

Strategic Plan

2021-2023

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Introduction

Zero Abuse Project is a national, independent nonprofit committed to protecting children from abuse¹ and sexual assault. Recognizing that everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe, Zero Abuse works with a diverse and wide-ranging group of stakeholders including prosecutors, law enforcement, social workers, forensic investigators, multidisciplinary professionals, k-12 schools, colleges and universities, faith communities, youth serving organizations, parents and, of course, children. It combats abuse through a trauma-informed combination of education, training, prevention, and response.

Zero Abuse Project is comprised of the following five programs:

Jacob Wetterling Resource Center (JWRC) offers prevention education for children, parents, and youth-serving organizations. It also provides advocacy, support, and resources for families of the missing and exploited.

Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) is an undergraduate and graduate-level academic minor and certificate program designed to provide experiential learning to students pursuing a career in a discipline that intersects with child protection. CAST programs are offered at 85 colleges, universities, professional schools, and seminaries across the United States.

ChildFirst®², a forensic interview training program for multidisciplinary members of an investigative team, facilitates the collection of corroborating evidence in an abuse case and teaches the necessary skills to conduct a competent, investigative forensic interview with a child. It is the most widely utilized model in the nation; twenty-three states and two foreign countries have designated ChildFirst as their forensic interview protocol.

Trauma-informed Prosecutor Project (TiPP), funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, aims to increase the effectiveness of the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases through providing state-

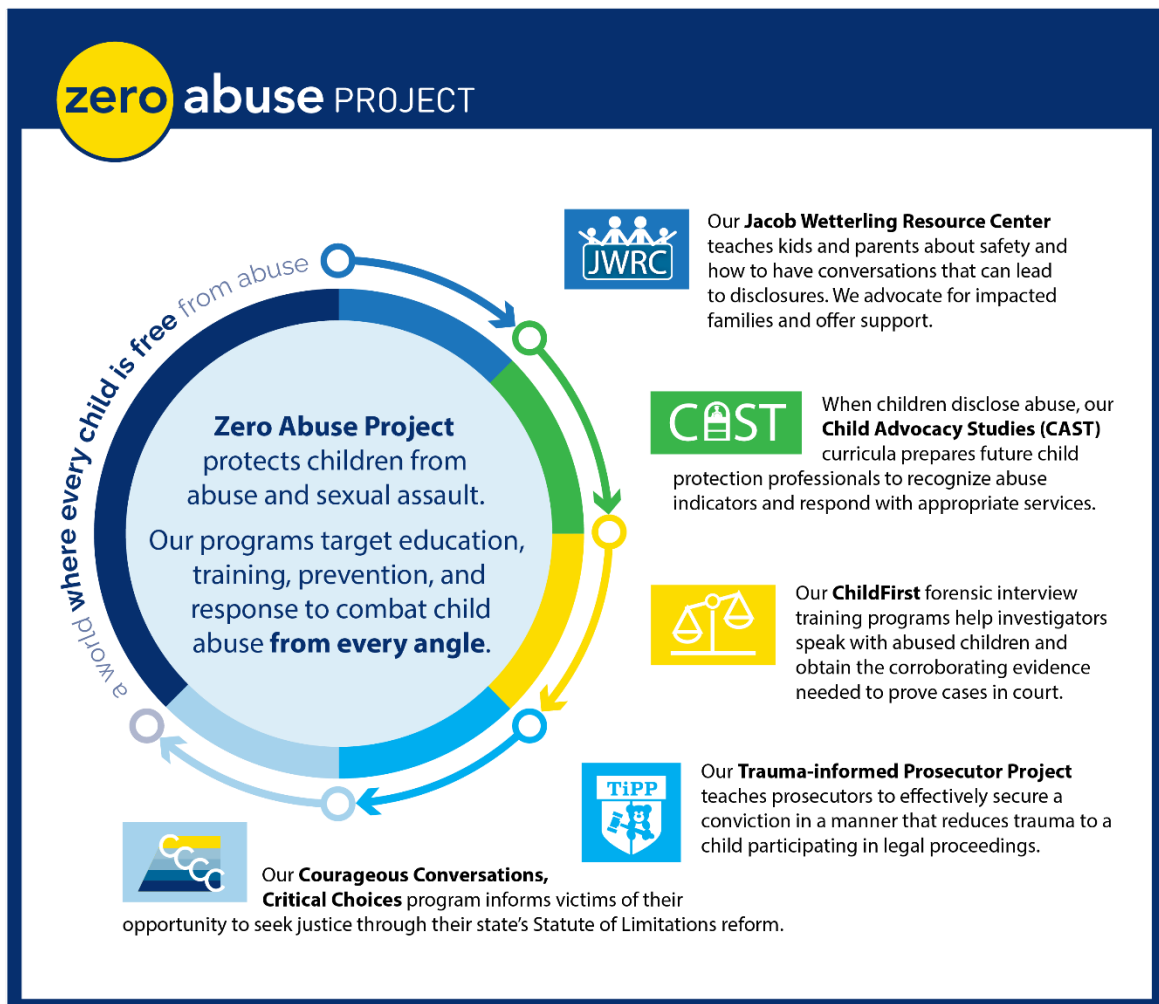
¹ Child abuse" refers to any form of maltreatment including sexual abuse, physical abuse, internet crimes against children including sexual abuse imagery and enticement, sex trafficking, neglect, emotional abuse, torture, and witnessing violence. Zero Abuse Project recognizes that approximately two-thirds of maltreated children are violated in at least two ways and about one-third are maltreated in five or more ways. This is called "polyvictimization." Given the prevalence of polyvictimization, it is critical to be skilled in responding to all forms of maltreatment if we hope to be successful in reducing any form of child abuse. Heather A. Turner, David Finkelhor, and Richard Omrod, Poly-Victimization in a National Sample of Children and Youth, 38(3) AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE 323 (2010), David Finkelhor, Richard K. Omrod, Heather A. Turner, Poly-victimization: A neglected component in Child Victimization, 31 JOURNAL OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 7 (2007).

