



May 2026 APS TARC Podcast Transcript

Title

Michelle Gayette: Welcome to the Adult Protective Services Technical Assistance Resource Center podcast. This is Michelle Gayette, technical assistance lead with the APS TARC. We come to you with the goal of sharing promising practices and innovations from the adult protective services 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: Welcome to the APS TARC podcast. Today, we're going to speak with Stacie Tolson, Oklahoma Human Services interim deputy director and district one field manager — there are three districts in Oklahoma by the way — and Courtney Fox, Oklahoma Human Services program administrator for long-term care investigations for APS, and systems administrator for AVA, their APS system. We'll get into that later. We will discuss the innovative IT enhancements that Oklahoma APS is undertaking for frontline APS staff. Before we begin, I'd like to remind listeners that a webinar on the APS field guide was presented a year ago exactly in May 2025 and the recording is on the TARC website. This podcast will provide a brief recap of that information while highlighting the newly developed APS resource directory, and how this supports the APS professionals in their daily work even more. So, let's begin by learning a little bit about each of you, because when I was reviewing our information together, you have over 30 years of APS experience. That's impressive. So, can you share a little background about yourselves and how your careers brought you to your current work? And Stacy, I'll let you kick it off.

Stacie Tolson: Well, I will be honest, I started out with the state with family support, doing the food stamp, those kind of things, and it ventured through a couple of jobs, and about eight years into it, I stepped away from state work and quickly decided that there are a lot of benefits to working for the state. I should get back there, and adult protective services was the opening that they had in my area that kind of was in the vein of what I had been working with juvenile services and child welfare, so I applied, thinking I'd only be here for a year or two, figuring out where I wanted to end up. Twenty years later, I'm still looking for where I want to end up, and I have started out as an adult protective services specialist 2, moved into the 3, which is kind of the backup to the supervisor, then I became a supervisor, then I was program field representative, and in that role I got to venture out into working with our tech side of it and the field guide, then I moved into my district director role, and now I am also serving as deputy director, so I really feel like my career with APS has spanned just about every position. I think that's my goal. Before I retire, I want to be able to say I've done it all, so that's where I'm at.

Jennifer Spoeri: That is impressive. You've got real street cred there too.



Stacie Tolson: Yes.

Jennifer Spoeri: So Courtney, tell us a little bit about your path.

Courtney Fox: Yeah, so I started in adult protective services here at DHS, Department of Human Services, in Oklahoma back in June of 2015, so it's almost been 11 years now. I started out as an investigator in the field, going into people's homes. After doing that for five years, my supervisor and my program field rep at the time, she and he, they realized I had some tech skills that maybe some of the other people did not have, and so they encouraged me to go into that type of role within adult protective services, so after I was a field investigator for five years, I then moved into the role of a program field representative, which was the systems administrator role for the state for our computer system. So I did that for about a couple years, and then another opportunity opened up to become a program administrator for our division, which is Community Living, Aging, and Protective Services, so I'm a program administrator for both sides, and I do the IT stuff, so I do a lot of our computers, iPhones, iPads, asset management, things like that, and then also a couple years ago I was given the role of programs administrator for the long-term care investigations team here at APS, so that is a little bit about how I got to where I am. It's been a, it's been a roller coaster of 11 years.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, quite a ride. And you all do so many things under one role.

Courtney Fox: Yeah, many different hats.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yes, all right. So a little background about Oklahoma for our listeners, because if I've learned anything with my time at NAPSA, it's that APS foundation is very similar, it's the same, but the way we do our work and the statutes, it can be subtly different. So, Oklahoma is state-administered, state-run, and can receive reports on individuals 18 years of age and older with a vulnerability, and Oklahoma's referrals have gone up 31% between 2022 and 2025. I know that other programs are in a similar situation, but just seeing that in black and white, I went, "Whoa, that's, that's a significant jump." So, and they do investigate in long-term care facilities, as Courtney had mentioned, because some APS programs do not. So this is important to keep in mind, because I've heard that a few programs have asked Stacie and Courtney for their APS field guide as a template to use for their program, so it must be edited for other programs, because we're all subtly different. So that said, there are three things that are interrelated that we're going to highlight today, the AVA, the Assisting Vulnerable Adults system, that's their main IT system, and the APS field guide, that's the one that there's the webinar on from a year ago, and then the newly developed resource directory. So let's start with, do you call her Ava, or do you say AVA? You call her Ava.

