

**CT DCF Job Satisfaction Survey Findings and Implications for Training**

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### Introduction

An ongoing concern in public child welfare practice is the significant turnover of line staff, up to 50% per year in some locations nationally. This high turnover rate negatively impacts service delivery to children and families as caseloads are transferred once, twice, or even three times in a given year. It takes time for new caseworkers to familiarize themselves with each child, foster

family, and birth family as well as the norms, expectations and procedures of the agency. In addition, training costs for new caseworkers are staggering, said to be up to 75% of the annual salary of a line worker.

Seeking to address concerns about staff turnover in child welfare, the federal Children's Bureau awarded a five year grant to Children FIRST, a center for child welfare practice, training and research, at the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service in Tarrytown, NY. Activities funded by this grant are intended to improve recruitment and retention of casework and supervisory staff at the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services by providing training that promotes self-efficacy, organizational commitment, recognition of accomplishment, and social support to the agency's managers and supervisors. By enhancing managerial and supervisory staff competencies in these areas, which have been identified in previous research as associated with staff retention; it is believed that DCF's ability to recruit and retain quality employees will be increased.

As a first step in developing the training curriculum, a Job Satisfaction Survey was conducted with 960 DCF staff at the manager, supervisor, social worker, trainee, case aide, and child care worker levels in the organization. Items on the survey instrument were drawn from the current research on employee recruitment and retention in the human services and elsewhere. Embedded in the questionnaire were two standardized instruments, one a seven item questionnaire designed to measure organizational commitment and the other a 36-item instrument measuring job satisfaction. In addition to demographic data, the survey also collected information regarding (1) reasons for accepting a job at DCF, (2) respondent's feelings about his or her job, (3) perceptions about the agency's responsiveness to employees, and (4) areas of difficulty on the job.

The results from the survey will need to be considered in the context of staff turnover at DCF, which suggests that recruitment and retention issues are more complex than simply addressing the rate of caseworker turnover. Employee turnover at DCF from 1/1/04 – 12/31/04 is reported to have been 8.8 percent for all staff, and 7.4 percent for workers, although the rate varies by office. Placed in the context of national statistics where the rate of turnover in child welfare is estimated to be 22 percent, this suggests that retention of workers in and of itself is not the issue.

Findings from the survey suggest that the issues of retention, and recruitment, are more complex at DCF. In general, results suggest that staff is attracted to the agency because of pay and benefits, but stay because of commitment to the work. However, there is a fair amount of dissatisfaction in a number of areas, some of which are amenable to training and technical assistance interventions and some that are more appropriately targeted by other management strategies. These will be discussed in detail below.

### Results from the Job Satisfaction Survey

The sample of 960 staff constituted a 45 percent return rate, and the sample was determined to be representative of agency employees on the variables of gender, age, race and ethnicity and office location. According to study findings, the average length of employment at DCF for Managers is 15 years, for Supervisors 11 years and for Caseworkers, 4 years.

The following discussion of findings from the Job Satisfaction Survey begins with the 9 subscales from the embedded job satisfaction instrument. These nine subscales reflect current consensus on the factors which directly impact employee job satisfaction and thus retention.

Each of the nine subscales in this instrument is composed of 4 items or questions. Response categories for each individual item range from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree, thus the range of scores on each item is 1 to 6 and for each subscale is 4 to 24.

If the DCF responses to each subscale fell into a normal distribution, that is, the same number of people disagreed with an item as agreed with it, the mean for each subscale would be 12. However, as will become apparent from the discussion below, this is not the case. In some instances, such as with the Supervision subscale, the mean of DCF responses is much higher than 12 at 19.41, suggesting that DCF workers on the whole are quite satisfied with the supervision they receive. On the other hand, the DCF mean for the subscale entitled Operating Conditions is 10.11, somewhat below the expected mean of 12, indicating that this is a problematic area for the organization. In the following discussion, the mean for each subscale in the DCF survey is compared to the national mean for all human services workers who have completed this same instrument in order to allow for a broader interpretation of the DCF findings.

Also of importance to understanding the results of this survey are the standard deviations (STD) reported for each mean score. The higher these standard deviations are (closer to 6), the broader the range of responses to the questions. For example, even though the mean score for the Supervision subscale is quite high at 19.41, indicating a high level of satisfaction in this area, the standard deviation score for this subscale is 4.58, indicating that there was a substantial group of respondents who are highly dissatisfied with their supervision as well as a group who are highly satisfied. The discussion below will look at these responses by job category as well as caseload type to determine if there is any pattern to the more extreme responses.