² ChildFirst is a registered trademark of Zero Abuse Project and may only be used with permission.

of-the-art training, offering comprehensive technical assistance, and developing free publications addressing issues in the field.

Courageous Conversations, Critical Choices works to increase awareness of the civil and criminal options made available through reformed statutes of limitations in several states and helps adult survivors of child sex abuse make informed choices about how they seek to hold accountable perpetrators and liable institutions.

The infographic at fig. 1 illustrates how the components complement each other throughout the stages of an abuse case and build toward the realization of the organizational vision.



Zero Abuse Project is national in scope. It delivers training and technical assistance related to all forms of child maltreatment throughout the United States and in some

international jurisdictions. The direct victim services offered by the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center are limited to the state of Minnesota.

Our Approach: Education, Training, Prevention, Response

Zero Abuse seeks to affect societal and individual, organizational change for the protection of children through a trauma-informed approach of education, training, prevention, and response.

Education

Whether teaching prevention and safety skills to K-12 students, preparing college students for a career where they can protect children, increasing awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences, or helping parents understand the best ways to keep children safe, Zero Abuse believes that it is most effective in educating—providing new information about a difficult topic—with an approach that is comfortable and engaging. No one enjoys thinking about children being sexually abused. Audiences are more receptive to the information offered if their anxiety about the subject matter can be reduced.

Training

While education can increase knowledge and awareness when introducing a subject, training is about developing specific skill sets for individuals who are already engaged in the subject. Law enforcement, prosecutors, child protection workers, forensic interviewers, and medical and mental health professionals, already deal with child abuse and its ramifications every day in their work. They are in need of the evidence-based, trauma-informed skills to work collaboratively as part of a multidisciplinary team to identify the sometimes subtle signs of abuse, discover corroborating evidence from a frightened child, or effectively prosecute the abuse.

