

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING IN THE CHANGING WORKPLACE: SANTA CLARA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

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INTRODUCTION

Each day in my current assignment as a Program Manager in the General Assistance Division of Alameda County Social Services Agency, I see the results of how staff members have been trained to deliver client service, determine program eligibility, and communicate effectively with clients and fellow staff members. I also note that our organization, like so many other county social services agencies, is now in the midst of change as we implement welfare reform and move into an increasingly automated social services environment. How will we prepare our staff for this change? Who communicates the issues and changing mission statement? What training programs are needed, and what types of facilities and staff will be needed to successfully conduct training? Do we need to revisit our current training programs to assess their effectiveness? These were a few of the questions that I hoped to address as I embarked on my BASSC executive development internship at the Santa Clara County Social Service Agency's Staff Development and Training department.

It is widely acknowledged that Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has an excellent staff development and training program. The agency manual states that "the overall mission of Staff Development is to strengthen the staff capacity to achieve Agency goals and objectives." To achieve their goals, Santa Clara County has dedicated a full complement of training staff and facilities, and programs that offer basic skills to advanced training.

Yet, even with the success of these programs, several Santa Clara County staff members noted that the staff development and training program is in a period of reevaluation as it strives to meet the challenges of the changing social services delivery system. Kathy Gallagher, the Administrator of Staff Development and Training, gave me some insight on how the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency is now looking at new ways to provide staff development and training as it looks towards the next century.

Ms. Gallagher noted that staff need to gain a better understanding of the issues of welfare reform and the effects that this major shift in public welfare policy has on public assistance recipients, the organization, and the work force. She also noted that organizational culture must change to successfully implement the major changes under the new law. To work toward this goal, Santa Clara County Social Services is currently evaluating several organizational change training programs to decide if they would address these issues.

Ms. Gallagher also proposed that maybe staff development should not be called staff development any longer, but, instead, be called employee development. Ms. Gallagher noted that a shift in emphasis to employee development might encourage staff to take a more personal role in their own career development. She also noted that staff members who understand the philosophy of life long learning might be better equipped to help recipients reach the goal of self sufficiency. As Santa Clara County Social Services moves in this direction, they have developed several programs that emphasize life long learning and personal career development. In the

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future, Ms. Gallagher envisions staff development providing more opportunities for staff and the community to use staff development as a resource for the betterment for their lives. In addition, as the Agency moves into the new century, she envisions the agency utilizing new training methods that are currently being explored.

I looked at all of the components of the Agency's current program to see how Santa Clara Social Services Agency is addressing issues of change in the workplace.

TRAINING FACILITIES

I spent most of my time in the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency in two excellent training facilities that would be the envy of any training operation. When I asked how these facilities and the full training program were developed, I received the same answer, time and again-with the vision and belief in a strong training program held by the recently retired administrator of Staff Development. It was also noted that the Agency Director and County Administrator strongly supported staff development.

The main training site is co-located with an income maintenance office at 1870 Senter Road, San Jose. All of the Santa Clara County Social Services training staff, support staff, the Social Services Agency resource library, a staff development resource

library, a video **library**, fully equipped units for eligibility induction training, and five fully equipped training rooms are at this site.

All five training rooms are equipped with standard training equipment. Two rooms are equipped for automation training to address the increased use of automation in the social services field. One of these rooms has a number of mainframe work stations where applications, like the Case Data System (CDS), can be mastered. One room is fully equipped with a number of personal computers used for training the increasing numbers of PC based programs being used by Agency staff. The equipment in this room was purchased with funds raised through the sale of Santa Clara County technology bonds. Staff noted that it is extremely difficult to keep up with the technological advances, and the training tools of today become obsolete very quickly. This leads to the question of how will under funded programs maintain quality training to meet the demands of the automated workplace.

