

IMPLEMENTING myPlan



An examination of a risk-informed domestic violence intervention in child welfare agencies



This qualitative study examines the feasibility and organizational needs for incorporating myPlan within the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS).



Methods: ASU researchers interviewed 27 DCS Specialists who had reviewed myPlan. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Four themes emerged from the data:

Ijeoma Nwabuzor Ogbonnaya, MSW, PhD
Jill Theresa Messing, MSW, PhD

Theme 1: Appropriateness of Using myPlan in DCS

DCS Specialists said that **myPlan is an appropriate intervention** for use in their practice. It will help their clients engage in self-assessment, and provide education, domestic violence resources, and safety strategies.

Theme 2: Feasibility of Using myPlan in DCS

DCS Specialists had many ideas about **how to use myPlan** in their practice. They would individualize the use of myPlan, and identified different ways and times throughout the case that they could use myPlan.

Theme 3: Potential Barriers to Using myPlan in DCS

Despite their overall enthusiasm, DCS Specialists identified potential **barriers to using myPlan** at the client, caseworker, and systems levels.

Theme 4: Ways myPlan Can Facilitate Work within the DCS

DCS Specialists identified that **myPlan can enhance their work with families** by making domestic violence resources easily accessible and helping them to achieve safety and permanency goals.

Based on the interview data, researchers identified recommendations for **research, practice, and policy**.

Acknowledgements: We wish to thank all of the DCS Specialists who took time to speak with us about this important topic, as well as the DCS administrators, especially Katherine Guffey, who facilitated this research project. We acknowledge the effort of Grace Turner, who assisted with the coding of transcripts. This research was funded by a seed grant from the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Arizona State University.



THEME 1:

DCS Specialists' Perceptions of the Appropriateness of Using myPlan in the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS)



DCS Specialists expressed overall enthusiasm for myPlan

“It is easy to use, simple, and has many useful features”

“[myPlan] is a lot less intimidating than actually going and talking to somebody about [domestic violence] and trying to figure it out loud, like verbally.”

“Especially with the local resources that are in there, and the detailed planning and strategies, it's really a good one-stop-shop for a lot of different areas within domestic violence.”

DCS Specialists wanted more domestic violence (DV) education and intervention for their clients



Participants wanted more DV intervention for their clients, they wanted interventions that would educate their clients about DV, they liked that myPlan allowed the clients to engage in self-assessment, could help clients learn more about DV resources and safety strategies.

“DV is “really common... I would say good chunk [of our reports], almost all of them have some form of history of domestic violence and current domestic violence...”

“Honestly, I think the department could use [myPlan], like, a lot.”



DCS Specialists liked that myPlan allowed clients to engage in self assessment

“It's not like I'm having to give this answer to somebody else right now who then I'm fearing judgment from. Like, I can just put this into an app and the app isn't going to judge me if I say that like, yes, these things are violent.”

Participants liked that myPlan could help clients learn about resources and safety strategies

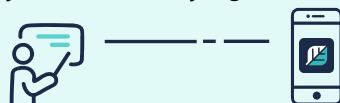


myPlan “does open the door to those resources so that maybe they do say, ‘oh, you know, I never looked up a hotline for domestic violence. I didn't know there was victim advocates for this. Let me just make a phone call and see if they can help me.”

DCS Specialists want more hands on domestic violence training

“[DV] is an area that we're learning more about every day. So I think that anything that you could add that could inform the investigator would be helpful.”

“A lot of [caseworkers] are hands on, like to see it, to learn it on a screen, and then you're like, okay, I get it.”



DCS Specialists wanted content on children added to myPlan



“I think it needs to really be more focused on:

- 1 the kids
- 2 very clearly why [DCS is] involved
- 3 then go into like helping them recognize how their relationship is abusive and how they've gotten here, and what kind of safety concerns that poses for kids, some education around like what the long term impact is going to be on their child.”

Methods: ASU researchers interviewed 27 DCS caseworkers who had reviewed myPlan. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. This is one of the four themes that emerged from the data.



THEME 2:

DCS Specialists' Perceptions of the Feasibility of Using myPlan in the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS)

How to Use myPlan in DCS ● ● ●

DCS Specialists said that their use of myPlan would vary depending on:

- client's support needs
- level of rapport with DCS caseworker
- extent and severity of domestic violence
- client's preference
- client's relationship status
- client's level of "readiness" to address domestic violence

Some DCS Specialists prefer to help their clients complete myPlan



"We would go through it together just so I'm kind of there or I would ask them to go through it with someone that they can have some support with. Because some of the stuff is kind of tough...they can have someone to lean on."

