

**County** Cumberland  
**Department of Social Services**

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**Project Title** Mini Training Academy – Employee and Leadership Information Sessions

**Category** Advancement in Staff and Leadership Development  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SUMMARY – WHAT DID YOU DO?**

Describe your program or project:

The Employee and Leadership Information Sessions is a “Mini Training Academy” that provides training, education, and empowerment methodology; to promote sustained quality customer and employee experiences.

What did you do?

A “Mini Training Academy” was created for employees in the format of Information Sessions for over 700 employees. A method was developed for this event to ensure that the manner of communication was consistent so that all employees receive the same information. The length and timeframe for the sessions was identified. A strategy to stagger staff was employed and logistics around space, location, and accountability were identified. The initial Information Session was conducted in 2009, and has continued as a biannual event. The purpose of the meetings is to keep employees up-to-date on pertinent issues, changes, policy, fiscal matters, strategic goals and accomplishments, and legislation facing social services locally, statewide and federally. Employees receive an overview of the functions and activities in all service areas that are relevant to quality customer experience, but may not be part of their day-to-day functions. This knowledge gives staff the ability to streamline service delivery to customers. These sessions were enhanced by adding a “Town Hall” component to promote reciprocal communication. Employees are very receptive to seizing the opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions, and share ideas and strategies toward improved service delivery and staff retention. The meetings provide an opportunity for the Director and upper management to dedicate time to educate, problem-solve, and hear from those who are doing the day-to-day work by which Departments of Social Services function.

What is the history behind the program/project?

The Information Sessions “Mini Training Academy” began in 2009. Initially, the sessions were only comprised of components for all staff. Due to the rapidly changing face of social services over the past several years, a monthly leadership meeting component was added in 2015 to ensure leaders are kept abreast of matters and trained more frequently. Also, in 2015, a Town Hall element was added to the all staff component to give staff more time to discuss issues and share information. Most recently, team building exercises, new hire and promotion celebrations, as well as meet and greet activities were incorporated.

What did you hope to accomplish?

The All Staff and Leadership Information Sessions “Mini Training Academy” was implemented to assist staff with understanding social services, the role they play, the role their peers play, and the importance of unified efforts to achieve success in the administration of services to customers. The program is designed to educate staff about the history of social services, the impact of legislation, fiscal responsibility, strategic goals and accomplishments etc., through the final stages of service delivery to customers. The overall goal is to provide staff with the knowledge and tools to help them feel empowered and skilled in their area of responsibility, which ultimately fosters quality employee and customer experiences.

What is your timeline?

All Staff Information Sessions are held in the winter and fall each year. In order to ensure that all 700 plus employees have an opportunity to attend, the sessions are staggered over a three to four-day period. Each session is approximately two (2) hours long. The Leaders meetings Information are held the third Monday of each month at 1:30pm. The Leaders meetings are approximately two (2) hours as well. On occasion, subject matters such as Strategic Planning, specified out-source training, and other topics; may warrant additional sessions.

Your budget?

Space identified in the agency is utilized for the sessions and materials are created in-house i.e. PowerPoint, hand-outs, etc., so there is no fiscal note to the program. In fact, staff receives mentorship, government and local policy training, introductory budget training, and strategies for self-empowerment at no cost to them.

How did you identify your objectives?

The objectives for the program were identified through research and the realization that people perform better when they are valued, heard, included, and equipped with the knowledge needed to do their best work.

How well did you use available resources?

Resource management is achieved by: 1). staggering the sessions, which allows continuous productivity, as staff rotates their schedules to attend.

2). Posting the materials on the agency employee site cuts cost associated with creating hard copies; 3). Planning ahead for the sessions provides adequate space for the event.

### **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

**PROJECT SUCCESS AND IMPACT – WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?**

Was your program/project a success?

The program has been a success. Our staff is known to exhibit a high level of expertise in their specific programs, as well as the added value related to familiarity of other programs and facets of social services. Staff from our agency has been promoted to paid and volunteer leadership positions within the agency, locally, and statewide. Many attribute their success to the experiences and opportunities provided through information sharing, discussions and trainings at the sessions.

What was the impact?

The result has been a high caliber staff with buy-in, mutual respect amongst staff in different sections, overall knowledge of agency services and resources, as well as an agency with a one-team approach to problem solving; all yielding quality service delivery to our customers

How did you measure the impact?

Customers, government officials, and community partners feel confident in contacting our office to assist with service questions and concerns. The agency is highly revered and respected in the community. The relentless work of staff is often acknowledged by government officials, community partners, and customers. Staff has personally commented on how grateful they are for the time management spends on keeping them informed, knowledgeable, engaged, and equipped to do their jobs.

How widespread is the impact of your program/project?

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Our staff are often called upon to speak at state and local events. Staff and leaders are often asked to serve on state and local committees and boards. Staff that are knowledgeable of agency and community resources feel comfortable talking to citizens about the resources and directing the citizens to those services. Most recently, we have been acknowledged on a national level.

How are you able to overcome obstacles and challenges?

The sessions are unique because in this multifaceted, fast-paced, ever changing world of social services; it can be difficult to employ methods to ensure that staff person number one (1) and staff person number 700 has the same information and understanding of matters related and significant to their day-to-day job functions and success. The Information Sessions differ from similar projects because they not only inform, but they empower staff to greater levels of efficiency, effectiveness, and performance. Additionally, the presentations are uploaded to the agency's internal employee web page to ensure that all staff has reference tools and materials readily available.

In order to overcome challenges relative to information that is to be presented, agency leadership attend the initial session separate from staff. Feedback, input, and suggested changes to the presentation are provided prior to the first All Staff session. To combat attendance challenges, the sessions are designated "Mandatory" to ensure all staff attends, a team of administrative staff oversees sign-in, supervisors manage unit assignments to stagger staff; coordination takes into consideration social worker's court schedules; and make-up sessions are planned in the scheduling. Upper level managers attend all the sessions to ensure that the same information is distributed at each session.

To overcome the potential challenge of staff not freely participating in open dialogue, the meeting is not officially recorded in writing or any electronic form. The only annotations of the meeting are the PowerPoint, sign-in sheets, and notes related to subjects broached, that Management needs to delve into, in order to provide feedback per staff inquiry or request. Once all sessions are completed each Power Point presentation is posted on the agency Intranet site for staff to review at any time.

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Information Services staff are on hand at each session to assist with any technical challenges.

Did your program/project meet established objectives?

This project certainly met the established objectives. Staff is not only knowledgeable in their areas of responsibility, but they are equipped with knowledge regarding internal and external resources to provide best practices of services delivery to customers. Additionally, there is an established cross-sectional camaraderie that propels them to support and encourage each other to completion of the task at hand as a team.

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