

Supportive Supervision and Resiliency

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

Exploration of Needs

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) partnered with the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD) to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment in nine participating counties, to identify potential issues related to staff retention within the child welfare workforce. A number of data sources were used to inform the process, including: 1) administrative data and metrics provided by the Human Resources representatives in each of the nine agencies, 2) formal surveys of child welfare staff and supervisors in the nine participating counties, and 3) the subjective perceptions and expertise from the QIC-WD and [Ohio Workforce Implementation Team \(WIT\)](#).



Human Resources (HR) and agency administrators provided information describing agency practices and metrics in recruitment, hiring of frontline workers and supervisors, onboarding and professional development, compensation, working conditions, employee attitudes and exit interviews, performance management, supervisory effectiveness, and organizational changes. These data were compiled and reviewed by the WIT team in multiple sessions, to identify themes and commonalities in needs across the nine agencies.

The QIC-WD also conducted surveys with 588 Ohio child welfare workers across the nine counties and found that the organizational culture and climate across all participating counties was above average in rigidity and resistance, and below average in engagement. The survey also revealed that, on average, 53% of respondents had recently experienced elevated levels of secondary traumatic stress (STS) symptoms. [STS](#) refers to the experience of people – generally professionals– who are exposed to others’ traumatic events as part of their work. As a result of this exposure, these professionals can develop their own traumatic symptoms and reactions.

Identification of Priority Needs

A [root cause](#) analysis was conducted to determine why the nine participating agencies were rigid, staff were resistant and unengaged, and most staff were experiencing high levels of STS symptoms. The results pointed to issues related to supervision. Supervision was identified as a challenge at every level of supervision within the agencies, from directors to managers, managers to frontline supervisors, and supervisors to frontline workers. The WIT determined that supervisors should be a priority for intervention. However, the team was also concerned about staff STS, and decided that helping staff manage their stress was also a priority.

To better understand the needs of supervisors, the QIC-WD then conducted 12 focus groups with 90 frontline supervisors across the nine participating counties. The focus groups determined that supervisors wanted:

- More skills in how to coach, give feedback, and support staff
- To increase what they learned in supervisory core training
- More time to be with other supervisors

- To carve out time to engage in supportive supervision, not just casework
- More support from management to support caseworkers
- To improve engagement in practice with clients

Information from the focus groups also determined that supervisors thought frontline workers needed to:

- Develop stronger coping skills
- Take emotions out of the work
- Learn to complain effectively
- Learn how to self-regulate emotions and maintain healthy boundaries (self-care)
- Gain independence and confidence faster

Thus, the focus of the QIC-WD project was determined to be improving supportive supervision and providing frontline staff with the supports they needed to better manage the stress of the work.

Intervention Selection

In order to best address these identified needs, the WIT in collaboration with the QIC-WD, created [Coach Ohio](#), a multi-level supportive supervision intervention that pairs [Resilience Alliance \(RA\)](#) with the [Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center \(ACCWIC\) Coaching Model](#). *Coach Ohio* was designed to integrate theory and research on supportive supervision in child welfare and other related fields, [coaching](#), and employee engagement, with a promising, but untested, intervention to address STS. The intervention targeted frontline staff, supervisors, and managers within [six county agencies](#).