

Child welfare matters.

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Fall/Winter, 2008

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Implementing Change at the Local Level Strategies for Success

As State and local child welfare agencies work towards the systemic changes called for by the Child and Family Services Reviews, they must engage a wide array of staff and stakeholders in the change process. This issue explores steps agencies can take to engage the local level in change. The main article highlights State and local experiences and explores some key strategies agencies can use to bring about change at the local level.

Our Training System News column explores approaches to taking training beyond the classroom, and the Quality Improvement (QI) Corner discusses how QI systems can support change at the local level. We also highlight resources from the NRCOI and the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network. We hope you find this information useful, and we welcome your feedback or comments.

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Your goal is to help children and families.

Our goal is to help you.

Across the country, Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) developed through the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process call for changes in practice to be implemented throughout each State, not just in the three areas examined during the onsite review. This article explores strategies agencies use successfully to engage managers, supervisors, front line staff and stakeholders at the local level in implementing change.

We gathered information on agency strategies in discussions with State and county staff identified through our Quality Improvement and CFSR/Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) peer networks and through the work of the national resource centers in the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network (see Resources, p. 7, 8). We talked with local managers, supervisors, quality improvement staff and stakeholders in Minnesota, Idaho and Illinois—three States that have successfully engaged local areas in implementing change.

To engage staff at the local level in change, it is important to provide data and information highlighting how local areas are doing on key practices and outcomes. As agencies developed approaches to monitoring progress on CFSRs, some modified information systems to produce local reports, and many others developed regular local case review processes that mirror the federal CFSR process.

However, agencies are finding that merely providing data and information is not enough. They also need to create a local structure that encourages staff and stakeholders to look at data and information and develop action plans to address areas needing improvement. Several States, including Minnesota, Idaho and Illinois, pair regular case reviews with a State requirement that regions or counties develop specific improvement plans and review and update them after every local case review. This requirement for local plans, developed in response to locally generated data, has helped engage staff and stakeholders and has contributed to improved outcomes.

Thanks
Peter Watson
Director, NRCOI

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Implementing Change at the Local Level

from page 1.

The experiences of these and other sites around the country suggest that agencies are more likely to achieve their goals if they have some kind of local structure—whether it is a planning process, a quality improvement process, or regular management or committee meetings through which managers engage staff and stakeholders in program improvement.

Below we describe three strategies agencies are using, illustrating them with examples from four local areas—two counties in Minnesota, and regions in Idaho and Illinois. The first strategy uses a local structure to bring key players together to discuss program improvements. The second takes steps to help that local structure operate effectively. The third strategy, undertaken by all of these sites, focuses on practice at the worker and supervisor level.

Create a local structure

These four sites illustrate different approaches to creating structures that bring staff and stakeholders together to develop action steps.

Build on regular local staff meetings.

Washington County, Minnesota shares results of internal quarterly case reviews with individual workers, managers, directors, and county commissioners. After each review the agency picks an issue on which to develop an action plan. A local supervisor who spends part of his time on quality improvement leads exercises on that topic during monthly Children's Division staff meetings of all county staff and supervisors. Everyone looks at the local data and breaks into small groups to discuss possible action steps.



Hold special meetings.

Olmsted County, Minnesota conducts monthly peer reviews of cases and sends summarized quarterly results to all supervisors and the Division's Director. For areas needing improvement, the Director asks a supervisor and the quality improvement staff person to organize and lead a discussion forum with the Director, supervisors, social workers, and other stakeholders. Sometimes smaller workgroups recommend solutions to the larger group.

In **Idaho**, the State conducts regular case reviews in each region and shares the results widely. In each region a staff person—the Chief of Social Work (COSW)—works with the management team to implement a collaborative process to develop and update a regional improvement plan based on review results. For example, after the first regional review in Region 5, the COSW met with managers and with all staff in each service area to gather ideas about the reasons behind local performance, and approaches to improvement. Based on this process, and her own assessment, she drafted a plan and finalized it in meetings with all staff.



Create an ongoing workgroup.

Illinois conducts regular case reviews in each region and requires regions to develop and continually report on regional program improvement plans. Each region has a PIP workgroup co-chaired by a public agency manager and a manager of a private, contracted agency—key partners in the Illinois child welfare system. In the Southern Region, this workgroup meets regularly to review progress on the plan and develop and implement action steps. Across the State, these workgroups build on a continuous quality improvement (CQI) structure involving staff in regular meetings, which was already in place due to accreditation requirements.

Support the local structure

There are a number of steps agencies can take to support these local structures as staff and stakeholders look at data and information, develop action steps and work to implement changes.

Leadership supports continuous improvement.

