

# MANAGING CARE

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## for Children and Families

A Newsletter of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement

### From the Director...

One of the most exciting developments in child welfare today is the increasing focus on the outcomes that agencies are achieving for children and families. Recent federal laws, regulations and policies have moved outcomes to the forefront, and state and county agencies have joined in the effort to focus on performance rather than process.

This issue of *Managing Care* explores how outcomes data are being used in managing the services that agencies deliver. Our lead article highlights trends in using

data in decision-making. It is followed by profiles of two states—Oklahoma and Alabama—that are making innovative use of their outcomes data.

Our resources listing includes descriptions of grant projects that are developing training curriculum to enhance the abilities of child welfare managers and supervisors to use child welfare data. We also profile the new National Resource Center for Information Technology in Child Welfare. We are working closely with this new Resource Center to

assist states in making the organizational and technological changes needed to make effective use of child welfare data.

As always, we welcome your comments or suggestions on this newsletter. Please e-mail your comments to us at [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu) or call us at 1-800-HELP-KID.

We hope this issue contains information that is useful to you!

—Kris Sahonchik

### Using Data for Decision Making In This Issue:

Using Outcomes Data in Decision Making . . . . .	2
Practice Forum: Improving Performance with Outcomes Data . . . . .	4
Update: Section 426 Training Grants . . . . .	6
Information Technology Assistance . . . . .	7
Resources and More . . . . .	8

## New Strategies:

### Using Outcomes Data in Decision Making

On both the federal and state levels, an increased emphasis on accountability has generated interest in development of outcomes measures to assess the effectiveness of child welfare services. Data generated as agencies track these measures provide a wealth of information that managers at all levels can use to make better, more informed decisions on both policy and practice.

To fulfill the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is compiling and publishing data on the extent to which state child welfare agencies achieve specified outcomes for children and families. To do so, the federal agency has developed a set of outcomes measures to assess states' performance. The outcome measures will serve as the basis for the agency's annual reports to Congress.

In addition, the agency's new child and family service reviews will assess the extent to which states achieve desired outcomes for children and families. ACF plans

to establish national standards for several performance indicators for these outcomes and will provide states with data profiles of their performance on them. States not in substantial conformity will be required to develop program improvement plans and demonstrate progress in meeting the national standards.

#### Strategic planning

In this new environment, it is critical for state and county child welfare agencies to regularly

examine data on their own performance and to use this data to guide their strategic decisions. Many states are already starting to do so—as demonstrated by the fact that, increasingly, state strategic plans and progress reports reflect the federal outcomes and indicators.

Many of these plans focus on the core indicators of safety, permanency and well-being that are common to the federal annual report and child and family service reviews. These indicators include repeat maltreatment, length of stay in foster care, and stability of foster care placements. By tracking these indicators, states are gathering and responding to data on their achievement of these three outcomes.

#### Increasingly, state strategic plans reflect the federal outcomes and indicators.

welfare information systems, they have developed the ability to build case level records that allow them to track the experiences of children over time.

Sophisticated reporting systems generate series of outcomes reports for all levels of management—from the Commissioner to county directors to individual supervisors. Systems are increasingly providing desktop access to data in user friendly formats and including additional information that makes data more useful to managers. For

example, providing population profiles of counties enables managers to sort data by counties of similar size and to make meaningful comparisons.

#### Many managers find it critical to organize data so comparisons can be made across units.

Systems that publish regular reports on outcomes create incentives to clean up data and improve data entry. If outcomes look lower in one county than might be expected, that

county may find that data are not being entered accurately. When managers pay attention to the numbers, local staff have an incentive to correct errors and omissions.

#### Comparative data

To use data as a basis for decision making, many managers find it critical to organize data so that comparisons can be made across regions, counties, and individual units. Comparing results allows managers to ask questions about variations in performance and to identify opportunities to improve performance.

For example, if one county stands out as moving children into finalized adoption more quickly than others, managers can look for county policies or practices that can be replicated elsewhere. Conversely, managers can identify units reporting poor results and focus their efforts on assisting them to improve performance.

