

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

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This publication for child welfare professionals is produced by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the University of North Carolina School of Social Work.

In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation, only to enhance them.

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North Carolina's New Plan to Strengthen Child Welfare



States are required by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to develop a Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), which is a five-year strategic plan that sets forth the vision and goals to be accomplished to strengthen the state's child welfare system. The CFSP aligns and consolidates plans for multiple programs that serve children and families, as well as older youth and young adults formerly in foster care, to ensure a comprehensive approach to

meeting the needs of children and families.

Over the past five years, North Carolina used its 2020-2024 CFSP as a roadmap to help transform its child welfare system. In June, our state submitted a new CFSP to ACF. This plan supports our state's continuing child welfare transformation journey by setting the following goals for the 2025-2029 period:

Goal 1: Strengthen all child welfare staff's ability to assess ongoing safety throughout the child/family's engagement with child welfare services.

Goal 2: Increase access to services for children and their families to keep children in the safest, least restrictive setting.

Goal 3: Develop and support a stable, competent, and professional workforce in child welfare.

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Goal 4: Implement continuous quality improvement.

Goal 5: Improve engagement with stakeholders to ensure services are responsive to the needs of communities and outcomes for children and families are improved.

North Carolina's CFSP is posted on the NC DSS website [HERE](#).

This issue of Practice Notes offers a look at the ways our state is already pursuing goals 1-4 above to strengthen the child welfare system over the next five years. For more on current efforts to achieve Goal 5, engagement, please see the [January 2024](#) issue of Practice Notes.

Assessing Safety Beyond CPS Assessments

Effectively assessing child safety during a CPS assessment is a priority in child welfare. This is why strengthening all child welfare staff's ability to assess ongoing safety throughout the child and family's engagement with child welfare services is the first goal in our state's 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

The CFSP includes partnering with Evident Change to utilize evidenced-based research in the revision of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools. Beginning with intake and moving through permanency planning, these tools support the ongoing assessment of safety. Revised tools will provide policy and guidance on completing the tools and explaining them to those we work with. They are designed to increase accuracy and consistency in practice across the state as well as increase opportunities for engaging stakeholders in safety planning.

The new tools were developed in partnership with all stakeholders in the child welfare system. According to Amanda Hubbard, NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) Safety Policy Consultant, and Jessica Frisina, NC DSS Permanency Planning Consultant, feedback was obtained throughout the revision process from child welfare staff, community and family partners, professionals in other areas that intersect with our work, and subject matter experts.

Ensuring child safety and mediating risk is an expectation throughout a family's involvement with child welfare. North Carolina's Practice Standards define assessment as "gathering and synthesizing information from children, families, support systems, agency records, and persons with knowledge to determine the need for ongoing child protective services and to inform planning for safety, permanency, and well-being." Assessment includes learning from

families about their strengths and preferences and establishing rapport. We engage families, their safety networks, and collaterals to support safety planning. Safety planning happens most effectively with engaged family and clear, consistent communication.



Skills that are important for child welfare staff to use include rapport building (engagement), active listening, clear communication, empathy, knowledge of policy, critical thinking, and solution-focused, family-centered thinking. Strong and effective rapport building upfront ensures better engagement with families throughout the life of the case. Ongoing assessment should always include assessing the impact of a caretaker's behavior on their child. If a parent's behavior does not have a significant impact on the child, it likely will not be identified as a danger indicator on the revised SDM safety assessment tool and there will be no need for a safety plan.

Impact is the harm caused to children because of their caretakers' behaviors. According to Hubbard and Frisina, impact occurs "when a parent's behavior, attitudes, emotions, intent, or circumstances create conditions that fall beyond

mere risk of maltreatment and have become an actual imminent threat to a child’s safety.” Hubbard and Frisina report that the revised SDM tools will help child welfare staff create the behavior-based harm and worry statements used in Safety Organized Practice.

According to the Northern California Training Academy, harm statements and danger statements are “brief, behaviorally-based statements that help families, network members, service providers and staff become very clear about why child welfare is involved with the family and what we are worried may happen in the future” (Cook, 2024).

