



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

International perspectives on Signs of Safety implementation research

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A vision for our session

'DOES SIGNS OF SAFETY WORK?'
-a review of international research

MIGHT THERE BE A BETTER RESEARCH QUESTION?

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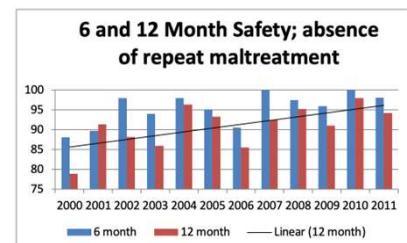
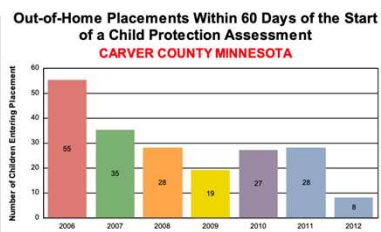
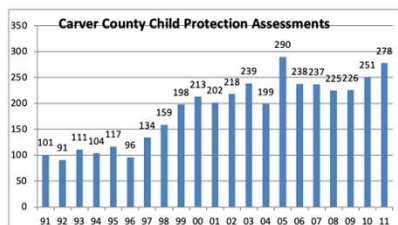


"Can you be a little more specific with step two?"

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In the early days

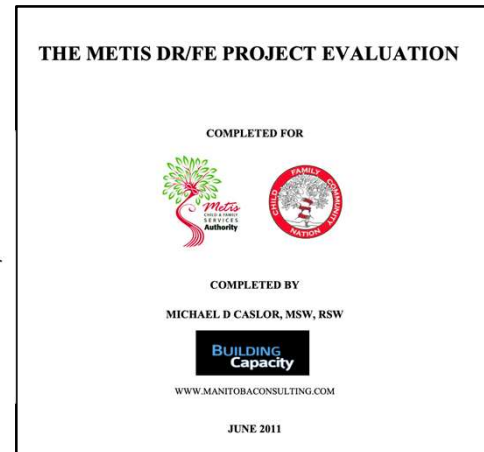
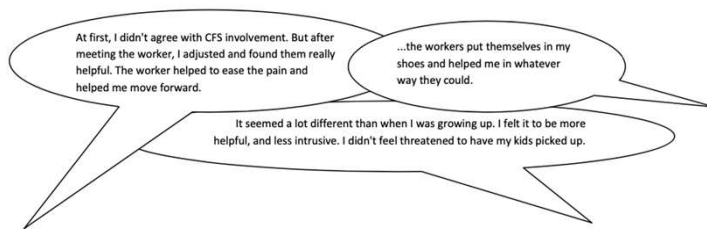
2000s data from Carver County, Minnesota, USA (one of the first SoFS implementations in North America)



Data prepared by Dan Koziolk

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My first experience with Signs of Safety



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Does Signs of Safety work?

A complicated research question, other similarly complicated research questions are:

Does love work?

Does marriage work?

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Does Signs of Safety work?

A complicated research question:

- the dose issue
- the context issue
- the outcome issue
- the sustainability issue

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Does Signs of Safety work?

There is little to no evidence to suggest that Signs of Safety is effective at reducing the need for children to be in care.

This reflects a limited evidence base, with few studies and none of a high quality for drawing conclusions about the impact of Signs of Safety on this outcome.

Lack of evidence is not the same as evidence that Signs of Safety does not work to reduce care. Nor does it establish that Signs of Safety does not have other possible positive outcomes.

(page 4)



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Does Signs of Safety work?

A complicated research question:

- the dose issue
 - the context issue
 - the outcome issue
 - the sustainability issue
- Process evaluations/Formative Evaluations
- Outcome/Summative Evaluations
- Internal Quality Assurance > External evaluation

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What is most Meaningful to Measure over time?

- Breadth measures– how often we do something
 - Depth measures– how well we do something
 - Impact measures– the difference our work makes in the lives of children and families
 - =the 'Meaningful Measures' framework at its simplest.
- Process evaluations/Formative Evaluations
- Outcome/Summative Evaluations
- External evaluation embedding an ongoing approach to QA

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Does Signs of Safety work? What does other research say?

	CONTEXT	BREADTH		DEPTH		IMPACT					
Publication	Organisational Factors (caseloads, IT alignment, form/policy alignment, collaboration with partner organisation)	Implementation Efforts (implementation strategies undertaken)	Frequency of practice methods used with families	Frequency of learning methods used in supervision	Frequency of leadership methods used within organisation	Practice Quality (including family engagement)	Supervision Quality	Leadership Quality	Child Safety Impacts (service trends or family/work perceptions)	Family Impacts (willingness, court involvement cases or rate of children in care or kin placement rates)	Organisational Impacts (job satisfaction or retention or workplace culture)

SofS often not implemented as intended or implemented in a piecemeal fashion (Baginsky et al, 2021; Baginsky et al, 2017; Rijbroek et al, 2017; Rothe et al, 2013)

