# CHAPTER 7
# Results-oriented Management

This chapter focuses on the role of supervisors in results-oriented management. Specifically, it describes how supervisors can use information management systems in their day-to-day management and examines other methods for monitoring performance.

Federal legislation over the past two decades has placed increasing emphasis on measuring outcomes for children involved with child protective services (CPS). The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, for example, requires States to measure achievement of the outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families.

The Federal Government has created two automated systems to collect and retrieve child welfare data nationwide. The systems are called the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). These two systems provide data on the characteristics, status, performance, and outcomes for children and families served by the public child welfare system. The Federal Government also has funded State development of data collection systems called the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The challenge for CPS is not only to use data like this to set goals and outcomes, but also to inform decisions regarding practice and policy and to improve services.[38]

## LEVELS AND PURPOSES FOR MONITORING

CPS supervisors are responsible for ensuring that program and client outcomes are achieved successfully. Consequently, supervisors need systems in place to track data on a consistent basis at three stages: the individual case level, the individual caseworker level (including caseload), and the unit level.

### Purposes for Monitoring at the Individual Case Level

It is important to monitor individual case levels to determine if:

- Child safety is being accurately assessed and addressed;

- Case decisions are effective, timely, and appropriate;

- Services and interventions are addressing the needs of the children and family;

- Progress is being achieved in a timely and effective manner;

- The family has been integrally involved in the casework process;

- Positive outcomes are being attained for children and families;

- Permanency is being achieved for children in the shortest time frame possible;

- Policy requirements are being fulfilled in the case.[39]

### Purposes for Monitoring at the Individual Caseworker Level

It is important to monitor caseload levels to identify:

- Achievement of the performance expectations and standards, as well as the policy and procedural requirements;

- Strengths in the caseworker's performance;

- Areas of problematic or unsatisfactory caseworker performance;

- Trends in a caseworker's caseload;

- Performance in terms of casework activities and outcomes;

- Training needs.[40]

### Purposes for Monitoring at the Unit Level

Monitoring on a unit level helps determine if the unit is:

- Achieving program outcomes and goals;

- Functioning well;

- Planning for trends;

- Addressing problems effectively.[41]

### CREATING METHODS TO TRACK DATA

CPS supervisors must identify techniques or methods to track data on performance for all three levels of monitoring mentioned above. In some States, these may be monitored at the agency level, but the supervisors will still play an integral role.

### Identify the Performance Indicators

The first step in creating monitoring systems is determining the performance indicators (outcomes and process measures) that must be tracked on a regular basis for monitoring at the unit, the individual caseworker, and the individual case levels.

### Establish Performance Indicators at the Unit Level

There are several performance indicators that supervisors commonly track at the unit level, including:

- **The number of reports by type of child maltreatment and by the age of the child.** These data provide valuable information on the types of interventions and services needed by families. This information assists in identifying training issues for staff and also can be used for resource development.

- **The response time to commence initial assessments or investigations.** This indicator provides information on whether caseworkers are meeting the required response time and whether caseworkers are assessing and responding to the level of risk. This has a direct relevance for ensuring safety for children.

- **The substantiation rate, including by maltreatment type and by type of reporter.** These data assist in determining whether public education or training should be provided on a particular type of maltreatment or for a specific professional group. Monitoring the unit's substantiation rate and comparing it to those in

similar communities, as well as to State and national averages, enables supervisors to determine whether their unit is above, below, or equal to average substantiation rates. When a unit is significantly above or below these averages, the supervisor needs to evaluate why this is occurring. For example, if the unit has a substantiation rate significantly below the State and national averages, it may mean that staff are not conducting thorough investigations and need additional training.

- **The rate of children removed from their families and the reasons for removal.** This is an extremely important indicator because it can provide information on a change in casework practice, an increase in the severity of cases, or a lack of resources needed to prevent removal. It also increasingly is being used as a benchmark for evaluation and funding.

- **The percentage of children placed in out-of-home care who are reunified with their family and the length of time to reunification.** This provides valuable information regarding achievement of permanency for children and the length of time children remain in care until it is achieved.

- **The percentage of children in out-of-home care that are placed with relatives.** This provides information on how well the unit is at maintaining family connections for children. It also provides insight on how successful the unit is at reducing the level of intrusiveness of the intervention.

- **The rate of multiple placements of children in foster care.** This provides information on how successful the unit is at promoting the well-being of children in its care. Children who experience multiple moves while in foster care often suffer further psychological trauma.

- **The rate of recidivism or reoccurrence of maltreatment.** This information lets the supervisor know the effectiveness of the unit's services and interventions.

- **The length of time between termination of parental rights and finalization of the adoption.** This indicator provides direct data on achieving permanency for children.

- **The number of cases opened and closed.** This provides the supervisor with information on the workload in the unit. These data can be used for planning and staffing purposes or to compare with agency benchmarks.

- **The length of time cases are open.** This gives information on a unit's workload and how quickly the needs of families are being served.

