

Closed

Case

A special investigative team resolves 1,000 pending elder abuse and neglect cases

In northwest Missouri, elder abuse and neglect cases are getting resolved faster—in 90 days or less.

A special investigative team is largely responsible for the successful close rate.

Patty Ankrom, the regional home and community services manager for northwest Missouri, knew a special team was needed to resolve 1,000 pending elder abuse and neglect cases. The cases were reported on the Elder Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

Ankrom brought up the idea of a special investigative team, and she asked the managers whom she supervises to handpick eight staff members who were already handling hotline calls.

Team 8410, as the special investigators were called, originally told Ankrom why they thought the 1,000 hotline cases had not been resolved.

“They said staff morale was low because of the heavy workload,” Ankrom explains. “When a new worker came on board, he or she inherited 50 to 60 pending hotlines. The feeling was, ‘there’s no end in sight.’ And when the next emergency came in over the hotline, that case became the priority. Staff never had an extra hour or two to close up the documentation from pending cases.”

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Ankrom says neither she nor Central Office played the blame game, so Team 8410 felt free to share another problem: staff members were afraid to ask the tough questions when going out to investigate an alleged abuse case.

The staff was reluctant to ask alleged victims, “Did your spouse hit you?” or, “Tell me about your sexual abuse,” or, “Is your son stealing your money?”

As a result, staff used to make eight or more trips to alleged victims, trying to establish a rapport before asking the tough questions. This long-term approach contributed greatly to the case backlog.



Region 4 Home and Community Services staff with Department Director Margaret Donnelly (not all staff are shown)

“The police don’t make eight trips during an investigation,” Ankrom says. “They ask the hard questions right away.”

Ankrom gave Team 8410 a goal: resolve or close the 1,000 overdue cases in 90 days. To meet the goal, the team was given a pass on receiving new hotlines. That meant the team’s 70 other regional colleagues had to pick up the extra load. These colleagues take hotline calls in 27 counties that include Kansas City and stretch to the Iowa border.

The clock started ticking on April 1, 2011, and ended on July 1.

Team 8410 surpassed its goal and resolved 991 of the 1,000 cases a month early, on June 1. The remaining nine cases were completed before July 1.

“It truly was a group effort,” Ankrom says. “Every single person in this region contributed to getting those overdue hotlines done.”

Each staff member’s pending hotline workload has also decreased from 50 to 60 to 20 to 30 on any given day.

Ankrom attributes the change, in large part, to better staff training. “All of our employees come to regional meetings now to receive training rather than through their individual supervisors. We learned that supervisors were not on the same page when it came to closing a case. We all had to come together to talk about when it’s time to close a case, how to ask difficult questions and how to role play, so that each and every worker was hearing the same message.”