Table X

	CONTEXT	BREADTH			DEPTH			IMPACT			
Publication	Organisational factors (caseloads, IT alignment, form/policy alignment, collaboration with partner organisations)	Implementation efforts (implementation strategies undertaken)	Frequency of practice methods used with families	Frequency of learning methods used in supervision	Frequency of leadership methods used within organisation	Practice quality (including family engagement)	Supervision quality	Leadership quality	Child Safety Impacts (service trends or family/work perceptions)	Family Impacts (willingness, court involvement cases or rate of children in care or kin placement rates)	Organisational Impacts (job satisfaction or retention or workplace culture)
Baginsky et al (2017)		X	X			X	X	X	X		
Baginsky et al (2020a)	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
Baginsky et al (2020b)	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X
Bunn (2013)			X			X			X		X
City and County of Swansea (2014)	X	X				X			X		X
Holmgård Sørensen (2013)			X			X			X	X	
Lohrbach & Sawyer (2004)						X				X	
Lwin et al (2014)									X		
Munro et al (2016)	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		
Munro & Turnell (2020)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Nelson-Dusek & Idziec (2015)									X	X	
Nelson-Dusek et al (2017)									X	X	
Reekers et al (2018)						X			X		
Reeves (2018)	X	X							X	X	
Rijbroek et al (2017)		X							X	X	X
Rothe et al (2013)		X							X	X	
Skrypek et al (2015)						X			X		
Vahs et al (2017)						X			X	X	

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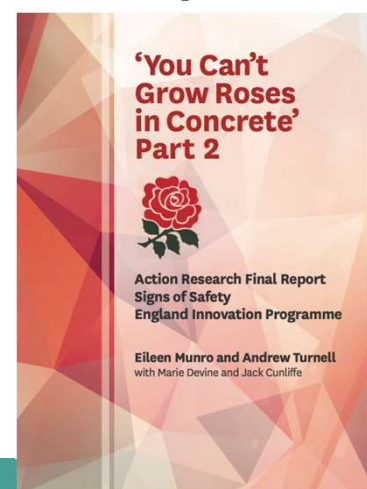
Considering the implementation learnings in England's EIP funding implementations (Eileen Munro et al.)

Nine 'Local Authorities' were funded and supported similarly at the National level to implement Signs of Safety,

- 3 Authorities made impressive gains,
- 3 Authorities changed minimally,
- 3 Authorities got worse.

...when independently reviewed by OFSTED (the national audit/inspection agency in England).

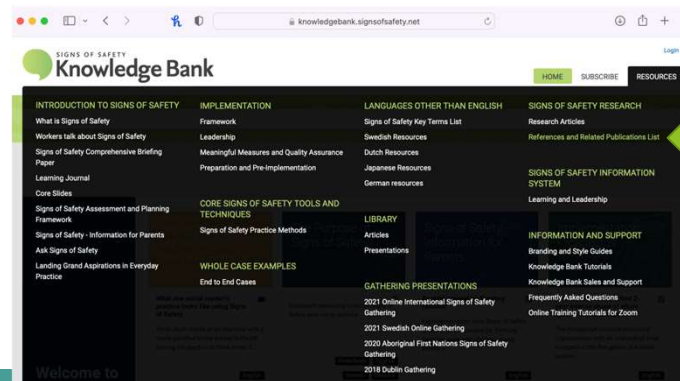
<https://knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net/resources/signs-of-safety-research/research-articles/you-cant-grow-roses-in-concrete-part-2>



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More information about the international evidence based for Signs of Safety is available at:

<https://knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net>

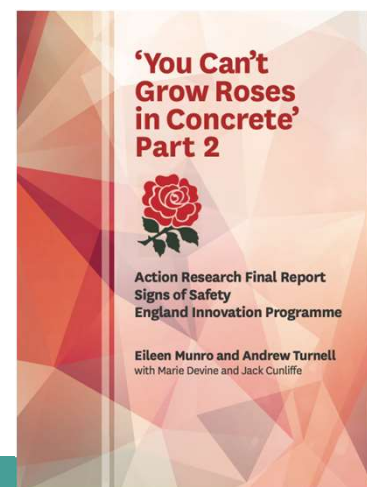


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Considering the implementation learnings in England's EIP funding implementations (Eileen Munro et al.)

So what is the difference that makes the difference?

Leading with visibility and follow through	I talk the talk and walk the walk and the way I lead just seems so natural, and aligns to Signs of Safety's principles of good working relationships, building on positives, and leading through curious questions.
Involved in Practice	I am involved in case complexity and really walk with staff through their most difficult and challenging work, they would say we are all in this together.
Understanding good practice	I regularly use group supervision reflection, appreciative inquiries with workers and families, and collaborative case reviews to inform my next leadership steps.
Leading toward a learning organisation	I have been able to model leadership and embed an organisational culture where everyone knows if messes or mistakes happen they will be approached a curious and fair way that will create learning and positive growth.
Leading with Stability	The staff I lead would say the person(s) they report to over time has provided stable and consistent leadership.
Leading toward organisational alignment	I regularly advocate for better organisational alignment to enable more participatory practice with families, including the alignment of policies, procedures, forms, and IT.
Leading with meaningful measures	I am clear about what is expected, and there are specific methods in place that help assess and grow the quantity, quality, and impacts of practice.



