

# MEMO

**Date:** April 24, 2002

**To:** Directors of Services and Implementation Coordinators

**From:** Zack Zambri, Project Director

**Re.:** CONNECTIONS Project Update

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The following topics highlight the progress of several notable milestones, achieved by the CONNECTIONS Project, during January through March 2002.

- Case Management
- Eligibility
- Steering and Management Committee
- Data Warehouse
- Technical Upgrade and Equipment
- Changes to Current Functionality
- New York State Enterprise Help Desk
- Training, Communication and Implementation Support

The following narratives provide a detailed summary of these project topics.

## **Case Management**

Work has continued on defining the business/user requirements for Phase I of the new development. The Case Management Workgroup met in January and March 2002. The Case Management project team is currently completing the user requirements documents. A walk-through of the requirements for Family Services Intake, Family Services Stage, Progress Notes, and Security was held in late March for the entire project team. Sign-offs will conclude this portion of the work. Walk-through and sign off of the rest of Phase I Requirements will occur in late April/early May.

The Family Services Intake, which includes the newly developed “Behavioral Concerns and Family Issues” evaluation, was reviewed and finalized by the workgroup at the last session. The fully dynamic UCR, which presents users with only the portions of the assessment, foster care issues and service plan that they need to complete, was demonstrated, using a placement case example to illustrate how the new system would move and display information. The group also favorably reviewed an edit matrix, developed by OCFS Policy staff, which will facilitate the building of a contact grid but minimizes the number of data elements a user must capture. Depending on the “type”

and “method” selected for a particular contact, the system will edit for only those elements that are appropriate and required in that circumstance. The required fields will be yellow to alert the user they must be completed. Common functions, including To-Do lists, assigned workload, task list, events and approvals were covered. CONNECTIONS new development will leverage these existing functionalities going forward. Initial discussions were held regarding conversion to the new CONNECTIONS Family Services Stage. A phased transition by region is envisioned. Local districts could convert existing cases at the point of implementation or over a six month period at the UCR due date. System support for matching individuals across CONNECTIONS and WMS will be provided, however it is envisioned that user intervention is necessary in this process to ensure a good match.

A potential exists for some of the Phase I requirements work done by the workgroup and project team to be modified. The New York State Program Improvement Plan for the Child and Family Services Federal Review has been occurring at the same time as the most recent Case Management workgroup. It will be necessary for CONNECTIONS to include any recommendations that are forthcoming from that process. The CONNECTIONS project team is confident that many of those improvements have already been anticipated and captured in the new development, but most likely there will be additional requirements.

Throughout this process, CONNECTIONS staff have worked closely with staff from OCFS Policy, Legal and DDPS Training. The Phase I body of work is a result of a collaboration of many entities. Phase I embodies practice and program changes sought by OCFS Policy; for example, changes to the CPS Safety Assessment and the new Risk Assessment Profile. The members of the Case Management workgroup voiced concern over the amount of time it will take to introduce and train on those practice changes, in addition to system training. Options to approaching both training and implementation are under consideration.

### **Eligibility**

During the first quarter of 2002 the Eligibility Worksheet has remained a focus project. Improvements to the original version of the worksheet have been made and a second version of this worksheet will soon be distributed. The second version of the Eligibility Worksheet will include two improvements; better navigational abilities through to the completion of the worksheet, as well as the addition of a summary sheet to the worksheet.

Plans have also been developed related to the improvements necessary in order for BICS to support Fiscal Processing for Child Welfare, thus ensuring a SAWICS compliant system. These noted improvements are referred to as SPSS II A and B. A workgroup is being developed to discuss the direction and structure of these improvements and will convene in early April.

### **Steering and Management Committee**

The Joint Steering and Management Committee met for the first time this quarter, on February 26, 2002. The Committee received an update on the status of the

CONNECTIONS Project and ensuing activities. Discussion included information regarding the implementation of Build 15 and the prioritization of items/activities for future Builds. Visual Basic Applications, which will be included in both Build 15 and 15.1, and the functionality that follows, were presented to the Committee.

A presentation, focusing on the planned direction for Family Services Intake and Case Management in Phase I of the new development was received by the Committee members. The new functionality, ease of use and navigability incorporated in the New Development Architecture was well received.

The Committee was also able to comment on future plans related to improvements (referred to as SSPS II A and B) needed for BICS to support Fiscal Processing for Child Welfare, thus ensuring a SAWICS compliant system. These planned improvements were also well received by the Committee.

The successful pilot of the ALPHA Smart devices, in Monroe County, was also discussed. These small “laptop like” computers offer caseworkers both quick and easy access to a word processing application that can be used in the field and subsequently uploaded directly into CONNECTIONS.

The Committee was also updated on the new Enterprise Help Desk supporting the Project. The new Help Desk is located in Farmington, New York and will provide Enterprise-wide Help Desk Support.

## **Data Warehouse**

### **CIN/PID**

The CIN/PID Application allows district staff to enter CINs into CONNECTIONS for children in foster care and their associated family members. The CIN/PID Application helps a district focus on the population most likely needing CINs in CONNECTIONS--the current foster care population and all case members. A CIN/PID manual was developed and posted within the Public Folders. Testing was completed and the CIN/PID Application was made available to the field in early April 2002.