Prevention

Every aspect of Zero Abuse's work can be traced back to prevention of sexual abuse. Our prevention education programs empower children to tell a trusted adult when someone is crossing boundaries that make the child uncomfortable. They help parents navigate the frank conversations with their children that can reduce the likelihood their child will be targeted for abuse. Strong child protection policies within a school or organization can frustrate a perpetrator's efforts to isolate, groom and abuse a child. Effective prosecutions can prevent an offender from abusing other children and can deter other offenders from thinking that they might be able to abuse children and get away with it.

Response

Prevention and response go hand-in-hand. Every crime against a child should be prevented, but should prevention ever fall short, a trauma-informed response can mitigate the harm suffered by the child, as well as prompt an intervention that can prevent other children from being abused. Child sexual abuse, in particular, is a

crime that occurs in private, without witnesses, and often results in no visible sign of injury. That crime can generally not be reported until the victim discloses what occurred. Shame, fear, threats, and confusion all contribute to delayed disclosures of abuse. Survivors are often fraught with worry about disclosing their abuse. If the first person to whom the survivor discloses, responds by dismissing, minimizing, or questioning the victim in a way that makes him or her feel responsible for the abuse, the survivor may never again tell another person, perhaps resulting in the offender being free to abuse other children. Fostering a culture of disclosure may encourage bystanders to alert others to the “red flag” concerns they have witnessed as well as empower victims to come forward.

Guiding Statements for Zero Abuse Project

Vision

A world where every child is free from abuse

Mission

To protect children from abuse and sexual assault, by engaging people and resources through a trauma-informed approach of education, research, advocacy, and advanced technology.

To fulfill its mission, Zero Abuse will:

- Equip current and future multi-disciplinary teams and other professionals with the skills to identify abuse, intervene for children's safety, secure justice, and build resilience;
- Surround survivors of abuse and families of the missing with tools to rebuild their lives, reclaim their autonomy, and create a future on their terms;
- Encourage technologies that strengthen investigations, expose abusers, and provide survivors with pathways to recovery;
- Promote evidence-based research that advances child protection, and;
- Advocate policies that create and sustain a culture of prevention, disclosure, accountability, and healing.

History

Zero Abuse Project was founded in 2018 by Jeff Anderson, a civil attorney who has dedicated his career to protecting children from sexual abuse. When it became clear that litigation efforts alone were insufficient to solve this problem, he knew that protecting all children required the engagement of a broader spectrum of disciplines. It was through the exploration of this new, more holistic approach that the Zero Abuse Project was born. In 2019, Zero Abuse brought under its organizational umbrella, the programs of the National Child Protection Training Center, a nationally recognized leader in training system-based responders, and Jacob Wetterling Resource Center which provides direct services, advocacy, and

support to families of the missing and exploited as well as offering prevention education programs.

While Zero Abuse is relatively new as an organization, its component parts have a rich legacy of working to protect children from abuse and have made significant advances to that end. In 2005, Victor Vieth, Zero Abuse's Chief Program Officer for Education and Research published a peer reviewed article detailing a plan to significantly reduce, if not end, child abuse in the United States within three generations (with each generation spanning 40 years).³ A revised version of the article was published in 2006.⁴ The plan, called *Unto the Third Generation* resulted in significant reform throughout the United States, even the world, and is recognized in the literature for its impact in the field.⁵ The plan identified five obstacles to ending child abuse and, more importantly, concrete solutions to addressing each obstacle.

The Five Obstacles to Ending Child Abuse

1. Most children suspected of being abused are not reported into the system

There is more than 25 years of research documenting that even when evidence is clear most professionals will not report a suspected case of maltreatment. According to this research, a significant contributing factor to our failure to report is that the vast majority of mandated reporters receive very little quality information on recognizing signs of abuse. The National Incidence Study has found a direct correlation between reporting maltreatment and education.

2. Even when reports come into the system, most children will never have their cases assessed or investigated

There is at least 40 years of federal data documenting that most cases of child maltreatment are screened out without any meaningful assessment. Indeed, the *more egregious* a case of child abuse is the less likely it is to be screened in. For instance, cases of child torture are routinely screened out.