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‘DOES SIGNS OF SAFETY WORK?’

Sometimes.

It depends.

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What helps & hinders Signs of Safety implementation?

Findings from a Realist Synthesis of Signs of Safety

- Aim: explanatory analysis of how and why interventions work or don't in particular contexts
- Realist literature review – *what supports, and derails staff buy-in to implement Signs of Safety and why?*
- Focus groups with 22 international Signs of Safety experts

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1. Staff sense making of the approach

Key Misunderstandings of SofS

1. 'Fixed towards harm'
 - Fear incorporating strengths is unsafe or assume families lack capacity to change
 - non-implementation
 2. 'Fixed towards strengths'
 - Excessive focus on strengths and/or goal of keeping children with family
 - Dysfunctional implementation
 - Overlook evidence of harm
 - Children left at risk of harm
- ❖ Need to monitor and closely engage with staff sense making of the approach & address misunderstandings

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2. Having and using interpersonal and critical thinking skills

- SofS provides a framework and tools that require workers to draw on core social work knowledge & skills – tools easy to use but skilled use requires time
- Skills and competence of the social worker found to make a significant contribution to how SofS is used and whether it is practiced using the SofS principles
- Workers may not implement SofS if they lack the skills or the time to use the skills that are needed to enact the principles that are the essence of the approach
- Insufficient interpersonal skills → families may not feel sufficient sense of psychological safety (trust & feeling cared for) to engage in the social work process
- Insufficient crucial thinking skills → workers may not be able to suspend judgement until sufficient evidence is collected and to balance harm, risk of harm and safety

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3. Group Supervision

- Quality group supervision a key part of SofS – share thinking, experiences and decisions in cases and receive feedback from a PL
- PL uses appreciative Inquiry to question and challenge workers to evidence what they think, correct misunderstanding and to model the approach
- Group supervision not always in place and absence associated with confusion about the approach (Baginsky et al, 2021; Holmgard Sorensen, 2013)
- Where frequent, quality group supervision is absent
 - responsibility for work is individualised (rather than shared)
 - work is not transparent
 - Misperceptions and cognitive biases can go unchecked, leading to dysfunctional implementation

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4. Organisational alignment

- Structured implementation, focused on organisational alignment (reform of existing policies, forms and case processes) has been found to support consistency of implementation (Baginsky et al., 2021; Hayes et al., 2014; Munro et al., 2020)
 - Across 10 English LA, successful implementation associated with development of a quality assurance system that aligned and fitted the agency (Baginsky et al, 2021)
 - In Denmark, where forms did not require workers to record child engagement, engagement with children was lacking and workers identified recording system as contributory factor (Holmgård Sørensen, 2013)
- Where organisational systems are not aligned with SofS
 - staff focus may be diverted from learning and doing SofS practice onto what the system records
 - Learning and accountability may be impeded because supervisors cannot easily check SofS practice
 - Staff may feel frustrated and confused by needing to duplicate recording
 - Staff may not implement SofS

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5. Engaged leadership

- Support of leadership strongly influences implementation & More consistent implementation where leaders modelled SoFS in interactions with staff (c.f.e Baginsky et al, 2021; 2017; Bunn, 2013; Salveron et al, 2015)
 - Where leaders (1) do not closely model SoFS in their interactions with staff
 - (2) are not closely engaged with front line practice
 - (3) do not expect SoFS will be used by all staff in every service
 - Staff miss active learning opportunities
 - Lack confidence they will be supported to learn and work in new ways and judged by fair criteria
- May therefore not implement SoFS

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Conclusions (1)

- SoFS outcomes will never be the product of SoS alone – emerge through complex interplay between the intervention and multi-layered contexts
 - Individual capacities of staff (attitudes, knowledge, skills)
 - Interpersonal relationships (lines of communication and management)
 - Institutional settings (norms, leadership, governance)
 - Wider structural and welfare system (funding, political support, competing priorities and influences)
- (Pawson, 2004)*
- Importance of organisational learning for:
 - 'single loop learning' (correcting misperceptions & developing learning)
 - 'double loop learning' (correcting org's underlying norms, policies, objectives)
- (Argyris & Schon, 1979)*

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Conclusions (2): might there be a better research question?

“what works, how it works, for whom, in what circumstances and why?”

- Help potential users and decision makers decide whether the evidence of positive impact looks credible
- Also whether the context in which they would implement Signs of Safety provides or can be reformed in order to provide the support factors to enable it to be implemented and used well.

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More information about this publication is available at:

Caffrey, L., Caslor, M. & Munro, E. (2021) How do we Know if Signs of Safety is Improving Children's Safety and Well Being? in, editors Turnell, A. & Murphy, T. *Signs of Safety: Comprehensive Briefing Paper*, East Perth, Elia, 2021, pp10-22 [TARA - Full Text](#)

OR AT

<https://knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net/resources/implementation/framework/evidence-base-and-implementation>

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Many thanks from....

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