Social Worker IAT/Investigations

1. Protective Services for Children begins with the investigative element. The primary purpose of this position is to offer protective services that are mandated by law. The definition of these services is as follows:

PROTECTIVE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN means social services provided to children and their parents or other caretakers in response to instances of actual or suspected child neglect, abuse, or dependency. The primary elements of protective services consist of investigating reports of neglect, abuse, or dependency, evaluating the degree of damage or risk to the child; cooperation with law enforcement agencies as required to obtain suitable care and services for children in or out of their own homes and initiation of court action where necessary; counseling and planning with the child’s family toward the solution and prevention of problems causing neglect, abuse, or dependency, and arranging for the provision of, and assisting families in utilizing appropriate services and community resources such as foster care, day care, health and mental health services, homemaker services, etc. as needed. These services are included for runaways, harmed or threatened with harm by virtue of their status as runaways. Included also are service activities necessary to carry out statutory responsibility to approve or disapprove the separation of a child under six months of age from its parent. At its option, the county may provide counseling.

II. A. (1) Protective Services for Children: Protective Services for Children’s foremost responsibility is to

protect the child.

The best interest of the child must be pursued when a department intervenes in cases of abuse, neglect, and dependency. After assuring the protection of the child, the department’s responsibility is to stabilize the family and help parents adequately care for their children.

Intervention into the life of a family must be done with much caring and dignity. Social workers must have skills to handle crisis without escalating them; to build self-esteem; to advocate with other agencies for support and help; to provide realistic goals and supportive case work.

Protective Services is based upon a legal mandate and upon social work values. Both are concerned with how children grow up.

The legal mandate of protective services is the state’s discharging its responsibility to assure that its citizens are properly protected and minimally cared for when those citizens are dependent upon others. Children depend on parents or other caretakers to feed, clothe, provide shelter, give supervision, and protect from physical harm or danger. When parents or other caretakers fail in their responsibilities to care for the children, the state intervenes through the local department of social services.

1. The protective service worker works with clients that are often substance abusers, emotionally disturbed, physically or mentally disabled, immature parents or parents who were abused as children. The clients are often hostile, aggressive and possibly assaultive due to the subject matter and the involuntary intervention of the social worker. The clients are all ages from infants to age eighteen and from all races.

B. 1. The activities of this position are as follows:

1. Case investigation which is the initiation of a case by case evaluation of all referrals received by the agency to determine the validity and the correctness of information received concerning the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children. It also includes the act of making consultations with persons who report the incidences of abuse or neglect and finally the act of determining the amount of risk which a person may be in at any given time. 55% of the worker’s time is spent in this activity.
2. Assessment and Case Planning are both very important activities of this position. This is the activity which allows the worker the chance to look at all the variables which have contributed to the problem which is at hand and is affecting the client’s well being. It enables the worker to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the client, the environmental conditions, and the economic condition, the emotional and mental capacity of the client to be able to define a means of alleviating these problems which he faces at this time. The worker must search throughout the community to determine what services are available and locate those services for the client. The worker must schedule and hold Child and Family Team meetings to address issues as they arise in the family. A estimate of 15% of the entire worker’s time is given to this activity.
3. Case Management is an activity, which requires about 10% of the worker’s time. This includes documentation of work done. There are numerous state mandated forms which must be completed with all cases that are open for services. Forms are to be open upon initiation of the case and then upon closure forms are closed as well as other forms generated by the worker. The determination of client’s eligibility for some services. It also includes the transferring of cases to various other units within the general agency structure. And on occasions in which the family is no longer residing in our county it could result in the case being transferred to other counties within our state.
4. Information and referral is an activity, which requires about 5% of the worker’s time. It includes consultation with other agencies and groups, which may serve to assist the client in meeting his or her needs.
5. Utilization of law enforcement and the court system requires at least 15% of the worker’s time. This activity is very important to the worker, especially in situations where a client is in danger and it requires more than the agency worker can give him to handle a problem where his rights are violated. The worker also works closely with law enforcement in handling physical and sexual abuse cases, as to eliminate the victim being interviewed multiply times and to work together in fact finding.

