

Child welfare matters.

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Summer, 2012

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Coaching In Child Welfare

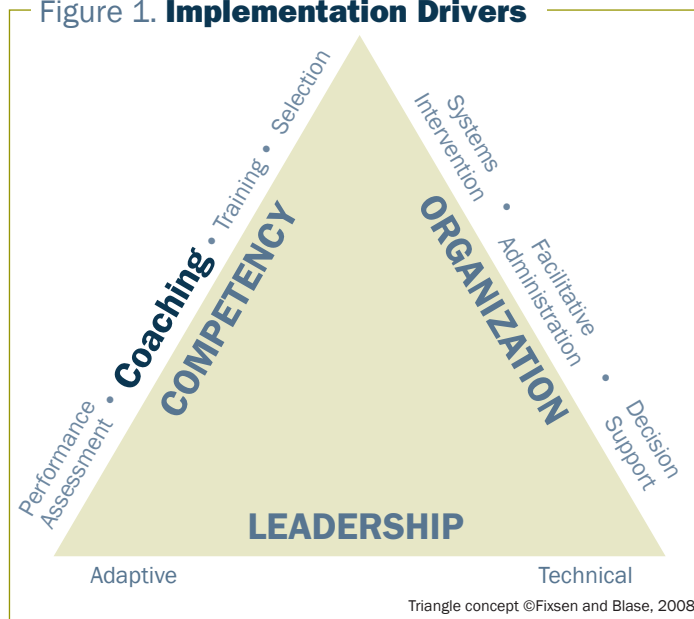
This issue provides information on a growing trend in child welfare – using managers, supervisors, peers, trainers and others to coach staff. Our main article offers a brief definition of coaching and the coaching process, and a discussion of the seven critical components of coaching programs, all illustrated with real world examples of programs already underway. We also highlight the experience of one participant in the Leadership Academy for Middle Managers coaching program, and provide some resources. I hope you find this helpful as you work to support staff in implementing new practices and improving our child welfare agencies!

*Your goal
is to help
children, youth
and families.*

*Our goal
is to help you.*

Across the country, child welfare agencies increasingly offer coaching programs to assist staff as they make program improvements or implement new practices. Research on implementation highlights the challenges staff face when applying new behaviors on the job, and the value of pairing training with coaching.¹ The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) has identified coaching as one of four components critical to building the competency of staff to carry out new practices.

Figure 1. Implementation Drivers



– Peter Watson, Director

¹ Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature, 2008. The National Implementation Research Network. P. 44 -47. <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NIRN-MonographFull-01-2005.pdf>

Coaching in Child Welfare

Agencies are moving forward with coaching efforts despite a lack of clarity about what coaching is, and about how to structure coaching programs in child welfare effectively. In order to explore this area, we interviewed representatives from child welfare coaching programs at the state level in Indiana and the regional level in Northern California, and from the national Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM). All three are learning from experience and continually developing their programs, and they were able to reflect thoughtfully on their successes and challenges in coaching caseworkers, supervisors, and managers. This article draws on these interviews, the literature on coaching, and a broader review of coaching efforts in child welfare to define coaching, the coaching process, and key components agencies should consider as they design and strengthen their own coaching programs.



Coaching Programs for Caseworkers in Indiana

MB Lippold, Deputy Director, Staff Development, Indiana Department of Child Services.

In addition to recent efforts to provide coaching for supervisors and to build the coaching skills of managers, Indiana has two well-established coaching programs to strengthen the skills of newly hired caseworkers. Experienced caseworkers, called family case managers (FCMs) in Indiana, serve as “field mentors” for newly hired FCMs during their initial new worker training, and work with them during their in-office days on transfer of learning activities. Then, other trained FCMs provide peer coaching to the new FCMs on facilitating child and family team meetings (CFTM), a key component of the state’s practice model. New FCMs observe a peer coach prepare for and conduct a CFTM, and then prepare and conduct a CFTM as the peer coach observes.

Coaching Programs for Supervisors in Northern California

Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy.

Since 2008, supervisors in Northern California have been offered an opportunity to participate in “Tools for Supervisory Excellence,” a series of learning labs on topics selected by supervisors, followed by two hours of one-on-one coaching to apply what they learned to their day-to-day work. “Practice leaders,” who are retired child welfare managers hired by the Northern California Training Academy, provide coaching by phone or in person. Recently, some of these practice leaders and other independent consultants have been providing coaching to the 13 counties implementing Safety Organized Practice, a new approach to casework. Trained on Safety Organized Practice by “master coaches” with national expertise, they serve as multi-faceted coaches in the counties, helping leadership design implementation plans, plan activities to introduce Safety Organized Practice, and support supervisors and staff using the new practices. The practice leaders and county staff call the master coaches for expert advice and support.

