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WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & AND FAMILIES

Designing a Telework Strategy to Improve Retention

Washington Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) is a state-operated child welfare system. Child Welfare Field Operations is divided into six regions and employs approximately 2,200 people who are responsible for the direct service to children and families with active child welfare cases. In 2017, DCYF had an annual external [turnover rate](#) of about 26%. They applied to be a QIC-WD site with the goal of strengthening their child welfare workforce.



When DCYF started working with the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD), an Implementation Team was established to participate in an extensive [needs assessment](#) process, determine an intervention, and support implementation. The needs assessment took many months and included surveys and a review of Human Resources data. The team considered a rewards and recognition program and a telework intervention.

A number of factors led to the Implementation Team selecting telework as the intervention, including : (1) surveys showing staff dissatisfaction with the limited mobility of their work, (2) an executive order from the governor that required state agencies to increase the mobility and flexibility of work, and (3) interest in expanding on the agency's 2018 experience with piloting telework for some intake staff. A [theory of change](#) was ultimately developed to connect telework with retention.

The telework policy included an employee [self-assessment](#) to help workers identify if alternative work arrangements are a good fit for them and a [Telework Program Handbook](#), which contains clear parameters and expectations to guide telework. For example, prior to COVID-19, there were specific eligibility criteria and limitations on the number of telework days per week.

As laid out in their [logic model](#), the telework intervention was [designed](#) to determine if a telework program was effective in improving workforce outcomes among workers and supervisors.

DCYF began to [implement](#) telework in 2019. They deployed an automated web-based application and agreement system that allowed applicants to submit and route the necessary

This [video](#) highlights the experience of DCYF who were involved in telework.



forms for approval. Eligible staff had to have been with the agency for at least 18 months, been in their current position for at least three months, and get supervisor approval to telework.

Telework was rolled out and a cluster randomized control trial was used to [evaluate](#) the impact of the intervention. Staff in 25 offices were eligible to telework (treatment group) and staff in 25 other offices were used as a comparison group. When COVID-19 hit in 2020, the experimental offices had up to 7-10 months of telework experience. [Key findings](#) include: no significant differences in turnover and intent to leave among those who were in the treatment and control offices. There were also no significant differences between treatment and control offices in any of the following quantitative measures: job involvement, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, perceived workload, work focus, stress (work and personal), burnout, or secondary traumatic stress. Administrative data showed one significant impact on productivity; staff in treatment offices had significantly higher attempted visit percentages on their caseloads than staff in control offices. However, the differences in completed visits and no visits were not significantly different between the groups. In a qualitative study of people who teleworked as part of the intervention or due to COVID:

- 94 of 97 people interviewed mentioned benefits of telework
- 39 of 97 thought telework improved their job satisfaction and organizational commitment
- 77 of 97 said telework increased their productivity and/or focus

When COVID hit, telework eligibility requirements were dropped. It is now more flexible and being implemented throughout the state.

All Washington [resources](#) summarized here can be found on the [QIC-WD website](#).