This kind of comparative data helps managers improve services to families and comply with federal law and state expectations. It also allows managers to highlight agencies or agency units deserving

#### Automation

Improvements in automation have made it easier for states and counties to use outcomes data in decision making. As states have implemented automated child



of recognition and provide rewards for good performance.

### Context

As child welfare managers focus on outcomes, they become increasingly aware of the need to view data in context—no information system, no matter how sophisticated, can tell the whole story of an agency's performance. Accordingly, many managers have realized that their agency's quality assurance system is a useful tool in establishing context for outcomes data.

QA systems examine data from information systems in conjunction with data generated by case reviews, case specific interviews and locally conducted stakeholder interviews. Many states have local quality councils or committees and corresponding statewide organizations that are involved in gathering and analyzing this data.

Quality assurance staff are charged with working to ensure that managers on the local and state level review and respond to the work of these organizations. By looking at a broad range of quantitative and qualitative data, quality assurance systems can assist manag-

ers by shedding light on local factors that influence the numbers.

Data generated from information systems and quality assurance processes give

managers a comprehensive picture of what is going on within their agencies. When reviewed regularly, these reports help managers know how safe children are, how they are progressing towards permanency, and how basic aspects of their well-being are being addressed.

### Accountability

Finally, many agencies find that the process of gathering and reporting outcomes data produces another significant benefit—it promotes accountability. When systems can track every case and analyze what is happening across cases, many more eyes are on performance: Supervisors can easily see what is happening to all workers' cases; county directors can see what is happening in all units; directors can see what is happening in all counties. No longer can cases slip from sight and be forgotten.

Intensive case reviews conducted by some quality assurance systems also promote accountability. As families, providers and other agencies provide input and quality assurance systems transmit their concerns to management, caseworkers and managers become more accountable for their actions.

## Web Sites to Watch

These Web sites were identified by presenters at the "Using Data to Make Critical Management Decisions" conference, June 3 -5, 1999.

Administration on Children, Youth and Families:  
[www.acf.dhhs.gov](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov)

Assessing the New Federalism:  
[newfederalism.urban.org/nfdb/index.htm](http://newfederalism.urban.org/nfdb/index.htm)

Kids Count:  
[www.aecf.org/kidscount](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount)

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (for DCDC data):  
[www.ndacan.cornell.edu](http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu)

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information:  
[www.calib.com/nccanch](http://www.calib.com/nccanch)

National Data Analysis System:  
[ndas.cwla.org](http://ndas.cwla.org)

### Other sites of interest...

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement:  
[www.muskie.usm.edu/helpkids](http://www.muskie.usm.edu/helpkids)

Children's Defense Fund:  
[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

National Indian Child Welfare Association:  
[www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

American Public Human Services Association:  
[www.aphsa.org](http://www.aphsa.org)

## Practice Forum:

### Improving Performance with Outcomes Data

This Practice Forum highlights two states that provide managers with outcomes data through automated information systems and quality assurance systems. We focus on how child welfare managers use data generated by these systems to improve practice and performance.

Examples are drawn from presentations at two teleconference sessions sponsored by the National Child Welfare Resource Center in April 2000. For more information on these teleconferences, see page 5.

#### Oklahoma

Oklahoma's SACWIS system produces extensive data on the performance of child welfare services, and the state's quality assurance system regularly reviews data and promotes its use by managers.

In 1995 Oklahoma became the first state in the nation to implement a SACWIS system. The system, called KIDS, now produces over 100 monthly reports that track basic case data, the utilization of resources, compliance with policy, and achievement of outcomes.

Many of these reports are available at the state, area, county and unit level, and the system allows managers to request reports tailored to their needs. Comprehensive training offered to all managers initially and on an ongoing basis has helped build their capacity to utilize the reporting capability of the KIDS system.

State staff, known as Program Field Representatives, serve a number of counties and are charged with analyzing data and ensuring that managers act on issues emerging from the analysis. These field representatives review data at least monthly to identify program issues and ensure that action plans are developed.

They also conduct quarterly on-site reviews of each county, examining files, records and related documents.

