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 | INFORMATIONAL LETTER |
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TRANSMITTAL: 95 INF-42

TO: Commissioners of
 Social Services
 Executive Directors

DIVISION: Services and
 Community
 Development

DATE: November 3, 1995

SUBJECT: CONNECTIONS Update

SUGGESTED

DISTRIBUTION: Directors of Services
 SACWIS Liaisons
 Staff Development Coordinators
 Systems Coordinators
 Child Welfare Staff

CONTACT PERSON: Richard Pryor, 1-800-342-3727, extension 2-2937 or
 518-432-2937, User ID 0FL080

ATTACHMENTS: I. Goals for CONNECTIONS (available on-line)
 II. Site Survey (available on-line)
 III. Purchase of Services Survey Form
 (available on-line)

FILING REFERENCES

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
94 INF-20			Section 474		94 LCM-114
94 INF-25			(a)(3)(c)		
95 INF-21			of the Social Security Act; 45 CFR 1355.22 (a)		

Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter is to provide information to social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies on the status of the CONNECTIONS project, schedules, and upcoming activities which will involve you and your staff.

Background

The CONNECTIONS initiative will enable us to re-engineer the casework process and make efficient and effective use of new computer technologies to improve service delivery, reduce administrative burdens on child welfare staff and improve outcomes for families.

Previous Informational Letters describe the goals of the project and the federal requirements.

Over the past year, the Department has completed a variety of activities with the social services districts and voluntary authorized agency user community including:

- o Vendor Demonstration Days
- o Focus Groups
- o CONNECTIONS Surveys
- o Regional Forums
- o Solutions Discovery
- o Advanced Planning Document for Federal Approval of Funding
- o Request for Proposal (RFP)

- o Child Welfare On-Line Workgroup

This initiative continues the Department's multi-faceted identification of user needs and system design options. This phase, specifically involving about 60 child welfare services staff from social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies will enable us to lay out specific case record content and the re-engineering of related services processes that CONNECTIONS technology will support. This group, along with a diverse contingent of State staff, is developing the case record design, incorporating a customized approach adaptable to the unique characteristics of each case, the principles of risk assessment and permanency planning. In addition, the contents of records related to foster and adoptive homes is being developed. Each aspect of the child welfare process is under review so that automation features are incorporated to improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

The input from the user community and the federal guidelines led us to identify the functionality which CONNECTIONS will include:

- Intake
- Case Management
- Eligibility
- Resource Management
- Court Processing
- Financial Management
- Interfaces
- Administration

Attachment I describes the goals of the CONNECTIONS system and provides more detail on the functional areas listed above.

CONNECTIONS Schedule

The CONNECTIONS RFP was released to prospective bidders on July 17, 1995. The Department has received proposals in response to this release, and these proposals are currently being reviewed and evaluated. It is expected that the CONNECTIONS contract will be awarded in November 1995.

The CONNECTIONS project will be implemented in two components once selection of the contractor is complete. The first component will involve installation of personal computers for the use of child welfare staff and electronic office training. The second component will include the training and implementation of the full functionality of the system.

Component One will begin in November 1995 and end in September 1996 and will consist of the following:

- o Preparation and/or renovation of social services districts and voluntary authorized agency sites to prepare these sites for the installation of the CONNECTIONS equipment. Site preparation and renovation will be the responsibility of social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies, based on directions from the CONNECTIONS contractor site survey results (see Attachment II for specific responsibilities).
- o Installation of PC's and LAN's by the contractor. The contractor will also be responsible for training workers and supervisors on how to use PC's, office automation and the basic CONNECTIONS word processing templates.
- o Installation of the statewide network which will be the responsibility of the New York State Department of Social Services.
- o Initiation of locally administered LAN operations in each locality that receives equipment for the CONNECTIONS system.

