

# PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

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*In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.*

#### Let us hear from you!

To comment about something that appears in this or any other issue of *Children's Services Practice Notes*, please send your comments to:

John McMahon  
Jordan Institute for Families  
School of Social Work  
UNC-Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550  
johnmcmahon@mindspring.com

#### Newsletter Staff

Mellicent Blythe  
Lane Cooke  
John McMahon

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## SUPERVISORS AND THE FUTURE OF CHILD WELFARE

What will our child welfare system be like in five years? What does the future hold?

Asked these questions, many people turn to the state and federal level in the belief that new laws, policies, funding changes, and interventions such as the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) will be what shapes our field in the years to come.

They're right, of course. The future of our child welfare system will certainly be shaped in major ways by the decisions of legislators and policy experts. However, the power to shape the future also lies with a group of people much closer to home: frontline supervisors.

### AS SUPERVISORS GO . . .

Often having risen up from the ranks of those who provide direct services to families, supervisors don't usually see themselves as powerful trendsetters. Indeed, most are so intent on the daily struggle to do right by their employees, their agency, and families and children that they seldom reflect on their important place in the scheme of things.

Yet important they are. Indeed, it would not be exaggeration to say "as supervisors go, so goes the child welfare system."

Think about it. Supervisors influence virtually everything in child welfare. They affect how policies are followed and what practices are encouraged. They set the tone and expectations in the work environment to such an extent that they are sometimes called the "keepers of the culture" for their agencies. They influence employee turnover (or lack thereof) more than any other factor. Much of the data legislators and policy-makers rely on to make decisions comes, directly or indirectly, from supervisors.

How well supervisors do their jobs affects nearly every outcome the child welfare system seeks, including the timeliness with which we respond to reports of child maltreatment, the well-being of children in foster care, and the rate at which children are reunified with their parents.

### INTERVENTION POINT, CHANGE AGENT

Nationally we are waking up to the importance of supervisors. That's why at least 22 states included strategies related to supervision in the Program Improvement Plans they developed after the first round of federal CFSRs (NCROI, 2007). Supervisors are an intervention point, a way to give reform efforts and other improvements traction.

Yet as we have seen in North Carolina, supervisors can also be the agents driving change. Take our state's child welfare reform effort, Multiple Response System (MRS), for example. Supervisors were the first to buy in to the concept of MRS. They persuaded others in their agencies of its value. They continue to improve and refine it. Supervisors make MRS a reality.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Because North Carolina understands the centrality of supervisors it has made partnering with and supporting them a key element in its next federal Program Improvement Plan. This issue of *Practice Notes* describes what our state is doing to fulfill this plan, discusses ways agencies can strengthen supervision, and offers suggestions about supervisory coaching, managing time, and more. ♦



We can't succeed without strong, skilled supervisors.

## MRS: THE IMPACT OF SYSTEM REFORM ON SUPERVISORS

We have already recognized supervisors for their contribution to the success of the Multiple Response System (MRS), North Carolina's child welfare system reform effort. Yet supervisors have also been profoundly affected by the progress they have helped bring about.

To explore MRS's impact on supervision *Practice Notes* interviewed county DSS supervisors, as well as Holly McNeill and Patrick Betancourt, who have been meeting monthly with supervisors for the past several years to talk about MRS. Here's what they told us.

### HOW MRS HAS CHANGED SUPERVISION

**Emphasis on Coaching, Listening to Workers.** Under MRS supervisors use coaching more often. This is a shift away from traditional supervision, where a lot of the attention was focused on administrative quality control and ensuring policy was followed to the letter. With MRS supervisors must pay more attention to the growth of family-centered practice. Different supervisory skills are needed for that, and coaching is one of them.

Listening to workers is another. One supervisor told us, "Supervisors always had to listen, but it is more important now than ever to spend time listening to workers and helping them problem solve and encouraging them to talk to families about child and family team meetings, frontload services, and make sure we aren't being punitive."

