

Rural Region Quality Parenting Initiative Committee (QPI)
Monthly Meeting Agenda
September 27, 2023; 11:00 am to Noon (Meeting held via Teams)

In Attendance:

Tim Baran	Anita Kelly	Shana Rogers
Tanya Calhoun	Caitlin Loera	Carole Shauffer
Betsey Crumrine	Lauren Karp	Tawney Simpson
Kyle Crutcher	Kristalei Mason	Ashley Smith
Jane Emery	Kelly McKiddie	Liz Stetson
Veronica Hagen	Kandee Mortenson	Rebecca Stoffel
Ashley Hall	Jhoanna Presswood	Megan Tingle
Laurie Jackson	Kevin Quint	Patricia McClinton (Guest)
Bobbette Jamison-Smith	Shelby Riley	Kayla Auzenne (Guest)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kevin welcomed everyone and introductions were made.

2. Recap of the August meeting

The recap of the August meeting was made available prior to this meeting.

3. Announcements & quick stuff

For the benefit of those in this meeting for the first time, Kevin explained that QPI is a national movement for foster care change made up of a network of states, counties, private agencies, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships so they can thrive and grow. The basic tenant of QPI is to “Put the child at the center of all decision making.”

QPI is a change in mindset in child welfare. The Rural Region QPI Committee has been designed to be an agent of change in order to meet the goal of ensuring that all children have excellent care. Kevin reviewed some of the projects that the Committee has been working on over the last 15 months, including establishing a Facebook page, a foster parent support group, a newsletter, and more. Comfort Calls and Ice Breakers have also been an important topic of conversation.

Kevin talked about how this month’s meeting is all about Comfort Calls and Ice Breakers. He introduced the two guest speakers to talk with the group on this topic, Patricia McClinton and Kayla Auzenne, both from DCFS in rural Louisiana.

4. Presentation and Discussion on Comfort Calls and Ice Breakers: Patricia McClinton and Kayla Auzenne, DCFS, Louisiana

Patricia and Kayla talked about the history of Comfort Calls and Ice Breakers (CC/IB) in their state. They call them “Initial Calls.” These calls are intentional and on purpose. They keep connection between a child and their family, even if the parents will not be maintaining custody of their child or children.

The Comfort Call is made at removal and is a chance for the worker and foster parent to contact the birth parent by phone to assure the parent that their child is safe. In addition, the call provides an opportunity for the foster parent to gain information about the child’s likes and dislikes, medications, favorite foods, daily schedule, etc. Ice Breakers come along a few days later and could be a call or a visit between the birth parent and the foster parent to further the conversation about the child’s needs and to begin the process of co-parenting. All of this is meant to help the foster parent, but more so to help the child in foster care to have a smoother and less traumatic experience.

The speakers said, “When we understood the need to cause the least amount of trauma to the child, then it all made sense.” They stressed the need to understand the “why” that gives us the motivation to do this. Carole Shauffer said that “We need to give the workers the ‘why.’”

Typically CC/IB are done with children who have been removed and their birth parents who are in their own home. However, there are some jails that allow the calls. They can also involve grandparents and other birth family members, as well. “Families are the voice for the child.”

One of the benefits of CC/IB is that it helps the foster parent not “start from scratch,” in that they learn about the child, their needs, their schedule, their likes and dislikes. A good question to ask as this program is developed is, “What information does the foster parent need to better care for the child?”

Another benefit is that the CC/IB help the birth parent feel like they are the expert on their child, which they are. It provides them empowerment, respect, and dignity. “You are still the parent.” It engages them in the system instead of creating an adversarial and negative relationship.

In starting the program, some challenges with staff and foster parents included understanding that a new program takes time. It took some time to bring the foster parents to the understanding that they really helps the children and it helps with the eventual goal of reunification. The agency needed to bridge some gaps and educated the foster parents on “why we are doing this.”

Rural Louisiana involves the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). “We need everyone to speak the same language.”

The speakers made the point that CC/IB is not time consuming. It starts with a phone call. But it requires support of managers and supervisors. It is helpful to remind workers and to make it part of supervision. Sustainability has been achieved through on-going education and to “continue.” They have once a month calls with staff. Certain staff present examples of an initial phone call, ice breaker, and transition. These meetings and discussions help to identify and resolve barriers to the program.

The conversation in these meetings is also used to create buy in and to provide examples of how it works. They also do refreshers with workers.

It was stated by the speakers, “If you make one call on the day or night of removal and it helps the child, we should do it.”

Ice Breakers were discussed. Rural Louisiana does IB on the 72 hour hearing date. They are working on streamlining the process.

Louisiana invites birth parents and foster parents to come to certain meetings to tell their stories about CC/IB. It was also mentioned that judges need to be educated about CC/IB.

5. Set next meeting

The next Rural Region QPI meeting will be on Wednesday October 18th at 11:00 am.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at noon but several people stayed behind for a follow up meeting with Patricia and Kayla. Following are the notes from that informal meeting:

It was asked if Nevada DCFS has a policy on CC/IB. Liz said there has been training for all district offices but staff turnover is a problem with sustainability. (Note: Kevin will research if there is a policy)

Shelby mentioned that foster parents don't typically attend the 72 hour hearing so that may not be the best time to do the IB. One person offered that we could do the IB at the 72 hour hearing by phone or by Teams.

Someone commented that supervisors need to hold the workers accountable to do this work. Staff should have to say why they couldn't hold a CC or IB.

We can present at staff meetings and have people report out at the meetings on how the calls go. This will help with normalizing the calls and also in building buy in. But it will take time.

Policy is needed from "the top," but workers will need to buy in so it will be successful. We need workers who are doing them and believe in them. We could set up "see and do" trainings. We also may need to develop a CC/IB note in UNITY to make it easier to document and to find the notes.

Developing outcome data will help make the case. Kevin will ask Carole Shauffer about this.

Someone asked about using CC/IB when a child moves from one foster home to another. The answer is, "Yes!"

A discussion was held on how to utilize the "CC/IB Role Cards" that Louisiana developed. Here are some ideas:

- Supervisors review the role cards with their workers**
- Develop a CC/IB pamphlet for new workers**
- Laminate, post, and disseminate the Role Cards**
- Training and refresher training**
- Develop a way to evaluate how the CC/IB go**

Overall, CC/IB can close the gap between foster parents and birth parents and create more opportunities for co-parenting. The child will benefit.

Everyone thanked Patricia and Kayla. The post meeting ended at about 12:45 pm.