

MEMO

Date: January 15, 2002

To: Directors of Services and Implementation Coordinators

From: Zack Zambri, Project Director

Re.: CONNECTIONS Project Update

The CONNECTIONS Project has achieved a number of notable milestones in the year 2001 including, the publication of the Reassessment Report, the implementation of Build 13.1 and, most recently Build 14, the conversion to Citrix servers, the replacement/upgrade of both supplemental equipment and PCs, the implementation of the Child Protective Record Summary, and the establishment and ongoing operational support of the Data Warehouse.

The Project has been able to move forward during this past year, through the collaboration and exchange of ideas emanating from both, Local Districts, as well as Voluntary Agencies statewide. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the numerous staff from both venues, Local Districts and Voluntary Agencies, who have worked to achieve the Project's 2001 milestones.

The following topics highlight the progress of these important milestones from September 2001 through December 2001.

- New Development
- Steering and Management Committee
- Data Warehouse Information
- Technical Upgrade and Equipment
- Changes to Current Functionality
- Training, Communications and Implementation Support

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

New Development

During the fall of 2001, the New Development Team has been working on developing Requirement Documents that capture and define all required information about each piece of system functionality scheduled to be released in Phase I. The Case Management Workgroup is reviewing these Requirement Documents, along with preliminary window mock-ups. The Workgroup has met three times this fall (for 2 or 3 day sessions) and covered the following

topics; Family Services Intake, Family Services Case, Assessment, Placement Issues, Contacts and Progress Notes. The remaining topics to be covered are Service Plan, Service Plan Review, Plan Amendments, Child Case Record, Security, Common Functions, Case Life Cycle, Conversion, Navigation and GUI Standards. Two more workgroup sessions have been planned to address these topics. Each topic is reviewed at several workgroups to insure incorporation of workgroup comments and suggestions.

During the initial presentation of Assessment, the Workgroup did not come to consensus on how individualized the assessment recording should be. Although all members agreed that assessing each child within a household was critical, they could not agree on how much individualized recording per child was necessary. Current OCFS Uniform Case Record wording asks for information by family group, frequently recording information on the individual with the most severe issue. In order to avoid a deficit-focused assessment, some members of the group preferred a move to a more individualized recording, allowing for a more balanced view of the family and attention to the needs of all family members. The issue was taken to the CONNECTIONS Management Committee on November 13, 2001. The Management Committee agreed that each tracked child should have some individualized recording, while the assessment, as a whole, should retain a Family focus. They also acknowledged that this would most likely increase the amount of time a worker would have to spend on the assessment, but felt the benefit to children and families outweighed the potential costs. With that increase in mind, they also cautioned the development team to keep individualized child, parent and family scales to a minimum.

The reworked Assessment was presented to the Case Management Workgroup on November 27-29, 2001. Although some members are still concerned about individualized recording and the time it may take workers to do, the response to the new assessment format was positive and the group continues to work diligently at refining it. The workgroup is meeting again in January and February of 2002 to continue work on Phase I.

During this period we also completed the initial development of the Eligibility Worksheet. This Excel Spreadsheet determines eligibility for Title IV-E, TANF-EAF and TANF-200% of Poverty. Regional forums have been completed upstate, at which time we distributed the Eligibility Worksheet User Guide and a video, which identifies the highlights of the spreadsheet.

Development has been ongoing in the definition of the user requirements for the Statewide Service Payment System II (SSPS Phase II). The CONNECTIONS Reassessment Report identified that the link from CONNECTIONS to the Benefit Issuance and Control System (BICS) should be at the point of the authorization/placement. This link is earlier in the process than in the planned R4 design. We are therefore enhancing BICS to process voluntary agency expenditures through rate tables, similar to the way direct foster care and adoption subsidies are currently processed. The State User Group hopes to review the proposed BICS enhancements with Local Districts and Voluntary Agencies by the spring of 2002.

Steering and Management Committee

A joint meeting of the Steering and Management Committee was held in September 2001. The committee received an update on project activities, and was presented an overview of the CONNECTIONS Project Charter. The Project Charter documents the common understandings that have been reached among OCFS, and the Steering and Management Committees regarding the project as we move forward in the new Application development. The charter addresses issues such as project scope, implementation approach, schedule and budget, and stakeholder's roles and responsibilities. In the future, it will serve as the measuring stick for the success of our efforts. In November, the Management Committee met again. As described earlier, Project staff presented issues from the Case Management Workgroup for resolution at this meeting. In addition, at this meeting, the Committee was given a demonstration of the new CONNECTIONS Intranet Site and an overview of implementation plans for the site. Feedback received from the Committee was positive regarding the new site design, content, and rollout plans. The Committee was also updated on the recently formed Training, Implementation and Change Management Workgroup, and was given overviews of the CONNECTIONS Training Plan and Implementation Plan.

Data Warehouse

Data Warehouse staff continue to provide demonstrations and overviews of the Data Warehouse to a variety of audiences. The recent creation of a Data Warehouse training database has allowed staff and SUNY contractors to provide statewide training to Phase I and Phase II participants using program services data. Users become oriented to the Cognos tool using genuine CPS and CCRS data examples. Continual Data Warehouse development has led to the creation of additional cubes and reports for foster home data, as well as five years worth of CCRS admissions, discharges, legal and placement data. These data objects are in addition to the original CPS Allegations and Investigations data provided in the warehouse. The rollout of the Data Warehouse Phase II machines was completed on December 20, 2001. The Cognos software product will be electronically pushed to these machines through weekly scheduled batch runs. Responses to the Phase II recruitment invitation were received from thirty-two districts and regional offices, as well as twenty-three voluntary agencies. Additional requests have come in for the Data Warehouse tool to be loaded onto existing CONNECTIONS 4.0 laptops in various districts. Staff are presently investigating the requirements and methods for expanding the distribution of the Data Warehouse tool to meet these additional requests.