**More Individualization.** In a parallel to the individualized attention we ask workers to give families, MRS requires supervisors to be more sensitive to the workloads and needs of each worker. Some supervisors are moving away from assigning cases strictly on a rotating or

numerical basis. Instead they factor in the complexities of each person's workload, assigning families to the worker best able to assist them.

More supervisors are saying to staff: "My job is to help you do your best work. That is not a one-size-fits-all proposition." For this to work supervisors must build trust. When trust is there, workers are less likely to be upset by differential treatment of their peers—they understand supervisors do what they do to ensure workers and families get what they need to succeed.

**Supporting Workers.** Many supervisors say their staff agree with MRS's family-centered principles, but some have trouble applying them. As one supervisor put it, "Workers are moving toward sharing power, but they were so used to having the answers. Workers will still sometimes say to me, 'What are we going to do about this family?' I try to help by asking, 'Have you asked the family this question?' But it can be scary to workers to give up that authority."

**Empowering Workers, Building Expertise.** MRS is an opportunity for agencies to step back and not be the boss or the expert when working with families. This applies to supervisor-worker relationships, too. One person told us, "As a supervisor I don't have to have all the answers. I can turn to my workers and ask them what they think the solution to a situation might be." ♦

#### Child and Family Team Meetings

Under MRS supervisors must talk to their workers early and often about CFTs. Asking workers if they have talked with families about CFTs can't wait until the last minute.

—Holly McNeill, NCDSS



## CREATING A VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN TO SUPPORT NC'S SUPERVISORS

Supervisors carry the burden of making sure that family-centered child welfare practice happens. The NC Division of Social Services wants to help supervisors with this task. That's one of the reasons it has invited supervisors from county departments of social services and other stakeholders to join with it to create a strategic plan to strengthen supervision in NC.

### Supervision Work Group

Agencies responded enthusiastically to this invitation. Today there are representatives from more than 20 counties on the Child Welfare Supervision Work Group, many of them frontline child welfare supervisors.

The group, which began meeting monthly in October 2007, is laying the ground-

work for a new vision and strategic plan for supervision in North Carolina. It is assessing the current culture of child welfare supervision, exploring the gap between stated expectations of supervisors and the actual practice of supervision, and discussing how the training provided to supervisors could be improved.

Staff from the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement and the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology are facilitating the strategic planning process.

### The Strategic Plan

Although they are still in the early stages, the group believes the strategic plan they pro-

**This strategic plan is a key part of our state's federal Program Improvement Plan.**

duce will clarify the supervisor's role with regard to data and outcomes and identify ways supervisors can most effectively impact casework practice. Consistency of practice across the state is another area the strategic plan will

address, especially as it relates to the staffing of common case decision points, the review of documentation, the frequency of individual and group supervision, and the levels of supervision and professional development supervisors themselves receive.

Questions about the work group? Contact the Division's Candice Britt (919/733-9467, [candice.britt@ncmail.net](mailto:candice.britt@ncmail.net)).

## HOW AGENCIES CAN STRENGTHEN SUPERVISION

In the fall 2007 issue of its newsletter *Child Welfare Matters*, the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement discussed initiatives and interviewed child welfare supervisors in four states—Arizona, Missouri, New York and Oklahoma. Out of these discussions emerged the following steps the Resource Center believes child welfare agencies must take to support supervisors.



**Value, respect, and recognize the contributions of supervisors.** Agency leadership needs to see the importance of supervisors and give them the supports they need to do their job.

**Define job responsibilities and expectations.** Supervisors need to have a clear definition of what their jobs entail, especially as expectations change. This includes job descriptions and related performance expectations and performance appraisal processes.

**Provide training for supervisors.** Supervisors need training, both when they're new and on an ongoing basis. As supervisors become more involved in reforming child welfare practice, many agencies are adding clinical training to their supervisory training curriculum.

**Provide ongoing professional development.** Supervisors value processes that allow them to continually develop skills and competence, such as assessment processes and personal development plans, career ladders and educational opportunities.

**Provide supervision and mentors for supervisors.** Supervisors need opportunities for case consultation and feedback, especially from people with experience in child welfare. This can be provided by the next level up in management—the supervisor of the supervisors—and/or by consultants or mentors who meet regularly with supervisors to assist them in their work.

