**August 2023 APS TARC Podcast Transcript**

# Administrative Approaches to Self-Neglect in Colorado, Oregon, and Tennessee

## Introduction

**Andrew Capehart:** Welcome to the Adult Protective Services Technical Assistance Resource Center podcast. We come to you with the goal of sharing promising practices and innovations from the APS field, and to highlight what is achievable with new ideas and partnerships to help you envision what may be replicated in your program. Let's join our host, Jennifer Spoeri APS TARC subject matter expert and guests in conversation.

## Discussion

**Jennifer Spoeri:** According to NAMRS data, The National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System, 94.6% of states investigate self-neglect and almost half of these cases received involve allegations of self-neglect and are confirmed or substantiated. Our guests today will provide us with the additional information regarding how each of their states has continued to work on cases involving self-neglect. Their innovative programs were initially introduced during the July 14th, 2022, TARC webinar titled “Innovative Responses to Self-Neglect”. Let's start with Colorado. Stefanie Woodard is the Program Director for APS in Colorado. Stefanie, can you provide an update on your alternative response in Colorado?

**Stefanie Woodard:** Yeah, absolutely. As a quick refresher, the Bill was signed in 2021. The alternative response pilot was authorized there. And we spent the second half of 2021 and, first half of 2022 working collaboratively with counties on rules, which is a long process. Then we worked on system changes for our data system, developing and delivering training for the pilot counties. And then we launched on January 4th of 2023. So, we have just finished the first quarter of implementation of this, at least two-year pilot. We do have a dedicated pilot specialist, and there are other members of my team, myself included, and folks from our data team that also support the pilot.

We will evaluate the pilot over a period of about two years, at least, and then there is reporting expected to our General Assembly in 2025 and 2026 to determine whether this will expand how that may look, based on the evaluation that we have with our third-party evaluation partners. And so, yeah, we're actively working it out, it's all very new, pilot, et al is new to us and, much less this, this particular model. So, we are learning a lot and working really closely with counties, to hopefully promote success.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah, it sounds like quite a process. So, I wish you all the best. Has the elimination of the word "findings" in the alternative response track helped with community rapport?

**Stefanie Woodard:** We hope so. So, one of our North Star goals for the entire pilot is improving collaboration between APS and communities and families. And so because that's a key outcome that we hope to see out of this. It's definitely, you know, there are things baked into the process to support that and evaluating whether that's happening and how that rapport, looks is part of the evaluation plan, at the time of this podcast, we have not done the, the analysis for that because, where that qualitative data comes from, we will be pulling the first, survey stuff and information to collect that in the fall.

But, when we get to that point and we'll, we'll be asking our caseworkers and, some clients hopefully about how they're feeling about it and how it looks, we'll be holding that up to our other learning indicator data that is being collected throughout the pilot to really evaluate and analyze. Is it doing what we hope it is doing? Anecdotally, so far, we've been hearing a lot of excitement around it. We know that counties are really leaning into the process and using it and hoping to build those relationships differently. So, TBD officially, but we certainly hope so.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** That was what I was going to ask you. I know it's only been about 6 months, but wondering if you feel like it's been positively received, and it sounds like staff is already giving you some positive nods.

**Stefanie Woodard:** Yeah, so far so good. We hope that that is the result.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah. Well, that'll be interesting. You better watch it or else, you know, the TARC will have you doing another podcast. So, uh, let's shift now to Traci Robertson. Traci is the Oregon Department of Human Services, APS Complex Case Investigator and Guardian Conservator Contract Administrator. Traci, the webinar last year indicated that you, Oregon, has a 3-to-5-year road map of APS and self-neglect. How are things going with this road map?

**Traci Robertson:** We are moving forward, Jennifer. So, thank you for asking. Yes, last year when we talked, we did talk about that 3-to-5-year road map. And also, it's a strategic development plan to meet the needs of the Oregonians that are experiencing self-neglect. And so how we have done that is we've begun by contracting with Dr. Stacey Wood, to develop a support plan for the adults we serve with decisional capacity deficits and direction for protective service specialists as well on how to assess capacity, safety and risk in potential self-neglect situations. This this is going to address when the traditional APS approaches may not be possible as well.

