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EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS

Onboarding



The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) is a federally-recognized tribe. The Family Safety Program (FSP) is the child welfare program that serves the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, under the tribal Division of Public Health and Human Services. FSP was established in 2015 with around 10 staff members and has grown to about 60 staff, all located in one office in Cherokee, North Carolina. Since FSP was a relatively new

agency when they began working with the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD), turnover had not been a significant problem, however, vacancies were a challenge. In October 2017, seven of the 25 allocated FSP social worker positions were vacant, resulting in a 28% [vacancy rate](#) for child welfare staff.

When EBCI started working with the QIC-WD, an Implementation Team was established to participate in a [needs assessment](#) process, determine an intervention, and support implementation. The team identified three areas of need that offered the strongest opportunities for intervention through the QIC-WD project: (1) team cohesion across the various agency units, (2) unhealthy levels of employee stress and work overload, and (3) inconsistent onboarding practices. Following a root cause analysis and [theory of change](#) exercise the Implementation Team decided to focus on onboarding because it addressed multiple needs. There were no existing tribal onboarding programs that EBCI could replicate or adapt so the team [created an intervention](#) from scratch. The intervention was designed to enhance the new hire experience by building: understanding of the agency, their assigned role, and Cherokee history and culture; social connections with colleagues across the agency; and a supportive relationship with their supervisor.

The Implementation Team created an onboarding intervention that was 5-weeks in duration. The [intervention](#) oriented new hires to FSP by:

1. Introducing them to the work conducted by each team unit using a video and by having them shadow staff in each unit to promote a shared understanding of responsibilities and social integration across teams;
2. Conducting a structured, interactive review of FSP's policies and procedures;
3. Using a mock family case to illustrate the full case process; and
4. Offering various activities related to Cherokee culture, historical grief and trauma, and culturally sensitive practice, including implicit bias training, a tour of a local museum, and a meeting with a cultural ambassador.

This [video](#) highlights the experience of workers, supervisors, and leaders who speak to the importance of cultural understanding and a consistent onboarding process.



Two manuals were developed to support the onboarding process: (1) the Supervisor Manual to provide guidance to the supervisor on how to assist their new hire and (2) the Employee Onboarding Manual. These manuals guided weekly supervisory meetings and help build agency buy-in, relationships, and understanding, as laid out in their [logic model](#).

The QIC-WD [evaluation](#) team studied this intervention using surveys, interviews, and focus groups to understand implementation and early outcomes. The evaluation [found](#) that onboarding participants reported a more developed understanding of Cherokee history and culture compared to

employees hired before the intervention. Additionally, onboarding participants experienced better integration across units, and gained greater clarity of their workforce roles and responsibilities. The [organizational socialization](#) measures—people, politics, history, and organizational goals and values—were slightly higher for the new employees who went through the onboarding process than other employees. Job satisfaction and intent to stay measures were also higher for the onboarding participants than other employees. The employees who participated in the onboarding process were also less likely to say they intended to look for a new job in the next year and they reported higher levels of supervisor support, compared to other employees. While these measures are encouraging, this was a very small study and longer-term impacts should be measured (e.g., impacts on job satisfaction & retention).

EBCI intends to continue to use its onboarding program to foster connections, provide role clarity, and build an understanding of culture and historical trauma. They will work to refine the process but are encouraged by the short-term outcomes and the positive feedback from the workers and supervisors who participated in the program. Onboarding is important because new employees need to begin the journey of obtaining valid and relevant information about the Tribe and understand the operations of the agency.

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