



Best practice specialists offer guidance, support to CYF caseworkers

Casework is a challenging career that requires balancing the needs of families with regulatory requirements. To help caseworkers maneuver through each aspect of their role, the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) created the case practice specialist position which was developed into the safety, permanency and best practice specialist position in 2016.

Best practice specialists are available in each regional office to support caseworkers, supervisors, and clinical managers in their work by informing staff about new policy changes, educating on best practices, and conducting quality and compliance reviews. Currently there are nine best practice specialists in CYF.

“Our best practice specialists have all been caseworkers themselves, so they understand the challenges that caseworkers experience,” said Zara Carroll, manager of safety, permanency and best practice in CYF. “The best practice specialists are not there to take punitive action; their role is solely to mentor and support caseworkers to help them make more informed decisions.”

In addition to day-to-day support of caseworkers and management, the best practice specialists have played an instrumental role in the reduction of congregate care placements. They work with staff to conduct permanency roundtables to discuss what has worked and not worked as well as new ideas or thoughts about what could be tried again.

The best practice specialists are also available to mentor caseworkers in the field. This may include attending a home visit with the caseworker to model a thorough assessment or attending a court hearing to support the caseworker through the process. The best practice specialist is also utilized for mentoring new hires to coach best practice from the onset of their employment as a caseworker.

“We’ve seen that the best practice specialists can really help to improve communication between caseworkers and supervisors, as well as within the regional offices as a whole,” Zara adds. “Knowing that there is always someone available for support and guidance helps our caseworkers provide the best possible service to our families.”