

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORTS OF BAY AREA SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES**

### **Jamie Buckmaster and Shirley Kalinowsky\***

*Historically, human services, both public and private, and the customers we serve, have garnered negative feelings from the general public. Part of the reason is that the only view of human services usually seen by the general public are those much publicized situations of people abusing the system and the taxes we all pay, to buy those services. Not seen are the many services provided by the numerous agencies throughout the County-kids living in safe environments, uneducated or untrained adults being trained into self-sufficiency, teen mothers receiving counseling towards completing their education, homeless families being placed into a house, and a myriad of other services to at-risk families and children. (Excerpt from Lois Koenig, Assistant to the Director, San Mateo County Human Services Agency, in her letter to Public Information Committee Members, 1994).*

*The Social Service Department, will: encourage community input and be responsive to expressed needs, concerns and suggestions; establish a legislative advocacy program; develop a public educational information program of Social Services Department responsibilities and accomplishments; involve the community-at-large in conducting service delivery needs assessments, defining program outcomes and assuming leadership responsibility for programs ownership. (Excerpt from Contra Costa County Social Service Department, Values and Objectives, 1996)*

The following report was written, and the information gathered, by two interns from the Executive Development program of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) as a result of their internship with Santa Clara County on the topic of public information.

### **INTRODUCTION**

We were originally assigned to the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency to assist in the beginning stages of their setting up the newly formed Office of Community Development and Relations (OCDR). In addition to assisting with this endeavor, as interns, we had the task of writing a case study as part of our class assignment in the Executive Development Program. This case study contains an introduction; program background and history; current issues, challenges and successes; and lessons learned and implications for host county and home county. Shirley Kalinowski, Contra Costa County, was given the additional assignment from her department's Director to form in-depth recommendations regarding the formation of a formalized public information function in the Contra Costa County Social Service Department (CCSSD).

### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

Structurally, the OCDR contains a newly-appointed Community Development and Relations Officer, Gil Villagran, and two existing public information positions that report to him. Michelle Swalley, a Management Analyst with an official title of Public Information Officer (PIO), has many years of experience. Before coming to the agency three years ago, she was employed in the same capacity with the County Executive's Office (CEO). Belinda Quesada became a Public Information Assistant (Associate Management Analyst B) when Ms. Swalley left on maternity

\*Jamie Buckmaster is a Benefits Analyst Supervisor in the Income Maintenance Division of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency; Shirley Kalinowsky is a Social Service Division Manager for Income Maintenance for the Contra Costa County Social Service Department.

leave approximately a year ago. Ms. Quesada stayed on when Ms. Swalley returned from her leave. Mr. Villagran began his new assignment as Community Development and Relations Officer in February 1996. He reports to Kathy Gallagher, Chief Administrative Officer, who in turn reports to the Agency Director.

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has had a model public information function for several years. The agency is now creating the OCDR to develop additional proactive approaches to public information as part of overall community development. As a beginning step, we assisted Mr. Villagran in convening an in-house task force to examine the meaning of community development, and to generate recommendations for proactive approaches to public information and education. After the in-house task force completes its charge, Mr. Villagran plans to convene a community task force to further address the issues of community development.

In addition to assisting Mr. Villagran in setting up the OCDR and learning all we could about public information efforts in Santa Clara County, Mike Austin, from BASSC, in a phone conversation with

Kathy Gallagher, suggested that we gather information about the public information efforts of eight other Bay Area counties as a comparison to the public information efforts in Santa Clara County. Mr. Austin believed this information would be useful to our directors, as well as to BASSC as it looks at a Bay Area regional approach to public information. The nine county profiles on Public information are contained in Appendix A. The information summarized in these profiles is the result of numerous interviews over the phone and in person with Bay Area Social Services Directors, Department Managers and staff of social service agencies using a questionnaire we constructed (Appendix B).

## **CURRENT ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND SUCCESSES**

Bay Area counties have always provided some degree of public information services to their clients and the community-at-large. As a result of our work, it is clear that although the counties provide these services, they are provided in many different ways. The primary questions then focus on how a county social service agency provides quality public information to the community within limited resources:

- Through a centralized public information contact point handled by a person(s) trained in the field of public information?
- Through an assigned central administrator where public information is one of many tasks?
- Through assigning public information functions among many different managers?

In our review we found that the public information function of the nine Bay Area social service agencies can basically be divided into these three types of efforts:

First, Santa Clara County which has a specific office with three full time positions devoted to Public Information and Community Development.

Second, Alameda County which has the public information function currently resting with the Assistant to the Director; this administrator has many other job duties and estimates she spends 20% or less of her time performing the public information function.

Third, the balance of the counties which have the public information function spread among the Director, Division Directors, and Program Managers with some support from staff.

In our interviews we found that many managers came to their public information duties by accident or default (e.g., because of a crisis situation that needed to be handled immediately by them, or because an employee quit or retired, etc.). Often the public information duties remained where they fell. Generally these duties include some combination of the following:

- Responding to inquiry phone calls;
- Information and referral;
- Producing or overseeing the production of newsletters, flyers, and brochures; Coordinating special events;
- Responding to crisis situations;
- Working with the media;
- Writing press releases or newspaper articles;
- Tracking legislation; and,
- Assisting with lobbying efforts.

It was reported during our interviews that limited public information coordination occurs between the CEO and the social service agencies except under disaster situations (e.g., the floods in Napa and the earthquake in Santa Cruz). This may be because the two departments would most likely receive different types of phone calls and inquiries for information from the public. For instance, specific program concerns would be referred to the social service agencies in the counties. Most agencies do keep the CEO informed of situations where the media is involved (e.g., a Child Welfare case that has caught media attention, etc). In addition, little public information coordination occurs between social service agencies and the other departments in the county except in case specific situations. For instance, agency contacts may occur with the Coroner's Office, District Attorney's Office, or the Probation Department.

Typically, working with the media is the responsibility of the Agency Director, Assistant to the Director or Division Directors. In Santa Clara County, the agency PIOs may also work with the media and, depending on the issue, may coordinate the call with one of the directors. Because of a special event, such as the opening of a neighborhood center in Santa Clara County, Ms Swalley or Ms. Quesada may contact the media directly and write the press release.

Overwhelmingly, the consensus was that the biggest concern in working with the media is the fear of being misquoted or misrepresented. Managers believe that this often happens in confidential situations where their hands are tied and they can not give the whole story or provide all the facts. On the other hand, when working with the media, managers feel a positive experience when they are represented fairly. In addition, when the press covers a positive news story, managers are pleased with the results.

Our interviews expanded beyond the staff of social service agencies. We also interviewed a reporter from the San Jose Mercury News; a former reporter, now the Public Information Officer for Santa Clara County Health and Hospital Services; the Santa Clara Social Service Agency Legislative Analyst; a retired Public Affairs Officer from the Contra Costa County Office of Education; and a Management Analyst from the CEO in Santa Clara County who performs part of the public information function. In addition, we met with Sheryl Goldberg from BASSC and Bobbi Fischer from Fischer Communications. Both Ms. Goldberg and Ms. Fischer are under contract with CCCSSD to develop a feasibility study regarding implementing public information strategies within the department. Their study is above and beyond Shirley Kalinowski's BASSC assignment.

In approaching our internship, one of the most important questions we wanted answered, was "Why have a public information function?" As a result of our interviews, discussions, and experience, we believe that there are many reasons to have a public information function including the following:

- The community knows very little about the services we provide.
- What the community does know is primarily negative.
- Department staff have limited knowledge about the programs and services provided by the department.
- With welfare reform and other funding limitations on the horizon, the responsibility for social services needs to be shared with the community-at-large.
- Limited resources can be maximized when the community has a coordinated service delivery system.
- The community deserves to know that our agencies spend taxpayer dollars in a responsible and efficient manner.
- Social service agencies need to provide leadership to assist the community in making positive and well planned changes to our social infrastructure.

One of the challenges in public information is the need to expand the public information efforts in each agency while dealing with limited resources. Generally, those persons interviewed would like to see the function expanded in the future because they believe that public information is a valuable part of what social service agencies do as we provide services to our communities. Plans to expand these efforts are varied in the nine Bay Area counties. Plans range from coordinating the production of videos to orient new employees in Santa Cruz County, to becoming more visible to the community in Napa County, and looking at setting up a formalized public information function in Contra Costa County. San Mateo County would like to take its public information function one step further by designating, or contracting for, a PIO and Santa Clara County with the largest, most centralized function, has expanded significantly in 1996 with the creation of the OCDR.

