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An ability to work well with (not loyalty to) one's supervisor, i.e. management, is one factor, among several, in selecting a new supervisor. The Department provided staff with additional information on criteria for promotion in response to the Audit, and will continue to provide clarification of the values placed on the interpersonal skills and job experience needed for supervisor positions.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board does not agree with this finding. The Audit, on page 58, refers to a "perception of favoritism" which exists among "some employees".

Recommendation

The Grand Jury maintains that even if it is only a perception, it is indicative of an underlying mistrust of MCDSS management. Therefore, MCDSS should make it clear to all managers, supervisors and employees that, by actions and deeds, favoritism of any kind will not be tolerated and all allegations of favoritism will be independently investigated.

Response (Social Services): Agree. The Department is very concerned about perceptions, especially if, they are not in line with actual practice. We are making it clear that everyone in the Department is to understand and adhere to fair and legal personnel practices and that even the appearance of favoritism is to be avoided. We are identifying the parts of the personnel process that may not be clear so that we can provide more education in the next 6 months. All allegations of favoritism have been and continue to be investigated. Depending on the level of the complaint, options include explanation and/or investigation by Staff Resources, by Merit System Services, by County Human Resources, or by the State Department Fair Employment and Housing.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with the recommendation and share the Grand Jury's concern about employee perceptions. The Department follows standard government personnel practices in its adherence to Civil Service and Merit System regulations in the recruitment, testing, and selection of employees.

It should be noted that the individual filing the complaint with the Grand Jury also filed an EEOC complaint regarding not getting a promotion. The Department of Fair Employment and Housing conducted an investigation and found no evidence of discrimination by the Department. This outcome was communicated to the Grand Jury prior to the completion of their report.

Time Frame for Implementation: Training on personnel process to be implemented January-December 2001.

Findings

4. The Audit found “the Department did not systematically collect or track the key human resource measures such as vacancy and turnover rates or measures of changes in employee morale.” The MCDSS response was that they had collected vacancy and turnover data, through employee surveys in 1992, 1995, and 1998.

Response (Social Services): Agree, with clarification. The Department’s actual response to the Audit finding was: “The Department has collected vacancy and turnover data on a periodic basis. The Department has conducted employee surveys in 1992, 1995, and 1998.” The Department has been collecting vacancy and turnover data on an ongoing basis for the past two years.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with clarification. Employee surveys were conducted as a method to measure employee morale in the three years listed. The Department has been collecting vacancy and turnover data on an ongoing basis for the last two years.

5. Case load assignments were not fairly distributed in the past, but have improved in the last year after new procedures were instituted. Counter to MCDSS Case Load Assignment Guidelines, testimony revealed that complexity is still not always considered.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. The Department has not been informed by staff about any concerns with the policy or the implementation of the Case Load Assignment Guidelines. Follow-up has not identified any concerns among the staff presently working here.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board can not agree or disagree since it did not receive information about the specific testimony. The Department reports that it has not received any concerns from employees regarding the Case Load Assignment guidelines.

Recommendation

MCDSS should include case complexity in all case load assignments.

Response (Social Services): Agree. The Case Load Assignment Guidelines already address case complexity. In addition, the Department is adding a section on how to appeal a case load assignment, so staff are encouraged to bring any concerns to their supervisor.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree that the Case Load Assignment Guidelines include consideration of case complexity. The Department is adding an appeal process to this guideline to offer another avenue for concerned employees.

Time Frame for Implementation: Revision of caseload assignment guidelines to be completed by February 2001.

Finding

6. The existing Merit System used for hiring and promotion is based on test scores which allows management the choice of selecting one of the top five qualified applicants, which creates the opportunity for favoritism.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. The Merit System testing and selection process is identical to that used in every department in Mendocino County, as well as in most counties in California. The testing is focused on experience, skills, and knowledge. The purpose of testing and ranking applicants is to ensure that selection is made from among the most qualified, as determined by an independent panel. It is standard government hiring practice to conduct a testing process, either oral or written or both, which yields a ranked list of qualified candidates, from which the hiring authority may select from the top five. The selection process always involves making a choice of one person instead of others. That choice cannot be made based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, marital status, age, or disability, but it is made based on job skills, work experience, temperament and demeanor, past work performance, people and relationship skills, program knowledge, and fit with the program and people needs of the particular job. Favoritism is the selection of an individual based on a personal relationship with the decision-maker, rather than on job-related factors. While favoritism is not illegal in the way that discrimination is, the Department's policy is that it is never advisable to select a person for any reason other than the expectation that s/he could do the best job.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department do not agree with this finding. Reference is made to Department response.

