



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • MSC 2407 • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2407
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Dempsey Benton, Secretary

Sherry Bradsher, Director
(919) 733-3055

June 16, 2008

**Dear County Director of Social Services of
Alamance, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cumberland, Forsyth, Granville, Harnett, Hoke,
Jackson, Johnston, Mecklenburg, Moore, Nash, Pasquotank, Person, Robeson,
Sampson, Scotland, Swain, Wake, Washington, Wayne, and Wilson**

ATTENTION: Child Welfare Program Administrators and Supervisors

**SUBJECT: Requested Sample Cases for the Structured Decision Making Validation
and Modification**

The intent of having a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process for North Carolina county departments of social services is to promote consistency throughout the state by providing simple, objective, and reliable tools that workers use to assist them with making a CPS finding, assessing any future risk of child maltreatment, establishing family service agreements, and making recommendations to the court. The primary goal of using the SDM assessment tools is to reduce the subsequent maltreatment of children by targeting appropriate service interventions geared toward the risk level of individual families.

The Division and county departments of social services specifically implemented the Safety Assessment, Family Risk Assessment of Abuse and Neglect, Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs, Case Decision Summary/Initial Case Plan, Family Risk Reassessment of Abuse and Neglect, and the Family Reunification Assessment statewide in 2002. North Carolina's current risk assessments were validated by the Children's Research Center (CRC) for the state of Michigan in 1994. The Division and CRC recommended that a risk validation study be conducted on North Carolina's local client population to ensure that the risk assessments perform well when estimating families' risk of repeat maltreatment. A local validation effort also permits NC to examine how the risk assessments classify their families. This information enables CRC staff to make modifications that improve the validity of North Carolina's risk assessments.

While the risk assessments are the primary focus of the validation research effort, an analysis will be conducted that examines worker completion of other SDM assessments and forms, including the Safety Assessment, Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs, Reunification Assessment, Case Decision Summary and Family Services Agreements. The analysis will examine how often workers complete assessments and whether assessments are completed according to policy. The analysis will also profile the sample of families assessed and/or served by counties based on SDM assessment findings. This includes, for example, the most common safety and risk factors, the risk

level distribution of families, the most prevalent family strengths and needs, and reassessment findings for families. The CRC may recommend additional revisions to the forms and or policy.

To ensure the high quality of these research efforts, the Division has established an advisory group to assist with the study design and implementation. The advisory group established is the supervisory group already in place that are developing a strategic plan to improve the quality of child welfare practice in NC. The tasks of the advisory group will include:

- 1) Identifying critical issues in the assessment and case management process to be considered during study design;
- 2) Approving all aspects of the research design;
- 3) Helping coordinate field implementation of the study efforts; and
- 4) Reviewing findings from all aspects of the study.

The CRC has identified specific cases with the date of CPS referral made between March 1 and September 30, 2006. These identified cases are spread out across several counties. All of the counties participating within the advisory group do have a requested sample. Additional counties were included to ensure there was a sufficient representation of race/ethnicity as well as geographical variance. Attached is a memorandum and county specific Excel spreadsheet written by the CRC that outlines the cases/families that are to be included in the sample as well as a request to mail copies of the SDM forms for each of those cases.

These SDM forms can be sent by each county all at once or over a few mailings if it helps to break up the copying. **The CRC needs all of the copies from the counties by July 31, 2008 in order to stay on target to complete the study within the contract period.** The CRC has included a Federal Express account number to bill the deliveries to.

The CRC has included contact information in the memorandum for any specific questions addressed to them. If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Rick Zechman (eric.zechman@ncmail.net) with the Family Support and Child Welfare Team (919) 733-9467.

Sincerely,



Charisse S. Johnson, Chief
Family Support and Child Welfare Section

Attachments:

[Children's Research Center Memorandum](#)
County Family Samples Excel Spreadsheet

cc: Sherry S. Bradsher
Sarah Barham
Local Business Liaisons Managers
Jo Ann Lamm
Children' Services Program Representatives
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Work First Representatives
Hank Bowers

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