3. Even when cases are investigated, the investigators and other frontline responders are often inadequately trained and inexperienced

There is a large and growing body of research that the vast majority of child protection workers, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, doctors, nurses, mental health providers and others called on to respond to child abuse received very little education on recognizing or responding with proficiency to allegations of child maltreatment. As a result, egregious errors are routinely made in CPS and law enforcement investigations, and in hospitals and clinical settings when child abuse is present. For example, a 2015 study found that

³ *Unto the Third Generation*, 12 JOURNAL OF AGGRESSION, MALTREATMENT & TRAUMA 5 (2005).

⁴ *Unto the Third Generation*, 28 HAMLIN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC LAW & POLICY 1 (2006).

⁵ See e.g. TANYA S. HINDS & ANGELO P. GIARDINO, CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE: CURRENT EVIDENCE, CLINICAL PRACTICE, & POLICY DIRECTION 114 117 (2017) (listing *Unto the Third Generation* as a "highly recognized" plan over the past 25 years).

medical professionals were missing obvious signs of child physical abuse half the time.⁶ If the most obvious cases of abuse are missed half of the time, it is logical to assume that more difficult cases are missed at an even greater rate.

4. Even when an investigation successfully substantiates abuse and gets a victim into the system, the child is typically older and it is more difficult to address the physical, emotional, and other hardships caused by the abuse

In many cases of abuse, particularly cases of child sexual abuse, the child's ability to talk mirrors the ability of the government to substantiate abuse. Since many professionals are not skilled at speaking to children, particularly young children, many potentially strong cases of abuse are not addressed timely. Instead, many victims of abuse who have their day in court are older. It is extremely rare, for example, for there to be a successful investigation and prosecution of a sexual abuse victim from birth to at least three years old.

5. Because the child protection community lacks a unified voice to communicate the needs of maltreated children, these children receive an inadequate share of our country's scarce financial resources

Although child abuse has been termed a "public health epidemic" and one study concluded that child maltreatment was ten times the rate of cancer, our nation spends very little on child maltreatment and the investments that are made are often poorly conceived.

Four Recommendations for Ending Child Abuse

The 2005 plan made concrete recommendations on how to overcome these obstacles and has since achieved significant progress toward realizing them.

- *Colleges and universities should provide students pursuing careers related to child protection comprehensive, experiential education with the coursework tailored to the profession they are entering.* This evolved into the first of three essential courses that were at the heart of *Child Advocacy Studies* or CAST. Today, 85 universities in 28 states have implemented this reform.
- *Every state should implement a high-quality forensic interview training program by 2040.* *ChildFirst* (originally called *Finding Words*) has now been implemented in 21 states. The program is being presented by Zero Abuse approximately 20 times annually in the state of New York. Additionally, the program is taught in Japan and Colombia. The replication of the course at the state level made this a "very influential" forensic interview training model that

⁶ Joanne N. Wood, Benjamin French, Lihai Song, Chris Feudtner, Evaluation for Occult Fractures in Injured Children, PEDIATRICS Volume 136, number 2, August 2015.

is “among the most widely trained interview structures in the United States.”⁷ The program inspired other states to also establish their own forensic interview training programs. As of this writing, at least 35 states have a designated model.

