



CONNECTICUT

Department of Children and Families



2025-2029 Training Plan

June 30, 2024

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Academy for Workforce Development

Over the next five years, the Academy for Workforce Development will continue making advancements in training, learning, and development to strengthen the skills and knowledge base of the workforce. During 2024-2029, concerted efforts will be made to accomplish the following as listed below. It should also be noted that the trainings described in this plan are taught by Academy trainers, program supervisors, and managers. When opportunities arise for co-training experiences to occur, the Academy partners with an array of subject matter experts for such purposes.

Pre-service

The Academy continues to offer an extensive pre-service training program for new social workers who are hired to conduct child welfare work in the regional area offices. The program is designed to prepare each social worker for effective child welfare/protective services practice and is based on seven core competencies:

- Professional development as a child welfare social worker
- Accurate assessment of safety and risk
- Engagement of individuals and families
- Assessment of individuals and families
- Interventions and services with individuals and families
- Legal
- Documentation

The pre-service training program currently involves 24 unique courses over 36 days of training offered during a period of five to six months, with a significant number of courses "front loaded" into the social workers' first seven to eight weeks of employment; and the remaining coursework scheduled intermittently to allow for gradual case assignment and workload increase. The courses are largely facilitated by the Academy's Child Welfare Trainers, supervisory-level employees with recent field experience; as well as numerous "adjunct" facilitators, including but not limited to agency attorneys, quality assurance staff, medical and educational consultants.

All but two courses are held in-person in order to maximize the learning experience for participants. In-person classes are held at the Academy at Central Office or one of two satellite locations. Most classes are a full day - six training hours.

Modifications to the pre-service training program have been put in place to occur starting this year. As we continue to train new staff, we will assess on an ongoing basis the effectiveness of the modifications to determine if the training curriculum is proving effective for the staff. We will also examine the cadence of the training series to ascertain whether this new iteration is conducive to balancing case assignment with training. This will be done through focus groups and targeted evaluations.

The Academy continued efforts this year around strengthening training evaluation to determine the effectiveness and impact of training. Pre-service participants continue to respond to three open-ended essay questions as part of the final test. These questions are designed to capture how participants have integrated their classroom learning into their case practice. The questions focus

on these key areas of practice: ABCD Safety Practice Model, Fatherhood Engagement, and Racial Justice. The use of these questions began in April 2023. There is evidence in the qualitative data that most participants are demonstrating an integration of their learning into practice. The Academy plans to strengthen the collection and analysis of this data in the coming year by collecting scoring data from the trainers. Responses are currently rated with the use of a rubric and scoring criteria. We will begin collecting the scores in a standard format to see more globally how many trainees are meeting the expectations of these writing prompts.

In addition, our current simulation training utilizing providers with lived experience will be assessed for the purposes of modifying the scenarios used in pre-service training. In partnership with staff from the area office and the providers who participate in the simulation, we will examine the scenarios and modify them to be reflective of the current compelling issues that face the children and families we serve.

Along the lines of strengthening our partnership with people with lived experience, the Academy will seek to increase the pool of individuals who are interested in speaking to the pre-service training participants. As part of this work, the Academy will collaborate with the External Affairs division to identify the individuals. From there, the Academy will work to prepare them to work closely with our staff in training. This preparation includes but is not limited to: Helping them to formulate their story in a way that does not retraumatize them, provide them with training on the agency and the Academy functions, research a funding stream to compensate them for their expertise and time.

As a division, we will research, develop, and implement a simulation scenario that will be placed at the end of the pre-service training. This will allow staff the ability to demonstrate in real time their competency and skill level acquired because of the training they received.

We also recognize the changing needs of our workforce and the high turnover rate impacting our agency. It is the goal of the Academy to provide ongoing support to the pre-service staff during their training tenure. We will create a voluntary support group for trainees to participate in monthly. This will be facilitated by one of the Academy trainers and potentially one of the Academy Program Supervisors. The sessions will run for 30 minutes either in-person or virtually. This will serve as a safe space for staff to receive support from peers and the Academy on issues pertaining to work life balance.

Additional information on staff training, technical assistance, and evaluation can be found in *CFSP Chapter 3: Services beginning on page 56*

For additional information on assessment of these systemic factors, please see *FINAL REPORT: State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Annual Progress and Services Report 2020 – 2024, p. 91-117.*

Planned activities targeted at improving performance toward CFSP goal and objectives for safety are included at the end of *CFSP Chapter 2: Safety, p. 31.*

Planned activities targeted at improving performance toward CFSP goal and objectives for DCF's workforce are included in *CFSP Chapter 2: Workforce, beginning on p. 51.*

In-Service

The Academy continues to offer a myriad of in-service classes on a continuous basis to agency staff and community providers. Staff and providers can view all course offerings through our online course catalog which is updated quarterly. Training is offered on a continuous basis either in person at the Academy, the Academy satellite office, or other appropriate locations. Training is held for 3 hours (half day) or 6 hours (full day).

The Academy continues to find it beneficial to have community providers and other state agency partners participate in the training classes with our workforce whenever possible. This opportunity lends itself to an enriching learning experience affording people the opportunity to share ideas, and philosophies. The development, execution, and success of many of these courses is due to the formal partnerships the Academy has made with agency staff, and external partners including but not limited to CAFAF, FAVOR, Probate Court, Office of Early Childhood, Child First, the Connecticut State Police, and adults/ youth with lived experience.