A National Coaching Program for Managers at the Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM)

Deborah Reed, Project Manager, LAMM.

Through the federally-funded Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM), part of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI), hundreds of middle managers around the country have attended a week-long residential training on leadership skills. Since 2011, participants have been offered follow-up coaching. LAMM coaches work with participants by phone once a month for an hour or two, helping them use LAMM leadership skills to implement change initiatives.

Coaching in Child Welfare: The Coaching Process

Confusion about “coaching” in child welfare agencies exists because many different terms describe coaching efforts. Work in Indiana and Northern California illustrates the wide array of terms in use. While these programs provide support for staff that we would consider coaching, the programs call the coaches “field mentors” or “practice leaders.” For the purpose of this newsletter we use the following definition:

Coaching is a structured process in which a coach uses specific strategies to help learners improve their performance on the job and to contribute to improved agency practice and outcomes.

Coaching is a collaborative, reciprocal process between a coach and a learner. We call the participant in the coaching process a “learner” to emphasize that coaching is about the engagement of that person in self-directed growth. Coaching models often describe strategies focused on helping learners assess where they want to go, where they are now, how they will move forward, and the actions they will take to get there. For example, the GROW model,² used in some child welfare training materials, describes the sequence of events in a coaching session as:

Goals – what is the learner’s concrete goal for the specific work being discussed?

Reality – what is the learner’s current situation?

Options – what options are available to work toward the goal?

Will – what will the learner do; what is the action plan? (See Resources – Leadership Academy for Supervisors on page 12.)

These components make up a dynamic action plan for a learner who develops, implements and revises the plan throughout the coaching process. Even in mandatory coaching programs designed to teach specific skills, such as the field mentor program for new caseworkers in Indiana, learners need to identify the particular skills they want help with and focus on coaching in these areas.

Coaches use the following strategies to guide learners, tailoring the strategies to each learner’s individual needs.

Asking questions, listening, reflecting, and discussing: Coaches ask a variety of questions to understand the learners’ current situations, their desires, their perceptions of different options, and what they want to do. Coaches listen actively, reflect back, and discuss ideas and options with learners.

Demonstrating, practicing, observing: As appropriate, coaches may model skills, or encourage the learner to practice in the coaching session, or in the field with the coach observing.

Giving feedback: Coaches offer feedback on what they have heard and seen, give advice and make suggestions in a diplomatic way.

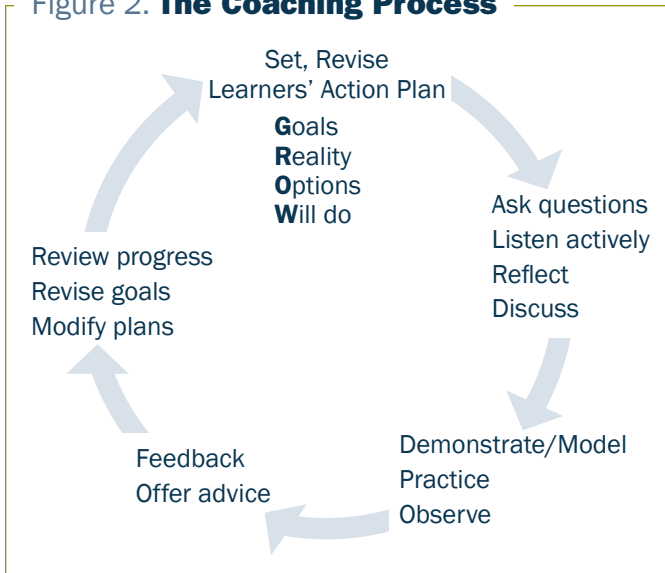
Reviewing Progress: the coach and learner regularly review progress together, revise their goals and modify action plans as needed.

Figure 2 illustrates the coaching process, with its focus on the learner’s action plan and the coaching strategies.

² Whitmore, J., (2002). Coaching for performance: GROWing people, performance and purpose. (3rd ed.). Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Coaching in Child Welfare: The Coaching Process

Figure 2. **The Coaching Process**



Indiana, Northern California and the LAMM program provide examples of how coaching helps staff and managers learn and apply new skills in their day-to-day work:

For the field mentor program I've gotten hundreds of evaluations and 90% of them have been positive. The new workers, commenting on their field mentors, say things like "She allowed me to work on things while she watched." "She found others to demonstrate skills that she could not demonstrate." and "Very helpful—she gave me the skills to be a family case manager—I will continue to learn from her as I progress in the field." – MB Lippold, Deputy Director, Staff Development, Indiana Department of Child Services.

