

Building Blocks

Building Blocks are specific strategies that support children and families. We measure these to ensure we are reaching our goal. There are five Building Blocks. The Practice Model is the cornerstone of the Blocks because it lists the beliefs that all child-serving agencies share; it's what we've all agreed to do. If the Transformation were a house, the Practice Model would be the foundation. The five Building Blocks are:

Community-Based Continuum – Developing, funding and sustaining a continuum of services that will meet the needs of every child and ensure that when at all possible children receive the services that they need within their own home and community.

Statewide Training System – A comprehensive, competency based training system built on the practice model and accessible across Virginia

Resource Family Recruitment, Development and Support – Finding, training and supporting resource and adoptive families to provide permanent connections for youth in foster care

Managing by Data – Using data to guide our decision making and using our desired outcomes to drive practice

Family Engagement Model – Engaging families in a deliberate way by giving them a voice in what happens to their families and their children.

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Transformation Strategy for Change



Community-Based Continuum of Care

With the passage of the Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) in 1992, Virginia created a legislative tool for transforming children's services. By encouraging flexible funding and cross-agency collaboration, CSA serves more children in their own families and communities.

All of the Building Blocks contribute to developing an accessible array of community-based services across the Commonwealth. By wrapping services around a child or family at risk, the need is reduced for more intensive levels of service such as residential care – and the length of stay when placement is required is generally shorter.

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Statewide Training Systems

In April of 1991, the Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities (VISSTA) (<http://www.vcu.edu/vissta/>) began as a collaborative effort that brought together the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), local departments of social services (LDSS), and the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU.)

Based on a model that was developed by the Institute of Human Services (IHS) (www.ihs-trainet.com) in Cleveland, Ohio, VISSTA was created to develop and deliver training to state and local social services staff. VISSTA established five Area Training Centers (ATC) (http://www.vcu.edu/vissta/vissta_atc.htm) responsible for scheduling training based on the needs of the localities in each DSS region.

During the early years of VISSTA, successful efforts were made to develop and maintain a process for the deliberate engagement of local agencies through the ATCs and other representative stakeholders on a statewide steering committee. Over the years however, as staff, priorities and resources changed, so did the training system. In the process, VISSTA evolved into a system that did not include the same level of local agency engagement and responsiveness to evolving training needs.

As part of Virginia's Children's Services System Transformation, a work group, made up of both state and local representatives, was charged to reengineer the training system with a mandate to return it to the model from which it was originally created - a competency based training model. The work group took on the task of conducting a training system assessment in order to identify what needed to change. Recommendations included the need to reinstitute the use of an Individual Training Needs Assessment (ITNA), the reformation of a statewide steering committee, and the development of a set of core competencies that align with the Virginia Children's Services Practice Model. In addition, the recommendations included returning flexibility to the ATC level in order to respond to local agency needs with greater precision and local involvement.

As a result of the work group recommendations, VDSS, the five ATCs, and VISSTA are working closely to realign Virginia's social services training system. A steering committee is meeting on a monthly basis with representation from local agencies, the Virginia League of Social Service Executives, VISSTA as well as VDSS to create a competency based training structure that better supports local and state staff. In addition, the steering committee will be looking at incorporating new information from each of the building blocks of the Transformation into existing VISSTA curricula. This will ultimately result in the revision of several courses as well as the development of several new courses. On the horizon, the work of the steering committee will also be to direct the development of transfer of learning mechanisms throughout the training system as well as expand course offerings to LDSS managers and supervisors.

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Resource Family Recruitment: Development and Support

Resource family development refers to the process of recruiting, developing, and supporting resource families, which include foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. Research has shown that children experience better outcomes – with fewer disruptions and greater family retention – when agencies actively pursue resource family development.

A CORE workgroup focused on expanding and improving this important Transformation resource by researching best practice for each phase of resource family development with expert support from the Casey Foundation and Denise Goodman.

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Managing by Data

Using the right data to manage performance is a key driver of the Transformation. We have developed a consistent process for capturing and using data to support decision-making, improve practice quality, and promote accountability.

The work to date has led to defined outcomes based on the Transformation goal of developing lifelong family connections for children within their own community – and then created measures to track progress. Over the past year, we have built system-wide data capacity through the following initiatives:

- The development of monthly management reports to improve accountability.
 - The VDSS Division of Family Services (DFS) has achieved its lowest error rate in the past five years on the latest AFCARS submission.
 - CORE localities have worked to improve discharge and length of stay data in the state data system.
 - DFS has created an internal accountability workgroup called TOP (Translating Outcomes to Practice) to monitor programmatic outcomes on a regular basis.
- VDSS enhanced its capacity to provide oversight, accountability, and support to LDSS in the area of data management.
 - DFS has created the Outcome Based Reporting and Analysis Unit (OBRA) which oversees all reporting and data analysis for the Division.
 - DFS is contracting with the Chapin Hall Center for Children to provide in depth longitudinal analysis of Virginia’s Foster Care system.
 - Through funding from Casey Family Programs, DFS has provided SafeMeasures to all local departments of social services which enable drill-down web-based reporting on selected outcomes at the local level.
- Improved results have been observed around the majority of Transformation outcomes: reducing the number of children in group care placements, increasing exits to permanency, and increasing the number of children in family based care.
 - In each of these three outcomes, both CORE and non-CORE localities are realizing positive trending data.
- The Managing by Data Workgroup serves as the local advisory team to OBRA as well as the project management team for SafeMeasures.
 - New process and outcome measures will be proposed and approved for incorporation by this workgroup – Additional training will be delivered statewide that will help make connections between the use of SafeMeasures and day to day child welfare practice.

[*Visit the home page of this site for the most current \[children’s services data and results.\]\(#\)](#)

Family Engagement Model

This building block fulfills the mission of “transforming how services are delivered” by giving a stronger voice to children and families regarding child welfare decisions that impact their lives.

One mechanism for achieving true family engagement is through the use of family engagement meetings. The purpose of establishing family engagement meetings in Virginia is to institute a consistent method of deliberately and meaningfully involving families in decision making. These meetings enable youth and families to:

- Actively engage with identified supports, child welfare staff and other important stakeholders in facilitated meetings.
- Family engagement meetings utilize a teamed approach to making decisions and occur throughout the family’s involvement with the agency such as, removal from the home or prior to a change in placement. [The Children’s Services Practice Model](#) states that children and families have the right to have a say in what happens to them and will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Bring together a team of individuals in order to recognize that family members are the experts about the own families and should always be consulted when decisions are made regarding safety, permanency, and well-being.

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