Courtney Fox: Ava,

Jennifer Spoeri: Okay.

Courtney Fox: Yeah, it came. If anybody's seen, is it WALL-E Stacie? The movie WALL-E?



Stacie Tolson: Yeah, it was. That was the name, was Ava.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's so cute. All right. Well, this was this the first system to support APS, and tell us a little bit about how it supports, and, you know, what you want the APS professionals listening to this to know how it supports your APS professionals.

Courtney Fox: So it's not the first APS system that we've had in the state of Oklahoma. Our previous system, we felt like we were lacking a little bit in the reports and dashboards area, so in 2020 we quickly transitioned from one system to this new system we have now, and it was a quick turnaround. I think we developed our new system in about three months, but it has worked well for us. You're surprised that it was three months, but it really was. I think we started in April and it deployed in July that year, so it was crazy. But what we have found is, I mean, it very well supports us in what we do here in Oklahoma. We are able to pull reports out of anything, so I mean, you could ask me for a report and I could probably get it to you within 10 minutes. We build our own reports, so any field there is in AVA, you can build a report off of that field. We have that, and then also we have the dashboards that also support us, and I'll let Stacie talk about the dashboards a little bit, because I know she, she used the dashboards when she was a supervisor, and then when she came into the role as system administrator, and then in her role as district director. So, I'll let her talk about the dashboards a little bit.

Stacie Tolson: I have spent a lot of time with the dashboards. One of the things that I loved when we switched to our new system was that I was able to go in and quickly see on a dashboard where we sit at caseload wise, and at the time that this program rolled out for us, when we initiated AVA into the field, I was in a county that we had a lot of backlog due to vacancy. I could pull that up every morning and see exactly where my backlog was sitting. I could easily click into the report off the dashboard to be able to see what cases were being counted in that count, and I was able to quickly decrease our backlog by being able to access that so easily, and that has been one of the things that has maintained for me through each of my jobs that I've looked at backlog is the information just being right there at hand, and it helps in so many ways, because as a district director, when I'm speaking with the supervisors that are being managed by me, I'm able to pull up their dashboard and I'm able to see what their team's doing in real time, and so there's so many aspects to it, they're wonderful, and when we first came out with it, I kind of do feel like I might have irritated Courtney a little bit with, can I get a report that does this? Can I? I was so excited, it's like a kid in a candy store. Can we do this? And almost every time the answer is yes, give me just a few seconds, and it was on my dashboard. And so I think if I had to say one thing about AVA, is that I would urge everyone to find a great vendor. There are vendors out there that can put together a system that meets the needs so incredibly, because it is wonderful. In my current interim deputy director spot, we're right in the middle of budget talks, and so I will get a call up and say, hey, we need to know this. I can go right into my dashboard, pull that report, send it right off without even having to ask anyone, think about anything. It's just wonderful, all the information that's at the fingertips. And one of the nice things is that we even have a dashboard for our field in the staff, our frontline workers, who can go in and see where their caseload is sitting, and so that's one of the great things about the dashboard, is that it is so easy to just have



everything in one place, that's a quick overview. If you have multiple dashboards to address different things, we have a guardianship dashboard, we have an allegations dashboard. Any position in our APS group, we can develop a dashboard to answer all the questions that they need. And so.

Jennifer Spoeri: Who do you have to ask to develop the report? Like, can you pull a report? Kind of, Courtney's the report master.

Stacie Tolson: I can create reports, but I leave that to Courtney and Casey, who's under Courtney. Anyone really has the ability to create reports. We haven't trained a lot in it, because there is, there is a little bit of knowledge that needs to be there, but it's really pretty simple for the most part. But anyone can pull the reports off the dashboard, or just within the reports in AVA. We have a tab you can go right to reports, and you can see all the reports that are created. So.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's great.

