Five Stages of Continuous Quality Improvement

The underlying principle at the core of DCF's CQI activities is the understanding that DCF's work should be informed by systematic processes that ensure quality implementation of its services. As a result, DCF has adopted a CQI approach rooted in a scientific reasoning framework. The framework's purpose is to advance a way of thinking about how DCF studies its practices, systems, and processes. There are five stages to this approach:

IDENTIFY

DCF begins by using multiple resources to identify areas of practice it wants to improve or replicate. DCF uses qualitative, quantitative and outcome data to identify areas needing improvement. In addition to information gathered from qualitative reviews and DCF's data information management systems, DCF staff and stakeholders help identify improvement opportunities.

EXPLORE SOLUTIONS

Once areas for improvement or replication have been identified, DCF constructs theories of change to explore strategies to improve services and processes at the local, area and state levels. At the state level, leaders research evidence-informed practices and determine the feasibility of implementing solutions. At the local level, staff members use the program improvement plan (PIP) process to develop sound theories of change and clear expectations of how proposed interventions will achieve short- and long-term outcomes.

DEVELOP INITIATIVES

DCF staff members identify the best approaches to making improvements. Selecting a best approach includes ensuring the needs of the local target population are addressed and evaluating DCF's capacity to implement the proposed improvement. Interventions are sufficiently defined and measurable and classified as evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising practices. Staff members go on to develop implementation and evaluation plans in tandem with the Office of Performance Management and Accountability. PMA provides access to resources and support during intervention planning and implementation, ensuring DCF learns from evaluating the implementation and its outcomes.
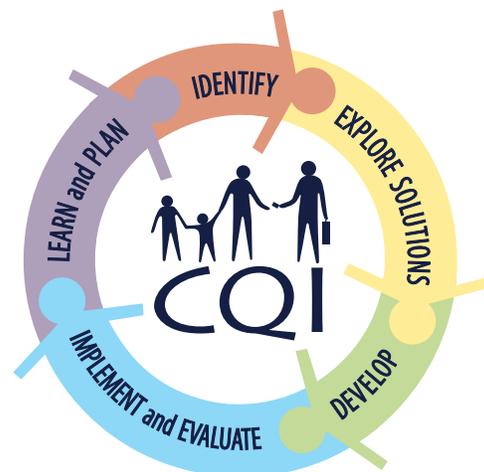
IMPLEMENT and EVALUATE

DCF uses the most appropriate evaluation strategy to determine how well programs are being implemented. DCF staff monitors results and, where possible, implements robust outcome evaluation methods to fully understand if the interventions are yielding improvements. Furthermore, DCF looks for opportunities to use randomized and quasi experimental designs to test proposed interventions and assess outcomes.

LEARN and PLAN

DCF learns from the intervention testing and attempts to replicate success. Staff members synthesize and disseminate information gained from the intervention studies so that DCF leadership can adapt and plan strategic replication of successful programs. Finally, DCF deploys successful interventions statewide, as deemed appropriate, through thoughtful implementation frameworks and careful planning that continues to effectively support and measure impacts over time.

Applying the Approach

DCF developed this framework to help shape and formalize its ongoing strategies for developing and learning from CQI activities. DCF's integration of this approach establishes a common language as well as shared expectations for how DCF goes about planning, implementing and learning. This way of thinking strengthens daily practice of field staff, but also supports state, area and local leaders in developing and implementing solutions.