



## **New Jersey Department of Children and Families “Manage by Data” National Promising Practice Findings June 2010**

### **Introduction and Methods**

New Jersey’s Department of Children and Families (DCF) has partnered with the Northeast and Caribbean Implementation Center (NCIC) to develop and introduce a model of utilizing data to manage toward improved outcomes for children and families. The project focus is on turning data into practical information that is used across the agency -- and specifically trying to bring it to the frontline supervisory level. This project will complement DCF’s new case practice model. Metrics will be directly tied to the practice model, standardized, known, and reported on and will build upon and acknowledge data measures already used in the CFSR and the Settlement Agreement.

In order to best achieve this goal, NJ DCF and NCIC began by reaching out to other state child welfare agencies who are currently managing with data to learn more about what is working well and what has been challenging. We first reached out to Linda Mitchell of the Administration on Children and Families (ACF) and Peter Watson of the National Resource Center on Organizational Improvement (NRCOI) for suggestions on which agencies may be helpful to talk with as they both work on data issues nationwide and would have a strong sense of the systems in place in each state. New Jersey selected several agencies from those suggested which would be able to describe their efforts in various aspects of managing by data. Those selected to interview were Illinois, Kentucky, Rhode Island, Texas and Utah. Approximately one hour telephone interviews were conducted with staff at each agency; please see the acknowledgments at the end of this report for the names of those who generously shared their time and expertise.

This report will describe the findings from those interviews, including why NJ DCF chose to speak with each agency selected, what we learned from each about their current system, what has worked well and what may have been challenging and what key lessons New Jersey learned about managing with data.

### **Illinois DCFS Division of Quality Assurance – Sustainable CQI System**

Illinois Dept of Child and Family Services’ (DCFS) Division of Quality Assurance is among the agencies with the most comprehensive quality system paired with a strong focus on sustainability. Their system has successfully survived several leadership changes. They are now bringing together how they monitor private contracts and staff.

### **What NJ DCF Learned**

Illinois DCFS has a highly developed and intricate system of continuous quality improvement (CQI) in their child welfare system. Their CQI structure is made up of Regional, Local field office CQIs, Statewide Quality councils and regional PIP workgroups. The agency has a comprehensive case and record review system in place.

Illinois DCFS is divided into six regions and the CQI system parallels this structure with six Regional Quality Councils (RQCs). RQCs meet monthly to raise issues beyond the control of the local offices. There were few models of managing by data to follow in the 1990s when this system was developed, so the regional structure allowed for a manageable starting point. It was imperative to have administrators and upper management leading by example and this structure helped to support that – it would have been impossible to start with the supervisor level due to the large number of staff that would have to be trained.

One of the requirements to ensure an effective CQI system was to gain support from upper management. CQI staff then established a peer review, which is used to date as well as a statewide database for maintaining records and evaluating results. Every quarter, approximately 10% of cases are reviewed using the same tools statewide, ensuring consistency. When creating an instrument, it is vital to get input from the field.

CQI staff emphasized that staff are much more interested in data about their team or local office than statewide data. They use quantitative as well as qualitative reviews to generate reports. Some of the key functions of the CQI staff are to identify data that are consistent with the agency mission and practice, gather data, analyze data and use data results to bring about “change”. Quality Assurance (QA) staff are not the only ones who complete data reviews; in fact, as caseworkers have taken over the record reviews, the agency now has an army of evaluators. Over 4,000 staff have participated in individual record reviews since the agency began conducting peer reviews in 1997. Bringing in people from the field to participate in the reviews supports sustainability.

Instead of using third party vendors to analyze their data, Illinois DCFS has a strong in-house data and analysis staff that produces their own reports and effectively communicates their findings to staff. Other data systems proved to be too difficult for staff to understand and use. The responsibilities of CQI staff are: 1) Qualitative Process Records; 2) Federal Review; 3) PIP; 4) Strategic Planning; 5) Accreditation.

