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## Louisiana Progress Update- Redesigning the Child Welfare Worker Position (Blog Post)

Posted on July 30, 2020

When there is a high workload, there is often a lot of turnover and when there is a lot of turnover the remaining workforce has an even greater workload. The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) was all too familiar with this negative cycle and the impact it was having on its child welfare workforce. When DCFS became a Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD) site, they were ready to make a significant change to their workforce operations. After a thorough needs assessment, DCFS decided to work with the QIC-WD on a job redesign project to strengthen their child welfare workforce. This post summarizes what DCFS has accomplished and learned during the initial roll out of a job redesign intervention. Evaluation of the ongoing implementation continues.

Three parishes are in the job redesign project. The parish offices involved in the intervention used to include three distinct programs: Child Protective Services (CPS), Family Services (FS), and Foster Care (FC). The redesign included combining the CPS and FS programs into [prevention teams](#) and restructuring the FC program as the [permanency team](#), with pairs of workers sharing a caseload so that one could be dedicated to working with the child while the other worked with the parents. In addition, a new position, the Child Welfare Team Specialist (CWTS), was added to both types of teams to take on many of the administrative tasks, previously borne by case workers.

Job Redesign	
Prevention Teams	Permanency Teams
Child Welfare Team Specialists (CWTS)	

This intervention required significant buy-in from both internal and external stakeholders, including the workers and supervisors involved in the new teams. More than 80% of the staff reported they were ready for change, however, change management is a significant task when people's jobs are changing. For example, one supervisor shared, *"One of my biggest concerns about the job redesign initially was my fear of having to supervise someone else in addition to the other five workers. I didn't know how this person was going to fit into the newly formed team..."* Similarly, a permanency team member stated, *"When I heard the term 'job redesign' I thought of job cuts and being laid-off."* The implementation team held a series of kick-off events to help staff prepare for the new structure. That same permanency team member reported that, *"Once I attended the kickoff at State Office back in March 2019, I was able to get a better understanding..."*

Preparing the workforce for change was the first step. In addition to building buy-in from existing staff, an onboarding program was created for the new CWTS. This position was established to decrease the time case workers were spending on administrative tasks such as scanning documents, requesting progress reports, making referrals, sending clients for drug screens, arranging transportation, delivering court reports, and inputting data into the computer system. Team specialists had to be hired and trained, but they also had to be integrated into teams and trust had to be built among team

members. Significant training was provided to prepare all workers, supervisors and managers who would be involved in the new team structure.

The second step was to keep the intervention participants excited and informed about the initiative. Implementation supports such as, team building exercises, a community of practice, a team for troubleshooting, coaching support, and observations were done to aid the redesigned units and continue to build buy-in among existing staff. Project leadership also gave “shout outs” to highlight the work of intervention participants and, after COVID-19, moved many team meetings to a virtual platform, and used newsletters and virtual stories to share implementation progress and successes.

The QIC-WD held focus groups to gather feedback from teams involved in the redesign. Early findings include:

- Caseworkers report **less job-related stress**
- **Families are more engaged** and getting services faster
- Staff has **better morale**
- Some **workers struggle with “letting go”** of responsibilities that were previously theirs
- Different **work styles and personalities can challenge the effectiveness of some teams**



The implementation team found that hiring individuals to fill the CWTS position has sometimes been challenging. Some teams struggled with team cohesion and trust. The implementation team provided additional supports around teaming and used community of practice calls to encourage CWTSs to be proactive in demonstrating how they could help the team. These efforts helped develop unit cohesion although some situations necessitated staffing adjustments.

The QIC-WD will study the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing the three parishes implementing the job redesign with the six parish offices that were chosen to serve as a comparison group. A time study is also underway by the QIC-WD. Early findings from the time study indicate the caseworkers are spending less time on administrative tasks and more time with families. This held true for workers in the prevention and permanency units, however, it happened more quickly among those in prevention units.

The project team hopes that the redesign will lead to achievable workloads for all team members. One participant reported, *“Having the redesign creates so much support for our families, support for our team members, and support to me as a supervisor. More eyes and perspectives have been great to bring to the table to provide permanency for our children.”* The project hopes to answer questions about staff workloads, the effects

of different unit structures, roles, and responsibilities on the job, the effects of the amount of work and other job factors on staff and the effects of staff turnover on child and family outcomes. Additional data collection and analyses are underway and include another round of the time study, case reviews, and an examination of state administrative data.