Planning for Sustainability

By Jen Agosti and Susan Dougherty
Model for Improvement Advisors

As we approach our fourth and final Learning Session, most teams have identified one or more practice improvements to spread from their initial PDSA tests, often incorporating them into wider system improvement processes. You are likely in the throes of planning for and implementing activities that are integral to your system’s ability to spread those improvements to wider arenas of practice.

If you haven’t already, now is the time to start planning how your jurisdiction is going to sustain the individual practice improvements you have already begun to spread, and consider what you have learned by your participation in this BSC that will help you engage in continuous improvement efforts.

As you look ahead to the months past September, ask yourselves, at every level of your organization and in your community:

- Are we seeking to spread and sustain specific practices (or behaviors) that will remain the same over time? Or do we want to become an agency that is continually receptive to new ideas and potentially better ways to achieve positive effects for children and families?
- Are we hoping to maintain our current system as it is, hoping that it continues to fit into what may be a changing fiscal, political or organizational landscape? Or are we willing to find ways to adapt to those changes as needed – even being on the forefront of change when we see an opportunity to do so?
- Are we looking at sustainability as an end product – a static condition that once attained requires no further action? Or do we perceive it as a process that will continue to change, adapt and improve our system?
- Do we expect the improvements to continue their effectiveness simply because we have found them to be effective during the BSC? Or will we establish some form of measurement to capture any degradation of performance in the future?
- If the improved practice does decrease in effectiveness, will we chalk it up as yet another failed “pilot”? Or will we address it using the Model for Improvement that has driven our work in the BSC for the past 18 months:
  - What are we trying to accomplish?
  - How will we know that a change is an improvement?
  - What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

Data Is for Sharing!

By Stacie Hanson
Project Associate

At our Senior Leader call in June, participants named lots of ways they are sharing their data and outcomes with their staff and the community. Sharing data and outcomes helps create a transparent change process and keeps everyone invested in the work they are doing for kids and families. Here’s what some jurisdictions are doing:

- Several years ago, Larimer County discovered their recurrence and reunification data was not improving. Faced with stiff budget cuts, they worked with their county commissioners to use the data to guide the budget process and decide where and how to cut.
- Larimer County posts re-entry and recurrence data on a monthly basis in a central office location for all staff to see. Workers are excited about the changes they are making because they can see the data improving for kids and families.
- Several jurisdictions, such as Larimer, Catawba and Navajo Southwest, have used worker-level data in performance appraisals and supervision so that workers and supervisors can target specific areas for improvement and feel a sense of personal responsibility for child and family outcomes.
- Catawba County has found that consistently sharing data and outcomes with the organization helps move everyone toward the common goal of improvement.
- Oklahoma and Texas have both found that more comprehensive assessments and increased family engagement have helped reduce their numbers of referrals and re-referrals. The state of Texas was able to show this data to the legislature and obtain increased funding for family group decision making programs.
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This is the same as what we experience in our everyday practice and work with children and families. Our days are busy and in these trying financial times, we probably have even less time than before to learn or try something new. It’s enough to do what we already know how to do – what we were trained to do. Who has the time to learn something new, we all know that it takes an awful lot of practice before we can do it as well as we used to do the old way. Moreover, when our internal “autopilot” kicks in, we naturally go back to the way we’ve been doing things the longest.

At the first learning session, our Model for Improvement Advisors (Jen and Susan) told us that the new way of testing practice changes through PDSAs would replace more familiar ways of implementing change, such as convening committees, gathering input, forming subcommittees, developing recommendations and so forth. They also told us that these more cumbersome processes would be reintroduced at a later time in the BSC. That time has come. But why make the shift? Why not proceed with spread as it has occurred so far?

