THE CONNECTIONS WEEKLY
February 15 - 22, 2008

Remember our Presidents

Build 18.9.6 Is On the Horizon…

And we are prepping for it in Communications by compiling all of the modifications that will be included in the Build into one document. We are doing things a bit differently regarding the prep document, or as you know it, the Build Release Notes, and we will be sending them your way by the end of next week!

As you are aware through your RIST and RUG group meetings, this Build will be implemented on Friday, March 7, 2008, and will include modifications to the CONNECTIONS application.   The focus of this Build is on most of the remaining, short term FIT recommendations, additional user requests and system support for mission critical tasks and legislation.

The following piece highlights a few specific application modifications, fixes and enhancements.

Responses to Functional Improvement Team Requests (short term items not provided in previous Builds)

- A comment box will be added to the Life Skills Assessment where the user can document information with regard to these assessments.
- Adding a grammar check to narrative areas and adding an improved spell check to both narrative areas and comment boxes, to provide more 'WORD-like' functionality in these areas.
- The Service Plan area of the FASP and FASP output will now include Outcome and Activity blocks that were discontinued in the last FASP so that workers have a more complete picture of the Service Plan and its related history.

User Requests

- Voluntary Agency workers will now be informed that there are reports prior to 1/1/2006 (date of ADM) – these reports will be listed on the CPRS and FSS Case Summary tabs providing a more complete view of the CPS history.
- A new Progress Note type of "Other Casework Activity" has been created that will allow the field to select purposes of "Cross Reference" "Case Closing" and "Transfer". The "Cross Reference" purpose will allow the caseworker to summarize the cross reference history. Voluntary Agency workers within the

CPRS Progress Notes module will not be able to search or view the Progress Note type of "Other Casework Activity" with a purpose of "Cross Reference." This purpose can be entered prior to a purpose of 24 Hour Contact.

- Two additional Progress Note types "Notice" and "Approval" will be created for those districts using higher level edits.
- More appropriate Day Care/Foster Care Investigation closure reasons will be added in accordance with programmatic need.
- FAD workers will now be informed when a CPS report involving a foster parent is determined, with the determination.
- The Permanency Hearing Petitioner information will now be enterable and included on the outputs.
- The To-Do list displayed to the user will now include all To-Do's coming due within the next 30 days. This view assists the worker in managing the approval of the FASPs coming due.

New Legislation\Program Initiatives\Support of Federal Requirements

- Support for the 2007 legislation regarding FBI Fingerprinting and out-of-state child abuse and maltreatment checks will be implemented in the Foster/Adoptive Home Record summary.
- Bridges to Health (B2H) - B2H will provide community based services to children who are in the care and custody of a Local Social Services District (LDSS) or OCFS, who have significant mental health, developmental disabilities or health care needs, and who require an institutional level of care.
- AFCARS - capturing the necessary, remaining elements for AFCARS compliance in order to improve New York State's submission. The design builds on some existing windows in order to complement the existing workflow and minimize worker impact and creates one new adoption related window.

Bug Fixes

Numerous (50-60) bug fixes in areas such as performance, system errors and access to data are also included in the Build.

Don't forget to look for the Build 18.9.6 Release Notes at the end of next week!

Preview Will Be Available for Build 18.9.6…

For the field, Preview for the Build will be available on Monday, March 4th. We encourage you to take a look at the new functionality that will be implemented when the Build is rolled out on March 7th!

Bits of Training Info…

A NEW CBT - Completing Supervisory Tasks with CONNECTIONS

In our continued effort to be responsive to the requests from the field related to training needs, the CONNECTIONS Training Project of the Professional Development Program (PDP) has drafted a new CBT titled: Completing Supervisory Tasks with CONNECTIONS. This course provides supervisors from both districts and voluntary agencies with an overview of specific CONNECTIONS functionality that can be used to

complete supervisory tasks. Topics in this course include an overview of supervisory responsibilities; monitoring casework activities using CONNECTION; using and generating reports; merging and splitting cases; reviewing work in CONNECTIONS and approving work in CONNECTIONS.

Copies of the CBT will be shipped to Staff Development Coordinators from each district and agency, as well as to Implementation staff from the OCFS Regional Offices. The memo announcing this CBT was forwarded to agency Staff Development Coordinators earlier today and is also posted to the CONNECTIONS website on the Training page.

More NEW CBTs Coming…

Be on the watch for 2 new CBTs…one on the topic of Data Maintenance and the other about the FASP! These two topics were identified as tricky ones by the field and PDP is in the process of developing these two new training tools. They should be available within the up-coming months! We'll keep you posted!

The Professional Development Program and The SUNY Training Strategies Group Recently Merged…

Recently, the Professional Development Program of Rockefeller College University at Albany (PDP) assumed responsibility for SUNY's Training Strategies and Technical Advisory Groups (SUNY TSG), which had formerly been affiliated with SUNY Central Administration. Most of you are familiar with SUNY TSG as the provider of CONNECTIONS training. This change should not affect the day to day project management or its commitment to the delivery of quality training and service to the child welfare community.

