

A Better Way to Do Business:

Changing Organizational Culture to Promote Integrated Service Delivery in Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Systems

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Introduction

A previous Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice publication, *From Conversation to Collaboration: How Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Agencies Can Work Together to Improve Outcomes for Dual Status Youth*, demonstrated how multi-system conversations provide the starting point for collaboration. The compelling examples described in the whitepaper made it clear that juvenile justice and child welfare systems must work together in order to improve outcomes for the youth and families they have in common. But how do we create the impetus for organizational change that will promote collaboration across both systems? How do we train for and encourage family engagement and information sharing across divisions? What do leaders need to do in order to move the needle of reform at the local level?

By highlighting insights and lessons learned in Outagamie County, Wisconsin, this brief aims to describe how a human service agency can move from early conversations about working together to developing protocols for how teams work with dually involved youth, and eventually to the establishment of a new way to "do business" by changing the organizational culture. We will examine the common needs and necessary tasks of personnel at each level of the organization as they relate to the promotion of transformative reform. Since it is often an administrator's job to see the big picture and guide the agency toward better practices and improved outcomes for youth and families, we will focus on recommended tasks for administrators in promoting and enacting organizational change. In addition, we will describe some of the salient needs of supervisors and direct service staff that must be identified and addressed.

About the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, provides consultation, technical assistance, and training to enhance the performance of youth-serving systems and improve outcomes for youth and families touched by the juvenile justice system. The array of services and resources delivered by the RFK National Resource Center addresses: (1) youth with prior or current involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, known as dual status youth, (2) the review and improvement of juvenile probation systems, and (3) the use of a model framework to address the state and national laws and policies governing the exchange and sharing of data, information, and records for youth and families.

For additional information, please visit:

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The First Step: Identifying the Need for Change

Change is not necessarily a “top down” process. It can be initiated from any level of the organization and often begins when either leaders or staff recognize an opportunity to improve outcomes that are beneficial to both the child welfare and juvenile justice missions. For example, officials in Outagamie County, Wisconsin were concerned about an increasing rate of placement in foster care among children in the child welfare system and increased workloads related to the investigation of child abuse and neglect reports. In turn, the county was experiencing a significant number of disrupted placements among those foster youth who were involved with the juvenile justice division. Historically, supervisors and social workers from the Children, Youth and Families (child welfare) and Youth and Family Services (juvenile justice) divisions did not collaborate on a systematic and consistent basis and often made inaccurate assumptions about the activities and objectives of their colleagues in the other division.

The managers of the two divisions recognized these concerns and began to collect retrospective data from case files that highlighted the need for better coordination across divisions and more proactive and thoughtful delivery of services to prevent the need for deeper end interventions. This examination of data revealed a strong correlation between the presence of a maltreatment history and deep penetration into the juvenile justice system, and was the impetus for Outagamie County to request technical assistance to address the needs of dual status youth.

What Administrators Must Do

While a compelling case for change can be made by champions at any level of an organization, it is ultimately the task of administration to articulate the will and permission to pursue change and then guide and facilitate its progress throughout the organization. Astute administrators recognize that leadership must evolve into a shared responsibility impacting all levels of the organization, and they must recognize when the time is right to turn over some of the responsibility for shaping new policies, protocols, and procedures to others. In doing so, they must trust those most familiar with the practicalities of day-to-day work to craft and design solutions that might not have been originally envisioned by the administrators. This partnership will produce the most practical and sustainable implementation strategies in support of the overall vision.