Component Two will begin in November 1995 and end in October 1997. It will include the following activities:

- o Design, develop, test and pilot of full functionality software (January 1996 through September 1996).
- o Implementation of the full functionality statewide. This is planned to begin in September 1996 and end in September 1997, and include data conversion, clean up, training of the social services district and voluntary authorized agency staff. Training on the functionalities described will be appropriate to the staffs' responsibilities.

Funding

Funding for the CONNECTIONS project is available as follows:

- o Equipment/LAN installation/design/development implementation and training

75% Federal share
25% State share
0% Local share

Federal reimbursement at the level of 75% for the planning, design, development and installation of CONNECTIONS is available until September 30, 1996. Effective October 1, 1996, the level of federal reimbursement is reduced to 50% federal share. Accordingly, it is imperative that social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies complete the necessary site preparation within the timeframes which will be provided. The failure to have a site or sites properly prepared will jeopardize federal funding. The Department is proposing to pass along the level of federal participation to a social services district which failed to adequately prepare its site or sites. The additional 25% non-federal participating share would be passed on to such social services district.

- o Site Preparation

Social Services Districts

75% Federal Share
25% State/local share under the State Family and Children Services Block Grant

Voluntary Authorized Agencies

75% Federal Share
25% Administrative Cost

- o Social Services District Claiming for Site Preparation

The following are the claiming instructions to be used by the social services districts to report expenditures for site preparation.

The social services districts will report their salary and non-salary expenditures for site preparation/renovation for CONNECTIONS as F-17 functional costs on the Schedule D - DSS Administrative Expense Allocation and Distribution by Function and Program (DSS-2347). These costs will carry through to the Schedule D-17 - Distribution of Allocated Costs to Other Reimbursable Programs (DSS-3274) where they should be reported as "CONN. SITE" costs. The D-17 in turn will support a DSS-3922 (Financial Summary for Special Projects). The title of the project on the DSS-3922 should be "CONN. SITE."

The costs reported on the DSS-3922 should be reimbursed at the rate of 75% Federal Share and 25% State Share. The State share will be paid from the Family and Children's Services Block Grant.

o Other Social Services District Claiming

For administrative expenditures other than site preparation costs, social services salary and non-salary costs incurred for CONNECTIONS should be reported in the F-17 sub-function on the Schedule D and reported in a separate sub-function entitled "CONN. Other" on the Schedule D-17. The D-17 will in turn support a DSS-3922. The title of the project on the DSS-3922 should be "CONN. OTHER". The costs reported on the DSS-3922 should be reimbursed at the rate of 75% Federal and 25% State shares. The State share will be paid from an appropriation separate from the Family and Children's Services Block Grant.

Both above noted DSS-3922's should be completed and submitted on a monthly basis to the Bureau of Local Financial Operations, 40 North Pearl Street, 8th floor, Albany, New York 12243.

If you have any claiming questions Region I-IV please call Roland Levie at 1-800-343-8859, extension 4-7549, User ID FMS001, and Region V please call Marvin Gold at 212-383-1733, User ID OFM270.

Allocation of Equipment

Social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies should be aware that staff targeted to use the computer for the CONNECTIONS system are child welfare caseworkers, supervisors and managers who devote 100% of their time to protective, preventive, adoption and/or foster care services.

Voluntary authorized agencies which contract with social services districts and perform either child welfare intake or case management (assessment and service planning) functions will also need to use the CONNECTIONS system for the same categories of staff.

Next Steps

Social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies should begin to assess site readiness and electrical needs to assure that installation can

occur on time. The contractor will be conducting site surveys starting in December 1995. The result will be a report for each site defining the specific site preparation activities that must occur in a short specified time frame.

To ensure that we have a comprehensive listing of voluntary authorized agencies and their locations which perform child welfare activities through contracts with social services districts, a Purchase of Services Survey Form is attached to this release (Attachment III). We are requesting that local social services districts return this form by listing voluntary authorized agencies with whom you contract and plan to contract in the upcoming fiscal year for foster care, preventive and adoption services and who will need access to CONNECTIONS. The listing should be submitted by November 15, 1995 to Richard Pryor, OFL080, by FAX to (518) 432-2930, or by mail to New York State Department of Social Services, Bureau of Services Information Systems, Arcade Building, Room 410, 40 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York 12243.

