

Frontline Supervision Where The Action Is

"I love my job because it's definitely where the action is! As supervisor, I can influence how my staff serve the families on their caseloads, and I can help offset administrative directives that get in the way of good practice. I try to treat the workers I supervise the way I want them to treat their families. And I like spending time with workers, brainstorming about what could make things better for kids and their parents."

One of the four main strategies of Community Partnerships for Protecting Children is "practice and culture change within the public child protective services (CPS) agency." This is easily said, but not so easily done. In the original four cities where community partnerships are being implemented, frontline supervisors have been identified as critical forces for promoting and sustaining practice change within the agency. This issue of *SafeKeeping* focuses on effective supervisors and quality supervision in CPS. Each article provides the "lessons learned" about supervision in the community partnerships and highlights the work of supervisory "champions." Sharing the wisdom and experience of these practice champions with other supervisors is an important strategy for success in changing the overall culture and practice of CPS agencies.

In the early days of the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative, local and state-level administrators helped promote "best practice" by ensuring that CPS policies were consistent with the partnership approach. But as they began to look for true practice change and better results for children and families, it became clear that good policies and supportive administrators were not enough. Why? Because nearly all CPS agencies have policies requiring workers to identify family strengths and to involve family members in the development of case plans. And nearly all CPS staff members - from top administrators to frontline workers - believe that they are following these policies. A closer look, however, shows that many workers need additional help to learn how to identify strengths within a family and to really include families in developing plans that ensure children are safe and thriving. This mismatch between stated policies and actual practice with families within most CPS organizations prompted the community partnership sites to search for solutions. How could they help frontline workers *really* engage, assess, and include families in the work? One answer is to ensure that frontline supervisors are committed to the practice

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Frontline Supervision

Where The Action Is

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changes being promoted and to arm them with the authority and skills to lead the practice changes within their units.

The recognition of the overwhelming importance of supervisors to implementing community partnerships has produced some important lessons for new communities that are getting started. These include:

- Get frontline supervisors (and workers) involved in the partnership planning from the very beginning. They need to understand what a community partnership is, why it is being implemented, what their role can and should be, and how to communicate practice change expectations to frontline staff.
- Engage supervisors in the “vision” of changed practice by ensuring that they participate in training to improve the skills needed to engage families, assess strengths and needs, and include families (through the use of family team meetings) in the planning process. A supervisor who lacks good engagement, assessment and case planning skills will not be able to promote practice change in frontline staff.
- The CPS system must give supervisors time to work with their staff - being readily available to provide case consultation - “spur of the moment” as well as in regularly scheduled one-to-one reviews. All too often, supervisors are overwhelmed with tasks that are disconnected from the hands-on supervision of workers. To support quality practice, workers must have access to a skilled mentor, and the most likely person to fulfill that role is their supervisor!
- Supervisors who enjoy working with families and children are good role models for workers, making them more likely to forge strong connections with the families and

children they serve. In some community partnerships, supervisors “share” very difficult cases with workers as teaching, learning, and supportive functions.

- When hiring staff, supervisors should select individuals who are likely to embrace the community partnership approach. In one location, employment interviews are being led jointly by a supervisor and parent who had been served by the agency. In the words of one supervisor, “you know pretty quickly not to hire someone if they mainly focus their attention on the supervisor and don’t include the parent.”
- Community partnerships encourage workers to treat families with respect and empathy, recognize their strengths as well as their needs, and individualize case plans. Supervisors who model respect and empathy in their treatment of workers are more likely to have workers who adopt these attitudes and practices with families.

In exit interviews and surveys from across the country, workers say they leave jobs more frequently because of poor supervision and less often because of the difficulties presented by the hard work of protecting children from abuse and/or neglect. Thus, skillful supervision is an important retention tool, helping to maintain an experienced and motivated work force. When asked to describe their best supervisor, workers have said, “She spent a lot of time with me when I was first hired so that I could do the job right.” “He likes the families and kids that we work with and looks for opportunities to go out on cases with his staff.” “She has a great sense of humor and doesn’t take herself too seriously.” “She is always looking at ways to improve how we do our work...she isn’t afraid to learn new things.” “He serves as a buffer between administrative expectations and the demands of our families. He tries to help us keep the focus on the families.”

The community partnership approach requires supervisors to assume new and different frontline roles. Some say that community partnerships help supervisors return to the roles they were meant to have. The table on page 3 contrasts supervisory practices before and after the community partnership approach is embraced by supervisors.

