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| LOCAL COMMISSIONERS MEMORANDUM |  
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DSS-4037EL (Rev. 9/89)

Transmittal No: 94 LCM-107

Date: September 1, 1994

Division: Services & Community  
Development

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: Competency-Based Training

ATTACHMENTS: A: Family and Children Services Outcome-Based Training  
Project Description  
(Available On-Line)

Together we are entering a new era in child welfare. The Department, and in particular the Division of Services and Community Development, is retooling its financial, systems, policy, planning and training resources to most effectively support local district's and voluntary agencies' ability to achieve positive outcomes with the children and families they serve.

As part of this comprehensive effort, the Division of Services and Community Development, Office of Family and Children Services, and the Office of Human Resource Development, are changing our approach to training to one that is based on supporting caseworkers' abilities to achieve outcomes with families. A first step in this process is the task of identifying the core and enabling casework staff abilities, or competencies, that are essential to the achievement of program goals and positive outcomes for families. This is an important part of our plan to design a system of training that supports supervisors' and managers' ability to use training to achieve these outcomes for families. The attached project description provides more detail on this approach and on the project workplan. We are writing to solicit your participation in this effort to design a system to meet our mutual needs.

The Department annually invests more than \$25 million in child welfare training. A wide range of courses covering many topics have been developed over time in response to local district and voluntary agency needs and in response to emerging priorities and social problems. We know from feedback received from all levels of district and agency staff, from our training contractors and from client families, that we need to get better results from our investment.

In response, we have begun the process of examining our current training system, our laws, regulations and policy statements, and our own understanding of what the people of New York and the federal government expect state and local Departments of Social Services to be able to achieve with families and children at risk. We have examined the efforts of a number of states and professional development organizations. We have enlisted the services of the Child Welfare Institute of Atlanta, Georgia, to facilitate our thinking and our design of a more effective way of preparing staff to achieve our shared goals. We have drawn on the vision and expertise of local district administrators and caseworkers, staff development coordinators and SDSS program staff by gathering them together for a three day retreat to hammer out the building blocks of an outcome-based system of training. This advisory group, whose members reflect the diversity within our child welfare system, was able to develop a set of caseworker outcomes and abilities that they believe to be universal.

Over the next few months, we will ask you to examine these outcomes statements and to let us know the degree to which you believe that caseworkers in your district should be able to achieve these outcomes in their work with families and children. We will also ask you to review the hierarchy of core and enabling casework staff abilities that emerged from the work of the advisory group. We will then use these abilities as the foundation for a plan to develop an outcome-based training system.

This year we are focusing our efforts on the expectations for staff achievement of outcomes. We hope that you and your Family and Children Services staff will participate in this process. Once we clarify what staff should be able to accomplish, and the model of practice that we believe will enable that accomplishment, we will turn our attention to how we can use training to prepare staff. We, at that point, will get input from staff development people, our training contractors, and others as we examine how we can best design an outcome-based training system.

As we move forward with our plans to revitalize the Consolidated Services Plan, develop the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and launch Families for Kids ASAP, we must have a system of training that will support staff now and in the future. We will work with you and your staff over the next year to ensure that all plans and decisions are carefully considered and responsive to district, agency and Department needs.

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We will keep you informed of all progress in this endeavor and look forward to your ideas. We recommend you share this with your Director of Services and Staff Coordinator.

If you have any questions, please contact Gail Haulenbeek at 1-800-343-8859, ext. 4-9879, or direct at 518-474-9879 or by user ID AX8340.

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Frank Puig  
Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Services and Community  
Development

Family and Children Services  
Outcome-Based Training  
Project Description  
March 1994

The New York State Department of Social Services annually invests more than 25 million dollars in child welfare training. Over the years this investment has led to the development of a wide array of courses covering many topics and concerns in social services practice. These courses were developed in response to local district and voluntary agency needs and in response to emerging priorities and social problems. In our current training system, training is provided by many different contractors through regional and agency specific training offerings. This combination of differing needs, emerging priorities and many training providers has resulted in the development of courses that at times overlap each other, may be either too basic or too advanced for some staff and may make it difficult for supervisors and managers to select the right training for their staff.

SDSS has begun an effort which will unify and base training on defined caseworker role outcomes and associated abilities. Caseworkers are social service agencies' way of providing benefits (e.g.: safety, adoption) to children and families. What they are able to do with and for children and families represents the benefits the organization extends directly through the casework relationship. Training caseworkers to perform their role must take into consideration the outcomes that their agency expects them to achieve. The approach that we have chosen for a competency-based, or as we prefer to call it, an outcome-based training system begins with the definition of role outcomes for the casework position.

