

Continuous Quality Improvement Project

Minnesota

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CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) STRUCTURE

Department Structure

The Quality Assurance Unit is housed within the Training and Quality Assurance Unit of the Child and Family Services Division. The QA Unit has four full-time QA consultants, one full-time policy specialist, one part-time administrative assistant, and a part-time managerial position. The reporting structure is as follows:

QA Unit → Training and Quality Assurance Manager → Division Director for Child and Family Services

The majority of QA Unit staff is located in Minnesota's central office. Two QA consultants work from home offices. The Unit's annual budget of approximately \$650,000 covers salaries, benefits, travel, and direct costs. The QA Unit was created in 2001; its current practices have been in place since 2003.

Staff Qualifications and Responsibilities

All CQI Unit staff must have a bachelor's degree and significant experience in child welfare as a social worker. It is preferred that staff have a Master's degree and supervisory experience within the county system. One QA staff serves as the CFSR and PIP lead (the policy specialist position) and all are responsible for multiple QA activities, including conducting all reviews. Though Unit staff are primarily responsible for QA-related activities, it is common for staff to be involved with other projects within the Division, e.g., permanency round tables, PIP strategies, communications, T/TA for supervisors.

Training

There is no formal training program for QA Unit staff. There is self-directed learning, sharing of research and resources and a culture of learning exists to constantly ensure staff are well informed. Some Unit staff participate in the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement's QI Peer Network.

Committees

There are no formal committees for QA-related activities.

CQI PLAN

Expectations, Missions, and Objectives

The QA Unit operates under the Child and Family Services Division's mission and values, which are couched in Minnesota's child welfare practice model. The Unit parallels its work with that which is being

practiced in the field. The Unit does not have a QA manual however they have developed numerous tools to assist with program design (Process Matrix) and with ratings consistency (Site Leader Interpretation guide). The system is described as more improvement than compliance based.

CQI Policies

Minnesota does not have any specific QA policies.

ELEMENTS OF THE CQI SYSTEM

Qualitative Reviews

Minnesota conducts a Child and Family Service Review for county and tribal agencies. Minnesota's 2011 Annual Progress and Services Report describes the State CFSR process:

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review (MnCFSR) identifies strengths and areas needing improvement in child welfare practice and systems, with an emphasis on partnering with counties and tribes to use the results of the review to plan for program improvements. The review examines delivery of child welfare services from two distinct, but complementary, perspectives:

- Systemic factors define the agency's capacity to provide services that support improved outcomes for children and families
- Outcomes of services look at the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families engaged in the county child welfare system.

The MnCFSR is intended to improve outcomes by promoting family-centered, community based and solution-focused interventions to strengthen parental capacity. It is a challenge to evaluate the impact of the child welfare system on children and families engaged in this system. It is further challenging to accomplish meaningful practice and systemic changes that will result in improved outcomes for children and families. The department's goal is to build on the work completed in the first round of MnCFSRs and use as a baseline to measure ongoing quality improvements in the child welfare system.

[MnCFSR Administrator Meeting Packet](#)

[MnCFSR Caseworker Meeting Packet](#)

[MnCFSR Onsite Instrument & Instructions](#)

Pre-review: During the first round of MnCFSRs, the self-assessment process allowed counties to identify systemic strengths and areas needing improvement, and provided a method to examine data related to safety, permanency and well-being performance. Issues raised in the self-assessment were further evaluated through the onsite case reviews or community stakeholder interviews. In addition, information from the county self-assessment was shared with other program areas at the department to inform plans for statewide training, technical assistance, practice guidance and policy development. During the second round of MnCFSRs, counties and tribes review their initial self-assessment and, using that as a baseline, update their evaluation of core child welfare practices and systems. Counties and tribes are also asked to provide comment on strategies that contributed to improved practice and/or barriers encountered.