Hats off to frontline supervisors who take the time to do the job right! They make a difference every day in the lives of their workers and in the lives of the families and children being served. Their influence is enormous, and no serious reform effort can succeed without their participation and support. *

The Transformation of Supervisory Practices to Support Community Partnerships

BEFORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS	AFTER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>SUPERVISION GOAL</i></p> <p>Produce competent frontline staff who focus on assisting families to comply with agency-directed plans to keep children safe.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>SUPERVISION GOAL</i></p> <p>Facilitate development of competent frontline staff who will make good decisions and empower families to make good decisions to keep children safe.</p> <p>Identify competence and build skills through observation, interactive supervision, and continuous strength-based feedback to improve outcomes for families.</p> <p>Create a climate of mutual respect, empathy, genuineness, and trust between workers and families.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>SUPERVISORY PRACTICE</i></p> <p>The focus is on caseloads and responding to tasks within time frames.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>SUPERVISORY PRACTICE CHANGE</i></p> <p>The focus is on families and finding realistic solutions that result in good outcomes. Supervisors emphasize the importance of partnering with families and affirm progress and successes.</p>
<p>Supervision occurs only in the office.</p>	<p>Supervisors make home visits with staff to model, observe, and provide the support and feedback that develops skills.</p>
<p>Supervisors are the source of knowledge. Interaction with workers is situational and primarily focused on problem cases or crisis intervention.</p>	<p>Supervisors guide workers on cases, encouraging them to look to each family's experience as a source of knowledge. Regular, scheduled case consultation is used to foster skill development. Supervisors also look for peer learning opportunities.</p>
<p>Interaction with unit members is hierarchical.</p>	<p>Interaction is team-focused and collaborative, providing opportunities for workers to take lead roles in peer learning, develop unique expertise, and become "model" practitioners.</p>
<p>Evaluation is formal, occurs once a year, and is supervisor-directed. The comments and plans look similar from worker to worker.</p>	<p>Evaluation is ongoing, constant, and mutual. The supervisor is a discoverer of individual competencies and strengths in workers. The worker and supervisor jointly plan how to build worker strengths.</p>
<p>Practice development opportunities for supervisors are passed up because "there is no time."</p>	<p>Staying abreast with best practices is a priority so supervisors can more successfully mentor staff.</p>
<p>Supervision suggests that workers are solely responsible for child safety, which places them in the position of making key decisions with little to no input from other professionals or from the families themselves.</p>	<p>Supervision helps workers to engage families as well as formal and informal community partners because "keeping children safe is everybody's business."</p>

Skill Set for Supervisors

Eight supervisors with the collective wisdom of more than 70 years of supervisory experience recently shared their insights about facing challenges, managing resources, juggling demands, and focusing on results. In our conversations with these experts, they identified skills and resources that supervisors need in order to be effective and successful. They agreed that the fundamental competencies include analytical and oral and written communication skills, as well as organizational and time management skills. But beyond the fundamentals is a skill set that helps sustain productivity and quality and builds a supportive work environment. According to the experts, supervisors need skills to:

- manage change;
- coach workers;
- lead teams; and
- negotiate effective resolutions.

SKILLS FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Constant change in the workplace is a reality for many, if not all, agencies. Change can be a challenge as well as an opportunity for growth, and it requires increased flexibility from both staff and supervisors. Change is produced by a range of stimuli – from reform initiatives to drastic budget cuts to new policies and procedures. Supervisors are forced

"Supervisors need to be more flexible with expectations as the environment changes."

John Burke, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
17 years of supervisory experience

to stay abreast of change while assisting their staff in maintaining a sense of balance amidst turmoil. Successful supervisors, in partnership with their staff, set priorities and expectations, clearly communicating how to respond to increased demands. Additionally, supervisors and their teams of workers can jointly define outcomes, establish a timeframe for implementation, and design the steps for achieving results. This provides staff with needed structure and encourages good decisionmaking. Another vital element to managing change is recognizing the impact that a supervisor's attitude and behavior have on staff. Staff are apt to follow the lead of their supervisor, so having a sense of humor in a stressful situation, showing enthusiasm when facing diverse demands, and being respectful and empa-

thetic toward those struggling with changes in their lives can provide good examples of expected behaviors. Both Theresa Pringle of Jacksonville, Florida, and Irene Foster of St. Louis, Missouri, add that some staff need "constant reassurance" to keep their balance in times of change.

COACHING SKILLS

Supervisors can also act proactively to anticipate the demands of change by supporting workers who seek to build new skills and knowledge. Promoting the idea that learning is an ongoing process that extends beyond classrooms and job orientation can create a work environment that values

"A supervisor has to be a teacher and a coach – a teacher in the beginning of the relationship and a coach later on as the worker develops skills."