## **LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HOST COUNTY AND HOME COUNTY**

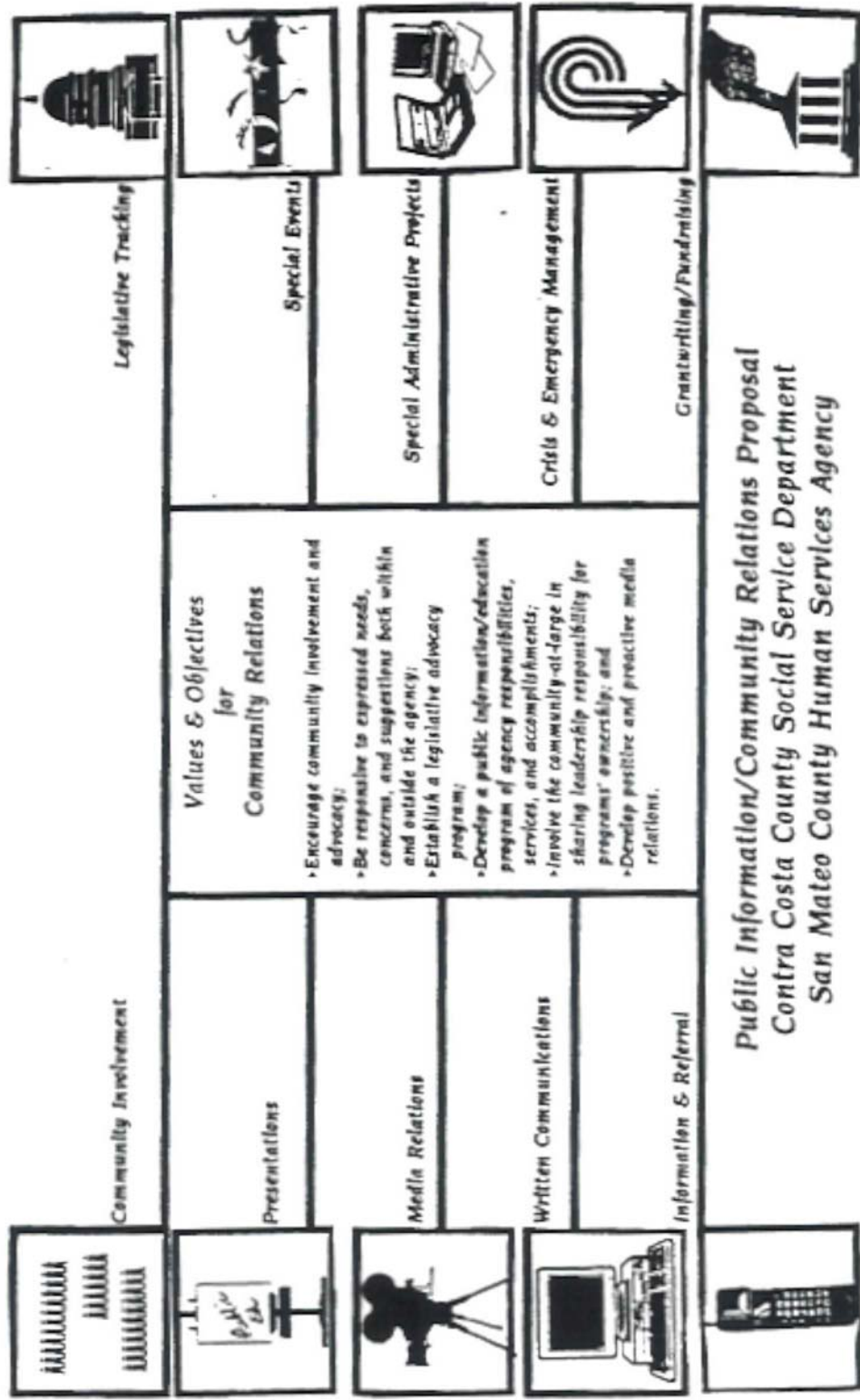
Several of the people we interviewed remarked that when working with the public and the media, it is very useful to have a full time PIO to act as a "Traffic Cop" for directing phone calls and

inquiries. This helps the media and public obtain information in a timely manner, instead of having to call several people in the agency. This also gives the public and our clients a central place to obtain information about our services and to ask general questions. A PIO can provide the agency with a higher quality of information to disseminate to the public. They also believe that this can improve the community understanding about what the agency does which becomes more important now in conservative political times, the undervaluing of government services, and impending welfare reform (Figure 1).

Based on the information we obtained through our surveys and in discussions with these nine Bay Area counties, we believe Santa Clara County's proactive approach to public information and community development will enable their agency to best serve their community. They will be educating their community on the services they provide, and in so doing, they will be acquiring community support and advocacy for their services.

As a result of our internship, we have gathered an enormous amount of information on the subject of public information. After the three week internship, we find that our thoughts about the implications for public information in our counties are essentially identical in that we both believe that it is critical for each of our counties to have a designated PIO as a focal point for community and media contact. Appendix C contains our proposed agency profiles which we will be presenting to our respective Directors and Executive Teams.

Figure 1: Public Information /Community Relations Proposal



## **APPENDIX A COUNTY PROFILES**

### **PROFILE - ALAMEDA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY**

#### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The Public Information Officer (PIO) in the Alameda County Social Services Agency is Luann DeWitt. Ms. DeWitt, whose formal classification is Assistant to the Director, is currently spending about 20% of her time as the PIO, about 30% of her time as the Legislative Coordinator, and about 50% of her time on other duties as the Assistant to the Director. The classification, Assistant to the Director, reports directly to the Agency Director and is equivalent to a midlevel manager (e.g., a Program Manager or Section Supervisor), with a salary high of approximately \$56,000 per year. The salary is funded through the General Administrative Claim.

The agency has long recognized the need to disseminate information to the public and has assigned that responsibility to various people as an additional task over the last six or seven years. In the last four years the coordination of public information has become a centralized administrative function.

#### **Scope of Public Information Function**

As the Public Information Officer, Ms. DeWitt handles a variety of public information tasks including: arranging for agency presentations by coordinating with Community Outreach; responding to inquiry calls (which takes about 10% of her time); coordinating crisis calls with the appropriate department head; calling press conferences when needed; working with the media (which includes press conferences, press releases, and providing information specific to the media's interest or story); and informing the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Officer when there is expected media coverage of breaking news events. She also serves as a member of the agency's Executive Team and represents the agency on various community boards and commissions.

The agency newsletter, which took two years to get off the ground, was initially assigned to the PIO. Due to time constraints, it was reassigned as a special project to the Assistant Director with the Department of Aging. In addition to the agency newsletter, each agency department has a newsletter published by staff volunteers. There is also a county newspaper, "The Courier," which is published under contract.

#### **Working with the Media**

Ms. DeWitt is the primary contact for the media. If she receives questions or story requests which she personally cannot do, she then connects the media with the person who can assist them with the story or answer their questions. She often works through the Press Room in the County Administration building ensuring that the radio, TV, and press have the information they need. She stresses that it is important that the media get a response and not be left with their questions unanswered or their phone calls unreturned. When staff are contacted directly by the

media they are responsible for letting her know they were called, the focus of the story, and when and where the story can expect to be "seen."

Occasionally, Ms. DeWitt writes agency press releases and newspaper articles. Individual departments are responsible for drafting their own press releases. Ms. DeWitt sends all press releases to the media and markets where necessary. While not all press releases are printed, marketing is important because the next time the media wants a story, old press releases may be an inspiration for a story topic.

### **Tracking Legislation**

As the agency's Legislative Coordinator, Ms. DeWitt: tracks state legislation through Legitech; coordinates with the federal, state, and county lobbyists; is a member of CWDA's Legislative Committee; and promotes county-sponsored legislation through the Board of Supervisors.

### **Community Advisory Groups**

The agency has a variety of community advisory groups that are formed in response to a specific topic (e.g., Refugee Assistance and GAIN). These groups provide essential input to the agency and to the Board of Supervisors.

### **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

As the PIO, Ms. DeWitt takes pride in the fact that she has developed a positive working relationship with the media. The media knows her as a professional person, one they can trust and contact when they need information. Ms. DeWitt suggests, "When contacted by the media, always take time to prepare your response. Ask them for the focus of their story, their timeframes, etc."

Cons:

Regarding the media, Ms. DeWitt advises, "You can and will be misquoted, accurate sound bites will keep this to a minimum."

The principal difficulty for this part-time PIO is not having time to devote to the function.

### **Future Plans for Public Information**

While the agency always wants to expand public information, and believes it is very important to educate the community, they have no additional resources to affect a formalized expansion at this time.



All senior managers are expected to provide information to the public, as well as to their staff, whenever possible. It is important to this agency that the public receive accurate information about the agency's roles and responsibilities as well as its community collaboration.