B. 2. This job position has the following job functions:

1. Assessment is done with the use of the North Carolina General Statutes, North Carolina Human Resources Division of Social Services Family and Children’s Services manual as tools. 30% of a worker’s time is spent at this function.

The social worker is responsible for making the initial assessment. The supervisor and the staffing team assist workers when further consultation is needed.

1. Service planning with such goals as the return of children to their home after their removal from the home. Emergency placement, when a child is in danger in his own home. Offering various services to the family to prevent the removal of their children from the home. A worker may work with a family and kinship care may be implemented. The worker would have to do a through background check on the kinship provider, including criminal records, 911 checks and a home assessment. 30% of the worker’s time is spent at this function.
2. Implementation of the plan is the responsibility of the social worker that has gotten involved with the family because of the need for protective services. An initial involvement to see that the family is willing and able to function in a caretaker role while taking advantage of services offered through the agency. The worker will assist the family and can provide transportation to the family to access the services needed. The worker will make adequate visits to interact face to face with the family (i.e. this could mean weekly or every other week depending on the risk in the case) 19% of a worker’s time is spent in this function.
3. Counseling by the social worker is limited to giving the client necessary information regarding services available to him in the agency and concerning the law as it pertains to abuse and neglect. The social worker can provide guidance and counseling on parenting and issues of child abuse and neglect. Further counseling is scheduled through other local agencies including, but not limited, to other public and private mental health clinics and health care facilities. 5% of the social worker’s time is spent in this function.
4. The worker has full responsibility for maintaining his cases, goals, and clients. At least 10% of his time is spent in this area.
5. Consultation is provided to individuals, families, court officials, Mental Health, school personnel, other DSS personnel, staffing team, medical personnel, etc. This is done on a case by case basis of assessing needs, problems and possible solutions in neglect or abuse of children.
6. Community Liaison is the function of the social worker 5% of the time. Every worker in this program has had opportunities to speak to various groups in the community. Every time a worker is in the school or community, they are representatives of the agency. They serve as the only contact that some persons in the community will ever have with this agency. Red Cross volunteers responsible for shelter management in the event of disasters.
7. Teaching/Training only requires about 1% of the worker’s time. Workers are asked to assist in conducting training for groups with interest in the area of abuse and neglect of children.

B. 3. Every case, which is investigated, must be staffed by a group of at least two (2) members of the staffing team before a decision can be made as too whether the case can be substantiated or not substantiated. This must consist of a supervisor and social worker or a designee of the supervisor.

1. 4. The worker carries, at the maximum, of 10 active cases at one given time. An active case generally is open for 30 to 60 days. The maximum amount of time is usually 90 days. Workers are required to complete all paperwork including the following forms on each cases: DSS 5010, Strengths & Needs Forms, Risk Assessment, DSS 5027, Case Decision Summary, Criminal Record Check Reque st, Central Registry Request, Maintenance of Eligibility and in some case daycare applications, Food and Nutrition Reviews, Medicaid Reviews and change of notice forms.
2. 5. There are situations where the worker may have assessed a family needs and problems determine that there is a need for budgeting and handling of a family’s financial needs. The worker’s assist the family with planning and budgeting and developing a plan to maximize their income.

B. 6. The worker has to work in case which are highly stressful involving child fatalities where a living child remains in the home, this can be emotional draining as well as mentally stressful for workers. In these cases workers must work with law enforcement which would result in court appearances for any charges that may be necessary surrounding a death. Also the worker will have to submit information to the State Office to determine if a Child Fatality Review is necessary.

Workers will investigate cases that involve sexual abuse, which could result in the worker completing extensive case work that involves Child Medical Evaluations, Child Forensic Evaluations and/or Child Mental Health Evaluations. All of these require extensive paperwork, scheduling of appointments for exams, extensive travel to involve transporting families to appointments and consulting with physicians.