The second training site is at the main administrative center for the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency at 1725 Technology Dr., San Jose. This site has an auditorium that can seat up to 275 persons. It is used for large training activities, community training, and resource fairs conducted by agency personnel. In addition, there are three small training rooms used for training smaller groups of up to twenty persons. Currently, one of the three smaller rooms is fully equipped with personal computers used for training the new on-line CWS/CMS (Child Welfare Services/Case Management System). There is also a complete library of resource materials for social workers at this site.

Staff members strongly feel that having permanent training facilities enables Santa Clara County Social Services Agency to plan for and present a variety of training programs without having to

depend on rented sites, other county sites, or temporary sites in other Agency facilities. However, it was noted, that the Technology Drive office is leased, and that at the end of the lease, training activities conducted at this site may be decentralized in other Agency offices. Also, at this time, it is unknown how changes from the implementation of welfare reform activities will affect training activities, although all signs point to an intense period of training in the near future.

STAFF

Currently, there are twenty-eight staff members dedicated to providing staff development and training activities to the staff of the Social Services Agency. I was extremely fortunate to meet with many staff members. They offered me detailed explanations of their roles, insights into their experiences as trainers, and where they saw their staff development programs changing in the next few years.

Staff Development Specialists

Nine staff development specialists, individually, or in teams, provide a broad array of training activities such as social services agency orientation, induction training, leadership academies, cultural awareness and diversity programs, and interpersonal skills.

Automation/Clerical Trainers

There are three full time staff development specialists, and one manager, who provide training in all facets of mainframe applications used for the public assistance payments, and for more specialized applications developed for the Social Services Agency. These trainers also provide personal com-puter (PC) skill training such as word processing and E-mail applications, and conduct induction training for all new office professional staff.

Social Worker Trainers

Two full time social work training specialists are dedicated to developing, providing training, and facilitating training sessions provided by non agency trainers for the social worker staff in Children and Family Services and Adult Services. Both trainers hold graduate degrees in social work. and have broad experience including providing direct services and training. Both work with a large network of agency staff and outside professionals in the fields of social work who provide a high level of professional social work training for new and journeymen social workers.

Support Staff

Twelve office professionals, and one office manager. provide full time support to the staff development trainers in areas such as scheduling and preparation of large amounts of training materials.

PROGRAMS

While trainers and facilities are important, what defines Santa Clara County's training program are the number and variety of programs offered to Agency staff. Any employee of the Social Services Agency can quickly decide what training programs are available by looking through the "Directory of Santa Clara County Social Services Agency Staff Development and Training Operations." This directory is issued quarterly. Frances Rodriguez, supervisor of office professional and automation training, explained that this directory will soon be available on-line on the Agency Intranet. This will be invaluable for efficient and widespread distribution of training information. It would not be too far from reality to see on-line registration as the next step. I received a copy of directory number XX (January 1997) that listed an impressive array of training opportunities.

Agency Orientation

All new employees attend a mandatory agency orientation that provides a standard body of information about the Agency. The orientation includes is a short, packed session that includes the history of welfare and human services in the United States, the Agency Mission, goals and objectives, Agency organization, services. procedures, ethics. and a video welcome from the Director. An Agency handbook is also issued to the participants at this orientation. Several staff members said that this orientation sets the tone about what the Agency "is about" for new employees.

Induction Training

One of the Social Services Agency's great training strengths has been the full induction program offered to all new employees, or employees who promote into supervision and management. This is a reflection of the Mission Statement that a fully trained employee will help the Agency to meet its goals.

The income maintenance induction program provides a comprehensive six-month classroom program for eligibility workers that includes training in all aspects of public assistance programs, and provides case work experience, automation training, and orientation. This program, often revised, has been in existence for twenty years. However, whether eligibility induction will continue in its current form is in question. There are some who believe that this training might be handled better by supervisors on the work site. The outcome of any Agency reorganization to meet the demands of welfare reform might also influence how future income maintenance induction is presented.