## **PROFILE-CONTRA COSTA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The Contra Costa County Social Service Department has neither a Public Information Officer (PIO) nor a formal public information function. Public inquiry phone calls go to the Director, Assistant Directors, Division Managers, Analysts, and Supervisors of the Day in the district offices. Public calls are numerous and vary from questions about program regulations, client complaints about staff, and questions about county demographics and public assistance statistics. Public inquiries that are programmatic or statistical are forwarded to the appropriate Analyst for response. Information and Referral (I & R) phone calls are often referred to a half-time I & R Social Worker.

Information is transmitted to other departments, to local private and public non-profit agencies, and to the community-at-large on a case-by-cases basis (e.g., public hearings on a specific county plan). Program Analysts work formally with other governmental entities through the California Welfare Directors Association (CWDA).

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

Public information functions are conducted on a limited basis usually by staff working with the programs) involved.

Much of the written program information distributed to the department's customers are flyers and program brochures created by the appropriate Program Analyst or printed through the state.

While there is no department newsletter at this time, the Director is currently issuing a monthly memo to all department staff highlighting department accomplishments. There was a newsletter for two years (1988 - 1990) created and produced by volunteer staff. It ended when the volunteers "ran out of steam" and there were no financial resources available for outside publication assistance.

Speaking requests are handled on an individual basis. Presentations may be made by the Director, Assistant Directors, Division Managers, Program Analysts, or line Supervisors depending on the audience and the presentation topic.

Special events are organized and hosted by staff responsible for that particular program. For example: the Volunteer nonprofit entity within the department hosts a Volunteer Recognition luncheon; the Children's Services Program Analysts organize and host Foster Parents luncheons and Adoption Fairs. Employee events are conducted on an informal basis in the various offices (e.g., social committees in the district offices host luncheons and potlucks throughout the year honoring special events).

The department does not routinely apply for service or recognition awards. Some years ago the department did apply for and receive a National Association of Counties (NACO) award. Recently, an application for national recognition of a multi-department program, the Services Integration Team, was completed through the County Administrator's Office (CAO). The Services Integration Team received Honorable Mention in this national competition.

### **Working with the Media**

The Assistant Directors are the department's media contacts. The individual bureaus are responsible for writing and issuing their own press releases.

The department does not routinely solicit media coverage. Often media contact is considered negative, putting the department in a defensive posture.

Near the County Administration building, there is a Press Room for TV, newspaper, and radio staff. In the Press Room, the reporters frequently get information from staff in the CAO's office.

### **Tracking Legislation**

No one in the department is specifically assigned to track pending legislation. Information regarding pending legislation comes into the department from a variety of sources (e.g., the CAO's office, CWDA and CSAC {the California State Association of Counties}).

The Senior Deputy County Administrator is the liaison between the county's lobbyist and the departments. He spends about 25% of his time tracking legislation and uses the computerized on-line system through CSAC. He receives recommendations from the departments in response to particular bills and will then prepare a Board Order or Board Resolution either in support, in opposition, or in seeking modification of the specific legislation. In addition, the department also provides comment on legislation through CWDA.

### **Community Advisory Groups**

The department has several advisory groups. Some are ongoing such as the Family and Children's Services Advisory Committee (FACSAC) and the Family and Children's Trust (FACT). Some are activated for a specific county plan process such as the Refugee Advisory Council and the GAIN Advisory Council. The FACT committee issues Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and recommends grant awards. The department advisory groups which process county plans are advisory only.

The Volunteer Services non-profit entity within the department has a Board of Directors which sets policy for the non-profit. The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) has an advisory group, the Advisory Council on Aging, which also participates in management oversight of the department's AAA plan and in evaluating the Older Americans Act programs.

The Board of Supervisors has a Family and Human Services subcommittee. The Family and Human Services subcommittee is policy-making and provides oversight on most Social Service Department issues.

### **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

There have been some positive articles published about specific department services (e.g., Services

Integration Team services and the Volunteer Services Cherish our Children holiday program).

Cons:

The department does not have balance in the press. Primarily press coverage is negative and there are few positive articles to balance the community-at-large's negative perception of the department. This seriously affects staff morale and the customer's perspective of the department.

### **Future Plans for Public Information**

The department is currently researching various public information models with the goal of implementing a public information component. This research is being conducted on two levels: through a Department Manager's Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) internship in the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency where she is reviewing the activities and organizational structure of that county's Community Development and Relations unit; and through a research contract with the BASSC Research Response Team in the School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley.

## **PROFILE-MARIN COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The Marin County Health and Human Services Department does not have a Public Information Officer nor do they have a formal public information function. Dr. Thomas Peters, the department's Director, is the principal contact for public information. Public inquiries that are programmatic or statistical are forwarded to the appropriate staff person for response.

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

Other than responding to public inquiries, the department provides a limited public information function. For example, there is limited solicitation to the media for press coverage, primarily to announce new information or new service opportunities.

## **Working with the Media**

Dr. Peters is the department's media contact. The department is generally in the enviable position where reporters seek them out to cover news events. Dr. Peters is also a frequent contributor to the "Op-ed" pages.

## **Tracking Legislation**

Information regarding legislation comes into the department from different sources, e.g., CWDA, CSAC, CHEAC (County Health Executives Association of California), and CCLHO (California Conference of Local Health Officers).

## **Community Advisory Groups**

The department has seven advisory groups (commissions and advisory boards) whose members are appointed by the Board of Supervisors. These groups are advisory only and cover a wide range of health and social issues: HIV/AIDS, Health, Mental Health, Emergency Medical Services, Alcohol and Drug, Aging, and the PIC. The department provides staff assistance to each group.

## **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Reporters seek them out for positive stories.

Cons:

The department reports no negative issues.

## **Future Plans for Public Information**

The department has no future plans for implementing a public information component.

## **PROFILE-NAPA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY**

### **Public Information organizational Structure**

The Napa County Health and Human Services Agency does not have a Public Information Officer. The public information function is primarily handled by Terry Longoria, Director of the Agency, or Jim Featherstone, the Assistant Director. Other managers and supervisors are involved as needed.

## **Scope of Public Information Function**

Ms. Longoria spends approximately 20% of her time on public information functions. She writes and produces a newsletter for staff, writes press releases and newspaper articles, solicits media coverage, assists with lobbying if necessary, tracks legislation, and responds to crisis situations.

Special events are coordinated by various managers. Employee relations activities are coordinated by the Agency Deputy Director of Personnel and his Administrative Assistant or by other managers. Flyers are done by whomever is running an event.

## **Working with the Media**

Ms. Longoria and Mr. Featherstone work with the media. They solicit coverage on positive angle stories. They coordinate with other departments and the Chief Administrator's Office to ensure that responses to the media are the same.

Several staff and managers have been on radio talk shows.

## **Tracking Legislation**

All managers in the agency track legislation through a variety of methods such as CWDA, CSAC bulletins, on-line tracking, newspapers, other well spent. directors, Mickie Richie at CHEAC, etc.

## **Community Advisory Groups**

The agency has several advisory groups such as:

- The Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group
- The Mental Health Board
- The Commission on Children, Youth and Family Services
- The Commission on Aging
- The Commission on Self-esteem
- The Commission on the Status of Women

Some of these groups are advisory only in nature, and some have limited decision making power such as the Mental Health Board.

## **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Agency staff feel good when a program for which they are employed or involved is portrayed by the media in a positive light. For instance, when the press wrote a story about a perinatal drug program, they interviewed clients and staff. Everyone was pleased with the results.

Cons:

After newspaper articles, Ms. Longoria is inundated with phone calls from the public complaining about the use of tax dollars.

### **Future Plans for Public Information**

Ms. Longoria believes that the public information function is very important in what we do. The agency plans to expand their public information function. First, they have hired a contractor on a permanent basis to create brochures and displays, and coordinate special projects. Second, they have plans to become more visible to the public, to assure the public that their tax dollars are being

## **PROFILE-SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The San Francisco County Department of Social Services does not have a Public Information Officer (PIO). The public information function is handled by the General Manager, Assistant General Managers (AGM) and their staff.

The AGMs report to General Manager (GM), Brian Cahill.

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

At one time, the public information functions were assigned to one staff person, the Director of Administrative Services as an add on to her original duties. Three years ago it was directed that all press calls would go to the General Manager or one of the three Assistant General Managers in order to keep a better handle on press calls. AGMs refer calls to Program Managers if they deem it appropriate.

Special events are organized by program areas. Brochures and flyers come from program, Staff Development or the Budget and Planning areas. Three newsletters are published by the department under the responsibility of AGM John Vera. One newsletter for foster parents is published under the responsibility of AGM Pat Reynolds.

They do not have a speakers bureau. Requests for presentations are handled informally through the GM's office or one of the AGM's offices.

### **Working with the Media**

The GM and AGMs work with the media.