Stacie Tolson: It's amazing how much information that we're able to have in AVA, where everyone can pull it and see, and it allows a lot of crosswork between districts, and you know, just everything. I can't speak enough on how that has changed APS, and that's coming from 20 years in Oklahoma APS. We are at the best position we've ever been, as far as our technology in AVA, so I am a huge fan of what we're doing there. We just went through phase two, where we went in and a lot of made a lot of changes that were needed, because, as Courtney said, this was all created in three months, and I was amazed with what they were able to put together in three months, but as we developed just a wish list of things I was even more amazed when we got with a vendor and were able to change things up even more, and so it's just kind of really unlimited what we can do in there.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's great. Wow, so then you spun off of that and created the field guide. So tell us how, or tell the listeners how the field guide is different than AVA, and how it was developed. How does it support workers?

Courtney Fox: Well, I'll go ahead and say, so the APS field guide is more like it's a resource for the field workers to be able to access when they're out in the field, that's why we call it the field guide, and so it basically gives a rundown of every step you take during an investigation basically. So it has tips on there of when you're investigating self-neglect, what things to look for when you're investigating self-neglect, or caretaker abuse, or exploitation. It gives you instructions of how to do certain things within AVA, so it tells you how to enter your interviews, how to enter your allegations, how to upload files, things like that, and so we needed it, because basically our supervisors were fielding a lot of phone calls, emails, chats, and Teams about, oh, what do I do now? How do I do this? How do I do that, and so instead of them going to their supervisor, we wanted them to be able to have the resource themselves at their own fingertips, where they could find the answers themselves, instead of having to go to their supervisor first. And so that's the reason why we developed it, one of the big reasons, and Stacie Tolson was actually instrumental in creating the field guide, when she was under me as the



program field representative, she met with the field, so we pulled together field workers, we pulled together supervisors, we pulled together our guardianship program field representatives, and we asked them, How do you do this? What are the steps? What is the process? And she basically took all the notes, wrote it all down, and then we got with a vendor to create our field guide, and it is online, it has its own website, and they did all the work of putting it into the website for us, but, you know, it was, it's been great implementing that. Stacie, do you want to say anything about our field guide?

Stacie Tolson: You know, I have to be honest, the field guide, and a couple of the changes that we did in AVA in phase two are probably some of the things that I'm proudest of, of my career. The field guide, one of the things I love about it is, as you said in the opening, we have three districts in Oklahoma and a lot of times we found we had three ways of doing things.

Courtney Fox: Little nuances in the details.

Stacie Tolson: Yeah, you know, and so if you had someone who lived in one part of the state and they moved to another part of the state, things might be done differently there, and it was just frustrating to have all those little nuances, as she said, and so one of the things that the field guide allowed was for there to be consistency throughout the state of how things were worked, so that if we have a case down in the southeast point of Oklahoma, and for some reason it gets sent to the northwest part of Oklahoma, they can pick that case up and know exactly where everything's at, how it's been done, and just continue on with the work, because the field guide has set the standard of how work is supposed to be done, and so while it also is tremendous helping folks in the field, keeping those supervisors free from having to answer questions of how do I do this, it also allowed us a consistency across the state of, you know, how we want to do it. It's going to be something that is probably forever living, changing as we change and update the ways that we do things to become more efficient, more effective, but it really is just a tremendous tool that our staff uses.

Jennifer Spoeri: I can see how the supervisors must love it, and the workers, because sometimes it's not even just the newer workers, it's somebody that's, I mean, I had staff that were out on leave for whatever reason, they come back and, like, oh, how do I do that, you know? And it's a lot to remember in our world, so just having these little tips.

Stacie Tolson: Yeah, and there's some folks that the things that come up are not everyday things, you know, whether it be a specific type of case or a guardianship in an area that we don't have a lot of guardianships in. It's nice, like you said, for those seasoned workers also to be able to go back through and, like, I don't remember the steps, what do I do? And they go to the field guide, the steps are laid out there, so it really has been just a tremendous addition to our tools.