The example is, those extensive or repeat in home visits that we weren't able to do, as early as last year but, Dr. Wood is really pivotal in developing this screening risk assessment tool for self-neglect cases in Oregon, and she's working to combine our existing functional observational evaluations with her proposed assessment tool. We are also coordinating with another grant project contractor that involves a report writing training to build the consistent statewide process of interviewing and capturing that complete and thorough investigation. Dr. Wood is also pivotal to that she's going to be providing that observation and assessment language. So, we have that consistency and we're going to be using that in the report summary of evidence.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Wonderful. So, I'm just curious. I always bring it home to the people doing the work. Are the APS workers in Oregon responsive to this training? Are they excited about receiving all of this knowledge from Dr. Wood?

**Traci Robertson:** They actually really are, and it's, it's been great to see, as a complex case investigator, I'm going out into the local offices, going from office to office and taking this information to them along with, how to contact Dr. Wood, and how we are building this plan. So, it has been very exciting. We've been introducing Dr. Wood a little bit at a time statewide and that's through Zoom training sessions and power hours is what we call them. So, it's an hour of intense training. It's been great. Dr. Wood has been featured and so she's been sharing things like a fresh look at fraud, and undue influence, and self-neglect, so she is really helping, yes.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** That is fantastic for your staff. How about, you know, the pandemic? A lot of remote interviews were needing to be done during the pandemic. And sometimes they still are done just because of whatever happens with the case. It's far away. The person won't let you in. So, you agree to do a remote interview is the screening and risk assessment tool useful for those remote interviews to assess the decisional capacity.

**Traci Robertson:** We are definitely building it with that in mind. So yes, that's going to be a big piece of this that we will be able to take it into the homes, or we can do it over the phone. You know, if it's going to be more comfortable for our alleged victim, or if there is a situation where we can't go into the home, that's what this tool is going to really focus is that we'll have that consistent method of looking at each person where they're at.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah, and that really gives a lot of options for the workers because, you know, each case is different. You've seen one APS case, you've seen one APS case. Fantastic, anything else to add about Oregon's road map and your work in this area?

**Traci Robertson:** Well, yes, just a little bit more because while we're building this screening risk assessment tool, and we are seeing that it is in the developmental stages, we are currently working under Oregon Administrative Rule for Assessment. And so, what that looks like is we do functional evaluations, we being the protective service workers. So, it's where the investigator will determine the alleged victim's degree of risk by witnessing how they function in their environment, the adequacy of information that they have available to them, their ability to protect their own interests.

So that's what we are using, and we are combining with this tool that Dr. Wood is creating. We really want to determine if an alleged victim can make an informed choice if they understand the consequences of those choices. Self-determination is pivotal to protective service, which you know, and so we are really looking at multifacet, all of this.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah, self-determination is huge, and we all know that capacity is there's a spectrum, there's so many different areas that somebody can still be able to make their own decisions and you can compromise and work with them. So that's really important.

**Traci Robertson:** Yeah, we definitely want to meet the victim where they're at, that's why this is so important and why we are continuing to work through this and create this tool.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Great. Well, that's really fascinating. You might also be pulled into another podcast as well. Oh, dear. And last but not least, let's hear from Joyce Reed, the Director of Field Operations for Tennessee's APS.

Joyce, you have a program called CREST, the Collaborative Response to End Self Neglect in Tennessee. Can you provide an update on the CREST program in Tennessee?

**Joyce Reed:** Absolutely, CREST is, I believe, nearing its 1st birthday, during the fiscal year that ended on June 20th of 2023. CREST had served a total of 524 vulnerable adults in six of our nine AAAD areas across the state. So initially, we were not able to set the program up statewide. Different providers weren't prepared for the program or, or whatever. So, this, just in the last couple of months, so this is fresh off the presses, just in the last couple of months, we've added two more AAAD areas and we are now officially statewide for CREST in Tennessee.