- **The reasons for case closure (case outcome).** This information helps the supervisor determine whether the interventions are successful. If this indicator is tracked by caseload, it can identify those caseworkers with the highest degree of achievement of successful case outcomes.

- **The number of referrals to community service providers (by type of service provider or by individual service provider).** This indicator provides the supervisor with information needed for resource development and allocation. It also allows the supervisor to determine which service providers are used most frequently and why.

- **The rate and type of court involvement and outcome.** Information collected for this indicator provides data regarding staff workload and whether there has been an increase or decrease in severity of cases. It also can provide some information regarding availability of resources to prevent removal. This may indicate the need for caseworker training on court preparation and testimony practices, as well as the possible educational needs of judges and others involved in the court process on CPS issues.

- **The percentage of report by type of reporter.** This information can be compared to national statistics as well as to data from previous years. If there is a significant difference in percentage between the national statistics and reporters in the local community, or if there is a change in the

number of reports by a particular mandated reporter, further training, consultation, or relationship building may be necessary.

### Establish Performance Indicators at the Individual Caseworker Level

Some of the performance indicators tracked on the unit level also should be tracked on the individual caseworker level or across a caseworker's caseload. Relevant performance indicators include:

- **The caseload size.** This indicator provides data on each individual caseworker's workload. If some staff have more cases than others, the reasons should be examined closely. In addition, the supervisor should compare the number of cases their caseworkers maintain to the caseloads recommended by State or national child welfare organizations.

- **The rate of difficulty of the caseload.** The supervisor must strive for equitable caseloads among staff. Consequently, the supervisor must possess a process for assigning cases by evaluating both the difficulty and number of cases in an individual caseworker's caseload.

- **The substantiation rate.** Comparing the substantiation rate of caseworkers to that of the unit and to other caseworkers within the unit enables the supervisor to determine whether there is any significant variation. When a caseworker is significantly above or below these averages, the supervisor needs to evaluate why.

- **The quality of caseworkers' relationships with children and families.** Since engaging clients in the change process is a critical step in achieving the outcomes of safety and permanency, the supervisor must evaluate caseworkers' relationships with children and families. For example, do caseworkers demonstrate empathy, do the caseworkers emphasize searching for and discovering client strengths, and do the caseworkers demonstrate respect for clients?

- **The quality of case plans.** The supervisor must evaluate the quality of case plans across a caseworker's caseload. In reviewing the case plans, the supervisor would consider issues such as:

  – Does the caseworker involve children and families in the planning process?

  – Does the caseworker develop effective goals that address all of the risks present in families?

  – Is the caseworker able to determine the actions and tasks that he or she and the client must accomplish to achieve each goal?

  – Is the caseworker able to select the most appropriate services that will lead to goal achievement?

- **The rate and type of court involvement and outcome.** If a caseworker has very high incidences of emergency removals or higher incidences of adjudications compared to other caseworkers, the supervisor should explore the reasons. It may be that the caseworker is receiving all the complex or most problematic cases. It may be that the caseworker does not treat clients with respect and empathy and, therefore, creates a climate of hostility and resistance. It also could mean that the caseworker does not fully understand how to work with each family's strengths.

- **Compliance with policy and procedural requirements.** This indicator tracks CPS process requirements that, if completed, lead to accomplishment of client as well as program outcomes (e.g., making monthly, face-to-face contacts or developing a case plan with the family within 30 days of assignment of the case).

## Establish Performance Indicators at the Individual Case Level

Many of the performance indicators tracked on the unit and individual caseworker levels also should be tracked on the individual case level. Additional performance indicators tracked may include:

- **Whether child safety is being accurately assessed and addressed.** The supervisor must evaluate the caseworker's assessment of client safety and the adequacy of the safety plan to protect the children. In addition, the supervisor must ensure that the caseworker continually assesses changes in behavior, circumstances, or conditions that may affect child safety. This includes assessing the development and enhancement of protective factors that may offset the risk factors.

- **The accuracy of case decisions.** All decisions affecting the safety and permanency of the child must be made in consultation with the supervisor. The supervisor must evaluate whether the caseworker has gathered comprehensive information to make informed decisions, whether decisions are based on the facts in the case, and whether the conclusions drawn are based on a thorough analysis of the information and sound judgment.

- **Whether the child and family have been integrally involved in the casework process.** Engagement leads to achievement of case outcomes. The supervisor must evaluate the relationship between the caseworker and the child and family. The supervisor should consider how the caseworker describes the client, and whether the caseworker emphasizes client strengths, understands the child and family's perception of the problems, and whether the case plan was written in language understandable to the client.

- **The progress toward risk reduction, treatment goals, and case outcomes.** The supervisor needs to track progression toward case outcomes. This is accomplished by addressing achievement of treatment goals in the case plan, reassessment of risk and safety, and development of protective factors.