In addition to discussing the mean scores and standard deviations, responses to the individual items that make up the subscales are also examined here. For some subscales, responses on all four items are fairly consistent. For other subscales, however, there are interesting variations in responses to the individual items that make up the subscale. For instance, in the subscale entitled Co-Workers which indicates satisfaction with co-workers, two of the items focusing on affective relationships with co-workers had high levels of positive responses; however, on the other two items, which spoke to perceptions of the competence of co-workers, responses were more negative. Examining the individual items in a scale can provide a more nuanced understanding of the overall contribution of the factors represented by the subscale to employee job satisfaction at DCF.

Each of the following headings represents a subscale in the Job Satisfaction instrument.

### 1. Pay and Benefits

Overall satisfaction with pay and benefits at DCF was significantly above the national average for human service workers (Pay mean=15.9 vs. 11.4; Benefits 16.3 vs. 13.9). The STD in DCF data was quite large as compared with national findings (Pay=4.6 vs 2.5; Benefits=4.0 vs 1.9), suggesting a great deal of variation in the level of employee satisfaction in these two areas.

Regarding the specific items making up the Pay and Benefits subscales, most respondents felt fairly compensated for the work they do (69.6%), and, although slightly over half (53.3%) felt that raises were too few and far between, nearly two-thirds were satisfied with their chances for a salary increase. Few respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the benefits they received. Nearly 78% of respondents disagreed with the statement "I am not satisfied with the benefits I

receive, ”; 79.4% of respondents believe the benefits package DCF provides is equitable; and 78.3% believe the benefits they receive are as good as most other organizations.

It seems clear that the salaries and benefits offered by DCF are perceived by workers as a positive aspect of their employment and not a source of job dissatisfaction as they reportedly are in other public child welfare systems. In an analysis of another area of the employee survey questionnaire concerning the reasons for accepting a job with DCF, salary was ranked as a primary consideration by 58% of Workers and Trainees, by 50.7% of Supervisors, and by 27.3% of Managers. Benefits, while not ranked quite as high, were still a priority for 32.9% of line staff, 25.7% of supervisors, and 25% of managers.

## 2. Promotion

The national mean on satisfaction with promotion opportunities in human services employees was 11.3 (STD=1.8), while at DCF, the overall mean on this subscale was notably higher at 13.4 (STD=3.9). By job title, DCF managers had a mean score of 14.8 (STD=3.7, median=15) on the Promotion subscale, supervisors' mean was 13.4 (STD 4.5, median= 13), and workers' mean was 13.5 (STD=3.7, median=14).

When the scores on the four items making up the Promotion subscale are examined separately, a more nuanced picture emerges. For example, slightly over half of the respondents (54.0%) believe there is too little chance for promotion in their current position. They disagreed with the statements that those who do well on the job “stand a fair chance” of promotion (55.7%) and that people at DCF get ahead as fast as they do at other places (63.3%). On the other hand, a small majority of respondents indicated satisfaction with their own chances for promotion (52.2%).

Thus, when compared with the responses of a national sample of human services employees on the Promotion subscale, DCF employees are more satisfied overall. However, when their responses on the individual items making up this subscale are examined, there appears to be some dissatisfaction regarding opportunities for promotion and the criteria for such promotions.

## 3. Supervision

Satisfaction with supervision is consistent with national norms (18.9) across job titles (manager, supervisor, worker/trainee), with means of 20.1, 18.4, & 19.8 respectively. The standard deviation in satisfaction with supervision scores is highest for supervisors (5.2) and workers (4.8) with the national STD at 1.6 and the overall DCF STD at 4.9. Managers' STD was 3.3. These wide standard deviations from the mean scores suggest that while many DCF employees are satisfied with their supervisors and some are very satisfied, there is a minority of workers who are extremely dissatisfied.

Individual items in the Supervision subscale supported the overall satisfaction with supervision at DCF. For example, 80.6% of respondents agreed that their supervisor is quite competent in his or her job, and 73.3% disagreed that their supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates. Less than 10% indicated that they did not like their supervisors. A few more thought their supervisor was sometimes unfair to them (14.6%), but, overall, respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the supervision they receive at DCF.

## 4. Contingent Rewards

DCF Managers' satisfaction with contingent rewards (15.9; STD 14, median=16) was significantly higher than the national norms for human services workers (13.0, STD 1.9), while the overall DCF mean (13.7; STD=4.5), and the means for Supervisors (13.6; STD=4.7; median=13) and Workers (13.5; STD=4.4; median=14) were more similar to national norms. Contingent rewards refers to recognition, appreciation, and intangible rewards for a job well done such as verbal praise.

Item scores on the Contingent Rewards subscale reflects these divided perceptions among respondents. For example, 52% felt that they did not get the recognition they deserved when they did a good job, while 48% agreed that they did receive such recognition. Slightly over 40% of respondents indicated they did not feel the work they do is appreciated, while 58.4% feel that it is appreciated by the agency. A third of respondents agreed that there are few rewards for those who work at DCF, while slightly less than a third (31.7%) believe their efforts are not rewarded as they should be.