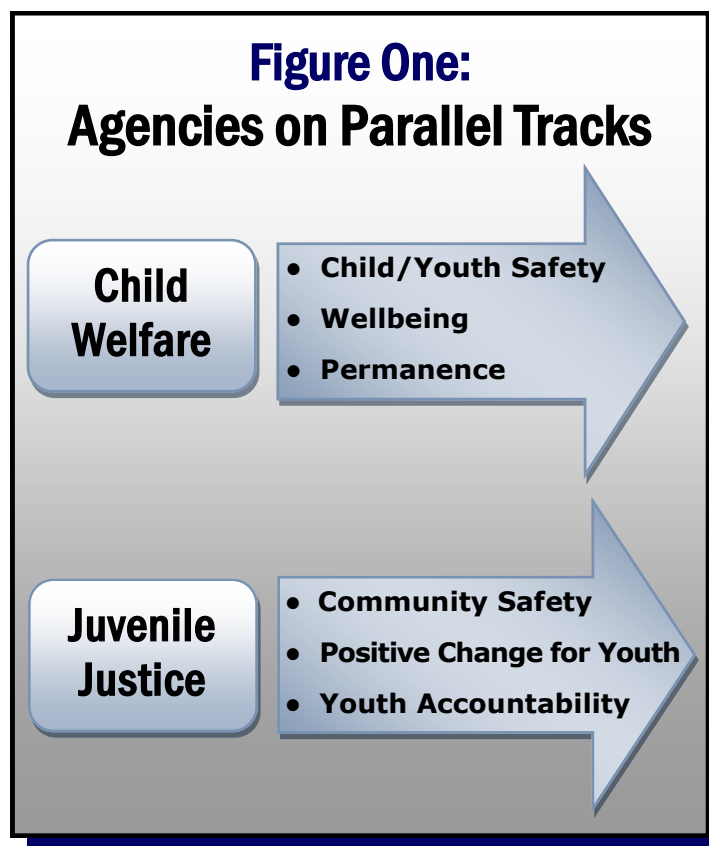
Examined below are four primary tasks for administrators to set the stage for reform:

- *forming an alliance;*
- *establishing common goals;*
- *producing clear, consistent and unified messaging; and*
- *tying the work to proven practices.*

Forming an Alliance

In most jurisdictions, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are structured to pursue distinctly different and, at times, seemingly conflicting objectives, as illustrated in **Figure 1** (seen right).

Misperceptions about the roles, priorities, or authority of each system can contribute to a culture of mistrust and blame. These misunderstandings are typically exacerbated at difficult case decision points like diversion from formal prosecution of youth, screen-outs of abuse or neglect referrals, and case closings. However, all decision points should be examined for potential conflicts.



In order to create a culture that allows for constructive navigation of decision points, administrators from the two systems must have candid conversations that address the misperceptions head-on, acknowledge the strengths and limitations of each system, and craft a path that can lead to the pursuit of shared objectives. Administrators must establish mutual trust that concerns will be listened to, considered objectively, and that each agency is invested in improving outcomes for children and youth. They must be prepared to confront the “sacred cows” – issues that preserve the status quo within each system. Leaders must become role models if the expectation of respectful, yet candid conversations about change is to be nurtured among the staff.

Establishing Common Goals

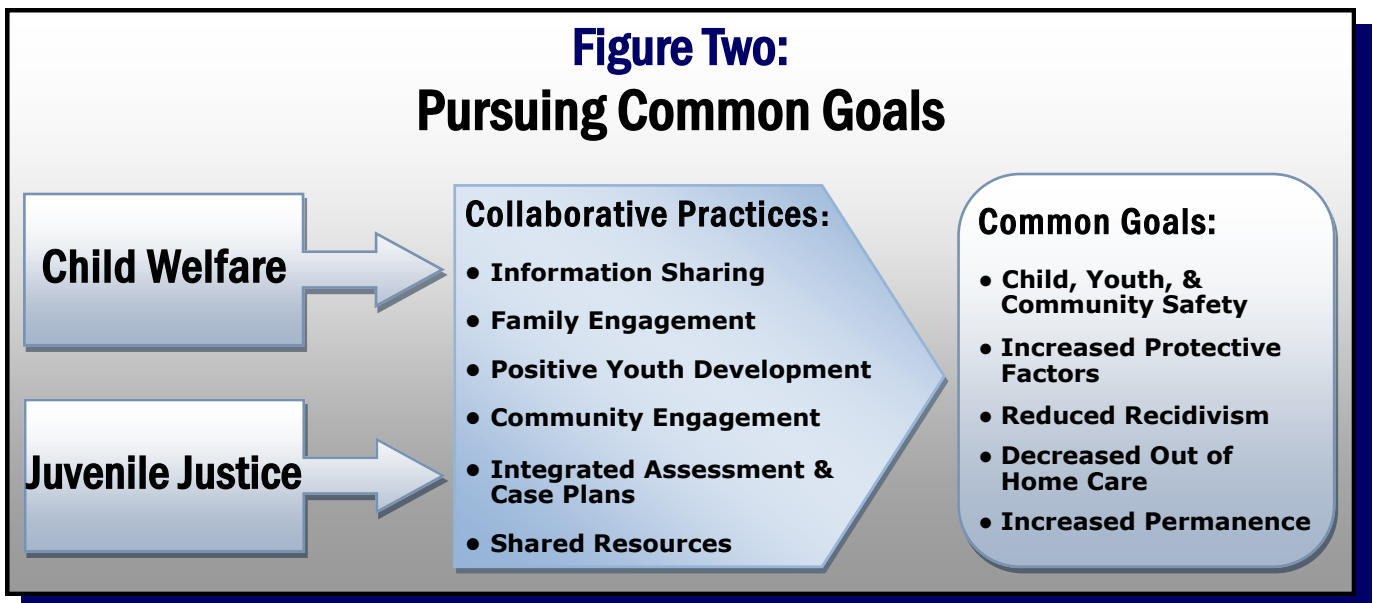
After administrators establish a true alliance they can jointly identify common goals shared by each agency which will serve to create the vision and lay the foundation for organizational change. In Outagamie County the journey toward identifying common goals began with discussion about the mandated objectives of safety, child well-being, and community protection along with the desire to improve long-term outcomes for youth. These discussions also required the expertise and partnership of mental health providers, school officials, judges, attorneys, and law enforcement which resulted in a collective agreement to support child welfare and juvenile justice in their development of a common set of goals focused on dual status youth. **Figure 2** (seen below) provides an example of Outagamie County’s vision of an