Regarding harm and danger statements in North Carolina, Hubbard and Frisina say as much as possible, we try to use the family’s own language for these statements. The goal is to write statements using honest, detailed, non-judgmental, and factual language. See the article [“Concepts and Terms to Enhance Assessments of Safety and Risk”](#) in Practice Notes vol. 24, no. 2 for more on harm and danger statements.

Creating a Kin-First Culture

Placing youth with kin and non-relative kin or “kin-like” caregivers is a priority for North Carolina. The NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services (NC DSS) is working to provide better services, support, and engagement with kin to ensure children can be placed with kin when it is appropriate and safe to do so. For example, North Carolina has implemented a partial board payment for unlicensed kinship caregivers to support more kin placements for children in foster care. This will help our state meet Goal 2 of its Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), which is to “increase access to services for children and their families to keep children in the safest, least restrictive setting.”

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care is when adults agree to raise and provide care for a child they know when the child’s parents cannot care for them. It may be needed for a short, long, or even permanent period. A kinship care placement can be the licensed or unlicensed home of a relative or kin-like caregiver.

Completing a thorough assessment may require referrals for and consulting with individuals who have specialized knowledge, certifications, licensure, or training. Mental health and substance use assessments, parenting capacity evaluations, and medication management checks are examples. There is an expectation that through in-home and permanency planning services, child welfare staff will collaborate with other professionals, the family, and the family’s collaterals while continuing to assess safety and facilitate behavior changes.

Hubbard and Frisina emphasize that while CPS in-home and permanency planning services are implemented to reduce safety and risk, services do not equal safety.

For more information on the SDM tools and SOP implementation refer to Evident Change’s [“North Carolina SDM Field and Consistency Testing Instructional Webinar: Assessment and In-Home Services.”](#)



What is Kin-First Culture?

A kin-first culture prioritizes young people’s connections with kin or chosen family to promote a sense of belonging and connection to family history and culture. When the decision is made to remove a child from their home, kin should be the first option for placement (CFP, 2022).

In a kin-first culture, placement with kin is an expectation, not a practice exception or alternative. In such a culture, all children are placed safely with kin who receive caregiver resources and supports. According to Casey

Family Programs (2023), agencies committed to a kin-first approach are:

- centered on the input of the children and their family,
- seek to explore and engage the whole family network, and
- strive to make every child's first - and only - placement with kin.

"In instances when placement with kin is not possible, the search for kin who can provide a safe home or connection for the child should be ongoing and include both maternal and paternal kin" (CFP, 2023).

Important components of a kin-first culture include:

- Leading with a kin-first philosophy.
- Developing written policies and protocols that reflect equity for children living with kin and recognize their unique circumstances. In kin-first systems, policies about diligent search, emergency placement protocols, licensing, training, permanency options, and financial supports speak to the needs and role of kin caregivers.
- Identifying and engaging kin for children at every step.
- Creating a sense of urgency for making the first placement a kin placement.
- Making licensing of kin a priority.
- Creating a strong community network to support kin families.

For more on these components, please refer to "[Creating a Kin-First Culture](#)" from the American Bar Association's Child Law Practice Today (Miller, 2017).

Benefits and Outcomes

A systematic review of more than 100 studies (CFP, 2019) found that when compared with children in non-relative foster care, children in kinship care have:

- More stable placements and greater likelihood of being placed with their siblings.

- Lower rates of re-abuse and institutional abuse.
- Better behavioral, emotional, and mental health (i.e., fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors, better adaptive behaviors, fewer psychiatric disorders).

