

## **States' Efforts in Ongoing Communication between Public and Private Partners**

Seventeen states<sup>1</sup> shared their current structures and strategies for promoting ongoing communication between public and private agencies in a dialogue on the Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services listserv. One such representative from South Carolina made a simple yet salient statement,

“I could recount many peaks and valleys over the last 30 years concerning efforts to introduce, improve, and strengthen communication and partnerships among services providers and the many State agencies . . . It takes no great mind to figure this out, but during the times of strong efforts to communicate, children benefited and of course the opposite is true as well.”

Of these seventeen, many emphasized the positive relationships that had been built as a result of their partnerships. The following themes were identified in their responses:

### **Leadership**

Some states, such as Louisiana, have found that the best decisions for the families being served are made when the public agency leadership takes an active role in providing an “open door” for discussion between public and private agencies. Similarly, in Texas, the Commissioner has taken an active role in facilitating open communication and partnership between public and private agencies. The Commissioner has conducted a statewide tour meeting with providers around the state to hear concerns and recommendations for building better working relationships between public and private agencies.

### **Councils/Commissions/Committees**

Formal councils, commissions or committees appear to have benefits for both public and private agencies, according to Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Texas and Wisconsin. Some of these were created by statute. For example, Delaware statute established Child Protection Accountability Commission whose aim is to monitor Delaware’s child protection system to best ensure the health, safety and well-being of abused, neglected and dependent children. This Commission has been instrumental in seeking legislative and budgetary changes that have made positive impacts on the child welfare system in our state. To name a few – they have had child welfare caseload standards established and refined over the years. The caseload standards are presently 11 for investigation and 18 for treatment. In addition to this Commission, Delaware has also created an Advisory and Advocacy Council. This Council provides an excellent foundation in framing and addressing issues in the child welfare arena. First, there is broad representation on the Council which includes both public and private members. Second, a strong vision statement guides their work: *To Think of the Child 1<sup>st</sup>*. Third, the agency has adopted a System of Care philosophy. The Delaware Children’s Department leads the system of

---

<sup>1</sup> The following states’ responses were included in this report: Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Wisconsin.

care that is child centered and assures effective, timely, and appropriate support for Delaware's children.

Established by Illinois statute in 1995, the Child Welfare Advisory Committee is made up of representatives from both the public and private agencies. The Committee and its subcommittees are focused on child welfare policy development and large scale system improvement.<sup>2</sup> The subcommittees address out of home care issues such as high end care, older adolescents, finance and administration. Each of these subcommittees also has a workgroup to address specific issues.

In existence for nearly ten years, Texas' Interagency Foster Care Committee (IFCC) was established to provide a forum to discuss and gain feedback from providers regarding policy changes. This Committee consists of representatives from Child Placing Agencies and Residential Treatment Center and Child Protection Services and Licensing and Contracts.

The Partnership Council in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin was created by statute. This council is an independent advisory body to the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare including public and private agencies and is the link to the community. They meet quarterly and their meetings are open to the public. The Executive Committee of this Council meets monthly and subcommittees may meet more often, depending upon the issue. For more information about this Council, you may go to the following website: <http://www.dhfs.wisconsin.gov/bmcw/partnership/INDEX.HTM>

### **Informal vs. Formal Communication**

Many states responded that they have a variety of informal and formal processes for communicating and addressing issues. Informal communications, such as, telephone and email communication, conference calls and in person meetings, take place to address immediate concerns and needs. Almost all states shared they have structured meetings that are typically initiated and facilitated by the public agency, however, in Wisconsin, it was stated that it has been quite effective to have an independent body assist in bringing public and private partners together.

States such as Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas hold quarterly meetings between public and private agency providers, where others, like Florida (Miami-Dade), Kentucky, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Wisconsin meet monthly. These meetings are designed to discuss a wide range of topics: regulation, policy and/or procedural changes, contractual issues, program and systemic issues and/or service delivery issues.

Ohio, while also holding ongoing meetings between the public and private provider associations, has recently instituted a bi-monthly forum made up of public and private

---

<sup>2</sup> Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. (2007). Semi-annual Report of the State of Illinois to the National Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services. Unpublished Report.

agencies to discuss child welfare matters, such as SACWIS implementation. Others note that meetings between public and private agencies do occur on a regular basis and often include regional office management, provider CEOs, program directors and/or provider organization management. Wisconsin and Vermont open their meetings up to the state foster parent association, community supported foster care agencies, mental health contractors as well as the private providers and state agency program and administrative staff. Wisconsin has found that advance planning works well for them; they set up the year's schedule at the November meeting and each private agency partner has an opportunity to host the meeting throughout the year.

In addition to the public/provider partnership meetings, many states hold additional meetings to include other agencies that partner with the public child welfare agency such as Juvenile Justice, Education, and the Courts. New York City has a wide range of regularly scheduled meetings with its private agencies on more specific issues such as Health Care, Performance and Monitoring, new case management initiatives, Procedural and Policy changes. North Carolina's individual workgroups meet three times throughout the month on such topics as policy, rules, strategic planning and funding. Vermont holds regularly scheduled meetings at the local district level to include Intensive Based Family Services, Juvenile Justice Community Programs, Chafee Independent Living Programs, Parent Educator Programs and Initial Screening and Assessment Programs. Wisconsin's public and private agencies meet with the Children's Court Judiciary monthly to address any court related issues.

Missouri and New Mexico have implemented a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process locally with their contractors, in which problem-solving between the public/private partners occurs on issues that arise in respect with implementing the contract.

Some states find it challenging to manage the day-to-day communication needed between public and private agencies. Kansas and Missouri have informal agreements that state central office will communicate directly with provider CEOs, although, Kansas notes that formal communications around such issues as contract management are often conducted at the regional level and rarely need to rise to a higher level.

In an effort to make sure all providers have up-to-date information on current issues, Louisiana sends newsletters to private providers who are not able to attend quarterly meetings.

A number of states already have in place strong public/private partnerships, others are just beginning this work. It appears that one common theme throughout these efforts to build a stronger partnership is *frequent* informal and formal communication. In addition, the continuing collaboration among *multiple* disciplines to address common issues appears of significant importance to the partnership's success as families and children at-risk are impacted by a variety of programs and institutions (i.e. education, juvenile justice, social services, health services, mental health services).

The Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services has noted a re-occurring theme around the importance of communication between public and private child welfare agency partners. These themes arose in the national forums held during the needs assessment phase in the first year of the project as well as in the National Summit on Public/Private Partnership held in September 2007. It is believed that through meaningful dialogue, a shared vision can be created to serve as the foundation for all future work; however, this can only be accomplished through open and ongoing communication.

*If you are interested in joining discussions on public/private partnership issues, please email Jennifer Hall at [jghall2@uky.edu](mailto:jghall2@uky.edu) in order to be added to the QIC PCW Network list serve.*