Analyses of responses to the Contingent Rewards subscale suggests that perceptions regarding recognition and appreciation for the work done by DCF employees varies somewhat by job title. Managers expressed feeling more satisfied with the contingent rewards available to them than either Supervisors or Caseworkers. Indeed, these differences across positions on this variable are statistically significant at the .013 level. Given the large standard deviations by position indicating some strong dissatisfaction in this area, this may be an important area to address in developing strategies for employee retention at the supervisory and line staff levels.

## 5. Operating Conditions

In this category, overall DCF satisfaction scores were significantly lower than the national mean for human services workers (13.3; STD 2.0). The overall DCF mean score in this category was 10.1 (STD=3.9), while the satisfaction scores by job title were: Managers (11.2, STD=2.9, median=12); Supervisors (9.7; STD=3.9; median=10); Workers (9.1; STD=3.4; media=9). The Operating Conditions category refers to rules, procedures, red tape, overload, and paperwork.

Again, in this category, the differences in perceptions of Operating Conditions were statistically significant across employee positions ( $p=.001$ ), with Managers perceiving these conditions more positively than either Supervisors or Workers. For example, in response to an item on the Job Satisfaction index which reads, "I have too much paperwork to do," 22.2% of Managers, 43.4% of Supervisors, and 64.1% of Caseworkers indicated that they agreed with this statement. Similarly, in response to another item on this subscale, "I have too much work to do," 48.5% of Caseworkers, 41.4% of Supervisors, and 35.6% of Managers were in agreement.

In response to the individual items in this subscale, nearly 60% of all employees reported being hampered in their jobs by red tape, while even larger percentages of respondents agreed that they have too much work to do and too much paperwork (80% & 84.5%). There is also a strong perception that doing a good job is made more difficult by many of the agency's rules and procedures (75.9%).

According to the results of the Job Satisfaction Survey, *Operating Conditions was the area of most employee dissatisfaction*. It is not just the paperwork or overall workload demands, but also the rules and regulations that hamper their day to day work that add to the low levels of job satisfaction in this area. This clearly affects line staff and Supervisors who are confronted with these factors on a daily basis more than it affects Managers as evidenced by the statistical differences in their responses in this area.

This may be an extremely important area to consider in the context of the exit plan that DCF is facing. The level of frustration is already high, and if compliance activities are stressed even more without concomitant efforts to increase job satisfaction, the possibility of more staff turnover at a time when experienced staff are critical to the successful achievement of the exit plan activities could be a less than useful development.

## 6. Nature of the Work

This category refers to the kind of work one is doing, whether it fits with one's values, and view of what is important. In this category, the DCF mean and the national mean for human services workers were identical at 18.9 with some difference in standard deviation (national STD=2.5; DCF STD=3.8). There was also some variation by job category with Managers having higher satisfaction on this subscale (20.5, STD=2.9, median=21) than Supervisors (19.6, STD=3.1; median=20), and Supervisors higher satisfaction than Workers (18.5; STD=3.8; median=19). In all, however, the DCF scores in this category clearly reflect the staff's belief in the agency's mission and purpose.

The scores on individual items in this subscale bear out the overall fit between respondents' values and the nature of their work at DCF. For example, 89.9% of respondents indicated that they like doing the things they do at work, while 91.8% feel a sense of pride in doing their job. Eighty percent reported finding their job enjoyable, while at the same time, 28.1% sometimes feel their job is meaningless. This latter finding may indicate some dissonance between the investment in the job and the belief that the work is making a significant difference in children's lives.

The importance of DCF's work as a source of job satisfaction is reflected in staff members' responses to the question later in the questionnaire on reasons for accepting a position with the agency. Nearly 64% of Managers, 49% of Supervisors, and 40.6% of Workers ranked the importance of the agency's work to society as a primary reason for taking a job with DCF. Similarly, on the item regarding the fit between the staff member's interests and the mission of the agency, 61.4% of Managers, 45.5% of Supervisors, and 36.1% of Workers rated this as an important reason for taking a job with DCF.

Differences between job categories with regard to satisfaction with the nature of the work at DCF are statistically significant at the .027 level. As the analyses reported above indicate, Managers are more satisfied with the fit between their views and values and the nature of their work than Supervisors who, in turn, are more satisfied than Caseworkers. It could be speculated that there is a process of selection at work such that those who remain employed at DCF over a longer period of time do so because there is a positive fit between their personal views and values and those of the agency.

