

Delaware_CIP_QRL

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

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Hi, my name is Joanne Sant'Angelo, and I am the Skype coordinator for the state of Delaware. I've been in my position for almost two years and was privileged enough to begin my time as Skype coordinator. Right when Delaware began to first focus on quality representation and family engagement as part of Delaware family engagement work. My predecessor began conducting surveys of parents following court, and what she found was that some parents did not even know the person sitting next to them in court was their attorney. This was it. They were even coming to court at all.

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This began Delaware as change management process to really focus on enhanced legal representation for parents looking towards the model used by the Center for Family Representation in New York for inspiration, a pilot project was created to pair a social worker with the parent attorney. But theory of change. This intervention was that it would increase the likelihood for parent attorneys to engage more effectively with their clients, including to advise them on the law of what is necessary to reunify. In addition, we wanted parents to feel more connected to their attorneys and more educated on the process in the hopes of increasing their willingness to engage in services immediately upon their child's enter into care.

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Some additional hallmarks of Delaware's project included for the parent, attorney and social worker to connect with the client sooner to ensure the right services are in place, and to coordinate these services with key members from the state. Child Welfare Agency team members would also focus on ensuring that quality visitation services were available for families as soon as possible after the child enters care.

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The pilot project found that parents who were engaged with the social worker were more likely to attend their adjudicatory and dispositional hearings to complete more elements of their case plan and were engaged more visitation when it was available to them.

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Some of the challenges we found with this project was maintaining communication across all stakeholders about the pilot project, as it was an introduction of a new practice model and new way working with parents. It created a lot of questions for stakeholders. We also found that there needed to be ongoing training across all disciplines about this new practice model. We have continued this project focusing on another county in our state and during the second round, we really focused on that engagement of stakeholders earlier in the process, as well as providing opportunities for the social worker

to meet with agency staff, as well as with their assigned parent attorney to provide updates on ongoing cases.

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I would say that three things to take away from this project or the three keys to success is for Sipi to be a collaborator, a connector and a caretaker. Being a collaborator include structured information sharing with key stakeholders, especially the agency before, during and after the project being a connector or sounding board for all stakeholders, including the agency, the parent attorney and the social worker. This would include being a liaison to ensure that all parties are on the same page and working together and being a caretaker, managing the relationships and spaces for the stakeholders engaged in the project in order to help move the workforce.

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This can include monthly team meetings with the social worker and parent attorney, as well as attending monthly agency meetings when necessary. I hope that by sharing our experience, both the positives and the struggles, we can encourage you and your state to move forward with your quality legal representation project.

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Thank you.