

Coming Soon: Phase II Best Practice Orientation

As we approach implementation of Phase II of Best Practice, staff are interested in learning more about Phase II and what it might mean for their jobs. Phase II Orientation is just around the corner, and it should begin to answer many questions regarding what is involved in Phase II and how it will impact service delivery.

Orientation for DCFS will begin in early January with sessions for supervisors. Once supervisors have participated in the orientation sessions, they will be provided to line staff. Orientation will begin in late January, with plans to have the orientation completed by late February. As was done with Phase I training, the Orientation sessions will be offered regionally to minimize travel time for participants. Sessions for POS supervisors and staff are currently being planned.

During orientation, staff can expect to receive an overview of Best Practice Phase II. This will include a discussion of the Principles of Intervention for Permanency, core practices relevant to all cases, and benefits of Best Practice. In addition, staff will have an opportunity to discuss necessary supports and changes needed to implement Best Practice.

Although there is a lot of additional

information that will come in future Best Practice trainings, this orientation provides staff an opportunity to have a preview of what to expect in Phase II.

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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

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SACWIS Phase II Roadmap

Some staff may be wondering what's next for SACWIS. This article provides the big picture of what Phase II of SACWIS is and gives a brief description of some of the key activities that involve staff and how SACWIS will impact you in the future. You will receive more information on the specific timing of the activities from your manager, supervisor and the Best Practice/SACWIS team.

The Scope

DCFS and POS staff who do work in the following functional areas are involved in SACWIS Phase II:

- Intake (both for SCR and on-going casework)
- Case Management
- Assessment
- Service Planning
- Placement
- Post-adoption
- Assignment and approval
- Legal
- Staff Organization

The best way to describe Phase II readiness activities is to chunk them into the following areas: Best Practice activities, SACWIS development activities, SACWIS training and readiness activities, and implementation activities. Below is a description of the organization and timing of these activities.

Best Practice Activities

The first activities for field staff are Best Practice Orientation and Training. Both DCFS and POS staff involved in Phase II will participate in these activities.

- Best Practice Orientation: statewide presentations to supervisors and staff providing an introduction and overview to Best Practice for permanency.
- Best Practice Fundamentals Training: training focusing on how to do assessment, concurrent planning, and family meetings.
- Best Practice Advanced Skills Development: advanced training sessions for supervisors with attention to the application of assessment, concurrent planning, and family meetings.

Best Practice training will be staggered for DCFS and POS staff. Staggering helps eliminate the time gap between trainings and provides the training when staff need it as part of their daily work.

SACWIS Development

Some key facts about SACWIS Development...

- Best Practice and DCFS field staff work with the SACWIS Project Team to guide the design of the different functional areas (assessment, case management, etc.).
- Computer programmers build the functional areas based on the design.

- Once the development is completed, the functional areas of the application go through a series of tests. Integration and acceptance testing is done to verify that the application works the way it was designed. Field-testing is the last and most important test. At field offices, the application is tested in the actual work environment.

SACWIS Training and Readiness

While the Best Practice Team is providing orientation and training, the SACWIS Project Team is busy preparing SACWIS training and readiness activities. What you can expect...

- SACWIS training for field staff will be similar to the way they will use SACWIS doing case-work in the field.
- SACWIS training is staggered for DCFS and POS staff to follow Best Practice training.
- DCFS staff will attend SACWIS training by regions.
- POS staff will attend SACWIS training in 12 implementation groups.

In addition to providing training to build skills to use SACWIS, the SACWIS Project Team will work with DCFS and POS managers and supervisors to prepare for the changes that will result from SACWIS. These activities focus on understanding and addressing issues related to work processes staff face when they begin to use SACWIS.

Best Practice/SACWIS Draws Expertise from the Field

Focus on Sandra Hughes

Sandra Hughes has worked for the Department in business support services for twenty-six years. For seventeen of those years, she's been working on the business end of operations, with various business related jobs in between. At one time, for instance, Sandra was the Business Administrator for three short-term residential programs run by the Department prior to the time these services were contracted out to private agencies.