Alise Barton, St. Louis, Missouri
4 years of supervisory experience

growth and encourages staff to continuously strengthen their practice skills. One important form of support is "coaching and mentoring for positive change," says Shannon McCure of Louisville, Kentucky. Providing recurring time for one-to-one case consultations can facilitate good casework decisions. This time can be tailored for senior staff to provide in-depth support on more complex cases. Supervisors can also provide guidance by highlighting a challenging family situation in a group meeting and having the group develop a creative problem-solving approach to address the needs of the family. Other coaching opportunities can be found in family team meetings: supervisors can co-facilitate meetings with a staff member who is new to the process or supervisors can observe a family team meeting and then take time immediately afterward to debrief with the facilitator and provide constructive feedback. Building on the skills of individuals will motivate and encourage further proficiency. Another avenue for encouraging positive change is to create opportunities for workers to team with a peer who has mastered a particular skill. This "coaching buddy" can focus on mentoring in a specific area and can be a part of the support system that is in place for those struggling with new processes. Identifying coaching buddies can also become a way to publicly recog-

nize and acknowledge proficient workers. Another recommendation is the creation of peer technical assistance networks for supervisors. These networks provide an opportunity for peers to encourage and assist each other, exchange lessons learned and share their expertise. (For more on coaching skills, see "Good Supervisors Can Make Change Happen: Strategies for Success" on page 6.)

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Supervisors can encourage and support greater achievement of staff by leading and promoting teamwork. The experts we interviewed confirmed that a team approach can inspire staff with a commitment and belief that their efforts can make a difference. As a leader, communicating a vision of success is the first step toward creating and sustaining a team. It can reinforce unity during times of change and refocus attention and commitment to the core mission of the agency. Supervisors must maintain a constant level of involvement with their teams. This involvement fosters supportive relationships and better communication. Supervisors as leaders can involve their teams in decisionmaking processes thus leveraging the interest and talent of their staff. Teams can

"Supervisors should promote teamwork."

Irene Foster, *St. Louis, Missouri*
1.5 years of supervisory experience

discuss new ideas, develop specific strategies to address issues, monitor these strategies for results, and adjust them as needed. Acknowledging individuals and teams for their contributions and frequently recognizing good case management "validates and reinforces their work everyday" says Karen Johnson of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Reflecting these successes in the performance evaluation of workers allows for identification of an individual's varied strengths and provides supervisors with an opportunity to identify a new generation of leaders.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS

Our experts also identified negotiation as a "must have" skill for superior supervisors. This skill is necessary when a conflict arises between two workers, a worker and a partner agency involved in a case, or in similar situations that require resolution in a diplomatic manner. "Working with different personalities and egos," says Alise Barton, can be a daily issue and demands patience and strong engagement skills. Supervisors as negotiators can encourage diversity of opinion and honor

"Supervisors are facilitators and mediators for workers."

Marsha Roberts-Blethen, *Louisville, Kentucky*
8 years of supervisory experience

individual perspectives while helping staff stay focused on the tasks at hand. Supervisors can facilitate discussions and meetings to help build agreements, make quality decisions, and create action plans. Negotiation skills are also needed when supervisors act as a "buffer" between management and frontline workers. To facilitate understanding and agreement, supervisors must be able to separate the individual from the problem and deal with the problem on its merits. It means asking the right questions in order to make correct assessments. To find effective resolutions, supervisors must look for shared interests and brainstorm many options.

The supervisors we interviewed had a few general recommendations that others may find useful in building the skill set described here. First, they stressed the importance of supervisors actively "sharing" difficult cases with workers. By teaming with workers on cases, supervisors are able to



continuously enhance their expertise with different case-work situations and interventions, expertise that is particularly helpful when coaching and mentoring staff and understanding the daily pressures that staff face in their jobs. Second, our experts suggested that supervisors need to continually invest time and energy in gaining new skills and knowledge. One particular type of training that experts have found useful is "engagement skills" training that can help supervisors improve their ability to manage difficult workers and identify staff strengths. *

Good Supervisors Can Help Make Change Happen: Strategies for Success

If there is anything the partnerships have learned over the last six years, it is that supervisors and senior agency management play key roles as change agents in promoting, motivating, leading, and affecting change in front line practice. They have also learned how difficult change is when supervisors and managers are not engaged in meaningful ways with their workers.