[Links to Helpful Websites and Resources](#)

- <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/kinshipcare> - For more information and resources regarding kinship/relative care from the NCDHHS.
- <https://www.ffa-nc.org/> - Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is a family-led, nonprofit organization supporting children and youth in foster care and the dedicated families and professionals that care for them.
- <https://fosteringnc.org/kinship-care/> - For more information, the kinship page on the learning site for North Carolina foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers features a collection of courses and other resources of special interest to kinship caregivers.
- <https://www.casey.org/media/Lever-2-Advancing-a-Kin-First-Culture-Discussion-Guide.pdf> - The guide, "Advancing a Kin-First Culture," includes short videos, discussion questions, and key resources and tools for child welfare leaders and stakeholders.
- The federal government recently gave child welfare agencies the option to use kin-specific foster care licensing standards. This will allow more children to be cared for by people they know and love and for those relative caregivers to be financially supported. NC DSS is developing policy and a process for a kin-specific licensure track.
- <https://ncswlearn.org/> - Be on the lookout for a new course for social workers on <https://ncswlearn.org/> called "Kinship Care and Child Welfare". This course will include information and resources, including videos from social workers about what they do to create a kin-first culture.

- Higher likelihood of achieving permanency with their relative caregivers to maintain life-long connections with their family if they are unable to safely return home.

Public-Private Partnerships Support Kin-First Culture

To find out how a kin-first culture is being created by one public-private partnership, Practice Notes staff spoke with Alice Moore, Social Work Supervisor at New Hanover County Health and Human Services, and Amy Lawson, Director of Foster Care for Boys & Girls Homes of North Carolina. Moore and Lawson’s agencies are part of the Kinship Therapeutic Foster Care program, a grant-funded project in which kin and kin-like caregivers receive specialized training and support to become licensed kinship therapeutic foster parents.

Moore and Lawson shared the following strategies and tips for creating public-private partnerships to support a kin-first culture:

- Assess interest, willingness, and capacity at all levels and ask for volunteers if your agency is considering a public-private partnership.
- Begin with brainstorming meetings attended by both agencies to establish a partnership plan, clear roles and expectations, and open communication.
- Establish a small group of 3-4 staff from each agency who can consistently attend meetings; the team lead should be in a middle management position.
- Make sure upper management participates from the outset in messaging to promote kin-first goals and practices.
- Embed the kin-first culture throughout the agency so all staff ask questions about kin in all cases.
- Regularly scheduled check-ins, trust, and open communication help with effective problem-solving, identifying solutions, and moving the work forward.



Alice Moore



Amy Lawson

- Gain the support of your legal team and judges.
- Consider pursuing grants to hire a kinship-specific worker.
- Get kin families into training or provide one-on-one training within a couple of weeks if they express interest in being licensed.

Major impacts of this partnership in New Hanover County cited by Moore and Lawson include the following:

- More children achieving permanence-including teens-who would not have achieved it otherwise.
- Kinship providers have a higher capacity for meeting children’s complex needs.
- More kin families are getting licensed.
- Some kinship providers continue to foster other children even after their relative child or youth reunifies. A number have gone on to be amazing foster parents to non-kin placements.
- Children’s placements are more stable and more family connections are identified.
- Many youth have received support through KinGAP (see below for more about KinGAP).

Kin-First Culture Action Steps

According to NC DSS permanency planning policy (2024), county child welfare agencies must make diligent efforts to identify and locate extended maternal and paternal family members as soon as a county child welfare services agency becomes involved with a child/youth and continue throughout the case (p. 16). These efforts should be made with a sense of urgency to find kin connections. The goal of identifying kin is to promote connections for children and youth and to create more options for support and planning for the family, parents, children, and youth.

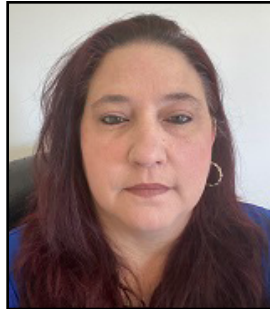
At least once a month, county child welfare workers must ask parents and children about extended family members to learn:

- Their names and when they were last seen by the family,
- Where they are located (including addresses and contact information),
- How the parents and children are in touch with them (e.g., phone calls, Facebook, etc.), and
- What the parents' or children's relationship with them is like (i.e., history with that relative, support that relative may be able to provide, etc.).

Support and Resources

One of the best ways to support kin and kin-like caregivers is to ensure they receive the resources they need. A few helpful resources include:

- [The Kinship Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance Program \(KinGAP\)](#) - KinGAP offers financial assistance and Medicaid for youth who are determined to be in a permanent family setting and unlikely to obtain permanency through reunification or adoption. This is helpful to guardians



Mary Mackins

responsible for the day-to-day care and supervision of these youth.