Courtney Fox: And we do with our field guide, we do have a feedback loop, so within the field guide there is a place where staff can provide feedback, so if they find that they're following the process, and something's



incorrect, or they find a different way to do it, and think that it's more efficient. They can actually click the little button within the field guide that says, you know, I found a problem, or whatever, and they can submit that to us, and it comes directly to Stacie and I, and Casey, who I think we mentioned she is my program field rep under me, who is a system administrator as well.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's important to have the people doing the work be able to help build it and give the ongoing feedback.

Courtney Fox: Yes.

Stacie Tolson: I love the ongoing feedback, because that way we're always, you know, sometimes when you remove yourself from the field to step into leadership spots, you're not up to date with everything that's going on in the field, and so I love that those field staff have a way to say, hey, you may not be aware, but this has changed up a little, and here's what we need to be doing, so that they feel like they have a voice in the changes and keeping us up to date, so I really do love that there's just ongoing feedback in there.

Courtney Fox: Because it is more likely if, if the field staff are the ones who are involved in developing something like this and are the ones who are providing the feedback, they're going to be more likely to use it as well.

Jennifer Spoeri: Oh, yeah, absolutely, and you mentioned the reports before, so when I was reviewing the field guide and AVA, all this information, I was thinking, wow, the data that can be collected, you know, for advocacy purposes, for reporting to your state legislators, you know, I was thinking specifically about the cost of financial exploitation, because I hear there's lots of states working on trying to collect that data. It's one of the hardest things to collect, so or successful prosecutions, something like that. So, tell me about, do you have some of those kind of reports that you've used that came out of the system?

Courtney Fox: Yes, we have all the things now. Yes, we do have reports that will show us exploitation and the price of exploitation in the state of Oklahoma, and we have provided that information to our state legislature before. So, I'll let Stacie elaborate a little bit more, but, like we said earlier, literally anything that has a field in AVA, we can pull a report out of that. We also, you know, we like, like she said, we have a whole dashboard on allegations and prosecution recommended, and we were able to use that dashboard and that data that we have there for one of our state program field representatives, who is in, she, she basically does the multidisciplinary teams. She has been able to use that data to start up some of those MDTs in the specific districts with the DAs and ADAs, and it's just been a great resource. So, Stacie, if you want to add to that?

Stacie Tolson: Well, and that was one of the big things I was going to mention was the MDTs. We have seen such progress with those because we're able to quickly say, hey, here are the cases that we've recommended for prosecution based on the reports, and then we're able to follow up with what are you doing with them, and we're in the process of trying to figure out a way to have feedback from the district attorneys so that we can add that into the system to know when they've prosecuted, and you know, so that we'll have the full circle of



cases on prosecution. We've recommended it. What did the DA do with it? Once we get all that into the system, we'll be able to pull out reports of that, which I think is just fabulous, and I'm excited about it. So it truly is, I mean, I said earlier there really is just no limit to the data that can be collected from AVA. The only limit is what we're putting into it, and when we identify something that we want from it that we don't have a way to pull, we figure out what needs to be put into the system so that we can pull that report, so it's just, there's not enough to be said about it.

Courtney Fox: Stacie mentioned we're trying to have to close that feedback loop with the district attorneys, and so we realized we didn't have any, any fields in AVA to be able to track that information from the district attorneys, and so recently we added those fields, and so now we'll be able to say the district attorney took this step, they, they, yes, they're going to prosecute, and here's the reasons why they were able to prosecute, or no, they can't prosecute this, and here's the reasons why, and so we were able to add those fields, and, you know, when all the MDTs get up and running, we'll be able to update those fields, and then pull reports from that.

Jennifer Spoeri: Well, if there's any researchers listening to this podcast, you might have calling on you, because this is a treasure trove of data.