The Child Welfare Practices and Procedures Training Program is a comprehensive nineteen-day induction training provided for all new social workers, and social workers transferred to child welfare. This program includes agency orientation, specific social worker training classes, and visits to courts. shelters, and family resource centers.

Employment Technicians, in the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program, are provided with an eleven-day induction program. The program covers GAIN history, program goals, appraisals, components. all agency automation systems, including the Gain Information System (GIS), and other relevant topics. This program is currently being conducted at the GAIN

work site. Barbara Sasaki, the Staff Development specialist who conducts the training, noted that providing induction on the work site is a different approach than those taken for other current induction programs conducted at the training facilities.

New office professionals have a one week, Training for Office Professionals (TOPS), induction program that covers agency orientation, introduction to the services that the eligibility workers and social workers provide, basic office practices, safety in the office, telephone skills, and hands on mainframe training for CDS, MEDS and other automated systems. A clerical handbook is issued during this training program.

Leadership Academy I is a mandatory training program provided for new managers, supervisors and administrative staff by trainers from both the Social Services staff development, and other County employees. The Academy provides eighty hours of training including specific County topics such as labor relations, and thirteen units from the Zenger-Miller Frontline Leadership training program. Leadership Academy II, is a thirty-five hour, non mandatory training, focusing on leadership, managing change, innovation, confronting issues, and problem solving.

AUTOMATION TRAINING

Moving into the 21st Century-CWS/CMS, SAWS, and the Intranet

Automation training is receiving ever increasing emphasis as much of the documentation and work done for social service activity is being automated. CWS/CMS training for social worker staff has been a full time focus for many months. SAWS, and the tremendous training activity it will require to carry out, sits out on the horizon.

In addition, more emphasis is being placed on communication through networks and E-mail. Santa Clara County Social Services Intranet provides network ability within the organization much like that of the World Wide Web. Training is vital to the correct application of the use of these systems. One recent innovation, on-line handbooks, required a comprehensive training program for staff to understand how to use the Intranet and then move through the on-line handbook with tools similar to those used to navigate the Web. Besides the wonder of having a fully updated handbook at your fingertips, the Agency anticipates that hundreds of hours of copying, distribution, and filing will be eliminated.

PC/Software Program Training

Subjects from such basics as "Making Room for Technology in Your Life" to Windows, word-processing and E-mail, are offered to all staff at the Senter Road training facility.

Mainframe Applications Training

Training is provided for staff who use the Case Data System (CDS), FAIR (Food Stamp issuance), and MEDS (Medi-Cal) systems that are the standard mainframe applications used to issue public assistance payments and to establish data bases of payment and person information. Much of this training is completed in induction classes for new income maintenance and office

professional staff. In addition, part day or full day classes are conducted on subjects such as MEDS. Frances Rodriguez also mentioned that she has taken some of the training that she has perfected in Santa Clara County into other counties at their request.

QUARTERLY TRAINING

A traditional component of Santa Clara's training program has been several standard classes conducted by staff development quarterly. Kathy Gallagher noted that recently there has been less attendance in these classes, and attributes this to "training burnout." Most staff have already attended, and few new staff are being hired. Ms. Gallagher noted that there is now a move to shift staff development staff from providing these classes to provide training for more critical programs. Ms. Gallagher envisions that much of the routine quarterly training activities will be made available to staff on video or interactive computer programs in the future.

COMMUNICATION, DIVERSITY, AND CULTURAL AWARENESS PROGRAMS

As changes come closer and closer together, all large organizations recognize the need for good communication between various departments, and, even more important, between individuals. To address the issues of communication, Santa Clara County provides an extensive training program to develop staff communication and conflict resolution skills. Staff explained that these programs allow Agency staff the opportunities to raise and work through the communication issues that so often plague a diverse and changing work place.