- [Caring for Our Own](#) - This kinship-specific training curriculum provides families support with the experiences common to kinship care.
- [Know Your Options Resource Guide](#) - This guide for kinship families provides information about foster care, adoption, and guardianship. Empowering kinship caregivers with information about permanency options is an important part of being a kin-first agency.

"It's important that we aim to keep children within their family unit or maintain those connections. Early in the case, we must begin to identify and engage relatives and other natural supports with families and continue throughout the case. It's our responsibility to encourage and support relatives to become a resource and hold ourselves accountable for the outcome of our efforts," Mary Mackins, NC DSS Adoptions Manager.

Homebuilders

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) provides funding to support Goal 2 of North Carolina's CFSP, which is to "increase access to services intended to keep children and their families safe and in the least restrictive setting possible." According to the FFPSA, each state must develop a Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan that identifies evidence-based services that will prevent children from entering foster care. The plan must be submitted to and approved by the Children's Bureau. North Carolina has included five services in its Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan. The first of these, HOMEBUILDERS®, is an intensive family preservation service designed to stabilize crises, mitigate safety concerns, and provide families with the skills, competencies, and resources they need to manage future crises.

In January 2024, regional providers began providing HOMEBUILDERS® services to families with children determined to be candidates for foster care. HOMEBUILDERS® requires mandatory provider participation in training

and technical assistance from the Institute for Family Development (IFD), which developed HOMEBUILDERS®. Their involvement ensures program quality and fidelity. IFD also consults with regional providers in hiring HOMEBUILDERS® staff and determining eligibility for this service. When implemented with fidelity, HOMEBUILDERS® has proven to effectively improve family functioning, reduce unnecessary out-of-home placements, and avoid future incidents of child maltreatment.

Collage of images of parents and children smiling, playing, and lying in the grass

Key components of North Carolina's HOMEBUILDERS® model include:

- Providing crisis intervention, case management, counseling, and life-skills services.
- Being available statewide through regional coverage.
- Providing intensive, short-term services with

24-hour availability for 4-6 weeks.

- Having caseloads of no more than two families at a time per caseworker.
- Providing service delivery in the home or location preferred by the family.

Who is eligible?

HOMEBUILDERS® is for families where children (aged birth through 17 years) are at imminent risk of removal to foster care but can safely remain at home or in a kinship placement if provided preventive services. In the future, adolescents in foster care who are pregnant or parenting will also be eligible for HOMEBUILDERS®.

What is the implementation plan?

The NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) is taking a scaled approach as it implements HOMEBUILDERS® across the state. When county child welfare agencies are selected for implementation they receive training, including on Title IV-E Prevention Services eligibility, child welfare documentation requirements, and the HOMEBUILDERS® referral processes. Counties are selected based on several factors, including their readiness to implement the program and service provider capacity. A regional child welfare prevention specialist from NC DSS and a HOMEBUILDERS® provider deliver a two-hour, in-person training. Upon completion of training, county child welfare staff can make referrals for HOMEBUILDERS®. As of the end of June 2024, more than a third of the state has received training.

HOMEBUILDERS® provider staff are also trained by IFD in model delivery, motivational interviewing, record keeping, and data management. This increases the capacity to deliver the HOMEBUILDERS® service statewide. As of June 2024, three provider organizations have trained 23 staff; additional staff will be trained as they are hired.

To initiate a referral, a CPS in-home services worker or their supervisor calls the HOMEBUILDERS® provider. To confirm the family's eligibility, county staff should be prepared to share information on current safety threats and why the children are at imminent risk of removal from the home.

Initial feedback from county child welfare agencies and HOMEBUILDERS® providers has been positive. County staff report that services are going well. HOMEBUILDERS® services help close cases sooner, meet family safety and well-being needs, and help prevent the need for petitioning court involvement. HOMEBUILDERS® providers report child welfare staff share information promptly, helping families.

