



Improving Services for Children, Youth, and Families in Rhode Island

Overview: Since March 2015, the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) has provided pro bono technical assistance to help Rhode Island’s child welfare agency overhaul service delivery for children and families as part of a system-wide turnaround. With the GPL’s assistance, the state has restructured, reprocured, and begun to more actively manage the agency’s approximately \$90 million array of family-based and residential services for children and families, collectively representing approximately forty-percent of the agency’s budget.

Project Components: The GPL worked with Rhode Island’s Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) on the following project components:

- 1. Strategic planning to assess service needs and design an approach for improving services for children and families**
 - To determine how services were contributing to the department’s budget overruns, prior year invoices and billing statements were reviewed, and individual provider records were consolidated into a single database of all services rendered that could be analyzed to uncover historical utilization trends, generate future cost projections, and explore opportunities for innovation.
 - More than 5,000 pieces of unique input were collected from DCYF frontline caseworkers, department supervisors, and direct care providers on service needs and historical gaps, referral and matching strategies, and potential contract structures for a new service array.
 - In November 2015, DCYF convened a public summit where the department previewed a preliminary service array redesign and prepared the provider community to respond to future requests for proposals.
- 2. Executing a results-driven procurement for a new set of service contracts**
 - DCYF reorganized its service array around fifteen outcome categories based on subpopulation needs and linked to specific performance objectives. Once contracts were in place, this framework – along with a new level of care assessment tool – has enabled more consistent matching of families and children to services based on client needs.
 - DCYF completed a results-driven procurement that resulted in 116 new contracts collectively representing approximately \$90 million of services per year. Unlike conventional solicitations that request that vendors deliver a predetermined service model, the new procurement asked providers to propose the services, supports, and resources that would best enable children and families to achieve any of the outcome categories prioritized by the department. The flexible nature of the solicitation leveraged the expertise of local experts and community providers to offer programs not previously considered by DCYF.

As a consequence, DCYF made critical expansions to its family-based services, including alternatives to group care, and is innovating with new programs not previously available in Rhode Island. These improvements include a fifty-percent expansion of foster care resources for the most challenging adolescents, doubling the capacity of high quality family visitation and

reunification services, and making start-up investments of \$1.2M in nonprofit community organizations to support new and expanded programming.

3. Strengthening DCYF's contract and provider performance management practices, initially piloted with the agency's maltreatment prevention programs

- DCYF designed and piloted active contract management strategies to improve outcomes for services delivered to children and families, and has begun to roll out these strategies across the agency. Active contract management consists of high-frequency, data-informed meetings between government and providers designed to produce action that improves results. A pilot was launched with the state's four providers of front-end prevention services for families at risk of maltreatment. Each month, the agency convened executive and program staff from all four providers to examine progress against critical performance metrics indicative of longer-term success, such as the percentage of referred families who were successfully enrolled in services, the speed with which providers conducted initial face-to-face meetings with clients, and family preservation outcomes for families completing services. Emerging drops in performance were swiftly identified and responded to, and providers learned innovative practices from each other when brainstorming ways to improve results. Following this pilot, DCYF has expanded these active contract management strategies to other services under contract.
- To institutionalize provider performance feedback loops, DCYF integrated small performance-based payment opportunities into all of its new contracts for family-based and residential services. Linking payment to DCYF measurement of administrative data ensures that throughout the duration of the multiyear contract providers will receive data from DCYF that will enable providers to learn what happens with their clients after they leave their care. This data will also help inform DCYF's future referral and contracting decisions.

4. Designing a strategic procurement management system to improve the results of contracted spending throughout the agency

- DCYF's new contracts unit periodically reviews upcoming contract priorities and advises agency leadership on how to allocate planning resources to the most critical procurements. It has also created tools that assist program staff in developing more strategic procurements for key services.

Results: DCYF has reduced the number of children in group care by nearly twenty-percent, reduced the number of children entering state custody due to the improved performance of preventative services, dramatically expanded its portfolio of family-based services and supports, and strengthened the department's financial controls and contract management practices.

The Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing pro bono technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this hands-on involvement, the Government Performance Lab gains insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. For more information about the Government Performance Lab, please visit our website: www.govlab.hks.harvard.edu.

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