[Self Assessment Template \(Round 3\)](#)

Onsite Review Stage: Between 2003 and 2006, all MnCFSR onsite reviews were conducted using a team of peer reviewers to examine cases and assess the quality of services for children and families. In response to county agencies, a second review model was developed in the later part of 2006. In this model, department Quality Assurance staff review cases. Both models involve an intensive examination of a select number of cases representative of child welfare practice during a defined review period. During the second round, counties and tribes can choose from two models for their review. The review process remains an inspection of the case record, as well as three interviews with those involved with the cases, such as parents, caseworkers, and when appropriate, children. The number of cases remains the same, but a higher percentage (66 percent) will be placement cases. In addition, the case sample will be stratified to reflect agency work with older youth.

Smaller numbers of individual and focus group interviews are conducted with community stakeholders who have the knowledge and experience to describe and assess the county/tribe's child welfare system. Starting in 2009, written stakeholder surveys are sent out to all county/tribal licensed foster parents in preparation for the county/tribal review. Community stakeholder input provides the review with a broader perspective in the evaluation of systemic factors, and an agency's capacity for achieving safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. At the end of the onsite review week, Quality Assurance staff conduct an exit conference. The exit conference focuses on outcomes and themes learned through the review, less focused on details associated with the 23 performance items.

Post Review Stage: The onsite case review results in findings, or ratings, on the seven outcomes and 23 performance items as they apply to each case. Findings from all cases reviewed are combined with data on national standard indicators to obtain overall findings.

Reviews in the two most populated urban counties generally occur each year (Hennepin and Ramsey counties), the plan is to review 18-20 counties each year, with the review frequency based on the counties' overall child population.

The scope of the MnCFSR mimics the federal CFSR (safety, permanency and well-being). Upon completion of the current federal PIP, the State would like to broaden its design to potentially conduct targeted case reviews as well.

The [Administrator Meeting Packet](#) describes the case selection and sampling process:

The period under review begins 12 months prior to the selection of cases, and generally includes the 14 months prior to the commencement of the on-site review. Case selection is conducted one to two months prior to the on-site review. For example, if the onsite review is scheduled to begin on May 15th, the case selection will occur anywhere from March 15th to April 15th to allow the county ample time to prepare the case files for review and complete the case review schedules. When the case selection list is generated it includes a 12 month retroactive time period. The entire period under review includes this 12 month period in addition to the time between the case selection and the onsite review. At times, when the case selection list results in a very small sample the period under review may be expanded.

The case sample size is determined by the child population in the county and ranges from 9 to 21 cases. The case sample includes both cases where children are in out-of-home care, and cases where children remain in the home and are receiving child protection services. Two-thirds of the cases reviewed will be placement cases, and one-third will be in-home cases.

For out-of-home care cases (placement cases) the child must have been in placement for a minimum of 60 consecutive days during the period under review. In cases where more than one child in a family is placed in out-of-home care, the reviewers will identify just one child as the subject of the review.

Similarly, in cases where child protection services are being provided and the child(ren) remains in the home (in-home cases), the case will be selected only if 60 days of post assessment services were provided during the period under review. All children in the family are subjects of the review in an in-home case.

Case selection reports are generated by SSIS (Minnesota's SACWIS system) at the request of DHS Quality Assurance staff. The SSIS report of in-home cases includes all child protection cases that meet the above criteria. The SSIS report of placement cases includes placement cases/workgroups that meet the criteria described above from the following program areas: child protection, adoption/guardianship, children's mental health and child welfare (in some situations).

The case selection is accomplished by a random selection from each of the two reports. The case selection also represents a distribution of cases across all primary case workers, to the extent possible. In addition, DHS and counties can stratify the sample to ensure that the sample adequately reflects county and case demographics and/or characteristics, e.g. Indian Child Welfare cases or cases involving domestic violence.

A larger case sample than the number that is necessary for the review is selected from the SSIS reports. This enables the agency to have a primary case selection list, as well as a back-up case selection list to be used in certain circumstances.