A higher percentage of Managers (61.4%) than Supervisors (45.5%) or Caseworkers (36.1%) reported that one of their top two reasons for taking a job with DCF was the fit between their interests and the agency's mission. Given that it is unlikely that there has been a significant change in the motivations of new workers for accepting a DCF position over the years since the time those now in management positions started with the agency, it is likely that attrition is higher among employees who do not experience such a fit between their interests or values and those of the agency over time. This may have implications for how the agency recruits and screens candidates for employment.

## 7. Communication

The national mean for satisfaction with communication in the workplace among human services workers was 14.0 (STD=2.2), while at DCF the overall mean in this category was slightly lower at 13.1 (STD=4.1). The variation in satisfaction suggested that Managers (14.4; STD=4.0; median=15) are more satisfied with communication in the agency than Supervisors (13.0; STD=4.3; median=13) and Workers (13.3; STD=4.0; median=13). There is also great variability within job titles as evidenced by the standard deviation scores. However, as the median scores are very close to the means, this suggests that as just many staff members were very satisfied with agency communication as were dissatisfied.

The overall level of satisfaction expressed in the Communication subscale was second lowest of all the subscales in the Job Satisfaction Index. Employee responses to the four items that composed this subscale indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with how information is disseminated within the organization. For example, nearly 80% of respondents (79.8%) disagreed that communication is good within the organization. Respondents reported that the goals of the agency are not clear to them (76.6%), that work assignments are not fully explained (48%), and that they often feel they do not know what is going on in the organization (72.6%).

While satisfaction with communication in the agency was not significantly different across job categories, there were differences on one of the items in the Communication subscale such that Caseworkers, and to some extent Supervisors, were much more likely than Managers to agree with the statement that the goals of the organization are not clear.

These findings reinforce the concern about the need for support for supervisors, noted in other areas as well. Middle managers are always subject to heavy demands from above and below, and the need for extra support for supervisors may aid in increased levels of satisfaction and organizational commitment.

## 8. Co-Workers

This was another category in which DCF mean scores (17.0; STD= 3.5) were very close to the national means for human services workers (17.8; STD 1.4), but varied more widely. By job title, the satisfaction with co-workers mean scores were: Managers (17.7; STD=3.2; median 18); Supervisors (16.4; STD=3.3; median=16), Workers (17.2; STD=3.4; median=17). As the satisfaction scores by job title illustrate, Supervisors are slightly less satisfied with their co-workers than Managers and Workers, though in each of these job categories, there is wide variation in satisfaction scores. Again, however, the scores are evenly distributed around the mean, so that as many staff members feel positively as feel negatively about their co-workers.

There were interesting differences on the 4 items that made up the satisfaction with Co-Workers subscale on the Job Satisfaction index. Two of the items spoke to affective relationships with co-workers ("I like the people I work with;" "I enjoy my co-workers") and, on these items, respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied; less than 10% indicated dissatisfaction. However, on the other two items, there was less unanimity. One of these spoke to the need of respondents to work harder because of incompetence of co-workers. While 40% percent of respondents disagreed that this was so, 60% indicated that they felt they did have to work harder because of this reason. A similar percentage agreed with a statement that there is too much bickering and fighting at work.

Chi-square analysis of position by response to the item on having to work harder because of co-worker incompetence found significant differences in responses at the  $p=.012$  level. Supervisors and Case Aides were much more likely to agree with the statement than Managers, Caseworkers, or Child Care Workers. The nature of these two positions may dictate that they rely more heavily on the competence of others and thus make employees in these positions more sensitive to the abilities of co-workers to carry out their roles.

#### Job Satisfaction by Office Location

Because of concerns about confidentiality of staff responses to the items on the Job Satisfaction Survey, discussion of results by area office (the institutional locations and the hotline are excluded in much of the following analysis by office) are limited to general indicators of satisfaction. However, while Human Subject restrictions prevents the sharing of data by individual office, it is possible to report on the group of offices that fall above and below the mean on the total job satisfaction scores. For example, the overall mean for all DCF workers (including the facilities and hotline staff) on the Job Satisfaction index was 55.95. When only area offices are considered, the mean satisfaction score is 60.49. Seven offices fell at or above the mean and six area offices (Norwalk/Stamford are treated as one) and Central office fell at or below this mean. Lower job satisfaction tended to be associated with larger offices serving the most economically deprived communities, but not always. The following indicates the offices that fell above or below the mean:

#### Offices at or above the mean JSS Total Job Satisfaction Score

Danbury  
Manchester  
Meriden  
Middletown  
Torrington  
Waterbury  
Willamantic

#### Offices at or below the mean JSS Total Job Satisfaction Score

Bridgeport  
Central Office  
Hartford  
New Haven  
New Britain  
Norwalk/Stamford  
Norwich

Analyzing the job satisfaction data by subscale provide additional information. In general, the offices that scored highest on the Contingent Reward subscale are the smaller offices, though one large office scored high on this subscale as well. Operating Conditions (rules, regulations, procedures, and paperwork) was the lowest ranked subscale by all DCF staff, indicating the most dissatisfaction in this area. Eleven of the 14 area offices fell below the mean on this variable. Similarly 8 out of 14 area offices were below the mean on the Communication subscale, another area of expressed dissatisfaction in the survey. Indeed, for every area office the 4 subscales registering the most dissatisfaction were: *Contingent rewards*, *Promotion*, *Communication*, and *Operating Conditions*. The subscales reflecting the most satisfaction

across offices were *Supervision* and *Nature of Work*, with satisfaction with *Co-Workers* and *Pay* and *Benefits* ranked third, fourth and fifth.

