

Continuous Quality Improvement Project

Florida

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CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) STRUCTURE

Department Structure

Florida has a State-administered child welfare system and contracts out all services (except investigations) to 19 community-based lead agencies around the State. The State conducts child protective investigations with the exception of a few counties in which sheriff offices are in charge of investigations. The State's QA staff is made up of staff at both the State and regional levels. At the State level, there is a Chief who oversees the work of three staff members: one manages the web tool for the QSR, QA Review, and case file reviews; one assists with pulling data from the State's SACWIS system and serves as the statewide child fatality coordinator; and one serves as a Quality Assurance Analyst. At the regional level, there are Quality Assurance Managers and staff (approximately twenty) located in each of the State's six regions, employed by the State. And finally, required by contract, there are QA Units at each of the 19 community-based lead agencies. The State QA staff serves more as a policy oversight unit. They are responsible for designing and building the CQI system; however, it's up to the local agencies to implement it. Prior to budget cuts in 2011, the State employed 40% more QA staff.

The state level Office of Quality Assurance has monthly conference calls and quarterly meetings with QA Managers from the regional offices and lead agencies. Though the Chief is closely involved with the work of these managers, they do not report directly to her. Rather, regional QA Managers report to the State through their Regional Directors and lead agency QA Managers report through their lead agency Chief Executive Officers.

The State's current CQI structure has been in place since 2007. A budget is available to cover salaries and travel related to CQI reviews and meetings. Money is also budgeted through contracts to lead agencies for their CQI activities.

Staff Qualifications and Responsibilities

QA Managers and staff must have experience in the child welfare field. A background in the field allows staff to apply professional judgment to data findings. As a result of the 2011 budget cuts, QA staff now have additional responsibilities, outside of their CQI-related responsibilities.

Training

QA reviewers are required by contract to be trained and certified within six months of beginning work in a QA position. Training is provided to QA managers during the quarterly regional meetings.

Committees

All lead agencies are required by contract to implement ongoing CQI activities. The state does not direct the format or process for these activities. At the present time, Florida does not have a statewide CQI committee.

CQI PLAN

Expectations, Missions, and Objectives

Florida has specific expectations, missions, and objectives for their CQI system that is published annually in the “Windows into Practice: *Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement in Child Welfare Service Delivery*”. Lead agencies must submit an annual quality improvement plan to the State. There are no strict guidelines on what must be included in the plan; plans vary across agencies, each is individualized to the particular agency’s needs.

Overall, the State describes its CQI system as assessing child welfare practice and performance, which is rated based on the reviewers professional judgment of the quality of practice. The process and system is not compliance based.

CQI Policies

QA staff follow the written [QSR Protocol](#), [Quality of Practice Standards for Case Management](#), and [Quality of Practice Standards for Child Protective Investigations](#) when completing the QSR, case reviews, and CPI Case Reviews. The state uses the Windows into Practice document as the written policy for conducting these reviews. In addition, the State has an operating procedure for child death reviews.

ELEMENTS OF THE CQI SYSTEM

Qualitative Reviews

Florida’s CQI system has three main components: the Quality Service Review (QSR), Quality of Practice Standards Review, and the Child Protective Investigations (CPI) Quality of Practice Standards Review.

- **Qualitative Service Review**

The State’s [QSR Protocol](#), developed in conjunction with Human Systems and Outcomes, Inc., describes the QSR process:

The Quality Service Review (QSR) is a powerful self-evaluation tool, helping child welfare and social services agencies assess the effectiveness of their practices and the interventions provided to the families they serve. It helps agencies learn how families are doing and which service functions are working. Because the QSRs are directly tied to the core components of individualized practice -

engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, and results - each QSR measures the degree to which true individualized and participatory practice is occurring with each individual family being reviewed.

During the QSR, a trained review team reads case documentation and interviews all parties involved in the case, most importantly the family, to qualitatively assess two broad categories - family status and system performance/case work practice. Within these two categories there are specific areas of interest including child safety, stability and parent/caregiver functioning, engagement, and teaming.

These intensive reviews usually occur in a short time frame to get a "snapshot" of how the family and practice supporting them are doing. Once the review is completed, a debriefing is held with the supervisor and workers to give feedback and recommendations about the case. In addition, themes, strengths, and areas of improvement are shared with the partnership's governing body and/or self-evaluation work group. Finally, the review team writes a "family story" to document what is going well with the family and service delivery and practical steps for improving what is not going well. These stories can be aggregated for content analysis and be an excellent strategy for putting standing data reports in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) into context.

QSRs are performed quarterly by each lead agency. Two cases per CBC are reviewed each quarter. The Regional QA Manager reviews all QSR findings before the information can be input in the web portal.