Stacie Tolson: It truly is, because so often with our MDTs in the past, what we've done is we've just gone and said we don't feel like you're prosecuting anyone. We didn't have any data to back that up. It was just like we don't feel. Now we can sit down, we can say X percentage of folks are, are being prosecuted, everyone else isn't. What's the deal? And we can compare it across the state to other district attorneys. That's probably one of the biggest things that I'm excited about, report-wise, is that hopefully we'll finally have a little bit of teeth in getting prosecutions that we have some evidence of you're not doing your job, and we have a couple of district attorneys who are very eager to move forward with prosecutions and want that report so that they can challenge their other district attorneys in the state with, look at my report, where are you at the, you know, and.

Jennifer Spoeri: Nothing wrong with a little healthy competition, you know.

Stacie Tolson: Yeah. We're excited about it, so there is just so much to be said about the report possibilities in AVA, you know. Yes, researchers, please do contact us, because AVA can pull the information.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, yeah, it sounds like there's a lot. So, and finally, last but not least, the recently unveiled APS resource guide. This really piqued my interest, because resource, and I'm curious, you know, describe the system, I guess. Courtney, you want to describe the system and what it can do for people. And then I have other questions.

Courtney Fox: Yes, so our resource directory is a database of all the different services and resources out there in the state of Oklahoma, and it is built within AVA, and so, you know, our APS field guide is a different website, and so it's separate from AVA, but the resource directory is built within AVA, and so basically we decided there



needed to be an easily accessible way to search the different resources in a certain area within the state. So if I'm in southeastern Oklahoma, down in McCurtain County, which is way down there in Broken Bow, Idabel area, if anybody is familiar, you know, I need to be able to search that area and see what services they have down there, so that if I am out as a field investigator, and I'm trying to offer services to one of our clients, I could look up those resources and services and see what I could offer that client, what they would be eligible for, and different things like that. And so that's why we decided to build the resource directory, and previously we had something similar, and but it was a large spreadsheet with a lot of, just, you know, data that wasn't useful. We couldn't pull any information out of it, really. And it was just a bunch of, it was 77 different tabs within an Excel spread. Each tab was one of our counties in Oklahoma, and it, no one used it, because it wasn't, it wasn't, you know.

Jennifer Spoeri: User-friendly.

Courtney Fox: So we decided, you know, what can we do to make this easier on our investigators, and you know, and that is one of the reasons why we built the resource directory. And Stacie, do you want to add anything to that that I'm missing?

Jennifer Spoeri: How in the heck do you keep it updated? That's what I want to know.

Stacie Tolson: And that's one of the things that.

Courtney Fox: It's very new. We literally just started training on how to add your resources and services to it, and so it's one of the things we're still trying to figure out, but.

Stacie Tolson: That was one of the problems with our old resource directory, was there were only a limited few that could change things in it, and we didn't have a real direct way of saying, "Hey, this needs to be updated. Please do this," so it wasn't getting updated, and as Courtney has already said, due to the clunkiness of it and the fact that it wasn't being updated, people had no use for it. With our new resource guide, the staff that are frontline meeting the resources we have out there are able to go in and add that into the system. We have a plan, and, like Courtney said, this is still very new, but we have a plan for phone calls to be made and for the resources to be verified, and there's a spot in AVA for us to say verified this date, which I'm sure at some point we will be creating a report to see when these have been verified. Do we need to call back out, you know.

Courtney Fox: Make sure they're still offering those services.

Stacie Tolson: So, you know, it's, it's in the progress of being developed. We're very excited because we see what it's going to mean to frontline staff to be able to just pull right up and see, okay, I'm in this county, this is the service I need. Wow, these five services are the ones I need to call, and a lot of times I found that through the years we have created our own little list on paper that we would hold on to so tightly, because, you know, I've developed this through my career. It doesn't always get shared with everyone on the team, especially not



throughout the state. And so we're encouraging people, hey, take those little lists that you hold so dear to your heart, put it in the system, share it with everyone, let us all benefit

Jennifer Spoeri: For the good of the greater masses.

Stacie Tolson: We just never had a way to do it that people felt like it was worth their time to put the energy in. Now we do, and so, although it's still a very baby project, I think in the coming months, as it gets further developed, our frontline staff are going to absolutely love having that at their fingertips at all times.