Good supervisors have tremendous power and influence as skill builders to help workers make individualized engagement and service planning “the norm” – the way business is naturally done with every family. This kind of practice requires that the family and their strengths, as well as their needs, take center stage. Successful supervisors can lead the change by accepting nothing less than family-centered, family-driven services from staff. Workers who see that supervisors are invested in them and families can and do change the way they work. Likewise, supervisors need the support and leadership of senior management to know they can make changes.

The three strategies described below are designed to help supervisors become positive change agents.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE: SHARING CASES AND GOING OUT ON HOME VISITS WITH WORKERS

Workers often face many difficult, multi-problem challenges when they step into a family’s life. It is not possible for supervisors to know the skills of a worker without actually observing them and joining with them in their interaction with families. Going out with workers as supportive consultants has made a tremendous difference in the quality of work with families in the partnerships. It is also a way for supervisors to understand and appreciate what workers face every day, even if they once carried cases themselves. Pauline Grant, a Department of Children and Families supervisor in Jacksonville, Florida stated, “It has built trust, improved practice and given us direction to better support our workers in their very difficult challenges.” Supervisors can share cases with workers not only to maintain their own skills, but also to provide readily available peer support.

Whether the supervisor is sharing cases with workers or not, going out on home visits is a great way to provide support. A few simple questions can help focus the visit and keep the worker thinking in a respectful, family-centered mindset.

Before the visit, the supervisor might ask:

- ✓ “What do you hope to accomplish in partnership with the family?”
- ✓ “What are the risks and safety issues the family needs to address?”
- ✓ “How can I be helpful to you on this visit?”

After the visit, the supervisor might ask:

- ✓ “Which parts of the visit would the family say were most helpful and made a difference?”
- ✓ “What progress has the family made since your last visit?”
- ✓ “What are the next steps for you and for the family?”
- ✓ “In what ways can I be helpful to you with this family?”

“Teaming” and partnership between workers and supervisors provides an opportunity to compliment workers on their skills and to provide “on-site” feedback on opportunities for improvement.

BEING A ROLE MODEL AND SUPPORTING FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS

Supervisors can be strong role models when they are actively participating in family team meetings. Patrick Fitzgibbon, a supervisor in Saginaw, Michigan, regularly facilitates and participates in family team meetings. He sees his role as reinforcing the good practice of workers and helping create a supportive and cooperative environment. The meetings give him an opportunity to demonstrate the agency’s commitment to strengthening families while also reassuring the families that “we’re not simply about removing kids.” When supervisors model family-centered

Supervisors can help workers keep the family and the child’s safety clearly in focus as they:

- ✓ **Evaluate** for strengths and possible solutions from the family’s perspective;
- ✓ **Elicit** well-constructed goals from the family’s frame of reference;
- ✓ **Listen** to the family to find hidden resources and capitalize on them;
- ✓ **Encourage** workers to always work toward family-driven solutions that are created in collaboration with the worker; and
- ✓ **Emphasize** what will work, tailoring interventions for each family, with the family fully included in and leading the effort to make lasting change.

practice, workers can see concretely how to keep the family's perspective front and center.

By sharing responsibility for facilitating family team meetings, supervisors are demonstrating to their staff that the best approach is a team approach. Workers begin to think more collaboratively and recognize that they do not have to do this work alone.

CARE OF SUPERVISORS: THE MANAGER'S ROLE

If supervisors are asked to be change agents, they need support from administrators. It is vital that administrators and managers promote the importance of strengths-based practice and family involvement in case planning. It is also essential that administrators do not send "mixed messages" about priorities. Longino "Gino" Gonzales, Director of the Saginaw County Michigan Family Independence Agency, sits down with supervisors to communicate his vision and open a dialogue about their efforts. In starting a community partnership in Saginaw, Gino first held focus groups with parents who had received his agency's services to hear directly from them how things could be improved. This information was used to guide the changes he is making, including a bottom-line expectation that, from the very first contact, families are treated with dignity and respect and are included as partners in decision-making. This change process has been a two-way street. Supervisors and workers told Gino their concerns, and he came back with some very concrete supports: an increased number of caseworker and supervisor positions, cell phones to aid workers in their on-the-go role, and a process for pairing workers who respond to families after-hours. Because all staff know how responsive he has been, he has an easier time getting people to buy-in to his vision for practice change.

Supervising is tough. Supervisors often find themselves in the middle between management and workers who both expect time and energy. It is helpful for managers to articulate to supervisors the importance of hands-on supervision, coaching and modeling the desired practice, and helping workers to develop their skills in serving families. Expectations for practice are made clearer through demonstration, and workers know that in a very real way, they have consistent support and back-up. Most importantly, supervisors who keep the core values of respect, genuineness, and empathy as their groundwork become true partners with their workers and the families they serve. *

Using Data in Supervision

Frontline supervisors rarely think of themselves as "users" of data. But keeping track of a few key pieces of data can help a supervisor, over time, gauge the strengths of individual workers – as well as identify areas needing improvement.

