

# MEMO

**Date:** February 6, 2003

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

**From:** William Travis, Project Director  
Zack Zambri, Former Project Director

**Re.:** CONNECTIONS Project Update

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First and foremost, I wish to thank all of the staff from both the local districts and voluntary agencies who worked, in direct collaboration with CONNECTIONS project staff, to propel the project forward during this past calendar year. Through these combined efforts the CONNECTIONS project achieved many memorable and notable milestones in the year 2002.

Among the highlights identified as measurable during 2002 was the implementation of two major Builds ~ Build 15 and Build 15.1. Most notably, Build 15 included additional person and resource improvements, enhanced capabilities for person and data maintenance, ease of use improvements in navigation and workload management areas, as well as, modifications to the collection of race and ethnicity information, in order to meet the new federal standards. In addition, Build 15 also included several new features to support the FAD workflow process, thus streamlining home development and maintenance.

Build 15.1 included the introduction and implementation of two items, Vacancy Control and Local Data Maintenance. Both of these items represent significant functionality with strong training and implementation impacts. Other noteworthy project achievements include: continued successful collaboration among local district, voluntary agency and CONNECTIONS project staff surrounding the planning and implementation of Case Management functionality; focus on Financial Management involving proposed changes to the SSPS Phase II-A and Phase II-B User Requirements documents; promotion of the NYS OCFS Data Warehouse, thus increasing the user base of this functionality, as well as the creation of the training database for the Data Warehouse; numerous technical upgrade initiatives, among them the Voluntary Agency Network Integration Project, new Citrix ICA Client and Citrix XP update, and the Desktop PC Replacement Project; and continued project field support in the form of various communications, training courses and implementation outreach.

The following topics underscore the progress of several notable milestones, achieved by the CONNECTIONS project, during the months of August through December 2002.

- ❑ Case Management
- ❑ Financial Management
- ❑ Data Warehouse
- ❑ Management Committee
- ❑ Technical Upgrade and Equipment
- ❑ Changes to Current Functionality
- ❑ Training, Communication and Implementation Support

The following narratives provide a detailed summary of the aforementioned project topics.

### **Case Management**

The New Development Requirements Team has been working closely with the teams from Application Development on the logical designs of all Phase I work. Logical design involves the meticulous process of determining ‘how’ to best build a system to meet the requirements specified during the workgroup sessions. This is both challenging as well as a time consuming process. While the Application Development teams’ design the window layouts and specify the interaction of data within and between the windows, the Requirements Team must provide specific information on how data should be captured and displayed. Throughout this period, the team staff have also worked closely with DDPS and OCFS policy staff to clarify questions raised by the developers. The flow of information and the intersections between modules have also been a focus of this teams’ attention.

A presentation of the proposed work completed by the Case Management Workgroup on Family Services Intake and Family Services Stage was delivered to representatives of HHR in October 2002. The presentation was well received, particularly the progress note module. The CONNECTIONS Implementation Team has also conducted regional presentations of the Phase I work.

Currently an analysis of conversion needs and strategies is underway. Several different approaches are being researched. We are exploring ways of associating WMS Child Welfare Services cases to current CONNECTIONS CPS Investigations, prior to the implementation of Phase I-B. This association would ease the conversion effort. The Implementation Team is currently working on strategies for Phase I-A and Phase I-B. One approach that has been recommended for Phase I-A is a statewide implementation of this functionality at the same time. As Phase I-A affects CPS workers in the local districts, and the changes are not voluminous, this proposed approach appears to be a reasonable method.

We have also started preliminary work on Phase II requirements. Adoption information, related to Phase II, will be a focus of this team. The team is currently hosting internal workgroups to identify workflows and facts pertinent to placement and adoption issues

and from those will be developing the materials to be presented to the Phase II workgroups in Spring 2003.

## **Financial Management**

### **Eligibility Worksheet**

Work has begun surrounding the requirements for inclusion of a medical assistance determination for foster care children in the eligibility worksheet. This determination will identify whether a child is eligible for medical assistance. It will also determine the correct eligibility code for the child. The aforementioned additions to the eligibility worksheet must be approved by the Department of Health. Upon approval, the enhanced worksheet will be distributed for use.