Courtney Fox: And just to add to that a little bit. Another reason we needed a resource directory that is useful for the entire state. You know, you mentioned our growing numbers here in the state of Oklahoma, and we're trying to figure out how to balance workloads, and so to balance workloads across the state for everyone to have a manageable caseload with somebody in an area, a rural area that might not get as many cases, they might be receiving some cases that are in another part of the state that they're not familiar with. So, somebody down in southeastern Oklahoma might receive a referral in southwestern Oklahoma to work, and so they're not familiar with those resources, and so you can search the database, search the resource directory to find what resources are in that area for that person.

Jennifer Spoeri: That is incredible. And so, when somebody verifies the resource, that's when they actually use it. They can go back in and say, "I verified this, and so that automatically updates it. Is that what you are, or are you having somebody maybe do a special call?

Courtney Fox: So when we trained people on how to add their different services to the resource directory, we tried to encourage them, you know, if you're going to be putting this into the resource directory, you should probably call upfront and make sure that they still offer this service, and so upfront we're hoping that they are doing that before they enter the resource, and so upfront they can put that it was verified on the date that they actually entered the resource. Yeah, and then we'll be able to pull a report in a couple months from now, if we have a report that says this was verified, you know, two months ago, is it time to maybe verify it again and figure out, are they still offering those same services? So, I think that's the way we had kind of envisioned it working, but you know, we're up for, you know, whatever's best for the field staff. So, if they come up with a different way to be able to do this that's easier, we're willing to hear it out and, you know, make it easier for them. So.

Jennifer Spoeri: Right, I'm sure they're receiving this well. I mean, you're building it as you're flying it, right? Isn't that what they say?

Stacie Tolson: Yes, yeah. And.

Courtney Fox: Yes.



Stacie Tolson: And we will be able to, if they were to contact someone today in the resource guide and discover that their services have changed or something, they'll be able to go in and edit it as we go. And so there's just, again, it's in AVA, there's so many possibilities there.

Courtney Fox: Yeah, so anyone can add a resource, and then anyone can edit that resource. The only thing they can't do is delete one. The only people who could delete the resource would be an administrator, so either me, Stacie, or Casey would be able to delete those, but all they would need to do, like if it was a duplicate, and they accidentally entered a duplicate, they just reach out to us, and then we go in and delete it. Takes literally 10 seconds, probably, to delete it. So, I mean, they really are able to own this. It's their ownership. They can add them, they can edit them, they can verify them, all of that.

Stacie Tolson: And that's what we want for the field guide and resource guide, is for the frontline staff who's going to benefit most to own both of those products that that they own them and can feel like they're really valuable to them.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, yeah, they are invested in it. So I'm sure it's going to help them. I can't wait to check in with you, you know, next year and see how it's all going, but.

Stacie Tolson: We look forward to that.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, anything additional you'd like to add before we close? This is quite the trifecta with AVA, the field guide, and the resource guide. You've got it going on in Oklahoma.

Courtney Fox: One thing I think we're looking to do, possibly in the future, after we, you know, get the resource directory up and running, and maybe you've had a year with it, we've already had suggestions from field staff, they think it would be nice to connect the resource directory to the service planning, so if they are searching a resource, they could, you know, click a button or something, and it automatically adds it to their service plan, instead of them, you know, researching the resource directory, finding the resource, and then having to go into their case, go into their service plan, and then add it from there. They want it to be seamlessly intertwined, so that's one thing we're looking to do in the future with the resource directory that I think, you know, when you, when you speak to us a year from now, hopefully we will have plans to do that.

Stacie Tolson: We will hopefully be in the middle of making that happen, because, and that's what I love, is that our field staff really have become very vocal through the phase two process of AVA. They've become very vocal in why don't we do this? They've learned to dream big on things, and we're trying to make those happen, and AVA makes it really easy for us to accommodate a lot of those big dreams that they have.

Jennifer Spoeri: Well, they have some good leadership there in both of you, and I think it's just incredible. Thank you so much for taking the time out of the busy APS work schedule. I know how that is. And have a good rest of the day. We really appreciate it.



Stacie Tolson and Courtney Fox: Thank you.

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