

Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration

Dear Children's Administration Colleagues:

In October 2011, you were invited to take the 2011 DSHS Employee Survey and were assured that *Your Response Matters*.

I want to reaffirm the message that your response matters. Of our 2,369 member workforce, 1,838 Children's Administration employees responded to the employee survey representing a 78% response rate, a very high response rate for an administration of our size. The majority of you also took time to write detailed comments. From those comments and the survey data, certain themes emerged.

This document is the 2012 Employee Survey Action Plan in response to the 2011 survey. It is no surprise that employee satisfaction has declined across DSHS and state government given the economic realities of our time. This plan addresses the findings of those key themes and identifies meaningful strategies which have minimal fiscal impact, but affect change that will improve quality of work life.

We welcome your comments and recommendations for continued improvement.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the survey and for the work you do every day on behalf of children and families.

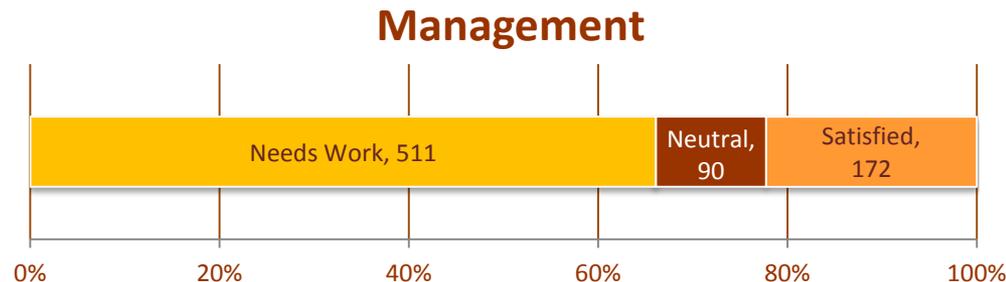


~ Denise Revels Robinson,
Children's Administration, Assistant Secretary

The purpose of the CA employee Action plan is to improve work life for those improving quality of life for children and families.



Focus Issue: 1. Disconnect Between Leadership and Field



Of the 1,838 staff who responded to the survey, 773 specifically commented on management. Those comments included 511 who stated management needs work, 172 who stated they were satisfied and 90 mixed or neutral.

Summary of the Issue:

Survey statistics show that overall, CA staff feel that “Management” needs work. While this theme became more prevalent across all of DSHS in the most recent employee survey, the Children’s Administration shows a greater decline in satisfaction regarding management. Specifically staff would like management to have a greater understanding of the nature and scope of their work, to value their work, and cultivate a work environment that is affirming, supportive, and demonstrates intolerance for unfair hiring practices, inequity, intimidation or fear-based management. In addition, staff are concerned about too many big changes in close succession, allowing for no real adjustment to one change before another one rolls out.

What we’re already doing

- 1) **Monthly videoconferences are held to share program updates and to encourage staff to speak up about concerns without fear of repercussions.**
- 2) **Multiple monthly program-specific meetings occur to facilitate communications between headquarters and field staff regarding policy issues and practice strategies.**

Focus Issue: 1. Disconnect Between Leadership and Field: New Commitment

Our plan for the coming year:

- a) **Develop a timeline of major initiatives implemented since 2007 to demonstrate the volume and complexity of major changes impacting the workforce in a relatively short timespan, the goals of this effort are to:**
 - i. **Acknowledge the changes that staff have experienced.**
 - ii. **Make leadership and external partners aware of the impact on successful and sustainable implementation of major initiatives when there is no time for adaptation.**
 - iii. **Use as a roadmap for new State, Department, and Administrative leadership.**
- b) **Utilize existing Reasonable Efforts Symposia, interdisciplinary training programs sponsored by Administrative Office of the Courts and Catalyst for Kids, held annually in each region throughout Washington state. Staff from Headquarters may use these symposia to take a "road show" to various parts of the state, allowing for employees to connect with headquarters personnel face-to-face toward cultivating relationships and exchanging critical information about new initiatives and practice strategies.**

"The work force at large is experiencing a great deal of change fatigue. We as an agency must perform at a very high standard however often are not given the time needed to learn and adjust to a major change in practice before several more changes come down the pike. This creates learning curve and implementation issues in addition to a feeling of constant inadequacies among a high performing work force because there is simply too much to learn and change all at once."