Illinois DCFS relies on private agencies to provide services for their clients. Case management responsibilities are given to both the contracted agencies and child welfare agency workers. They have about 70 foster care providers tied to Performance Based Contracting. Their child welfare system has direct case management responsibility for all investigations and most intact family cases however the private sector manages approximately 70% of all foster care cases across the state. They also have tracking mechanisms in place that ensure progress is made in achieving performance goals. Illinois DCFS staff emphasized that real partnership between state and private contractors is required, and that the state and private contractors need to have good communication and rapport.

Illinois DCFS made a strong point of suggesting that agencies should have a common platform of metrics used throughout the agency. In other words, the metrics that are being used to evaluate client outcomes as part of case management services delivered by the public agency staff should be the same

ones reflected in a vendor’s contract for case management services through a performance based contracting structure.

### **Key Lessons for NJ DCF**

- Metrics should be consistent with agency mission and the practice model
- Be able to target the data to critical outcomes, core practices and the future level of improvement and performance you want to achieve
- Active agency staff participation in Peer Record Review
- Ongoing Assessment
- Use of evaluative data to support programmatic improvements
- Incorporation of key metrics into vendor contracts
- Development of a common platform of metrics for agency-wide use
- KEY PARTICIPANTS include:
  - Agency staff from all levels
  - Stakeholders-Foster parents, youth, private child welfare agencies and families

### **Kentucky Dept for Community Based Services – Comprehensive CQI System**

Kentucky Dept for Community Based Services (DCBS) was recommended because the system is adept at collecting data and in getting sites to use data. Training is provided at different levels and middle managers develop master’s level projects – there is a link made between data and practice that is meaningful to the field - a key link that is missing in many states.

Also, in identifying Kentucky DCBS as an agency that has lessons to share, the presence of a “data champion” emerged. This role was also evident in other agencies interviewed. The data champion is a staff person at the state level, sometimes mirrored at a regional or local level, which has nurtured the development and use of data in their states. They have spearheaded meetings, mentored CQI staff, and provided one-on-one coaching with staff – always over a period of years – in order to institutionalize the use of data within their respective agencies. The data champion plays a key role in developing other staff on the ground, in local offices, which then bring the data to the frontline staff.

### **What NJ DCF Learned**

Kentucky DCBS staff informed us that achieving a point of managing by data takes time and much managerial attention to evolve. As part of the effort, Kentucky DCBS hired CQI specialists who are good at working with data and excited about it to play a key role. The agency tries to find people with skills in Excel and data usage. Kentucky DCBS has nine CQI staff across the State. Beginning at the county level and going down to the local level, the CQI staff bring data to caseworkers and supervisors in a way that “tells the story” to staff.

CQI staff attend training focused on data work as it relates to front line work and then complete a project to follow upon and solidify their learning. They take data, analyze it and try to improve outcomes. Kentucky DCBS has developed an infrastructure of people to do this work. They produce and/or utilize qualitative reports and also are significantly involved in the qualitative piece of certain

metrics or case reviews. CQI staff meets with workers and supervisors to engage them, and jointly review the findings of both quantitative and qualitative work. Topics of discussion are based on the region, but include things like the recurrence of maltreatment and frequency of caseworker contacts.

The agency's vision is to get people to talk about data. CQI staff is an important key to success as they bring the data both up and down the line. For instance, data and information shared up the line is used by the regional office to assess how their team is doing. The CQI specialists meet every quarter. They review facts and trends, for the purpose of interpreting them. For example, if you continue on this trend, you will be at X%. CQI staff present the data using graphs, videos and maps to workers and supervisors. Visuals are key in doing this work.

CQI staff is very much involved in qualitative reviews. In Kentucky DCBS, in particular, there is a close connection between reviews by CQI staff and supervisors which then tie the data to the qualitative case review findings. This all comes together in "telling the story" as it relates to the children and families in a worker's caseload. This is important in having the data make sense to the caseworker as well as helping them use quantitative and qualitative results to improve performance.

Kentucky DCBS also noted that trend analysis is a key component of their work. It allows them to identify what is happening and why it is happening. This is complimented by the qualitative review findings. As a result, systemic issues are identified that are then shared up the line to be addressed at a central office level.