### Summary of findings on the Job Satisfaction Survey

Overall, findings on the Job Satisfaction Survey suggest that on the whole DCF staff are satisfied with the supervision they receive, with their co-workers (with the caveat noted above), with the fit between their values and beliefs and the mission of the agency, and with the salaries and benefits paid by the agency. They express less satisfaction with their *opportunities for promotion*, particularly employees in supervisory and line staff positions, with the *contingent rewards* they receive in terms of acknowledgement and recognition for the work they do, with *communication* in the agency, particularly at the Supervisor and Worker levels, and, most of all, with the *operating conditions* of their jobs, including rules, procedures, red tape, the level of paperwork, and overall job demands.

Case Aides and Child Care Workers in DCF institutional settings scored very much like the other three categories of staff on the 9 job satisfaction criteria. Their lowest levels of satisfaction were in the areas of *opportunities for promotion*, *operating conditions*, and, especially, *communication*. Interestingly, they were more satisfied with the contingent rewards they received than Supervisors or Workers, though not as satisfied as Managers. They were less satisfied than other DCF staff with their co-workers' competence in their jobs. Some of their job satisfaction on these various subscales is likely to be reflective of the institutional nature of their work, the close daily contact with co-workers and clients, and the particular demands of the jobs they hold. Strategies that include educational opportunities as well as professional development may serve to increase satisfaction as well as organizational commitment.

Analysis of job satisfaction data by area office finds that, on the whole, the larger offices serving more challenged and challenging populations have lower levels of job satisfaction, though there are exceptions on some of the subscales. However, even high levels of satisfaction in areas like *Supervision* and *Nature of the Work* don't seem to affect the overall perception of an unsupportive work environment, resulting in much lower scores in the areas of *Contingent Rewards*, *Operating Conditions*, *Communication*, and *Promotion*. The fact that staff in the smaller area offices tend in general to express less dissatisfaction in most areas of the survey suggests that there is something about the work environment in these offices that staff finds more satisfying.

Analysis of job satisfaction data by job category suggests that there are significant differences in the level of satisfaction between managers, supervisors and workers in the areas of the *Nature of the Work*, *Contingent Rewards* and *Operating Conditions*, with managers being significantly more satisfied in each of these three areas. In addition, supervisors and caseworkers are much more likely to agree with the statement that they have to work harder due to the incompetence of co-workers than are managers. Caseworkers, and to some extent supervisors, are more likely than managers to feel that the goals of the agencies are not clear. More support for supervisors in particular is likely to increase important areas of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The above findings suggest that targeting interventions for staff not only by office but by job category as well will be useful in increasing job satisfaction. As can be seen by the following discussion, increasing job satisfaction appears to strongly influence commitment to DCF. One could reasonably argue that by extension, a satisfied staff which is highly committed to the goals and mission of the organization are employees the agency would wish to retain..

## Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is conceptualized as the relative strength of an employee's identification with the mission, goals and values of, and involvement in, a particular organization. It has been demonstrated to impact organizational performance as well as staff turnover. Low organizational and professional commitment is among the major predictors of leaving a job. In order to measure organizational commitment among DCF staff, a seven item scale was embedded in the overall Job Satisfaction Survey. Findings on the items in this scale are presented below (please note: items 2 & 3 marked with an asterisk (\*) are not part of the original 7-item scale but were included in the survey as indicators of intention to leave the agency):

	<u>Agree with Statement</u>
1. It was a mistake to work for this agency	12.6%
2. I plan to leave this agency in the next 12 mo.*	14.9%
3. I plan to leave child welfare in the next 12 mo.*	10.2%
4. It would take very little to cause me to leave DCF	24.4%
5. I would take any job assignment to remain employed by DCF	45.9%
6. I could just as well work for a similar agency	53.1%
7. I find it difficult to agree with DCF's policies relating to employee matters	58.0%
8. My values and DCF's are similar	66.2%
9. I am willing to go beyond normal expectations to help this agency succeed	86.2%

A composite Organizational Commitment score was analyzed in relation to the total Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) score, and subscale scores from the JSS. There is an extremely significant correlation between the score on the Organizational Commitment scale and the Job Satisfaction Survey. This suggests that job satisfaction, for the purposes of designing interventions, can be generally equated to commitment to the organization, and by inference, to the intention to remain with the agency.