Focus Issue: 1. Disconnect Between Leadership and Field New Commitment Continued

Our plan for the coming year:

- c) **Revise structure and process for policy roll-outs to allow greater staff understanding of and offer input into policy changes.**
- d) **Explore opportunities to support supervisors to develop knowledge, skills and abilities through the *THE WASHINGTON STATE ALLIANCE FOR CHILD WELFARE EXCELLENCE*. This new alliance, codified through a Memorandum of Understanding between Eastern Washington University, DSHS and the University of Washington.**
 - **The primary goal of the Alliance is to enhance the delivery of education, training, and professional development opportunities for social work staff, supervisors, administrators, and managers at Children Administration, and for the foster, adoptive, and relative caregivers and private community agency partners.**
 - **The focus is on these target groups as the customers, and utilizes a university-based service alliance that works through partnerships to strengthen knowledge and skills. The alliance of both universities and the Children's Administration working collaboratively will result in a highly skilled workforce with the competencies needed to serve Washington's children and families.**
- e) **Improve consistency across regions regarding fair and objective recruitment and hiring strategies according to laws and policies.**
- f) **Provide in-service for all hiring authorities about recruitment and hiring guidelines.**

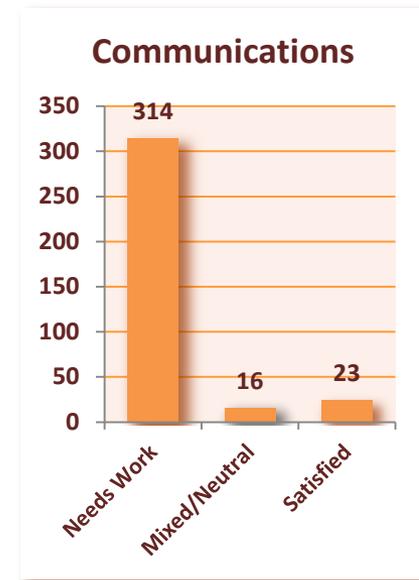
Focus Issue: 2. Communication

Summary of the Issue

While employees acknowledge that the Administration has engaged in increased communication, the communication that field staff receives may not be timely or adequate.

What we're already doing

- a) Holding statewide Communications Committee meetings monthly with representatives from every region to help develop communications strategies.
- b) Holding monthly video conferences with the Assistant Secretary and/or designees to inform staff about major changes and address any questions or concerns.
- c) Disseminating all-staff messages following high profile incidents involving child welfare involved children or families.
- d) Distributing regular messages from the Assistant Secretary about issues of importance to staff.
- e) Designated CAcommunications@dshs.wa.gov, e-mail box to which staff may send recommendations for communications improvements.



Of the 1,838 staff who responded to the survey, 353 specifically commented on communications. Those comments included 314 (89%) who stated communications needs work, 23 (6.5%) who stated they were satisfied and 16 (4.5%) mixed or neutral.

Focus Issue: 2. Communication: New Commitment

Our plan for the coming year:

- a) **Make every effort to share information about big changes with greater advanced notice, even if all of the details are not available.**
- b) **Send joint message from the Assistant Secretary and a labor advocate from the Washington Federation of State employees following monthly Union Management Communication Meetings to share initiatives and action items toward improving the working environment for Children's Administration employees.**
- c) **Ensure that field personnel are involved in big decisions affecting practice and communicate with the field who the involved staff were and the regions/offices they represent. This addresses both communications and recognition.**
- d) **Utilize the Good News section of the intranet not only for success stories about children and families but also as a place for staff recognition.**
- e) **Explore effective communications channels for disseminating quick information versus channels that are more successful in changing practice. Answers the question, "when does information need to be communicated in person and when will e-mail suffice?"**

Focus Issue: 2. Communication: New Commitment

Our plan for the coming year:

- f) Continue to explore the use of new media as viable and cost effective communications channels.
- g) Evaluate the monthly video-conferences to determine if the content, frequency, and format may be revised to better meet staff needs.
- h) Develop a new process for convening regional and statewide all-staff meetings within.

"...A lot more communication from upper management. We never have all-staffs and with all the turmoil' going on with budget etc. having all-staffs could help ease a lot of minds, instead the lack of communication creates speculations and has a negative effect on staff morale."

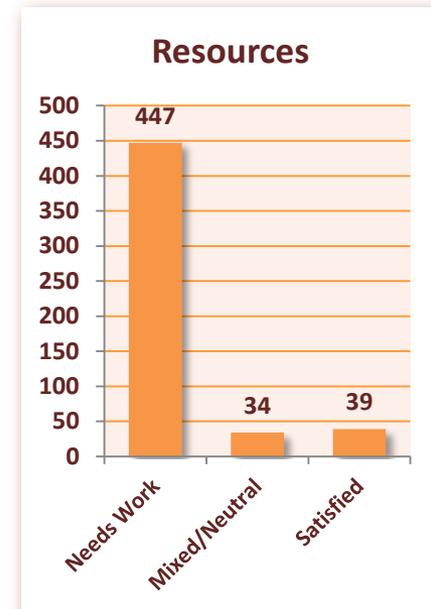
Focus Issue: 3. Resources

Summary of the Issue

Employees feel strongly that in addition to having to perform stellar work with fewer staff, they often feel they lack the basic tools and resources necessary to complete their jobs. Specifically lack of access to agency vehicles and widespread breakdown of computers, copiers, and faxes is hindering work.

What we're already doing

- a) Children's Administration Technology Services is in the process of replacing copiers. Between the end of 2011 and the first three months of 2012, approvals for replacement copiers was administered. The machines have been ordered and delivery and networking is in process.
- b) Holding monthly video conferences with the Assistant Secretary and/or her designees to inform staff about major changes and address any questions or concerns.
- c) Inventorying and replacing fax machines.
- d) Utilize new technologies to reduce travel requirements. At present 16 field offices have the ability to Skype (*The service allows users to communicate with peers by voice, video, and instant messaging over the Internet*) for child visitation and new offices continue to come online.