Even early in a BSC, standard operating procedures are not actually replaced by the rapid test cycles of PDSAs and the supporting team structure. Instead, they are pruned back in a very careful way, making sure that the elements critical to BSC-style learning, like clinical supervision, stay in place. The effect is two-fold: on the one hand, space is created for a team to conduct PDSAs; on the other hand, the standard operating procedures are not relied on to be used for things they are not designed to be used for, like finding, testing and adapting new solutions to everyday practice challenges. By pruning back those procedures, we clear space for a new set to take root, and allow the old ones to operate as intended. This is a little like growth in a family with blurred roles, where a child who has taken on the role of parent, for example, is relieved of the burden of raising her siblings. As the BSC moves into spreading and sustaining, it’s important to keep in mind that spread comes in two forms: spreading and sustaining new practices, and spreading and sustaining the learning process that leads to new practices. Making sure everyone in the agency understands how to focus a PDSA on an actual practice change, finding ways to support innovation while maintaining safety, or engaging families not just as clients but also as leaders, all take a strong and standard way of working. And that means making the best use of all those standard agency structures, hierarchy and processes that we pruned back in the beginning of the BSC.

One of the most significant challenges we face when trying to sustain a change is in convincing others that the new way is easier or better than the way they are used to doing it. We can probably all think of an example in our own lives when something new was introduced to us that we resisted wholeheartedly despite the claims that it would save us time, be more efficient or have better results. In fact, some of us continue to rely on our “old-fashioned ways,” even when we see those around us catapulting into new technologies. Think about how long it took you to feel comfortable using a new technology (computer, cell phone, mp3 player - you name it!) or even driving a different route than you always did. This isn’t about being resistant to change or being a traditionalist versus an early adopter. It’s about trying something new and liking it better than what you did before – liking it enough that it will become the way you do it from now on.

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So when we have a terrific practice that we’re spreading and trying to sustain, we need to remember that this is exactly what we’re up against. Here are some quick things to ask yourself and each other as you begin spreading practices and trying to make them as sticky as possible [adapted from Sustainability and Spread, The Centre for Healthcare Quality Improvement at The Change Foundation]:

- Does this practice reduce or eliminate the duplication of efforts?
- If it does duplicate something else that we’re already responsible for doing, how can we eliminate what it would be duplicating?
- Does this practice reduce or eliminate unnecessary or repetitive work or data collection?
- Does this practice reduce or eliminate unreliable processes that require tasks to be repeated or result in unintentional mistakes?
- Does this practice reduce or eliminate unnecessary delays, waits, or inefficiencies in the way we work with children and families?
- Can we teach and support this practice in ways that will make it just as easy – if not easier – for people to do?

As you answer these questions for yourself, you will gain valuable insight into what will make this new practice worthwhile for staff. It will inform your messaging as well as the type of work that your team will need to do in reducing barriers. And thinking about these questions ahead of time will significantly increase your chances that this practice will stick around until something better comes along.
Olmsted is gathering staff monthly to have “courageous conversations” about diversity to spread the idea among staff and ultimately, to families. Video clips and articles are used to get the conversations started. Check in with Jessie Stratton for more info.

Have you seen something extraordinary happen on your CORE team, at your target site or beyond? We want to hear about it! Please either post these good deeds on the extranet or email Donna Parrish at donnap@americanhumane.org to have your entry posted in an upcoming newsletter.

As of July 2, 2009, 295 PDSAs were posted and 207 have been studied in the following key practice areas:

1. Race, Ethnicity and Culture – 34
2. Family and Youth Engagement – 96
3. Tools – 28
4. Sound Decisions – 40
5. Integrated and Comprehensive – 22
6. Permanency and Well-Being – 25
7. Community Collaboration – 31
8. Services – 6
9. R.1 – Workforce – 4
10. R.2 – Data – 8
11. R.3 – Agency Leadership – 1
Wondering what the spread status of some of these great ideas for practice change might be???
LS3 Storyboards...Are these practice changes spreading?

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Discussion Boards

Have you seen all of the collaborative sharing going on lately? If not, visit the general discussion board to ask a question or share an idea with your collaborative learning community! Many thanks to all of you who have posted some excellent discussion topics thus far - keep it going!