

Ohio Well Positioned For National Standards

As part of the Adoption and Safe Family Act, section 203, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services is required to develop a set of outcome measures to assess states' performance regarding the protection of its children vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

Many states throughout our nation are struggling to create, let alone implement a statewide data system. Many of our sister states still manually gather statewide data because a statewide system is either non-functional or non-existent. **Not in Ohio!** While many have questioned the validity of the data over the years with our statewide data system: FACSIS (Family and Children Services Information System) and while others see its validity as a function of the data entered at the local level, the fact is that OHIO has had a statewide data system for more than a decade -- however many warts that have yet to be extricated.

Ohio's child welfare system has something else most states do not have, a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process developed with the assistance, guidance and in partnership with Ohio's county child welfare agencies and ODJFS staff. While CQI is not a new concept, it is still considered cutting edge in the field of child welfare. Ohio's CPOE system (Child Protection and Oversight), which relies on the use of a set of child welfare indicators, has given us a solid foundation of experience in systematically researching; reviewing; analyzing; and targeted problem solving service delivery at the local level. We are well couched and learned in using outcomes and indicators to reflect the extent to which our practice is "working." Certainly not without its failings, CPOE and FACSIS have nonetheless assisted us in taking a long hard look at our service delivery system on a regular and periodic basis and has allowed counties to develop Quality Improvement Plans to address targeted areas needing attention.

As a result of our experiences, we come prepared to take on the HHS Service Conformity National Standards. We need to prepare ourselves to review our practice in relation to these National Standards and to have regular dialogues with staff at all levels as to what can be done to meet these standards if they are not currently being met.

Without rendering a judgment as to whether these are the "right" standards to be looking at, I offer these up for all to see - may we be bold and energized in our own review of our practice as we prepare for the HHS On-Site Reviews and beyond.

The National Standards include:

- 1. Recurrence of Maltreatment**
5% or fewer children had another substantiated or indicated report within 6 months.
- 2. Incidence of C/AN in Foster Care:**
Substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or staff is .04% or less.

3. **Foster Care Re-Entries:**
6% or fewer children re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.
4. **Stability of Foster Care Placement:**
Of all children in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal, 89% or more had no more than 2 placement settings.
5. **Length of Time to Achieve Reunification:**
At the time of discharge from foster care, 78% or more children were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal.
6. **Length of Time to Achieve Adoption:**
Of all children who existed foster care to adoption finalization during the year under review, 36% or more children exited care in less than 24 months.

In addition to these National Standards set by HHS, the on-site review will examine 7 systematic factors that affect the quality of service delivery. May I suggest yet again, that Ohio is well positioned to respond to these at a local level.

Ohio was the first state in the nation to develop county-driven, practitioner-based Standards for Effective Practice. These Standards, spanning the child protection continuum, have assisted agencies throughout Ohio to take a serious look at the daily practice of our child welfare administration, supervisor and direct service practitioner. As a result, counties have been raising the bar on practice and service delivery. In addition, for more than a decade, Ohio has had a nationally recognized, respected and supported Comprehensive Competency-Based Child Welfare Training Program excellently managed by the Institute For Human Services and funded by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, operated with locally generated and federal funds. Finally, so many of our counties have been rigorously involved in a Community-Based Strategic Planning process for years. For those heavily invested in planning, in partnership with the communities they serve, counties have been responding to these seven factors:

1. Statewide Information System
2. Service Array
3. Case Review System
4. Staff Training
5. Quality Assurance System
6. Agency Responsiveness to the community
7. Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention.

Ohio's county Child Welfare agencies DO GOOD WORK and while what we are "doing" can always be improved upon we have a history of challenging ourselves to seek excellence when partnering with children, families and communities. So, while not perfect, we are certainly in a position to take on these National Standards and seven Systematic Factors with experience, aplomb and finesse! ■