

February 2022 APS TARC Podcast Transcript

Improving APS Financial Exploitation Investigations Through Innovative Multi-Disciplinary Partnerships

[00:00:00] Introduction

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[00:00:00] **Krista Brown:** Welcome to the Adult Protective Services, Technical Assistance Resource Center, APS TARC podcast. The first in a series of four podcasts plan for this year, we come to you with the goal of sharing promising practices and innovations from various APS program. Who have received Administration for Community Living or ACL discretionary grants.

[00:00:22] **Krista Brown:** We hope to highlight what is achievable with additional funding, fresh ideas, and new partnerships to help you envision what may be replicated in your program. In this podcast, Jennifer Spoeri, APS, TARC subject matter expert and Angela Medina APS, director of policy and performance management at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

[00:00:45] **Krista Brown:** Discuss improving financial exploitation investigations in client services, through multidisciplinary partnerships and the use of high-level forensic accounting. Before we go to our interview, a quick disclaimer. The Adult Protective Services, Technical Assistance Resource Center APS TARC is a project of the U S administration for community living administration on aging department of health and human services and is administered by WRMA incorporated.

[00:01:15] **Krista Brown:** Contractors, findings, conclusions, and points of view. Do not necessarily represent the official policy of the federal. For those that may be new to Adult Protective Services and not familiar with the APS TARC. Our mission is to enhance the effectiveness of state APS programs by supporting federal state and local partners.

[00:01:35] **Krista Brown:** Use of data and analytics, applying research and evaluation to practice and encouraging the use of innovative practices and strategies. Now let's join Jennifer Spoeri and Angela Medina in conversation.

[00:01:48] Interview

[00:01:48] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Hello, my name's Jennifer Spoeri and I'm thrilled to be with Angela Medina today to discuss an administration for community living or ACL grant funded program that I was very interested to learn more about. Angela oversees the ACL APS enhancement grant that the department of family and protective services in Texas applied for in 2019 and received for fiscal year 2021.

[00:02:13] **Jennifer Spoeri:** There are several grant partners that have come together to improve APS investigations and client services by incorporating high quality forensic accounting into standard investigative systems and practices. This includes enhancing training for APS investigators on financial exploitation. Developing exploitation investigation, checklists, and law enforcement reporting protocol.

[00:02:36] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Angela, first of all, thanks for taking time to be with us. I know how precious time is in the APS world. Can you start by providing a little background about your experience at APS and at the Texas department of family and protective service?

[00:02:50] **Angela Medina:** Absolutely. Thank you for having me. So, I started with Adult Protective Services in Texas in March of 2000.

[00:02:57] **Angela Medina:** At that time, I started as a caseworker, and I also worked as a frontline supervisor and a subject matter expert out in the field. And the front line. And then after that, I transitioned into our state office and worked as a policy specialist and the policy manager. And now I'm the director of policy and performance management.

[00:03:19] **Angela Medina:** And for this grant, I actually became involved with it just this past March 2021.

[00:03:26] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Great. You've got quite a bit of boots on the ground experience there in Texas. Yeah. Yeah. And that's so important for so many reasons. How did the idea for the grant application actually come to fruition if you know this?

[00:03:42] **Angela Medina:** Yeah, so we have APS in Texas has a long history of working with UT health science center in Houston and the team Institute, which is part of UT health and is headed by Dr. Jason Burnett. Who many of you are probably familiar with? He's a very active participant in helping us improve Adult Protective Services.

[00:04:04] **Angela Medina:** He actually approached APS in Texas about this opportunity and helped us with getting this grant application.

[00:04:13] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Great. Yeah. He's kind of a rockstar in the APS world. Yes. Dr. Burnett. So, can you tell us about each of the partners that were involved with this grant and how they work together? Because there's several integral

[00:04:25] **Jennifer Spoeri:** partners in here?

[00:04:27] **Angela Medina:** Absolutely. Yes. So, as I mentioned, UT health and the team Institute, which stands for the Texas elder abuse and mistreatment institute. They are our primary partner,

which again, they're headed by Dr. Burnett. They serve as our academic partner and program evaluator for our grant activities and outcomes. And then they also assess whether the project is meeting its goals.

[00:04:50] **Angela Medina:** And so, at the end of the project, the team Institute is going to create a type of manual that will hopefully be beneficial for other states. [00:05:00] Areas that want to look at the project that we did in case they want to try to replicate it. So, we also needed some forensic accounting expertise and So the team Institute reached out to Eide Bailly and brought them in to provide that expertise.

[00:05:15] **Angela Medina:** Eide Bailly is a certified public accounting and consulting firm, and they're helping us in a few ways. One of which is providing consultation on our complex exploitation investigations, but they're also helping us with strengthening our exploitation curriculum and. So now, in addition to them, we have a little group of partners through the Tarrant County district attorney's office, which is in Fort Worth Texas.