There is a very high level of excitement around the implementation of Safety Organized Practice, and practice leaders have been intimately involved in the process and are having a huge impact. The stories are pretty incredible about staff who are scared or leery about using the Safety Organized Practice tools. Then they work with a coach, and finally take the first step—and are excited about how well it works. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

I coached a manager who needed to talk with her manager about her need for more support during a time of change. We spent quite a bit of time discussing the changes, identifying what her fears and concerns were, and discussing strategies for her to speak with the manager. She identified the strategies that she thought would work for her and practiced with me how she was going to approach the manager, and what she was going to say, and she was very successful. – Deborah Reed, Project Manager, Leadership Academy for Middle Managers



Coaching in Child Welfare: Key Program Components

Through a review of coaching efforts in child welfare, the literature, and interviews, we identified seven key components agencies should consider as they oversee coaching. We describe these components below, and organize them under three categories—Program, Coaches and Motivated Learners—as illustrated in Figure 3.

1. PURPOSE

Agencies need to clearly define the purpose of their coaching programs. What is the problem to be solved, and how will coaching address that? As our definition indicates, coaching often has a dual purpose:

Individual goals – learners use the coaching process to improve their performance on specific skills.

Agency goals – the agency develops coaching programs to respond to organizational needs and to improve practice or outcomes.

For example, the LAMM coaching program works at the individual level to facilitate the transfer of learning around leadership skills taught at the residential LAMM training; and at the organizational level to help middle managers develop, improve and sustain significant organizational projects, or “change initiatives” for which they have the lead.

Figure 3. Coaching Program Components



2. EVALUATION

If agencies are going to invest resources in coaching programs they should assess whether those resources improve skills and agency practice and outcomes. Measuring progress at both the individual and agency levels can help determine if coaching is worth the investment. Child welfare agencies have done limited evaluations of their coaching programs, often focused on the individual level, assessing whether learners in coaching programs are satisfied and whether those who work with or for them see them as more effective in their jobs. For example, Indiana has both learners and their supervisors evaluate field mentors, and Northern California conducts surveys and focus groups of mentors, supervisors (the learners) and the supervisors’ caseworkers. More work is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching at the agency level. Agencies should consider using or adapting existing systems to measure the results of coaching—such as case review and quality improvement systems.

Coaching in Child Welfare: Key Program Components

3. STRUCTURE

Those involved often point to the value of having some structure around the coaching process. Agencies should be clear on what coaches and learners are expected to do, and when and how they will meet. Some programs are structured by design, where the roles of the coach and learner, the activities they undertake and the sequence of events are well-defined. In other cases, the coach and learner have to create a structure, either through written, formal agreements or informal, verbal agreements. Some agencies have developed tools to provide structure, including:

- Written coaching agreements specify when and how the coach and learner will meet, and the roles and responsibilities of the coach, the learner, and sometimes the learner's supervisor (Click [HERE](#) for examples)
- Coaching plans, developed between the coach and the learner specify the coaching process that will be used and/or the learner's action plan. (click [HERE](#) for examples)

For example, in Indiana the field mentors found a long list of possible activities overwhelming. The state revised the process to a smaller set of required activities field mentors do with new workers, and other activities that are optional. LAMM coaches note that learners like structure, which in LAMM often consists of a verbal agreement between the coach and learner about when and how they will meet, and about committing time each session to review progress.

4. WHO COACHES

A key decision agencies need to make is who will provide coaching. In child welfare today, a variety of people may serve as coaches:

- Managers and supervisors coach those they supervise
- More experienced peers, or
- External coaches

Each of these choices is described below and summarized in the box on page 7.

Managers and supervisors coach staff they supervise. Traditionally, coaching has been a part of managers' and supervisors' jobs. For example, they should work with staff to meet goals in their professional development plans. Today, some agencies build on those roles, using training staff or external experts to train managers or supervisors on coaching. For example, Indiana training staff offers a course for supervisors on "Coaching for Successful Practice," in which supervisors discuss specific challenges they face in coaching their caseworkers, and practice coaching skills. [Click [HERE](#) to see this curriculum] Some believe training supervisors or managers to coach those they supervise will lead to more sustainable coaching.

