

Training **MATTERS**



A PUBLICATION OF THE NC DSS CHILDREN'S SERVICES STATEWIDE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

Volume 4, Number 3 • May 2003

Training Matters is produced by the North Carolina Division of Social Services Children's Services Statewide Training Partnership, an organization dedicated to developing and delivering competency-based, job-relevant, accessible child welfare training. Partners include:

- N.C. Division of Social Services
- N.C. Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Appalachian Family Innovations at Appalachian State University
- Children and Family Services Association-NC
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- N.C. State University Department of Sociology/Social Work
- N.C. A & T State University Social Work Program
- Resources for Change, Inc.
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want To Hear from You!

If you have questions or would like to comment about something that appears in *Training Matters*, please contact Rebecca Brigham, Program Administrator, Children's Services Staff Development, N.C. Division of Social Services, 2412 Mail Service Center, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Suite 735, Raleigh, NC 27699-2412, State Courier: 56-20-25, E-mail: Rebecca.Brigham@ncmail.net, Tel: 919/733-7672.

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This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

New Cornerstones Series Promotes Family-Centered Practice

North Carolina is embracing family-centered practice in child welfare like never before. It is doing so because it believes this approach, which is based upon the notion that identifying and developing family strengths is the key to solving family problems, will lead to greater child safety and better long-term outcomes for families.

Our State also hopes the family-centered approach will help fix many of the problems—from inconsistent interventions to staff turnover—that plague child welfare agencies here and across the country.

Consequently, North Carolina has undertaken an all-out effort to ensure its child welfare system is family-centered. This effort can be seen in the many changes in children's services policy and practice being pursued across the State right now. Chief among these are the new Strengths-Based Structured Intake form that, as of June 1, 2003, became the standard tool for screening reports of child maltreatment, and the development and evaluation of the Multiple Response System (MRS), which is expected to become the standard approach to child welfare in North Carolina in 2005.

The Catch

But there's a catch. You see, even though the family-centered approach is the best way to work with families, it cannot be mandated.

True, structural changes like the ones we are making can encourage family-centered practice. But family-centered practice itself cannot be prescribed because when you get right down to it, family-centered is a philosophy, not a methodology.

That's not to say that the family-centered approach is merely an attitude. Indeed, there are many specific techniques, such as the "Miracle Question," the "Exception-Finding Question," and other strategies associated with Brief Solution-Focused Therapy, that are used by most family-centered practitioners.

But to succeed with these techniques, workers must *believe* families are capable of creating solutions to their problems. To identify and build on family strengths, workers must *believe* the strengths are there to begin with.



Photo Illustration

North Carolina sees the family-centered approach as key to ensuring child safety.

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Cornerstones Series from page 1

The Cornerstones Series

Making this shift in thinking is easier said than done, especially for individuals working in agencies with policies and organizational cultures that are not particularly family-centered.

To promote family-centered practice and prepare counties to implement the Multiple Response System, the N.C. Division of Social Services and its partners have developed the *Cornerstones of Family-Centered Practice*. This training series consists of:

- *Multiple Response Is System Reform: The Future Direction of Child Welfare Services in North Carolina* (Cornerstone One), a course for anyone wishing to learn about MRS.
- *What Is Good for Families Is Good for Workers* (Cornerstone Two), a training for child welfare supervisors.
- *Partners in Change: A New Perspective on Child Protective Services* (Cornerstone Three), a course for child welfare social workers.
- *Working with Others, Working with Outcomes* (Cornerstone Four), a training for child welfare supervisors.

Principles of Partnership

Though they offer a chance to learn about and practice different family-centered techniques, each of the courses in the *Cornerstones* series is built around six principles of partnership:

1. Everyone desires respect
2. Everyone needs to be heard
3. Everyone has strengths
4. Judgments can wait
5. Partners share power
6. Partnership is a process

Developed by Appalachian Fam-

Case Example: Principles of Partnership Can Help Victims of Domestic Violence

Try this scenario on for size. You are a child welfare supervisor. In your office is a CPS worker trying to serve a family struggling with domestic violence. He's come to you for advice because he's "stuck."

You're not surprised. You know the pressures these families face are often difficult to evaluate and address. On top of this, you know many social workers grapple with their own beliefs and reactions to domestic violence.

That's where you think this worker's challenge lies. Even though he understands the mother in this family is not the reason for the batterer's violence, he clearly feels intense frustration at what he sees as the woman's failure to shield her children from exposure to the abuse. He complains to you about her lack of concern for her kids and blames her for not leaving the batterer.

From your perspective, this worker's ability to serve this family is being compromised by his rush to judgment. Put another way, you think he is not following the fourth principle of partnership: "Judgments can wait." Because he believes he understands the situation, he unconsciously looks for and finds evidence to support his perspective. As a result, you fear he may overlook signs of the mother's concern for her kids and strengths she has demonstrated while coping with the domestic violence.

As a supervisor, what do you say to this worker? Parallel process tells us that, if they want workers to delay judgments when working with families, supervisors need to model this behavior in their interactions with workers. Thus, rather than assuming your assessment of the worker is correct, demonstrate to him you have an open mind by asking the worker questions such as:

- What are your concerns about working with this family?
- What would make you feel more at ease with this family?
- What's the worst case scenario?
- Describe a resolution in which everyone wins.

Use the worker's answers to address his concerns and help him develop strategies for his next visit with the family. Child welfare supervisors can help workers—and families—by teaching and modeling a family-centered approach to social work practice.

This scenario was developed based on information contained in Cornerstone Two, *What Is Good for Families Is Good for Workers*, a training for child welfare supervisors.

What's Good for Families Is Good for Workers



A Training for
Child Welfare Supervisors

ily Innovations (part of Appalachian State University), these principles are designed to promote and guide supervisors and workers in their pursuit of family-centered practice.

See the box above for an example of how one of these principles ("Judgments can wait") might come into play during an exchange between a supervisor and a social worker.

Child welfare social workers

and supervisors from county departments of social services interested in the *Cornerstones of Family Centered Practice* series should visit "N.C. Social Services Professional Development" <<http://www.ncswtrain.org>>. Here they can learn about the courses offered by the N.C. Division of Social Services, identify course times and locations, and register for training events.