Northern California Training Academy CQI Practicum

**Session 1: “I observe that… I think it’s because…”**

Observations & Hypotheses Workbook

**Goals for the session:**

1. Make an observation about the rate of re-entry in your county.
2. Generate hypotheses as to what might be driving that outcome.
3. Develop a plan for generating evidence to support/refute your hypotheses.

This practicum will focus on counties’ efforts to improve re-entry outcomes – i.e., lower the rate of re-entry – for children in foster care.

Evidence-based problem solving requires managers to support the following statements with evidence:

* I observe [some outcome that needs improvement].
* I think it’s because [of this reason].
* So I plan to [implement some intervention]…
* …which I think will result in [an improvement to the observed outcome].

**Part 1:** In this session, we begin by using administrative data analyses to support the first statement. You will use the results of these analyses to make a series of observations about the speed and likelihood of re-entry in your county. Part 1 of this workbook provides space for you to record your observations. Each section corresponds to a tab in the **davis\_reentry tables** Excel workbook. At the end of Part 1, synthesize your observation(s) into a paragraph.

**Part 2:** Once you’ve made an observation about re-entry, begin to hypothesize as to what might be driving the outcome that you see. Then, develop a plan for how you will gather evidence to support (or refute) those hypotheses.

**ANALYTIC NOTES**

* Analyses are based on California’s state customized FCDA spell file (fcda.chapinhall.org).
* Only children adjudicated for child abuse/neglect are included (i.e., juvenile justice youth are excluded).
* All foster care spells are included (i.e., first admissions as well as reentries).
* Censor date is 6/30/2016.
* Smaller counties will have smaller cell sizes – be sure to attend to the count as well as the percent when interpreting the rate of re-entry.

**PART 1: I OBSERVE THAT…**

**ENTRY COHORT ANALYSES**

1. Of all children who entered care during the year, how many exited to reunification/relative (XFM) within 12 months?
2. Of children who entered care during the year AND exited to reunification/relative within 12 months, what percent re-entered within one year of exit?
3. Among children who entered care between 2010 and 2013 AND exited to reunification/relative within 12 months, how does the likelihood of re-entry within one year **vary by child age at entry**?
4. Among children who entered care between 2010 and 2013 AND exited to reunification/relative within 12 months, how does the likelihood of re-entry within one year **vary by exit type**?

Additional **entry cohort** questions asked and answered:

**EXIT COHORT ANALYSES**

1. Of all children who exited during each year, how many reunified or exited to relative?
2. Of all children who exited during each year to reunification/relative, what percent re-entered care within 12 months?
3. Among children who exited to reunification/relative between 2010 and 2014, does the likelihood of re-entering within 12 months **vary by the child’s age at entry**?
4. Among children who exited to reunification/relative between 2010 and 2014, does the likelihood of re-entering within 12 months **vary by exit type**?
5. Among children who exited to reunification/relative between 2010 and 2014 does the likelihood of re-entering within 12 months **vary by how long the child had been in foster care**?
6. Among children who exited to reunification/relative 2010 and 2014, what was the cumulative likelihood of re-entry after discharge? How does my county compare to the state? How has the pattern changed in my county over time (i.e., from one exit cohort to the next)?

Additional **exit cohort** questions asked and answered:

**SUMMARIZE YOUR OBSERVATIONS**

I observe that…

**PART 2: I THINK IT’S BECAUSE…**

**SKETCH OUT YOUR HYPOTHESES**

In the grid below, write each of your observations. Next to each, write your hypothesis as to what might be driving that outcome. Add rows as necessary.

Which of your hypotheses is/are the most plausible? Which is/are the most testable?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **I observe that…** | **I think it’s because…** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Create a plan for gathering evidence TO support (or possibly refute) your hypothesis**

Just as making an observation about performance requires you to “know your question and write it down” so does making an evidence-based hypothesis as to the cause of that observation. For each of your hypotheses, follow the five steps below to articulate a research question and determine a systematic plan for answering it.

***EXAMPLE:***

**Step 1: State question/curiosity in general terms.**

*I observe that of all children exiting care in my county, re-entry within one year is more likely for teens than it is for all younger children. I think it’s because teens have behavior problems that parents can’t manage once their teens come home. I wonder if we are give parents of teens the right support to manage those behaviors when their children come home. If there’s a gap there, maybe we can do more to support parents and stabilize those reunifications. So, generally speaking, my questions are:*

* *Do teen exiters in fact have more behavioral issues than younger exiters?*
* *Are we monitoring families enough when children are home on trial discharge?*
* *Are parents of teens more/less likely to receive age-appropriate parenting support?*

**Step 2: What method do you need to answer the question? Some possibilities are:**

* Administrative data analysis
* Case review
* CANS data analysis
* Focus groups
* Interviews
* Adding a variable to your spell file?

*I can use a case review to answer these questions. In the record I should be able to find out the child’s behavioral needs at the time of exit. I should also be able to see what type of parenting support the parent received, both while the child was in care and after discharge.*

**Step 3: Pick the type of population that you will use to answer the question.**

* If you’re analyzing administrative data, will you use an entry cohort, exit cohort, or an in-care population?
* If you’re selecting a sample for case review, will it be from an entry cohort, exit cohort, or an in-care population?
* If your population is foster parents, will they be selected from an entry cohort (starting FPs), exit cohort (leaving FPs), or an in-care population (active FPs)?
* If your population is service providers, how will they be selected?

*My observation about re-entries is made from an exit cohort (“Of all children who exited…”) so I would take a sample from an exit cohort. I need a random sample of teens and a random sample of younger children. Also, in each group, I also need to select some children who re-entered and some who didn’t.*

**Step 4: Identify the specific population(s) you will use to answer the question.**

*I will select a stratified random sample of children who exited care in 2014. Specifically, I will take 10 random cases from each of the four following populations:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Entry age* | *Re-entered within one year* | *Did not re-enter within one year* |
| *0-12* | *10 cases* | *10 cases* |
| *13+* | *10 cases* | *10 cases* |

**Step 5: Write the analytic question(s).**

* *Did the parent receive age-appropriate parenting services while the child was in care?*
* *Does the record indicate that at the time of exit, the child had behavioral problems?*
* *Was there a trial discharge before reunification?*
* *How many times did the worker visit the family during the trial discharge?*
* *Did the parent receive age-appropriate parenting services during trial discharge? If yes, how many times did the parent attend that program?*
* *Did the parent receive age-appropriate parenting services as part of an aftercare plan?*

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