



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

Information Packet

Quality Assurance Systems in Child Welfare

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning

A Service of Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

By Teija Sudol, MSW Intern

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129 East 79th Street • New York, NY 10021
TEL 212/452-7053 • FAX 212/452-7475
www.nrcfcppp.org

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Summary

In the past decade, the quality assurance function in child welfare agencies has moved from mere compliance monitoring of case records to continuous quality improvement systems that assess information on quality and implement the necessary changes (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, 2002). Broader in scope, the goal of continuous quality improvement systems is to assess child welfare practice, outcomes, and compliance, to use data and results to guide and change policies and practices, and to include a variety of internal and external stakeholders in the quality improvement process.

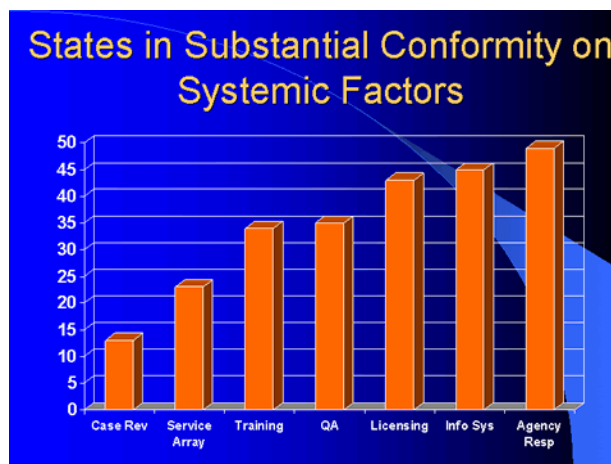
Mandated through federal laws and regulations, states are required to develop and implement a five-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) in order to receive funds under the Title IV-B. As part of the CFSP, each state must describe their quality assurance system and how they will improve child welfare practices when needed. State-level quality assurance systems are monitored through the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) as one of the seven systemic factors assessed. The first round of CFSR took place in 2001-2004, and the second began in 2007 and will be completed in 2010. To better prepare for the CFSR process, many states have refocused their individual quality improvement efforts to parallel the federal reviews.

The Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS) supports the quality improvement efforts of the states' child welfare agencies by providing information through online publications, trainings, and technical support services. Additionally, the Children's Bureau funds seven national resource centers, of which the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement specializes in quality assurance and improvement issues.

Through continuous quality improvement efforts at both the state and federal levels, child welfare agencies can continue their efforts to achieve the shared goal of improving outcomes for children and families on an ongoing basis.

Facts & Statistics

- A quality assurance system that develops and implements the standards for quality service delivery is required by federal law and evaluated in the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR).
- Quality assurance efforts are moving from compliance monitoring to continuous quality improvement (CQI) systems.
- Program improvement planning should be an integral part of the strategic planning process in child welfare agencies.
- Suggested national standards for quality assurance systems can be obtained from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Council on Accreditation of Services for Children and Families (COA) or National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA).
- According to the findings in the initial 52 CFSRs, 35 states achieved substantial conformity on the systemic factor #3, quality assurance.
- The initial CFSRs also showed that there is a relationship between ratings of substantial conformity on the two systemic factors, Service Array and Quality Assurance, and substantially achieved ratings for Well Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs).



Source: Findings From the Initial Child and Family Service Reviews 2001-2004
(<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/results/>)

Policies & Legislation

Federal law requires public and private child welfare agencies to develop and implement standards that ensure the delivery of quality services. Furthermore, federal regulations require states to outline their quality assurance systems assessing the services delivered in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). As one of the seven systemic factors in the CFSR, quality assurance is evaluated at the state level focusing on each state's standards and QA systems.

