INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES
CASE PRACTICE REFORM OVERVIEW
SPRING 2009

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) has fundamentally changed the way it works with families involved in the child welfare system and has begun to see promise of significant impact on outcomes for children. Between December 2007 and December 2008, Indiana achieved the following as a result of less than three years of practice improvement:

- Median length of stay in care decreased 19 percent (from 457 to 370 days).
- Number of children in care longer than one year decreased by 8 percent (from 5576 to 5144 children)
- Percentage of children placed in their own home or with relative caregivers steadily increased 6 percentage points statewide. (Percent placed at home increased from 27% to 31%. Percent placed with relatives increased 16% to 18%.)

Indiana's practice improvement efforts began in 2005 when Governor Mitch Daniels established the Department of Child Service (DCS) as a cabinet-level, independent agency. Governor Daniels sought to create a child welfare agency that could better serve and protect the children and families of Indiana. In order to start to carry out this mission, the Indiana legislature provided DCS the staff resource to cut caseloads to 12 new cases or 17 on-going cases per worker, or under half of their previous average.

DCS's new leadership sought to ground their improvement efforts in strong principles and values and to translate these into caseworker's every day actions and decisions. The mandate to double agency staff provided an opportunity to embed these principles and values and to improve practice. [1] Leadership also understood that lower caseloads allowed caseworkers greater time to invest in family engagement.

Indiana Practice Model

DCS's desired case practice was captured in its "practice model", or its description of the practice principles and essential skills to effectively implement its vision, mission and values. These principles and skills built upon case practice reform efforts that have significantly improved child safety and family reunification in other states. After researching other States' best practices, Indiana identified five essential practice skills. These skills are:

[1] Indiana state legislature mandated in January 2005 that DCS lower caseloads to 12 investigative cases and 17 on-going cases per caseworker by July 1st, 2008.

- ***Engagement***. The skill of effectively establishing a relationship with children, parents, and essential individuals for the purpose of sustaining the work that is to be accomplished together.
- ***Teaming***. The skill of assembling a group to work with children and families, becoming a member of an established group, or leading a group may all be necessary for success in bringing needed resources to the critical issues of children and families. Child welfare is a community effort and requires a team.
- ***Assessment***. The skill of obtaining information about the salient events that brought the children and families into our services and the underlying causes bringing about their situations. This discovery process looks for the issues to be addressed and the strengths within the children and families to address these issues. Here we are determining the capability, willingness, and availability of resources for achieving safety, permanence, and well-being for children.
- ***Planning***. The skill necessary to tailor the planning process uniquely to each child and family is crucial. Assessment will overlap into this area. This includes the design of incremental steps that move children and families from where they are to a better level of functioning. Service planning requires the planning cycle of assessing circumstances and resources, making decisions on directions to take, evaluating the effectiveness of the plan, reworking the plan as needed, celebrating successes, and facing consequences in response to lack of improvement.
- ***Intervening***. The skill to intercede with actions that will decrease risk, provide for safety, promote permanence, and establish well-being. These skills continue to be gathered throughout the life of the professional child welfare worker and may range from finding housing to changing a parent's pattern of thinking about their child.

Indiana Practice Changes

Child & Family Teaming

DCS adopted a teaming model where meetings occur with the family or potential permanent caregiver present and the participation of the family's informal support system is continuously sought. Meetings are coordinated and facilitated by the Family Case Manager. The purpose of the meetings is to expedite permanence, ensure safety and support the child's well-being. Results of the meetings include more effective plans and interventions because of a greater richness of family support and more inclusive decision-making.

Family team meetings are held at all key decision-points in both assessment and on-going case management phases. The following are triggers for a case worker to call a meeting in the assessment phase:

- Safety Planning (identifying family strengths, needs so that risk can be mitigated or removed)
- Prevention of Removal (child remains safely in the home)
- Placement (exploring relatives, non-custodial parents, local placement, placement with sibs)
- Visitation Planning (parents, sibs, relatives, essential connections)
- Case/Service Planning ("Informal Adjustment" development, recommendations for disposition, case plan, education needs, medical needs, etc)
- Reunification Planning

The following are triggers for a Family Case Manager to call a meeting in the case management phase:

- Case/Service Planning (implementation, tracking and adjusting)
- Prevention of Removal
- Placement (exploring relatives, non-custodial parents, local placement, placement with sibs, ensuring the stability of placement to avoid disruption)
- Visitation Planning
- Permanency Planning
- Reunification Planning
- Case Closure

Clinical Supervision

Supervisors are expected to provide individual and group supervision to staff that advances and supports their learning of practices supported by the DCS practice model. This supervision is expected to model the practice model skills case workers are expected to use with families, such as meaningful engagement, collaborative decision-making, and strength-based and solution-focused problem solving.

<u>Supports for Practice Change</u>

DCS embedded its values, principles and the core skills through a sequencing of supports to staff. Supports included:

- **Introduction of Practice Model and reform vision to staff in local offices and service providers**

  The DCS "Practice Model Manager" traveled through-out the state presenting an overview of the practice model (mission, vision, values and

skills) and desired outcomes (10 "practice indicators"). Specific Expectations were developed for all levels of management from the Executive Team through Supervisors and other positions identified to assist with the identified Practice Model process. Regional Managers discussed role expectations in the change process with all affected individuals. These changing role expectations were very basic descriptions of what was expected of each staff member in the process of learning and practicing new skills.

- **Training for all staff on the 5 core skills: Engaging, Teaming, Assessing Planning and Intervening**

  DCS trained all caseworkers, supervisors and managers on the five core skills. In total, training was 11 days of over a 2 ½ year period. To date, over 2000 child welfare staff have been trained. This training has been provided by DCS/Indiana University Partnership trainers who were initially trained by the Child Welfare Policy & Practice Group. Detailed curriculums have been developed for each of the identified core areas and have also been incorporated into all New Worker Training.

- **Training and support for Supervisors**

  DCS developed and trained all supervisors on the supervisory skills necessary to support case managers' practice in the practice model. This training was provided by DCS Peer Coach Consultants who were trained by the Child Welfare Policy & Practice Group.

  DCS has also provided regular monthly support to Supervisors in a group meeting format through central office staff person with expertise in clinical supervision practice.

- **Coaching for all staff on child & family teaming (skills and process)**

  DCS provided individual coaching to all caseworkers, supervisors and managers on team meeting coordination and facilitation. This coaching involved modeling, observing and providing feedback over the course of several co-led child and family team meetings. The coaches were case managers or supervisors from each office who received special training to coach their peers and were temporarily relieved of some of their normal responsibilities.

- **Quality Service Reviews to provide regular practice improvement feedback**

  This review process assesses the quality of case practice and corresponding status of the children and family. The review occurs for each region in the state every 18 months. It provides case workers and supervisors individualized feedback on case practice strengths and weaknesses. It also provides managers and staff a larger, aggregated assessment of case practice in their region.

Many regions have also begun a “mini-QSR” process that utilizes the quality services review assessment tool to provide staff more informal feedback on the case practice improvement areas and strengths.

Other Statewide Supports:

- Creation of flexible services for families
- Policy changes which support and promote the team meeting process
- Outcomes-focused strategic planning by regional managers
- Improvements to the state’s information system, including opportunity to note team meeting occurrence
- Updated position profiles and staff performance measures