## **Tracking Legislation**

Legislation is tracked by a Senior Administrative Analyst who reports to the Director of Planning and Budget, Judy Bley.

## **Community Advisory Groups**

The department has several advisory groups:

- AFDC Staff, Advocates, and Client Focus Groups
- Family and Children technical Advisory Committee
- Employment and Training technical Advisory committee
- African American Task Force
- Asian American Task Force

## **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Being quoted correctly by the media.

Cons:

Being misquoted.

## **Future Plans for Public Information**

The department is currently in transition. Future plans are hard to predict because of this.

## **PROFILE--SAN MATEO COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) does not have an official Public Information Officer (PIO) position. All managers are expected to participate in the agency public information function.

The majority of the written public information function is handled and/or coordinated by the Assistant to the Director, Lois Koenig (i.e., the agency newsletter, the agency strategic plan, etc.).

Organizationally, the agency has a Director, Maureen Borland, and four Division Directors for Housing, Income Maintenance, Job Training and Economic Development (JTED), and Youth and Family Services. Each of the four Division Directors have a Management Analyst and Program Managers who report to them. Ms. Koenig reports to the Agency Director. Staff Development is supervised by a Program Manager II who also reports to the Director.

## **Scope of the Public Information Function**

Historically, public information in the Human Services Agency has been provided on a reactive basis. HSA is currently in the midst of designing a proactive approach to public information as a result of the agency strategic plan which calls for a proactive public information function. In addition, the agency is looking at additional planning and organization regarding the public information function.

General inquiry phone calls are handled by the following people: the Director, Division Directors, Assistant to the Director, the Administrative Secretaries, Staff Development, or other agency staff. Programmatic phone calls are generally referred to Staff Development, the Division Directors or the Division Management Analysts, Ms. Koenig, or other agency staff. Demographic phone calls are generally referred to Ms. Koenig or the Management Analysts for each of the four divisions: Housing; Income Maintenance; Job Training and Economic Development; and Youth and Family Services.

Crises are handled by the Director, Division Directors or Ms. Koenig as their backup. The agency does not have a speakers bureau, but would like to organize one. Requests for public speaking engagements are routed to the appropriate person. Quite often it is the Director, Division Directors or Assistant to the Director who make presentations. Occasionally the Program Managers make presentations, especially in our JTED division. In addition, Ms. Borland and Ms. Koenig have appeared on radio and TV Programmatic presentations such as Medi-Cal and AFDC, or Children's Services related presentations are made by a Program Specialist or Services Training Specialist from Staff Development.

Ms. Koenig oversees the production of an agency newsletter which is published approximately every two months and distributed to staff. She also writes and ghostwrites articles for the newsletter. Ms. Borland has a regularly featured article in the newsletter. In addition, staff contribute articles for the newsletter.

Brochures and flyers are created by program staff or administrative staff. Special events can be organized by Ms. Koenig, Staff Development, various Program Managers, or program staff depending on the event.

## **Working with the Media**

Media calls are forwarded to Ms. Borland, Ms. Koenig, the Division Directors or the appropriate Program Manager depending on the type of call. The agency does solicit media coverage regarding positive events or stories.

The agency has been successful at obtaining positive press regarding its SUCCESS program in the JTED division.



## **Tracking Legislation**

Ms. Koenig tracks legislation for the agency. When in the office, she can track legislation through Legitech on the modem on her computer. She is a member of the CWDA legislative committee. She also tracks legislation through the Internet. The Division Directors and Program Managers track legislation around particular programs of interest.

## **Community Advisory Groups**

Since 1992, the agency has created a number of advisory groups to participate as part of the agency strategic planning process. These groups were formed to examine a wide range of topics such as Public Information, Legislation and Waivers, Single Intake, Partnerships, Job Training and Education, Training, etc.

Two committees were formed to consider the topic of public information. The membership roster of the first group contains Human Services Agency staff, members of the public, and members of public and private non-profit agencies. This group is currently entitled the Public Information Design Team and will be producing a document which includes recommendations that focus on the public information function. The second group was a Human Services Agency work group. The document created as a result of their work contained several recommendations including a recommendation regarding the necessity of creating a half-time PIO position for the agency who can coordinate a proactive approach.

## **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Ms. Koenig found that dealing with the media was more pleasant than she had anticipated. Ms. Borland feels that the media can be a valuable tool to communicate to the public that we are redesigning programs to better fit the community's needs. The media can also highlight the creative efforts of staff.

Cons:

Ms. Borland said that unless you have an established relationship with a reporter, it is hard to tell if there is a bias. Ms. Koenig said that she has concerns about being accurately represented or being misquoted.

## **Future Plans for Public Information**

The agency would like to secure a position for, or contract out, the public information function and is currently in the midst of looking at this issue.

## **PROFILE-SANTA CLARA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

In February 1996, the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency created the Office of Community Development and Relations. This new office includes their extensive public information operation.

The agency has had a formal public information component for over ten years. The current Public Information Officer (PIO), Michelle Swalley, came to the agency in 1992. Prior to becoming the agency's PIO, Ms. Swalley had been the Public Relations Officer in the County Executive Officer's office; that position was eliminated in 1992 due to budget cuts.

The newly created Office of Community Development and Relations, consists of three fulltime staff: Gil Villagran, the Manager of Community Development and Relations, has a formal classification of Management Analyst Program Manager I with a top salary of \$56,862 annually; Michelle Swalley, the Public Information Officer, has a formal classification of Management Analyst with a top salary of \$50,830 annually; and Belinda Quesada, Public Information Assistant, has a formal classification of Associate Management Analyst B, with a top salary of \$38,974 annually. Funding for all three positions is through the General Administrative claim.

Both Ms. Swalley and Ms. Quesada report to Mr. Villagran. Mr. Villagran reports to the Chief Administrative Officer, Kathy Gallagher, who, in turn, reports to the Agency Director.

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

The scope of the Community Development and Relations unit is expansive and has no equal in any of the other Bay Area counties. Not only does this unit respond to public inquiries but they plan to be proactive in terms of working with the media, issuing informative publications, arranging special events, and in now concentrating their efforts on developing a proactive community education and community partnership process.

Examples of the types of activities presently accomplished by this unit include:

- Writing a newsletter for Family and Children's Services. This newsletter is distributed to 3500 financial donors of the Children's Shelter (they contributed half of the \$13 million needed to build the Shelter), 800 to community organizations, and 500 to Child Welfare Services (CWS) staff.
- Writing a weekly article for the San Jose Mercury News about foster children in need of a home.
- Writing flyers announcing different agency events and writing brochures for different agency programs.
- Writing and submitting award entry applications for service programs.

- Editing and revising the Agency Guide.
- Organizing and planning special events. This can include designing, printing, and distributing the invitations; arranging the presentation schedule; drafting the speeches; arranging for press coverage; decorating; and arranging for the food. Examples of events include: Foster Parents Recognition Dinner and the Job Training Awards events for JTPA and GAIN.
- Arranging and coordinating agency special events (e.g., they arrange and coordinate such things as employee blood drives, food drives, and health assessments).
- Responding to phone calls. This takes up about one-fourth to one-third of the PIO's time. Phone inquiries include: calls are from students requesting fact sheets and brochures; calls from CBOs regarding agency services; calls from the community with general questions about child abuse; calls from professionals (e.g., nurses and teachers) who want information about mandated reporting requirements; calls requesting information about specific programs (these questions are forwarded to the appropriate Program Specialist for response); and specific complaints regarding Child Welfare Services (these calls are forwarded to the Children's Services Ombudswoman for resolution).
- Hosting Office Tours and either making presentations or arranging for them to be given.
- Providing some Information and Referral (I & R) activities (they used to have an I & R unit, but it was disbanded some years ago due to budget cutbacks). The PIO: provides clients with resource information such as meals for holidays; receives and responds to general I & R phone inquiries; and orders and distributes resource directories, including the United Way Directory.
- Serving as the Public Information Officer for county emergencies.

In addition, the public information function: facilitates the agency's Customer Service Committee; participates in a joint venture with Silicon Valley to develop an I & R database; participates in the Positive Image Committee with Family and Children's Service; participates with the Positive Image Committee to put on the Annual Social Worker's Month celebration; coordinates the Combined Giving Campaign (United Way) for the agency; participates with the Health Department's countywide Immunization Program; helps Social Work Supervisors produce slide presentations; and prepares agency displays for district offices, libraries, and fairs.

The Community Development and Relations Officer is in the initial stages of expanding the office's scope to include proactive community development and partnerships. To begin, Mr. Villagran has convened an in-house task force to initiate discussions on how to make the community aware of the services the agency provides and ways to partner with the business community, other non-profit organizations, and other governmental bodies, to provide maximal service delivery.