- *Prosecutors must be adequately trained to prosecute egregious child abusers.* Until the 1980's, child abuse was, to a large extent, ignored by our criminal justice system, which was ill equipped to handle these cases. Moreover, prosecution is an essential part of prevention. According to one study, 561 non-incarcerated sex offenders accounted for the sexual abuse of over 195,000 victims.⁸ Improving the quality of prosecution can only be done through training. Since law schools do not presently teach future prosecutors the intricacies of successfully handling these cases, the training must come elsewhere, must be comprehensive, and must be consistent throughout the nation. In 2019, Zero Abuse Project was awarded a three-year, \$2.4 million grant from the U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for its Trauma-informed Prosecutor Project (TiPP). The purpose of TiPP is to provide training, technical assistance and publications for front line investigators and prosecutors. In 2020, TiPP trained more than 7,000 child protection professionals.
- *In their role as community leaders, child protection professionals must enlist the support of the faith-based community.* There is research documenting that sex offenders and other child abusers operate differently in faith communities than in secular communities⁹. Accordingly, Zero Abuse developed, *Keeping Faith*, a program that addresses these unique dynamics. Equally important, there is a very large body of research documenting that most abused children are impacted spiritually. Left unaddressed, these spiritual injuries impair the ability of a child to cope physically and emotionally. If addressed appropriately, a healthy spirituality may be the most important source of resilience for maltreated children. Zero Abuse has assisted four accredited Children's Advocacy Centers in implementing a chaplaincy program to address this dynamic.

Unto the Third Generation called on child protection professionals to take the long view and to realize that our actions will be “judged by those who come after us.” Dr. David Chadwick, a pioneer in the medical response to abuse and neglect, wrote this about our plan to end child abuse:

⁷ Faller, K.C. (2015). Forty Years of Forensic Interviewing of Children Suspected of Sexual Abuse, 1974-2014: Historical Benchmarks. *Social Sciences* 4, 34-65.

⁸ Gene G. Abel et al., *Self-Reported Sex Crimes of Nonincarcerated Paraphiliacs*, 2 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 3, 17-19 (1987).

⁹ Victor I. Vieth, What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse, 40(4) *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 257-273 (2012).

The authors of this remarkable work speak of ending child abuse not as a platitude but as an attainable goal for our country. For the first time in history, we are presented with a blueprint for accomplishing the goal of ending child abuse and are given an estimate of the time required.

With respect to the time required, *Unto the Third Generation* was divided into three periods of 40 years. The first of these periods ends in 2040 and then we must develop a second generational plan to build on our successes. In the next two decades, we must complete the work contemplated, fully assess its impact, and then develop the next wave of national reform. Arising from this framework and informed by these accomplishments, this strategic plan was developed.

Stakeholders

Many people have a vested interest in Zero Abuse Project. All of them want to know how our organization is changing and how well it is succeeding in meeting its strategic goals and objectives. Zero Abuse depends on its stakeholders; keeping them informed is crucial to gaining their support, and ultimately their buy-in, for our strategic plan. The five planning subgroups identified over 100 stakeholders, some of whom were relevant to the work of multiple subgroups. Each subgroup identified stakeholders as being primary or secondary. A primary stakeholder is a person, group or organization that is directly impacted by Zero Abuse Project. It could be someone with whom we work on projects or someone receiving direct services. A secondary stakeholder may have an interest in Zero Abuse Project but is indirectly impacted. They may benefit from our work, but in a more remote manner. Primary and secondary classifications help prioritize our efforts to seek relevant data from stakeholders and provide ongoing communication about the progress of our strategic plan. A complete listing of identified stakeholders can be found in Appendix A.

Goals and Objectives¹⁰

GOAL 1: Increase disclosure and reporting of child sex abuse and ensure that mandated reports are made by the person directly receiving the information; the report includes the facts and context to render it actionable; and the reporter responds to the information in a trauma-informed manner.

Objective 1.1: Provide body safety education to 11,250 children and 1,250 parents to increase disclosures.

¹⁰ Objectives are designed to be strategic, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline for achieving the objective is the end of 2023, which also represents the scope of this strategic plan.

Objective 1.2: Train 25,000 child protection professionals and mandated reporters on child maltreatment identification and appropriate reporting protocols through delivering 250 training topics.

Objective 1.3: Provide 15 standard and 20 customized trainings for youth-serving organizations to encourage them to foster a culture of disclosure that is codified in institutional policies and implemented in practice.

GOAL 2: Ensure law enforcement, child protection workers and other multidisciplinary team members conduct a competent investigation of every child abuse case that comes to their attention, and when abuse is substantiated, pursue appropriate criminal and civil actions.

