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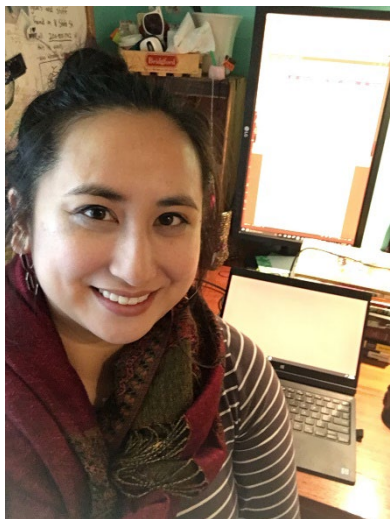
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Washington Progress Update – Telework in Action (Blog Post)

Posted on April 2, 2020



The vast majority of the U.S. workforce (80%) says they would like to telework at least part-time, according to research by [Global Workplace Analytics](#). Although not all jobs are conducive to telework, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) is working with the QIC-WD to design, implement, and research the impacts of telework as a strategy to support and retain the child welfare workforce. Implementing telework is more complicated than giving staff a laptop and a cell phone and telling them to check in with their supervisor. This post summarizes what actions DCYF is taking to implement telework and some early lessons learned.

One of the first questions the team addressed was, “Who can telework?” DCYF determined that only permanent staff who had worked in Child Welfare Field Operations for at least 18 months and within their current position for 3 months would be eligible for the telework program. The target group for teleworking is frontline caseworkers and supervisors, but other DCYF staff are also eligible to apply to telework. The next question was “When can employees telework?” It was decided that eligible employees could select up to two days per week to telework and that the days needed to be fixed to help manage daily business needs. The third key question in designing this intervention was, “How can employees telework?” In previous telework pilots in the state, employees were required to have a separate office with a locking door to secure the privacy of sensitive information. However, that is not a requirement for this telework implementation. All DCYF workers have an agency-issued laptop or tablet and an iPhone to support their work, but they provide their own internet access and any additional hardware such as larger monitors or keyboards. Staff have the option of teleworking from home or another state office. DCYF also worked closely with their information technology (IT) department to ensure a virtual private network (VPN) is available to support teleworking.

The implementation team designed a two-step process through which eligible workers could apply. The first step is a Telework Application where workers are asked to consider where they would telework and which day(s) they would request to telework. As part of this first step, applicants are to read the [telework handbook](#) and conduct a [self-assessment](#) to help them think through whether they are a good fit for

teleworking. The second step is a Telework Agreement (between the worker and the agency) that specifies telework expectations and necessary supports.

As of December 2019, nearly 400 workers applied for telework. Most people who applied to telework in the first months of the initiative elected Wednesday (41%), followed by Monday (38%), Friday (31%), and Thursday (30%) (note that workers were not limited to selecting only one day). Most people opt to work from home only one day per week. This is, in part, due to necessary appearances in courts, visits to see children and families, and the pre-existing schedule of supervisory and team meetings.

The telework initiative is still being studied in Washington, yet some early lessons have been learned by the DCYF and QIC-WD team during the initial period of implementation:

1. A **telework handbook** was created to support workers, and anecdotal feedback indicates it is a valuable resource for staff.
2. Supervisors and staff are reporting a perceived **increase in productivity**. They find that they get more done (e.g., writing reports) at home than they did in the office.
3. Staff value greater **flexibility with their time**. For example, one teleworker reported that she can now put her kids on the school bus in the morning on days she is teleworking, which she was previously unable to do due to her commute to work.
4. The QIC-WD team created tracking and data visualization tools to report on key aspects of implementation. These tools have helped the implementation team to **use data throughout implementation and to support data-driven decision making**. As an example, the Telework Dashboard highlighted that a significant portion of applicants completed the first step (application) but not the second step (agreement) of the telework process. The project leads therefore **streamlined** the process for future applicants to ensure telework agreements were approved before the workforce began teleworking.
5. **Human Resources and IT are essential partners** with child welfare leaders in rolling out a telework initiative for child welfare workers.

The QIC-WD is examining the impact of telework on worker retention, a variety of shorter-term outcomes related to employee satisfaction, and longer-term impacts on child and family outcomes. Different locations in Washington are implementing telework over time to study its impact on the workforce. All the DCYF offices will be able to participate in telework by the end of 2020 and the study will continue until 2021.

Note: This blog was drafted before the COVID 19 outbreak in March 2020. Like other child welfare agencies across the nation, DCYF has modified the telework application and agreement process to facilitate more staff being able to work from home.