### **Financial Management**

Coding continues on the enhancement to BICS made under the SSPS Phase II-A Project. This project provides rate table payment processing, retroactive payments and retroactive claiming for local district payments to voluntary agencies. Testing of these enhancements is scheduled to begin in February 2003 and planned implementation of these enhancements is slated for mid-May 2003.

A recruitment notice, requesting additional workgroup members for the Case and Financial Management Workgroup, was forwarded to local district and voluntary agency staff during the later part of this quarter. This workgroup's charge will be to provide input into the requirements, design, testing, training, and change management strategies for CONNECTIONS Phase II development and implementation.

## **Data Warehouse**

### **Data Warehouse Training**

A new advanced training curriculum was developed, and training sessions began in November 2002. To date, forty-two users have received the advanced Data Warehouse training. In total, two hundred and eleven persons received the basic Data Warehouse training course during 2002.

A count of the number of Data Warehouse users identifies that, at present, there are six hundred and twenty-three individual users representing fifty-three local districts, fifty voluntary agencies and eighteen NYS OCFS offices/bureaus.

### **Enhancements/New Development**

In response to the Children and Family Services Review (CFSR), a new master report was developed, and is available to users. This one report displays rates for all six national indicators for each local district, with sub-reports displaying child specific data. These reports are now available for the calendar years 2000 and 2001.

Also in support of the CFSR Program Improvement Plan (PIP), OCFS Data Warehouse staff calculated and distributed local district baselines and targets for the recurrence and stability of placement indicators for performance measurement purposes. Data

Warehouse staff also created a new Security Mart with four pre-defined reports that allow CONNECTIONS users to display information on assignee/designee relationships, business functions, staff security and unit approvers.

In addition, Data Warehouse staff has modified four reports, the Admissions to Foster Care, In Foster Care, Legal and Discharge reports to provide additional counts and further clarity by re-labeling catalogs, reports and data items.

### **CIN/PID**

As noted in the previous quarter, CIN/PID entered into production in April 2002 for participating Data Warehouse pilot sites. The CIN/PID database has now been increased to all local districts in New York State.

### **Management Committee**

The CONNECTIONS Management Committee met on December 5<sup>th</sup> for the final time this year. The committee received an update on the status of the CONNECTIONS project and ensuing project activities. The agenda also included the following topics of discussion: recruitment of members for the committee, a briefing on the project schedule to date, implementation issues related to the phased rollout of the various functionalities of case management and the impact of the related programmatic changes. The committee was also introduced to William Travis, who assumed the project lead at the end of December 2002, upon Zack Zambri's retirement.

Committee member recruitment was the first topic on the agenda and propelled a discussion concerning proposed strategies to recruit and retain participation. It was noted that several committees had lost membership due, in great part, to retirements. Initial discussion identified barriers to recruitment, including the fact that many current, as well as prospective members are handling multiple assignments due to staffing cutbacks. Other noted barriers were restrictions of travel and the reorganization of local districts into larger structures where executive support, related to committee participation, may not yet exist. It was proposed, as well as agreed upon, that the CONNECTIONS Regional Office staff would assume the lead in identifying and conducting outreach to prospective committee members. CONNECTIONS project staff will also participate in this venue and seek opportunities to heighten the awareness of the ongoing nature of the project.

The committee membership also discussed the necessity of recruiting participants for the pending Phase II Requirements Definition workgroups. It was decided that one tool to be used to recruit members would involve the distribution of a memo that would outline the roles and expectations of committee and workgroup members.

The current project schedule was discussed and it was noted that staff are reviewing the current timeline with the task of shortening the overall schedule.