Some DCS Specialists identified specific time points for when myPlan would be useful, such as:

"within the first 45 days of getting a case;"

"at the TDM or when the TDM's over;"

"in the beginning and then have it re-administered after you build rapport"

Some DCS Specialists preferred that clients complete myPlan on their own



"Take this questionnaire, go through this app tonight and I want you to see what the results are because that will give you just a small indication of where your relationship [is] at...And then when I come back next week, we can talk about what we can do, what the results were, and what we can do to offer to help you with some of the issues that you're dealing with. Okay. So that's one way having to build rapport, it's a great way to just be supportive."

Some DCS Specialists indicated that they would include myPlan as part of their clients' case plan

"We create case plans, so we give them kind of like services and tasks to do each step the way to get towards reunifying with their kids."

While others indicated that they would share myPlan with clients as a resource

"We have a little resource list here in our office that we utilize. So, I would probably just add it to that list..."

It is important that myPlan is confidential



"We're not going to use it against them in court or anything like that, so this is just for their own safety and for them to be able to understand...what they're going through."

How to Identify If Client Benefited From myPlan



DCS specialists defined success as changes in behavior and increased DV awareness and knowledge

"[coming] up with their own strategies and safety plan and actions that they're going to take."

"Engaging in conversation with me about it...because that shows that they're thinking about it, they're analyzing it."

That the client is "Self-aware of their actions and they're able to understand...how [domestic violence is] impacting them [and] their kids."



Methods: ASU researchers interviewed 27 DCS caseworkers who had reviewed myPlan. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. This is one of the four themes that emerged from the data.

DCS Specialists noted potential barriers at three different levels:

1 Client-level Barriers



Client safety:

"I don't want to put them [client] in that unsafe situation of them filling out a strategy of how to get away from somebody if that said somebody is sitting right there with that power and control."



Clients' lack of DV awareness:

"People that aren't ready to face domestic violence, or maybe don't even want to admit that it's happening yet..."



Clients may lack engagement or have an:

"Unwillingness or inability to look at it, to really take a look and really assess the healthiness of the relationship."

Clients' demographics:



clients may not have "access to [the] Internet,"



clients may have "developmental or intellectual disabilities,"



"There's a lot of refugee families now that I have on my caseload and [language is] a very big barrier for them."

Cultural barriers:

"The way they were raised culturally, they might not understand that there are different rights for them, and they don't have to listen to their significant other or partner."



2 Caseworker-level Barriers

DCS Specialists indicated that the following may be barriers:

- high workload
- high caseload
- limited time
- limited experience with DV
- they do not identify DV as a problem
- pressure to make prompt child placement decisions



"The time piece is always going to be the largest barrier...if we are assessing the children as unsafe, I now have a lot of work cut out on how I get those children to be safe"



3 System-level Barriers

Child Welfare

The focus of DCS is not DV: *"We got to figure out like, 'Is the child safe? Is the child not safe?' That's it. We don't worry about anything else. Unfortunately, like, we get a lot of sad cases where it's, like, our job is not to protect the mom. That is not our job. Our job...is child safety. We are not victim advocates."*

"Being a service provider with DCS, like the forefront of everyone's worry is that I'm taking their children."

Domestic Violence Services



"It's a systemic issue of resources are just limited, access to resources is limited because funding is limited. So that's the other huge issue we face is because sometimes people can't go to a shelter to escape because there's no beds. And then we have to end up removing their children because they don't have the social support to implement a safety plan. So that becomes kind of a huge barrier we see in the department."

Methods: ASU researchers interviewed 27 DCS caseworkers who had reviewed myPlan. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. This is one of the four themes that emerged from the data.



THEME 4:

DCS Specialists' Perceptions of the Ways myPlan Can Facilitate Work within the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS)

DCS Specialists believed that using myPlan could enhance their work with families.

"I feel like it would be beneficial to them. I just feel like each one of us would utilize the app differently with our families."

An ongoing specialist may use myPlan primarily for safety planning and leaving the relationship:

"I think with ongoing...they would be able to help them work through developing a plan once they've left that situation..."

Investigators may additionally use the intervention to provide resources:



"And investigations is the same thing. It would be the plan and resources."

1. Assessment:

myPlan can help provide a thorough assessment and "get a little bigger idea of what exactly they're dealing with."

"It speeds up that process, at least for the DV component...this is where they're scored, this is what we learned, and it took 15 minutes instead of like an hour and a half."

DCS Specialists thought that myPlan could alleviate barriers in their work by making the DV assessment process more efficient and act as a conversation starter.



