

Phase II Best Practice Begins Roll Out in January

Phase II of Best Practice is slated to roll out to the field in January '03 as part of the Department's on-going efforts to provide the highest quality services possible to our children and families. It's an effort that's drawn expertise from our own Department staff as well as from nationally known child welfare experts throughout the United States. It puts Illinois in the forefront of cutting edge child welfare practice but, most importantly, it will be a tremendous benefit to the children and families we serve!

Best Practice will provide more consistency in the way services are delivered throughout the State and contains Core Principals that will guide casework practice including:

- Case Decision Making that is consistent with a child's sense of time
- Respect for Family Connectedness regardless of case outcome
- Ongoing, thorough Assessments throughout the life of a case
- Full Disclosure to parents and families about their case-related situation
- Caseworkers as Change Agents for the family
- Empowerment of Families to participate in case decision making

- Family Involvement in frequent reviews
- Foster Parents as a support for permanency
- Family behavior impacts safety decisions
- Reasonable efforts by staff and reasonable progress by parents
- One worker per family
- Responsiveness to diversity in families

Fundamental practices will support these Core Principals to insure that services offered to children and families served by the Department and by private agencies are consistent, are of high quality and are delivered as promptly as possible.

Best Practice will begin with a series of Orientation sessions for DCFS management and staff in January and will extend until the end of the month. The Orientation will give everyone an overview of Best Practice Core Principals, information about the SACWIS roll out, and an opportunity for discussion about how the upcoming changes with Best Practice/SACWIS will impact the field.

After Orientation, Best Practice Fundamentals Sessions will occur, emphasizing basic knowledge and skills and will take place over five days. The training is designed to develop staff proficiency with the core casework practices of

Continued on Page 4

Contents

Phase II Best Practice Begins Roll Out in January - The second phase of continuous improvements for children and families in Illinois

Best Practice: Valuing Family Connectedness - Best Practice focuses on keeping family members connected

POS Training Steering Committee - Diane Yost and Dave McClure help facilitate POS involvement in SACWIS

Coming to the Field, SACWIS Increment Model Office - The SACWIS Project Team takes Phase II out into the field for a test drive

SACWIS Project Update - SACWIS project status

Best Practice: Valuing Family Connectedness

Family connectedness has its beginnings in the parent-child attachment process and is the glue that holds relationships together within the family. Most families that receive Department services have both deficits and strengths when it comes to their connections between family members. To a large extent, case outcomes are determined by how much, or how little connectedness is present within the family at crucial decision points in the life of a case. But regardless of the degree of connectedness within the family or the case outcome, the Department's Best Practice model places a high value on this central concept.

Even though we understand the importance of establishing and maintaining connections within the family, it's critical to incorporate this concept into our work with all families. Here are some ways to accomplish this:

- Non-custodial parents should be involved in the case early. This not only helps to strengthen the connection between the non-custodial parent and the child, it provides the opportunity to develop an additional family resource in the event this becomes necessary.
- Help the family identify support systems and resources. This could include the non-custodial

parent, a sibling or extended family member, like an aunt or cousin. Too often, potential family resources are overlooked. They might be good resources for occasional childcare, transportation assistance or even long-term care if needed.

- Help parents learn to develop activities that will strengthen their connections to their children. Relatively simple tasks like reading to children, caring for them when they're ill, playing games, celebrating birthdays and holidays, and spending time together are ways to strengthen connections within the family.
- Help ensure that parent-child visits are maximally beneficial. Visits should be planned with a definite purpose and should, to the extent possible, be conducted in surroundings that afford the most opportunity for healthy parent-child interactions. In this regard, it's better to graduate from the office to more natural surroundings when it's safe and when obvious progress has been made in the office. Office visit settings should be designed to be as much like a home setting as possible.
- When children are in substitute care, parents must have the opportunity to participate in activities and events that involve their child; healthcare, school meetings, recreational activities, etc. This not only helps build connections be-

tween parents and children but can also be a benefit for the relationship between birth parents and substitute care providers.

- Even when children are unable to return home, connections with their parents and other family members can ease the trauma associated with out of home care and help the child ultimately understand what has happened in their life. The goal of maintaining family connectedness should be based on what the parent can offer the child balanced with what perceived benefit the child can receive from their parent.

All of these activities promote connectedness between parents and children and result in optimal case continuity for children and families throughout the life of the case, despite the case outcome. Promoting family connectedness helps children and families and should be a central focus of our casework efforts.

.....

POS Training Steering Committee

In November 2002, Diane Yost and Dave McClure formed the Phase II Best Practice POS Training Steering Committee. Diane is the Director of the Training Academy funded by DCFS, which has responsibility for all system-wide child welfare training in Illinois. Dave McClure is the Executive Director

Continued on Page 4

Coming to the Field, SACWIS Increment Model Office

The SACWIS Project is rolling out the Increment Model Office. An Increment Model Office, or IMO, is an opportunity for selected DCFS and POS agency staff to “test drive” specific functionality of the SACWIS Phase II application. The purpose for going out to the field to involve staff is to understand what training and preparation actual SACWIS users need so they can use SACWIS when Phase II goes live.

The roll out of the Increment Model Office is completed in three phases over the first five months of this year. Each phase conducts IMOs at two DCFS field offices in different regions. The IMO at each location lasts about two weeks and involves about 20 DCFS and POS staff.

