

News Today

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STEP Team Helps OFC Reach Out to Counties



The Solutions Through Empowerment and Partnership team includes a cross-section of staff representing all OFC bureaus.

The partnership between the Office of Families and Children (OFC) and the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center (MCWIC) is designed to develop a new model for how ODJFS provides technical assistance to child welfare agencies.

To achieve this objective, OFC has formed a Solutions Through Empowerment and Partnership (STEP) team, which includes a cross-section of staff representing all OFC bureaus. The STEP team addresses issues of organizational culture within OFC and works to enhance mutual accountability and respect between OFC and its county and private partners.

"Our collaboration with our county partners and with our private partners is unprecedented throughout the nation," Director Colbert said during a recent STEP team meeting at the Lazarus Building.

County staff have been receptive to working with the STEP team to increase efficiency, said OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice.

"They've said, 'Here's an opportunity to improve,' and I think that's really commendable," Justice said.

Over the past year, the STEP team has drafted a five-element work plan, a charter, and vision, mission and principles, and implemented a comprehensive rule review. The team also has

worked to increase communication among OFC staff, counties and private agencies.

"We're serving our customers, and our customers are our public and our private agencies, so that they can do their jobs, which is keeping families and children safe," said MCWIC Project Manager Kristin Gilbert.

A recent visit from the STEP team helped Vinton County staff bring cases up-to-date with the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and improve communication with ODJFS, said Helen Lehman, director of the Ross and Vinton public children services agencies, which are in the process of merging.

"It was kind of like, 'We're starting anew. This is how we can do things better,'" Lehman said. "It was presented like a helping hand."

STEP team member Melissa Cromwell said she and colleagues Kevin Bullock and Lisa Purdy helped Vinton County review each active case and address outstanding issues. Cromwell said the goal was to let Vinton County staff know that help is available from OFC.

"Everyone goes to work every day to do a good job," Cromwell said. "Any assistance they can get in doing that job, that's what they're looking for."