## **Working with the Media**

The Public Information Officer, Ms. Swalley, is a liaison between the agency and the media. The agency actively solicits media coverage according to what's currently happening in the agency. Ms. Swalley solicits media coverage by contacting the newspapers, radio, and television, and also by writing press releases. For example she arranged for media coverage of: the openings of the Children's Shelter and the Family Resource Centers; the presentation of the Latino Strategic Plan; and the JTPA Awards luncheon.

Responding timely and accurately to the media is an important function of public information. When she receives a call from the media Ms. Swalley must decide if she will respond to it herself, or if she should forward it to someone else. If she forwards the call to someone else she follows up to ensure that the media has been responded to. If the call is about a controversial policy issue she will refer it to the appropriate director. If the media is asking about a case specific situation, due to confidentiality, Ms. Swalley acknowledges that at times she may not be able to share much information.

## **Tracking Legislation**

In 1995, the official position of Legislative Analyst was created and Andrew Shaw was hired to track legislation that is applicable or of concern to the Agency. As there is a Legislative Analyst, the Office of Community Development and Relations has little to do with legislative tracking.

The Legislative Analyst reports to the Chief Administrative Officer, Kathy Gallagher. He works in Sacramento four days a week tracking legislation, frequently using the online Legitech system. He informs **the managers and key policy staff** about the current status and implications of various bills. Additionally, he completes two reports for the Executive Team: one is a weekly report about the bills of major interest and the second is a monthly report of all bills in the agency's area.

In Sacramento, the Legislative Analyst also works closely with the county's lobbyist to advocate on legislation that is of key interest to the agency.

## **Community Advisory Groups**

The agency has several advisory groups including: the Social Services Advisory Commission, the Private Industry Council Board (GAIN/JTPA), and the Child Abuse and Prevention Coordinating Council. Members in these groups are appointed by the Board of Supervisors and are advisory to the Board.

## **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Public information provides one central place the community and media can contact to have general questions answered. This interaction promotes better, more responsive customer service

and provides a quality image of the agency, its staff, and its customers. It significantly improves the quality of information disseminated to the community, thereby, increasing community understanding about the services the agency provides. A positive understanding about agency-provided services is even more important with the conservative political tide and the strong possibility of drastic welfare reform.

Ms. Swalley offers the following, "Public information is an important function in an environment as complex and diverse as the Social Services Agency. With current public opinion swaying against government and social programs, a positive public image is even more essential. Public information plays a key role in informing and educating the community, explaining what we do and why we do it."

Cons:

The public information environment is ever-changing and has a lot of high-stress situations that need to be responded to. A PIO must be someone who can handle the stress and juggle a lot of different duties at the same time. There is frequently not enough time to get it all done.

Public information professionals claim that the position does not get as much respect as it should from higher level administrators. To be the most effective, the PIO should be advisory to the executives at high level policy discussions. Executives need to include the PIO in discussions regarding public policy as the PIO will help to ensure that the public image of the agency is not damaged, but rather enhanced.

### **Future Plans for Public Information**

The Office of Community Development and Relations has a proactive and definite vision. Its initial focus is to address the question: What can the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency do to partner with other agencies, businesses, bodies of government, and the community, to ensure that all members of the community are well and thriving?

As the Community Development and Relations Officer, Mr. Villagran, explains, "Our community has a great physical infrastructure. For example, we have freeways, we have streets, and we have the light rail. We have many ways to get from one place to another in our community. The big problem in our community is within the social infrastructure. The community needs to know that help (by the way of the agency's services and programs) is available ... we need to show the community that we are effective, that we do protect children and elders, that we provide quality services to eligible people, and that we care."

## **PROFILE-SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The Santa Cruz County Human Resources Department does not have a specific position with the title of Public Information Officer.

Gail Groves, Senior Human Services Analyst, handles the public information function as part of her overall job duties. She reports to the Agency Director.

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

The public information function was set up four years ago when two crisis situations occurred at the same time—a difficult Child Protective Services case and a rape on campus. Ms. Groves handled the situations and was subsequently given the public information function.

She spends approximately 20% of her time on public information duties. She handles the public information tasks with minimal clerical support.

Ms. Groves organizes special events and writes flyers for the events. She solicits media coverage and writes press releases and newspaper articles. In addition, she writes brochures. Inquiry phone calls are either referred to Ms. Groves or the agency information phone lines. She handles crisis situations.

The department has a newsletter.

### **Working with the Media**

Ms. Groves works with the media and may write a press release around a special event or around job training and self-sufficiency.

### **Tracking Legislation**

Legislation is tracked by CWDA.

### **Community Advisory Groups**

Actually, the Board of Supervisors has advisory groups. These groups make recommendations about the department and, usually, tell the department about the recommendations before they tell the Board of Supervisors. The advisory groups have titles such as the Human Services Commission, Latino Affairs Committee, GAIN Committee, and IHSS Advisory Committee.

### **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros: Ms. Groves has had very few positive experiences with public information. She has had better luck with features than with news.

Cons: Stories occasionally become distorted through the media when not all the information is released due to confidentiality.

### **Future Plans for Public Information**

The department plans to coordinate the production of videos to orient new employees.

## **PROFILE-SONOMA COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

### **Public Information Organizational Structure**

The Sonoma County Human Services Department does not have a Public Information Officer nor do they have a formal public information function.

In the late-1970's, the department's public information function was housed in Staff Development. Over the years, the department developed a two staff-person approach to public information. Currently, the Deputy Director for Children's Services, Linda Kalenik, responds to the more sensitive or political inquiries and a Program Specialist in Staff Development, Lonna Necker, responds to the informational, programmatic, or demographic inquiries. They estimate they each spend less than ten hours a month on public information. The department also has one Information and Referral (I & R) Social Worker and a staff of volunteers who respond to I & R inquiries.

Organizationally, the Deputy Director, Ms. Kalenik, reports to the Department Director. The Program Specialist, Ms. Necker, reports to the Staff Development Manager. The funds for their time are run through their respective financial claims (i.e., the General Administration claim for Ms. Kalenik and the Staff Development claim for Ms. Necker).

### **Scope of Public Information Function**

Primarily, public information is provided on a reactive basis. Upon request inquirers are provided informational packets of statistical or program information, the department-developed Children's Services Programs Resource Book, department fact sheets, or lists of department resource phone numbers. The department is currently developing a department brochure detailing their full range of services. In addition, outreach posters describing the services the department provides have been placed in the community.

Each Division Director organizes their division's special events. A staff person may be assigned to coordinate the event. Examples of special events are: with local Community Based Organization's (CBO's) the department brought a community forum together to discuss Welfare Reform; coordinated a special event with CBO's to bolster the importance of foster parents; and prepared media packets for Social Worker Recognition Month to raise community awareness about the Social Worker's role.

Presentations about the department and its services are available to outside organizations. For example, a presentation was made to Leadership Santa Rosa when Human Services was that day's topic. Who gives the presentation depends on the audience. It could be the Director, a Staff Development Program Specialist, or a first-line Supervisor.

Internal communications are issued in the form of Human Service Department Bulletins and a department newsletter. Staff Development publishes the newsletter. Any manager can distribute

a bulletin and the subjects can range from informing of a change in program regulations to inviting employee participation in a department-sponsored employee event (like a Walk-a-Thon).

### **Working with the Media**

Media calls are forwarded to the Director or Division Director level depending on the area of expertise needed. For example: the press called when the nationwide Food Stamps statistics came out and wanted to know how Sonoma County Food Stamps data compared.

If an issue is sensitive, the department may contact the County Administrator's Office (CAO) to advise them. If the issue is county-wide, it is forwarded to an Assistant County Administrator who responds to county issues.

The department does not routinely solicit media coverage from the media; however, occasionally the Director will write an article for a newspaper, or a press release will be issued.

Since the early 1990's the public information program in the CAO's office has hosted a weekly program, Sonoma County in the 1990's, describing the services available in the county. Volunteer staff from the various departments, including Social Service, participated in the filming. The program was aired on the Public Access Channel.

### **Tracking Legislation**

The department tracks legislation in two principal ways: through Legitech, an on-line program available in the CAO's office, and through the department's participation in CWDA.

### **Community Advisory Groups**

The department has several advisory groups: the Health and Human Services Council, the Private Industry Council, and the Area Agency on Aging. The members of these groups are appointed by the Board of Supervisors and they are advisory to the department and to the Board of Supervisors.

### **Pros and Cons of Public Information**

Pros:

Callers who ask for program and statistical information are very happy to get the informational packets.

Cons:

While working with the media can be intimidating, it is important to provide them with the information they need to the legal extent possible within the confines of confidentiality.