Our goal is to get supervisors to coach social workers around implementing Safety Organized Practice. Probably the best model is this kind of trickle down approach—train someone to coach, they go out and coach others, then those people can coach others. I think coaching by an outside entity without any kind of internal capacity building is pretty difficult to sustain. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

Deciding Who Should Coach

Agencies should consider the pros and cons to make informed decisions about who will coach:

	Pros	Cons
MANAGERS/ SUPERVISORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps build learning culture within agency • Builds on ongoing job and existing role– supervisors in their educational role; managers as overseeing professional development • Expenses limited to training and support for coaching role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers and supervisors have power and authority over those under them, making it difficult to create a safe environment for coaching • Managers and supervisors have multiple roles and limited time • Managers and supervisors may lack objectivity as they are invested in their unit's performance
PEERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility – doing same work at same time • Investment in improving quality of work in own workplace • Can be included in their ongoing job • Expenses limited to training and support for coaching role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time availability, especially if not offered caseload or workload reduction • Lack of objectivity if coaching affects their own unit's performance • Lack of incentive to take on additional responsibility
EXTERNAL COACHES (training staff, retired agency staff, independent consultants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility – able to schedule coaching at times that work for learner • Credibility if they are experienced in the skills being coached • Distance from organization – objective; not directly affected by the learner's performance • Not in power or authority role over learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not on site – need to make effort to communicate to schedule coaching • Sometimes can only coach by phone, not in person • Additional resources needed to hire, train and compensate coaches • Usually funded through training or other special funding that can more easily be cut

More experienced peers. In some agencies more experienced staff—caseworkers, supervisors or managers—coach less experienced peers. While agencies find these peer coaches credible and the structure is likely to be sustained, limited time for the role of coach is often a constraint.

Having full-time coaching staff would be a luxury in some ways, but on the other hand field staff might feel that coaches don't understand what they are going through, and when we have budget problems coaches would be the first to go. We just don't have the positions to designate as coaches, so we ask current family case managers (FCMs)—our caseworkers—to serve as field mentors and peer coaches to new FCMs, without a reduced caseload. They sometimes complain that it takes too much time, but we are looking at this as a leadership opportunity and a resume builder. Staff know that if they are looking for advancement, or to get into our MSW program,

they will be asked whether they served as a mentor or coach. And staff who do serve well are likely to have that included in their performance appraisals which can affect pay. – MB Lippold, Deputy Director, Staff Development, Indiana Department of Child Services.



Coaching in Child Welfare: Key Program Components

External coaches may be training staff, retired child welfare staff, or independent consultants. External coaches can offer flexibility and objectivity, but also may have limited availability and less stable funding. Some see benefits in external coaches, especially for higher levels of management.

The higher you go in management the fewer people there are who are not subordinates and who can provide feedback to you. So that is a reason to reach outside your workplace to find someone who can give you feedback through coaching in a way that is not confusing or obstructed by issues of authority. LAMM coaches don't have any vested interest in the context, and there is clear agreement about confidentiality.
– Deborah Reed, Project Manager, Leadership Academy for Middle Managers

All staff coach others: Another approach is to work towards a learning culture throughout the agency, encouraging everyone to continually learn and improve, and to help others do the same. Some, like the Indiana Department of Child Services, encourage people on all levels of the agency to help others improve their performance as part of their job.

We've worked on building coaching in at every level, so that it becomes part of the fiber of the work. You are expected as part of your job to help coach others. So the regional managers coach the local office directors, the local office directors coach the supervisors, the supervisors coach the staff, the staff coach the clerical people, and staff utilize the same engagement techniques to work with support staff and their clients.
– MB Lippold, Deputy Director, Staff Development, Indiana Department of Child Services.

5. COACHES' CHARACTERISTICS

Research and experience indicate that a coach's characteristics are critical to success. Three characteristics are particularly important for agencies to consider as they select coaches.

Capacity to build relationships and help others learn

Agencies should choose coaches who can focus on helping others learn, empathize with learners and build trust. Effective coaches build relationships, create a safe environment, and have strong communication skills.

Some success in coaching is just personality and the ability to teach people. So when our local office directors are selecting mentors, I urge them to ask who in their office relates well to others? Who likes to explain things to others? That should be the first consideration, then they should make sure they are knowledgeable about their work. We can train people in some communication techniques, but we can't teach people to relate well to other people. – MB Lippold, Deputy Director, Staff Development, Indiana Department of Child Services.