#### **Kentucky DCBS has:**

- CQI – Case Automated Review Evaluation System (CQI-CARES)
- Web-based data entry for case reviews.
- 4 reviews per quarter by the supervisor
- CQI staff and the review findings are used for coaching and mentoring
- 18 case reviews occur each month at the regional level – for regional planning, measure PIP outcomes
- 32 reviews each month at Central Office
- Incorporated the utilization of data in staff performance evaluations

#### **Key Lessons for NJ DCF**

- The work is best accomplished by having knowledgeable, data savvy, excited people to train others with utilizing data
- Learners **must** be able to practice using data and be able to interpret it to "tell the story"
- Must make data "come alive" and its use should be people oriented
- Use data to "tell the story" to caseworkers and supervisors at the child/family level
  - Demonstrate what is being achieved
  - Identify what needs attention
- Use visuals to demonstrate how data is helpful, useful, and can help them improve their outcomes for children

- The results of managing by data should be felt at both the local and central office level. At the local level, it should be used in a way that promotes improvement in practice and outcomes. At the central office level, it should be used in a way that identifies systemic issues that need attention.
- Managing by data is an ongoing process that takes time to get started, and needs continual reinforcement
- You know that you have institutionalized managing by data in your system when staff and the agency talk about and use the data on a routine basis

### **Rhode Island Dept of Children, Youth and Families – Supervisory Review Process**

In response to a shortage of CQI staff, Rhode Island Dept of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has developed a Supervisory Review Process which supervisors conduct on a regular basis. A doctorate-level central office staff member leads the effort, reviewing results and talking through trends with local offices.

#### **What NJ DCF Learned**

Rhode Island DCYF has implemented a multi-layered supervisory review process. The agency has monthly Supervisory Reviews where each supervisor receives a random case to be rated on the 23 CFSR points and logged in a database. This review is completed with the worker and aggregated to quarterly regional meetings. There was initial resistance to this process but the director was very supportive and now most supervisors are conducting the reviews.

The quarterly Regional Data Meetings mentioned above are held with central office QA staff who travel to each of Rhode Island DCYF's four regions. Five data elements are selected to focus on as it would be overwhelming to review the 23 CFSR elements in the aggregate. This allows the group to see the trend over time. Certain data reports that the department needs to work on are identified, emailed in advance and reviewed. Trend data is shared with each region receiving their own as well as the state-level data. The focus is to identify what is working within subpopulations as opposed to being punitive. For example, it was identified that 30% of repeat maltreatment cases were false positives. This resulted in training on the distinction between risk and safety as well as a policy change. RI DCYF CQI staff stated that "Data doesn't do the work; it tells you where the work needs to be done".

In addition, a monthly Data Analytic Group meets and analyzes SACWIS data as well as data that service providers submit. This consists of primarily survival and predictive analyses examining the potential of returning to the system. If a negative trend is identified, the head of the QA office, who is a member of the executive team, can bring the issue to the weekly executive team meeting for discussion and possible interventions.

#### **Key Lessons for NJ DCF**

- Using data to look at trends over time is essential
- You can use trend data to target your reviews to certain practice areas or sites
- "Data doesn't do the work, it tells you where the work needs to be done"

- Sharing data promotes organizational transparency, allows for learning from each other

### **Texas Dept of Family & Protective Services – Performance Management Model**

Texas Dept of Family & Protective Services (DFPS) has developed a performance management model in response to a legislative mandate. As a result, all staff have performance metrics included in their performance rating/evaluation. Accountability rolls up from the caseworker, through all levels of staff. At the higher levels of the agency, this includes CFSR measures.

#### **What NJ DCF Learned**

In 2004, Texas DFPS began to seek ways to improve accountability. Agency staff didn't feel they were using data in a meaningful way and only 10% of supervisors were completing performance evaluations annually at this time. Their Performance Management Initiative was only one response to these issues but was designed to make data available to staff for use in performance plans and evaluations.