Society and the workplace become more automated everyday. This impacts a variety of issues, such as staff communications, record keeping, and management of information and processes. It is critical that supervisors stay informed about emerging computer applications, capabilities, and practices to enhance agency efficiency and accountability. Below are five systems that supervisors commonly use to organize and track data.[42]

### Management Information Systems

Management information systems can provide supervisors with the capability they need to track data for performance indicators on the individual case, individual caseworker, and unit levels. For example, SACWIS is designed to automate record keeping and facilitate quick retrieval of case information. It can provide supervisors with a tickler system for keeping track of their own as well as their caseworkers' tasks, which can assist them in evaluating progress toward caseworker and unit outcomes and goals. Agencies have found that the support of supervisors is a key element in winning acceptance of new automated systems.[43]

### A Calendar System

Supervisors use calendars as a tickler system to track key casework activities. For example, supervisors may track court dates; dates for court reports; and administrative, citizen, and foster care reviews. Some supervisors still use a month-at-a-glance paper calendar to track these activities. There are many calendars available on computer systems that offer features supervisors may find beneficial.

## A Log System

A log system provides an efficient means for supervisors to track discrete data. For example, in an initial assessment or investigation, the supervisor may maintain a log consisting of the name of the case, the caseworker assigned, the date assigned, 24-hour contact, the disposition, the type of reporter, and the type of maltreatment. Some supervisors maintain a unit log on paper. These data also can be organized using spreadsheet software, which has many benefits. For example, the supervisor can examine the data in a variety of ways, such as compliance with initial contacts by caseworker or the rate of substantiation by type of reporter or caseworker.

## A Notebook or File Folder System

Many supervisors in CPS, family preservation, and foster care divisions use a notebook or file folder system to document case information. As supervisors and caseworkers discuss cases during individual case conferences, supervisors record progress, directives, next steps, and barriers. This type of system enables supervisors to keep track of what is happening in each case. Some supervisors use one notebook for their unit, with divider sections for each caseworker. Other supervisors use a separate notebook for each caseworker, and still others use a file folder to organize the data. Supervisory case notes also can be documented in the computer. For legal reasons, it is important to identify whether these notes are considered part of the case record, and whether they are kept within the record or externally. Depending on the State and locality, either or both types of records may be subpoenaed in any cases going to court. It would be prudent to check with the agency's legal counsel to see how to address this issue.

## A Card File System

Some supervisors use a card file system to record case-specific data, organized by month or by caseworker. This system serves the same purpose as a notebook or file folder system.

## Quality Assurance

Regardless of the data collection system, it is important to have a quality assurance method in place. Every agency has an independent program or unit whose responsibility is to evaluate casework practice, compliance with policy and procedures, and achievement of outcomes in individual cases. These data can be used by supervisors to enhance individual caseworker practice or unit practice.

## MONITORING THE QUALITATIVE ASPECTS OF CASEWORK PRACTICE

One element of casework performance of particular importance for supervisors to monitor is the qualitative aspects of casework or how the caseworker relates to and interacts with the client. To help a child and family change the behavior or conditions that are causing the risk of maltreatment, the CPS caseworker must develop a positive relationship with the family. The methods for collecting data on the qualitative aspects of practice include observation of the caseworker-client interaction, review of documentation, and discussions with the caseworker.[44]

### Direct Observation of Caseworker-Client Contact

Observing caseworker-client contact provides the supervisor with direct information regarding the caseworker's ability to establish positive, effective relationships with clients. It also provides information on how the caseworker handles difficult client reactions. Behaviors demonstrated by the caseworker should be noted and shared following the observation.

There are many opportunities to observe caseworkers interacting with clients, including:

- Home visits

- Office visits (by either direct observation or via a one-way mirror)

- Court appearances

- Supervised parent-child visitations

- Family group conferences.

If a unit has the recommended ratio of caseworkers-to-supervisor (i.e., 5-7 caseworkers per supervisor), then the supervisor should be conducting direct observation of each caseworker quarterly and should make use of the variety of opportunities for observation.

Below are recommended ways for introducing the idea of direct observation to caseworker staff:

- "Observation will enable me to identify your strengths and areas for growth."

- "Observation will enable me to identify training needs."

- "Since I am ultimately accountable for what happens in cases, there are three ways I know what is happening in your cases, by observing you with clients, reviewing your documentation, and discussing cases in individual supervision meetings."

### Review of Documentation

Reviewing case documentation to determine how caseworkers describe the family and their situation provides the supervisor with insights on relationship skills. In addition, reviewing records to determine how caseworkers identify client strengths provides clues regarding the quality of the helping relationship.

### Discussions with Caseworkers in Individual Supervision

During regularly scheduled individual supervision meetings, caseworkers typically describe their work with specific children and families. What caseworkers say or do not say to the supervisor provides valuable information regarding how caseworkers feel about their clients. Additionally, the supervisor should note whether what the caseworker says matches what he or she documented in the case record.

The supervisor who monitors performance indicators at the case-specific level and at the caseload level will stay better informed about the progress in the cases. In addition, the supervisor is able to identify caseworker strengths to provide frequent positive feedback and recognition. The supervisor also is able to identify problems in performance and respond to them quickly, preventing them from becoming ingrained performance problems.