

## Training

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](http://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](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.