**Create opportunities for peer networking.** Supervisors particularly value opportunities to interact with and learn from other supervisors. Many agencies organize regular meetings or learning labs that allow supervisors to meet together, sometimes assisted by a facilitator, to support one another.

**Provide tools to help supervisors talk with workers about agency goals and current performance.** Tools that help supervisors educate workers about where the agency wants to go and how their current practice affects performance include data reports and clinically focused case review processes.

**Involve supervisors in organizational improvement processes and community collaborations.** It is important that supervisors are listened to and given an active role in strengthening the agency and its services. Agencies involve supervisors by including them in quality improvement processes, work groups, and surveys. Super-

visors also have a role in collaborating with key partners in the community.

**Involve supervisors in training workers.** Supervisors need to be engaged in the training of new staff, and should be integrally involved in the ongoing caseworker training. Agencies should partner with supervisors to develop and deliver worker training.

**Train supervisors in policy and practice changes before they are made and provide tools for supervisors to promote these changes with their workers.** Agencies need to recognize that supervisors are critical partners in implementing practice change and select supervisors who can be effective in this role. At a minimum, agencies should inform and train supervisors about policy and practice changes before they are made. To help supervisors coach workers, agencies can integrate the changes into tools used in day-to-day practice such as case planning documents and assessment tools. ♦

Reprinted with permission from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, (2007, Fall)

### UNDERSTANDING & USING DATA: AN ESSENTIAL SUPERVISORY SKILL



We work in a system where, at the national, state, and local levels, the emphasis is increasingly on accountability and outcomes. Every day, legislators, advocates, agency administrators—and yes, supervisors—rely on data to help them set priorities and guide interventions.

Like it or not, knowing how to find, understand, and use the data you need is an essential skill every supervisor must have.

Fortunately, North Carolina offers a course to help supervisors sharpen this skill: *Cornerstone IV: Supervisors Working with Others, Working with Outcomes*. During this course supervisors learn how to gather, analyze, and use agency data to measure progress in achieving successful outcomes for families. It also helps supervisors identify what has been successful and what adaptations are needed to improve their approach.

This course is designed for **all** social work supervisors, program managers, and directors (including but not limited to Child Welfare, Work First, Adult Services, Medicaid, etc.). Small county supervisor teams of 20 or less are encouraged to partner with neighboring county supervisory teams in requesting and scheduling this training. For more information about this course please contact Chris Howell (919/962-6419, [chowell@email.unc.edu](mailto:chowell@email.unc.edu)).

## TRAINING FOR NC'S CHILD WELFARE SUPERVISORS

This article outlines current training resources and describes important new changes the NC Division of Social Services is making to support supervisors as they seek to achieve the best possible outcomes for families and children.

### CURRENT TRAINING

Like all those who provide child welfare services, by law supervisors must complete 72 hours of pre-service training before assuming their job responsibilities. In addition, within 12 months of assuming managerial duties supervisors must complete 54 hours of additional training. To fulfill these requirements, supervisors attend two courses: *Child Welfare in North Carolina* and *Introduction to Supervision for Child Welfare Services*. In addition, within their first year supervisors must attend these courses: *Legal Aspects*, *Medical Aspects*, and *Child Development in Families at Risk*.

After their first year, by law supervisors must receive 24 hours of continuing education annually. To help them meet this obligation the Division offers the following courses specifically for supervisors:

- *Cornerstone II: What's Good for Families Is Good for Workers*, a four-day, classroom-based course that explores the relationship between parallel process, supervisory coaching, and family-centered practice.
- *Cornerstone IV: Supervisors Working with Others, Working with Outcomes*, a four-day, classroom-based course that teaches supervisors from all program areas within an agency how to analyze and use data to measure progress toward successful outcomes and build collaboration with various stakeholders.
- *Supervisors Strengthening Staff Performance: Managing Transfer of Learning in the Work Place*, a blended learning course for supervisors who want to help staff members transfer classroom learning into the workplace. Consists of four days in the classroom and the equivalent of one day online.