Each of the placement and in-home case sample lists will be reviewed by the DHS site leader and the agency to determine that they reflect an accurate representation of in-home and placement cases. Cases may be eliminated from the case sample for the following reasons:

- If enough of the individuals to be interviewed in the case are either unavailable or completely unwilling to be interviewed that sufficient information cannot be obtained to complete the review instrument, or
- If the case was selected in error and did not meet the selection criteria.

In the event that a case is eliminated from the case sample the agency supervisor and DHS site leader will consult to determine an appropriate substitution case from the back-up list. The substituted case will represent the same efforts of distributing cases between in-home and placement cases, and distributed across primary case workers.

The [Administrator Meeting Packet](#) describes the selection and qualifications of reviewers:

The number of peer reviewers needed for a Minnesota Child and Family Service Review (MnCFSR) depends upon the number of cases being reviewed in a particular county/tribe. Peer reviewers will be paired in teams of two and each team will review one case on each of the 3 case review days during the on-site portion of the MnCFSR.

Recruitment of competent and committed peer reviewers is vital to the overall success of the MnCFSR process. The input of agency administration is essential in the selection and recruitment of the peer review team. Agency administrators should first determine how many agency staff will participate as peer reviewers. Second, administrators should consider if there are any community/tribal persons, involved in some capacity with the county child welfare system, who may be interested in participating in the MnCFSR. The next step is for the county to provide the names and email addresses of county staff and community persons willing to serve as peer reviewers to the DHS site leader. The site leader will recruit child welfare professionals from other county/tribal agencies and DHS to complete the peer review team.

The DHS site leader will contact each of the peer reviewers to discuss expectations for their participation in the review and provide information regarding dates and locations of review activities.

In addition to the number of peer reviewers needed, the agency is asked to designate one staff person as a back-up/substitute reviewer in the event that a confirmed peer reviewer is unable to participate.

Inter-rater reliability is addressed during the MnCFSRs. The QA staff act as consultants to the peer reviewers and are available as needed during the review week. When the QA staff are conducting the reviews themselves, they discuss data during and after the review process. While onsite, consultants meet daily to discuss review consistency and again at the end of the review week. The QA Unit meets monthly to debrief and share review findings with each other. This helps to keep all QA staff informed about what is happening throughout the State.

Additional Qualitative Reviews

Because Minnesota is state-supervised, county-administered, there are some counties that conduct their own internal case reviews. These internal processes, in general, originated as a part of Program Improvement Plan (PIP) work following a MnCFSR as a way for counties to monitor progress on PIP goals established following a MnCFSR. A number of counties have continued these processes after successful completion of their PIP. State QA staff provide technical assistance to local county agency review teams as requested.

Quantitative Data

Minnesota's SACWIS system uses a program called Analysis and Charting which allows counties to run real-time reports on their performance on federal data indicators (national standards). The State also uses a Child Welfare Dashboard which offers data pulled from the SACWIS system on a quarterly basis. This data is not in real-time, however it is utilized when the available SACWIS reports do not clearly measure what the QA Unit is looking for.

USE OF DATA

Reports

Minnesota's 2011 Annual Progress and Services Report describes the State CFSR report:

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review report includes a detailed examination of each of the seven outcomes and 23 performance items evaluated in the onsite case review, identifying both

strengths and areas needing improvement. Tables summarize performance on each of the seven outcomes, including performance on national standard indicators, if applicable.

All reports are made available to the public on the Division's website:

[Child and Family Services Review](#)

[Child Welfare Data Dashboard](#)

[County Self Assessments, MnCFSR Reports, and PIPs](#)

The state DHS Research and Planning Unit compiles data from several different sources into an annual child welfare report. Data from this, and other available reports is pulled for county/tribal self-assessments.

The QA Unit compiles data to share during quarterly supervisor forums, attended by county and tribal agency child welfare supervisors. Data specific to the State's performance on the forum's topic is generally shared at the beginning of each forum.

