Using Organizational Data to Create the Essential Context for System Transformation in Child Welfare

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A comprehensive system transformation initiative is underway, to shift from the traditional “adversarial” child protective model, and translate the core values of “child-driven,” “family-centered,” “community-focused,” “strength-based,” “committed to diversity/cultural competence,” and committed to continuous learning... into an active child welfare agenda. The “learning organization” is the guiding framework.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is an interactive, iterative, participatory process that reflects change in organizational values, and catalyzes and guides improvements in policy and practice. Data drive CQI, obtained as framed by federal performance benchmarks, and in response to criteria or questions generated by the organization, and the field. CQI embraces both learning and accountability.

To elaborate a coherent child welfare system the new core values must be reflected in selecting and measuring benchmarks, obtaining data from multiple perspectives, and providing feedback to inform improvements and to promote the “new” way of doing business at the clinical, managerial, and system levels. The Child Welfare Institute (CWI), a public-academic partnership between MA/DSS, Salem State College, and the UMMI, is aimed at transforming the system through professional development. The Staff, Family, and Provider Development Centers will offer competency-based workshops, seminars, conferences, and certificate programs. Areas for training and development are emerging via the CQI process.

MA/DSS has 29 Area Offices organized in 6 Regions; 74,681 consumers (39,913 are children < 18 years of age), 10,863 children and youth in placement; and 3,440 employees (FY2005, 2nd quarter).

...The challenge is getting the right data to the right people...and helping folks know how to use it. When people are engaged in the process...when they can reflect on practices, and use data to ask and answer larger questions... it builds excitement.

People need help overcoming their fear of failure; of trying new...and making recommendations. When it works well, it’s very exciting.

Incorporating new ways of relating to families in our practice...building the emotional and work demands of eighteen or more families...requires...a bridge rather than a wall.

Staff Comments

"While CQI can be a useful tool to shape organizational change, it may be viewed as an unwelcome ‘add-on’ when the other things that are changing take so much time and energy…"

"Effective CQI requires a context of trust and cooperation...the shared understanding that the goals are feed-back and learning, and not negative evaluation and criticism."

"Feedback has to be framed as a learning opportunity. When it’s positive, it’s an opportunity to highlight good things...there’s good work being done all over the place. When something doesn’t work we need to say, ‘How can we do this differently?’ because there’s always room for improvement."

CQI Data Sources

• FamilyNet State-wide Data Base
• Foster Care Reviews
• Quality Service Reviews
• Reports from Specific Units, e.g., Family Resource Unit
• Lead Agency/Provider Reports, including CANS-data
• Training Evaluation Forms
• Feedback from Area, Regional, & Central Offices
• Client Satisfaction, Family Centered & Strength-Based Care Surveys

CQI Team Functions

• Ensure data is available/understandable (A,R)
• Develop and review performance indicators & action plans on quarterly basis (A,R,C)
• Implement, evaluate, & modify action plans for continual improvement; ‘Plan-Do-Study-Act’ (A)
• Organize, provide staff, & participate in annual Quality Service Reviews (A,R,C)
• Ensure review processes are characterized by learning & reflection (A,R,C)
• Analys-data, develop & disseminate CQI reports (C)
• Ensure that training resources & agency policies support practice & system changes (C)