Workers will investigate reports on Day Care facilities consulting with the Division of Child Development. Day Care investigations that involve sexual abuse also involve working with local law enforcement as well as the State Bureau of Investigations. Workers also investigate Group Homes working with the Division of Health Services Regulations and/or NC Division of Social Services Regulatory & Licensing Services.

B.7. Every worker in this program has the responsibility of initiating court action in situations where court intervention is needed. This would include the filing a petition with or without a non-secure custody order and preparation of the case for it to be heard in court. (With distribution of the court reports and exhibits to support the filing of a petition delivered to the Attorneys in the case in a timely manner.) The court decides whether custody is granted to the agency.

Note: Workers in this program use the following guides and reference sources in making decisions or carrying out their duties: North Carolina General Statutes, The Juvenile Code, N. C. Human Resources Family and Children’s manual, Service Information System manual.

A worker in this program has contact with various agencies. Examples of these are local school systems, courts, health departments, Mental Health Clinics both private and public, local law enforcement agencies, and the local public service agencies. These contacts are made with the primary purpose of determining the needs of persons who are abused, neglected or exploited.

Every case of neglect, abuse and exploitation is investigated and discussed with the supervisor. After completing the investigation, the staffing team decides whether to substantiate the report of abuse or neglect. If there is a decision to remove a child from his home, a staffing is done by the worker and supervisor. Upon completing each case, the records of each worker are checked by the supervisor for the accurateness of dictation, the true completion of investigation and documentation as required by the N. C. Division of Social Services.

1. III. 1. The social worker works in the home of the clients, which often consists of substandard housing with inadequate heating and cooling systems. The homes are often dirty and have strong foul odors. The level of responsibility and legal liability is high. The social worker can be sued if he/she does not follow the guidelines, which have been set for proper performance of his/her job. The clients that the workers become involved with are often hostile, volatile, aggressive and sometimes assaultive. Approximately 55% of the worker’s time is spent out in the field and 45% of the worker’s time is spent in the office. While in the field, the social worker often becomes involved in heavy traffic and inclement weather, which is not conducive to driving. The social worker is also exposed to all types of diseases, which the clients that he/she works with have and must enter homes with all types of animals and other unknown situations. These situations could consist of homes with structural damage and therefore, causing workers to enter homes, which are hazardous and/or an injurious environment to the worker themselves.
2. Social workers may encounter homes in which there are Clandestine Drug Lab Situations. If it is expected that a Lab is present and active in a home, then a worker would respond with law enforcement. But there may be a situation where a worker would enter a home without the knowledge of the lab, which could result in a high risk to the worker being contaminated.
3. The social worker has access to a calculator, Xerox machine, lap top computer, cellular phones, computers, Dictaphone, telephone, automobile and child care seat. The social worker also uses state and county manuals and forms to complete his/her work.
4. The social worker must be accurate in writing legal terminology on court documents. The worker must complete for most court cases: Court reports, Assist clients with completion of Affidavits and be prepared to testify. He/she is also responsible for accuracy in completing various department forms; i.e. Title XX, strength and needs, risk assessments, case decisions, case plans and case reviews, and dictation.
5. The worker must be involved with the client and this means going out to the home when it is extremely hot or cold outside. The home may be hot or cold inside and the worker must remain there until he/she has completed his/her visit. She/he makes frequent home visits; thus she/he is exposed at length to the weather. She/he may have to restrain a child that is acting out if that child becomes violent. Sometimes the worker is required to lift a physically handicapped child. The worker may have to meet a child’s basic needs when bringing them in care, such as ensuring they are fed, clothed and are clean (i.e. changing diapers, finding clothing, etc). The worker may have to administer medications to a child, treating such concerns as diaper rash, lice infestation, etc. The worker should be in good physical condition in order to perform her/his job to the best of her ability.
6. Driving and paperwork require close visual attention. Sometimes the worker may become involved in long trips to other counties and may have a large amount of paperwork to complete in one day. The worker must use close visual observation in all client contacts. Sometimes an interview with a client may become very lengthy. A worker may have to transport a child and or parent on long trips. Therefore a worker must possess knowledge of their surroundings and have good directional skills and map reading skills.
7. A crisis situation that develops in a worker’s caseload requires the greatest amount of intense mental concentration by the worker. Interviews and looking for resources also require a great deal of concentration by the worker. The duration of time spent working with a family in a crisis situation would depend on the circumstances of the case. An interview could last anywhere form one to three hours, again depending on the circumstances of the case. Searching service and legal manuals regarding information on special cases would require concentration in deciding the most appropriate plan of action. In some crisis situations a worker may work with the family for the duration of an eight hour day and work overtime, depending on its severity and if a petition was needed, which would require a worker to complete shopping duties for children and locate placement.
8. It is the primary duty of the Protective Services worker to protect the child (ren) from neglect, abuse, and exploitation. This is accomplished by frequent home visits, using casework services and community resources including the Juvenile Court when necessary.