471(a)(22) of the Social Security Act

"In order for a State to be eligible for payments under this part, it shall have a plan approved by the Secretary which provides that, not later than January 1, 1999, the State shall develop and implement standards to ensure that children in foster care placements in public or private agencies are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children." http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0471.htm

45 CFR 1357.15(u)

"The State must include in the CFSP a description of the quality assurance system it will use to regularly assess the quality of services under the CFSP and assure that there will be measures to address identified problems." http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2008/octqtr/pdf/45cfr1357.15.pdf

45 CFR 1355.34(c)(3)

"Quality assurance system: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care placements are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children (section 471(a)(22)) and is operating an identifiable quality assurance system (45 CFR 1357.15(u)) as described in the CFSP that: (i) Is in place in the jurisdictions within the State where services included in the CFSP are provided; (ii) Is able to evaluate the adequacy and quality of services provided under the CFSP; (iii) Is able to identify the strengths and needs of the service delivery system it evaluates; (iv) Provides reports to agency administrators on the quality of services evaluated and needs for improvement; and (v) Evaluates measures implemented to address identified problems." http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2008/octqtr/pdf/45cfr1355.34.pdf

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement lists other related quality assurance requirements in its 2002 publication, "A Framework for Quality Assurance in Child Welfare" (<http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/OA.pdf>). In addition, the online Child Welfare Policy Manual (CB/ACF/HHS) has a useful Q&A section in part 5.1 Monitoring, Child and Family and Services Review (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/index.jsp).

Best Practices and Model Programs

A group of child welfare experts convened by Casey Family Programs and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement developed a continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework for child welfare practice (2005). The key components of the suggested framework are:

1. Organizational culture that supports and actively promotes CQI
2. The agency-adopted and specific outcomes, indicators, and practice standards that are grounded in the agency's values and principles
3. Training for agency leaders, staff, children, youth, families, and stakeholders in the specific skills and abilities that are needed to participate actively in CQI
4. Qualitative and quantitative data and information from and about children, youth, families, and staff that agencies collect
5. Review, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data by staff, children, youth, families, and stakeholders to inform agency practices, policies, and programs
6. Use of CQI results to improve policies, practices, and programs by agencies

The first round of Child and Family Service Reviews that was completed in 2004 found promising approaches in certain states. The following link has a full list of these states and topic areas:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/promise/>. Some of the model programs included:

- **California:** Child and Family Review System strengthens the accountability system used to monitor and assess the quality of services provided. The C-CFSR maximizes compliance with the federal CFSR. It draws from Outcome and Accountability County Data Reports, County Peer Quality Case Reviews, County Self-Assessments, County System Improvement Plans, and State Technical Assistance and Monitoring.
- **Missouri:** The State partners with community stakeholders to conduct Quality Assurance Practice Development Reviews (PDR), which mirror the federal CFSR. The findings are presented in a community meeting twice a year to encourage community input and feedback.

- **North Carolina:** The North Carolina Division of Social Services began the Biennial Reviews in 1992. Redesigned in 2001, the new review process was created to fully comply with the federal CFR. Much like in the federal reviews, the county and DSS staff are paired to review cases using interviews, review instruments, and stakeholder surveys. The report provides a starting point for quality improvement for counties in those outcome areas that substantial conformity was not achieved.
- **Washington:** The Washington Quality Assurance System reviews a large number of cases to meet the Council on Accreditation and Program Improvement Plan requirements. Combining Central Case Review Team reviews and peer reviews, a total of 1,200 to 1,500 cases are reviewed each year. The bi-annual reviews are done using an automated tool with about 50 questions that provide ratings on 20 of the 23 federal CFR items. Information obtained from case records is supplemented by interviews.

Online Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>) is a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and provides access to print and electronic publications, websites, and online databases covering a wide range of topics, including a wealth of information about systemic issues, such as quality improvement in child welfare.

Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm>) provides information about monitoring requirements for child welfare agencies, as well as procedural details for Child and Family Services Reviews.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (www.nrcoi.org) is one of seven national resource centers (NRC) funded by the Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS), and provides free, on-site training and technical assistance (T/TA) to State and Tribal child welfare agencies with the Child and Family Services Reviews, including strategic planning, quality improvement and evaluating outcomes.

Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services

(<http://www.uky.edu/SocialWork/qicpcw/>) is a part of the Children's Bureau's Quality Improvement Center initiative to promote development of evidenced-based knowledge about effective child welfare practices, and to communicate it in a way that guides practice at the direct service level.

National Center for Field Consultation (<http://www.cwla.org/consultation/qualityassurance.htm>) at the Child Welfare League of America assists organizations with the creation and implementation of continuous quality assurance programs and provides an array of training and technical assistance that includes assisting organizations in assessing all related continuous quality improvement elements.

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