

Continuous Quality Improvement Project

Colorado

Interview with Marc Mackert, Director, Administrative Review Division, Office of Performance and Strategic Outcomes,
Colorado Department of Human Services
marc.Mackert@state.co.us • 303-866-7137
February 6, 2012

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) STRUCTURE

Department Structure

Colorado's Administrative Review Division (ARD) serves as an independent third party review system for the State and is housed within the Office of Performance and Strategic Outcomes in the Department of Human Services. The ARD is responsible for the State's Case Review System and a portion of the QA System for both the Division of Child Welfare and the Division of Youth Corrections. Because Colorado is a county-supervised system, direct services are the responsibility of counties and the writing of policy and program development is the responsibility of the Division of Child Welfare. By sitting outside both the counties and Division of Child Welfare and Division of Youth Corrections, the ARD is able to maintain its independent status and focus on all aspects of the system. Collaborative relationships are formed with program staff in both Divisions, allowing ARD to easily report out on data related to policy. Relationships are also formed with the counties to share data around practice. The ARD does not have formal authority to make changes in either Division or the county departments. Rather, it is the strength of their relationships and the fact that staff trust in their data that allows the ARD to make recommendations that eventually turn into changes in practice and policy.

The ARD Unit is made up of 26.2 full time employees, including:

- Twenty Compliance Investigator IIs, responsible for in-home, out of home, and assessment reviews;
- One Director;
- Two Managers, responsible for overseeing Compliance Investigators;
- One Manager responsible for overseeing the Data Unit;
- Two part time staff who do data analysis and publications.

The Division also has an administrative assistant. The three Managers report to the Director, though the Division operates more as a horizontal system than a vertical one. The Director reports to the Director of the Office of Performance and Strategic Outcomes.

[ARD Organizational Chart](#)

The ARD was created in 1991. The majority of the ARD's budget comes from the State general fund and a small portion comes from IV-E Federal dollars.

Staff Qualifications and Responsibilities

The ARD looks to hire Compliance Investigator IIs with previous experience as a county caseworker in child welfare or a client manager in youth corrections. Because ARD staff are responsible for making recommendations, it is important to have a strong understanding of the systems in which the ARD is working. Additionally, the ARD looks for staff with at least a Bachelor's Degree in a human services related field. Each of the ARD's staff is geographically based, living in the region where they primarily review cases.

The ARD staff are responsible for completing the State's six-month periodic reviews, quality assurance reviews on assessments, in-home cases, and screened out referrals, and providing training and technical assistance. The ARD sees a core component of their role as reinforcing and educating around critical practices.

Training

All ARD staff meet on a monthly basis for a two and one half day consistency training in a central office. Guest speakers will come in to train on various topics. For example, a trainer from the Division of Child Welfare came in to provide the risk assessment training given in the counties. The purpose of these trainings is to ensure that the ARD staff are using the same concepts and language being used in the counties. Reports are run on data within each county to track consistency in reviewers' responses. Staff have discussions around differences in responses that are wider than expected due to normal variation in cases.

Inter-rater reliability is also addressed at the monthly meetings. All reviewers will review the same case, and statistics are calculated determining the percent of agreement and inter-rater reliability. Staff then discuss their responses to each individual question as a group. These conversations focus on applying both what the reviewers know around state policies and rules, the instructions on the review tool, and how reviewers determined their response to each question. This helps increase the consistent application of state policy and the instrument to each individual review. Lastly, these meetings serve as an opportunity to discuss CQI concepts on a broader scale and the ARD's role in the State system.

The ARD staff shadow workers in the field from time to time. This helps the ARD staff remain current on practice and to be more empathetic about the challenges facing workers as well as improve their abilities to tie in intent with the data.

Committees

As part of the Colorado Practice Model roll out, counties have been asked to create Quality Practice Teams (QPTs). Teams are completing business process mapping around different practices in the county, as well as using data to identify areas in which they are doing well and/or need improvement. Initiatives are then identified in order to improve performance.

The ARD Steering Committee is made up of representatives from county departments, the Division of Child Welfare, and other system partners. The Committee meets quarterly to help guide the ARD's decisions. For example, the Committee met recently to discuss removing two questions from the review instrument after the ARD decided they had collected enough data on the questions to write a white paper. By communicating which practices the Steering Committee would like to see reinforced, the ARD is able to tailor their reviews to meet the State's needs.

CQI PLAN

Expectations, Missions, and Objectives

The Administrative Review Division is in the process of revising their mission, vision, and values to better reflect their role in Colorado's child welfare CQI process. The ARD is working with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement on these changes. The current "Goals" and "Values and Guiding Principles" are listed on the [ARD's website](#).

Colorado's CQI system is a mix of both compliance and improvement based efforts. Many questions on the case review instruments are compliance based, e.g., based specifically on capturing adherence to program rules or related to pure data/indicators in a particular area. Improvement based efforts are discussed in the *Elements of the CQI System* section.

CQI Policies

Colorado is currently working to create a collaborative CQI process through the Colorado Practice Model.