There are workshops such as "Interacting with Porcupines," and "Coping with Communication Challenges at the Work Place" offered to all staff regularly. However, the one program that caught my attention was "Working"-The Individual Contributors Program," a three hour a week, fourteen week course designed to develop non supervisory staff into successful contributors to the organization. The training covers subjects such as Listening to Understand Clearly, Being a Team Player, and Dealing with Change. This program is so popular with line staff that managers receive training slot allocations so that staff from all Divisions can attend.

Santa Clara County Social Services also has an active diversity training program. Three separate workshops, "Diversity: TODOS-Building Multicultural Alliances" (the county wide mandatory diversity program), "Diversity: Communicating Across Cultures," and "Diversity: You Make the Difference," give staff an opportunity to look at many issues of diversity in the workplace including culture, self-awareness, stereotypes, sensitivity, and learning how to reduce barriers that keep people apart. In addition, participants who have completed at least one of the three "Diversity" programs, can participate in a series of Diversity Discussion Groups to continue an open exchange about diversity issues in the workplace.

Santa Clara County Social Services has a policy that groups who have considered themselves "on the outside" take the leadership to develop awareness training proposals. Training has been developed for cultural awareness of Hispanic, AfricanAmerican, and Asian cultures. These programs are then presented to all staff. During the first quarter of 1997, "La Cultura Cura"-Working Effectively and Sensitively with the Chicano/Latina population. was presented.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Training Institutes A Training Model for the Future

As I noted earlier, Kathy Gallagher, Administrator for the Staff Development department, believes that the staff development department of the future should have a larger goal than basic in-house training, and pointed to the Santa Clara County's Training Institutes as a training model for the future.

The Child Welfare and Adult Services Training Institutes exemplify life long learning by offering postgraduate training to social workers and human service professionals who work with children, and dependent and older adults. They also are highly successful models of how collaborations can be established between the public sector, educational institutions, community groups, and other professional trainers. to provide quality staff training.

In addition, the Institutes are designed to provide training, on a regional basis, to professionals from Santa Clara County and from other counties and community organizations in the San Francisco Bay region. In reality, the Institutes have drawn professionals from many regions of California. The philosophy of regional training is to use the limited federal, state, county and private training resources to serve a region, and create a superior program by eliminating duplication. This approach can be extremely valuable as the training staff available for this type of training is often stretched to provide the same types of training in many smaller training settings.

Sally Salinas, one of the two social worker trainers in Santa Clara County, was of great assistance to me. She provided me with much insight into the history and the development of these Institutes.

The Child Welfare Training Institute was created in January 1992. The Adult Services Institute followed A thirty-hour Child Sexual Abuse Training and was created in September 1994. Both Institutes are sponsored by the County of Santa Clara, but rely heavily on collaborations with educational institutions and the community to provide training. Both Institutes have community Advisory Committees who provide ideas about training needs and subjects, and often help the Institutes obtain instructors. In addition there are working advisory committees. Several contributors to the Institutes worked with current staff development trainers when they worked in community organizations. In the 1996/1997 program, there are many training courses offered through collaborations with San Jose State University, San Francisco State University, Stanford University, and Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital Systems. Agency staff, and consultants also provide some training programs.

In support of the philosophy that employees with advanced skills can provide better service to clients, some training courses are designed to offer continuing education units for professionals to maintain or obtain licenses. Examples of this are the courses designated to meet LCSW license examination requirements. In addition, two certificate programs are offered. A 150-hour certificate program is offered in Forensic Human Services. This program is designed to prepare human service professionals to present their clinical knowledge and opinions in court. This

program is an example of the collaborative approach to training. The program is conducted by the College of Social Work at San Jose State University, and the Child Welfare Training Institute. It also has the cooperation of the Santa Clara County Superior Court and Office of County Counsel, who participated in the development of the program and provide sponsorship.

A thirty-hour Child Sexual Abuse Training Certificate Program is being offered in the Spring of 1997 in collaboration with the Giarretto Institute, an international child abuse treatment and training program in the Santa Clara Valley.