Staff identified all existing positions and identified performance metrics for those positions which were tied to outcomes. Critical tasks have specific reports tied to them which can be pulled down to the worker level. Clearly described benchmarks were established for each metric ranging through five tiers from "needs improvement" to "distinguished". The ratings tied to each tier have been refined over time to a bell curve that appropriately reflects the distribution of ratings and performance. The rating scale was designed to be achievable and realistic but challenging. The accountability for these metrics rolls upward; each worker is responsible for their caseload meeting these metrics, each supervisor for their unit, onward up to the head of Child Protective Services. Employees have a performance plan provided at the beginning of the year so they know what they are accountable for. There is a comment section for each metric allowing the identification of mitigating circumstances that may affect outcomes such as a leave or taking over the caseload of a departing colleague. The overall score is not solely based on the metrics but takes other factors that may affect the employee's performance into account.

This process took four years to move from identification to approval. There is a Quality Assurance Consortium in place composed of leads from all divisions who are the decision making body. They also trained over 1,000 managers statewide on how to use data.

It was emphasized that these reports should be used throughout the year – no one should be surprised at their annual evaluation.

Texas DFPS reports that using established and known metrics is in the best interest of employees and takes away subjective evaluations. It is very clear to staff as to what is required and they know how they are doing. Including the metrics in the performance evaluation also supports the concept that the data is owned by the worker and thus addresses claims of the data is bad. Furthermore, data may be used in decisions involving the transfer or promotion of staff.

Metrics used at the higher levels of the agency can include CFSR measures, caseload size, completing required documentation, vacancy and turnover rates.

Texas DFPS has “absolutely” seen a change in outcomes as a result of this initiative. For example, face to face contacts were recording percentages in the teens, both because they were not being done and not being documented. Within a few years they have risen to 90% receiving face to face visits monthly and being documented on a timely basis. In order to measure quality, they review 360 cases per quarter and use the CFSR case review instrument. Face to face contact is not counted if not substantive.

In hindsight, while having the quantitative metrics in their performance evaluations has been overwhelmingly positive, they do acknowledge that there should have been more emphasis on quality to reach a balanced approach.

The system has been well received now that the initial distrust of the quality of the data has passed. There is a sense of ownership of the data so it is very accurate now. The availability of the data to all caseworkers has allowed them to identify others who may be achieving an outcome they are struggling with and has also fostered a bit of a competitive atmosphere that has improved performance. There has been an overall culture shift toward the use of data; as recently as three years ago, almost no one was using it.

The emphasis of the initiative has been on performance improvement, which is critical. Positive trends are identified early and sent to leadership. If trends that require correction are identified, the appropriate intervention such as training or mentoring can be identified.

Texas DFPS does use performance based contracting and it incorporates the CFSR measures. However, their use of metrics in contracting is not as comprehensive as their staff metrics – but they are striving for more.

#### **Key Lessons for NJ DCF**

- Goals for improvement (worker & outcome) should be achievable and realistic, but challenging
- Metrics should be tied to evidence-based practice and desired outcomes
- Metrics at the worker level should reflect critical tasks linked to better client outcomes
- Critical to have metric that drill down to county/office/unit/worker level
- Metrics should balance quantitative with qualitative
- Linking performance evaluation to the data helps develop a sense of ownership of the data and facilitates its accuracy
- Tie metrics to performance improvement at all levels of the organization

#### **Utah Dept of Child and Family Services – QSR System**

Utah’s Dept of Child and Family Services (DCFS) has a well-developed QSR process which has been very effective. It has served as a model for other systems developed across the country.

## **What NJ DCF Learned**

Utah DCFS has had its Qualitative Case Review (QCR) process in place for 11 years. Prior to this, they were much more compliance oriented - the QCR brought a quality focus based on outcomes for the child and family. Utah now has two formal reviews, the QCR and the Case Process Review (CPR) that are conducted each year by the Office of Services Review (OSR). OSR is not a part of Child and Family Services but is an office within the Department of Human Services. OSR certifies and selecting reviewers for the QCR and organizes each review. A review of cases is conducted in each of the 5 regions each year. Cases selected are reviewed by a two person team – one certified reviewer and a shadow reviewer. The reviewers come from OSR and Child and Family Services employees as well as community partners. Utah Child and Family Services has found that by involving mid-level managers, supervisors and even front line staff in their formal QCRs, they understand what is required and why and move more quickly towards improving performance. Some neighborhood offices have begun a “mini” QCR that is held informally in their office that help workers to look at the important status and outcomes in their cases that are reviewed in the QCR. These “mini” QCR’s have been used as a way to “staff” difficult cases.

