



LEAN EVENT – EISA Placement Stability

During the week of May 12th (2014), the Eastern Iowa Service Area was involved in a multi-day LEAN event which brought stakeholders together to collaboratively design ways to improve processes & outcomes, in support of placement stability. The aim was to do a better job of placing children in suitable homes the first time they are placed, thereby eliminating the need for subsequent placement changes. The three placement settings focused on for process improvement were: Foster Care, non-relative care, & relative placements.

Leta Hosier & Lori Frick (Eastern Iowa Service Area Social Work Administrators) were joint Project Sponsors for this event. They knew that to address this statewide matter, would also require improving relations between their partners. It was imperative that this effort align purpose, process & people so that these entities could not just collaborate but such that they would also develop the unity & the drive needed for successful implementation, a prerequisite for delivering improved outcomes.



It is important to a successful Lean event to involve those who do the actual work, those who are connected to the work being completed, and some of the customers of the work. This team had representation from DHS (Supervisory, SWCM, CPW, Contracts, EISA & CRSA) plus Iowa KidsNet, IFAPA, Families First Counseling, Family Resources Inc., and Foster Families.

Seventeen participants worked with a facilitation team from the DHS Bureau of Quality Improvement. Together they: gained a shared understanding about current practices within each agency; reviewed available data; analyzed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats from current practices; examined trends; brainstormed ideas for improvement & identified action steps needed for improving processes.

A review of the current state process maps helped visualize the variances in practice taking place throughout the service area. They also revealed gaps in knowledge about what takes place within each partner agency and opportunities to help make the first placement the best placement. Next, the data revealed that it had taken just over 6 weeks for children to reach their third placement. This caught the attention of the team and became the basis for further focus. Once a quality match had been decided upon, they felt that there was a need for a standardized, front-loaded process built into the first 6 weeks of a placement. After brainstorming about possible improvement strategies, the team then moved forward to identify which strategies would be most beneficial to the customer and easiest to implement (typically called the “low hanging fruit”). The resulting process improvements were incorporated into new process maps that were developed.

From a practice perspective, the team developed three distinct areas of focus to improve stability of placement for children: First Placement-Best Placement, 6 week front-loading support to the placement and improved partnership and collaboration.



First Placement-Best Placement

The team Developed and is in the process of developing strategies to make better matches for children when they are initially placed in the system.

- Training on how IKN matches children to foster homes will be provided to all SWs to improve communication and understanding.
- There will be an increased emphasis on gathering information about children and the family's support system in the field and during FTMs.
- There is a team continuing to develop strategies to lengthen the amount of time IKN will have to make a match for a child: safety planning children with friends/relatives, seeking supervision to require more time for referrals, assessing whether or not Urgent Referrals to IKN are necessary, etc...

Six Week Front Load

The team developed this philosophy based on the data showing placement instability consistently occurred in our data set on average within the first 6 weeks. This PRO-ACTIVE service provision has an emphasis on:

- Family interactions,
- Disruption prevention,
- Foster and bio-parents contact,
- Smooth case transition from CPW to SWCM,
- Increased foster parent support from all partners,
- In-home visits with children and foster parents from DHS, FSRP and IKN,
- and more efficient use of existing resources.

Partnership and Collaboration

The team identified that we have many awesome resources that are underutilized due to poor system-wide communication. The team also identified a needed shift in the culture of DHS around placement and our community partners in placement. There are many strategies being developed to improve cross-system communication and understanding including:

- trainings,
- foster parent appreciation efforts,
- and staffings/meetings.

Next Steps: While the LEAN Event week is over, the work continues. The products from the LEAN Event were provided to the Sponsors for review and action. These included data analysis, survey results, revised process maps and team recommendations. On 6/4/14, The Sponsors met with the team to discuss next steps. During which time they continued to demonstrate their full support and told the team, "We appreciate the effort put into this event and are excited for the positive change in services provided and partnerships built."

Team participants now have "homework" assignments designed to further inform and support successful implementation of their process improvements ideas. Team participants have had weekly conference calls the few weeks after the event and will have follow-up meetings at 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, 6 months and one year to A) develop implementation steps, B) further develop supporting processes, and C) review implementation success (and, if necessary, make adjustments).



Iowa Department of Human Services



As we move ahead towards implementation, we will make sure to provide follow-up communication to staff regarding planning, formalized processes, and implementation. Notification to staff will be forthcoming and will then be posted to a folder in the EISA SharePoint so everyone can access these.

In the meantime, if you have questions about this Event, please feel free to contact Christine Ferris, our Quality Improvement Coordinator for the Eastern Iowa Service Area, or any of the team members:

Eastern Iowa DHS:

Russ Hayes & Lynn Bell, SW Supervisors
Maria George & Terra Davids, CPWs
Hanna Chesmore Potts & Traci Gael, SWCMs

Cedar Rapids DHS:

Karen Andrew, SW Supervisor
Jessica Widmeyer, CPW

Central Office DHS:

Stacy Anthony, DHS/IKN Contract Specialist

Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association:

Angela Stark, Resource Information Specialist
Kim Edwards, Peer Liaison & Foster Parent

Iowa KidsNet:

Theresa Lewis, Project Director
Susan Salmon, Service Area Leader Manager
Tina Royer, Supervisor

FSRP:

Mary Macumber-Schmidt, VP, Family Resources
Katie Henniges, Eastern Regional Director, Families First Counseling Services

While this event and the subsequent effort afterwards requires a significant commitment of staff time, the resulting improvements should provide better first matches and improved levels of support to those who open their arms, hearts & homes to our kids in care, thereby minimizing placement disruptions.

The DHS QI Role

The DHS Quality Improvement Team's role is to provide support, consultation, assistance, and leadership in process & quality improvement activities for departmental staff and work teams as they seek to continually improve their work culture, procedures, processes, and environments—in order to meet the mission of the department and the expectations of the citizens of Iowa.