The committee discussed the implementation issues related to a phased approach to the rollout of the next modifications to the system, as well as changes to the current functionality. In its current structure, the rollout of the modifications and changes will

take place over several months, which may pose some difficulty to users as they may be working in two environments for a period of time. It was stated that this incremental approach was conceived, via user request, for greater levels of training and on-site support related to the rollout of this new functionality. Discussion revealed and concluded that the current phased approach should not be segmented further and that the length of each piece of this overall rollout should be individually determined, following an impact analysis of the phase. Committee members agreed that up-front planning will be vital to this approach.

It was announced that Walter R. McDonald Associates would meet with NYS OCFS leadership to discuss specific strategies related to further project implementation. The firm's vast experience with SACWIS implementation in other large states will be an asset.

A final point of discussion was that committee members noted value in building capacity of the users in local districts and voluntary agencies as a component to a strategy using state level training and technical assistance. The impact of programmatic change was briefly discussed and will be further evaluated at subsequent committee meetings.

## **Technical Upgrade and Equipment**

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

The Office for Technology and the DFA-IT Customer Support Services staff collaborated to successfully complete the Voluntary Agencies Network Integration Study Pilot Project. As a result of this effort a selection of offerings, and their associated costs, were developed and presented to Executive Directors and IT Directors at regional forums that were conducted during the Summer of 2002.

The main objective of the Voluntary Agency Network Integration Project (NIS) is to allow voluntary agency staff the ability to access the CONNECTIONS Application from their own agency PC. In order to support this initiative a number of changes will take place within the existing infrastructure. The objective will then be to effect these changes through a gradual and incremental transition to the new system. Standards will be set for the integration of networks, with each agency's network being individually analyzed, and proposed solutions developed that will best meet the needs of both the agency and the NYS OCFS.

To date, fourteen voluntary agencies are involved in this initiative. A total of five, of those fourteen, have been successfully transitioned to the new system.

### **CONNECTIONS Desktop PC Replacement Project**

As noted in the previous Quarterly Report, approval was received from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services for the replacement of the remaining 25% of CONNECTIONS baseline desktop computers. Distribution of the remaining 25% of PCs

began in mid-November 2002. This initiative is on target for completion in March 2003 throughout New York State.

### **Citrix Upgrades ~ Citrix Session Fifteen Minute Disconnect State/Stay Alive Feature and Auto Client Reconnect**

Two new initiatives, related to the operation of Citrix, were implemented during the last portion of this quarter. The Citrix Session Fifteen Minute Disconnect State/Stay Alive feature prompts as a major benefit to the user, such that when the Citrix client detects that its connection to the server is broken, the Citrix session will transition into what is termed a 'disconnected' state. Descriptively, the Citrix session that the user is in will remain 'alive' on the Citrix server for a total time of fifteen minutes. If the connection to the Citrix server becomes available within that fifteen minute time period, when the user logs back into Citrix they will be reconnected in the exact place that they previously left. The major implementation benefit of this initiative is that work in progress will not be lost as the user then returns to the place in the system where they were, prior to the break to the server.

The second Citrix initiative implemented during this quarter is the Auto Client Reconnect feature. This initiative is a major enhancement to the current CONNECTIONS Citrix ICA Client. Descriptively, when the Citrix client detects that its connection to a server is broken, it will automatically begin a 'reconnect' sequence. When the user then logs back into the Citrix session they will be re-connected to their session in the exact place that they left prior to the timeout or network interruption.

### **Changes to Current Functionality**

#### **Build 15.1 Developments**

Build 15.1 was implemented in early September 2002. This Build contained two new Applications, Vacancy Control and Local Data Maintenance; both of these Applications were developed in Visual Basic. Vacancy Control allows local districts and voluntary agencies the ability to maintain bed level vacancies and characteristics for the facilities that they authorize, thus providing real time access to vacant bed information for children in need of placement. This functionality combines existing CONNECTIONS licensing information with Vacancy Control data to provide placement search logic that will give local districts and voluntary agencies the ability to search for bed level vacancies that meet the needs of children requiring placement.

Local Data Maintenance provides 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.

