



DCF COVID-19 Daily Update Supporting Children, Families and Staff June 24, 2020

ACADEMY FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MOVES TO A DIGITAL FUTURE

The Department of Children and Families Academy for Workforce Development was heading toward more digital and remote classes for new and experienced social workers even before COVID-19 hit Connecticut hard in mid-March. The pandemic just expedited the evolution.

Academy Director Tracy Davis said the movement toward digital and remote classes is driven by the needs of staff. "This is the way staff want to learn," she said, "so this is just a reflection of our respect for staff time and staff functioning. It meets the needs of the agency." She noted that the Academy is similar to a higher education institution, and that higher education is increasingly moving online.

She said the future is clear after the pandemic is over: a combination of in-person and online instruction -- much like colleges and universities employ.

The Academy's assistant director, Tim Monahan, said the path toward digital had been set by Ms. Davis before anyone had heard of COVID-19.

"Well before the pandemic hit, she targeted this is the direction," he said. "We've been working to increase our virtual presence --this just pushed us."

The first set of virtual online trainings began with the Differential Response Series for investigators. The success of those offerings encouraged the Academy staff to move forward with others. In May, the Academy offered 10 virtual pre-service trainings for newly hired social workers and 15 virtual in-service trainings for the staff at large. In total, over 800 people participated in these trainings.

One series of online classes was offered weekly for five weeks. Called "Together We Learn," the instruction focused on supporting staff during the pandemic when the agency was forced to do its work while still maintaining the social distancing required to limit the coronavirus' spread. The series was a response to the need for staff to conduct much of their work virtually due to the pandemic.

Ms. Davis said Together We Learn "has been extremely well received" in part because the Academy used voices of staff themselves who have experienced both the successes and challenges of conducting work remotely. Topics have included assessing risk and safety remotely, teleworking, and using remote visitation techniques.

"The whole series was intended to generate discussion and share ideas concerning best practice and policy," Mr. Monahan said.

Ms. Davis thanked Jennifer Rondini, program supervisor at the Academy, for ensuring that the series was well organized and coordinated in order to deliver a beneficial product to the staff.

The Academy also created a SharePoint site <http://cqi.dcf.ct.gov/sites/CQI/TA/SitePages/Virtual> for internal use by Department staff to help them navigate the new way of doing work. Called the "Virtual Information Gateway," the intranet-based resource includes helpful information on a variety of subjects, including:

- Child welfare best practices during COVID-19;
- Guidelines for conducting work in a virtual environment;
- Supervising in an online environment; and
- Time management skills while working remotely.

Additional resources are offered for social workers to share with families on their caseload, including help supporting children's online schooling and even family activities and games.

Ms. Davis said the intent was to provide "a one-stop location to find lots of information about working remotely and working from home."

Ms. Davis credited Mr. Monahan, Carmen James and Jennifer Uttley-Rosado, both child welfare trainers, and IT consultant Suzanne Neafus for quickly compiling a comprehensive and useful resource for staff.

Ms. Davis and Mr. Monahan said the Academy's journey to a digital future has only begun. "This is something we will get better at as we fine tune it," Mr. Monahan said. "Our staff want it."