PDP has been a leader in continuing professional education for 32 years and maintains a rich and diverse portfolio of traditional and non-traditional education and training programs which includes the application of state-of-the-art instructional technologies. Many of you may be familiar with the range of child welfare training that PDP has provided over the years. The incorporation of TSG into PDP has enhanced and extended the programs and services available through PDP. With its staff of committed professionals having grown to approximately 250, PDP continues to bring the resources of the university to government agencies and affiliated organizations to develop their workforce goals through education, training, research, and evaluation.

We would just like to remind you that all remains the same when you want to register for training – you would still complete the registration process through STARS. In addition, the contact information that you have had for the folks at the former TSG also remains the same. As you know, to sign up for trainings through STARS you would go directly to the STARS website at: http://stars.bsc-cdhs.org/. We would just note that if you have any issues registering for training through STARS you can contact the STARS Help Desk at 1.800.413.3210.

A NEW Administrative Directive (ADM) - 08-OCFS-ADM-01…
Changes Associated with CONNECTIONS Build 18.9 Health, Education and Permanency Hearing Report Modules

As you are aware, in March 2007, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) implemented Build 18.9 in CONNECTIONS. Included in the Build were discrete modules that supported the documentation of currently required health and education information for children served through the child welfare system; the incorporation of the Permanency Hearing Report (PHR), the Notice of Permanency Hearing and the Statement to the Court of the Permanency Hearing Report and Notice Sent; as well as additional functional improvements that provide ease of use for workers and aid in system responsiveness.

At the time of the implementation of Build 18.9 in OCFS provided local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) with the option to implement an incremental approach to full compliance with the documentation requirements of health and education in CONNECTIONS. Please note that this ADM serves as official notification of what health and education data must now be included in CONNECTIONS for all children in foster care, including children placed in certified or approved foster homes, and all children in the custody of LDSS or OCFS placed in congregate care settings in Voluntary Authorized Foster Care Agencies (VA). In addition, this ADM identifies significant changes and enhancements in CONNECTIONS Build 18.9 designed to capture essential data elements required to support New York State compliance with the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS).
The link to access the Administrative Directive (ADM), issued on February 13th, is: http://ocfs.state.nyenet/policies/external/.

Just a Reminder About the Records Retention Run...
(Please note that this piece is pertinent to local districts only.)
Just reminding you that the next Records Retention Purge Program is scheduled to begin **Tuesday evening, February 19th**. This program will purge cases/stages listed in the **November 2007** "To Be Expunged" reports. Please note that if you have not already reviewed and made the necessary demographic changes, via Local Data Maintenance, to the cases/stages identified in the November 2007 "To Be Expunged" report you have until close of business on *Monday, February 18th* to do so.

A General Information Systems Message – GIS 08 - #001; Dated February 13, 2008...
WMS Client Identification Number (CIN) Consolidation Process
(Please note that this piece is pertinent to local districts only.)
A new GIS message was communicated on Thursday, February 13th. The purpose of the GIS is to inform Local Districts of an enhancement to the WMS Client Identification Number (CIN) Consolidation process that was migrated to WMS Production on 10/22/07. This process allows a faster and more direct resolution with less processing steps to follow, by giving the district an on-line capability to remedy most multiple CIN occurrences. It also requires that the district assign a new security function to the staff designated to carry out the on-line CIN Consolidation task.

The OTDA-IT Customer Response Center (formerly known as the WMS Help Desk), currently has a mailbox set up to receive all WMS CIN Consolidation forms via e-mail to the mailbox address of: OTDA.SM.WMSCIN. Upstate Local Districts will now be able to

complete the WMS CIN Consolidation process directly on-line when consolidating multiple CIN situations within their district, and will only need to use the 'old' process of e-mailing multiple CINs to OTDA when they involve multiple district involvement.

For this new on-line process, a new security function of 0188 – CIN Consolidation – has been made available in NYSeWebstar under the TTSS Menu, for assignment to staff performing the new on-line CIN Consolidation. Please work with your local district TTSS Administrator to identify appropriate staff for this online CIN Consolidation security function. Staff can access the data entry screen for CIN Consolidation via the WMS Menu, screen WMSMNU, selection F7 – NS Data Entry & Disposition (WCINC1) CIN Consolidation.

Local Districts are reminded that an adopted child's 'new' CIN should never be consolidated with their 'original' CIN.

Need More Info
For more information regarding the WMS CIN Consolidation process, please visit the OTDA-IT website at: http://otda.state.nyenet/it/notices.asp

For questions regarding the WMS CIN Consolidation process, please contact the OTDA-IT Customer Response Center at 1-800-342-3010 or the OCFS-IT Customer Support at 1-800-342-3727.