[00:05:44] **Angela Medina:** Some people may know that the Dallas Fort Worth area, so Tarrant County is Fort worth. And then we also have the Houston senior justice assessment center, which people here in Texas know is S Jack. And it's a type of multidisciplinary team. So, the Tarrant County DA's office and the senior justice center or S Jack both worked together with us.

[00:06:08] **Angela Medina:** And, oh, I should mention that S Jack includes multiple partners, including the Houston police department, the county Sheriff's office, the district attorney's office the Harris County health services. For other partners in there UT health has also involved area agency on aging. And of course, APS for this, for this grant, we are just now getting into our work with these partners, but they are going to be giving us recommendations on how to improve our exploitation evidence collection.

[00:06:41] **Angela Medina:** And then along with their input, Eide Bailly is going to help us with creating an evidence check list. And then based on all of this review and this information that they provide they're going to put this all together and give us some recommended protocol for making these referrals to law enforcement, which is required in Texas.

[00:07:01] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah, we do vary by the states. Don't we? Yes. So how did the kickoff with the project begin given the current state of the world today?

[00:07:12] **Angela Medina:** Yeah. So, the grant was secured in late August of 2019. And then, like I mentioned before, UT health is our contracted partner for the grant. But as many people know their contracting issues are fairly complex.

[00:07:28] **Angela Medina:** And so, we had a few hiccups throughout the contract, or I shouldn't say hiccups, but just delays because of the complexity of the process. And then of course, right, when
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we're thinking things were about to work, COVID hits. So. We have COVID hit. Then we have UT had a hiring freeze that resulted from that.

[00:07:46] **Angela Medina:** So, it slowed things down a bit. So basically, it was about September of 2020 before UT health was able to hire their primary research coordinator for this project. And then after that, our kickoff meeting was held virtually in October of 2020. So, with the exception of one meeting that we had with, Eide Bailly during our APS conference, which we did get to do here in Texas, in person this past October, all of our meetings for this grant have been done virtually.

[00:08:16] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Wow. Yep. That's the way it is in the world. Right. And you did mention that, that the grant is for three years. And tell me more about that. Cause you can ask for an extension, you said.

[00:08:30] **Angela Medina:** Yes. So, the grant was received in late August of 2019, and it's for fiscal year 20 and we have a 21 and in fiscal year 22 is our last year.

[00:08:43] **Angela Medina:** So, we will be running through the end of fiscal year 22. And if there are activities that aren't quite yet completed, then we'll be able to request that no-cost extension so that we can try to complete those activities.

[00:08:56] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Got it. That's, that's a nice caveat to that. [00:09:00] Yes. So, let's get into the nitty gritty here.

[00:09:02] **Jennifer Spoeri:** How are the APS investigation, referrals reviewed or received? How do you actually get this from point a to point B to get the work done?

[00:09:11] **Angela Medina:** Right. Right. So, one part of the grant of course is the investigations and those being reviewed by Eide Bailly. And then we have this other part that is our training part, which we're going to talk about.

[00:09:24] **Angela Medina:** But for Eide Bailly, they are working with our forensic assessment center network or what we call the FACN, or you'll sometimes hear called the FACN. And it's a portal that we have access to. And before we started working with the forensic accounting. It was primarily used for capacity assessment referrals, but now we are able to use it for both.

[00:09:48] **Angela Medina:** So, APS sends a de-identified intake report along with the forensic exploitation investigation, suite of tools or the Feist through the portal to Eide Bailly. So Eide Bailly's able to access that material through the portal. They review it and create a draft report of their analysis. And then that also goes back through the portal and once APS reviews it and it's approved, Eide Bailly will provide us their final report through the portal as well.

[00:10:24] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Great. Wow. That portal seems like the key to everything. Yes. So we'll talk about training, like you said in a minute, but, Eide Bailly the training component is to train workers on investigations because obviously Eide Bailly, can't do every financial investigation in the state of Texas. So, what is the criteria for the referrals that go through the portal?

[00:10:49] **Angela Medina:** So, the referrals that go through would be ones that have a more that are more complex. So, if they have multiple bank accounts or they have [00:11:00] multiple resource, maybe they have multiple properties money market accounts, or CDs, credit cards, they have lots of different things going on. So, they have that, or it's complex in the manner of maybe it's only one account, but there are many, many, many transactions on money coming in, going out and moving around and very difficult to follow and track.

[00:11:28] **Angela Medina:** Yeah. So, it's really those, those more complex trying to follow the money type cases that are being referred to, to Eide Bailly.

[00:11:38] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Yeah, I got it. I remember seeing the packets of financial statements coming into the APS office where I was and knowing, oh, this is a thick one. I'm going to be a lot of stuff going on.

[00:11:50] **Angela Medina:** Exactly. And it could be one account, like you said, or it could be eight different accounts. It's just so individualized. So, tell us more about this training component of the grant, because like we said, Eide Bailly, can't handle every financial exploitation case. So, what's that about?