Who are the regional providers of HOMEBUILDERS®?

- Regions 1, 2, & 4: Children's Home Society of North Carolina
- Region 3: Crossnore Communities for Children
- Regions 5, 6, & 7: Coastal Horizons Center

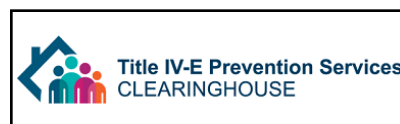
Questions?

For questions regarding HOMEBUILDERS® implementation as well as other services in a region, contact the assigned regional child welfare prevention specialist:

- Region 1 - [Kristy Smith](#)
- Region 2 - [Larissa Berger](#)
- Region 3 - [Nikki Hull](#)
- Region 4 - [Laura Wasson](#)
- Region 5 - [Tonya E. Askew](#)
- Region 6 - [Jiselle Hirsch](#)
- Region 7 - [Nikki Hull](#)

Resources

Click the following links for more about HOMEBUILDERS® and North Carolina's Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan:



Track Training Supports the Child Welfare Workforce

One of the ways the NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) is supporting Goal 3 of NC's CFSP, to "develop and support a stable, competent, and professional workforce in child welfare," is the redesign of track trainings for child welfare staff.

The Track Training Redesign Project, which began in December 2022, is a new approach to ongoing training for the child welfare workforce. Through this project, NC DSS will roll out five track trainings:

1. CPS Intake
2. CPS Assessments
3. CPS In-Home
4. Permanency Planning
5. Foster Home Licensing.

The track trainings will be implemented using an academy training model. An ongoing training needs assessment completed in February 2024 informed this process by identifying essential topics, skills, and behaviors as well as a structure that would best support the learning needs of child welfare staff. Through this assessment process, outdated existing standalone courses were eliminated, some courses were revised and rolled into the new track training, and new courses were developed to meet the needs of child welfare staff. Because the assessment also showed a need to add more skill practice to training, more opportunities for that have been built into the new track training model.

Track trainings are job-specific trainings staff take after they complete pre-service training. These trainings streamline many of the current, standalone 200-level courses into one track per discipline. The intent is to give child welfare staff all the information relevant to their job role in a more comprehensive and effective manner.

The model used for the track trainings is similar to that of the re-designed pre-service. The trainings consist of a combination of asynchronous online learnings, in-person classroom sessions and, in some cases, time back at the office between training weeks. Compared to the current 200-level courses, track trainings are longer, ranging from 5-8 days, and more

comprehensive. They include more opportunities for transfer of learning with supervisor guidance and integrate content related to DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and access) and North Carolina's practice standards.



A lot of forethought has gone into the development of the new track training model. Crystalle Williams, Program Manager of the NC DSS Child Welfare Staff Development Team, has been instrumental in the redesign process. She is optimistic Goal 3 of the CFSP can be achieved by focusing more on practical application and less on the forms and compliance. Her hope is that thanks to track training, the child welfare workforce will be confident in their roles and better prepared to work with families. Mrs. Williams is also hopeful that the new track training will build the capacity of a more stable workforce where child welfare staff feel supported, experience less burnout, and remain in the child welfare workforce.

Timeline and Next Steps

The completion of the track training courses is set for fall 2024, with statewide rollout projected for early 2025. The goal for initial implementation is to hold each training track once a month and increase offerings as training capacity increases. Completion of the track training will be required within 6 months of completing pre-service.

Be on the lookout for an announcement from NC DSS when these courses launch. In the interim, existing 200-level required training for the areas of intake, assessments, in-home services, permanency planning, and licensing services will continue to be offered. To access these courses, please visit [NCSWlearn.org](https://www.ncswlearn.org).