The social worker has the duty of protecting his/her client’s rights to confidentiality. This includes information contained in the client’s record and contacts made with other agencies.

1. The social worker’s regular work hours are from 8:15 to 5:15. He/She may work after hours if the case circumstances require her to do so. They are periodically responsible for handling all emergencies that occur after working hours. The time served is usually two weeks per year and hours 5:15 p.m. to 8:15 a.m. Sometimes when on emergency duty, the social worker may have to file a Juvenile Petition, which means that she will have to appear in Juvenile Court and testify regarding the circumstances of the case.
2. The worker is a Red Cross Volunteer responsible for shelter management when a disaster occurs. The social worker may have to work as a worker taking applications in cases where disaster has occurred and the agency needs additional staff in other areas. The Social Worker is also responsible for other duties as assigned by the Director.
3. The Social worker is responsible for receiving 24 hours of continuing education in the field of Child Abuse each year. This could include the worker traveling out of county or state to maintain their continuing hours of education.

IV. 1. A worker entering this job position must have basic knowledge of casework theory and techniques, knowledge of community resources and services, knowledge of basic federal and state social services programs and their purposes, knowledge of basic socioeconomic and political theory, knowledge of social and environmental factors affecting clients to be served, the knowledge of theories of human growth and development and of family and social interaction and knowledge of ethical standards and practices of professional social work.

A worker in this position uses the following skills in investigating all incidences of abuse, neglect and exploitation. These skills are basic to being able to protect individuals in their homes. This worker must be able to listen to others with understanding and purpose. The worker must display a willingness to help others and concern for their well being.

The worker must have skill in eliciting information and in assembling relevant facts to prepare a social history, assessment and report. Worker must be able to create and maintain a professional helping relationship and in using one’s self in the relationship. Worker must be able to observe and interpret verbal and nonverbal behavior. Worker must be able to engage a client in efforts to resolve his own problems. A worker must be able to discuss a sensitive emotional subject in a non-threatening supportive manner. Worker must be able to create innovative solutions to client’s needs. A worker must also be able to mediate and negotiate between conflicting parties.

A worker in this position must have the following abilities: to speak and write clearly, to respond supportively in crisis situation, to identify and obtain resources needed to assist others, to function under stress, to deal with conflicting situations and contentious personalities and to identify the information necessary to solve a problem. A worker must be able to identify a hostile situation and think quickly and clearly on how to handle the situation, as not to allow anyone to cause harm to others. All of these abilities are basic to being able to protect children from abuse or neglect and protect in their own homes.

2. A. Master’s degree from an accredited school of social work and one year of social work experience; or a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited school of social work and two years of social work or counseling experience; or Master’s degree in a counseling field and two years of social work or counseling experience; or a four-year degree in a human services field or related curriculum and three years of social work or counseling experience; or graduation from a four-year college or university and four years of experience in rehabilitation counseling, pastoral counseling or a related human service field providing experience in the techniques of casework, group work or community organization; or an equivalent combination of training and experience.

B. The employee should have had an internship of 400 hours duration as part of their course of study that would give them field experience in helping agency.