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Monitoring Service Quality During Adaptation

Service quality is about **how well we are doing our work,** and in times of rapid change there is rarely time for advance research, pilots, or other tests to determine the best approach to high-quality service adaptation. However, service quality can be monitored and improved in real time. The quality areas below are key aspects of high-quality social service programming to consider in assessing and monitoring quality across service delivery. Descriptions of each quality area are included in the pages that follow. With current service adaptations and the program quality areas in mind, consider:

- What is different now?

- What needs the most attention from our team?

- How are we delivering quality in this area with consistency under current conditions?

- What can be improved in the short-term to bring us into greater alignment with our goals?

Record your responses to these questions (and other reflections) alongside the quality areas below that are most relevant to your work in this time.

Accessibility

Family Engagement

Referrals & Partnership Management

Staff Support & Performance

Trauma-Informed Practice

Use of Evidence

Performance Measurement

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Quality Areas for Social Service Programs

DOMAINS OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Accessibility

Barriers exist that prevent some children and families from accessing programs and services. These barriers tend to be more prevalent among populations that have traditionally been less able to use existing services available, for a wide variety of reasons. These barriers to services tend to be more significant in low income neighborhoods; marginalized racial/ethnic, cultural, and immigrant groups; rural and remote areas; and non-traditional family structures. As a result, these groups tend to face more challenges and be less able to get the supports and services needed in a child's early years.

Family Engagement

Family engagement refers to the systematic inclusion of families in programs that promote children's development and wellness including the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of program services. In family- centered programs, traditional parental roles as program helpers are transformed into creative roles in which families partner with staff to establish goals and make decisions related to the programs. Through active and dynamic forms of family engagement, families share power and responsibility with program staff which leads to improved parent/guardian-child and parent/guardian-program relationships, resulting in improved program efficacy.

Referrals & Partnership Management

Families frequently fall through the cracks of social service systems because the connections between services are either absent or ineffective, or because needed services are missing altogether. Strong referral practices help ensure that families receive relevant, timely, and valuable connections from one program to others in a way that adequately addresses their needs. When managing partner relationships effectively, programs and organizations have close, communicative, and trusting connections with partners; and have put in place processes to sustain their partnerships and strengthen them over time. Programs with strong referrals and partnership management practices coordinate their services in order to ease access to services, reduce unnecessary duplication of effort, and produce a more effective and efficient social service system. Direct service providers that make effective referrals across programs and systems in the community can contribute significantly to meeting existing and projected needs in their communities.

(nb: Here, "partners" refers to people and/or programs that the program relies on to deliver services and improve outcomes for children and families served.)

Staff Support & Performance

Staff support is a critical component of organizational and program performance. When staff members feel supported professionally, personally, and financially by their organization they are better prepared and more motivated to perform and excel in their roles. Staff turnover, burnout, and lack of adequate support negatively impact service quality and a program's ability to achieve its outcomes. Organizations and programs with strong staff support and performance practices prioritize staff supervision, development, and retention initiatives within the organization, with the aim of ensuring that staff have the support and preparation they need to deliver quality services.

Trauma-Informed Practice	Research shows that many children and families experience trauma from abuse/neglect, loss of a caregiver, economic struggles, lack of food, housing instability, and other life challenges. A trauma-informed program understands the actions and behaviors of a child in the context of what has happened to them and their family. A trauma informed approach realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. This approach should be implemented in any type of service setting and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing.
Use of Evidence	There is currently a growing movement around using evidence of effectiveness to spread what works and to avoid what does not work, thereby maximizing results from limited resources and increasing impact on people's lives. This includes reviewing the best available research that already exists in the program's field, increasing evidence of effectiveness for the organization's own work, and incorporating best practices.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT CAPACITIES

Performance Measurement Culture	Successful measurement and evaluation begin with a program's senior leadership and board prioritizing and embedding it within the program's culture in order to ensure strong commitment. Guiding this commitment is clarity on the program's primary objectives/motivation for its measurement and evaluation efforts and the key learning questions it is looking to answer.
Performance Measurement Framework	A clearly articulated hypothesis is an essential grounding to outline the results a program aims to achieve and how its work will lead to those results. It can also anchor a program's performance measurement and evaluation efforts by defining what will be measured and why. A program's hypothesis should rest on sound logic and assumptions explaining how and why its activities/interventions will address the need and opportunity it is targeting and lead to the Outcomes it aims to achieve.
Performance Measurement System	A strong measurement system helps to ensure that performance information is readily available and used to support continuous improvement and to report out to key stakeholders. Measurement systems include staff time, processes, and tools to collect, store, analyze, report, and learn from performance data on an ongoing basis. In the following section, we refer to Process/Output indicators and Outcomes indicators. Process/Output indicators are data points (i.e. the # and % of clients enrolling in a workforce development program) that measure whether activities and interventions are being executed as intended. Outcome Indicators are data points (i.e. the # and % of clients passing job skill competency assessments or the average # of job interviews and offers per client) that measure whether the Outcomes (i.e. participants increasing job skills or job placement) are being achieved.