QIC·WD QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

How Can Child Welfare Agencies Leverage Data to Address Important Workforce Questions?

Child welfare agencies experience workforce turnover (14-20% annually) that can be costly and result in poorer outcomes for children and families. Although turnover is often acknowledged as a significant problem, it is not one that is easily understood or addressed. The following tips and strategies being implemented by jurisdictions working with the QIC-WD may be helpful for child welfare administrators, legislators, and other policymakers seeking to utilize agency data to answer pertinent child welfare workforce questions.

▶ **Understand what data is collected and stored, and where.** Oftentimes, there are multiple systems used by agencies during the employee lifecycle that may contain important information to understanding worker turnover. During the recruitment phase, data may be collected to track a candidate's previous experience and education; this may be captured formally in a data system, informally in emails or notes from oral communication, or it may not be tracked not at all. Once a person is hired, data systems may track an employee's start date, positions held, supervisor assignments, etc. Information that tracks workers' progress through training is often stored in separate training databases. Furthermore, the child welfare administrative data system (e.g., SACWIS) includes information on the child, caregiver, event response, caseworker, and supervisor; these indicators inform caseload, on-the-job experiences, and performance,

> "We have to match the data about the workforce to data about who is on board in child welfare using their personnel number. But we literally have to do that manually.
>
> Once matched, we have a very rich, complete data set about everything related to the child and everything related to the staff person."
>
> Elizabeth Reveal, Louisiana Site Data Coordinator.

which are important to understanding workforce issues related to burnout and workload. Understanding the locations of your data and how to weave them together to provide a comprehensive picture of worker experiences within an agency can be a complicated, but valuable undertaking that requires coordination across departments.

▶ **Quality data is necessary to support data-informed decision making.** Establish standards the data should meet such as relevance, completeness, and uniqueness. Assess the quality of that data and review systems and procedures to ensure high quality data is produced and useful to guide decision making. See the QIC-WD Child Welfare Workforce Analytics Institute's Data Quality Resource for more information.

▶ **Create a common and unique employee identifier to be used in the human resources (HR) and child welfare systems.** This can allow administrators to track a worker throughout their employment history, and as they move throughout the agency or across jurisdictions. Alternatively, jurisdictions may develop a matching algorithm that pairs common data from different systems (e.g., emails, names, etc.). This video, Connecting HR and Child Welfare Data, discusses this topic further.

▶ **Standardize HR data and definitions across or within jurisdictions and entities.** States with county-administered systems, autonomous regions, separate HR departments, or distinct local hiring practices may benefit from standardized HR information to be collected, similar to requirements within the child welfare system. Examples of helpful HR information include (but are not limited to):

- Educational attainment (BA, MA, etc.)
- Type of degree(s) obtained (criminal justice, psychology, social work, etc.)
- Date degree attained
- Employee ID
- Role of staff (intake, investigator, assessment worker, in-home services, adoption, training, etc.)

- Start and end date of role(s)
- Exit data (e.g., reasons, date)
- Supervisor ID
- Start and end date with supervisor
- Start and end date with supervisory unit
- Supervisory reviews and their dates

HR data systems should also allow for changes over time to be recorded (e.g., if an advanced degree is earned) without overriding past data. Finally, some terms, like "turnover," "churn," and "termination," may be used interchangeably in an agency, yet they may have distinct meanings across entities. Discussing these terms and developing common definitions can improve understanding of workforce challenges.

▶ **Identify workforce questions relevant to your jurisdiction and ensure your agency tracks the necessary data to answer those questions.** Questions should be informed by the (identified or potential) root causes of workforce challenges in your agency. For example: Are agency hiring processes effective in identifying high performing candidates? Do high performing workers stay with the agency? Do staff with a particular educational or professional background stay longer in specific roles? How does the number of caseworkers a family has impact child outcomes? Working backwards from the questions will assist jurisdictions in identifying the data necessary to examine the specific workforce issue(s) of interest. Agencies may also find that they do not collect the necessary data to answer key workforce questions.

▶ **Create a workforce team with representation from child welfare administration, HR leadership, information technology, and individuals with data analysis and management skills to discuss the identified workforce questions and how to explore and analyze them.** The team should focus on understanding the available data, opportunities for data matching, and what data needs to be collected to better inform decision making. Learn more about the skills needed by the workforce team, as well as how to increase the knowledge and skills of its members here.

▶ **Create a workforce dashboard Create a workforce dashboard to support well-informed decision making by policymakers, leaders, and managers at all levels of the agency.** For example, Washington State developed a "Workforce Performance Measures Dashboard " that provides many of the workforce descriptors noted above, and allows the user to customize the view by different types of workforce indicators, agency, and time. Providing such a vital and accessible understanding of the workforce simultaneously is only possible by aligning the data system elements noted above and is key to promoting the use and sustainability of such data-driven efforts.

Child welfare agency administrators and policymakers can work together to encourage collaboration to develop critical workforce questions, examine needs around accessing relevant data, and create specific solutions tailored to their agency needs.