### **Data Warehouse Initiatives**

During the first quarter of this year the Data Warehouse also implemented efficiency initiatives to improve the time for remote batch process run. Changes to two procedures resulted in a savings of 17 hours.

In response to the Children and Family Services Review (CFSR), three new Cognos Impromptu reports related to CPS recurrence, were developed and are now available to users. These reports provide statistical and child specific information on children who meet the federal definition of repeat maltreatment.

A meeting of the Management Reporting Workgroup was held in February 2002. Members were given an overview of work completed in the last year, planned new development work, and received a demonstration of the CIN/PID Application. New development efforts will center on the creation of additional data sets related to the New York State Program Improvement Plan (PIP), CFSR, AFCARS and NCANDS - all federally required data sets.

The Data Warehouse user population continues to grow with 41 districts and 26 voluntary agencies participating. Data Warehouse staff continue to provide demonstrations and overviews of the Data Warehouse to a variety of audiences. Five more districts and six voluntary agencies have submitted requests to participate.

### **Technical Upgrade and Equipment**

During the first three months of this quarter the rollout of replacement CONNECTIONS pcs continued. The Albany (Region IV), Syracuse (Region III), Rochester (Region II) and Buffalo (Region I) regions have been completed. The Yonkers region (Region V) will be completed by the end of April. Region VI, NYC, began a successful pilot, and both the Bronx and Staten Island locations have received their replacement pcs. The remaining NYC sites will be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup>. The installation of the new pcs have introduced users to the Windows 2000 environment. The new pcs are pre-loaded with updated and improved UCR templates. The Office For Technology is currently developing a workplan to address the processing of requests for supplemental equipment.

### **Voluntary Agencies Network Integration Study (NIS) Project**

This pilot project is being conducted, via voluntary agencies, in collaboration with the Office for Technology Human Services Network staff. The main objective of this initiative is to allow voluntary agency staff access to the CONNECTIONS Application from voluntary agency pcs. Through the pilot experience voluntary agencies will explore various available options related to connectivity to the CONNECTIONS Application. In its most basic form the integration will fall into two broad categories, either, state owned equipment with the capability of connecting the voluntary agency resources or, agency owned equipment with the capability of connecting to state resources. Once the pilot is completed, a selection of offerings and their associated costs will be developed and shared with agencies statewide. The Office for Technology will then work with agency staff to design a solution that will best meet each agencies needs. The anticipated pilot completion date is June 30, 2002.

### **Changes to Current Functionality**

#### **Build 15 Developments**

Earlier in this quarter Build 15 product test was successfully completed. User Acceptance Testing (UAT) began as scheduled and local district users participated in UAT in mid-March. Testing problems have been both minor and fixable and implementation of the Build remains on schedule for mid-May. The major items in Build 15 include additional person and resource search improvements, enhanced capabilities for person and case data maintenance, ease of use improvements in navigation and

workload management areas, and collection of race and ethnicity modified to meet new federal standards. In addition, the Build will also include several new features to support the FAD workflow process that will streamline home development and maintenance and provide a comprehensive case and home study record.

### **Build 15.1 Developments**

Build 15.1, which is scheduled to be implemented in July 2002, includes two items, vacancy control and local data maintenance. These two items represent significant functionality with both training and implementation impacts.

Vacancy Control will provide real time access to vacant bed information for children in need of placement. It will allow districts and agencies to maintain bed level vacancies and characteristics for the facilities they authorize. It will also combine existing CONNECTIONS licensing information with vacancy control data to provide placement search logic, thus enabling districts and agencies to search for bed level vacancies that meet the needs of children for whom a placement is required.

Local Data maintenance will provide the ability to maintain demographics in closed cases, as well as the ability to correct mistakes made recording investigation information once the investigation is closed.

### **New York State Enterprise Help Desk**

In early March the Office for Technology, in collaboration with the CONNECTIONS Project, partnered with Unisys to establish the new NYS Enterprise Help Desk. Initially the Help Desk will support the CONNECTIONS and as well as the ASSET\$ systems. Staff of the Help Desk were trained by CONNECTIONS Project staff regarding all aspects of the CONNECTIONS Application. Project staff also provided on-site technical assistance during the initial phase of the Help Desk operation. In the following months the Enterprise Help Desk will also provide support for the remaining entities within the Human Services Enterprise Network. The new Help desk is located in Farmington, New York

### **Training, Communication and Implementation Support**

The Training, Implementation, and Change Management workgroup held its second meeting in early January 2002. Workgroup participants included representatives from both local districts and voluntary agencies. The workgroup members provided valuable feedback regarding the various field approaches and support tools that were implemented to support Build 14. Discussion about the individual approaches identified that, although all users may not use all of the support/tools available, all of the various field approaches are viable and valuable support methods to transmit information to the field about an upcoming Build. In the post Build 14 survey overall responses rated the various methods of field support including, communication, training and regional implementation of the Build's modifications as very good. The CONNECTIONS Intranet Site was also distinguished as being another positive method of communication and support related to the implementation of Build 14. The workgroup participants stated that the site was

accessible and timely in the dissemination of information. Participants also discussed and gave input regarding the proposed plan for the implementation of Build 15.