Special events, such as the recently held conference on "The Many Faces of Adolescent Depression-A Collaborative Conference," is another function of the Institutes. This two-day conference was presented by a collaboration of nonprofit agencies, private individuals and government organizations.

Ms. Gallagher pointed out these Institutes could be the model of many types of employee development training programs within Santa Clara County. Of even more interest to me, Ms. Gallagher said that she also envisions that regions of counties could build several training programs based on the Institutes model for income maintenance, automation and other subjects that are common to more than one county in a region.

Mentor Program

Another employee development program that has strong Agency support is the Mentor Program. It is a "people helping people" program, and is designed to help staff members explore career development and changes. Once a year, the program is offered to staff who want an opportunity to be either a mentor or a mentee. Doris Rutland, a Staff Development Specialist, and coordinator of the program, then attempts to create the matches, and is the central point for problem solving and support. Meetings are held between mentor and mentee for two hours per month, on county time, for a maximum of one year. Ms. Rutland said that several new careers had been launched through this program.

Supervisory Skills-Home Study

This program provides a self paced home study supervisory skills course for staff members who are interested in moving into supervision, and who are seeking to enhance their knowledge of supervision in order to successfully pass supervisory tests. Staff who complete the course receive a certificate of completion.

TRAINING FOR ORGANIZATION CHANGE

As the organization shifts, the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has held a series of brain storming sessions with various staff members to obtain responses regarding what they see as emerging training needs. Not surprisingly, SAWS, automation, collaborative training, organizational cultural change, and customer service were some top issues. The Agency has reviewed several organization change training programs, and is evaluating whether they offer the vehicle to provide the training opportunity for staff to begin to understand the issues of change.

CENTRALIZED VS. DECENTRALIZED TRAINING

In various conversations with staff about the enormous changes taking place in the social services field, there was much discussion about the virtues of centralized versus decentralized training activities. There was a strong feeling that the economy of scale of a centralized program would be lost if training was decentralized to the point of providing all programs with their own trainers who would then develop and train individual programs. It was emphasized that a centralized, ongoing training plan and program has been a key to reinforcing Agency values and meeting the Agency Mission. Some discussion has taken place about training line supervisors to conduct more of the staff training.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be easy to recommend duplication of the comprehensive training program offered by Santa Clara County. However, even now, with such a mature program in operation, there is acknowledgment in the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency that changes must be made to respond to welfare reform, automation, and funding issues. I would certainly recommend looking at some of the ways that Santa Clara County is evaluating the issues of change, and how they are attempting to incorporate training as a method to change the culture of the workplace. I would also recommend the following:

Establish Training Collaborations

Investigate inter county training collaborations. Explore the possibility of establishing collaborations between business, educational institutions, community based organizations, and other government agencies. This might be particularly useful for automation training. I was particularly interested in Ms. Gallagher's suggestion that more inter county training programs be established to maximize use of regional county training resources.

Develop Agency Orientation Training

As I observed a number of training programs, one underlying theme was the Agency Mission and goals, and how they are consistently communicated to staff. As change occurs, the need to communicate the changing mission and goals becomes even more important.

I recommend creation of an Agency orientation training program. I'd envision this training package as an extension of the current orientation activities offered by the Human Resources Department, and that Human Resources would be involved in developing this package. However, an additional focus would be added to communicate a consistent understanding of the Agency's Mission and goals, and of the Agency's expectations of its employees.

Establish Employee Development Programs

Explore the possibility of establishing low cost employee development training activities such as a mentor program and home study programs. These programs could provide staff with low cost career building activities, and build communication skills with "staff to staff" activities

Provide Standard Induction Training for All Staff

Extend standard induction training programs to all new staff, including a standard automation training program for all staff and a clerical support training package for new clerical employees. This would build on programs already provided for income maintenance and social workers. Induction programs provide the framework for establishing consistent, quality service to our customers.

As change occurs, strong training programs that offer staff the opportunity to grow with the changes. will help the organization meet the many challenges of welfare reform and the changing work place.