Staff and stakeholders are much more likely to engage in the change process if leadership at both the State and the local levels clearly expect their involvement. Leaders can create a culture of continuous improvement by being personally involved and providing resources.

The leadership of our current Director, on the statewide level, has been very helpful. He has provided support for anything we wanted to do to grow the continuous quality improvement process, including giving us additional quality assurance staff positions when needed. – Joan Nelson Phillips, Administrator, Division of Quality Assurance, IL

Our County Director is committed to a culture that encourages everyone to think about how we do our work. In our agency you will see “PIG” symbols on display—these represent Practice Improvement Groups which are flexible and formed when a practice area sees the need for change around a specific topic. – Belinda Krenik, Quality Assurance Specialist, Olmsted County, MN



Involve the local level in developing statewide plans.

The more local level staff and stakeholders are involved in State level processes to assess needs and develop improvement plans, the more likely they are to implement them on the local level. States can involve local staff in CFSR or PIP teams and workgroups, and get input through meetings and consultations.

There hasn't been a big initiative on the State level where we—on the county level—haven't been involved. In the second round of the CFSR, three people from our county, including our Director, sat at the table to help create the PIP – Belinda Krenik, Quality Assurance Specialist, Olmsted County, MN

Conduct local case reviews; share results widely.

Regular local case reviews using a qualitative review tool (often similar to the one used in the CFSR process) provide ongoing information on local performance on key items related to outcomes. Sharing results regularly throughout the agency and community raises awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the child welfare system and can increase interest in making improvements. States can also support local areas in doing case reviews targeted to specific issues.

After each regional review, we do an exit meeting with all staff. Reviewers also meet with workers on individual cases and results are shared with the management team. – Lynn Baird, Chief of Social Work, Region 5, ID



When we saw that we had an issue with reentry, we decided to review all reentry cases over the last year, and received assistance from central office staff to complete this local assessment. – Lynn Baird, Chief of Social Work, Region 5, ID

Design accessible, customizable data reports.

States can support local involvement in change by developing information systems that provide reports in simple, easy to understand formats (i.e., graphs with explanatory text) and allow data to be pulled out at different levels (i.e., by State, region, unit, or worker).

The State produces a child welfare outcomes report which I use at least quarterly to see where we are. When we set out to increase the number of adoptions finalized within 24 months, we started by just being aware of the issue. Supervisors looked at how their unit was doing regularly, and we looked at data for the whole region. – Lynn Baird, Chief of Social Work, Region 5, ID

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Support the local structure

Provide staff to support the structure.

State and county agencies can support local structures by dedicating staff to the process or by contracting with universities or other partners. Staff can organize case reviews and other data collection processes, assist in disseminating data and information, facilitate meetings to develop plans, and assist with follow-up.

The QA staff have been the driving force that has brought managers and supervisors from the public agency and private providers together. They present review results and let us ask why we're not doing better and what we should do about it. We also have a contract with a university partner, and the support they provide keeps us moving. – Larry Lolley, Southern Region Manager and PIP Workgroup co-chair, IL

Focus on specific issues and involve appropriate stakeholders.

Agencies often engage staff in implementing change by focusing reports and meetings on a particular practice issue or a small set of performance measures. Also, reviews and data analyses can focus on specific issues, and knowledgeable stakeholders can be engaged in assessing needs and developing and implementing action plans.

We realized that one-third of our cases involved children's mental health, so for one review we oversampled these cases and included a children's mental health supervisor as a reviewer. Recently we held an exercise with all of our staff on improving practice on mental health screens, and developed an action plan. – Rick Backman, Social Services Division Manager, Children's Services, Washington County, MN

Provide training and resources.

State sponsored training on topics such as conducting local case reviews, using data reports, or writing specific, measurable local improvement plans, can strengthen local structures. States can also provide written guides and resource packets on local processes or on addressing specific issues.

Our State quality assurance staff come in every year to train our peer reviewers, and this has been an excellent resource. – Belinda Krenik, Quality Assurance Specialist, Olmsted County, MN

During the first round of the CFSR, the State developed "PIP Tips," short newsletters for each PIP item on requirements, best practice, improvement strategies and resources. We used these, and one supervisor has saved them all so she can refer to them when needed. – John Nalezny, Supervisor, Washington County, MN

SUMMARY

10 Steps Agencies Can Take to Implement Change at the Local Level

- 1** Create a local structure to engage staff and stakeholders in looking at data and information on how they are doing, and develop action plans based on their particular needs.
- 2** State and local leaders support continuous improvement.
- 3** Involve the local level in developing statewide plans.
- 4** Conduct local case reviews; share results widely.
- 5** Design accessible, customizable data reports.
- 6** Provide staff to support the structure.
- 7** Focus on specific issues and involve appropriate stakeholders.
- 8** Provide training and resources.
- 9** Communicate desired practice to local level staff.
- 10** Provide forums for supervisors to discuss practice on the State and local levels.