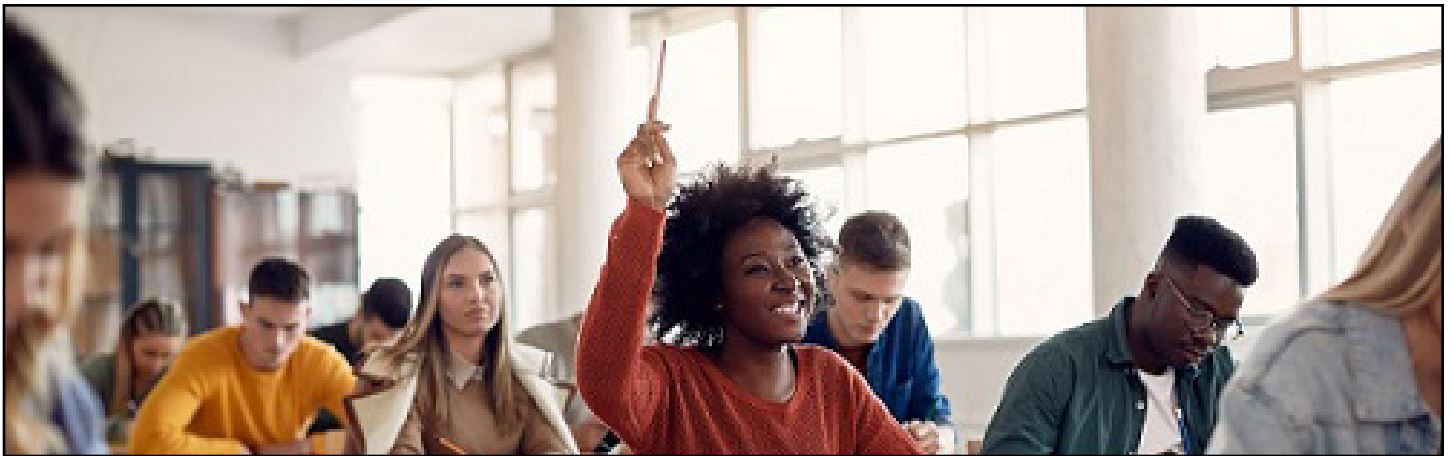
Child Welfare Education Collaborative

Recruiting and retaining a skilled child welfare workforce is a challenge facing most counties in North Carolina. Goal 3 of our state's CFSP, to develop and support a stable, competent, and professional workforce in child welfare, is aimed at addressing this challenge. One strategy to meet this goal is strengthening the Child Welfare Education Collaborative (CWEC) program.

CWEC was established in 1999 to create a pathway for students pursuing bachelor and master of social work degrees to focus on a career in child welfare. Through CWEC, hundreds of students from universities across the state have

How will the stipend program be implemented?

In fall 2024, three universities - Appalachian State, East Carolina, and NC Agricultural and Technical State - will implement a new pre-service curriculum that mirrors the redesigned pre-service for workers. In addition to this new curriculum, these universities will be responsible for vetting applicants, ensuring that students complete all requirements of the CWEC program and complete placements in county child welfare agencies. NC DSS will use this first year as proof of concept to support the expansion of the number of universities able to use this model for CWEC



graduated ready to work in county child welfare agencies, prepared for both the challenges and the rewards of working in our field. While the program has gone through several iterations in the past two decades, feedback from students, universities, and counties showed a desire to reinstate the stipend that provides financial support for students to complete the CWEC program. The NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services (NC DSS) is working to reestablish a model that will allow universities to offer stipends through IV-E funding, making the program more sustainable in the long term.

LaShonda Pickett, NC DSS Workforce Coordinator, recently discussed what the shift back to CWEC stipends means for county child welfare agencies in the coming year.

stipends in future.

What can counties expect from CWEC students once stipends are implemented?

Students who meet all CWEC requirements will be eligible for stipends to assist with the cost of their education. Students receiving stipends will have a one-year work commitment in a county child welfare agency for each year of receiving the stipend. The goal is to create more consistency in the way students receive their pre-service education, so that regardless of where they go to school, they will be ready to fully assume their roles as child welfare staff on day one of employment.

What can counties do to support CWEC students?