From '96 through May of last year, Sandra was the Administrative Services Manager in Cook Central Region. In this capacity, she was responsible for budgeting, contracting, procurement, facilities, and equipment for the Region. Prior to that, Sandra served as Section Manager for the Division of Program Review ('85-'94), which involved program evaluation and quality assurance monitoring of child welfare programs across Illinois and out-of-state institutional facilities.

Sandra was asked to join the Best Practice/SACWIS team on a part-time basis beginning in June of 2000. In the beginning, Sandra attended business and financial meetings and participated in focus groups, but her part-time tenure was short-lived as she was asked to make a full-time commitment to the Project in June 2001. Her major responsibility since then has been to

participate in the design of SACWIS Phase II.

What does Phase II include? Right now, it includes all casework functions—Intake, Assessment and Service planning. The remainder of Phase II, including eligibility, financial and licensing, as well as some other functions, will be developed after the casework component is completed.

What is the major goal of Phase II design? According to Sandra, it's basically to support Best Practice so that staff can more efficiently complete their work in the field. In order to accomplish this, staff will need to make changes in how they document their work, just like staff did in Phase I. "SACWIS will help staff better organize their work", she says.

In addition to her work in Phase II design, Sandra has been given the added responsibility of being Phase II Test Manager. In this capacity, she'll be responsible for overseeing the testing of the system during its development, during acceptance testing (when the Department tests it to decide whether to accept the final product from the developer), and post implementation testing (when the system improvements are made).

What are the major challenges to Phase II development, testing and ultimate roll-out to the field? Unhesitatingly, Sandra says, "Making sure we get it right—that what we're doing helps the field." She goes on to say, "You either work directly with kids or you support the people who do, but either way,

we're all working toward the same goal—to help children."

Sandra is an example of many Department staff who have devoted their time, skills and expertise to the Best Practice/SACWIS Project. We appreciate the contributions, knowledge, and hard work of these staff.

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SACWIS Phase II Roadmap

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Implementation Activities

The implementation SACWIS Phase II occurs when field staff actually begins using SACWIS as part of their daily work. Implementing SACWIS with such a large number of users requires the implementation to be broken down into regions for DCFS and by groups for POS agencies.

- Implementation for DCFS staff will be done regionally, meaning that implementation will occur one region after another.
- POS agencies will be implemented in twelve groups after DCFS implementation.
- Post-implementation support will consist of help desk and on-site support.
- On-site support will consist of SACWIS support staff and on-site desk-side training at local field offices.

Best Practice: Valuing Family Connectedness

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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, celebrat-

ing 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 between 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.

Updates to Phase I

Since the implementation of SACWIS Phase I on May 20, 2002, there have been several improvements to the system that impacted Investigation, SCR/Intake, and Supervisors/Management.

Communicating improvements and tips to the system is key to the success of SACWIS. Several communication tools have been implemented. They are:

- The Release Notes that outline the problem and resolution. The Release Notes are located on the Home Page of the D-Net and a soft copy is emailed to staff.
- Special communication is sent prior to a major release highlighting the Upcoming SACWIS Release.
- A message is placed on the System Wide Message area of SACWIS

reminding staff to read the Release Notes.

- SACWIS Tips are located on the Home Page of the D-Net. These tips are changed every week to ten days.

Since the implementation of SACWIS, the key changes have impacted these areas:

- On-Line Management Reports
- Link Reporter and Link Participant
- CERAP
- Contact Notes
- Adding Sub-Types To Define Neglect Allegations
- Cants 8 Letter
- Adding Contacts
- Person Soundex Search
- Change Entity for Creating Designee

- Intake Search
- Burgos
- Primary Closed Assignments
- Quick Search – Person Search
- Checklist
- Birth Date Calculation
- Callback Log

ADVANCES IN CHILD WELFARE

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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.