Focus on desired practice

Agencies often find they need to ensure that staff know what practices the agency expects and help supervisors reinforce that practice.



Communicate desired practice to local level staff.

Some agencies communicate desired practice to caseworkers by developing checklists of key items to remember. Case review tools often reflect desired practice, and agencies find that serving as reviewers reinforces caseworkers' knowledge of practice expectations.

The Regional PIP workgroup develops practice memos and reviews rules and procedures for areas that need to be addressed. We ask agencies to present these to all their staff, and then come back to the workgroup with verification that this has been done. – Terry Whipple, Quality Assurance Manager, Southern Region, IL

Our agency has been able to benefit from the work of the PIP workgroup by using the checklists that have been formed from rules and procedures by PIP workgroup members to orient new caseworkers to what is expected of them. – Gayle Fisher, Quality Improvement Coordinator, private agency and PIP workgroup co-chair, IL

Workers learn so much from being reviewers. They say it is the best training they could have about what the expectations are. – Lynn Baird, Chief of Social Work, Region 5, ID



Provide forums for supervisors to discuss practice on the State and local levels.

Supervisors are key to communicating practice expectations to workers, and to helping them use data and conduct outcomes focused case reviews. Agencies can support supervisors in that role by providing opportunities—on both the State and local levels—for them to hear about agency expectations and to share information on best practices and addressing challenges.

The State holds quarterly supervisory forums that focus on one item in the case review tool and what we can do as supervisors. I have found these to be very helpful and have taken a lot from them. – John Nalezny, Supervisor, Washington County, MN

We started a supervisory forum where supervisors from the Department of Children and Family Services and private agencies meet quarterly and talk about things that need to be improved and how we can work together. The Department also uses this forum to communicate policy and make sure that everyone is on the same page. I think it has been really positive. – Marilyn Wilkinson, Supervisor, private agency, IL

The local structures at these four sites have brought people together and have resulted in improvements in local programs and outcomes. In Washington County, Minnesota, Commissioners responded to the continuous identification of local needs by adding frontline staff, and the Southern Region of Illinois secured funding to expand critically needed transportation services. By continually making improvements, Olmsted County, Minnesota has reduced the rate of repeat maltreatment, and Idaho has increased the number of adoptions finalized within 24 months. Supporting a local structure that engages key players in change, and focusing on practice, can build stronger systems and move agencies closer to achieving safety, permanency and well-being for children and families.



Training System News

... making training for child welfare workers, supervisors, foster parents and others more accessible, needs based, outcome focused and local.

Here we are, well into autumn, which means back to the classroom for so many after a long summer off from school. For child welfare training, however, there is never a spring, summer or winter break. Classes happen most days of the week, every week of the year in locations throughout the country. As I talk with State and county child welfare training managers and their university partners across the country, I'm hearing increasingly about various ways agencies are using child welfare training systems to improve organizational effectiveness. These efforts often include making training for child welfare workers, supervisors, foster parents and others more accessible, needs based, outcome focused and local. Let me share with you a few of the exciting ideas that I've heard about recently.

More and more child welfare agencies and universities rely on web-based training, which makes learning opportunities for the child welfare professional available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from home, work or another convenient location. Other agencies offer district or regional training in addition to classes in a central location. Similarly, some agencies are creating field trainers who work out of local offices and specialize in working with new workers who have completed their first level training and their supervisors to help ensure that positive transfer of learning occurs. Bringing training staff to a local district office reduces travel and time away from the office for participants, which may increase attendance.

Recently, I talked with trainers from a university partnership who are working with their child welfare agency to develop a series of 3-hour classes for supervisors on priority practice topics identified by the agency. Each half-day class focuses on a specific topic and is delivered in a local district office. While this is a very new approach to supervisory training for this child welfare agency and will need some time to reach its full potential, supervisors responded enthusiastically to the first sessions.

One of the leaders in using child welfare training systems to improve organizational effectiveness is the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program (PCWTP). Over a 7-year period, this system was transformed from a traditional classroom training model to a comprehensive training system, offering classroom training as well as on-site technical assistance and transfer of learning support to county agencies. Throughout that period, the PCWTP staff and managers constantly asked themselves and their stakeholders "How can



we make this training better?" "How can we ensure that we are delivering training that is based on identified organizational needs?" The training system developed a solid curriculum aligned with the defined practice standards, engaged partners, utilized transfer of learning and moved beyond individual needs assessments. This and other creative on-site work has resulted in a training system focused on meeting identified, 'real world' challenges, as well as ensuring that the front-line workers have the knowledge and skills they need to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

To learn more about the transformation of the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program, you can listen to a recent peer training network teleconference on this topic on the NRCOI website www.nrcoi.org.

