

Necco Executive Summary

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Established in 1996 by the Necco family, Necco is a private child-, youth-, and family-serving company that is committed to *building families*. Necco serves clients in four states—Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, and Georgia. They provide foster care in all four states. Additionally, in most of their jurisdictions they offer independent living services, behavioral health services, residential and outpatient services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and an alternatives to detention program. In the fall of 2012, Necco engaged researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to develop the agency’s administrative data resources into research evidence to build knowledge about their program performance and to assess Necco’s efforts to further develop organizational capacity for continuous quality improvement (CQI). This summary contains highlights from the larger report that describes the activities involved in the collaboration between Chapin Hall and Necco.

Assessing and Building Capacity

Necco has taken a number of critical steps to become better at what they do—delivering strong outcomes for the children, youth, and families they serve. For the past five years, Chapin Hall and Necco have worked together to enhance the agency’s capacity to use research evidence, to establish and generate baseline performance metrics, and to survey Necco’s culture for learning and ongoing improvement. This effort, coupled with Necco’s significant investments in growth and development strategy, business intelligence, data infrastructure, and internal

human capital, demonstrate the agency’s prioritization of both the acquisition of knowledge and its incorporation into business and program decisions.

Capacity for Research Evidence Use and Quality Improvement

Organizations can choose to build knowledge about their current practices and opportunities for improvement by investing in acquiring, processing, and applying research evidence (RE). Necco invested in *acquiring* RE by making database enhancements to collect more meaningful information. The Chapin Hall team worked with Necco counterparts to convert the raw data into analytic files that could be used to generate RE. To promote the *processing* of RE, Chapin Hall supported Necco’s performance management team in their efforts to develop and analyze performance metrics using best practices. Additionally, the engagement with Chapin Hall included education and technical assistance that promoted Necco staff’s internal skills for RE processing through an Advanced Analytics training and ongoing consultation on how to manipulate the analytic files. In the vein of continuous quality improvement, Chapin Hall researchers continue to work with Necco counterparts to *apply* RE by supporting their efforts to recognize promising practices as well as to identify opportunities for program improvements.

Performance Measurement

To establish baseline performance, the Chapin Hall team created analytic files that Necco can

manipulate internally and also drafted preliminary program profile report based on the analytic file. These files allow Necco to track longitudinal performance at the program, managing office, and state levels. Performance metrics tables are refreshed on a biannual basis, and Necco works with the analytic files internally using Tableau software. This allows Necco to incorporate outcome measures into agency performance monitoring, track program performance over time, and look for trends to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The program profile reports compare Necco's performance to local and national standards. The first set of reports for foster care and independent living suggest that Necco is performing at or above these standards. Highlights include:

- All children and youth who entered Necco Foster Care between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2016 experienced, on average, 2.9 placement moves per 1,000 days in care—well below the federal standard of 4.12 moves.
- At least 40 percent of Necco Foster Care clients entering care in 2013–15 achieved permanency (reunification, adoption, etc.) within 12 months, meeting or exceeding the federal standard of 40 percent.

Suggestions for Future Focus

As Necco strives to set and achieve greater performance standards, we have suggested several areas for future focus. Necco can build on the work to establish baseline performance metrics by integrating them into a well-defined CQI program for client services. A program level CQI process that includes the development of specific logic models describing how each program is structured to produce key outcomes would be an effective counterpart to the sustainability cycle model through which Necco leadership monitors Necco's overall business performance.

Furthermore, Necco can continue to build and expand the longitudinal database, reproducing current metrics and adding new data elements to

the analytic file. As programs grow and expand, thoughtful consideration about what leadership needs to *know* to continue strong performance can inform how to expand the file so that it can produce the evidence necessary for monitoring, oversight, and continuous improvement. Necco's significant investment in an "evidence infrastructure" situates them well to not only build that knowledge base but also to make it available to both leadership and staff.

Finally, continuing to provide staff at all levels with access to research evidence, training them in its use, and encouraging to them to be guided by what they observe and learn will strengthen the capacity of all Necco employees. And that increased capacity, in turn, will mean that Necco's existing strong internal structures and processes that promote experimentation and innovation will benefit from the contributions of staff whose ideas are grounded in evidence.

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