Counties should support CWEC students during internships and employment by:

- Providing CWEC interns opportunities in CPS assessments, in-home services, and permanency planning program areas so they will have a well-rounded understanding of the agency.
- Educating staff about CWEC and the roles and responsibilities of county Field Supervisors and Task Supervisors.
- Developing an internal process for screening and selecting interns, including criminal background checks and drug screening.
- Communicating with university liaisons to help identify students strengths, interests, and areas of need.
- Working with universities and students to ensure all components of learning

agreements are completed, including identifying student goals, knowledge gained, and priorities for further development throughout the CWEC training process.

- Supporting students by proactively addressing secondary traumatic stress.
- Giving preference to CWEC graduates when hiring.

CWEC is a key component of building a skilled and committed child welfare workforce, and it will take collaboration between counties, universities, and NC DSS to ensure this program graduates students who are prepared and ready to commit to a career in child welfare.

If you have questions about CWEC, contact LaShonda Pickett at CWEC@dhhs.nc.gov

Regional Meetings Support CQI Implementation

According to the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#), “continuous quality improvement (CQI) systems are frameworks for defining and examining strengths and problems and then testing, improving, and learning from solutions on an ongoing basis”.

Although North Carolina has been focusing on CQI for years, understanding how CQI applies to day-to-day work has remained challenging for many. The bottom line is we all want to improve outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system. Implementing CQI is a way to do this effectively.

While most agencies are engaging in CQI in some way, Goal 4 of North Carolina’s CFSP (“implement continuous quality improvement”) is aimed at universal implementation at all levels - workers, supervisors, agencies, regions, and the state. Structures are already in place to accomplish this goal, including a Statewide CQI Lead, Holly McNeill. Over the last two years, Holly has worked to establish quarterly regional CQI meetings to build CQI capacity in all regions and improve practice.

Regional CQI meetings began in October 2022 and are held in each region once a quarter. Meetings are led by Holly and supported by the regional child welfare specialists. The initial goals

of these meetings were to encourage a regional identity, educate county staff on the CQI cycle, and establish a baseline understanding about using data, including what data is available, how to access it, and how to use it and disseminate it to support practice improvement.

“If we are going to address complex problems, we need to have a diverse set of views on the root cause as well as creative ideas for problem-solving.”

Holly feels these initial goals have been met and that she has seen a change over time in how counties are using meetings effectively. “Teams who attend the regional CQI meetings no longer see CQI as an event, but as a process that they are engaged in all the time,” Holly says. Her hope is that when teams leave these meetings they talk to leadership, staff, and community partners about what they have learned and take at least one step to implement changes that will lead to improvement.

What happens during a regional CQI meeting?

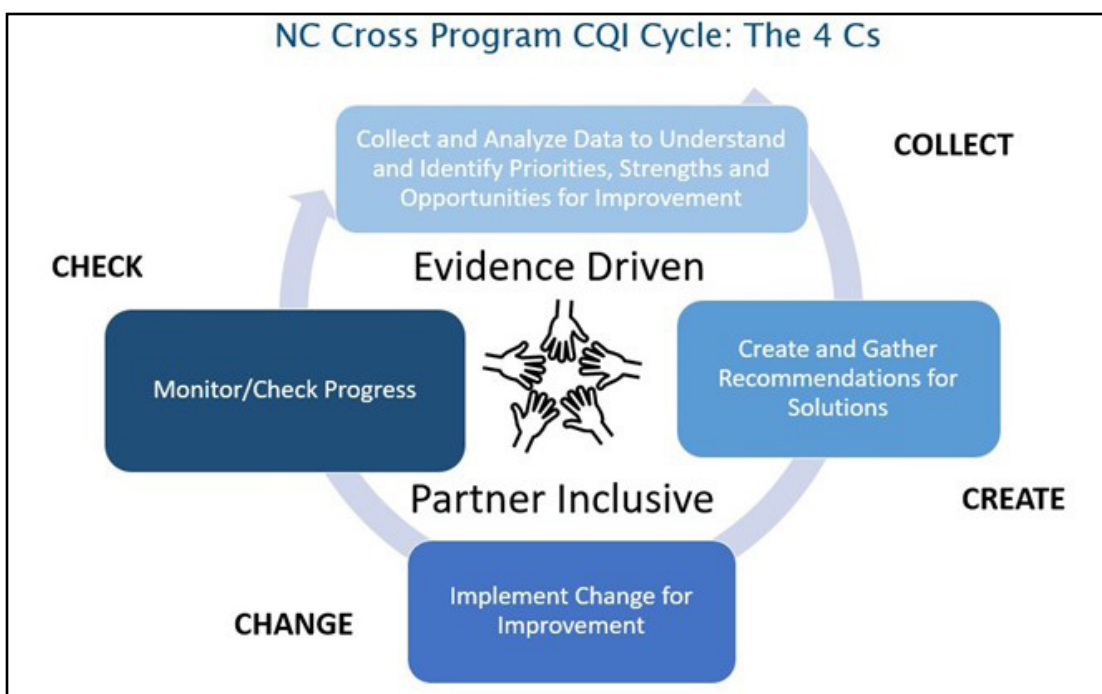
Each county is responsible for sending a team ready to discuss the identified topic for the quarter.