As we think about 2025-2029, the Academy will continue to seek out and develop new training content that is relevant to caseload carrying staff and non-caseload staff to meet the learning and development needs of the whole agency.

As the needs of our young adult population change, we plan to continue our collaboration with the Transitional Services and Support (TSS) division to enhance the Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) training series. We will work together to develop TAY Micro Learning Labs as a supplement to the existing training series, on the following topics:

- Services Past Majority-Federal Funding-Reentry
- CHAP/CHEER/TSEA
- Child Welfare Accounting
- Post Secondary Education
- DHMAS/DDS Referrals
- Case Planning Omega
- Adolescent Parents
- Juvenile Justice System

These micro-learnings will be 60-90 minutes in nature and available to all DCF Staff.

In addition, the Academy is exploring the usage of virtual reality/virtual simulations to assist intake staff in assessing safety and risk, with the possibility of expansion to other programs. This is contingent upon funding approval.

In the coming months, the Academy will partner with the Connecticut State Police and the Governor's Task Force to develop a training course on Interviewing Children from birth to age five. This will provide the workforce with strategies and techniques that are useful and relevant to this vulnerable population.

In response to internal and federal review data, we continue to focus on strengthening staff's attention and skill in the initial and ongoing engagement of fathers and paternal relatives. We plan to partner with our internal resources to create a Fatherhood Training Series and related Micro Learning Labs. This series will be available to all staff, either virtually or in-person.

The Academy will be expanding the training catalog by including training offerings for clinical staff. A workgroup has convened to identify learning needs and interests. They will seek out external training resources in the community and when possible, develop in-house training.

Concerted efforts to assess the training and workforce development needs of non-social work staff across the agency will be a focus for the upcoming year(s). Results will inform future training development. Finally, the Academy will be looking to readminister the DCF Child Welfare Workforce Training Needs and Preferences Statewide Survey. Non-social work staff will be included in this process. The last time this survey was administered was in 2022.

Community Trainings

The Academy for Community Partners (ACP), a subdivision of the Academy for Workforce Development continues to offer a robust offering of training for contracted and credentialed providers. These trainings are held in the community for 3 hours (half day) or 6 hours (full day). There are also opportunities to offer the training virtually for half or full day. In addition, the ACP will continue collaborating with states sister agencies such as the Department of Developmental Services and Department of Social Services to provide trainings for their staff on topics related to assessing risk and safety, racial justice, mandated reporter, and DCF 101.

The Academy of Community Providers seeks to provide further trainings from 2025-2029, we are looking to explore and develop the following:

- A multi-day Supervisory Leadership Series that will be created in partnership with our systems division and identified providers. The goal is to build upon the current skill and knowledge of the supervisors within the community organizations that work in collaboration with DCF.
- Simulation Training for Community Providers will be an opportunity for some of the newly hired staff within this population to practice skills associated with safety and risk trainings offered to them by the ACP.
- Legal 101 for Community Providers in partnership with the System's Program Directors, and the agency's legal division, this course will be developed to provide a baseline understanding of the legal realm by which DCF must operate.

Planned activities targeted at improving performance toward CFSP goal and objectives for racial justice are included in *CFSP Chapter 2: Racial Justice, beginning on p. 47.*

Leadership Programs

The Academy plans to enhance already existing leadership programs with the addition of evidence-based tools. We will also expand the catalog of supervisor-specific courses.

The Intercultural Development Inventory®, or IDI®, is a theory-based, reliable, comprehensive, and cross-culturally validated assessment instrument that assesses intercultural competence along a developmental continuum. This tool is available in multiple languages and provides group and individualized results regarding capacity to connect and bridge cultures. The IDI provides individualized Intercultural Development Plans (IDP) to support growth along the intercultural competence continuum.

Academy managers completed the IDI Qualified Administrator (QA) Training and became certified administrators of the tool. The Academy will integrate the use of this tool in the Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS) and Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM). The goal is for participants to raise their self-awareness of how their intercultural development impacts their work with the workforce, children, youth, and families.

The Academy will also incorporate the use of the DiSC assessment tool - a personality and behavioral assessment tool used to improve teamwork and communication within the Leading from a Supervisory Perspective (LSP) training series for new supervisors. It will also be available to teams on an individualized basis through the Academy.

Based on feedback from the most recent LAS cohort the program which originally took place over the course of five to six months will be extended to nine months. Participants advocated for the extended time to increase their capacity to develop and more fully implement a change project.

The Academy is looking into creating our own feedback loop for supervisors based on a 360-evaluation model. Staff will have the opportunity to evaluate and provide feedback to their direct supervisor. This information encourages self-reflection and will be used for professional and personal development of agency supervisory staff.

The Academy has a robust training series for new supervisors and offers the LAS program for a limited number of experienced supervisors but does not have many other opportunities targeted to experienced supervisors at all levels. As a result, the Academy is partnering with the area offices to examine the learning needs and interests of this audience. This information will support the expansion of supervisory level training through the development of new course content.

Internship Enrollment

The Academy has experienced decreased enrollment in internship programs for employees and non-employees. We plan to analyze the contributing factors of this decrease and strategize efforts to increase participation.

Cost Allocation Methodology

Please refer to the IVE section of the APSR for additional detail on the cost allocation methodology in relation to training services.