## **Future Plans for Public Information**

The department is planning to place a greater emphasis on developing a higher level of public awareness about the department's services and on promoting more outreach into the community.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BAY AREA COUNTIES REGARDING PUBLIC INFORMATION**

County \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction: Call the Public Information Officer. Explain who we are and why we are calling. If there is no Public Information Officer, call the Director's Secretary, explain who we are and why we are calling, and ask whom we should talk with.

1. Do you have a Public Information Function?
  - (a) If yes, do you have a Public Information Officer?
  - (b) Is that the title or do you have a different title for this person? If yes, what is the title?
  - (c) Is this a full time position? If not, what other responsibilities does this person have?
  - (d) What is the classification for this position?
  - (e) What is the salary range?
  - (f) How is this position funded?
  
2. Do you have other positions or administrative support assigned to this function (e.g., assistants, clerical support, etc.)?
  - (a) If yes, what are they?
  - (b) How many FTEs in total are involved in Public Information?
  
3. To whom does the Public Information Officer report?
  
4. When did you set up the Public Information Officer function?
  - (a) Why did your county implement a public information function? (For example, were you responding to a particular problem or a perceived need?)

(b) Who came up with the concept of this function? (For example, a committee, an individual, etc.)

5. Does your Public Information Officer:

(a) Track legislation?

If yes, to what extent?

(b) Lobby?

If yes, examples:

(c) Conduct employee relations activities ?

If yes, examples:

(d) Produce newsletters?

If yes, examples:

(e) Write flyers announcing different events?

If yes, examples:

(f) Write brochures for different programs?

If yes, examples:

(g) Respond to crisis situations?

If yes, examples:

(h) Work with the media?

If yes, examples:

(i) Write newspaper articles?

If yes, examples:

(j) Write press releases announcing special events?

If yes, examples:

(k) Solicit media coverage according to what's currently happening in the agency?

If yes, examples:

(l) Organize special events?

If yes, examples:

(m) Respond to inquiry phone calls?

How does the Public Information Officer respond to program issues? (Particularly when there is pending litigation, other sensitive program topics, or major program changes-like welfare reform.)

If yes, examples:

(n) Write and submit applications for services agency provides to organizations that have awards?

If yes, examples:

(o) Conduct Office Tours and make presentations to outside guests?

If yes, examples:

(p) Receive and respond to general I & R phone inquiries?

If yes, examples:

(q) Participate on Committees? (Both external and internal?)

If yes, examples:

6. Does your agency have advisory groups?

- (a) If yes, what are they advisory on?
  - (b) What is their role? Are they decision-making bodies? Policy-making bodies?  
Advisory only?
7. What positive experiences have you had with Public Information?
- (a) What negative experiences?
8. How does the Public Information *Officer coordinate* Public Information with the County Executive's Office?
- (a) With other departments?
  - (b) With other local private and public non-profit agencies?
  - (c) With other counties, state and federal organizations?
  - (d) With the community at large?
9. Is there a Speaker's Bureau in your county?
- (a) If yes, which agency is it in?
10. What is the level of your county's Board of Supervisors support for Public Information? (High, neutral; low?)
11. Do you have future plans for Public Information? (e.g., expansion?)
- (a) If yes, what are they?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about Public Information?

Note: When we designed this questionnaire, our assumption was that most agencies had a specific person designated to provide public information, whether as a full-time assignment or as a part of their duties. Therefore, we worded Question #5 to ask about the tasks of the Public Information Officer. As we conducted our interviews, we soon found that for most agencies, the exceptions being Santa Clara and Alameda, the public information tasks are fragmented and spread among several people in the agency. In our interview discussions, we found we had to change our wording to ask not only does the Public Information Officer do these specific tasks, but does anyone in the agency do these tasks, and, if so, who.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PROPOSED PROFILES-CONTRA COSTA & SAN MATEO COUNTIES**

#### **PROPOSED PROFILE-CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY**

##### **Shirley Kalinowski**

"The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors is committed to providing the public full and timely information on the functions and activities of the County government, its departments and divisions, advisory boards and committees.

"The County conscientiously pursues and practices an open Public Information Program, an integral part of which consists of contacts with our departments, the general public, other governmental agencies and the news media. The purposes of such contacts is twofold: (1) to determine the needs and opinions of those the County serves and (2) to help build public understanding of County programs, benefits and services." (Excerpt from the "Contra Costa County Policy on Public Information" adopted 1991)

##### **Background**

Based on my internship in Santa Clara County and on the information obtained during the interviews with the other Bay Area counties, I recommend that the Contra Costa County Social Service Department and the community would be well served by the department creating an Office of Community Relations. I believe this recommendation is in sync with the department's 1996 Values and Objectives and the County's 1991 Policy on Public Information.

As stated in the Contra Costa County Profile in Appendix A of the Case Study, our department "has neither a Public Information Officer nor a formal public information function. Public inquiry phone calls go to the Director, Assistant Directors, Division Managers, Analysts, and Supervisors of the Day in the district offices ...The Assistant Directors are the department's media contacts. The department does not routinely solicit media coverage. Often media contact is considered negative, putting the department in a defensive posture ...The individual bureaus are responsible for writing and issuing their own press releases ...No one person in the department is specifically assigned to track legislation. Information regarding legislation comes into the department from a variety of sources (e.g., the County Administrator's Office {CAO}, the California Welfare Directors Association {CWDA}, and the California State Association of Counties {CSACJ})."

Based on the information I obtained from my internship in Santa Clara County and as a result of the interviews with representatives from the nine Bay Area counties, I have concluded that an ideal public information program contains a centralized public information/education contact point, a direct linkage to other community outreach programs provided by the department, a proactive approach to media relations, a system to enhance internal department communication, creation of internal and external communication publications, a direct linkage to the department's

Executive Team, a proactive community education and community partnership, and the capacity for promoting community support and advocacy for our department's services.

This proposal, which contains what I believe to be the best public information elements from the nine bay area counties, is described in detail below. It includes discussion of an organizational structure, the scope of the office (including focus on public information, working with the media, legislative tracking, working with community advisory groups, and special administrative projects), a proposed budget (Attachment 1), and an implementation timeline (Attachment 2).

## **Organizational Structure**

I recommend the Contra Costa Social Service Department create an Office of Community Relations to provide: public information; public education; legislative coordination; internal communication to Department staff; coordination with Volunteer Services, the Family and Children's Services Advisory Committee (FACSAC), the Family and Children's Trust (FACT), Information and Referral (I & R), a department speakers bureau, and an employee Toastmasters group; executive-level support to the Director; and special administrative projects.

This Office of Community Relations should consist of the following staff: a Community Relations Officer, a Community Relations Specialist, the two Volunteer Services Coordinators, the half-time I & R Social Worker, the contract consultant to FAC-SAC and FACT, and a Senior Level Clerk. The Community Relations Officer, the Community Relations Specialist, and the Senior Level Clerk would be new positions.

There would be significant benefit to our department's overall community outreach efforts by bringing the community outreach programs, FACSAC, FACT, Volunteer Services, and I & R, within the Community Relations umbrella. Not only would they be able to more closely coordinate the services they provide to the community and would benefit from being a direct part of a larger public information and public education function, they would have additional support from the other staff members in the Office (e.g., the Community Relations Officer could assist them with their strategic planning processes; the Community Relations Specialist could help with designing, printing, and distributing brochures, flyers, press releases, and newsletters; and the Senior Level Clerk could provide them with additional clerical support).

In addition to general management, administration, and program knowledge and skills, the field of public information requires the ability to speak effectively in public and to have excellent writing skills. This field also requires knowledge of media organization, techniques for preparing and disseminating information to the various media (i.e., television, newspaper, and radio), media requirements for written press releases and newspaper articles, community advocacy and organization, and grantwriting and proposal development for government, private foundations, and corporate funding. Therefore, in recognition of these specific knowledge and skills requirements, I recommend that unique management classifications be established for the positions of Community Relations Officer and Community Relations Specialist.

To create the formal positions and determine their corresponding salary ranges, if these positions are established, the department will need to further research comparable positions in both other counties and within Contra Costa County.

Based upon the interviews with the nine Bay Area counties, the department could initially correlate the proposed Community Relations Officer and Community Relations Specialist positions with the existing classifications of Social Service Division Manager and Administrative Services Assistant III respectively. Using the salary ranges of these comparable classifications would result in a beginning salary of \$51,852 annually for the Community Relations Officer and a beginning salary of \$43,056 annually for the Community Relations Specialist. The Senior Level Clerk would have a salary of \$33,276. Funding for these additional three positions would be through the General Administrative claim for a net county cost of \$25,637 annually.