Each IMO has scheduled sessions focused on a specific function in Phase II SACWIS (intake, assessment, service planning, etc.). The IMO session lasts about three hours and is conducted by a skilled facilitator with one staff member at a time. During the session, the staff member explains how they do these functions now, “tests out” the functionality on the SACWIS application, and then shares their experience of using SACWIS. It is important to remember that the design of SACWIS is complete when the IMO rolls out and design changes cannot be made. The goal of the IMO is to understand what SACWIS users need in order to be prepared to use the application.

After the IMO is completed, the information staff provide is used in

three ways. First, much of the information users provide in the IMOs helps develop training. The SACWIS Training Team can provide better training when they understand how staff actually use SACWIS to do their work. Second, the IMO provides additional information to DCFS in preparation for SACWIS. New technology often creates changes to the way people do their work. The IMOs provide a clearer understanding of these changes. Third, the IMOs provide information that can benefit all DCFS and POS staff. The information gathered from the IMOs can give staff an understanding of what to expect, what to prepare for, and the changes that will occur as a result of SACWIS.

.....

SACWIS Project Update

Here is a quick summary of the SACWIS Phase II Project progress. In the last issue of Advances, there was an overview of the different areas that make up the SACWIS project. This article provides a snapshot of current SACWIS Project activities for the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003. Additional SACWIS Project updates will appear in the next issue of Advances.

The SACWIS Phase II is comprised of the following functional areas:

- Intake, Assignment, Approval
- Person and Case Management
- Assessments
- Service Planning
- Staff Organization

SACWIS Design

The SACWIS Design Team works with DCFS subject matter experts to design

the functional areas. The SACWIS design closely reflects the Best Practice Model. The Design Team has completed the design for the first four functional areas (see list above). The design of the Placement/Legal and Staff Organization functional areas is scheduled to be completed the beginning of 2003.

SACWIS Development

The SACWIS Development Team uses the completed SACWIS designs to create what we see as the SACWIS application. The SACWIS Development Team has completed the development for the Intake, Assignment, Approval and Person and Case Management functional areas. Development of the Assessment and Service Planning function areas began at the end of December. Development of the Placement and Staff Organization begins early 2003.

SACWIS Testing

The SACWIS Testing Team is responsible to make sure the system works the way it was designed. DCFS has completed User Acceptance Testing (UAT) for portions of the Intake functionality. UAT testing is the process DCFS uses to verify that the functionality of the application is correct. UAT testing for all other functional areas begins early 2003. After UAT testing is complete, field testing begins in the spring of 2003.

SACWIS Training

The SACWIS Training Team has started work to identify the total number of users, the total number of training days, and the temporary training sites. The Training Team

Continued on Page 4

Phase II Best Practice Begins Roll Out in January

Continued from Page 1

concurrent planning, assessment and service planning and the use of family meetings.

Fundamentals Training for DCFS staff will begin in February and will extend through July. Training will roll out one region at a time in order to coincide with the subsequent roll out of SACWIS. In Phase I of SACWIS, staff were trained in Best Practice followed by SACWIS Training but SACWIS “went live” all at once. In Phase II, SACWIS will be implemented region by region—the first region to receive Best Practice Training will

be the first to use SACWIS, the second to receive Best Practice Training will be second on SACWIS and so on. This approach to the roll out in Phase II avoids the technical problems associated with implementing SACWIS for all Phase II users at once, and also gives the field time to work with Best Practice prior to SACWIS Implementation.

Best Practice Orientation and Training will be provided to POS staff beginning in the fall of '03. Exact dates have yet to be set for private agencies. The Orientation and Best Practice Training Curriculum for POS agencies will be the same as provided to Department staff with the rollout strategy being done in segments, making it similar to the Department’s regional roll out.

Look for more specific orientation and training information through future D-Net announcements, through upcoming Newsletters and through your local management team.

There have been many positive changes in the Department in recent years that have resulted in better services to children and families in Illinois. Phase II of Best Practice will build on these changes and will take the quality of services delivered to Illinois families to an even higher level.

POS Training Steering Committee

Continued from Page 2

of the Youth Service Bureau of Illinois Valley in Ottawa, Illinois.

The Steering Committee will work on behalf of the private sector to develop rollout plans for Best Practice and SACWIS. They will identify timelines and trainer and site resources necessary to deliver Best Practice and SACWIS training to private agencies. This training is scheduled to begin late 2003 or early 2004.

In November 2002, a POS down-state provider meeting was convened to begin addressing the

above issues. For Cook County repeats of this meeting will be held on February 6, 2003, at Bensenville/Lifelink and on February 7, 2003, at Ada S. McKinley. A letter has gone out inviting individuals to attend.

If you would like more information about the Phase II Best Practice POS Training Steering Committee, please contact Diane Yost at (312) 328-2857 or Dave McClure at (815) 433-3953, ext. 247. You may also email Diane at dyost@idcfs.state.il.us or Dave at dmc@ysbiv.org.

SACWIS Project Update

Continued from Page 3

will begin developing training materials for each of the functional areas beginning early 2003.

SACWIS Change Management

The SACWIS Change Management Team is rolling out the Increment Model Office to a DCFS office in each region beginning early in 2003. For more information, see the article on the Increment Model Office in this issue of Advances.

<p>ADVANCES IN CHILD WELFARE</p> <p>is a bi-monthly publication of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services SACWIS and Best Practice project.</p> <p>Design & Production: American Management Systems</p> <p>Please send inquiries and suggestions to the Best Practice mailbox. It is listed in Outlook or can be reached at bpractic@idcfs.state.il.us.</p>
--