Drawing on this information, the field representatives act as resources for county and area directors, and represent the field in making policy recommendations to State Office program units. One field representative reported that she uses at least 15 of the KIDS reports regularly to "get the pulse of the counties."

Managers in Oklahoma have traditionally focused on tracking performance on the timeliness of initial investigations and the rate of worker visits to children in foster care. Managers and field representatives regularly review performance data on these measures and work to improve performance as needed.

Recently, they were involved in developing an "early warning report" that identified the status of visits during the month, prior to the official monthly report. This system allows managers and workers advance notice, so they can complete required visits before the final report comes out.

Under a recent continuous quality improvement initiative, three measures of permanence are tracked and reported at all levels within the agency. According to Oklahoma staff, the report on "length of time to achieve permanency plan" has been particularly useful in managing care. One supervisor reported that he uses the report regularly to identify deficiencies within his unit. He noted that the report helps him comply with the new federal requirements for filing for termination of parental rights (TPRs) if children are in care 15 out of the last 22 months.

The report is also available in a form that compares counties, and

population data are available so that managers can generate reports comparing their county with ones of similar size. The supervisor reported using these comparisons as a motivator for his staff. The field representative also described highlighting the report at county directors meetings and at monthly meetings of supervisors to motivate managers to improve performance.

Data are also used in Oklahoma to evaluate the performance of employees. The state has established performance management process accountabilities for caseworkers, supervisors and county directors. Critical "accountabilities" for staff at all levels are established for the percent of referrals that can be pending over 60 days, the rate of foster care visitation, and the percent reduction in out of home lengths of stay. Performance on these measures is discussed as part of the regular personnel evaluation procedures.

#### Alabama

Under the quality assurance system in Alabama, a broad range of data is reviewed regularly, and a county and statewide structure brings issues to the attention of management. Data are produced at three levels:

- The state's Center for Informational Systems produces and distributes data to county departments.
- A quality assurance coordinator in each county works with the county to produce additional data.
- A county quality assurance committee, made up of community representatives, conducts regular reviews of a sample of cases as well as stakeholder interviews.

In addition, the county QA committees and QA coordinators work together to compile quarterly reports, which tie all this quantitative and qualitative information together in regular reports to the state.

The data gathered on these three levels focus on 51 indicators of three outcomes—safety, permanency and child well being—and seven systemic factors. These systemic factors are:

- community collaboration,
- service array and resource development,
- individualized service plans,
- quality assurance and supervision,
- staffing and caseloads,
- staff and provider training, and
- information system capacity.

For example, the state produces data quarterly for the counties on safety, counties compile data on educational services for children, and county QA committees, in conjunction with QA coordinators, produce narrative descriptions of the level of community collaboration based on the qualitative data they have gathered.

As a result of their reviews, county QA committees make recommendations on specific cases or systemic issues to county departments. County departments are required to review and respond to these recommendations, and the county QA coordinator works to facilitate this interchange between the committee and the department.

One QA coordinator commented that the outside perspective of the QA committees has produced numerous benefits for the counties. The committees often point out the need to provide services to families, identify unfulfilled needs, and identify and mobilize additional community resources for the children and families served by the department.

A local QA committee chairperson provided some examples of the

types of recommendations the committee might make:

- In some case reviews, the committee might see that a safety plan had been developed for a child, but that the plan is not as specific as it should be, nor is it monitored as well as it needs to be. The committee's recommendations then focus tightening up the safety plans for that child.
- At times the committee's finding has been that appropriate services are being delivered to children, but the agency, while aware of the needs of the children's families, has not offered adequate services to these other family members. The committee has recommended that specific, measurable goals be developed for the family and has identified areas where the department needs to develop additional services.

A representative of each county QA committees sits on the state QA committee, which is an independent body created to monitor statewide agency performance and to serve as a link between the community and the state department. The state QA committee promotes communication among counties, sharing innovative practices and pointing out trends in performance data. It also reviews reports of state QA reviews to stay informed of practice and system performance in individual counties.