The Community Relations Officer should plan, organize, and direct the department-wide Community Relations Program. This would include, but certainly not be limited to, such responsibilities as: being a department spokesperson; responding to media or community inquiries of a political, sensitive, or controversial nature; developing public education and community partnership processes; advising and assisting top management in community relations activities; overseeing the writing and distribution of written materials (e.g., press releases, department fact sheets, and department newsletters); assessing pending legislation and keeping key policy staff informed of possible department implications; coordinating with FACSAC, FACT, and the Volunteer Services Board of Directors; participating on the county's Public Information Officer Committee; assisting Personnel in department recruitment efforts; researching, analyzing, and preparing written or oral reports at the Director's request; direct supervisory responsibility for the Community Relations Specialist, the Volunteer Services Coordinators, the I & R Social Worker, and the Senior Level Clerk; and direct administrative linkage with the FACT/FACSAC contractor.

Under the general supervision of the Community Relations Officer, the Community Relations Specialist should assist the Community Relations Officer by providing technical support for department and public information/education activities and legislative tracking activities. This would include, but would not be limited to, such responsibilities as: drafting department press releases, brochures, flyers, and newsletters; creating and distributing department fact sheets; providing department data and demographic information to the community and media upon request; responding to phone inquiries of a general or non-sensitive nature; assisting in data gathering, research, and analysis; using an online system to track pending legislation; attending and participating in community meetings upon direction of the Community Relations Officer; and assisting in organizing special department and staff events.

The Senior Level Clerk in the Office of Community Relations would provide clerical support to the staff in this Office. The Senior Level Clerk might also provide clerical support to the FACSAC, FACT, Volunteer Services Program, and I & R functions. Typical tasks of this position would include, but would not be limited to, such responsibilities as: scheduling and coordinating appointments for the Community Relations Officer and the Community Relations Specialist, writing and distributing minutes from the Office's various meetings, and initial data/information collection.

To be most effective, the Community Relations Officer should be advisory to the Department's executives and a participant during executive-level policy discussions. This involvement would help ensure that the public image of the department is seen in the most positive light possible.

### **Scope of the Public Information Function**

A well-designed public information program would enable the department to better serve the community by educating the community on the services the department provides and by obtaining community support and advocacy for those services.

The scope of the public information function within the Office of Community Relations should include responding to public inquiries, developing community education and community partnership processes, proactively working with the media, and enhancing internal department communication.

Examples of this Office's activities could involve: participating on the county's Public Information Officer Committee; writing department newsletters, newspaper articles, flyers announcing department events, brochures for department programs, and department fact sheets; organizing or assisting in organizing special events (recognition luncheons for example); arranging and coordinating internal special events (for example: arranging and coordinating such events as brown bag wellness lunches and chairing the Combined Giving Campaign); responding to inquiry phone calls; developing a department speakers bureau; developing a Toastmasters group for interested staff; arranging for presentations to be given; applying for service and recognition awards on behalf of the department's programs; assisting the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) in creating a regional public information program; participating in department recruiting efforts at colleges and universities; and coordinating the department's emergency preparedness role during county exercises and actual emergencies.

### **Working with the Media**

The Office of Community Relations would provide one central contact point for the community and the media. This interaction would promote better, more responsive customer service and provide a quality image of the department, its staff, and its customers. It would significantly improve the quality of information disseminated to the community, thereby, increasing community understanding about the services the department provides.

The Community Relations Officer should be the primary liaison between the department and the media. Responding timely and accurately to the media would be an important function of community relations; ensuring that the radio, TV, and press have the information they need. The Community Relations Officer should inform the Director, and if so directed, the Board of Supervisors, and the County Administrative Officer, when there is expected media coverage of breaking news events.

The Community Relations Officer would decide if he/she should respond to a media call or forward it to another person. If the call is forwarded to someone else the Community Relations

Officer should follow up to ensure that the media has been responded to. The Community Relations Officer should advise the Director of all significant media contacts.

The Office of Community Relations should actively solicit media coverage for the department by contacting the newspapers, radio, and television, and by writing press releases.

Department staff contacted directly by the media should be responsible for letting the Community Relations Officer know they have been contacted by the media and what the media's focus was. A consultant specializing in working with the media should be hired to teach designated staff how to effectively respond to media contacts.

The Office of Community Relations should apply for a Contra Costa Television (CCTV) video grant to produce a video describing the departments services. This video would be aired on the county's Public Access Channel and would be available for community presentations. In addition, the Office of Community Relations should work with Data Processing Department to develop and maintain an Internet WEB page describing department services.

### **Tracking Legislation**

The Office of Community Relations should track pending legislation and develop forums to encourage active public input. Having a pulse on community service needs and expectations would enable the department to better represent the community in advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Information regarding pending legislation comes into the department from a variety of sources (e.g., the CAO, CWDA, CSAC, and BASSC). The Office of Community Relations should track legislation through these sources and through an online system like StateNet or Legitech. The Community Relations Officer should become a member of CWDA's Legislative Committee, coordinate department responses to legislation and advocacy efforts through the County Administrator's Office, and write department position papers.

The Community Relations Officer should keep the Executive Team, managers and key policy staff informed about the current status and implications on bills of department interest.

### **Community Advisory Groups**

Supervisor Jeff Smith, when he became chair of the Board of Supervisors on January 9, 1996, stated that CCC stands for "Conscientious Commitment to Community."

As part of the department's Conscientious Commitment to Community, the Office of Community Relations should identify and develop strategies with the community around emerging issues and needs affecting the programs the department administers. To further community involvement, the Office of Community Relations could also represent the department on various community boards and commissions.

Internally, the Office of Community Relations should coordinate with FACSAC, FACT, and the Volunteer Services Program Board of Directors. The Office of Community Relations should also



coordinate as warranted with the Contra Costa County Advisory Council on Aging and with the Board of Supervisors' Family and Human Services Committee.

A long-term goal in this area might be to partner with community organizations and develop grant proposals to foundations, enabling new service programs to be created or existing services to be expanded.

### **Special Administrative Projects**

The Community Relations Officer should provide executive support to the Director such as completing special administrative projects. Such projects would be department-wide in scope and would most likely involve staff research and written reports.

### **Attachment 1**

### **ANNUAL BUDGET FOR OFFICE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS (NEW COSTS ONLY)**

	Actual Annual Costs
<b>Salaries:</b>	
Community Relations Officer	\$51,852
Community Relations Specialist	\$43,056
Senior Level Clerk	\$33,276
<b>Staff Development Costs:</b>	
Workshop on Working with the Media (for designated department staff)	\$4,800
Workshops on Writing Press Releases, on Desktop Publishing, and on Computer Graphics (for Office of Community Relations staff)	\$1,050
<b>Equipment:</b>	
3 PC's (pentium 75's with monitors, data and fax modems and ethernet cards, plus MS Office Suite)	\$9,600
Netscape for web access (\$43 x 3)	\$129
Development of initial Departmental web page (80 hours by DP @ \$55/hour)	\$4,400
CompuServe minimum access monthly fees (\$10/month x 3)	\$360
Subscription to StateNet (similar to Legitech) (160/month)	\$1,920
Pagers (\$8/month x 2)	\$192
Electric Typewriter	\$350
Chairs (3 x \$500)	\$1,500
<b>Travel Expenses for Recruiting:</b>	
10 overnights at \$130/day for accommodations and food	\$1,300
Mileage, tolls, or air fare	\$1,860

Total Proposed Annual Budget:

Actual Costs	\$155,645
Net County Costs @ 20%	\$31,129

Note: Additional research is needed to determine costs of: an 800# information hotline to provide public information updates and newsletter printing and distribution.

## **Attachment 2**

### **IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE (18 MONTHS)]**

#### **Phase I (2 Months):**

- Create job descriptions and salary ranges for the Community Relations Officer and the Community Relations Specialist based upon further research
- Develop Office of Community Relations budget based upon further research
- Obtain Board of Supervisors' approval to create and fill three positions: the Community Relations Officer, the Community Relations Specialist, and the Senior Level Clerk
- Hire Community Relations Officer and Community Relations Specialist
- Obtain space and equipment for Office of Community Relations staff
- Reassign Volunteer Services Coordinators, I & R Social Worker, and contract consultant for FACSAC and FACT to the Office of Community Relations
- Community Relations Officer to become a member of the CWDA Legislative Committee
- Coordinate with UC Berkeley as they develop the Public Information/Public Education Strategic Plan

#### **Phase II (6 Months):**

- Hold focus groups with department staff to discuss their public information needs
- Meet with community and local business groups to develop a public input process
- Meet with FACSAC, FACT, and the Volunteer Services' Board of Directors for their input on community relations
- Develop a network with boards, commissions, councils, and committees which have a relationship with the Department
- Report to the Family and Human Services Committee on the development and goals of the Office of Community Relations
- Meet with local reporters to develop positive working relationships
- Identify and implement a community project which can be accomplished quickly
- Arrange for media training for key department staff
- Arrange for training in writing press releases for the Community Relations Officer and the Community Relations Specialist
- Arrange for training in desktop publishing and computer graphics for the Community Relations Officer and the Community Relations Specialist
- Develop and implement a Speakers Bureau; arrange for training on making presentations for Speakers Bureau participants