### NEWLY REQUIRED CFT TRAINING

Having seen the effectiveness of properly implemented child and family team meetings (CFT), county DSS agencies and community partners have suggested to the Division of Social Services that all child welfare workers and supervisors would benefit from mandated training on CFT meetings. In response the Division has made the course *Step by Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams* a requirement for all child welfare workers and supervisors hired on or after February 1, 2008, to be completed within the first year of employment. Social workers and supervi-

sors hired before February 1, 2008 are required to take this course within the next 12 months unless they have already met this training requirement by:

- Successfully completing *Step by Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams*; **OR**
- Successfully completing **both** *Setting the Stage for Family-Centered Meetings: County Orientation* **and** *Caution: Family Centered Meeting Ahead!*

In addition, because the use of a neutral facilitator significantly enhances the effectiveness CFT meetings, the course *Anchors Away! How to Navigate Child and Family Teams: The Role of the Facilitator* is now required for anyone facilitating a CFT meeting in high and intensive risk cases. For facilitators beginning facilitation on or after February 1, 2008, completion of the course is required within the first 12 months of facilitating. For facilitators who began facilitation prior to Feb. 1, 2008, completion of this course is required by March 8, 2009, unless previously completed. The training is also strongly recommended for those who facilitate meetings in moderate risk cases but is not, at this time, mandated.

To register and view all current offerings of these courses, please visit <[www.ncswlearn.org](http://www.ncswlearn.org)>. ♦

### SUPERVISOR RESOURCES ON [ncswLearn.org](http://ncswLearn.org)

The "Supervisor Resources" section of [ncswLearn.org](http://ncswLearn.org) allows county DSS supervisors to manage all aspects of training related to their employees. Through this area of the site supervisors can:



- Use "Employee Management" to add information about employees not currently in the training system and edit personnel information for employees currently in the training system
- Register their employees for training:
  - Use the "Search for Training Events," "Training Calendar," or "Training Catalogue" options for different views of upcoming training events
  - Once they have created their employees' registration applications, supervisors can use the "Employee Registration Cart" to submit registration applications for all their employees simultaneously
- View their employees' Individualized Training Assessments (ITA), training attendance history, and training schedules
- Cancel their employees' training registrations if needed

Supervisors can use the options presented on the left-hand side of the [ncswLearn.org](http://ncswLearn.org) screen to perform the tasks listed above. Note that these options are very similar to those in the Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP), but are customized specifically to your employees. Use the PLP to register yourself for training, view your training attendance history, etc.

## TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS

Recently *Practice Notes* asked a child welfare supervisor what she would change about herself to make her a more effective supervisor. Without a beat she answered: “Time. I just need more time to get everything done!” Then she laughed.

We laughed, too, but the issue isn’t funny. Supervisors and staff in child welfare agencies consistently say managing time is a serious challenge for them.

### A SMALL STUDY

The importance of time management for supervisors was underscored by a small study done recently with members of North Carolina’s Child Welfare Supervision Work Group. In this study supervisors from a mix of different counties agreed to keep a log of how they used their work time during a typical week in fall 2007. The log broke activities up into four categories:

1. **Systemic** (*not case specific*). Examples: regular unit meetings, compiling information for reports, etc.
2. **Personnel/Management** (*not case specific*). Examples: Attend training events, coach individual staff, etc.
3. **Case-Specific/Clinical**. Examples: Review case documentation, fill in for absent workers, attend court, etc.
4. **Other**. Anything not in the first three categories.

Although the sample size is too small to make this count as a scientific study—only ten supervisors participated—the results are interesting. Figure 1 presents the mean (or average) amount of time participating supervisors spent on the various categories. Figure 2 presents the average amount of time devoted to planned and unplanned activities.

What’s your reaction to this? What would a similar study say about how you use time? How could you improve your use of time?

### ASSESSING YOUR “OPEN DOOR” POLICY

Cutting back on “open door” time is a strategy that has helped some supervisors get a better handle on their time. While it is important for workers to know they have access to their supervisor when urgently needed, an unqualified

### Don’t Let Them Put a Monkey on Your Back

People bring questions and problems to supervisors all the time. Sometimes this is appropriate—the issue cannot be resolved without supervisory input. Other times, however, the person asking for help has it in their power to resolve the issue but, for whatever reason, wants the supervisor to take it on as their own. They want someone else to take ownership of their “monkey” (problem) and carry it for them.