Recommendation

If the Merit System procedure is continued, final selection should be made by independent evaluators in the County.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. As stated above, the Merit System procedure is identical to the Civil Service procedure used in all other County departments. Independent evaluation occurs as part of the testing process, and explicitly does not include people who will be in the line of supervision for the position being filled. Final selection is made by department heads who are designated by the County as the appointing authority for their respective departments.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department do not agree. As stated above, the Merit System selection procedure mirrors the County's Civil Service procedure and is the standard practice in governmental agencies.

Time Frame for Implementation: Not applicable.

Findings

7. Response to many problems by management is frequently ineffective and many employees feel management pays "lip service" only. Employees think many problems are not dealt with by management, or too much time passes before being addressed. Management views this differently, asserting that changes must be made slowly and carefully to avoid making mistakes.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. Opinions and perceptions are being stated here as fact. It is not clear what responses to which problems are considered ineffective. Some problems are beyond the authority of Department management. Many solutions are effective, and forgotten. Some problems are lower priority due to resource limitations and are not dealt with. Some solutions take longer than anyone would like because of the complexity of the programs we administer and competing demands. Not all changes must be made slowly, but most must be done carefully as they have an impact on a lot of clients and people in crisis. Maintaining operations serving thousands of people countywide each month is challenging for all.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board can neither agree nor disagree with this finding, as there is not enough information. It appears that this finding may be based on the opinion and perception of some employee(s).

8. On at least one occasion, an employee's evaluation forwarded to MCDSS Human Resources was not the same evaluation shown to the employee. It

was later changed to a third version after the employee complained to various levels of management. A study of the evaluation indicated the performance criteria marked as sub-standard by the supervisor, and approved by the next level of management, seemed to contradict the other areas which were marked "Standard" (average). Indications were there was some form of "reprisal" involved.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. In the situation referred to, the employee's supervisor forwarded an earlier unsigned draft of the evaluation to the Department's Staff Resources Division, instead of the final copy which had been discussed with and signed by the staff person. When the mistake was discovered, the wrong version was discarded and the correct copy was filed. The situation was explained to the employee, with an apology for the mix-up. The Department does not agree that any form of reprisal was involved.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board disagrees with this finding. Reference is made to Department response.

9. MCDSS policies and procedures are not consistently followed by management and supervisors.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. The Department is striving for consistency and is working on mechanisms for monitoring compliance with external and internal policies and procedures at all levels. There are occasions when staff, supervisors, and managers make mistakes. These do not occur on a regular basis, and every attempt is made to remedy errors and discrepancies as they are found and to prevent their reoccurrence.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and Department agree in part as referenced in the Department's response.

Recommendation

All managers and supervisors should clearly demonstrate their ability and willingness to address existing problems between staff and management. Lack of this commitment could raise serious questions concerning an individual's ability to effectively carry out the responsibilities of management.

Response (Social Services): Agree fully.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with this recommendation.

Time Frame for Implementation: Training for managers and supervisors to be implemented January-December 2001.

Findings

10. Managers and supervisors are not trained to deal with many employee problems. As a result of the Audit, the MCDSS developed a Multi-Faceted Action Plan, to have managers and supervisors receive training in staff support, communication, involvement with staff and leadership to try and solve these serious problems. Results are not available as to the effectiveness of this initiative, which began in the fall of 1999.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree in part/agree in part. This finding implies that all managers and supervisors are not trained and are ineffective at dealing with employee problems. The County and the Department provide training to managers and supervisors every year. Even in Fort Bragg, there have been times when employee problems were handled well. The Multi-Faceted Action Plan, or MAP, addresses a total of eight elements, of which manager and supervisor training is a key, but not sole, objective.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department both agree and disagree with this finding. The Department provides training to managers and supervisors and the Board is following this as part of the Department's Multi-Faceted Action Plan. The Grand Jury does not appear to have analyzed the many employee problems which were handled well.