When the scores on the Organizational Commitment scale were analyzed by office, all offices where staff were found to have lower than average commitment to the organization were in the offices that fell below the mean on job satisfaction, appearing perhaps to reflect the demanding nature of the work in these offices.

## Other Area of Inquiry

### 1 Reasons for accepting a DCF job

Respondents were asked to rank 8 items in order of their importance in their decision to take a job with DCF. As noted above, for Workers, salary and benefits were extremely important to their decision-making, while for Managers, the fit between their own interests and the mission of the agency, as well as the importance of the work to society, were primary considerations. Supervisors were somewhere in between. This suggests that the salaries for beginning line staff

are instrumental in attracting new employees to the agency, but, over time, the nature of the work and its fit with their personal values is what induces staff members to stay.

It is important to keep in mind that for many respondents, the ranking of reasons for accepting a job with DCF is retrospective, in some cases by many years. Retrospective reporting is always influenced by events that have occurred since, so that the reporting of reasons for taking a job with DCF may be heavily influenced by the respondent's experiences in the agency since first employment. Employees who stay with an agency over time may become increasingly influenced by the organizational culture, whether or not it originally fit their own values and beliefs. Alternatively, as suggested above, the work of DCF is so challenging that those who are motivated primarily by salary and benefits in taking a job with the organization may not have the commitment needed to weather the personal and professional challenges of the work over time. It would be informative to have beginning workers rank their reasons for accepting a DCF job and follow this cohort over time to see if the different reasons are correlated with retention in any way.

## 2. Respondent's feelings about his or her job

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with 7 statements about their job. In general, responses to these questions paralleled the responses on the JSS, but they do provide an additional window into staff experience with employment. For example, 78.8 percent of staff agreed with the statement "I work under pressure most of the time". At the same time, 78.6 percent of the staff disagreed with the statement that they have a sense of hopelessness most of the time, and 86.8 percent feel that they make a difference in the lives of the families they work with. This appears to reflect the dynamic noted above, that staff on the whole are satisfied with the nature of their work but do experience stressors, articulated more specifically in responses to the JSS, that cause a great deal of dissatisfaction for them in their work.

Despite this, the overwhelming majority express feelings of efficacy, in that 88.4 percent believe that they are successful at helping families and children, and 97 percent agreed with the statement that they have the skills to do what is expected of them. Interpretation of the latter responses needs to be qualified, however, by consideration of the effects of social desirability, i.e. the desire on the part of respondents to present themselves in a good light in response to survey questions.

## 3. Perception about the agency's responsiveness to employees

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with 7 statements about the manner in which the agency responds to employees. Here, the findings appear to reflect the concerns with promotion opportunities and professional development discussed above. For example, only 53.5 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the agency makes available opportunities to change job duties; however, 69.8 percent agreed that the agency offered relevant training and professional development opportunities.

Difficulties with rules and regulations and paperwork, expressed above in the Operating Conditions subscale, appear to be mirrored here in that only 42 percent of respondents agree with the statement that the agency allows them to control their job tasks. Another factor emerged here as well, which is the staff perception of the availability of resources for them in their job. Only 39.9 percent of respondents agreed with the statement "The agency provides me with enough resources to do my job well".

#### 4. Areas of difficulty on the job

Staff were asked to rate 18 statements in regard to areas of difficulty. The response categories were “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Seldom”, or “Never”. Here, too, many of the responses reflected the concerns that emerged on the JSS, but also provide some additional insight into difficulties that may impact job satisfaction. Three issues in particular stand out: 1) personal safety concerns, 2) difficulty negotiating the DCF system and 3) the lack of client resources. The following table provides feedback regarding the percentage of staff who “Often” or “Sometimes” felt that these issues were a concern.

**EMPLOYMENT ISSUES:**  
**Percentage of staff who say that “Often” or “Sometimes” this is an issue**

<b>Employment issue</b>	<b>All staff</b>	<b>Managers</b>	<b>Supervisors</b>	<b>Social workers</b>	<b>Social work-trainees</b>
<b>Personal safety</b>	66.0%	37.7%	67.3%	69.3%	52.2%
<b>Difficulty negotiating DCF</b>	69.4%	62.2%	70.7%	71.6%	61.1%
<b>Lack of client resources</b>	69.9%	70.4%	80.2%	75.8%	67.1%

The finding about personal safety and lack of client resources are new issues, not tapped by the standardized JSS. However, the concern with negotiating the DCF system resonates with the findings reflected on the Communication subscale of the JSS, where the overall level of satisfaction was second lowest of all the subscales in the Job Satisfaction Survey.