The topic is chosen based on statewide data, issues related to the CFSP goals, and priorities for where the state needs to improve outcomes. Since starting regional meetings, teams have addressed repeat maltreatment, placement stability, quality visits, domestic violence, assessment of safety and risk, kinship placement, and DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility).

Counties bring data that reflects how they are performing in each identified area. They review it before the meeting to identify the root causes of a problem, discuss possible solutions, and create an action plan for implementing change. Counties learn from each other’s experiences, share ideas

getting now, especially in placement stability.” In addition, Holly thinks there has been an increase in comfort with data in general. “Teams have a better understanding of data as a tool and are more willing to look honestly at data in order to understand the problem and make changes.”

In addition, Holly was encouraged when community partners attended quarterly CQI meetings. “When we addressed domestic violence, community partners came and had valuable discussions with county staff about how to support families in their region. It really showed how we must work together to solve complex issues families face.”



Where do we go from here?

Counties typically send CQI or quality assurance staff and supervisors to regional meetings. In some cases, program managers and administrators also attend. While this is a good start, it keeps CQI at the upper levels of agency awareness. Holly believes that “CQI needs to be all-inclusive and not just top-down.” To bring

and strategies, and develop a support network for future resources.

What are some highlights from the meetings so far?

Holly says, “First of all, I think post-COVID, there was a real need for counties to talk to each other again and open lines of communication. It has been great to see counties learning to use each other as resources and be creative about working together.”

Another success has been around data quality. “We have done a good job helping counties see where data errors come from. We have seen an impact on the quality of data we are

CQI to all levels, Holly would like more individuals with lived experience, community partners, and line staff to attend. “If we are going to address complex problems, we need to have a diverse set of views on the root cause as well as creative ideas for problem-solving.”

Holly hopes line staff will become more involved in the CQI process. There are many ways to bring the CQI model to the work we do every day. Supervisors can use CQI when looking at documentation issues, staffing, and personnel needs. Workers can use CQI when looking at their caseloads or even on one case. Holly says supervisors can encourage workers to review their data: “How often are you seeing kids? How often

are you seeing families? Are we doing what we set out to do?" Looking at data more often would help workers see the root causes of ongoing challenges and find better solutions.

If you are interested in learning more about CQI or attending regional meetings, talk to your supervisor, program manager, or CQI staff to find out about the next scheduled meeting.

For those planning to attend regional CQI meetings, Holly says it is important to prepare in advance. "Look at data and know what is going on in your county that is relevant to the topic, but most importantly come prepared to take action and create a plan to move forward."

Key Questions to Guide the CQI Process

Collect: Identify the problem

- What is the problem I want to solve?
- What factors contribute to this problem?
- What is the root cause?

Create: Research/decide on my solution

- What have we tried? What strategies have been shown to make a difference?
- Will it meet the needs of our target population?
- Will it fit with our agency?
- Do we have the capacity to implement it?

Change: Implement/try my solution

- How will I put the solution into practice?
- What will help me make sure the new practice is used correctly?
- What are some common challenges when trying new practices?

Check: Evaluate my solution

- How will I know if my solution is working?
- What should I do if nothing is improving?
- What are the next steps if things are working?

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