This is a significant departure from the professional development approach that the Department has taken in the past. The traditional professional development model has staff assessing their needs and interests, and has staff decide how or if the information and skills presented in training could or should be put into practice. While this may be an effective model for individual professional practitioners, it may not be an effective strategy for managers to rely upon as they try to mobilize their staff resources to achieve their agencies' mission. To be effective in public social services, it is helpful to first define what caseworkers are expected to achieve for the agency and for families and children, then, to design training to give them the skills to perform.

A role outcome is a result the caseworker is expected to contribute toward the overall program goal. For example, a role outcome might be a decision, such as determination of the validity of a complaint of abuse or neglect. Or, it might be a change in client behavior, such as a parent selecting and using a non-physical approach to discipline with a child. The approach begins with program outcomes. We will then look at the abilities that a caseworker must have to achieve those outcomes. In this way our training can focus on the abilities that are truly important to achieving results, rather than focusing on just general knowledge or the processes that caseworkers must complete.

The project is using a key informant advisory group to define outcomes and competencies. This group reflects different levels within local and central offices, and other dimensions of diversity within the department. Additionally, broader review and input from the field will be obtained through an interactive delphi survey process. The approach selected by SDSS for the development of an outcome-based training system incorporates the following design and decision process elements:

1. Specification of Outcomes. Casework roles are defined by the expectations held for the role. Expectations generally are defined both by outcomes expected from role performance and by methods used to achieve the outcomes. The first step in the design of the training system will involve definition of the outcomes caseworkers are expected to achieve in their service relationship with children and their families. For purposes of this task, an outcome is defined as: a change in the pattern of client behavior (e.g. a parent consistently provides supervision appropriate to the child's age); a change in the capability of a client (e.g. the acquisition of a parenting skill); or a decision (e.g. determination of the validity of a complaint of abuse or neglect).
2. Specification of Core Abilities. Core abilities are broad capabilities considered essential to achieve a desired outcome. Generally, each desired outcome may require the presence of several core abilities on the part of the caseworker. For example, achieving the program goal of family preservation requires that the caseworker be able to reduce the risk of maltreatment to acceptably safe levels. Ultimately, performance on the job is a function of three ingredients: ability, opportunity and motivation.
3. Definition of Enabling Abilities. Enabling abilities are more specific and concrete performance capabilities which are necessary to perform a core ability. For example, an enabling ability which supports the core ability described in number two above might be the ability to determine the level of various risk elements within a family. Another enabling ability might be the ability to engage the parents.
4. Selection of a Model of Practice. Models of practice define elements of the process used to pursue outcomes. A model of practice is based on theories, beliefs and existing knowledge both about causes of social problems and how people are enabled to change their social condition. Historically, child welfare practice has been child centered and individually focused. More recently, the field has been shifting to a more family and systems focus in both assessment and intervention. This shift has profound implications for both interventions and the preparation of staff to effect these interventions.
5. Specification of Training System Requirements. SDSS will need to decide on a number of structural elements of the training system. These decisions will ultimately influence curriculum design. For example, time allocated to training determines, in part, what levels of competency can be attained in training, and therefore what level of competency of workers will be offered to children and families receiving

service. Similarly, the timing of training relative to employment will determine the length of exposure of children and families to untrained staff. Other factors requiring decisions include, assumptions about trainer qualifications, continuity of trainers relative to trainees within core training sequences, residential requirements for core training sequences, measurement of training outcomes, recognition of trainee achievement (e.g. certification for passing a test on the program), assessing training needs and planning for training, relationship of training to job tenure and promotion, etc.

During the initial retreat of the key informant work group, members will identify outcomes and core abilities. They will discuss elements of practice models and considerations for the structure and delivery of training. Following the retreat, staff of the Child Welfare Institute will complete a description of related enabling abilities necessary to support the outcomes and core abilities developed by the retreat participants. After review from the workgroup this will be distributed for broader review and input. Once comments are obtained, a final list of outcomes and related abilities (competencies) will be prepared and the next phase of work will focus on recommendations for design of a training system to implement these recommendations.

A final report will describe options available for the design of a training system based on the defined outcomes and competencies, along with advantages and disadvantages of each option. The Department expects to begin review of the report by October, 1994. Work on the project will continue throughout 1995. The Department will be working closely with local districts and voluntary agencies to ensure that the decisions to implement various options are thoroughly considered and mutually satisfactory.