interview that is convenient for you. Most interviews last about 35-45 minutes, although the length will depend on what you choose to say. To thank you for participating in this interview, you'll receive a \$40 gift card to your choice of either Target or Wal-Mart.

The telephone interview is completely voluntary, so you decide whether you want to participate or not. We could even do the interview right now, if you'd like. Is now a good time, or would you like to schedule the interview for a later date?

If yes: Proceed

If no: Thank you so much for your time today. Have a great day. Goodbye.

If later date, schedule day and time on face sheet.

[INTERVIEWER: At the time R agrees to participate, please read the following]:

Before we begin, I am required to tell you a few important things about this interview and the study:

- Your County has only provided us with enough information to know that you were involved in Child Protection and when that involvement began and ended. We do not know anything about the circumstances, and we do not need to know anything about the circumstances.
- If you choose to participate in the interview, you decide how much you want to share.
- You may experience some minor stress by recalling your experience with child protection during the interview. If there are any questions you don't want to answer, though, we can skip them, including any questions that you are uncomfortable with. If you want to stop the interview at any time, we will stop.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your status or relationship with the County, the Child Protection system, or any other systems.
- Your responses to the interview questions will be kept private and will be summarized with the responses of other safety network members. Your answers will not be seen by anyone except the research staff working on the study. Exceptions to this are possible. For example, we may not be able to keep your information private if a court orders us to release it, or if you make a threat of harm to yourself or others. All information you share will be stored in locked cabinets or on secure, password-protected computers and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- If you would like more information about the study, you may contact Wilder Research or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. Would you like this contact information?
 - You can either contact Michelle Gerrard at Wilder Research at 651.280.2695 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subject Co-Chair at 206.378.4610.

Before I get into the interview, I just want to make it clear that you do not need to share ANY specifics about the circumstances that brought child protection into your life. We do not need any of that information in order to complete the interview. BUT, we DO want to know how things have been going since your case closed and have some questions about that...

1. Thinking back to when you were still involved with child protection, do you remember talking with your worker about creating a safety network? This is basically identifying family members or friends who might be able to help you keep your child(ren) safe. [IF NO, PROBE: Do you have someone who you can call when you need help keeping your children safe? IF YES: Who? IF STILL NO, SKIP TO Q6]
 - a. How many people are in your safety network? Can you identify them? (WE DO NOT NEED NAMES, BUT RELATIONSHIP OF EACH MEMBER WOULD BE HELPFUL, I.E. SISTER, NEIGHBOR, CO-WORKER)
 - b. Why did you ask each person to be involved (or did your case worker invite them)? How did you think they might be able to help? Do they all have a similar role in your network, or are they helping in different ways? (GATHER THIS INFORMATION FOR EACH NETWORK MEMBER IF POSSIBLE)
 - c. How did you initially ask people to be part of your safety network? Was there a formal meeting? Did they meet your caseworker?

2. Since your child protection case closed in [month, year], how would you say your safety network has helped you **in keeping your child(ren) safe**?
 - a. Can you tell me how each person you identified earlier has been involved in your network since your case was closed? Did you ask for this help or did they decide to get involved on their own?
 - b. FOR EACH PERSON INVOLVED: Have you found their involvement helpful? Why/why not? Did they help you in a way you expected (was it part of their designated "role" in your safety plan?) or was this unexpected?
 - i. (**Probe** for examples of how each member has helped - especially around how they have helped keep their child(ren) safe)

3. In what ways, if any, has the involvement of your safety network changed over time? In other words, do you think members of your safety network are more or less involved with your family than they were when you were still working with child protection, or right after your case closed?
 - a. How have things changed? Who is/isn't still involved?
 - b. If it's changed → why do you think involvement/support has changed since your case closed?
 - c. Do you want more or less support from anyone in your network? How so/why?

4. Since your child protection case closed, has there been a time when you needed help from someone in your safety network, but they were unable or unwilling to help you?
 - a. If yes, please describe what happened.
 - b. How did you handle this situation?

5. Overall, how would you say your safety network is working for you today, on a scale of 1 to 10, where "1" means you think it was a worthless hoop you had to jump through to get child protection out of your life, and "10" means you feel 100 percent confident that it will help you keep your child safe? _____
 - a. Why would you give it this rating? (**Probe**: How is it, or is it not, helping keep your child(ren) safe?)

6. Thinking back to when you were still involved in child protection, did you and your caseworker develop a safety plan? This may have been a written document describing what you would do to help keep your children safe. It may have also included specific roles for people in your safety network. [IF THEY ANSWER “NO” TO BOTH Q1 AND Q6, TERMINATE]
 - a. Have you used your safety plan? How did it work?
 - b. What, if anything, would have made it better?
 - c. Would you say your safety plan is something you would use/think about in a crisis only, or is it something you think about/use on a regular basis? Can you share an example?