Objective 2.1: Provide child maltreatment education, including investigation and litigation skills development, to 40,000 child protection professionals through 400 training topics. Provide current, research-based education to the field through customized training workshops, experiential training courses, targeted technical assistance, practical and scholarly articles, and webinars.

Objective 2.2: Institute a curriculum review process by May 2021, with full implementation by March 2022, to ensure that all external training content and materials reflect the latest research and incorporate client feedback/evaluations.

GOAL 3: Develop a competent child protection workforce that is able to prevent, recognize, and respond to child maltreatment and excels in their understanding of the impact of child abuse and neglect on the lifespan of the individual.

Objective 3.1: Provide child maltreatment identification education to 40,000 child protection professionals through 400 training topics.

Objective 3.2: Expand the presence of CAST programs domestically and internationally at both the undergraduate and graduate level by increasing the number of CAST programs from 85 to 105.

Objective 3.3: Increase information sharing and cross fertilization among CAST faculty as measured by a 30% engagement at all CAST faculty activities, training, and events.

Objective 3.4: Increase the number of students who receive CAST training and number of professionals in the workforce with CAST training by 10%.

Objective 3.5: Expand scope of CAST to incorporate four new projects focused on direct-to-student instruction and new modalities for remote learning.

GOAL 4: Prevent child sex abuse through the use of empowering, positive, and engaging communication methods.

Objective 4.1: Provide age-appropriate prevention education to 11,250 children and parents by 2023.

Objective 4.2: Discourage and prevent abusers from isolating and harming children by delivering training to 25,000 people on strengthening child protection policies and response.

GOAL 5: Support a trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary response to child victimization and families of the missing.

Objective 5.1: Provide direct, trauma-informed response to 200 unique victims and families by 2023.

Objective 5.2: Support a trauma-informed response by professionals by training 25,000 child protection professionals on working collaboratively within a multidisciplinary team through 250 training topics.

GOAL 6: Foster a national commitment through partnership and collaboration to ending child sex abuse and recognizing it as a public health crisis.

Objective 6.1: Convene or participate in a strategic planning session to discuss a push for child sex abuse as a congressional designation with the top ten most politically sophisticated child organizations in 2021.

GOAL 7: Pursue multifaceted fundraising strategy to ensure that Zero Abuse Project has resources to effectively fight child abuse.

Objective 7.1: Create and implement a Development and Fundraising Action Plan which both anticipates and answers the funding needs of the organization with measurable goals in each of the following categories: Major Gifts, Individual Gifts, Grants, Legacy Planning, Corporate Sponsorship, Event Sponsorship, New Donor Acquisition, and Donor Retention.

Objective 7.2: Build and fund an endowment of at least \$500,000 by end of 2023.

Objective 7.3: Secure five new programmatic grants through federal, state, foundation, individual, and corporate funding sources.

Objective 7.4: Each board member will take at least one specific, concrete action per year to develop financial resources for Zero Abuse Project.

GOAL 8: Effectively communicate the nature of abuse, our strategy to eliminate abuse, and articulate the impact of our work.

Objective 8.1: Define our strategy to eliminate child sexual abuse.

Objective 8.2: Raise brand awareness and engagement with stakeholders, donors, general public, and media through a minimum of five outreach /communications activities per month.

Objective 8.3: Develop a communications and marketing strategy.

Objective 8.4: Increase Keela contact list by 8% annually.

Objective 8.5: Develop evaluation metrics to assess the impact of our work.

GOAL 9: Administer the organization in a way that supports and promotes our work in the field, nurtures the staff to thrive in the workplace, and ensures one's race identity has no influence on how they fare within the organization.

Objective 9.1: Ensure organizational operations are cost-effective, efficient, and in line with best practices.

Objective 9.2: Have six months of cash operating reserves on hand by the end of 2023.

Objective 9.3: Establish a work environment that allows retention of 75% of staff that have the skills and abilities needed to create Zero Abuse's desired impact.