Good for you. So, we can meet all the needs of our vulnerable adults, hopefully. We're extremely excited that this program is now statewide. So, I'm really hopeful for what we can do in the coming fiscal year with this program.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** That is fantastic to hear. So, tell us more about what's proven successful with the CREST program.

**Joyce Reed:** Well, the specific assistance that's available through CREST has been extremely beneficial. It's provided utility assistance, home repair assistance, pest control services, housing assistance, and that can be anything from deposits and rent, you know, missed rent payments or securing deposits on a new home, a new apartment, things like that, furniture, personal care items, medication, and so much more. I can't even list it all. But we've been able to assist vulnerable adults to stay safely in their own homes or help them relocate to a safer home of their choosing. And in many cases, we've been able to increase their overall quality of life, thanks to the services that are provided by CREST.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** What I'm thinking is no matter what their ability, if you do a psych eval or something like that, they're still making their own decisions and determining what they want to receive and accept to stay in their home.

**Joyce Reed:** Oh, absolutely. And in a lot of times, what we're finding is, especially with the specific assistance piece, is having access to these funds to do things such as pest control. That one simple service can open the door for them to get even more services in their home so that's the place they want to be, it's the place they feel safe, it's the place they feel happy. And if we can enable them to remain there safely, then that is exactly what we want to do. We love the fact that we can take a financial piece like that, and it can just blossom into this overall wraparound services for the client. That one piece can be the hindrance that we get a lot of reports from folks that they're in home service providers. They refuse to go in the home anymore because of a pest infestation. And if we can solve that one problem, it opens the door to all these other possibilities.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** That is tremendous. So, it's almost like short term care management to get them back into their long-term program.

**Joyce Reed:** Yes, fix the short-term problem to get the long-term gain.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** Wow, the APS workers must be thrilled about this program in the counties that it's being done in?

**Joyce Reed:** Oh, definitely. They love this program. And I'll tell you, there's another piece of the program that we really underestimated, the short-term case management piece because CREST has two parts. We have the specific assistance, but we also have short term case management. And that piece has proven to be far more important than we originally thought it could be. The CREST advocates have been extremely creative in their problem solving, which has resulted in some amazing outcomes for our clients.

The one example that really comes to mind is we had a gentleman who was in need of choices services, he wanted choices services he knew that that's what would be best to meet his needs, but he needed some help managing the resource piece of the Medicaid application, because he was actually over the income threshold. There was just some legal maneuvering that need to occur for him to fit into a certain category under Medicaid. So, this CREST advocate was able to find a local attorney who was willing, pro bono, to set up the correct type of trust account so that our client's assets could be put aside and cataloged and everything according to Medicaid rules.

And so, he did ultimately qualify for Medicaid and getting enrolled in choices services. So, CREST has kind of become a bridge between our vulnerable adults and those services that they need to stay safe and healthy.

**Jennifer Spoeri:** That is a wonderful success story. And I was sitting here thinking, the person is making decisions for themselves. You're just connecting them with the professionals that help them effectuate those decisions. So, what an incredible program. Thank you, Joyce. You're welcome. So, a big thank you to all three of you for providing updates on each of your state's progress and thank you for all who are tuning in and listening to this podcast. I'm sure you'll agree that we can all learn from the states of Colorado, Oregon, and Tennessee and push the field of APS forward. So, thank you and have a good rest of the day.

**Andrew Capehart:** Thanks so much for listening. The APS TARC is a project of the Office of Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services at the Administration for Community Living Administration on Aging Department of Health and Human Services, and is administered by WRMA, Incorporated a TriMetrix Company in partnership with the National Adult Protective Services Association. Contractors' findings, conclusions, and points of view do not necessarily represent the official policy of the Federal Government. To give us feedback on this podcast or reach out to us, please visit our website at apstarc.acl.gov.