Technical Upgrade and Equipment

In the last quarter of the year, Citrix server rollout was completed. The CONNECTIONS Application is now supported, statewide, in the Citrix environment. Completing this transition was critical to the Project's ability to distribute CONNECTIONS Build 14 in December 2001. It was accomplished through the collaborative efforts of program and technical staff from OCFS and the Office of Technology.

Rollout of replacement CONNECTIONS computers began on November 6th, with a Pilot of the installation process, training, and support materials in Saratoga and Rensselaer counties. Subsequently, the installation of PCs, including Data Warehouse equipment, began in the rest of the Albany Region (Region IV). This Region was completed on December 7, 2001. The new pc's introduce users to the Windows 2000 environment and include updated and improved UCR templates. Rollout will continue in Rochester (Region II) and Syracuse (Region III) in January 2002. Installation in the Buffalo Region will begin in February. Planning is underway for installation in the Yonkers and New York City Regions, including a Pilot in New York City, followed by equipment rollout in Spring 2002. The Office for Technology is currently working on the INF for supplemental equipment requests.

Changes to Current Functionality

Build 14 Developments

Build 14 was released to the field December 17, 2001. This Build includes the Child Protective Record Summary (CPRS), as well as significant improvements to person search, fatality tracking, workload management, and foster/ adoptive (FAD) home closings and fingerprint letters. Two additional districts have requested local CPRS templates.

Build 15 Developments

Build 15 (May 2002) construction is nearing completion and most of the items have been moved to product test. Major items in Build 15 include additional person and resource search improvements, vacancy control, 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. Additionally, several new features to support the FAD workflow process will streamline home development and maintenance and provide a comprehensive case and homestudy record.

Training, Communications and Implementation Support

The new Training, Implementation, and Change Management workgroup held its first meeting on October 25, 2001. Workgroup participants include representatives from 10 local districts and 5 voluntary agencies. This initial meeting focused on training and implementation support for Build 14, training supports for the PC rollout, and the implementation strategy for the new CONNECTIONS Intranet site. A follow up meeting is scheduled for January 2002, during which post-implementation feedback will be received on Build 14 and work will begin on support for Build 15.

Training

During this quarter the four current training courses continued to be 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 the

Core training in each region. In addition, an adaptation of the CPS Investigation Course was developed and implemented specifically for ACS workers.

A new training curriculum and Step-by-Step Guide for the OCFS Data Warehouse have been prepared and statewide training was delivered during November and December for staff authorized to access the Data Warehouse.

A number of materials were developed to support Build 14, including program specific training videos and Job Aids. In addition, lab based training covering all the major Build 14 changes was provided to over 400 upstate staff and 651 ACS staff. With the introduction of Build 14, a new format and approach to the CONNECTIONS Help system has also been introduced. This approach is most fully visible in the CPRS and includes increased graphics and easier navigation throughout the Help system.

Three training aids were finalized during the last quarter of the year, a 2 Volume Step by Step Guide for FAD workers, a Step-by-Step Guide for OCFS Regional Staff to use in licensing Congregate Care settings and, a Quick Start Guide and video were developed to support the roll out of new PC's. In addition, both the CPS and FAD Step by Step Guides are currently being updated to include Build 14.

Communications

Over the last quarter of 2001, the Communications Team continued to participate in a range of activities across the CONNECTIONS Project. Communications staff contributed to the collaboration of efforts that supported the Citrix rollout. Communications also coordinated the exchange of information necessary to initiate the rollout of the replacement CONNECTIONS PCs, and in developing and disseminating information necessary to assist local LAN administrators and users transition to using the new equipment. Throughout the implementation of Build 14, ongoing communications were developed to keep field staff informed regarding changes in the CONNECTIONS Application. In addition, the design of the new CONNECTIONS Intranet site and content of the site was finalized in November, and the redesigned Site was introduced to the field. To support this initiative, demonstrations of the new site design were provided and support materials developed aimed at promoting local awareness and use of the Intranet Site as a source of current information related to project activities.

Implementation Support

Implementation staff continued to assist local districts with the Citrix rollout and was on site in each district as Citrix was implemented. The Regional staff assisted both LAN Administrators and users and worked with the Help Desk, as well as our project's technical staff, to identify and resolve problems on-site.

Implementation staff collaborated with OFT, OCFS-IT and IBM to prepare for the installation of the replacement PCs. Meetings were held in the Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo regions to review preparatory activities and materials, such as the training video and Job Aid, in

order to assist CONNECTIONS users with the transition from the 3.51 to 2000 PC environment. The team developed a preparation checklist for users that listed the tasks that must be completed to ensure a smooth transition.

In preparation for the release of Build 14, Implementation staff conducted regional meetings to assist local districts to prepare for modifications to CONNECTIONS. These meetings focused on the local impact of the major modifications to the Child Protective Services and the Foster/Adoptive Home functions in CONNECTIONS. The team developed a checklist for Implementation Coordinators that identifies the user training, agency decisions, and activities needed to prepare for Build 14.