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

Transmittal No: 96 LCM-106

Date: December 3, 1996

Division: Services & Community
Development, and
Management Support
and Quality
Improvement

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: Competency-Based Training

ATTACHMENTS: Recommendations for Development of an Outcome-Based
Training System: Part I & Part II.
(Not available on-line)

Over the past two years, the Department has examined how it uses training to support local districts and voluntary agencies to achieve child protective and child welfare program goals as reflected in the Federal IV-B plan and in the Consolidated Services Plan. This initiative was first described to you in 94 LCM-107. Since then we have made considerable progress in assessing our current training system, gathering information on the needs of local districts, in assessing current child welfare practice, and in articulating a plan to restructure our training system to better support core child welfare outcomes.

The Department has begun to move forward on the recommendations of our advisory group composed of State and local district Child Welfare experts. Our goal is to design a training system that provides child welfare staff with the skills they need to achieve the outcomes for which you hold them accountable. This will require a fundamental restructuring of our training program. Skill building will be the focus of classroom training. Knowledge of policy, program and social problems will be acquired outside of the classroom through reading, distance learning and computer aided learning programs. Structured on-the-job training materials and programs will be made available to trainees and supervisors to aid the transfer of learning to the workplace, and to assist supervisors to assess and evaluate trainee progress and learning needs.

Our advisory group has provided guidance to our efforts. Their recommendations formed the basis of the report entitled "Recommendations for Development of an Outcome-Based Child Welfare Training System" that is being sent to you separately. This report, developed by the Child Welfare Institute (CWI), outlines in Part I a description and analysis of Department child welfare training practices and recommendations for restructuring those practices to better support the results we all want and must achieve. Part II of the report contains the list of caseworker outcomes and enabling abilities (competencies) that the advisory group identified as being essential for effective child welfare casework practice.

As you will see from reviewing Part II, the scope and depth of knowledge and skill needed by child welfare staff is enormous. You will also notice that the basic skills needed by staff to achieve each of the five core child welfare outcomes are very similar. This fact, coupled with input from many districts that you need the flexibility to assign staff across program lines, led us to conclude that a common core training program for all new child welfare staff would provide an effective and efficient base for program specific training. Child safety is the foremost responsibility of all child welfare staff, not just those staff assigned to Child Protective Services.

Child welfare's primary goal is to influence families to change their behavior to protect and nurture their children. All staff must be able to engage families and influence them to change and to act on behalf of children, whether they are biological families, foster families or adoptive families. All staff must be able to assess both presenting problems and the needs underlying those problems in order to construct a strategic, focused and time limited intervention plan. All staff must be able to judge the effectiveness of the intervention plan with the family so that no child is unsafe, lingering in foster care when they could be home or be adopted, or sent out of foster care unprepared to be a self-sufficient young adult. The new core training process will seek to develop these basic capabilities in your staff.

Our examination of our current training and the recommendations contained in the report formed the basis of the Department's testimony presented at the May 3, 1996 public hearing conducted by the New York State Commission on Child Abuse, chaired by Attorney General Dennis Vacco. Members of the Commission responded very favorably to the Department's plan for restructuring training. It is our hope and expectation that the Commission will issue similar recommendations.

The design for this new program, including the on-the-job and program specific components, is under development. This design has been influenced significantly by input from the advisory group and district focus groups. A number of workgroups of local district, university training partners and SDSS staff have also been formed to give input to us and our consultant on the design.

It is our plan that you and your staff will have many opportunities to provide additional input into the restructuring of our training program. By working together, we will build the capabilities that your staff need to achieve the outcomes that are expected of us by the public, and needed by the children and families we serve.

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