Data Software

The QA Unit uses Microsoft Word, Excel, Powerpoint and an Access database for all QA-related activities.

Plan Development, Training & Systemic Issues

Minnesota's 2011 Annual Progress and Services Report describes the State CFSR Program Improvement Plan:

The value and success of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Review is ultimately measured by improvements in child welfare practice and improved outcomes for children and families. Plans for accomplishing these improvements will focus more on outcomes and themes, and less emphasis on individual performance items. The department Quality Assurance staff and Child Welfare Training System provide technical assistance to the counties and tribes preparing and implementing a Program Improvement Plan. Counties and tribes prepare quarterly updates to the department to support program improvement strategies and measure goal completion.

[MnCFSR PIP Instructions](#)

As noted previously, information from the county/tribal self-assessment is shared with other program areas at the department to inform plans for statewide training, technical assistance, practice guidance and policy development. The Unit will contact the State's child welfare training system if a particular training need has been identified and T/TA is necessary.

The Unit does not collect specific data to address systemic issues, however questions re: these issues are included in the MnCFSR self-assessment.

Identifying and Correcting Data Quality Issues

Reviewers note data quality issues during the MnCFSR. These issues are either addressed through individual technical assistance from the QA Unit or brought to the State for further consideration. The

state DHS has a Reports/Data Team that is tasked with reviewing and ensuring quality and consistency in data and reports being issued to counties. There is QA Unit representation on this team.

Linking Data Sources

The MnCFSR reports pull together data from both quantitative (SACWIS) and qualitative (case findings, stakeholder interviews) sources.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Internal/External Stakeholders & Collaboration

Stakeholders are primarily involved in QA activities through the MnCFSR's interview process. Stakeholder interviews are conducted with local agency administration and caseworkers, court partners, older youth and tribes. The county is able to make requests of the QA Unit to meet with other groups (e.g. multi-disciplinary teams, child protection teams, the Citizen Review Panel). Additionally, input is sought from licensed foster parents through a written survey. Performance on national child welfare standards are shared with court improvement teams across the State. In the two largest counties, the State court coordinator participates in all MnCFSRs and leads the court stakeholder focus group. The court coordinator will also bring data from the State court system to share with the group.

Privatized Systems

The QA Unit does not have a formal system for interacting with private agencies. Private agencies may be interviewed as part of the MnCFSR process.

FUTURE PLANS

The QA Unit is considering developing a cadre of reviewers around the state who may be called upon to participate in MnCFSRs. Having such a consultant group would assist the Unit to increase capacity while maintaining the quality, integrity and fidelity of their reviews. The Unit is also working to revise the post-MnCFSR process, after finding that the lag between finishing the review and issuing the report was impacting the capacity of the QA staff/counties to capture the energy and strategies that were naturally flowing following the onsite review week. In January 2012, the QA Unit will pilot issuing the report and beginning discussions on the county's PIP immediately following the exit conference. The following 30 days will be spent developing the PIP and sharing a draft copy with the QA Lead. The Unit hopes to have all PIPs approved and returned to the county within 60 days of the on-site review to begin implementation. Lastly, the Unit will call upon counties who participate in the new design to request their input on the redesigned process. Additionally, the QA team could like to seek input from counties that have partnered with the state for several MnCFSR's to seek feedback as we continually reassess quality assurance processes. The Unit would like to incorporate broader thinking around improvement and/or changes in the process.

SUMMARY DOCUMENTS

[MnCFSR Administrator Meeting Packet](#)
[MnCFSR Caseworker Meeting Packet](#)
[MnCFSR Onsite Instrument & Instructions](#)
[MnCFSR PIP Instructions](#)

[Self Assessment Template \(Round 3\)](#)

[Minnesota's Child and Family Services Review Website](#)

[Child Welfare Data Dashboard](#)

[County Self Assessments, MnCFSR Reports, and PIPs](#)