#### **Build 15.2 Developments**

Build 15.2 will be implemented in Spring 2003. The prime focus of this Build involves changes to current CONNECTIONS resource information to support SSPS Phase II. Also included in Build 15.2 are security enhancements designed to improve the process that establishes new CONNECTIONS users, as well as enhancements to expand the number of security attributes available for new development. Another Build item will

support entry of the WMS case number in an indicated CPS investigation that is opened for services. This entry is optional by the local district and will allow linking an existing CPS case with its services counterpart when Case Management Phase I-B is implemented.

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

In October, the NYS Enterprise Help Desk implemented a new Application, Peregrine Service Center, for client support and service call tracking. The CONNECTIONS Ticket Triage Team attended a training session and reviewed instructional manuals in preparation for the new Application. The transition to the new software was implemented without significant impact on ticket resolution. As the team continues to become familiar with Peregrine tools, reports are being developed to analyze specific Application problem areas, evaluate agent responses, and identify user and agent training needs.

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

The Training, Implementation and Change Management Workgroup hosted two meetings this quarter on September 24<sup>th</sup> and on December 3, 2002. As in previous workgroup meetings, participants included representatives from local districts and voluntary agencies, as well as CONNECTIONS project staff.

Agenda topics for the September 24<sup>th</sup> meeting included a project update that identified that the implementation of Build 15.1 was well received, an update on the PC rollout with specificity regarding the remaining 25%, a status report regarding the Case Management Staffing and Equipment Survey, discussion relative to the Citrix upgrade, and an update of Case Management Phase I-A. Workgroup participants expressed positive support of the phased approach for case management, as well as the field support plan for the rollout of case management.

The agenda also included a review of the various Build 15.1 field supports, as well as an update regarding the Build 15 Implementation, Communication and Training Survey. Updates related to the various CONNECTIONS project team's work products were also presented.

Workgroup members were very positive in their response to the discussion of the Build 15.1 field supports. The members felt that the various supports used to augment the implementation of Build 15.1 met the needs of the users.

Members were involved in a discussion and presented with screen mock-ups of the Contact and Progress Notes ~ Investigation Stage which will be introduced in Phase I-A of Case Management. Participants were positive about the direction that the implementation of Phase I-A is taking and discussion among the group ensued that identified that this will be a major practice change rollout supported by the CONNECTIONS system.

Implementation Assessment, related to Phase I-A, was another major agenda item. Group participants discussed the necessity, involvement and structure of local districts as well as voluntary agency teams banding together to plan for these practice changes.

The December 3<sup>rd</sup> workgroup meeting agenda items presented the group with a summary of the status of the project as it relates to the implementation of Case Management ~ Phase I-A and Phase I-B, as well as a discussion of suggestions related to this implementation. A call for the recruitment of new members to the workgroup was presented to the current members. The CPRS Notes Survey Results, related to a survey conducted by the CONNECTIONS Implementation Team, were presented to the group members. Some notable issues were presented, via the survey, and the group was apprised that these issues will be addressed with the implementation of Phase I-A. Overall the participants felt that the Notes Tab captured a great deal of information in a succinct and uniform manner.

Two demonstrations were presented during the meeting. The first was a presentation of the QuickPAD IR Word Processing device that was distributed to local districts recently to use in the field to record case notes. It was noted that initial feedback regarding the use and efficiency of these devices has been positive from both CPS workers and supervisors. The other demonstration was a brief review of the CONNECTIONS Intranet. The group was presented with a discussion question related to agencies that don't currently utilize the Intranet and how the team should recruit and initiate their involvement. This initial discussion led to a larger group discussion related to suggested communication strategies for this potential user group.

This group continues to provide valuable input regarding the future direction of the project with regard to all three teams: Communication, Implementation, and Training.

## **Training**

### **Build 15.1 Training Supports**

A variety of training supports were developed and delivered to local districts and voluntary agencies to facilitate the implementation of CONNECTIONS Build 15.1. These included:

- Instructor Led Training: Prior to the implementation of Build 15.1, three separate instructor led trainings were offered, each focusing on changes to the system that impacted specific groups of CONNECTIONS users. These trainings were provided to over six hundred workers statewide.
- Job Aids: Four separate job aids were developed, printed and distributed to local districts as well as voluntary agency FAD and CPS supervisor and caseworker staff.

