

# Training **MATTERS**



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- NC Division of Social Services
- NC Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine

### We Want to Hear from You!

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## In Pursuit of Better Outcomes

# Putting CQI in NC's Child Welfare Toolbox

In recent years, the federal Children's Bureau and many practitioners have embraced the concept of using outcome measurement to help child welfare agencies make a difference in families' lives.

At the same time, there has been a growing awareness that in order to help families in the most effective and sustainable way, we need to apply strategies and tools that have not always been seen as part of the traditional social work toolbox.

Continuous Quality Improvement is one of the most important of these "non-traditional" social work tools.

### What is it?

CQI, simply put, is "an ongoing process by which an agency makes decisions and evaluates its progress" (Watson, 2005).

In an outcomes-focused agency, staff and community partners use a standard model to analyze data, develop goals and action steps, and track progress. The figure in the next column depicts the 4-step CQI process model North Carolina has adopted.

### North Carolina's CQI Model



### REAP is CQI

REAP (Reaching for Accountability and Excellence in Practice) is our state's model for creating an achievement-focused child welfare system. REAP includes a CQI approach done in partnership with DSS staff, community partners, and the families receiving services. (For more on REAP, see the box below).

### Focus on Implementation

Moving an entire system towards a new approach takes time and a clear focus on supporting change. REAP has

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## Quick Profile of REAP

**Mission:** Create achievement-focused child welfare culture that includes:

- Sharing accountability for reaching core achievements
- A data-driven, results-oriented CQI approach
- Engaging partners to assess community's needs and build on its strengths
- Continuously improving achievements using best practices, technical assistance, and training

**Current REAP Pilot Counties:** Craven, Cumberland, Hoke, Pender, Pitt, Scotland, Union, Wilson

### Key Components

- Focus on a set of core child welfare achievements (outcomes)
- Counties track progress on outcomes using monthly data report
- County Self-Assessment: A new approach to the biannual review
- County Achievement Plan: Developed with community partners; includes actions steps to improve selected outcomes
- Division of Social Services provides technical assistance and support based on county achievements and self-assessment

# Putting CQI in NC's Toolbox Continued from page 1

looked to the field of implementation science for guidance. Implementation is defined as a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions (NIRN, 2012).

Years of research tell us that there are specific **implementation drivers** that determine whether a new model will be successfully adopted and make a difference in agency outcomes (Fixsen et al., 2009). Staff training and supervision, leadership, and effective community partnerships are all implementation drivers.

## Promoting a "Learning Culture" in Pilot Counties

The NC Division of Social Services offers REAP pilot counties an array of training opportunities. The trainings are designed to bolster an agency's capacity to assess and build implementation drivers at the local level.

For example, agency leadership and culture are critical factors in successful change efforts. In particular, agencies with a "learning culture" are most likely to be successful in implementing new approaches. A learning culture is one which values curiosity and critical

thinking, and which empowers all staff—management to front-line workers—to be leaders and innovators.

Implementation science also tells us that to improve outcomes, front-line staff must develop new skills and approaches (Fixsen et al., 2009). That's why supervisors are a key intervention point for CQI efforts—they're the ones responsible for continually assessing and developing workers' skills.

To support supervisors and REAP implementation, in pilot counties North Carolina is focusing on building coaching skills and other supervisory competencies. **CQI and the CFSR**

The Children's Bureau sees CQI as a critical component for each state's child welfare system. According to a recent Information Memorandum ([http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws\\_policies/policy/im/2012/im1207.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2012/im1207.pdf)), the next round of Child and Family Services Reviews is likely to include an assessment of each state's CQI system.

Fortunately, because of REAP, North Carolina is well positioned to show progress in this area. With training and support from federal, state, and county resources, even

## Why Does CQI Matter?

At times child welfare agencies make a huge effort to help families, but to no avail. CQI is founded on the idea that before we jump to solutions, we must first understand the problem. Only then can we target our intervention in the most effective way.

For example, rather than doing ten new things that might improve time to permanency, an agency should figure out which children are most likely to remain in care the longest, and why.

With this information, we can select just one or two interventions to help that specific group of children.

Although this process takes a bit longer on the front end, it saves time and resources and is more likely to actually improve outcomes.

data-shy child welfare practitioners can add CQI to their toolkit for helping families.

## References

- Fixsen, D. L., et al. (2009). Core implementation components. *Research on Social Work Practice, 19*(5), 531-540.
- National Implementation Research Network. (2012). *Implementation defined*. Chapel Hill, NC: FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH. <http://bit.ly/PwTEAg>
- Watson, P. (2005). *Using CQI to improve child welfare practice: A framework for implementation*. Portland, ME: Casey Family Programs and NCROI. <http://bit.ly/T2qFuw>

## CQI Learning Resources for Agencies

- **Becoming an Achievement-Focused Child Welfare Agency.** Offered by the NC Division of Social Services in partnership with the Jordan Institute for Families at UNC-CH School of Social Work, this 3-day classroom course is open to REAP pilot counties. In it, county teams assess their readiness for CQI, practice using the 4-step CQI model, and practice accessing data from the Division's Management Assistance Site and Data Warehouse. To sustain CQI efforts, a one-day follow-up training, **Advanced Data Skills**, develops higher level abilities in using and sharing data.
- **Coaching Skills** (for supervisors). Offered by the NC Division of Social Services, this 2-day course develops REAP pilot county supervisors' ability to coach their work-

ers to master new practice and critical thinking skills. Participants make the connection between sustainable skill development and improved outcomes for families. An advanced train-the-trainer course develops Master Coaches who can disseminate effective supervisory skills throughout county DSS agencies.

- **Results-Oriented Management in Child Welfare.** This free online course from the University of Kansas offers 21 self-paced modules that build skills in understanding data, using it as a supervisory tool, and selecting evidence-based programs based on your agency's outcomes and goals. Participants can view and download any of the modules and materials at any time and in any order. Available at <https://rom.socwel.ku.edu/ROMTraining/>

- **Getting to Outcomes: An Approach to Implementing Systemic Change** (3/27/12). This recorded webinar from the National Resource Center on Organizational Improvement reviews a 10-step model for creating sustainable change within an agency, with lessons learned from a state that has implemented the model. Materials for this and other events are available online at [www.nrcoi.org/tele\\_detail.htm#032712](http://www.nrcoi.org/tele_detail.htm#032712)
- **Using CQI to Improve Child Welfare Practice: A Framework for Implementation.** This publication from Casey Family Programs and the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement explains a basic 4-step CQI model developed for child welfare. Online at <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/CQI-Framework.pdf>