Your SACWIS liaison will soon be contacted regarding the staff numbers you provided earlier this year, for the purpose of identifying any discrepancies between that data and Department data from your organizational and staffing charts. You will be advised of the numbers of PC's which will be allocated for your district or agency use by November 30, 1995. These allocations will be based on your staffing and caseload.

Social services districts and voluntary authorized agencies must also submit a floor plan to the Department by December 15, 1995. This will be given to the contractor for purposes of the site survey. Floor plans should be sent to Richard Pryor, OFL080, by FAX to (518) 432-2930, or by mail to New York State Department of Social Services, Bureau of Services Information Systems, Arcade Building, Room 410, 40 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York 12243.

The Department is planning a CONNECTIONS teleconference for December 20, 1995 to inform you and your staff of our current status, schedule, funding, and the recommendations of the Child Welfare On-Line Workgroup. There will be a discussion of next steps and questions and answers. There will be a separate INF issued describing the agenda, locations and sign up procedures.

Rose M. Pandozy
Deputy Commissioner

ATTACHMENT I

GOALS FOR CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS will be designed to support the Department in achieving the following goals:

- o Improve worker ability - promote consistent applications of requirements and improve practice decisions;
- o Support management and program administration;
- o Improve quality, timeliness and utilization of information;
- o Create a positive work environment for workers while improving their efficiency and productivity;
- o Provide electronic exchange of information support, interfaces and approvals;
- o Protect vulnerable children and preserve, stabilize and support families;
- o Ensure that the family and children's connection to their heritage, kin and community are maintained.

The key premise underlying the development of CONNECTIONS is that the system will be a useful tool for the Child Welfare worker. CONNECTIONS will benefit workers by:

- o Providing a single point of entry for a comprehensive child welfare system;
- o Promoting a more efficient and economical service delivery process;
- o Automating case recording;
- o Reducing time to complete required reports;
- o Providing tools to facilitate case decision making;
- o Improving productivity through office automation;
- o Relieving mandates and unnecessary processes;
- o Eliminating unnecessary forms and duplication of data.

Intake - This function will provide the necessary computer support for all intake statewide, whether it be the State Central Register's call receipt centralized child protective intake process, social services district or voluntary authorized agency intake, or referral to other agencies when such referral can best serve client needs.

Case Management - This function entails initial and ongoing assessments and reassessments, including risk assessments, the preparation of service plans, determining whether a given agency can provide needed services, authorizing the provision of services, and managing the delivery of those services.

Resource Management - This function supports the maintenance and monitoring of information on an array of service providers, including prevention programs, placement services, and foster care and adoptive providers. Service provider information crosses district boundaries and will be accessible to all social services districts, voluntary authorized agencies, State Central Register and other State staff.

Court Processing - This function includes an array of legal activities and documentation procedures involving judicial events requiring action on the part of State Department of Social Services and social services districts, and voluntary authorized agencies.

Financial Management - This function will support the effective and efficient administration and management needed to ensure the accurate and timely operation of a financial system including interfacing with legacy systems where appropriate.

Administration - This function will support the efficient and effective management of personnel supervision, mandated reporting and system administration to provide reliable and accurate information regarding agency operations.

Interfaces - CONNECTIONS will establish and support efficient and effective administration of the processes necessary to transfer information between CONNECTIONS and the Department's other automated systems.

Software Tools - This function will support E-Mail, Calendaring, Ad Hoc Reports and On-Line Help and Ticklers.

ATTACHMENT II

SITE SURVEY

DSS will request a date from the vendor for a site survey. The vendor's Installation Coordinator will be given pertinent information including DSS Order Number (Processor ID), address, travel routes and directions as necessary, site contact, contact's telephone number and amount of equipment to be installed.

This job will be assigned to the vendor, who will complete a timetable for the survey. The vendor will notify the local site contact, who will arrange for a building representative and an electrician to be present at the site survey.