ELEMENTS OF THE CQI SYSTEM

Qualitative Reviews

The ARD completes reviews on Colorado's out-of-home cases, in-home cases, assessments and screened out referrals. Approximately 15,000 reviews are completed annually.

- **Out-of-Home Reviews**

Reviews must be completed every six months for each child in out-of-home care. Each review includes a case file review and interviews. The ARD's Compliance Investigator IIs review case files, answers questions prior to the interview and determines areas to explore further during the face-to-face meeting. Interviews include anyone involved in the case, including: caseworkers, client managers, parents, guardian ad litem, attorneys, foster care providers, etc. The intent is to make sure everyone has an opportunity to provide perspective on the child's progress and to make sure that all are in agreement on any recommendations. See the following documents for more information on the out-of-home case review: [ARD Out of Home Instructions](#); [ARD Out of Home Instrument](#).

- **In-Home Reviews**

The in-home review is completed in the State's ten largest counties once every six months, and annually for the remaining counties. A random sample is pulled from cases receiving in-home services that have had an open case for at least six months. Cases six months or older are chosen because the ARD wants to focus on areas where they can have the most impact. The ARD uses a 90% confidence level and 10% confidence interval to determine sample size and ensure generalizability of the findings to the entire population. This helps establish legitimacy in their reporting. These reviews consist of case file reads followed by a review of findings with the caseworker. The review with the caseworkers also serves as an opportunity for training and technical assistance. See the following documents for more information on the in-home case review: [ARD In Home Instructions](#); [ARD In Home Instrument](#).

- **Assessment Reviews**

The ARD also reviews assessments, regardless of whether they move on to become an open case or close after assessment. Assessment reviews are completed in tandem with the in-home reviews. A random sample is pulled, using the same 90/10 confidence level and interval, from any assessments accepted in the past six months. The intent of this review is to examine the up front process, to determine if assessments are conducted thoroughly and sound decisions are being made. These reviews are also known as the ARD's Quality Assurance reviews. See the following documents for more information on the assessment case review: [ARD Assessment Instructions](#); [ARD Assessment Instrument](#).

Report out meetings are organized with each county within three weeks from the date of the in-home and assessment reviews. Staff from the ARD will meet with the county to walk through findings from all of the reviews. Counties are encouraged to bring their supervisors to these meetings, as they are the most informed about practice and are directly involved in seeing that changes are implemented. Additionally, prior to in-home and assessment reviews, entrance interviews are conducted with the County Director and supervisors to go over systemic level issues, including: changes in staffing, practice, programming, etc.

- **Screen Out Reviews**

Screen out reviews are also conducted annually. A random sample is pulled, by county, from all referrals that were not accepted for assessment. The 90/10 confidence level and interval is used. County staff are invited to the ARD's offices to join ARD staff to review these cases. County staff review cases from other counties, in order to facilitate peer learning. Approximately 1,500 referrals are reviewed during this week long review, with 40+ county staff participating each year. All data is then kept at the central office and used to make reports for each county and for the State. The random sample allows ARD to make generalizations about practice in each County and the State as a whole.

Quantitative Data

Colorado is able to gather quantitative data from several sources, including: the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems (NCANDS); the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System

(AFCARS); and the State's SACWIS system, a.k.a., TRAILS. All data from qualitative reviews is also stored in a section of the State's SACWIS system.

USE OF DATA

Reports

Aggregate reports by county, region, state, judicial district, and Division of Youth Corrections region are run quarterly. These reports are available on the ARD website [here](#). Following a request from the counties, county comparison reports are also run.

Comprehensive quality assurance reports are completed following all in-home and assessment reviews. The reports include trend lines and aim to capture the discussion and feedback gathered from the post-review meetings in each county. These reports are sent directly to the county and counties are asked to change/update any inaccurate information. The goal of these reports is to promote counties thinking about what works and what does not.

For the six-month periodic reviews, ARD review staff provide the county with a compliance report and narrative findings for each child. The compliance report lists any item in which the case was found out of compliance. The narrative finding is the reviewers' summation of issues pertinent to the child (e.g., safety, progress or barriers to permanency, well-being, etc.) Additionally, if an ARD reviewer identifies a significant and unresolved issue that directly affects a child's safety, permanency and/or well-being, an issue requiring a county response is requested. If it is an issue of safety, the county needs an immediate plan; if it deals with permanency or well-being, the county has five days to produce a plan. The State had 43 of these findings in 2011, 33 of which had a positive impact on outcomes for kids.

Data Software

Reports are created using Crystal Reports. The State planned to move to Cognos; however, the economy has slowed that process. SPSS is used to gather random samples and for outcome analyses and research. Microsoft Access is used as a database for the screen out review results and for other ad hoc activities.

Plan Development and Training

The State does not have a formal process for developing local improvement plans. This is an area that the State is trying to improve through development of the practice model. Currently, if the ARD identifies an issue around training or performance, they will notify the county and appropriate staff at the State level. If the ARD has seen low performance for several reviews in a row, they will report to the Division of Child Welfare, who has the authority to work with counties using progressive levels of engagement. As part of the practice model development process, the State is looking to see if there are certain thresholds or standards that should be instituted in order to initiate corrective action or program improvement plans.