integrated approach, depicting how elements of collaborative practice can lead to the joint pursuit of common goals.

Compelling and Unified Messaging

Administrators must be deliberate in how they communicate the vision for change and the goals they wish to pursue. They must make a compelling and logical case for change before they can credibly ask others to take on the difficult task of implementing new practices and policies. The use of data related to client outcomes, organizational effectiveness, emerging demographic trends, or changes in client needs will be critical in establishing urgency for change.

For example, Outagamie County data revealed that 64 percent of youth open for juvenile justice services had experienced maltreatment at some point in their history. In digging deeper, there were several families that had a surprising number of child protection reports over their lifespan. The realization that the families being served in juvenile justice had a history of child welfare information stemming from multiple contacts begged the question: “what can we do on the front end to have greater impact?” The managers saw this as an opportunity to engage staff from the two divisions in examining how the earliest encounters with families could become more impactful and result in lasting change for families beyond the presenting immediate safety concerns. This required that the administrators frame the problem and convey an urgency to address it.



In conveying urgency, administrators need to pay attention to how the message of reform resonates within their organizations. It must “strike a chord” or “reverberate” in a way that clearly communicates why change is necessary. A message with positive resonance should:

- a) fit the mission of the organization;
- b) outline a course of action that seems fundamentally logical and achievable;
- c) connect the staff with their core values (reasons for why they got into this type of work);
- d) compel action from an ethical perspective;
- e) be inclusive and offer opportunities to give input.

Resonance speaks to the head, the heart, and the feet. In other words, it appeals to our logic, intellect, core values and purpose, and motivates us to take action.

Tying the Work to Proven Practices

Change is most effective when the strategies for reform are founded on proven practices and approaches. While there should be room for innovation and assimilation to an organization’s culture or structure, administrators should focus on proven approaches rather than relying on ad hoc strategies. Trainers or consultants can be used as experts to help solidify the knowledge about proven practices and to help develop skills that effectively advance reform efforts. Administrators who are looking to take on this work are encouraged to review the *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: A Framework for Improved Outcomes, 3rd Edition* and the *Dual Status Youth – Technical Assistance Workbook* (both publications: Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Actions Corps, 2013).