Of the 1,838 staff who responded to the survey, 520 specifically commented on resources. Those comments included 447 (86%) who stated the issue of resources needs work, 39 (7.5%) who stated they were satisfied and 34 (6.5%) gave mixed or neutral responses.

Focus Issue: 3. Resources New Commitment

Our plan for the coming year

- a) Examine policies governing the use of state cars and mileage reimbursement to determine if more flexibility may be afforded for situations which warrant an employee keeping a vehicle overnight for the purposes of conducting agency business.
- b) Inventory existing vehicles and determine if new vehicle purchases are justifiable.
- c) Make laptops available to certain designated field staff who meet predetermined criteria for laptop eligibility.
- d) Inventory office equipment to see if other equipment failures need to be addressed.
- e) Identify processes through which staff communicate resource concerns and needs through their regional chains of command.
- f) Communicate to staff the message that while resources are limited, we will prioritize resources to support field personnel in keeping children safe and families stable. Management must be informed when there are resource, material, or equipment needs.

“One frustration is equipment that breaks down and is not fixed quickly or equipment that only works sporadically and is not going to be replaced. It's a constant complaint in our office.”

Focus Issue: 4. FamLink

Summary of the Issue

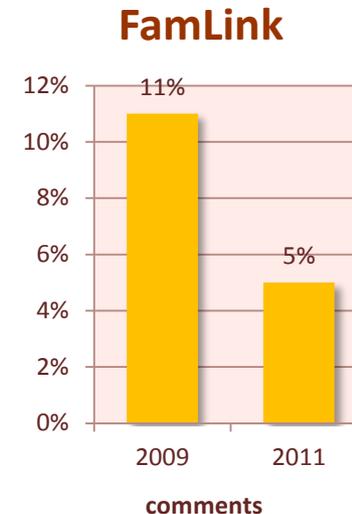
Staff continue to express concern over the capacity of FamLink to serve as an effective case management tool.

What we're already doing

- a) Through the Union Management Communication meetings, we have identified primary concerns about FamLink and have already begun to address the concerns that have caused the most difficulty to staff work.
 - Currently addressing ISSP supervisory checklist.

New Commitment

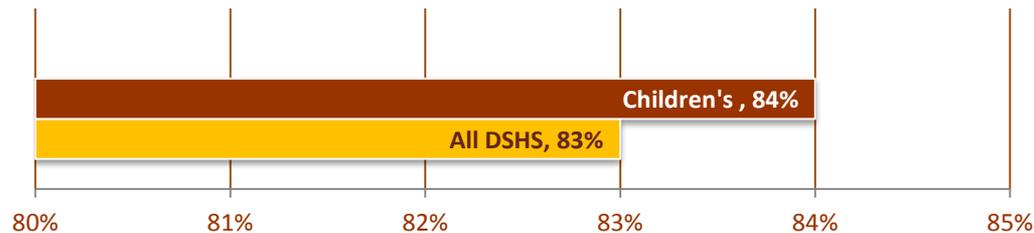
- a) Explore new ways to survey staff regarding the most pressing FamLink concerns and needs and prioritize them accordingly.



Of the 1,838 staff who responded to the survey, 72 specifically commented on FamLink. That is 5% of the responders compared to 11% of responders commenting on FamLink in 2009.

Focus Issue: 5. Immediate Supervisors/Supervisor's Support

My Supervisor Treats Me With Dignity and Respect



Of the 1,838 staff who responded to the survey, 84 percent of them, a total of 1,541 staff stated that their supervisor always or almost always or usually treats them with dignity and respect.

Summary of the Issue

Staff feel that their greatest support comes from their immediate supervisor. This perception is especially true among field personnel. Many work units have strong camaraderie, good work/life balance, and good productivity. It was suggested that we take this work unit success model and find ways to operationalize on an agency-wide level.

What we're already doing

- a) Many work units and supervisors have positive working relationships and high productivity.
- b) Offices find ways to recognize and reward staff.

Focus Issue: 5. Immediate Supervisors/Supervisor's Support: New commitment

Our plan for the coming year

- a) Develop one-page tip sheet for supervisors regarding free/cost-effective ways to acknowledge and appreciate staff.
- b) Clarify roles and expectations across the entire Administration. As regions have reorganized, chains of command, reporting structures, and some roles and responsibilities have become increasingly ambiguous. When changes are made to work units, ensure that employees understanding their reporting structures and clearly communicate any changes in responsibilities. Update Position Description Forms accordingly.
- c) Build on the successes of effective supervisors by sharing how they lead through difficult times with other supervisors.
- d) Empower, support, mentor, coach, skill build through the new Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence.
- e) Allow the Good News site to be a place where staff can acknowledge their supervisors for their good leadership.

"My current unit and supervisor are amazing and contribute to my overall satisfaction at work."

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CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEE SURVEY ACTION PLAN

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