For CPS workers who primarily do investigations or assessments following an allegation of child maltreatment, supervisors could track, by worker the number of:

- Families where children are able to remain safely at home following a substantiated report;
- Children placed in foster care;
- Children placed with relatives;
- Families agreeing to participate in voluntary services;
- Families who actively participate in family team meetings; and
- Families re-reported to CPS who were previously investigated (or assessed).

For CPS workers who do "ongoing" work with families, supervisors could track, by worker, the number of:

- Children returning home from foster care;
- Families where children are able to remain safely at home following return from foster care (or from placement with relatives);
- Children placed in adoptive settings;
- Children whose placement is disrupted;
- Children who have frequent contact with birth families and siblings; and
- Families who actively participate in family team meetings.

The data, updated monthly and kept over a 6-month period, could help a supervisor assess and compare casework practice among his or her unit's workers. For example, do some workers seem to rely heavily on removal and foster care placement? Do others actively seek family participation in planning? Are some workers successfully engaging families so that they want services on a voluntary basis? Do some workers consistently have fewer placement disruptions? Are families allowed greater access to their children if they are served by a particular worker?

In most states, the child welfare system tracks much of the data on a county, regional and state-wide basis. By keeping track of how individual workers are succeeding, supervisors and workers are better able to "keep their eyes on the prize" — that is, the outcomes that are most desirable for children and families.

Profile of a Good Supervisor

Linda McMillon has 15 years of supervisory experience with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in Jacksonville, Florida. Ms. McMillon has embraced the practice reforms of the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children and has been an exemplary champion of individualized practice and family team meetings.

Ms. McMillon believes: "Supervisors should be team leaders. They should provide guidance, training and support, and promote teamwork. Supervisors also need a good knowledge of the resources available in the community."

Ms. McMillon has a few guiding principles:

- Have an "open door policy;"
- Provide immediate feedback to staff; and
- Participate in family team meetings.

An open door policy provides Ms. McMillon with an opportunity to stay closely involved with the cases assigned to her unit and allows her to give immediate feedback on worker performance and commend worker commitment and excellence. As a supervisor, mentor, and skill developer, Ms. McMillon wants to be easily accessible to her staff so they can develop supportive relationships. She lives these principles by sitting at a work desk outside of her office in the main area among staff.

Ms. McMillon also models good practice by regularly participating in, and sometimes co-facilitating, family team meetings. She continuously supports her staff with this approach. To all hard working supervisors and Ms. McMillon, we commend your efforts and work. Thank You.

Individualized Practice with Families

- Engaging the family
- Assessing strengths and needs
- Developing and implementing the plan; using family team meetings
- Tracking progress and responding to new concerns
- Sustaining the change

Quality Service Reviews:

A Tool for Supervision

The Quality Service Review (QSR) is a powerful self-evaluation tool, helping child welfare and social services agencies assess the effectiveness of their practices and the interventions provided to the families they serve. It helps agencies learn how families are doing and which service functions are working. Because the QSRs are directly tied to the core components of individualized practice – engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, and results – each QSR measures the degree to which true individualized and participatory practice is occurring with families.

Each community partnership site used the reviews to get a baseline measurement of practice and has regularly completed QSRs to track progress and determine what technical assistance is needed for practice development. Sandy Lint of Iowa says: "Our most important 'lesson learned' is that the starting place for statewide reform is with the QSR. It motivates people, shifts the system from compliance to outcomes, and provides an excellent teaching opportunity on the frontline. Once you have experienced the QSR there's no going back. It provides an in-depth look at the system to help build on strengths and strategize about needs."

During the QSR, a trained review team reads the paper records and interviews all parties involved in the case, most importantly the family, to qualitatively assess two broad categories – family status and network performance. Within these two categories there are approximately twenty-five specific areas of interest including child and family safety, family stability and resourcefulness, service team involvement, family involvement in plan development and planning vision, and tracking of progress. These intensive reviews usually occur in a short time frame to get a "snapshot" of how the family and network supporting them are doing. Once the review is completed, a debriefing is held with the supervisor and workers to give feedback and recommendations about the case. In addition, themes, strengths, and areas of improvement are shared with the partnership's governing body and/or self-evaluation work group. Finally, the review team writes a "family story" to document what is going well with the family and service delivery and practical steps for improving what is not going well.