11. Testimony shows that confidentiality concerning both clients and staff has been treated carelessly by some staff, supervisors, and trainers. Considering that Fort Bragg is a relatively small town, the seriousness of this problem is accentuated.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. The Department does not know the particular testimony received, but is aware of a few incidents involving breaches of confidentiality. These incidents were investigated and appropriate actions were taken. Staff at all levels are aware of and trained on the grave importance of confidentiality.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board is unable to either agree or disagree with this finding since it has not received the testimony. However, the Department acknowledges that the few incidents involving breach of confidentiality have been investigated and appropriate action taken. Training on confidentiality laws is mandatory for all employees.

12. Testimony showed that "inadequate management, favoritism, burnout, and lack of recognition for achievement" were more important than low pay in creating frustration and job dissatisfaction.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. Perceptions of those factors, as well as the possible existence of those factors, can be elements in frustration and job dissatisfaction. However, low pay has a significant negative impact across the board on the levels of skill and experience that the Department is able to hire and to retain, in addition to contributing to individual job dissatisfaction. The Department has actively advocated for increased pay for staff.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board is unable to either agree or disagree with this finding since it has not received the testimony. The Action Plan approved by the Board and the pay raises going into effect in November 2000 should help address the perceptions listed above.

13. Testimony has shown that there have been problems concerning office politics, favoritism, confidentiality, and unprofessionalism in the Fort Bragg office for many years.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree in part. The issues that led to this report occurred over two years ago. Though they remain issues for some individuals who were directly involved, they are not of concern to other staff who were not directly involved, or who have been hired more recently. As a group, the Fort Bragg EFAS staff are very committed to client service, have been successful in meeting and maintaining mandated time frames, and came together to present a well-received open house to the community in October 1999.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board is unable to either agree or disagree with this finding since it has not received the testimony. However, the incidents referred to in this finding are over two years old. The Department reports that the Fort Bragg EFAS staff are very committed to client service and have been successful in meeting and maintaining mandated time frames.

Recommendations

1. MCDSS should ensure that managers and supervisors of all levels receive training and counseling in the areas of favoritism, confidentiality of personnel and clients, leadership techniques, avoiding burnout, and recognizing achievements. The existing training courses in the County Training Institute are mostly eight-hour sessions and there is doubt that one session will have a lasting effect. This training should be mandatory and should include mandatory periodic refresher courses.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. Training is important. Just as important, however, is monitoring follow-through on an ongoing

basis, dealing with problems as they arise, and holding managers and supervisors accountable in their areas of responsibility.

Response (Board of Supervisors): Agree in part. The Board has been both philosophically and fiscally supportive of continuous employee training. The Board further agrees with the Department that “holding managers and supervisors accountable in their areas of responsibility” is also a critical factor.

Time Frame for Implementation: Training and follow-up for supervisors and managers to be implemented January-December 2001.

2. The Grand Jury recommends that the MCDSS continues to take the Multi-faceted Action Plan of August 17, 1999 seriously, maintaining the letter and the spirit of the Plan.

Response (Social Services): Agree in the intent and the actuality.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with this recommendation.

Time Frame for Implementation: The MAP is being progressively implemented from September 1999 – December 2001.

3. Employee surveys should be conducted with no names, or identification of employees, to ensure that there is no animosity or reprisal, directed toward individuals.

Response (Social Services): Agree. All employee surveys in the Department have been and will be conducted with complete anonymity.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with this recommendation and note that all employee surveys have been and will continue to be conducted with complete anonymity.

Time Frame for Implementation: Anonymity in employee surveys was implemented in 1992 and will be continued.

Finding

14. Many employees stated that they do not feel free to speak up about issues without suffering reprisals.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. The Department does not know the number that constitutes “many employees” and does not

know if the employees cited evidence on which they based their feelings. It is the Department's policy to maintain open, honest, direct and respectful communication at all levels of discourse.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board was not provided with enough information by the Grand Jury to either agree or disagree with this. It is unknown how many employees were individually interviewed, how much was based on hearsay or perception, and what constitutes "many".