### **Training Database Upgrades**

During this quarter a plan for updating case materials on the training database has been developed by SUNY Training Strategies Group and approved by NYS OCFS. A methodology for the replication of training database cases, and for updating the data, has been developed and is in the final stages of testing. It is projected that the actual

replication of the training database and updating the data will be accomplished during the first quarter of 2003. These changes will include more cases and reflect new functionality in the system.

### **Ongoing CONNECTIONS Training**

During the second half of this year, five training courses were delivered by the SUNY Training Strategies Group to participants from both local districts and voluntary agencies. These courses were:

- Building Blocks of CONNECTIONS
- Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation
- Basic Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD)
- Advanced Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) for Experienced Workers
- Basic Data Warehouse

### **New Training Courses**

In addition to the courses noted above, two new courses were also developed, they are the Advanced Data Warehouse Training course, and the CONNECTIONS Security course. The CONNECTIONS Security course was piloted in late November 2002 and will be introduced into regular delivery in January 2003. In addition, a new Data Warehouse course for advanced users has also been developed and began to be delivered in late November 2002.

### **Online Help**

During this quarter, the CONNECTIONS Online Help was updated to reflect the modifications that were implemented in Build 15.1.

### **Communication**

The Communication Team continued to participate in a range of activities across the CONNECTIONS Project. One primary task of the team over the last few months has revolved around support for the implementation of Build 15.1. Throughout the past few months, ongoing communications were developed to keep users informed about changes in the CONNECTIONS Application relative to modifications in this Build.

Various other communiqués were disseminated, via this team, throughout this last quarter of the year. Among them, communications regarding the Build 15.1 Business Function Profiles; information related to the reclaiming of CIAB equipment from voluntary agencies; an announcement that described and notified local districts of the dissemination of the QuickPAD IR Word Processing devices; various notices relative to the upgrades to Citrix functionality; workgroup recruitment memos; and the development and dissemination of the Training, Implementation and Change Management Workgroup meeting minutes.

The team continues to coordinate the exchange of information necessary to the rollout of the remaining 25% of replacement CONNECTIONS PCs.

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

During this quarter the CONNECTIONS Communications Team presented the new design of the Intranet site with the introduction of two new Intranet Web pages. The two new pages, the OCFS Data Warehouse page and the CONNECTIONS Security page, will compliment the site and present timely and targeted information related to these two topics.

The OCFS Data Warehouse page was put into production on the site in late August 2002 and provides information to current Data Warehouse users, as well as to local districts and voluntary agencies who may be looking for general information regarding Data Warehouse developments. Ongoing enhancements to the Data Warehouse and new development efforts are also available on this page.

The Security page, which was put into production in early November 2002, is designed to provide pertinent information to local district and voluntary agency Security Coordinators about CONNECTIONS security initiatives. This page provides specific information about training, policies and procedures for security, business function guidelines, security reports that are generated by the OCFS Data Warehouse, as well as other general informational bulletins and topics.

### **Implementation Support**

During the past quarter, Regional and Central Office Implementation staff participated in regional meetings for OCFS child welfare staff. Topics of discussion during these meetings included: structured decision making, the new case management functionality, and the Web-based Risk Assessment Profile Pilot. A survey of local district use of the CPRS Notes Tab was completed this quarter and the results are being used in planning implementation activities that will be needed by local districts as they prepare for the Progress Notes functionality in Phase I-A. Also, in conjunction with the introduction of Progress Notes in CPRS, Implementation staff are assisting local districts, that currently have local templates in CPRS, to analyze their future need for these templates.

Additional activities for this quarter include, staff contacts with voluntary agencies, related to their submission of responses to the recent CONNECTIONS Local District/Voluntary Agency Staffing and Equipment Survey, as well as assisting with the distribution and technical use of the QuickPAD IR Word Processing devices that OCFS provided to all local districts for use by both CPS workers and supervisors.