State QA staff review quality assurance reports and recommend ways in which managers can make use of the data. They identify "red flags" and recommend actions to bring about improvement. Along with the state QA Committee, they can also identify counties that are doing well and recommend that they act as mentors for other counties.

#### **For more information:**

Oklahoma: Bill Hindman, KIDS Director, Oklahoma Department of

Human Services, Oklahoma City, OK. (405) 767-2527

Alabama: Larry Dean, Program Supervisor, Quality Assurance Unit, Alabama Department of Human Resources, Montgomery, AL. (334) 242-1472

### **Teleconferences on Data for Decision Making**

The National Child Welfare Resource Center's 2000 Child Welfare Teleconference Program included two sessions that highlighted sites that are using outcome data in decision making. Audiotapes of these sessions, along with handout packages, are available from the Resource Center's Clearinghouse at 1-800-HELP KID (1-800-435-7543). Cost is \$10 per set.

*Quality Assurance Systems: Focusing Child Welfare Agencies on Improving Quality*—April 11, 2000. In this session, presenters from Alabama and Illinois described their state's quality assurance systems. Both conduct regular reviews of cases, using peer review (in Illinois) and community-based committees (in Alabama). Both also have local and state organizational structures that regularly analyze a broad range of data

*Outcomes Based Management for Supervisors*—April 25, 2000. In this session, managers and supervisors from Oklahoma and from Hamilton County, Ohio discussed their experience with using outcome data and its impact at the case level. Presenters also described the development of information systems that provides data in user-friendly formats and the changes in organizational culture needed to facilitate supervisors' use of the data.

## Update:

### Section 426 grants—Training on the Use of Child Welfare Data

The Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded grants in FY 1997 and FY 1998 to several universities to develop training curricula to enhance skills in the use of child welfare data. Federal funds for this priority area have been available under Section 426 Child Welfare Training Programs.

The projects require collaborative efforts between the grantees and state child welfare agencies in developing and field-testing training curricula designed to build the capability of managers and supervisors in using child welfare data in making program related decisions. The training curricula developed under these projects, which all end in September 2000, will be made available to states and other interested organizations.

Following are descriptions of selected projects:

*Training for managers to support outcomes-based management*

#### Illinois

The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services have developed training curriculum for mid-level managers in Illinois, with a focus on managers overseeing substitute care services. The training introduces managers to the outcomes reports developed by the project and explores ways to utilize the reports in managing child welfare services.

The project has worked with the Illinois database to develop a comprehensive set of measures relevant to front-line caseworkers and managers. It is also working on approaches to analyzing and reporting the data to increase its usefulness as a case management tool. Contact: Roland Kulla, (773) 324-2549, [rkulla@midway.uchicago.edu](mailto:rkulla@midway.uchicago.edu)

#### Virginia

The School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Virginia Department of Social Services have developed a Web-based curriculum on an outcome-based management approach to child welfare practice for agency directors and managers. The curriculum introduces outcomes-based terminology, the concept of outcome levels (client, program and system/community), and the federal child welfare outcomes and indicators.

It also provides an opportunity for managers to identify appropriate outcomes and indicators for their



programs. The project is developing a second curriculum that will address data sources and reporting for outcomes-based management. Contact: Cari L Crawford, (804) 828-1173, [clcrawfo@saturn.vcu.edu](mailto:clcrawfo@saturn.vcu.edu)

#### Kansas

The University of Kansas School of Social Work is working with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services and with private child welfare agencies contracting with the state to deliver child welfare services. The project has developed a training curriculum for supervisors and mid-level managers on outcomes based management.

The project has also implemented a report package that provides summary information on outcomes performance at the supervisory unit level as well as a case level data set that can be queried to explore the reasons behind numbers in the reports. The report package draws from an administrative database that is maintained by contracting providers. Contact: Terry Moore, (785) 864-4720, [tmoore@ukans.edu](mailto:tmoore@ukans.edu)

*Training for frontline and supervisory staff on the use of SACWIS data*

#### Maine

The Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service at the University of



Southern Maine worked with the Maine Department of Human Services to develop and field test a curriculum for child welfare supervisors on using SACWIS data. This curriculum serves as a foundation for a training curriculum being used by five other pilot states.