[00:12:10] **Angela Medina:** So, like, we've talked about, Eide Bailly is going to be helping us with updating some of our training, but before we got to that part, we had Eide Bailly do basically a gaps assessment of our existing training and they reviewed everything that we have so far on exploitation.

[00:12:27] **Angela Medina:** And based on that, they made some recommendations to us on potential things that we could do to bolster our existing training. And while they gave us some fabulous recommendations because of our timeframes and our limitations, we had to narrow it down from, we want the whole thing to here's what we actually can manage.

[00:12:47] **Angela Medina:** So, what we're going to be working with is two different trainings. One of them will be Our training that will be in person. And then there'll be another one. That's a web-based training. And Eide Bailly is developing both of these by working they're going to be developing them and working with our in-house training department, which is the center for learning and organizational excellence.

[00:13:10] **Angela Medina:** And they're going to, for the in-person, when they're going to do a sort of train the trainer. With those CLOE staff so that Eide Bailly will be able to provide that training on the

front end at the beginning. But then once our grant is over, then our CLOE department will be able to continue forward with providing that training.

[00:13:32] **Angela Medina:** So, it's not just a one, it'll be a continuing benefit to the.

[00:13:37] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Gotcha. That's impressive. I just want to point out to our listeners how well we're doing would not using acronyms CLOE is affectionately known as Chloe, right? Yes. I mean, it was just so easy in our world to fall back on the acronyms, but you have to remember not everybody's from Texas, I suppose.

[00:13:58] **Jennifer Spoeri:** So, as you've mentioned, COVID effected the upstart of this project. So, can you kind of tell us and the listeners about where your progress is thus far? Where are you at this point

[00:14:08] **Angela Medina:** in time? Yes, COVID COVID did really slow things down a bit. And so we weren't able to really start sending referrals to Eide Bailly until mid-September of 2021.

[00:14:20] **Angela Medina:** Since that time, we've sent them about 18 referrals. And several of those have been processed. But we, we haven't, we're still in the beginning phase stages of it, but that's, that's kind of where we're at so far.

[00:14:36] **Jennifer Spoeri:** You still getting their sea legs? Yes, exactly. I get it. And you said when we discussed this before you were offered a supplemental grant from the administration for community living, can you tell us about that?

[00:14:49] **Jennifer Spoeri:** Cause that was intriguing to me.

[00:14:51] **Angela Medina:** Absolutely. Yes. So, there was a supplemental grant that ACL offered to go along with this grant and Texas has decided to use it for some software for our subject matter experts. Focused on exploitation. So, the software which is called ScanWriter it takes, it takes financial statements and documents, bank records, credit card statements handwritten checks, things like that.

[00:15:17] **Angela Medina:** And it converts those into like an Excel type format. So, it, and it does this of course, much quicker than a person could do it. And. Puts it all into that format. So, they're able to start doing their analysis much quicker as well. So, there's a lot less error or room for human error with the software going through this information and putting it in there and not having to worry as much about.

[00:15:47] **Angela Medina:** Oh, did I, skip a line on this part and not skip a line on this part. So, so we're excited to get, get the software we're still in the process of of procuring it. But it's something we're really looking forward to.

[00:16:01] **Jennifer Spoeri:** That's great. That sounds like some pretty innovative software. Yeah. So, as we close our conversation, I imagine APS workers in Texas really feel the support from this project.

[00:16:12] **Jennifer Spoeri:** What kind of feedback have you received from the

[00:16:14] **Angela Medina:** field? That's exactly right. The feedback we've received has been nothing but positive. Some of the exploitation cases really involve a significant amount of money, you know, what the multiple accounts and transfers and transactions. So, it makes it hard for our workers who most times don't have that that financial expertise to be able to.

[00:16:35] **Angela Medina:** To sort through all of that information. So, our staff have really repeatedly told us how happy they are to have access to the forensic accountants and having them review the records and then providing them back with this really easy to read report that it doesn't only strengthen their case, but it's something that they can provide.

[00:16:54] **Angela Medina:** With their referral to law enforcement. And because some of the, the accountants at Eide [00:17:00] Bailly are former law enforcement. Those reports are really tailored in the way that we need. So, they they've been very, very happy. With the

[00:17:08] **Jennifer Spoeri:** surface. That's amazing. And this can analyze bank statements, financial statements while the investigators getting new cases to investigate.

[00:17:20] **Jennifer Spoeri:** So yeah, so our goal for this podcast was to share innovation that achievable through the administration of community livings APS enhancement grants. And I think we accomplished that goal. So, thank you again for your time. And sharing this project with us, Angela. I know, I look forward to hearing about how the rest of the project rolls out and seeing the manual that the team Institute will be sharing down the road.

[00:17:42] **Jennifer Spoeri:** So, thank you.

[00:17:43] **Angela Medina:** Thank you. I appreciate you having me.

[00:17:47] Closing

[00:17:47] **Krista Brown:** Thank you very much for listening to give us feedback on this podcast or any other APS TARC product, please visit our podcast page at apstarc.acl.gov forward slash



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