7. Overall, how would you say your safety plan is working for you today, on a scale of 1 to 10, where “1” means you think it was a worthless hoop you had to jump through to get child protection out of your life, and “10” means you feel 100 percent confident that it will help you keep your child safe? _____

8. As you probably know, the purpose of both safety plans and safety networks are to help you keep your children safe and keep child protective services out of your life. Do you believe safety plans and safety networks can provide real support to you in these ways? Or did you feel like it was just something you had to do in order to get your child protection case closed?
 - a. Do you feel confident that your safety network & safety plan will help support you when you need it (them)?
 - b. Do you feel confident that your safety network & safety plan will help you keep your children safe?

9. If you could suggest one thing that might improve safety planning for other families involved in child protection, what would you suggest?
 - a. If no suggestions/everything went well → What did your worker(s) do that you liked, or felt was helpful, that you think other workers should do with other families? In other words, what went well?

Demographic characteristics

Finally, I would like to ask you a couple of questions about yourself and your background.

10. What is your gender? [Do not ask unless it is not known.]

- Male 1
- Female 2

11. If I may ask, what is your age? _____

12. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY. IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE GIVEN, ASK: ANY OTHERS? READ LIST IF THEY CHOOSE SOMETHING OTHER THAN ONE OF THESE CATEGORIES)

- African-American or Black 1
- American Indian or Alaskan Native 2
- Asian 3
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 4
- Hispanic or Latino 5
- White or Caucasian 6
- Something else (Please describe: _____)..... 7
- Refused 8
- Don't know 9

13. How many children, under the age of 18, do you have? _____

14. How many of these children are currently in your legal custody? _____

End of interview

Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Thank you for taking the time to complete our interview. As a thank you, we would like to send you a \$40 gift card to either Target or Walmart. Which store would you prefer?

- Target..... 1
- Walmart..... 2

Your gift certificate will be sent within the next week or two. We can either send it by certified mail or regular mail. Certified mail means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door and someone will have to sign for it so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. If no one is there to sign for it, the postal carrier will leave a notice that they tried to deliver it, with instructions about how you can pick it up at the Post Office. They will try to deliver it three times and then they will send it back to us. We would then call you to work out how to get it to you. Sending it certified would mean that, if it was lost or stolen in the mail, we could have it replaced – but as far as I know, we have not had cards stolen in the mail. We can also send the gift card by regular mail. You would not have to sign for it, but we cannot replace it if it is lost or stolen. Would you rather have it sent certified or regular mail?

- Certified 1
- Regular mail 2

What name and address should we send the gift card to?

IF R DID NOT WANT CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE START OF THE INTERVIEW:

If you would like more information about the study, you may contact the researcher or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. I asked you before but am asking again, now that you've heard the questions. Would you like this contact information?

- You can either contact Michelle Gerrard at Wilder Research at 651.280.2695 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Review Committee at 206.378.4610.

Thank you again!

Safety Network Member 9-month Follow-up Interview Guide

for “A study of the activation and use of safety plans and safety networks after case closure for families involved in Child Protection” (submitted by Wilder Research)

Introduction:

Hi, may I please speak with _____? My name is _____ and I am calling from Wilder Research. We received your contact information from [client name] and his/her child protection caseworker at _____ County because they identified you as a member of [client's] safety network. I am calling today because we are interested in learning more about how families are doing after they leave child protection, and where and how they get support when they need it. In addition to talking directly with families involved in the child protection system, we are trying to connect with at least two people from each family's safety network to hear directly from you about your experience as a safety network member and how you feel the process is going.

We want to schedule a time to do the interview that is convenient for you. Most interviews last about 35-45 minutes, although the length will depend on what you choose to say. To thank you for participating in this interview, you'll receive a \$40 gift card to your choice of either Target or Wal-Mart.

The telephone interview is completely voluntary, so you decide whether you want to participate or not. We could even do the interview right now, if you'd like. Is now a good time, or would you like to schedule the interview for a later date?

If yes: Proceed

If no: Thank you so much for your time today. Have a great day. Goodbye.

If later date, schedule day and time on face sheet.

[INTERVIEWER: At the time R agrees to participate, please read the following]:

Before we begin, I am required to tell you a few important things about this interview and the study:

- The counties participating in this study have only provided us with enough information to know that families were involved in Child Protection and when that involvement began and ended. We do not know anything about the circumstances of the case, and we do not need to know anything about the circumstances.
- If there are any questions you don't want to answer, we can skip them, including any questions that you are uncomfortable with. If you want to stop the interview at any time, we will stop.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your status or relationship, or [client's] status or relationship, with the County/Tribe, the Child Protection system, or any other systems.
- Your responses to the interview questions will be kept private and will be summarized with the responses of other safety network members. Your answers will not be seen by anyone except the research staff working on the study. Exceptions to this are possible. For example, we may not be able to keep your information private if a court orders us to release it, or if you make a threat of harm to yourself or others. All information you share will be stored in locked cabinets or on secure, password-protected computers and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- If you would like more information about the study, you may contact Wilder Research or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. Would you like this contact information?
 - You can either contact Michelle Gerrard at Wilder Research at 651.280.2695 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Review Committee at 206.378.4610.