#### Implications for Training and Technical Assistance

Findings from the Job Satisfaction Survey further support and inform development of a training curriculum for supervisors and managers to address factors which contribute to attrition of line staff. Most importantly, training organized both by office, or a group of offices, and by job category is probably warranted. According to the survey results, *Supervision* is an area of considerable satisfaction for most employees. They both like their supervisors and believe that they are competent. Training initiatives developed and implemented with the resources of the federal grant, discussed below, can support this area of agency strength.

The mentoring program, designed to develop and strengthen agency leadership, this year has 25 active pairs of mentors and mentees, and each pair is in turn supported by a team leader. Verbal feedback and anecdotal findings to date support a high level of satisfaction with this program. An on-going evaluation is underway and will be completed by the end of the program in November, 2005. Results of the evaluation will be used to refine program goals and procedures, as needed. Following the cohort of mentees from this and subsequent years may prove a fruitful yield in terms of the impact on career development. Plans are underway for the continuation of this program, tentatively scheduled to begin in January, 2006.

A second training initiative has been the development of a Transfer of Learning curriculum for managers whose supervisory staff is participating in the American Humane Society (AHA) Supervisory Training. The purpose of this program is to support supervisors by engaging their manager more specifically with the goals and activities of the AHA training as they (the supervisors) go through the training. Again, preliminary analysis suggests some areas for revision, but overall satisfaction with the initiative. The evaluation of this program will be completed by October, 2005. Currently, it is expected that the resources of the federal grant will be used to continue this effort for another year, with a plan for a transfer of training to the DCF Training Academy by the following year.

The area of *Promotion*, including criteria for promotion, is an area of some dissatisfaction, although on the whole when compared to the national norms, DCF employees are more satisfied with their chances of promotion. This may be an area for which DCF will want to consider strategies that can enhance promotional opportunities.

It is thought that this area may be related, by extension, to professional development. The two initiatives described above begin to provide new and exciting avenues for professional renewal and DCF may want to consider the development of additional programs and strategies to support staff in activities aimed at individual professionalization. Since the nature of the work is a source of job satisfaction for DCF employees, activities which enhance the individual's sense that the job they are doing is meaningful and important may be very well received by staff.

By contrast, *Contingent Rewards and Communication* are two areas of widespread dissatisfaction among DCF staff. Training in the development of quality leadership teams, as described in the grant proposal, may assist in development of clear channels of communication, as well as engage all levels of staff in agency decision-making and policy formation which would increase opportunities for contingent rewards. Teamwork training can also increase peer support, reduce competition, and increase the effectiveness of work units which may help to address concerns expressed on the Co-Worker subscale.

The greatest level of dissatisfaction expressed by DCF staff was with Operating Conditions in the agency. Training at the supervisory and management levels to promote a sense of belonging to a community with a shared mission and goals can begin to address aspects of this dissatisfaction. Clear job descriptions and performance standards can reduce role ambiguity, enhance feelings of role and task mastery, and increase the congruence between job tasks, organizational culture and newly-recruited or promoted staff.

Initiatives already underway can help address these areas of dissatisfaction (contingent rewards, communication and operating condition). These initiatives include the development of an exit survey (both on-line and by interview, if possible) for all staff leaving the agency. Results of these surveys may help shed light on areas of on-going dissatisfaction for staff and suggest processes to address this. Other projects are underway to strengthen the recruitment of supervisors within the agency. A set of standardized interview questions is being formalized to aid in this effort, and plans to do this for other job categories as well are under discussion.

The next step in developing a training outline is to conduct a series of focus groups to enhance and further develop the findings from the employee Job Satisfaction Survey reported here.

### Plan for Focus Groups

Based on the results of the analysis, it is suggested that focus groups be convened by a sample of offices to explore in more detail the findings reported above. Focus groups are a tool to provide more in-depth understanding about particular issues, in this case, issues identified in the survey as providing low job satisfaction. The goal is not to re-administer the survey in verbal form, but to probe for reasons staff may have answered particular survey questions the way they did.

Not every employee or every office needs to be part of a sample of focus groups in order obtain reliability. The methodology of focus groups, in fact, presumes that if one samples effectively, major concerns or areas of interest will emerge. Even with the seven offices proposed for the focus group study, it is anticipated that many themes will be repeated across offices and the major issues will emerge relatively soon.

It is assumed that the concerns identified in the survey are not the only place that they have surfaced. Therefore, staff need not have completed the survey in order to participate in the focus groups.

Feedback from DCS management staff to a preliminary plan leads us to propose that the sample of offices for the focus group include Central Office and six other offices. We believe that a focus group with Central Office staff is critical because the emphasis on building management capacity has been identified as a focal point for the federal grant activities. Understanding management concerns is central to shaping training or technical assistance activities to sustain a more satisfying work environment.