When this happens supervisors owe it to the individual, the agency, and themselves not to pick that monkey up. Instead, seize this chance to empower that person and support him as he pursues the best possible solution.

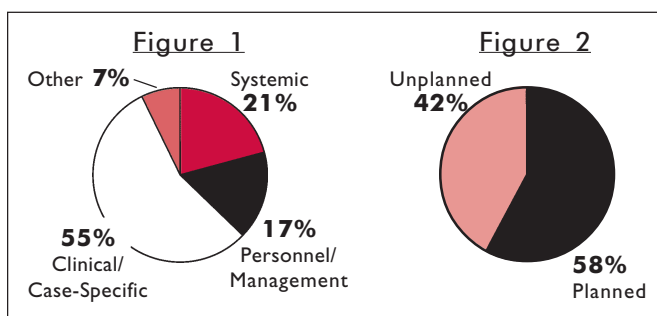
“open door” policy can mean that the majority of supervisor-worker contact focuses on emergencies. This leaves little time for more strategic, reflective supervision. It also means some families and children simply do not receive supervisory attention. When this happens, risk factors can be missed and families can lose out on ideas, resources, and insights that a supervisor might offer.

Instituting a policy of scheduled supervision time can help workers better prioritize issues and plan their own days. True emergencies will always come up that need immediate attention. But when workers know their planned time with their supervisor will be protected as much as possible, they begin to develop lists of questions. Both worker and supervisor can then begin to see the patterns and themes that emerge for individual families and for the worker, pointing the way to the training, reflection, or discussion that the worker needs to grow and advance.

### OTHER TIPS

Some general tips for better time management include (Salus, 2004):

- Use time efficiently while remaining flexible. Try to not let circumstances control how time is spent.
- Set attainable annual, monthly, and weekly goals.
- Make daily “to do” lists identifying high priority items.
- Avoid “anticipatory dread.” Supervisors sometimes think ahead to activities or tasks that they do not like and dwell on the negative feelings. This can blow things out of proportion.
- Identify routine and special items to delegate.
- Run organized meetings (e.g., have an agenda with staff input, keep on time, and remain on task).
- Group similar tasks together.
- Break large tasks into smaller parts.
- Identify and eliminate time-wasting activities. ♦



# IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH COACHING

When you hear the word “coach,” a face may come to mind. It might be the coach you had in school, UNC’s Dean Smith, or some other coaching icon. Regardless of who you picture, the feelings and thoughts you connect with the word “coach” will probably be positive. Why? Because coaches—the good ones, anyhow—inspire us to set goals and develop the skills to achieve them. They help us succeed by living up to our potential.

## SUPERVISORS AS COACHES

Coaching is not confined to the world of sports. In child welfare, supervisors, managers, and directors use coaching to enhance employee motivation, morale, and performance. Additional benefits of coaching for the supervisor, work unit, and agency can include a more stable work force (reduced turnover) and better outcomes for families and children.

In contrast to traditional supervisory approaches, in the coaching role the supervisor is not directive. Rather, when supervisors act as coaches they encourage individuals to determine what needs to be addressed and inspire them to take responsibility for their own professional development (Salus, 2004).

## COACHING IS A PROCESS

Coaching is an interactive process of observation and reflection. In this process the coach encourages self-observation, self-correction, and an ongoing refinement of the learner’s knowledge and skills (Flaherty, 1999; Kinlaw,

### THE CONNECTION TO MRS

It is important to note the link between effective coaching and the principles and practices used in North Carolina’s Multiple Response System (MRS). For example:



- Supervisors who are good coaches know that workers respond better to support and positive reinforcement than to punitive pressure or control.
- Successful coaches help workers identify goals and solutions themselves, rather than simply handing down directives and step-by-step instructions.
- Coaching can require more time on the front end, when supervisors take the time to explore problems and brainstorm possible solutions. Yet once that investment is made, workers will be better prepared to act independently and thoughtfully.