What Supervisors Need

Supervising direct service staff is one of the most challenging positions in a human services organization. In regard to organizational change, supervisors are tasked more directly with confronting “what is” and transforming it into “what we wish it to be” than any other position in an organization. An effective supervisor must be able to challenge direct service staff to expand their knowledge and broaden their perspectives and do so in a supportive and

genuine manner. They must absorb and translate the conceptual and convert it into the practical. Supervisors typically bear most of the burden when the direct service staff is expressing discomfort about changes in practice or policies, and they must avoid the temptation to assume a protective rather than supportive role in these situations. There are a number of factors that can assist supervisors in effectively promoting organizational change, including:

- *clarity of goals, expectations, and outcomes;*
- *opportunities for leadership;*
- *permission to navigate the pace of change; and*
- *the capacity to measure progress and provide quality assurance.*

Clarity of Goals, Expectations, and Outcomes

In order for supervisors to have the tools and support necessary to transfer the message for change, it is critical that they have the opportunity to discuss the identified goals and outcomes with the administrators. Historically tense interactions between supervisors across systems may create an obstacle to forming constructive cross-system alliances. Therefore, it is critical that supervisors seek and receive a clear and unified message from administrators that they are expected to work together to jointly address the objectives of cross-system collaboration. Administrators have to check in with supervisors regularly and inquire what is needed to successfully implement these cross agency reforms. A continuous circle of input and feedback is required and will speed up the implementation of new practices and approaches and will reduce the number of obstacles that threaten to delay or even destroy the effort.

Opportunities for Leadership

Some of the most convincing and effective leadership can come from a cohort of supervisors that identify themselves as champions of the new culture. To that end, supervisors need to be given the opportunity to take the conceptual imperatives spelled out in the goals and translate them into practice. If administrators have succeeded in clearly defining the goals and desired outcomes, communicating the urgency of change, and rooting the work in proven practices, this will support supervisors in

working across systems as partners. Greater opportunities to lead the change efforts and permission to solve problems across systems should be given to supervisors as they begin to demonstrate that the message is resonating with them. Administrators should encourage, facilitate, and support their efforts, but avoid mediating disputes or prescribing solutions.

Listening to the concerns and ideas of all participants in the change process can open the door to approaches that were never considered as well as create opportunities that were not thought possible. For example, almost immediately upon embarking on reform efforts in Outagamie County, the data began to reveal how significantly trauma played a role in the lives of youth who were being served in both the juvenile justice and child welfare divisions. This led to discussions about the need to screen youth for trauma symptoms. However, as the managers began to make the case for screening, supervisors and direct service staff expressed apprehension, asserting correctly that it would be counter-productive and possibly harmful to ask youth to share their painful histories without first building an infrastructure to provide treatment for those who need it. As a result, the managers applied for participation in an improvement project to acquire evidence-based clinical training in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for clinicians in the community.

Navigating the Pace of Change

The path of change within most organizations is fraught with sharp turns and obstacles. Unanticipated budget deficits delay implementation efforts. Key employees find new jobs outside the organization. Law and policy changes impose new priorities. Executives and elected officials gain or lose positions. Amidst these challenges, the pressure to continue to advance new directives that support culture change is acutely felt by supervisors, and it is important that they receive support in navigating the change process. Successful supervisors need to have some latitude to negotiate the pace of change in order to maintain credibility and stay engaged with the workforce.

There is no ideal pace for change. Each organization must establish the correct pace for itself. However, a recommended strategy is to allow supervisors to have input about the pace of implementation and to provide them with administrative support as they work to advance the new practices among those they supervise.

Capacity to Measure Progress and Provide Quality Assurance

It is vitally important that administrators and supervisors establish and track quality assurance measures that demonstrate the extent to which new protocols are being practiced. Due to the variety of demands that supervisors must attend to, accessing these measures should be as automated as possible. In the beginning this can be as simple as establishing monthly case reviews. Often the initial data comes in the form of qualitative statements both from the family and from the case workers describing the process. Accurate, easily accessible performance measures can be used as a barometer of successful organization change, and it is critical that administrators and supervisors create an established routine to review them in order to keep the pace of change advancing forward.

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What Direct Service Staff Need

Child welfare and juvenile justice professionals who provide direct service to children, youth, and families face the challenge of acclimating to organizational change while at the same time confronting the myriad daily tasks and urgent demands of ensuring the safety of children, addressing the immediate needs of family members, and responding to collateral concerns from school personnel, law enforcement, the courts and others. They must also meet the demands of administrative expectations. These demands cannot be deferred while the worker learns and absorbs new protocols, participates in planning meetings, and receives training on new practices. This can make it difficult for direct service staff to accept new initiatives from management unless they can see a direct benefit for children and youth or clear and tangible efficiencies in how to carry out their work.