Before I get into the interview, I just want to make it clear that you do not need to share ANY specifics about the circumstances that brought child protection into the parent's life. BUT, we DO want to know how you have been involved in the parent's and children's lives since their case closed, and have some questions about that...

1. Thinking back, how were you initially asked to be part of [client's] **safety network**? In case you have not heard that term, a safety network is basically a group of family members or friends who come together to help the family keep their child(ren) safe.
 - a. Was there a formal meeting?
 - b. Who asked you to be part of this (the client or caseworker or someone else?) Why do you think you were asked to be a part of this? What is your relationship to [client]?
 - c. Did you meet [client's] caseworker?
 - d. What did you understand your role to be? (**Probe**: if they only mention a role in relation to the parent, ask if their role had anything to do with the child(ren) too?)
 - e. What about the role of the safety network overall? (What did you understand the purpose/role to be?)

2. Do you remember whether there was a formal process or document that outlined your role/responsibilities as a safety network member? This may have been called a **safety plan**. IF YES...
 - a. Have you seen it (the plan)?
 - b. In your own words, what would you say is the purpose of the safety plan? How is it to be used?
 - c. Do you think it's realistic? Why/why not?
 - d. Since [client's] child protection case closed, have you used the safety plan? Have you carried out any of your roles/responsibilities from the safety plan, or did you help in some other way?
 - i. IF YES, Can you describe what you did to help?

3. In what ways, if any, has your involvement in [client's] safety network changed over time? In other words, do you think you are more or less involved with [client's] family than you were when they were still working with child protection, or right after their case closed?
 - a. IF YES, How have things changed?
 - b. IF YES, Why do you think your involvement has changed? (Probe for whether this was because the respondent felt the family was doing well, or because of their own circumstances; e.g. not around, haven't checked in on family, etc.)

4. Since [client's] child protection case closed, has there been a time when [client] asked for your help, but you were unable or unwilling to do so?
 - a. If YES, Can you describe that situation?

5. Overall, how would you say [client's] safety network is working for [client] today, on a scale of 1 to 10, where "1" means you think it was a worthless hoop they had to jump through to get child protection out of their life, and "10" means you feel 100 percent confident that it will help them keep their child(ren) safe? _____
 - a. Why would you give it this rating? (**Probe**: How is it, or is it not, helping keep their child(ren) safe?)
 - b. How about the safety plan? _____ Why would you give it this rating? (**Probe**: How is it, or is it not, helping keep their child(ren) safe?)

6. As you probably know, the purpose of both safety plans and safety networks are to help families keep their children safe and keep child protective services out of their lives for good. Do you believe safety plans and safety networks can provide this kind of support to families? Or did you feel like they are just something families are made to do so that child protection can close the case and get on to the next one?
 - a. Do you feel like your role as a safety network member helped the family **keep their children safe** after their child protection case closed?
 - b. If yes → How so? (**Probe** for examples: What did you do that helped them keep their children safe?)

7. Do you have any other comments about your role as a safety network member or the client's safety plan? Anything that went particularly well, or that you would have changed?

Demographic characteristics

Finally, I would like to ask you a couple of questions about yourself and your background.

8. What is your gender? (Do not ask unless it is not known.)

- Male 1
- Female 2

9. If I may ask, what is your age? _____

10. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY. IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE GIVEN, ASK: ANY OTHERS? READ LIST IF THEY CHOOSE SOMETHING OTHER THAN ONE OF THESE CATEGORIES)

- African-American or Black 1
- American Indian or Alaskan Native 2
- Asian 3
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 4
- Hispanic or Latino 5
- White or Caucasian 6
- Something else (Please describe: _____)..... 7
- Refused 8
- Don't know 9

11. About how long have you known [client]? _____ weeks/months/years (circle)

End of interview

Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Thank you for taking the time to complete our interview. As a thank you, we would like to send you a \$40 gift card to either Target or Walmart. Which store would you prefer?

- Target..... 1
- Walmart..... 2

Your gift certificate will be sent within the next week or two. We can either send it by certified mail or regular mail. Certified mail means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door and someone will have to sign for it so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. If no one is there to sign for it, the postal carrier will leave a notice that they tried to deliver it, with instructions about how you can pick it up at the Post Office. They will try to deliver it three times and then they will send it back to us. We would then call you to work out how to get it to you. Sending it certified would mean that, if it was lost or stolen in the mail, we could have it replaced – but as far as I know, we have not had cards stolen in the mail. We can also send the gift card by regular mail. You would not have to sign for it, but we cannot replace it if it is lost or stolen. Would you rather have it sent certified or regular mail?

Certified 1
Regular mail 2

What name and address should we send the gift card to?

IF R DID NOT WANT CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE START OF THE INTERVIEW:

If you would like more information about the study, you may contact the researcher or Casey Family Programs, who is sponsoring this study. I asked you before but am asking again, now that you've heard the questions. Would you like this contact information?

- You can either contact Michelle Gerrard at Wilder Research at 651.280.2695 or the Casey Family Programs Human Subjects Review Committee at 206.378.4610.

Thank you again!