This curriculum covers the impact of technology on the workplace, how technology is changing the job of supervisors, and the reasons behind SACWIS development. It also trains supervisors in locating key data and in data analysis techniques and skills that allow supervisors to use information to improve casework supervision. Contact: Susan Kanak, (207) 780-5840, [susank@usm.maine.edu](mailto:susank@usm.maine.edu)

### Oregon

The Graduate School of Social Work at Portland State University is working with Oregon Services to Children and Families to develop and pilot a curriculum for front line and supervisory staff on making effective use of FACIS, the state's SACWIS system. The curriculum aims to achieve maximum and consistent use of the FACIS technology by demonstrating how staff can use the system to more effectively manage case practice information. Contact: Bridget Darling, (503) 725-8122, [darlingb@cwsp.ssw.pdx.edu](mailto:darlingb@cwsp.ssw.pdx.edu)

## Need Assistance with Information Technology?

In September 1999 the Children's Bureau awarded a five-year cooperative agreement to Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) to support state child and family service managers, local and tribal child welfare programs, and courts in their effective use of automated information systems and outcomes-related data.

CWLA is partnering with Ellsworth Associates, Inc., the National Indian Child Welfare Association and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin. The organization will also work closely with other Children's Bureau Resource Centers.

Activities of the National Resource Center for Information Technology in Child Welfare (NRCITCW) will include:

- developing strategies and guidance to increase the collection, quality, comparability and use of child welfare data,
- examining the relationships between the use of effective automation, data collection requirements and the ability to measure outcomes, including those required for the annual Report of State Performance,

- building the capacity of state and tribal agency managers and administrators, workers and court personnel to use child welfare data in making policy, practice and management decisions,
- identifying needs and providing consultation, training and technical assistance to share information and resolve issues related to the development and use of complex child welfare information systems, the collection of data and the use of data in self-assessment activities,
- coordinating with the Children's Bureau to conduct an annual data use and information systems conference and other meetings to benefit states, and
- developing and disseminating information in various ways, including a Web site ([www.nrcitcw.org](http://www.nrcitcw.org)).

The Project Manager for NRCITCW is Tom Hay. He may be reached by phone at 202-662-4285 or by email, [nrcitcw@cwla.org](mailto:nrcitcw@cwla.org).

State requests for technical assistance may be submitted through the appropriate ACF Regional Office.



## for Children and Families

National Child Welfare Resource Center  
for Organizational Improvement  
University of Southern Maine  
1 Post Office Square  
PO Box 15010  
Portland, ME 04112



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Editors:  
David Karraker  
Barbara Sparks

Layout and design:  
Peter Bramley

Telephone: 207-780-5810  
Toll Free: 1-800-HELP-KID  
Fax: 207-780-5817  
TDD: 207-780-5646  
E-mail: [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu)

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## Resources and More...

### On outcomes-based management

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement provides training and technical assistance to child welfare agencies in implementing outcomes-based management. We encourage child welfare agencies to develop their own sets of outcomes and measures, in conjunction with the federal set, and to track and use this data in managing their programs.

We can assist agencies in:

- establishing outcomes and indicators in strategic plans,
- implementing outcomes-based management throughout agencies,
- developing quality assurance systems to regularly review performance and the quality of care, and
- moving beyond required compliance with ASFA outcomes to using performance data to improve services.

Call us at 1-800-HELP-KID to discuss ways in which we might assist your agency in establishing and strengthening your practice through outcomes-based management.

### On self-evaluation

*The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice* is one of the tools developed through the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family-to-Family initiative. It provides information on the self-evaluation process and on the analytical tools used to develop and report useful data.

At the Foundation's Web site, you can view a one-page fact sheet, a 20 -25 page summary, or the full implementation guide. Print copies can be ordered on-line at [www.aecf.org/familytofamily](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily) or by calling the Annie E. Casey Foundation at 410-547-6600. The Foundation will provide up to ten copies at no charge.