- **Quality of Practice Standard Reviews**

Each Quarter, the CBC lead agency QA manager assigns 15-25 cases for review to trained/certified QA specialists employed by the CBC. The reviewer uses the Quality of Practice Standards for Case Management to assess practice. To accomplish this, the Office of Child Welfare data unit provides an extract for each lead agency that lists all children who are eligible to be reviewed by permanency goal. The extract is pulled the first week of the month that precedes the beginning of a new quarter. The extract consist of all children who were service recipients during a defined selection period. All children are assigned to a CBC's sampling population based on the CBC assignment of the primary worker as of the sample date or the service recipient end date, whichever is earlier. Each quarter, the CBC QA manager identifies cases from the extract and assign their required number of QPS reviews and an additional two (2) cases for a Quality Services Review (QSR).

The sample for QPS and QSR reviews includes an equal share of in-home service cases (non-judicial and judicial) and Out-of-Home service cases. After the initial stratification, the CBCs may choose to stratify their samples further if they need to focus their reviews in specific areas of local practice. Decisions to discard a randomly selected case from the sample list must be approved by the CBC QA manager, who must also document the basis for the decision as it relates to the discard criteria.

CBCs may choose to draw additional cases for their own review purposes in any random, stratified or purposive manner. For example, if they want to do expanded reviews by subcontractor or other factors, they may select more cases from the extract.

CBC QA managers must track the cases reviewed from quarter to quarter, discarding duplicate cases from subsequent samples, and conduct various data analyses. The CBC QA managers will ensure the list of cases selected for the QSR is unduplicated and make another random selection if the same case is identified for both review processes.

In addition to the QPS and QSR reviews, the CBCs will also select 10 more cases in order to assess practice in an identified category using only the QPSs related to that category. For these cases, only the applicable QA standards will be applied.

- Quarter 1 – Psychotropic medications (Standards 36.5, 37.5, 46.6, 67, 72.2)
- Quarter 2 – Independent Living (Standards 44, 45, 46, 47, 58,59)
- Quarter 3 – Adoptions (Standards 42, 43)
- Quarter 4 – Assessments (Standards 5, 6, 7, 9)
- Quarter 4 - Education (Standards 45, 58, 59, 60)

Prior to the review of a selected case, the reviewer researches the Florida SACWIS to learn about the prior child welfare history in order to effectively assess current work. Once the CBC QA specialist completes a case file review and inputs the responses into the QA web-based tool, the specialist “staffs” or “debriefs” the review findings with the CBC QA manager who must concurrently assess the data for consistency and accuracy, providing quality control and inter-rater reliability.

- **Child Protective Investigations (CPI) Case Review**

The State’s [CPI Guidelines for QA Review](#) describes the CPI process:

Regional Quality Assurance staff will conduct a qualitative review of one recently closed case per CPI Unit in every circuit within the region, each quarter. In addition, each region will randomly select one case per region in which the investigation case is currently open. The closed investigation cases for review must be randomly selected from the "Child Investigations Closed within the Last 30 Days" report. These reviews will include a combination of Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) research and paper file reviews.

As reviews are scheduled, regional QA staff will need to be linked to a local CPI Unit (or administrative unit) in order to be given authorization to access criminal background checks from the Hotline. Regional QA Managers will work with local operations staff and security officers to ensure this is completed.

As the reviews are being completed, reviewers will rate the [Quality of Practice Standards for Child Protective Investigations](#) and input findings into the web-based portal. Reviewers should provide comments as necessary so external parties understand the rationale behind the ratings. After the review has been completed, reviewers will enter a Case Note in FSFN documenting the investigations case was reviewed and briefly summarize the findings.

In addition to review of recently closed cases, the regions will select one open investigation case for review each quarter. The open investigation case must be randomly selected from the FSFN Daily Report

and be at least 20 days into the investigation, but no more than 30 days. The region may choose to select an open case within a specific circuit, or unit within the circuit, if deemed more effective in identifying local practice.

Reviewing an open investigation case requires an onsite visit, whether the review is conducted in the actual unit locale or elsewhere within the circuit. Reviewers will input a FSFN Case Note documenting the review occurred. If concerns were identified during the review of an open investigations case, those concerns should also be entered into a FSFN Case Note. In this case, QA Reviewers should inform the CPI and the CPI Supervisor that QA staff will follow the case to ensure all concerns have been addressed before closure. This process is intended to coach or mentor investigative staff, not to usurp the supervisor's role or responsibility.