The QSR is intended to be a useful tool for practice improvement, not a "gotcha" or something that goes "on the shelf." For example, in Jacksonville, the findings in a QSR helped a supervisor guide a worker in finalizing arrangements for returning children to a mother's care. The QSR demonstrated that, while all activities from the plan had been accomplished, the children remained apart from their mother. The problem? Mom had a work schedule that made it impossible for her to care for her children. With a little help, the supervisor and worker assisted the mom in

securing employment with daytime hours. So, in a very practical way, the QSR can “move things along” in cases that are stuck.

This story illustrates how supervisors, in particular, can use the rich information collected during the QSR to coach front-line workers and stimulate practice. A statewide training session in Alabama helps supervisors to do just that. Lu Tosch in Lee County reports: “The QSR tells us how we are doing overall, if we are practicing in accordance with the principles, and it helps the supervisor know how each worker is doing. We take copious notes during the debriefing conference so that supervisors don’t miss a beat in getting the immediate feedback and recommendations to the workers. The supervisors use the QSRs to determine what the workers’ strengths and needs are, and then they go with the workers into the field to coach and model good practice.”

In Louisville, Kentucky, Shannon McCure, a child protective services supervisor and QSR “champion,” posted the strengths and needs from the QSR debriefing conference on the wall in her unit as a celebration of how far they have come in teaming with families and to highlight the practice areas they will be focusing on as a group in the coming months. After the latest round of QSRs in her unit she asked: “When can we do these again? I want to continuously monitor our progress.”

The QSRs can also be useful to supervisors even when the reviewed cases are not in their own units because the QSR family stories are great training tools. Some supervisors remove the “recommendations” from the review team’s narrative and help workers develop their own recommendations based on the presented data. Others have brown bag lunches to go over the narratives and discuss the findings. In this way, the QSR can be a positive learning experience for a broad audience. Many supervisors also employ the Discussion Guide for Reflective Practice with their workers, which can be used at any time during supervision. This guide follows the QSR outline to assess the areas of practice that are critical for attaining positive outcomes for children and families. (See sidebar for an outline of the Discussion Guide.)

Quality Service Reviews are a robust supplement – not replacement – to the quantitative data historically used by administrators and supervisors to determine how their units are doing. As George Taylor of the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group puts it, “It’s important to quantitatively know the response time for intake cases, but it is equally important for supervisors to know how well their workers engaged the families once they got there.” *

Outline of the Discussion Guide for Supervisors*

The Discussion Guide creates opportunities for discussions between caseworkers and supervisors. The Discussion Guide may be most helpful when used to:

- Identify successes and opportunities;
- Affirm good practice when observed in the case;
- Suggest options for any barriers encountered;
- Provide assistance to the caseworker as needed; and
- Discover patterns across cases and plan actions accordingly.

QSR Practice Principles

The Discussion Guide uses five Quality Service Review (QSR) principles to assess areas of practice that are critical to attaining positive outcomes for children and families:

1. Engaging service partners and informal supports
2. Understanding the situation
3. Planning responsive services
4. Implementing services
5. Getting and using results

*The Discussion Guide for Reflective Practice was developed by Human Systems Outcomes, Inc. For a complete Discussion Guide, please contact the Clearinghouse at clearinghouse@cssp.org or 202-371-1565.

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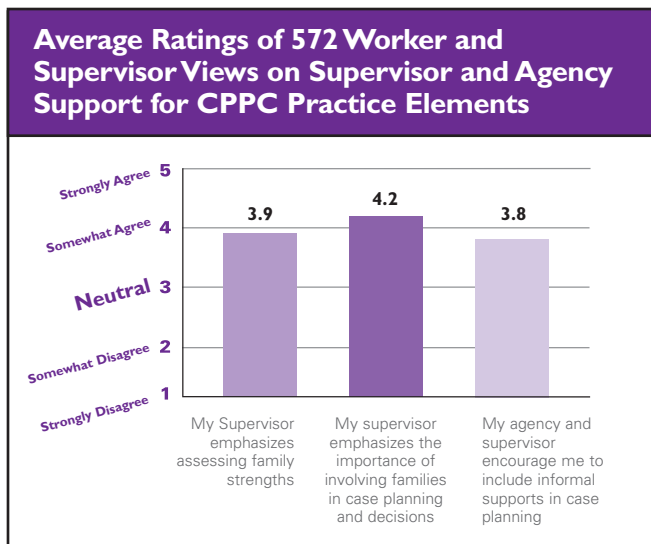
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Spotlight On Evaluation:

Views from the Frontline

As this issue of *SafeKeeping* highlights, *supervisors matter!* Supervisors can help create an environment that supports reform, or they can just as easily convey a message of indifference or, worse, they can actively undermine reform efforts in how they coach and lead their units. The articles in this issue of *SafeKeeping* offer insights from some of the most engaged supervisors in the four original community partnerships, as well as provide strategies from practice around the country. These insights illustrate what can be and is being done by some supervisors. However, a survey of supervisors and frontline workers across the four sites suggests that not all supervisors and managers have embraced the practice reforms, underscoring a need for continued engagement and development of supervisors.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND JOB SATISFACTION UNDENIABLY INFLUENCE PRACTICE.

Common sense suggests that the more satisfied, respected, and valued a worker feels, the more likely he or she is to demonstrate respect for and value others. This common sense notion is beginning to receive greater attention in human service settings as researchers are studying the relationship between workers' perceptions of their work environment and child and family outcomes. The first major study in this area revealed that workers' job experiences affect both the quality of services provided to families and the outcomes for children.¹ Simply put, the children served by CPS workers who had greater job satisfaction fared better.

¹ Glisson, Charles and Hemmelgarn, Anthony, "The Effects of Organizational Climate and Interorganizational Coordination on the Quality and Outcomes of Children's Service Systems," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 22, no. 5, 1998.

VIEWS OF WORKERS AND SUPERVISORS WERE OBTAINED FOR THE CHAPIN HALL STUDY.

Chapin Hall Center for Children included a frontline worker and supervisor survey in the overall evaluation of the community partnership initiative. In the summer of 2001, Chapin Hall evaluators administered the first of two written surveys. A total of 572 frontline workers, supervisors, and some senior managers from public child protective service agencies in the original four sites responded to the survey, producing an overall response rate of 78 percent. The evaluators will be repeating this survey in the summer of 2003.

Chapin Hall's study, which looks at some of the same issues examined in the pioneering study on organizational climate previously mentioned, will contribute to the understanding of the relationship between workers' job experiences, the influence of supervisors and teams on workers' job experiences, and the relationship between workers' job experiences and child and family outcomes.

The survey is intended to provide insight into frontline workers' and supervisors' views of community partnership practice reforms, the degree of support they receive, job satisfaction, and organizational culture. The information obtained from the initial Chapin Hall survey is being used to understand the differences among sites and to identify potential areas for technical assistance, training, and policy change. The follow-up survey in 2003 will assess if and how frontline workers' and supervisors' views changed over the course of Community Partnerships for Protecting Children implementation. Results of the initial survey are described below.

VIEWS OF SUPERVISION ARE MIXED, BUT THE INFLUENCE SUPERVISORS EXERT ON JOB SATISFACTION IS CLEAR.

- Supervisors generally were seen by their staff as being modestly supportive of key practice elements of the community partnership approach.

Using a "1 to 5" scale, where 1 equals "strongly disagree" and 5 equals "strongly agree," those who completed the survey indicated their level of agreement with a series of statements about current practice issues and the support they receive from their supervisors (in some cases, managers).

As illustrated in the chart, a response of 1 equaled "strongly disagree," and 5 equaled "strongly agree." On average, those

responding to the survey somewhat agreed (in the range of 3.8 to 4.2) that their supervisors *emphasize the importance of assessing family strengths and involving families in case planning and decisions and encourage them to involve informal supports in case planning.*

- Average ratings of satisfaction with supervision received from frontline staff and supervisors, although higher than other aspects of job satisfaction, were between "neutral" and "somewhat satisfied."

Those individuals who were surveyed were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with seven aspects of their jobs including: 1) workload, 2) quality of supervision, 3) salary raises, 4) opportunities for advancement, 5) being valued, 6) agency cultural sensitivity, and 7) physical working conditions. Again, a scale from 1 to 5 was employed. In this scale, 1 equaled "very dissatisfied," 3 equaled "neutral or mixed," and 5 equals "very satisfied." The average ratings for each of the seven job aspects were all below "somewhat satisfied" (a rating of 4). Overall, when all aspects are combined into one measure, job satisfaction received an average rating among respondents of 2.9, falling within the "neutral" or "mixed" range.

Quality of supervision received the highest average rating of satisfaction – 3.5. A modestly positive view, this finding does indicate that a supervisor can make a difference in how his/her staff feel about their work experience even when an extraordinarily difficult work environment beset with huge cutbacks contributes to fairly low job satisfaction.