The QCR and CPR reviews are only a part of the practice improvement structure in Utah. Utah also has Quality Improvement Committees made up of community partners and child welfare stakeholders who meet on a regular basis to discuss trends in data and how improvements can be made. A Trends Analysis Committee, which meets quarterly and includes program administrators, the data team and Region Practice Improvement Coordinators also reviews the findings from the QCR, CPR, and data included in the Quarterly Report, which corresponds with CFSR data.

There has been a decade-long culture shift toward managing by data. Supervisors and managers are constantly talking about data in a positive way, focusing on what can be changed and what is being achieved. Utah has several hundred reports that can be pulled from their SACWIS system (SAFE) by data people in each of the regions. They also have over 100 reports that supervisors and other managers and administrators can generate themselves through the SAFE system. This library of reports continues to expand as suggestions for data reports are made by frontline supervisors who know what will best help them in their everyday work. Utah believes that it is important to take the data down to the worker level. When data was presented at the office level, supervisors assumed their unit wasn’t the problem. Change came about by going to the individual worker level allowing supervisors to see where extra support and training was needed. This also allows supervisors to celebrate success and improvement.

Utah DCFS staff has learned to dig into the data looking for what the data is telling them. For example, they had broad state- and region-level measures on reentry into foster care but didn’t necessarily know why their performance wasn’t where they wanted it to be. As the data was further explored, issues with kinship care were identified including a lack of support for kinship caregivers. This helped with a portion of the re-entry cases but there was still work to be done. One region had particularly high numbers and so decided to look at each child who reentered the system asking the supervisors to answer a series of questions about the reentry. Supervisors explained what happened in each case and as a result generated many good case practice suggestions.

In one particularly successful region a strong team mentality has emerged as teams began to strive for better practice that is then reflected in reports. This region has an upper level administrator who acts as their data champion. She uses data when meeting with staff, attends “Trend Meetings” at the statewide level and celebrates accomplishments with the employees in her region. She leads a strong effort to find out who is doing it right and figuring out how it can be replicated. One example is an office who has recently achieved a 96% rate of timeliness of investigation in CPS investigation. In looking at the achievement the question of the number of “unable to locate” findings was raised. In other words, were the workers in this office quick to disposition a case as “unable to locate” so that they did not miss the timeframe for initiating investigation. The answer was no. Only four of over 800 investigations were designated as an “unable to locate” case. What was happening was that the staff was working as a team to meet the requirements. Caseworkers would ask what was needed by others on their cases before they left the office. This resulted in stops to visit child victims on other caseworkers’ cases when they were in the area so that the face-to-face with the child victim was completed on time.

Training on the use of data has been presented annually at Utah’s supervisor conference. Supervisors are encouraged to contact data experts at both the region and the state level for help in pulling data reports and using data to manage their teams. Data is a part of nearly every meeting. Utah strives for transparency and so posts data reports including the annual report, QCR and CPR results, and the quarterly report on their website.

Recently, Utah DCFS has been expanding their use of data to manage, by connecting better with the Courts. Case specific data can be pulled by judge and by any of the attorneys connected with the case. When this practice first began there were accusations that “the data was bad”, “it wasn’t right”. Child and Family Services and the Administrative Office of the Courts now have an interface with the two data systems that allows for data to be shared across the two databases. This has helped to move the courts forward in the use of data.

#### **Key Lessons for NJ DCF**

- Supervisors know what reports they need to help them get the job done – when you are managing by data, your best reports are designed at the request of supervisors
- Qualitative feedback can inform improved practice, and thus improved outcomes
- Accountability is best achieved by focusing at the supervisor level
- Developing creative, fun ways of working on problems is most useful
- Team effort is essential – this can be cooperative and competitive
  - Creating a competitive spirit between teams helps improve practice, outcomes
  - Creating a cooperative attitude helps achieve desired outcomes
- The common platform of metrics to achieve improved performance and outcomes can and should involve judicial partners.

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