After each investigations case review is completed, the reviewer must schedule a debriefing session to discuss review findings. The debriefing must always include the CPI and the CPI Supervisor. Others can be invited at the Regions' discretion. Debriefings should be conducted as soon as possible upon completing the review, preferably within 48 hours of completion. If there are any concerns or disputes over the findings, the QA reviewer and the supervisor are expected to resolve any differences within this debriefing setting.

Once the reviews are completed for each circuit, region QA staff will summarize the findings (circuit-wide) into four practice areas: Conducting Thorough Assessments; Observing and Interviewing Children, Parents, Others; Determining Maltreatments, Family Needs and Services; and, Planning for Safe Investigation Case Closure. In addition to the narrative analysis, the data findings should be provided in excel format provided by the Office of Child Welfare, as an attachment to the summaries.

- **Other Qualitative Reviews**

For those counties with sheriff offices in charge of investigations, a peer review process is used to satisfy the QA requirement. These offices are allowed to maintain their own CPI reviews by statute.

- **Reviewer Staff**

The private sector Community Based Care lead agencies are required by contract to have a QA division with dedicated QA staff. There are over ninety dedicated QA reviewers statewide. By reviewing cases from another agency, peer learning is able to take place among caseworkers. All QA reviewers must complete the State's quality assurance training within six months of being hired. New reviewers shadow veteran reviewers prior to the training.

Quantitative Data

All federal composites are run regularly from the State's SACWIS system. Additionally, weekly medical, dental, and education reports are run for all children in out-of-home care. These reports are backed up with list reports for individual agencies so that they can see which kids are on track and which are not. Reports are also run to track kids taking psychotropic medications.

USE OF DATA

Reports

CPI and case management services Case Review reports are made available on the State's website and can be accessed through the Quality Assurance tab on their [website](#). The following reports are also regularly updated on the State website:

- CPI Discretionary Review Reports
- CBC Case Management Reports
- CBC Discretionary Review Reports
- Sheriff's Peer Review Reports
- Child Fatality Reports
- Statewide Reports

The State recently decided to no longer make public the QSR narratives due to QA Managers' concerns that this may negatively impact workers. These narratives remain public record, but are only actively distributed to local workers, supervisors, and leadership at the post QSR meeting.

Data Software

All data is stored on the State's web portal. The system was built by an IT vendor and is now managed by the Department's IT team. Reports are run through the portal and can be downloaded to an Excel document for manipulation. Lead agencies are given access to data associated with their subcontracted agencies.

Plan Development and Training

Community Based Care agencies are required to develop annual improvement plans based on feedback from the QSR and other external evaluations. These plans are vetted through community alliances, i.e., local social service leaders in the community.

Regions are also required to create annual improvement plans.

The State reported that CQI data and results are used to inform CFSRs, APSRs, training, and policy development in Florida.

Systemic Issues

Data is examined to identify training needs in child welfare across the State. Licensing, recruitment, and retention issues are not examined by the QA staff.

Identifying and Correcting Data Quality Issues

There is a staff person in charge of checking the web portal for missing/incorrect data. Additionally, the State tries to minimize data quality issues by having supervisors review the case file review tool before the data is input in the web portal.

Linking Data Sources

After the sample has been identified for the QSR and CPI Reviews, data on the safety, permanency, and well-being indicators is pulled from SACWIS to make a face sheet. This information complements what reviewers are seeing in the case file or QSR review. Florida's long-term goal is to imbed the QA web tool into the State's SACWIS system.

Collaborative Data Analysis Efforts

Florida does not have any formal agreements for collaborative data analysis. The University of Southern Florida uses data from the QA system to complete IV-E evaluations.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Internal/External Stakeholders & Privatized Systems

As a result of Florida being a privatized system, there is a lot of stakeholder involvement in the CQI process. The State Secretary has an advisory board of community stakeholders from across the State and the Governor has a Children's Cabinet chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families. At the local level, there are also a number of community coalitions and alliances.

Collaboration

In addition to working with all contracted agencies, the State works closely with the Office of State Court Improvement; in particular, they've been helping to roll out the State's new ABA safety framework. Stakeholders in domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse, and law enforcement are also teaming up to help with implementation of this framework. Last year, the Department did a joint review with the Department of Juvenile Justice to look at casework practice for children committed to delinquency residential programs.

FUTURE PLANS

The State is moving their system to a more bifurcated system, which looks at both case file reviews and QSRs. Because QSRs are so labor intensive, they leave little time to complete case file reviews. The State will be able to gather more data if they can increase the number of case file reviews being completed annually.

SUMMARY DOCUMENTS

[QSR Protocol](#)

[Quality of Practice Standards for Case Management](#)

[Quality of Practice Standards for Child Protective Investigations](#)

[CPI Guidelines for QA Review](#)