If you have other ideas to share with your training colleagues across the county on how to bring child welfare training beyond the classroom, please contact me.

*Cheers,
Susan Kanak • skanak@usm.maine.edu*



QI Corner ...helping local offices and units use review findings to make improvements in practice...

I have worked at the NRCOI for seven years, primarily assisting State and local child welfare agencies as they develop and refine their quality improvement systems. One of the major changes in the child welfare field since the implementation of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) in 2001 has been an implementation of similar review processes at the State and local levels. By my unofficial count, more than 40 States now use some sort of qualitative case review component, and the vast majority of these are modeled on the CFSR. While most agencies also include other types of data and information in their QI approaches, qualitative reviews in particular help State and local agencies identify and understand the key practice and systemic issues that impact their child and family outcomes.

Whether agencies have developed case file reviews, supervisory reviews or comprehensive case reviews that include interviews with key case participants and stakeholders, implementing these processes takes a lot of time, effort and ongoing staff support. Perhaps as a result, many States have struggled with the back end of these QI approaches: helping local offices and units USE review findings to make improvements in practice, address systemic barriers and achieve better outcomes for children and families. Experience shows us that conducting high quality and consistent reviews, providing detailed and timely findings and requiring local program improvement plans are important aspects, but they do not necessarily guarantee that local offices will take the next critical step of making proactive changes to improve practice and outcomes.

A number of States with good quality review processes have had to refocus their efforts on supporting change at the local level. Rather than view this as an indication of a failure in their new QI processes, I urge agencies to remember that developing comprehensive QI systems requires a willingness to make adjustments over time.

None of the agencies featured in our main article figured out how to support change immediately. All of them modified their QI systems, approaches, and especially their collaborative efforts with local offices and units, as they learned more about what types of practice and systemic changes were necessary to improve outcomes.

One other point: agencies should keep things as simple as possible, especially when they have relatively new QI approaches. Too many agencies have implemented QI approaches that result in a virtual avalanche of data and information from numerous sources. In some cases, local offices cannot figure out what to prioritize and where to focus their efforts at making changes. Setting the expectation that local offices should use QI results to make change is necessary, but training and supporting them in doing so is critical. A good first step may be narrowing the information sources and asking local offices to focus on just a few areas of change that will impact their outcomes. Over time, agencies can expand the information reviewed and the complexity of local improvement plans, especially as local offices develop skills and confidence in using QI results to drive change.

Peter Watson

Resources available at www.nrcoi.org

Using Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) to Improve Child Welfare Practice: A Framework for Implementation. This document, developed by a group of national child welfare quality improvement experts convened by Casey Family Programs and the NRCOI, describes six components of a complete CQI system. www.nrcoi.org/QI.htm (look under QI resources and publications)

Lessons Learned: PIP Development. Listen to the audio file or download the Podcast! www.nrcoi.org/telepast.htm During this May 15, 2008 teleconference, presenters discussed factors that contribute to successful program improvement plans (PIPs) and a member of the CFSR federal review team noted actions that have helped agencies implement changes in the first round of the CFSRs, including using data and making changes at the local level.

Peer Networks offer regular calls allowing staff to share and learn from the experiences and successes of others as well as websites for posting documents. **QI Peer Network**, contact Peter Watson at pwatson@usm.maine.edu. **CFSR/CFSP Coordinators Network** (facilitated with the NRC CWDT), contact Steve Preister at spreister@usm.maine.edu. **Peer Training Network**, contact Susan Kanak at skanak@usm.maine.edu.

Strengthening Child Welfare Supervision. *Child Welfare Matters*. Fall, 2007. www.nrcoi.org/newsletter.htm

Resources from the Network

The national resource centers in the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network offer resources and assistance to help you engage the local level in change. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) T/TA package highlights available assistance on the following focus areas critical to using the CFSR process to achieve systemic change (see www.nrcoi.org/cfsrta.htm):

- Strategic Planning,
- Strengthening Child Welfare Supervision as a Key Practice Change Strategy,
- Engaging Community Stakeholders and Building Community Partnerships,
- Using Information and Data in Planning and Measuring Progress,
- CFSR Kickoffs, and
- Program Improvement Planning.

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<http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/survey.htm>

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