Tell us what you think. We welcome your comments! Please use the CONTACT button on our website to give us your feedback: www.nrcoi.org

Ability to coach in a flexible, individualized manner

Coaches need to be able to listen to the learner, and adapt the process and the strategies they use to meet the learner's needs. Coaches are most effective when they are flexible, start where the learner is, ask questions and suggest coaching activities that are appropriate to the learner's situation.

A characteristic of coaches that is really helpful is the ability to match what they have to offer with where the person they are coaching is. It's an ability to be flexible and hone in on what the person they are coaching needs or wants. For example, we have a class on the organization of a supervisor's daily life, and during follow-up coaching, the county was going through a big crisis with staff being laid off. It's not going to work for our practice leaders to just ignore this and go in and start talking about organization. They have to be able to reflect and match where their learner is. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

Shared knowledge base with learners

It is often helpful if coaches and learners have a common knowledge base, perhaps doing the same kind of work, and /or working in the same geographic area. If agencies offer coaching as a follow-up to training, coaches should have attended the training so they are familiar with the skills the learner is trying to apply.

By using local child welfare retirees as practice leaders, we've been able to capture a wealth of experience and local expertise that has contributed to our success. We've learned that there is a huge value in the practice leaders building relationships with the person they are matched with, and having a local person helps with that. We also found that it is invaluable for the practice leader to attend the Tools for Supervisory Excellence classes to build relationships with the person they were matched with and to make sure they are getting the same information. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

T/TA Network Supports Managers and Supervisors as Coaches

The Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network (T/TA Network) sponsors efforts to build coaching skills among agency supervisors and managers:

- The Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS) will be releasing a "Take the Lead" module on Coaching to help supervisors build their coaching skills and learn concrete strategies to enhance this aspect of their educational role with caseworkers. (See Resources, page 12.)
- The Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center (ACCWIC) has helped several states, including Mississippi, North Carolina and West Virginia, train supervisors or managers on coaching skills.
- The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI) has worked with Cambridge Leadership Associates (CLA) to provide coaching to executive leaders and to support their work with county and regional managers to address adaptive challenges in New Mexico's practice model implementation.



Coaching in Child Welfare: Key Program Components

6. TRAINING AND SUPPORTING COACHES

Training can build specific coaching skills among coaches who are knowledgeable, and who have the basic capacity to build relationships and to work flexibly. Coaches should understand the structure of the coaching program so they can lead learners through the process. Many programs require coaches to participate in training on coaching strategies, such as asking questions, the process for observation or modeling, listening skills, and providing feedback. Some provide activity guides, manuals or handbooks for coaches that describe these skills, and they may offer forms to use in the coaching process (click [HERE](#) for examples of training and resources for coaches). Coaches often benefit from consulting with one another, and from ongoing monitoring and supervision to keep them focused and assist them with coaching challenges.

Really good training for coaches makes a tremendous difference. We've learned that it's better to give them information up front about the purpose and goals of coaching, and to be really clear about boundaries. We try to be clear on the line between supporting staff that you are coaching and moving into a therapeutic role. It's also easy to get roped into internal politics. We also feel it is important to have regular contact with the coaches to track what is happening—they need some oversight. Their desire to want to help and to fix things can get in the way of good solid coaching. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

7. MOTIVATED LEARNERS

Coaching requires motivated learners who are willing and active participants in the coaching process. In child welfare today, participation in coaching may be mandatory (as when it is part of new worker training or when an agency is implementing a new practice) or voluntary (as when agencies offer staff opportunities to improve their skills). However, even mandatory participants may be motivated to perform well after being placed in new

jobs or trained in new skills. Agencies also can build motivation to improve skills through management, training and quality improvement programs that encourage the agency, units and individual staff to continually examine and improve their performance.

CONCLUSION

These key components draw on the lessons learned through research and experience about how to implement coaching and support it effectively. As agencies increasingly understand coaching, and consider these lessons, they can build stronger coaching programs, which can be worth the investment:

I'd advise agencies to take the risk and implement coaching, and then make changes where you see the need. We implemented it in one program and saw the power of coaching and knew we had to use it more. It was clear that it was a good practice to support skill development. – Nancy Hafer, Northern California Training Academy

Collaborative efforts need to continue to evaluate the impact of coaching on both skill development and on agency practice and outcomes to ensure that it is used effectively to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children served by child welfare systems.

Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM) Coaching in Action

The national Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM) program focuses on helping child welfare middle managers apply leadership skills to implementing sustainable systems change efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth and families. It is part of a five-year project funded by the Children's Bureau under the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI), and will continue to offer training to teams of child welfare leaders from states and tribes in every region through February, 2013. Participants identify change initiatives they will implement in their agencies, and then participate in pre-work (two coaching calls and an introductory module) and a week-long residential training. After the training LAMM offers peer networking and, since 2011, coaching to support implementation of change initiatives. LAMM added coaching because participants reported difficulties implementing their change initiatives once they were back in their work environment. Participants can meet monthly with a coach, usually by phone.

In August, 2011, Vanessa Dorantes from Connecticut attended a LAMM residential training and her change initiative focused on statewide implementation of differential response. She has participated in one-on-one coaching sessions by phone with LAMM trainer and coach Patricia (Tricia) Mosher since the training.

Vanessa (a new local office director) has set a goal to become a better leader and uses the coaching time to figure out how to apply the leadership skills she learned in LAMM, and to check in on progress. Excerpts from our interview with Vanessa's comments follow.

Can you tell us about how well the coaching program worked for you? Did it help you apply the leadership skills learned in LAMM to your day-to-day work?

Usually you go to training, you get immersed in it, and a month later you forget about it. This coaching has given me an opportunity to really practice the concepts that were given to us in the LAMM training. In coaching I bring up things that have happened, and Tricia asks me questions and re-

minds me of how that links to a concept in training—like leading in context or leading people. I feel more confident knowing that these are scenarios that other managers across the country are experiencing. When I run into a situation that we've talked about I have the courage to talk myself through how I am going to handle it, because I know that when I meet with Tricia next she will ask me about what I did. I often find myself thinking "I can't wait to talk to Tricia about this situation and see how she thinks I handled it."

One example is around the LAMM tenet of leading for results. The quantity piece of data really drives what we do, but through coaching I've been able to discuss how I am trying to go beyond that and look for results and outcomes. I've also been learning how to help others become partners and share accountability for those outcomes. The coaching experience has reinforced my moving towards that.

The work that I do is really stressful and complex, and the fact that I take an hour out of my time to devote to being coached really shows that I see value in it. I feel like I am a better person for having connected with Tricia and this effort to make the LAMM material come alive and to make the transition from theory to practice.

LAMM Coaching in Action

What elements of the coaching program do you see as being strong and effective in helping you develop your skills?

80-90% of the success of my coaching experience is Tricia's ability to help me recognize where I am and to help me manage the complexity. She helps me ask the right questions and use my experience to its fullest.

It also helped that she speaks the same CPS language and understands child protection. And she even shares some geography, as she has practiced in the Northeast. Also, since she was the trainer for the LAMM training I went to we share that context and refer back to it all the time. We both have our LAMM books in front of us during our coaching sessions! She has a great knowledge base and gives me resources—journal articles, books, or authors to look up. She'll pull out quotes or different examples that help me visualize if I made the right move or decision, and that helps me feel that I am doing all right.

RESOURCES

Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS)

An online training program for supervisors interested in becoming leaders (www.ncwwi.org/las). For training on coaching see:

The Core Leadership Program – course on Leading People: Describes the importance of coaching, introduces the GROW model, and provides examples.

Coming Soon: The “Take the Lead” series will offer a standalone module on Coaching.

Webinars

From NRCOI: Coaching Change, June 19, 2012

Highlights the role of coaches, supervisors and managers in supporting implementation of a new practice model at one site in New Jersey. View the recording and access handouts at www.nrcoi.org/tele_detail.htm#061912

From the NCWWI: Coaching for Solution Focused Practice, Sept 26, 2012

Part of the National Webinar series, see

[http://www.ncwwi.org/docs/National Workforce Webinar Series Overview.pdf](http://www.ncwwi.org/docs/National%20Workforce%20Webinar%20Series%20Overview.pdf)

NRCOI Supervisory Training Project

Supervisor Training by Topic: Mentoring and Coaching [www.nrcoi.org/SupervisionProject/MentoringCoaching.pdf]: List of mentoring and coaching programs for child welfare supervisors drawn from interviews with child welfare training staff.

Other Resources

Basics of Coaching: A Brief Review of Recent Literature, from the Northeast and Caribbean Implementation Center (NCIC), March 2010 - <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/ncic/assets/CoachingLiteratureReview0310.pdf>.

Improving Employee Performance through Coaching, in *Children's Services Practice Notes*, North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, Vol 13, No. 2, March 2008 <http://www.practicenotes.org/13n2/coach.htm>

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