In each of these examples, the parallel with the strengths-based, family-centered philosophy and strategies we have embraced as a child welfare system is clear.

1999). The coaching process itself consists of a series of one-on-one conversations. These can occur during informal work progress discussions, formal performance reviews, and at appropriate times throughout the work day (“coachable moments”).

Russ and colleagues (2003) suggest the coaching process consists of phases, as the box describes below. Note that the coaching process is not necessarily a

*cont. p. 7*

## PHASES OF THE COACHING PROCESS

### Initiation

Coach focuses on worker’s goals by helping the worker define the coaching relationship, clarify desired outcomes, identify strategies for improvement, and identify measures of progress. Examples of questions to use include:

- What would help you . . . ?
- What have you thought about doing (or tried)?
- How will you know you are improving?

### Observation and Action

Coach and worker gather data about the worker’s practice. Worker may do this through self-observation. Coach may do this via first hand observation, progress reports, interviews, demonstration, guided practice, modeling, etc.

### Reflection

Coach enhances worker’s perceptions and actions by helping the worker summarize impressions of the worker’s progress, compare anticipated and actual results, and apply new information. Questions to ask include:

- What happened when you . . . ?
- What did you do to influence what happened? How is this different?
- What changes would you make, if any, next time?
- What have you learned from this process?

### Evaluation

Coach reviews the effectiveness of the coaching sessions, either alone or with the worker, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the sessions, analyzing the effectiveness of the coaching relationship, and determining whether progress is being made to achieve intended outcomes. Based on conclusions, decide whether to continue the coaching process. Questions to ask include:

- Do I need to make changes in the coaching process?
- Am I helping the worker achieve the intended outcomes?
- Should I continue as the coach, or is there someone else in the unit/agency with the specialized experience/skills to coach the worker at this time?

*Adapted from Russ, et al., 2003*

linear one—the order in which the phases occur is influenced by the situation at hand.

### SKILLS FOR COACHING SUCCESS

Most successful coaches rely on a mix of skills familiar to social work supervisors, including:

- Active listening—which includes attentiveness, clarifying, reflecting, synthesizing, giving feedback, and summarizing
- Questioning—good coaches ask questions that are open, positive, nonthreatening, and thought-provoking
- Finding strengths and giving praise/recognition
- Assuming an objective, nonjudgmental stance

Of course, being nonjudgmental does not mean supervisors always agree with workers. At times it will be important to challenge workers or offer constructive feedback. When giving feedback, be constructive and positive. Remember the BOOST model, which holds that feedback should be:

- **Balanced.** Focus on strengths as well as on what needs improvement.
- **Observed.** Provide feedback based only on behaviors you have observed.
- **Objective.** Focusing on facts reduces blame and defensive reactions and encourages cooperation.
- **Specific.** Back up your comments with specific examples of observed behavior.
- **Timely.** Give feedback soon after the activity. This gives the person a chance to reflect on what he or she has learned.

(Source: NHS, n.d.)

### HOW EFFECTIVE ARE YOU?

Curious about the effectiveness of the coaching you do? Go to <[www.practicenotes.org/coach.pdf](http://www.practicenotes.org/coach.pdf)> to find a self-assessment that will help you understand your strengths and a template for an action plan for improving in the areas where you need it. ♦

#### TO LEARN MORE

- Attend “Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents through Teachable Moments.” Although the focus of this course is on teaching workers coaching skills for use with parents, supervisors can apply what they learn to their work with their employees. For class times and registration information go to <[www.ncswLearn.org](http://www.ncswLearn.org)>



### COACHING FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

In her *Supervising Child Protective Services Caseworkers*, Salus (2004) offers these suggestions for supervisors using coaching to improve employee performance:

- **Be supportive.** State in clear language your understanding of the worker’s situation. Include the nature of the problem, your current understanding of the worker’s feelings about the problem, your objectives, and your desire to support the worker as he or she resolves the problem. Make it clear that this is a problem-solving process, not a disciplinary process. Being supportive does not require accepting the worker’s explanation of the problem or explanations of why it cannot be solved.
- **Develop an understanding of what is happening.** Use active listening to make sure you understand the problem from the worker’s perspective. You may need to ask clarifying questions to understand the cause of behaviors, reactions, or emotions. At the same time, help the workers understand how their contributions to the problem affect the child, family, agency, etc.
- **Help the worker evaluate how her current performance and behavior are affecting her goals.** This helps develop the worker’s interest in change. For example, a worker may be neglecting documentation in favor of “giving more direct time to clients through personal contacts.” The worker’s goals are focused on the client. However, the worker also needs to understand the benefits of paperwork to clients, as well as the consequences of incomplete paperwork. In the worker’s absence, a decision may need to be made based solely or primarily on information available in the family’s record. If records are incomplete, a decision may be made that may be contrary to the best interest of a child or parent.
- **Create a clear, specific, and feasible plan for change.** Once the underlying needs are determined, engage the worker in developing goals and future actions. This step involves developing a contract between yourself and the worker that defines clearly what you each want and are willing to offer. Like plans for parents and children, performance improvement plans must have concrete steps and behaviorally defined goals.
- **Follow up.** Second only to inaccurate assessment of the performance problem, failure to follow up is the most frequent reason difficulties in performance persist. To get the worker to enhance his or her performance you must also change some part of your current behavior. Although most supervisors intend to follow-up, many become busy with other priorities. Some avoid follow-up because they do not want to confront the lack of improvement. If improvement is evident, some may assume that no follow-up is needed because the problem apparently is solved. Following up conveys to the unit that the supervisor cares about results.
- **Provide feedback.** Sustaining changes in performance requires supervisory encouragement and positive feedback. Therefore, provide both evaluative and developmental feedback on an ongoing basis to sustain the improvements in the worker’s performance.

*Adapted from Salus, 2004*

# A DEMOGRAPHIC SKETCH OF NC'S CHILD WELFARE SUPERVISORS

Most of what we know about supervisors in North Carolina's public child welfare agencies comes from two sources: periodic staffing surveys conducted by the NC Division of Social Services and North Carolina's Family Support and Child Welfare Training Information Database.

## 2006 STAFFING SURVEY

Ninety-nine of the state's 100 county departments of social services responded to the Division's most recent staffing survey. From this we know that in calendar year 2006 there were approximately 497 child welfare supervisor positions in our state, which means there was approximately one supervisory position for every 5.27 public child welfare social worker positions. This is slightly higher than the ratio of one supervisor for every five workers required by state standards. In truth, supervisor to worker ratios were probably even higher

in some counties due to supervisor turnover—in calendar year 2006 the vacancy rate for supervisory positions was 17.5% (NCDSS, 2006).

## TRAINING DATABASE

The Training Information Database tells us that between Jan. 16, 2003 and Dec. 20, 2007, 446 child welfare supervisors from 92 county DSS agencies registered to attend *Cornerstone II: What's Good for Families Is Good for Workers*. Though the Database can't tell us anything about the supervisors who did not register for this training, this registration data tell us a bit more about the demographics of NC's child welfare supervisors.

**Gender.** Of the supervisors registered for this course, 83.4% were women and 16.6% were men. This is consistent with recent findings from the Brookings Institution; in its national survey of more than 800 human services

workers 82% were women and 18% were men (Light, 2003).

**Race.** Of the supervisors registered for this course, 30.5% were Black and 66.3% were White. This suggests our supervisor workforce is roughly in line with the state as a whole, which the US Census estimates to be 21.6% Black and 70.2% White.

**Education.** Nearly all (99%) supervisors registered for this course had a degree from a four-year college. What's more, nearly 47% had either a Bachelors or Masters degree in social work. This is a positive sign, since studies have found higher job performance and lower turnover rates among caseworkers with BSWs and MSWs (Albers, 1993; Dhooper, 1990). ♦



What do the numbers tell us about NC's supervisors?

## IN THIS ISSUE: SUPERVISORS AND THE FUTURE OF CHILD WELFARE

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