What direct service staff need in order to successfully implement the newly developed practices are:

- *the opportunity to give input and show commitment;*
- *clear communication of expectations;*
- *assurance that proposed reforms will result in greater efficiency and improved practice; and*
- *tangible assurances that new practices and protocols will be sustained.*

Opportunity to Give Input and Show Commitment

Direct service staff must be given opportunities to influence the path of change within the organization. Direct service staff provide a vital link to what is practical and attainable and should be included in each step of the planning. By identifying and engaging the “early adopters,” administrators and supervisors can touch on and nurture an inherent motivation within the organization to “do better.”

In Outagamie County, the managers of the child welfare and juvenile justice divisions called upon the supervisors and direct service staff who were early adopters to develop protocol subcommittees. After some initial facilitation by the managers, the work group developed, with surprising speed and clarity, collaborative solutions for some historically difficult and thorny issues. Further, some of the work group participants offered to take on additional responsibilities in order to pilot the protocols, train their peers on the new practices, and review the protocols for fidelity. This was a strong indication of the commitment that the process produced.

Clear Communication of Expectations

Confusion is the enemy of culture change. Clear, affirmative communication of new practices and policies is essential to advancing the new way of doing business. Charter agreements, protocols, MOU’s, and other documents should be developed and communicated throughout each level of the organization as well as with key stakeholders. See the *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: A Framework for Improved Outcomes, 3rd Edition* (pp. 84 - 91) for excellent examples. Whenever possible, cross-training should occur with members from each agency. This promotes consistency of messaging and encourages cross-system communication and team building.

Assurance that Proposed Reforms Will Result in Greater Efficiency and Improved Practice

It is important for administrators to explicitly outline any efficiencies in workload that are created by the new practices. If there are practices that can be eliminated or workload volume reduced because of the new practices, administrators must treat this as an accomplishment worthy of celebration. Sometimes efficiencies are not immediately apparent and administrators must ask direct service staff to take a leap of faith. In Outagamie County, some staff expressed concerns that a collaborative case planning process would be too time consuming for workers already overtaxed with initial assessments and court reports. In response, the managers referenced the high incidence of families with multiple referrals and built a case that information sharing and teaming would create efficiency by reducing the number of repeated assessments and increasing the level of family engagement with both systems when there was collaborative case planning.

Tangible Assurances That New Practices and Protocols Will be Sustained

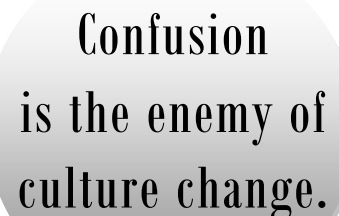
Veteran direct service staff have seen many initiatives come and go. New practices come in and out of favor. Programs are developed and promoted with enthusiasm but not sustained. Priorities emerge, only to be abandoned for newer priorities. As a result it is understandable that many direct service staff cast a wary eye upon change.

Direct service staff has some level of separation from the political, fiscal, administrative, or human resources related factors that can impact the pace of change.

While they may not need to know all the details, it

is imperative they understand that challenges and setbacks will be overcome and that the reform efforts will move forward.

In Outagamie County this meant carrying the message forward by regularly bringing both divisions together to celebrate how the reforms were having impact. Testimony given by staff on the benefits had far more influence than any words the administrators could have shared.



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Bringing It All Together

Administrator Tasks

- Form an alliance
- Establish common goals
- Deliver clear, consistent and unified messaging
- Tie work to proven practices

Supervisor Needs

- Clarity of goals and expectations
- Opportunities for leadership
- Permission to navigate the pace of change
- Capacity to measure progress and provide quality assurance

Staff Needs

- Opportunity to give input and show commitment
- Clear communication of expectations
- Assurance that proposed reforms will result in greater efficiency and improved practice
- Tangible assurances that new practices and protocols will be sustained

Final Thoughts

Lastly, we emphasize that just as our work with youth and families is most importantly about relationships, so too is the work of promoting organizational culture change. Just as our agencies must strive to engage youth and families in forging their own path toward a productive, safe, healthy, and pro-social future, so must we as administrators engage our staff to work with us side-by-side to forge a path toward effective, sustainable, ethical, and meaningful practices that best serve youth and families. The parallel process is evident. We cannot ask our youth to embark upon this journey without committing ourselves to a willingness to be open to new and better ways of practice. They deserve the best we have to offer.

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