The ARD provides data and assists the State with writing the Quality Assurance section of the CFSP and APSR. The ARD also writes white papers, typically on policies. For example, when the ARD rolled out a

new instrument, they included questions about the use of Colorado’s risk assessment tool. The ARD quickly discovered inconsistent use of the tool, primarily due to a misunderstanding around key terms. These findings prompted the Division of Child Welfare to work on improving those definitions and to begin “over the shoulder coaching,” i.e. walking through the tool with intake workers and doing hands on training. The ARD has turned the related question off on the instrument and will turn it back on following completion of the training to test for effectiveness.

Systemic Issues

The ARD does use data to address quality of training, availability and quality of services, and licensing/recruitment/retention issues. Findings related to these areas are discussed during the post-review meeting with counties. The reporting process is informal and intended to assist counties in using the data to compare their performance against practice standards and determine reasons for variance in performance across time. In addition, comparison across county reports helps identify larger, statewide issues. For example, if a licensing issue is identified across several reviews, the ARD will report this back to the State as something they should pay attention to.

The ARD gives certificates to workers during the review period who have demonstrated strong case practice. An annual award is provided to a select number of caseworkers for Outstanding Case Practice.

Practice Matters is a quarterly publication of the Administrative Review Division. Using data collected from the various ARD review processes, it is designed to highlight key systemic issues within Colorado's child welfare system. The ARD hopes these publications will inform future policy and practice initiatives, ultimately improving the safety, permanency, and well-being of Colorado's children. To view any of the newsletters, please follow this [link](#).

Identifying and Correcting Data Quality Issues

Crystal Reports has been used to build data quality tools, which test for completeness of the instrument. For example, the tool will pick up if a reviewer has labeled an item as “not applicable” but then has answered the question. Flagged items are sent to the reviewer and after he/she has fixed the problem areas, a second test is run to ensure that all areas have been fixed. The test also checks to see that each question has one answer. Tests are run for all in-home, out-of-home, and assessment reviews.

Linking Data Sources

The State is working to tie outcome data with practice and process data. AFCARS and NCANDS data is linked through the SACWIS system to the qualitative data coming from the three case reviews (in-home, out-of-home, assessment). The ultimate goal is to be able to establish linkages between the data which will better inform the State of which practices do or do not drive outcomes.

Collaborative Data Analysis Efforts

Specific to the reports produced by the ARD, collaborative data analysis is not employed. However, as a larger system, there are initiatives that include ARD and others. For example, the ARD has been working

with Colorado State University's Social Work Research Center and the Division of Child Welfare to complete outcomes studies using ARD's data. The ARD hopes that these efforts will lead to the group being able to gather even more useful information from their case reviews.

The Colorado Department of Human Services has recently initiated a departmental level quality assurance and accountability mechanism known as C-Stat. Specific to the field of child welfare, this process combines data from the ARD, the Division of Child Welfare, and the Division of Youth Corrections to track statewide performance on improving outcomes for children and youth.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Internal/External Stakeholders

The ARD Steering Committee is a multi-disciplinary team charged with the oversight of the processes and functions of the ARD. The Steering Committee exists primarily to advise, inform, educate and approve proposed changes to the ARD processes and procedures. Before any changes are made to the ARD's processes or procedures, proposals for change are presented to the Steering Committee. This ensures that our numerous stakeholders, through their representatives on the ARD Steering Committee, have the opportunity to discuss proposed changes and provide input from the perspectives of their unique positions.

Current membership of the Steering Committee consists of representatives from the following groups and agencies: County Directors, county employees from a wide variety of levels, community members, providers, Child Welfare staff, a City Attorney, the State Court Administrators Office, foster parents, the Foster Parent Association, the Colorado Adoption and Foster Care Association, Denver University's Butler Institute for Families and Children, Trails staff, the Office of the Child's Representative, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division, the Mental Health Division and the ARD

The ARD works with internal stakeholders in the Division of Child Welfare on a regular basis. Work with external stakeholders is typically based around specific projects. For example, the ARD, the State, and/or the counties will periodically conduct provider surveys to inform changes in policy and practice.

Collaboration

Aside from the collaborative relationships previously discussed, the ARD does works with the mental health system, though not through an ongoing reporting system. All data, by judicial district, is provided to the courts.

Privatized Systems

Colorado has one county who contracts its out-of-home services to a private provider. These providers are invited to all exit conferences post ARD review.

FUTURE PLANS

The ARD is working to create a larger program model to articulate how CQI and QA are used to improve services in the State. They will use measurement strategies to test effectiveness in each of the CQI/QA areas of work. Essentially, the ARD will be applying CQI principles inwardly to their own practice. The ultimate goal is to create a framework that gives the State structure, but also allows for flexibility at the local level.

SUMMARY DOCUMENTS

[Administrative Review Division \(ARD\) Organizational Chart](#)

[ARD Out of Home Instructions](#)

[ARD Out of Home Instrument](#)

[ARD In Home Instructions](#)

[ARD In Home Instrument](#)

[ARD Assessment Instructions](#)

[ARD Assessment Instrument](#)

[ARD's Website](#)

[ARD's Practice Matters Newsletters](#)