The six other offices were selected for focus groups based on a combination of factors: whether they fell above or below the mean on the JSS in addition and the rate of social work and social work trainee staff turnover at the end of 2004. Based on these criteria, the following offices are proposed: **Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Norwich, Waterbury and Willimantic**. Four are relatively large offices, four are below the mean on the job satisfaction scale, one had the lowest rate of turnover, and one the highest.

Three focus groups are proposed for each office: one for managers, one for supervisors, and one for caseworkers. Staff will be asked to sign consent forms that allow findings to be reported by office (managers, supervisors and worker responses aggregated) or by job category (managers across offices aggregated, supervisors by offices aggregated and workers by offices aggregated) for the group of offices: above and below the mean.

The focus groups will be undertaken by Fordham staff and consultants. It is anticipated that all 21 focus groups (3 groups at seven different locations) can be completed before the end of July if we start now. The results of these focus groups will help in two ways: One, it will provide DCF with more specific information that may be useful in shaping management strategies and two, it will help target areas for training and/or technical assistance interventions.

### Summary

Results of the survey, including the findings from two standardized scales inserted in the survey as well as findings from additional items of interest, suggest broad areas of satisfaction (Pay, benefits, nature of the work), conflicted feelings about satisfaction with co-workers (staff like and enjoy co-workers but a significant proportion feel that the incompetence of co-workers makes their job harder) and broad areas of dissatisfaction, with communication within the agency and operating conditions causing the most frustration.

Levels of satisfaction vary significantly by office location and job category. Large offices serving the most challenged children and families appear to suffer the lowest job satisfaction, and in important ways there are varying levels of satisfaction depending on whether one is a manager, supervisor or worker, regardless of office..

Focus groups will help elaborate these themes, and bring specificity to areas of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Results of this process will be used to further inform curriculum development, training, technical assistance and other management strategies.

APPENDIX A

Job Satisfaction Survey

## APPENDIX B

### Focus Group Questions (revised)

The Department of Children and Families of Connecticut  
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1) Supervision

Based upon the Job Satisfaction Survey administered this past year at an agency, staff are generally satisfied with the supervision they receive.

- Could you tell us a little more about what you like about the supervision you have received? What is about the relationship between you and your supervisor that has worked well? Are there areas that are problematic?
- Do you feel that your supervisor is competent? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that your supervisor shows interest in the feelings of subordinates, and treats them fairly?
- What additional qualities in a supervisor do you feel are important?

2) Communication

The overall level of satisfaction expressed in the communications subscale was second lowest of all the subscales,.

- What are some of the barriers in DCF to successful communication?
- In what way is it difficult for you to negotiate the DCF system? How does this impact on clients?
- How are the goals of the agency made clear, or not made clear?
- Are work assignments always fully explained?
- What do you feel needs to be done in order to improve the level of communication within the agency? Within your area office?

3) Co-Worker Relations

While staff at the agency generally like and enjoy the people they work with, many felt that there is too much bickering and fighting at work.

- What do you think that is about?

Many others said that they find they have to work harder at their job because of the incompetence of people they work with?

- What do you think that is about?

What would you suggest could be done to create a more collegial atmosphere?

4) Feeling appreciated

Based upon the survey there appeared to be some overall dissatisfaction with how staff is appreciated within the agency.

- Do you feel that your work is appreciated? Why or why not?
- How is recognition and appreciation given within the agency for efforts on a job well done? Do you receive recognition when you do a good job?
- What would you suggest be done to improve the area of appreciation and recognition for staff who do a good job?

#### 5) Promotion and Professional Development

- Do you feel that you have chances for promotion?
- Are criteria for promotion made clear?
- On a related topic, do you feel that you have sufficient opportunity for professional development? If yes, what are these?
- If not, what would you like to see? (More opportunity within the agency- more opportunity for training, education outside the agency)

#### 6) Personal Safety

Many staff report concerns about their personal safety, or the safety of staff they supervised. .

- What specifically are the issues and concerns around the personal safety of staff?
- What has been done to address these issues? What would you suggest be done to enhance personal safety?

#### 7) Availability of Client Resources

Lack of client resources was an area of great dissatisfaction.

- What are the client services you feel are deficient ?
- Are there specific service needs that are greater than others (substance abuse, domestic violence, me treatment)?
- Is the quality of services, or the match for client problems, a problem for you?
- How well do you (or your staff) know the staff at agencies to which you need to refer clients?

#### 8). Operating Conditions

A majority of respondents reported being hampered in their work by workload demands, paperwork, and rules and regulations.

- What is the one thing that makes your job the hardest?
- What is the one thing that if changed, would make your job easier?
- Do you think that the activities associated with the exit plan have made this aspect of your job easier? Harder? How?