The Training, Implementation and Change Management Workgroup met a second time in late March with the focus of discussion being change management as an essential support to the successful implementation of new application development. Several workgroup members provided valuable input regarding various change management activities implemented in their districts and agencies. Key points from this discussion were drafted and will be a topic of discussion of the next workgroup meeting. Other discussion topics included the transition to the NYS Enterprise Help Desk, the status of the pc rollout, Build 15 Phase I and Phase II field support, and the prioritization of future training courses to be offered. Feedback was sought on the transition to the new Help Desk.

### **Training**

During this quarter four training courses were delivered: Advanced FAD for Experienced Workers, Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation, Building Blocks and the Basic FAD course. The CPS Investigation course provides a two-day overview of the basic CPS functionality for new workers. Its delivery is coordinated with the delivery of Core training in each region. Over two hundred upstate and two hundred twenty ACS staff participated in lab-based training mentioned above. An adaptation of the CPS Investigation course was developed and continues to be provided specifically for ACS workers. In addition a Congregate Care course was developed and delivered to OCFS Regional Office staff. Curriculum was developed, and training delivered, to the new NYS Enterprise Help Desk staff.

Upon request by ACS, additional Build 14 training was provided to over two hundred ACS staff. Also upon request, on-site technical support and training was provided to both districts and voluntary agencies.

A number of materials are being developed to support Build 15, including a training video and Job Aids for CPS and FAD workers (including the FAD Record Summary Job Aid). In addition, planning for lab-based training covering all major Build 15 changes is in process. CPS and FAD Step by Step Guides were revised to include Build 14 changes in functionality.

Revisions to the Data Warehouse Step by Step Guide are currently in process. In addition, revisions to CPS, FAD and Search Techniques Step by Step Guides are being completed to include Build 15 changes to functionality.

### **Communication**

During the first quarter of the new year the Communication Team continued to participate in numerous activities across the CONNECTIONS Project. One primary task of the team over the last few months has revolved around support for implementation of Build 14 and preparation for the implementation of Build 15.

In January the Communication Team hosted a booth, highlighting the CONNECTIONS Project, at the NYPWA Fall Conference. A range of both training and informational materials were made available to conference participants, including: information about the future direction of the Project; information on CONNECTIONS technical upgrades; materials regarding the specific modifications within Build 15; information on the CONNECTIONS Project Charter; and upcoming changes in the production system, such as the Foster and Adoptive Home Record Summary (FRS). In addition, CONNECTIONS staff provided two demonstrations at the booth. The first demo involved the CONNECTIONS Intranet site, the second involved the Help feature within the Child Protective Record Summary (CPRS).

In early March, the Communication Team was involved, with other members of the Project team in the introduction of the new NYS Enterprise Help Desk that is now supporting the CONNECTIONS Project. Communication about the new Help Desk was posted on the Intranet Site and forwarded to both local districts and voluntary agencies announcing and describing the functions of the new Help Desk.

### **CONNECTIONS Intranet Web Site Update**

Over the last three months improvements, to provide a more cohesive format, have been made to the CONNECTIONS Intranet site. The major modification to the site in the past quarter involves the “Home Page/What’s New” section. This section has been restructured to list activities and information that is included on the site by the most recent posting date of the item. This new section format accommodates an ease of use feature, thus allowing the user the ability to quickly scan the site for recent postings. The Intranet Web Site can be accessed by clicking on the Microsoft Internet Explorer Icon which opens the NYS Human Services Intranet Site; click on OCFS and click on CONNECTIONS. Use of the Web Site continues to rise and the Communication Team is responding to suggestions regarding ease of use of the site, as well as questions about material presented on the site.

### **Implementation Support**

Implementation staff collaborated with OFT, OCFS-IT and IBM to prepare the field for, and complete the installation of, replacement pcs in the Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo regions. The Team also prepared districts and agencies for replacement pcs in the Yonkers region and several sites in New York City. Staff coordinated the procurement of signed Bailment Agreements, which are required prior to pc replacement, from voluntary agencies. Regional staff supported the local districts and agencies in using a preparation checklist, developed by the team, that listed the tasks that must be completed to ensure a smooth transition to the new pc environment.

Implementation staff made post-Build 14 follow-up site visits and contacts to the local districts to assist them in the resolution of issues related to the new Child Protective Services (CPS) functionality introduced in Build 14. In preparation for the release of Build 15, Implementation staff conducted regional meetings to assist local districts to prepare for major modifications to the Foster/Adoptive home functions in CONNECTIONS and some modifications to CPS functionality. The team developed

both a checklist as well as a question and answer document, that was sourced by Build 15 questions raised at the regional meetings. Staff will use these materials during subsequent site visits to assist Implementation Coordinators, managers, and users to identify the training, agency decisions, and activities needed to prepare for Build 15.