Objective 9.4: Ensure that the revenue of each programmatic department exceeds expenses.

Objective 9.5: Define the roles, responsibilities, and capacity of the Board.

Objective 9.6: Set an example as an equitable and inclusive organization.

GOAL 10: Be an exemplar in promoting racial justice and work to dismantle systems of power, privilege, and racial bias within our sphere of influence.

Objective 10.1: Counteract the impact of privilege and bias in the child protection system by incorporating racial justice topics into 75% of all programmatic materials.

Action Plan

Each of the activities identified in the goals and objectives is assigned to a specific program. Program directors will assign tasks implementing the strategies to designated staff members. Those tasks will be part of the goals and objectives set for individual staff members in collaboration with their supervisors and assessed during annual performance reviews.

Following adoption of the strategic plan, the activities will be translated into a detailed task timeline for completion of benchmarks. The task timeline will be reviewed quarterly and updated to reflect progress towards meeting objectives.

Communication of the Strategic Plan

The complete strategic plan will be synthesized into a shorter document for public consumption and disseminated to identified primary stakeholders. Stakeholders will receive progress updates on the implementation of the strategic plan via emails, podcasts and video blogs.

Evaluation of the Strategic Plan

Following the adoption of the strategic plan, a detailed plan will be created for conducting an outcome evaluation of the plan. The outcome evaluation will look specifically at whether or not Zero Abuse achieved the goals set forth in its strategic plan and had its intended effect. An outcome evaluation will focus on questions such as: Has Zero Abuse actually protected children from abuse or assisted victims, and how?

Appendix A: Stakeholders

Stakeholders	JWRC-Primary		JWRC-Secondary		CAST-Primary		CAST-Secondary		E&R-Primary		E&R-Secondary		Admin-Primary		Admin-Secondary		Board-Primary		Board-Secondary	
Jeff Anderson	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Zero Abuse Board Members	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Zero Abuse Staff	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Contractors		x		x	x						x								x	
Vendors											x									
Institutional Funders of Zero Abuse Programs	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Individual Donors/Potential Individual Donors	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Dept of Justice					x	x							x							
Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Dept of Justice					x	x							x							
MN Office of Justice Programs	x												x							
IRS													x						x	
Auditors													x	x						
Wetterling Family	x																			
Victim Services Clients	x																			
Training and Technical Assistance Clients	x						x						x							
Children	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x			
Parents		x					x													
Adult Survivors		x							x				x							
Non-offending Caregivers									x											
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children	x								x											
National District Attorneys Association									x											
National Association of Prosecutor Coordinators									x											
National Children's Alliance									x											
Institute on Violence and Trauma									x											
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children									x											
CAST Colleges & Universities			x		x															
ChildFirst Coalition Partners				x	x															
Other Organizational Partners in the Field	x		x		x								x							x
Professionals in the field	x		x		x		x		x		x									
Law Enforcement we interact with		x		x	x															x
Faith Communities we train		x		x	x															
Child Advocacy Centers		x	x		x								x							
JWRC Volunteers	x																			
Youth in Placement		x	x		x															
CAST Higher Ed Faculty			x																	
Undergraduate & Graduate CAST Students			x																	

Stakeholders	JWRC-Primary	JWRC-Secondary	CAST-Primary	CAST-Secondary	E&R-Primary	E&R-Secondary	Admin-Primary	Admin-Secondary	Board-Primary	Board-Secondary
Educational Administrators at CAST institutions			x							
CAST Simulation Laboratories			x		x					
Professional Boards				x						
State Departments of Higher Education				x						
Accrediting Organizations				x			x			x
Child Fatality Review Teams				x						
Judges				x		x				
Medical Providers				x	x					
Mental Health Providers					x					
Child Protective Services		x	x		x					
Victim Advocates		x			x					
SANE Nurses					x					
Prosecutor Associations						x				
Attorneys General Offices						x				
News Media		x		x		x		x		x
Social Media Followers		x		x		x		x		x