As you are aware, all GIS messages are available in public folders by following the path identified below.
*All Public Folders/dfa.state.ny.us/OCFS/TSU/ ***Services systems Reference Documents/ GIS (system change notices)*

Need Help With CONNECTIONS – The Folks Who Man the CONNECTIONS APP_HELP Mailbox Are Available…
(Please note that this piece was included in the Weekly dated 2/8/08.)
In the beginning of June '07 we announced the "birth" of the Application Help Mailbox or the "APP HELP" mailbox, as it is affectionately known! Until recently, this service was primarily available for local district staff to use - *but now we invite voluntary agency staff to use this service as well!*

Just a Bit of APP HELP Mailbox History
This service became available for local districts in June 2007 - at that time, the mailbox was introduced as a new service for local district '*Resource Users'* (and other key individuals at the local district) who were experiencing issues with the CONNECTIONS application, be they system issues or just questions about how to perform a task within the application. Since June the "mailbox" has taken on a few other roles as well, and has helped many local district CONNECTIONS system users immediately solve issues that they were experiencing within the application. Through the mailbox, staff contact the (OCFS/IT) CONNECTIONS User Support/Triage unit **directly.**

How Do I Contact the Mailbox?

And now, voluntary agencies can also avail themselves of this type of application help! Staff from both agencies and districts can access the mailbox by filling in the form titled: *CONNECTIONS Application Help Request* (posted to the CONNECTIONS intranet on the CONNECTIONS Forms page) and emailing the completed form to the following address: ocfs.sm.conn_app@ocfs.state.ny.us*.*

A few points about the address: please note that there is one underscore in the address, and the underscore has to be typed into the address in order for the email to be directed to the correct mailbox, and… if you are emailing 'out of our network' we ask that you tack on the following piece to the address: @dfa.state.ny.us or, @nysemail.state.ny.us.

We want to take this time to THANK YOU for sharing the success of this resource with us! Between your use and our ability to answer your issues, for the month of January we successfully answered 99% of the issues that we partnered with you to solve! So we encourage those of you who have not yet taken advantage of this tool, to contact us, and we applaud those of you who have contacted us and look forward to working with you to resolve any future issues!

A Few "Words of Note"

To best provide prompt service it is critical that you limit the number of specified users who will have permission to access the mailbox. The staff who are designated by your agency to access this mailbox should be Resource Users, or other individuals who provide on-going assistance to staff in completing work in the CONNECTIONS application.

Please note that questions related to your agency's equipment, access to CONNECTIONS, connectivity issues, and any Citrix or Webstar problems should continue to be referred to the OFT NYS Enterprise Help Desk.

So there you have it! Please spread the word…

Data Warehouse News You Can Use…
NEW Casework Contact "Summary" Reports
(Please note that this piece was included in the Weekly dated 2/8/08.)
The OCFS Data Warehouse Team is pleased to announce new Casework Contact "Summary" reports. There is a "Summary" report for tracked child contacts and a "Summary" report for biological parent contacts. Each contains two sections – one focusing on the overall number of individuals (either tracked children or biological parents) contacted and the other focusing on the overall number of contacts attempted or made. Please be patient; these reports may take several minutes to run. Documentation for these reports is available at http://ocfs.state.nyenet/connect/datawarehouse/dwreports.asp.

Data Warehouse users can access the Casework Contact "Summary" reports by following these steps:

1. From **Cognos 8**, click on the **OCFS Data Warehouse** tab, if it is not already open. [For help accessing Cognos 8 or the OCFS Data Warehouse tab, view the Quick Reference Guide at http://ocfs.state.nyenet/connect/datawarehouse/dwstep.asp.]
2. Click on **Casework Contact Reports**
3. Click on the link for the folder that displays. [Contract agency staff will see a "Voluntary Agencies" folder, LDSS staff will see a "Local Districts and Regional Offices" folder, and State staff will see both folders.]
4. Click on the link for the "Summary" report that you want to run:
   Local Districts
   - Case Manager: Tracked Child Contacts Summary
   - Case Manager: Biological Parent Contacts Summary
   Contract Agencies
   - Tracked Child Contacts Summary (VA)
   - Biological Parent Contacts Summary (VA)
5. Complete the report prompts to run the report for any completed month.

Requests for access and other correspondence regarding the OCFS Data Warehouse should be directed to data.warehouse@ocfs.state.ny.us.

New Postings to the CONNECTIONS Intranet…

The following document(s) were recently posted to the CONNECTIONS intranet website:
- *The CONNECTIONS Weekly for the week of January 25, 2008*
- *The Announcement of the NEW CBT* **-** *Completing Supervisory Tasks with CONNECTIONS*

Weekly System Maintenance…

Due to regularly scheduled system maintenance, the CONNECTIONS application will not be available on…
- *Wednesday, 2/20/2008* from 5:00 AM – 7:00 AM
- *Friday, 2/22/08* from 5:00 AM – 7:00 AM
- *Wednesday 2/27/08* from 5:00 AM – 7:00 AM