- Develop and implement an internal public relations protocol
- Develop department fact sheets on service programs and customer demographics
- Become familiar with County emergency plans and determine the appropriate role for the Office of Community Relations to have in an emergency
- Develop and implement a tracking and reporting process for pending legislative

**Phase III (10 Months):**

- Create a department newsletter
- Apply for a CCTV video grant
- Develop and implement a public information campaign
- Develop and implement a community education program
- Develop and implement a training program on department services provided for Department staff With Personnel, assist in department recruitment activities Incorporate the Public Information/Public Education Strategic Plan developed by UC Berkeley
- Participate in BASSC's development of a regional approach to public information
- Develop and maintain an Internet WEB page consisting of information about department service programs, customer demographics, and answers to most commonly asked questions
- Identify community boards and committees appropriate for Office of Community Relations representation
- Complete special administrative projects as requested by the Director
- At twelve months, prepare annual Public Information report for the Board of Supervisors

**PROPOSED PROFILE-SAN MATEO COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY**

**Jamie Buckmaster**

"We will build public support for addressing human service needs through separate and joint public education efforts. These efforts will stress public involvement in human service issues as well as education for human services consumers" (excerpt from San Mateo County Human Services Strategic Plan).

**Background**

Historically, public information in the Human Services Agency (HSA) has been reactive in nature All management staff are expected to participate in the public information function. The majority of the written public information function in HSA primarily falls to the Assistant to the Director who publishes the agency newsletter; writes press releases; writes the agency annual report; publishes flyers; writes agency brochures and plans such as the strategic plan; works with the media; answers inquiry calls, plans agency- wide special events such as the CWDA conference; gives presentations; tracks legislation, etc.

Crises are handled by the Director, Maureen Borland, or one of the four Division Directors. The Assistant to the Director may backup one of the directors in a crisis situation.

Programmatic phone calls are handled by a variety of persons such as the Division Directors, Staff Development and the staff in the districts and divisions. The Director, Division Directors, Program Managers and the Assistant to the Director give presentations to community groups. In addition, presentations may be given by Staff Development on Medi-Cal, Children's Services, AFDC, General Assistance and Food Stamps. Brochures and flyers about events are produced by program staff.

The Agency Strategic Plan supports the need for a public information function in the agency in order to develop a plan for educating the public on the services we provide, and to initiate an education campaign to change public perception about human services and the clients we serve. Because of this, two committees were formed to consider the topic of public information. One committee is still in existence and is currently named the Public Information Design Team. This committee includes agency staff and members of the public. The other committee, an internal agency committee, presented a final document to the HSA Executive Team in 1995. Their overall recommendations regarding public information included: the production of videos about services for our clients; formation of a committee to educate staff through training by topic (seniors, teenagers, the disabled, etc.); formation of -a committee to produce "cheat sheets" to educate staff on the services we provide; and their most important recommendation: the appointment of a half time Public Information Officer for the agency.

My internship with the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) Executive Development Program was a joint internship with Shirley Kalinowski, a Division Manager in Contra Costa County, which focused on the topic of Public Information. We were assigned to the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, which in February 1996, created the Office of Community Development and Relations (OCDR). This office includes a full time Public Information Officer, the newly appointed Community Development and Relations Officer and a Public Information Specialist. They are now creating OCDR to look at proactive approaches to community development and public information. Our task was to assist Santa Clara County in the initial setting up of this office. As a first step, we helped the Community Relations Officer convene an in-house task force to examine the topic of community development and to produce recommendations around this issue. In addition, we conducted interviews with Directors and Managers from the nine Bay Area counties in order to determine their public information efforts.

Our interviews then expanded to include a reporter from the San Jose Mercury News; a former reporter and now Public Information Officer from the Santa Clara County Health and Hospital Services Department; a former Public Affairs Officer from the Contra Costa County Board of Education; the Legislative Analyst from the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency; and a Public Information Officer from the Santa Clara County Chief Executive Office. Those interviewed support the need for a specific PIO. They believe this need becomes more critical with the current conservative political times, the undervaluing of government and impending welfare reform.

We gathered an enormous amount of information on the topic of public information during the internship. All of it supports the need for a proactive public information function in our agency.

The following proposal includes those pieces of the various public information functions we studied that I believe will best fit with the Human Services Agency as currently structured, and will support our agency values and goals.

### **Proposed Organizational Structure**

I recommend that the San Mateo County Human Services Agency establish an Office of Community Relations as part of the Office of the Director.

Further, I recommend that as part of the Office of Community Relations, the agency secure a position, or contract to perform the public information function. This function should be placed in the Office of the Director under the Assistant to the Director, as she currently performs the majority of the written public information function in the agency. In addition, as it is critical that this person be seen as authoritative, credible and knowledgeable with the media, staff and the public, I recommend that this position be classified as a management position (possibly commensurate to a Program Manager I).

Although this position will be primarily responsible for much of the public information function within HSA, I believe it important that this position not be titled as Public Information Officer (PIO) because the duties of this position will be far greater than that of atypical Public Information Officer. In addition, this position will need to emphasize proactive approaches to Public Information including an ever increasing need for community involvement in the agency. I recommend that the title of the person performing this function should be Community Relations Officer (CRO). The CRO will be a primary contact point for the community. Because of the community involvement and greater responsibilities, I believe that the title of Community Relations Officer is more appropriate and reflects more closely the duties and responsibilities of the proposed position.

### **Scope of the Public Information Function**

The following duties would fall under the scope of the Community Relations Officer:

- Act as liaison between the media and the agency;
- Develop working relationships with the media — increase the level of trust;
- Write press releases;
- Solicit positive media coverage;
- Respond to phone calls from the community, professionals, students, media;
- Provide information and referral;
- Provide agency demographic information to callers --students, media, public; ‘
- Coordinate and publish the agency newsletter;
- Coordinate the desk top publishing for both internal and external brochures;
- Coordinate the writing and publishing of the Agency Annual Report;
- Write and design flyers;
- Establish and coordinate an agency speakers bureau;
- Serve as the PIO during emergencies;
- Pursue the following recommendations from the public information staff work group:

- Coordinate and produce videos for clients and the general public on the services we provide;
  - Form and chair a committee (in coordination with Staff Development) to produce "cheat sheets" to educate staff about the services we provide; and
  - Form and chair a committee to organize trainings by topic (seniors, disabled, veterans, teens etc.)
- Pursue future recommendations generated by the Public Information Design Team;
  - Assist in the tracking of legislation;
  - Organize and coordinate agency community outreach activities etc.;
  - Host tours-grand jury etc;

One benefit to the agency of centralizing the majority of the public information function with the CRO is that the CRO will organize and develop a professional community relations office. Most important is that this person will have the time to focus on community relations and public information which include the duties listed above. The CRO will be able to expand the current agency public information efforts with a goal to introducing additional proactive public information strategies. This will ultimately enhance the image of **the** agency.

### **Working with the Media**

The CRO would be the liaison to the media. During the internship we interviewed a San Jose Mercury News Reporter and a former reporter from the San Jose Mercury News. Both reporters stressed the need for timely response to media calls even if the response is "I'll get back to you" or "because of confidentiality, we cannot discuss the case". The CRO will act as the "traffic cop" for all media calls. This would give the press one person to contact. The CRO would then forward the call to the appropriate Director or, after research and discussion with a Director, return the phone call to the media. The CRO would not be the spokesperson for the Agency except under specific direction.

A CRO is able to provide a higher quality of information to disseminate to the public and the media. Because a priority of the job is to work with the community and public, this person will be able to make this responsibility a priority.

The CRO will complete a writing course specific to writing press releases. Steve Robitaille, Santa Clara County Health and Hospital Services, told us that a well-written press release is a first step to getting the media to take notice of an event or issue.

The CRO will cultivate relationships with the media based on trust. Those relationships and a well written press release may be the key to attracting the press to write positive stories about the agency. The bottom line is that in these conservative political times, we need as much positive press as we can get. The CRO will persistently pursue positive press.

The CRO will coordinate Media training for the Executive Team and the CRO. This is critical so that the agency is united in an effort to approach the delivery of services with an eye to possible media opportunities.

## **Tracking Legislation**

Currently legislation is tracked by the Director and Assistant to the Director. The CRO can assist in this endeavor.

## **Committees**

The CRO should be a member of the Public Information Design Team. The CRO may be called to chair committees related to public information and community relations.

## **Special Administrative Projects**

The CRO will provide executive support to the Director and the agency in the areas of special administrative projects related to public information and community relations.