During the survey the vendor will verify locations of hands-on devices, establish locations of processors and data drops and note the telephone number nearest the data drop location.

SITE SURVEY RESPONSIBILITIES (Local Social Services Districts (LDSS), Voluntary Authorized Agencies (VA) Responsibilities are bolded):

1. Indicate desired location of processor, modem, workstations, printers and other devices on floorplan. (LDSS, VA)
2. Describe projected operating conditions, i.e., heat, noise, vibration and glare. (Vendor)
3. Determine furniture requirements, i.e., desks, tables, workstation desks, printer stands, chairs, portable partitions, etc. (LDSS, VA)
4. Provide access to certain areas and information needed to determine cable routing, available power, fire and building codes. (LDSS, VA)
5. Define locations, type and length of all cables. (Vendor)
6. Identify communications facilities required including type of circuit and modem and record phone number closest to location of processor. (Vendor)
7. Define all electrical work to be performed including receptacles, dedicated circuits, power, breaker panels, cable pulling, etc. (Vendor)
8. Define air conditioning ventilation recommendations or requirements, if any. (Vendor)
9. Make recommendations for alterations needed to provide for security of equipment, such as partitions, locked doors, etc. (Vendor)

10. Ensure that final placement of equipment will not be affected by heat, humidity, and other environmental factors; allow sufficient space for maintenance. (LDSS, VA, Vendor)
11. Provide proper security in placement of equipment to avoid tampering, physical removal, damage, etc. (LDSS, VA, Vendor)
12. Ensure that final placement of equipment will not cause heat discomfort to office personnel. (Vendor)
13. Ensure that final placement of the processor is consistent with proper network design and allowing for flexibility of reconfiguration. (Vendor)
14. Prepare and approve an Installation Plan. (DSS, Vendor, LDSS, VA)

RESPONSIBILITIES AFTER EQUIPMENT SITE SURVEY:

1. Order cables and equipment, submit Installation Plan. (Vendor)
2. Confirm delivery date and notify site contact of delivery date. (Vendor)
3. Preparation of site: general construction, alterations, A/C power, electrical outlets, air conditioning. (LDSS, VA)
4. Receive equipment and cables, match number of pieces with bill of lading, sign bill if acceptable, obtain bill and packing slips. (LDSS, VA)
5. Notify Vendor of receipt of equipment and cable. (LDSS, VA)
6. Inventory equipment. (Vendor, LDSS, VA)
7. Place equipment or mark boxes. (Vendor, LDSS, VA)
8. Check site preparation complete. (Vendor, LDSS, VA)
9. Perform cable labeling, if necessary, instruct cable pulling personnel, pull cables. (Vendor, LDSS, VA)
10. Software support to initiate the site. (Vendor)
11. Submit Old PID/New PID forms to Data Administration. (LDSS)
12. Schedule installation of equipment. (Vendor/DSS)
13. CONNECTIONS Security. (Vendor)

ATTACHMENT III

PURCHASE OF SERVICES SURVEY FORM

Submitted by: _____
District

Contact Person: _____ . Phone: _____

NOTE: List all agencies with which you contract for the provision of child welfare services. Include the address of all sites where child welfare staff perform child welfare duties 100% of the time. Do not list community based congregate care facilities such as group homes, AOBH's, etc.

Purchased Foster Care

<u>Name of Agency</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Number of CONNECTIONS Users</u>
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Purchased Preventive

<u>Name of Agency</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Number of CONNECTIONS Users</u>
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SURVEY FORM (Continued)

Adoption Services

<u>Name of Agency</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	Number of <u>CONNECTIONS</u> <u>Users</u>
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NOTE: Please send form to Richard Pryor, OFL080, by FAX to (518) 432-2930, or by mail to New York State Department of Social Services, Bureau of Services Information Systems, Arcade Building, Room 410, 40 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12243.

Submitted by: _____
District

Contact person: _____ . Phone: _____