2. Case Planning:

"...it would help me develop case plans more clearly."



using myPlan for safety planning plan may be "empowering" and may "give [clients] the opportunity to make changes and give them the opportunity to have a voice in what's going on in their families and what's going on with their children."



3. Domestic Violence Resources:

"It compiles all of those [domestic violence] resources in one place for us [DCS]."



myPlan makes DV resources easily accessible: *"We tell them, okay, you know what, reach out to DV advocates or any sort of assistance, but they're like, I don't know where to find it. And if they have the app downloaded, they're just going to click it and they'll get help right away, instead of having to call us..."*

Providing additional resources to clients is important: *"I think that whatever resources we can have for our clients that just...gives us more kind of credibility that we're here to support and help our families."*



4. Achieving DCS Safety and Permanency Goals:

myPlan can

"give parents things that they can do on their own and...take their own safety, their child safety, their family safety into their own hands."



Prevent out-of-home placement: *"Now I can argue in front of supervisors and judges and attorneys that these kids should be in home with the victim because look what the victim's willing to do and has done."*

Prevent re-entry into foster care: *"You don't see DV, but it ends up coming out eventually. So, if we can catch it before a case closes, so they don't return into the department's care, I guess, the children, I think that would be great."*

Assist with family reunification: *"I could see that, like, we create case plans [using myPlan], so we give them kind of like services and tasks to do...to get towards reunifying with their kids."*

myPlan may help clients build healthy relationships: *"I think it gives an understanding and how can we utilize this to make sure we're in a happy, healthy, loving relationship."*

Methods: ASU researchers interviewed 27 DCS caseworkers who had reviewed myPlan. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. This is one of the four themes that emerged from the data.



Recommendations for Research, Practice & Policy based on Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) Specialists' Perceptions of myPlan

Research



Implementation

- Design a brief assessment to evaluate clients' outcomes pre-and-post myPlan implementation.
- Better understand DCS policies that may facilitate or hinder the adoption of myPlan.
- Gather quantitative (i.e., statistics) and qualitative (i.e., client and caseworker stories) data showing the influence of myPlan on client outcomes and field operation related to domestic violence (DV).

Evaluation

- Assess the ability of myPlan to link diverse clients to culturally appropriate DV services and meet their service needs.
- Conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental study to assess the intervention's effects on child and family permanency, safety, and well-being.

Policy



- Request a waiver to use Family First Prevention Services Act funding to implement evidence-based interventions designed for DV survivors, such as myPlan.
- Recommend myPlan for review by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse.
- Provide trauma-informed training on DV for DCS Specialists, including content related to implicit bias towards DV survivors and cultural, language, and immigration barriers to DV help-seeking.
- Provide hands-on training for DCS Specialists and supervisors on how to use myPlan and improve workers' level of self-efficacy in handling DV cases.

- Develop policies to ensure that myPlan is used in a confidential and supportive manner.
- Apply for funding to increase DV resources, improve services for DCS-involved families experiencing DV, and coordinate training opportunities for DCS.
- Hire more staff with professional DV experience.
- Invest in professional development opportunities for current employees, such as DV risk assessment training and the Domestic Violence Intervention and Victim Advocacy Certificate through the ASU Office of Gender-Based Violence.

Practice



Implementation

- Use myPlan to guide discussion and education with clients regarding the different forms of DV that they may be experiencing, particularly those outside of physical violence (e.g., financial abuse, emotional abuse, control)
- Use myPlan to identify DV and connect clients to appropriate DV resources, including culturally relevant and gender responsive services.
- Tailor the use of myPlan based on client and worker needs. If the client completes myPlan on their own, provide a reasonable timeline and ask follow-up questions.
- Deliver myPlan through multiple modalities, such as in person, virtually, or included as part of the caseworkers' list of resources to share with clients.
- Recommend myPlan universally to all DCS families, regardless of their DV status.
- If a client's score on the Danger Assessment indicates severe or extreme risk, act expeditiously to get the client help from a DV agency and ensure that a safety plan is in place.

- Build rapport with clients by explaining that myPlan is confidential and framing it as a tool that will help better understand their relationship and provide resources to improve safety in their relationship, if needed.
- Ensure that someone is available to help clients with special needs using myPlan (e.g., clients with learning disabilities; emotionally distraught clients).
- Include myPlan as a part of standard DCS intervention, such as in Team Decision Making or case planning.

Adaptation

- Include a message informing clients that DV is complex. While relationships may have healthy or positive aspects, these do not excuse unhealthy and abusive behaviors.
- Add information to myPlan about the impact of DV on clients and their children.