Recommendation

MCDSS should implement an effective, realistic, nonself-serving evaluation of supervisors and managers, to include employee morale issues and concerns. In order to prevent reprisals, this should include a means of determining employee morale without identifying individual employees by their questionnaire.

Response (Social Services): Agree. MCDSS has committed in the Multi-faceted Action Plan to the development of some sort of multi-level evaluation of supervisors and managers. The concern about reprisals actually goes both ways. Supervisees and their supervisors are leery of the opportunity for retaliation in either direction. A staff advisory group is working on the issue of evaluations of line staff, as well as of supervisors and managers. Ultimately, open, honest, direct, respectful and appropriate communication in all directions on an ongoing basis is the best means of providing supervision and support, addressing concerns, and preventing problems.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board agrees with this recommendation and reminds the Grand Jury that the Management Audit was conducted by an outside consultant and that all employee surveys have been conducted anonymously. Further, the Multi-faceted Action Plan commits to developing a multi-level evaluation of supervisors and managers, and a staff advisory group is working on the issue of evaluation for all levels of staff.

Time Frame for Implementation: Revision of supervisor and manager evaluation process to be implemented by December 2001.

Finding

15. Training is not always sufficient, due to the ineffectiveness of some trainers and lack of proper supervision.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. The County and the Department provide a great deal of training on a wide variety of topics.

It is unclear what specific training sessions this statement refers to. Training is evaluated after it is given and ineffective presenters or topics are not repeated.

Response (Board of Supervisors): Do not agree. The Department and the County use recognized training professionals and all classes are evaluated by the participants for effectiveness.

Recommendation

Management should ensure that trainers are competent, qualified, and properly supervised.

Response (Social Services): Agree.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board agrees.

Time Frame for Implementation: Review of trainers to be implemented on an ongoing basis.

Finding

- 16.** The FARs are entry level positions for MCDSS. It is apparent that not all new hires come to the job adequately prepared for the workplace. Job expectations often are neither explained to nor understood by new employees.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part/do not agree in part. FAR positions do require experience in providing basic public service, clerical or accounting work. They are filled many times by external applicants. Not all new hires are adequately prepared for this workplace by their previous jobs. A job specification is provided to all applicants. A complete job description is given to new employees. FARs are oriented and trained to the job of eligibility determination in groups in a classroom setting for 2-3 months, and then for 6-9 months is a training transition unit. Job expectations are thoroughly explained. It is possible that expectations may not be truly understood by new employees until they are able to experience the workload directly. It is very detail-oriented, regimented, regulated, computer-based, people-interactive work that is challenging to master.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and Department both agree and disagree in part with this finding as referenced in the Department's response.

Recommendation

Shortly after being hired, new employees should receive instruction in job expectations including work ethics, teamwork, mutual respect, and recognition of the problems and concerns of MCDSS. In addition, existing employees should receive regular refresher training.

Response (Social Services): Agree. The FAR Training Program curriculum currently includes all of the above. Refresher training on a variety of topics is provided on an ongoing basis.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with this recommendation and note that the FAR Training Program curriculum includes all of the above. Refresher training on a variety of topics is also provided on an on-going basis.

Time Frame for Implementation: Revised and expanded new employee orientation to be implemented by July 2001. Refresher training for existing employees to be implemented by December 2001.

Finding

17. Managers and supervisors spend too much time at meetings out of the office.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree in part. The basis for this statement is unclear. The Department strives to limit the number of meetings for managers and supervisors, while supporting teamwork, group decision-making, and information-sharing. Back-up coverage is arranged when off-site meetings or training sessions are necessary.

Response (Board of Supervisors): Do not agree with this finding as the basis is unclear.

Recommendation

Fewer meetings for supervisors would enable them to spend more time on-site. Use of teleconferencing to save time should be explored.

Response (Social Services): Agree. This fiscal year, the Department was allowed to budget for complete video-conferencing stations to link our three main offices to allow for long distance participation. We expect that this will be of great assistance to staff in Fort Bragg.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department agree with this recommendation. It should be noted that the Board approved the Department's request for complete video-conferencing stations to link their three main offices in Ukiah, Willits, and Ft. Bragg.