- Those who responded to the survey were likely to be more satisfied with their jobs if their supervisors support the community partnerships' practice ideals and if the supervisory culture is open, supportive of professional development, empowering, and focused on quality.

In a close examination of what contributes to or detracts from job satisfaction, two factors are particularly important for understanding the key role of supervisors.

1. *Supervisory support* of community partnership practice ideals such as the importance of assessing family strengths, involving families in case planning and decision making, and including informal supports in case planning.
2. *Organizational culture*, specifically a culture that empowers workers by valuing openness, creativity, personal development, quality orientation, personal integrity, etc.



Combined, these two factors have a very large effect on job satisfaction. *Almost 20 percent of the variation among workers in ratings of job satisfaction can be explained by these two factors.* Furthermore, these two factors remain important even when other possible factors are considered such as: 1) feelings about how clear job responsibilities and expectations are; 2) perceptions about the degree to which stated goals and regulations conflict with actual practice; and, 3) beliefs about how manageable the workload is. In Chapin Hall's survey analysis, supervisor support and organizational culture remain positive forces in job satisfaction even if these other factors are not the best. Supervisors, therefore, have the power to build effective teams and advance frontline practice by creating a supportive environment. This issue of *SafeKeeping* provides some excellent examples of supervisors who are doing this.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION: INVEST IN SUPERVISORS

The findings from Chapin Hall's initial survey support continued investment in supervisors as a key to successful implementation of community partnerships and individualized practice with families. Indeed, the findings suggest there is a continuing need for improving job satisfaction and the quality of supervision. The community partnership initiative needs to continue a focus on helping supervisors acquire and use coaching skills to strengthen their support of practice ideals. In addition, both public and private organizations within the partnerships can examine their organizational cultures to assess how they support or hinder an environment where staff and supervisors are respected and valued and are given the opportunity to learn new tasks and develop their fullest potential. *

Outlook

Supervision in Community Child Welfare Partnerships

As an increasing number of communities and child welfare agencies are making a shift to more collaborative, family-centered, and community-based practice, they are learning that the involvement of supervisors from the beginning is essential to sustaining ongoing change. For without the involvement and buy-in of supervisors, frontline practitioners will not have the leadership, guidance, and support they need to strengthen their skills to work more inclusively with families, children, and communities.

To be effective in supporting a shift to community child welfare practice, supervisors need an opportunity to share their ideas about policy and program design. Training for supervisors around the implementation and management of a new practice framework should follow. This can be a daunting task and is often the critical step in the systems reform process that receives the least attention. Consequently, too often without even realizing it, the sustainability of the change effort is compromised.

Supervisors play a vital role in shaping an inclusive culture within the child welfare agency and ensuring the effectiveness of community partnerships. In these complex roles, they need SUPER-vision to sensitively translate the mission of the agency and the child welfare reform initiative with their staff. This process involves a sensitive balance of multiple supervisory responsibilities aimed at enhancing professional growth, promoting competent practice, encouraging teamwork, and ultimately ensuring accountability.

Taking the time to find the right supervisors is worth the effort. So much of the ongoing success of community child welfare partnerships depends on the quality of the dynamic supervisory and collegial relationships involved. It is important to look for supervisors who appreciate differences and can build relationships with management, practitioners, and across systems within the community. It is equally important that supervisors in community partnerships value inclusiveness in their work styles with practitioners just as they

value inclusiveness in the work with families. They need to be balanced and mature professionals who can lead by example.

There is an art to good supervision. Core practice skills of respect, genuineness, and empathy are critical with frontline practitioners and families alike. Good supervisors listen with appreciative inquiry and openness for the strengths and needs of their staff and provide individualized opportunities for professional development. Their ability to ask effective questions helps build respectful professional relationships, maximize agency and community resources, and find solutions jointly. And finally, the art of good supervision involves effective management skills with a careful use of authority to hold practitioners, partners, and families accountable for setting and achieving timely goals that keep children safe, enhance their well-being, and support family stability and permanency.

As I reflect on my career in child welfare, I am still influenced today by the good supervision I have experienced along the way. The encouragement I have received – and continue to receive – to take risks in my practice has been invaluable as I've learned to make hard decisions with families and colleagues about what will happen to children and how and where they will grow up. Child welfare practice, in my opinion, the hardest social work practice there is, for we are charged with balancing the rights and needs of children with the rights, needs, and responsibilities of their families. Good supervision is essential to helping new and seasoned practitioners struggle with the dual charge of being helpful while also being concerned about children's safety. Learning how to accomplish this in partnership with families and colleagues is a challenging process in which skilled supervision is critical. *

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