Time Frame for Implementation: Video-conferencing stations to be implemented by July 2001.

Findings

- 18.** A review of the Turnover Data from July 1, 1995 through March 31, 1999 (pre-Audit) provides the number of "Voluntary Resignations" but states no reasons for leaving. Consequently, even if there was a desire to correct this serious problem, management had no idea what specifically was creating the high turnover.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. March 31, 1999 is post-audit. The turnover data provided does include a count of promotions, which are a large part of the turnover, and separately identifies retirements, as well as involuntary terminations. The reasons for voluntary resignations are identified through letters of resignation and exit interviews and, although they were not on the particular chart that was reviewed, they are known to management.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board and the Department do not agree with this finding. Reference is made to the Department's response.

- 19.** In January 1999, MCDSS began conducting exit interviews. However, the summary report of these interviews would be improved if the number of respondents were shown after each stated reason for leaving. Furthermore, the MCDSS response to the BOS stated that exit interviews would be handled by a "Human Resources Manager or Training Specialist," which raises the question as to who would be the most objective interviewer.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. The Department conducts exit interviews. The format is currently being reviewed. It is important to maintain confidentiality. Interviewing is done by staff in the Staff Resources Division, who are not part of any of the other divisions. The questions have been determined in advance. The interviewer simply documents the responses in the person's own words, so the interviewer's objectivity is not at issue.

Response (Board of Supervisors): Agree in part. Exit interviews consist of pre-determined questions that are asked by human resources staff within the Department. The responses are documented in the employee's own words so the interviewer's objectivity is not an issue.

Recommendation

The Grand Jury strongly recommends that departing employees continue to be given exit interviews. These interviews should be conducted by the County Human Resources Department instead of the MCDSS internal Human

Resources Unit. This would give the employees a chance to give their reasons for leaving without feeling intimidated thereby providing valid information. The reasons should be identified for each employee. The employee's name should be withheld.

Response (Social Services): Agree in part. The Department will continue to conduct exit interviews. The format will be revised to identify a reason for leaving for every employee who leaves, without any names attached.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board agrees in part with this recommendation and will ask the new Human Resources Director to analyze and make a recommendation on the issue of centralized exit interviews on a countywide basis. In the meantime, the Department of Social Services will continue to conduct its own exit interviews and revise its format to identify a reason for every employee who leaves, without any names attached.

Time Frame for Implementation: Revised exit interview format to be implemented by February 2001.

Comment

While it appears that the Department is taking steps to correct the problems noted, it is too early to tell if there is the will and capability to permanently turn the Fort Bragg office into a professional work place.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. The Department appreciates the recognition of the steps it has taken to address the concerns noted, and affirms the will and capability of all of the EFAS staff at all levels in Fort Bragg to continue to build a professional work place.

With three surveys taken over a six-year period (see Finding 4), MCDSS still has been unable to correct these problems regardless of how much information it has. The MCDSS cannot be blamed for low pay, nor is the BOS to be blamed for this problem as they have limited funds, but all the other issues are within the parameters of the MCDSS mission to correct.

Response (Social Services): Do not agree. Three employee surveys have been conducted approximately every three years. Over that time period, several massive projects have occurred, including automation of financial assistance, relocation of all offices, and implementation of welfare reform. In spite of the stress and effort associated with these conversions, there has been positive movement in a number of areas, particularly client service. Certain areas have been harder to improve. A number of areas yield results not significantly different from the

responses found in standardized national employee surveys. Low pay cannot be dismissed as insignificant in the dynamics of this organization. Not all other issues are within the parameters of the MCDSS mission or authority, for example the functionality of statewide computer systems, or the rapidity of regulation changes, both of which affect supervisor and manager time and effectiveness and staff job satisfaction. Nevertheless, many issues are within the scope of the MCDSS mission and are being addressed through the Multi-faceted Action Plan.

It is incumbent on management to set clear and unambiguous standards, exemplified by their own professional actions, and to fairly enforce these standards.

Response (Social Services): Agree wholeheartedly.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Response Requested

Mendocino County Department of Social Services