

# Developmental Services Human Resource Strategy

Ontario Developmental Services  
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## ***Best Practices for DSW Student Field Placements in Developmental Services Agencies***

### **INTRODUCTION:**

On July 23, 2012, the Developmental Services (DS) Human Resource (HR) Strategy Steering Committee met with representatives of the Developmental Services Worker (DSW) College programs in Ontario to discuss opportunities for collaboration with the education sector. One of the items on the meeting agenda was DSW Field Placements.

One of the outcomes of the July 2012 meeting was the establishment of a *DSW Field Placement Task Group* to identify the processes that occur within the DSW field placements. The Task Group is comprised of members of the *Workforce Development and HR Practices Implementation Committee* (WDHRPIC) (one of the committees of the DS HR Strategy) and DSW college program representatives.

A *DSW Field Placement Manual* is going through revisions at the DSW college coordinators level and will become more consistent across Ontario and be reflective of the revised Ministry of Training, Colleges and University's (MTCU) DSW Program Standards, which embedded the Core Competencies developed by the DS HR Strategy. The DS HR Strategy Steering Committee determined that a more consistent approach to the DSW field placement process would also be required. In addition, the members of the task group acknowledged that there is great variation in the field placement process for each college and agency within the province.

In order to collect related information, the *DSW Field Placement Process Task Group* designed and forwarded a survey for all colleges to complete that offer DSW 2 year diploma programs.

#### ***DSW Field Placement survey***

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The purpose of the survey was to gather information from colleges about their policies, procedures and experiences related to DSW field placements. Thereby, this task group could identify and then promote best practices to plan for field learning opportunities for the DSW student. The "best practices" supports the DSW student to demonstrate and practically apply the vocational learning outcomes during the field placement.

The survey was sent to the thirteen Colleges that offer the DSW diploma program in Ontario. Twelve colleges completed the survey with the thirteenth College having to omit their response due to the fact that their first semester for DSW program will take place in the fall of 2013.

## *Best Practices for DSW student field placement report*

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The task group reviewed the survey responses and compiled an analysis report to capture the findings. Based on the conclusions of the survey, best practices for DSW field placements in DS agencies were identified.

The purpose of this report is to provide all stakeholders involved in the DSW field placement process (agencies providing placements to DSW diploma students and colleges offering the DSW diploma program), the principles and practices that the committee identified as leading or being the best practices in the DSW field placement process.

In preparing this report the task group noted that there are many variables that determine which practices work for colleges and agencies and it is critical that partners have a discussion about their unique community needs. Ultimately, the success in the placement experience for the DSW diploma student is the responsibility of all involved: the college faculty, agency staff and the student.

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS:**

The task group recognizes that different agencies and colleges use a variety of terms to describe the participants in the field placement process. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, the following terms were used:

***College Field Placement Coordinator:*** The faculty or support staff member at the College who arranges/oversees field placements. It includes other terms used in some colleges such as Field Placement Supervisor, Field Placement Planner/Field Placement Developer (dual role), Coordinator, and College Field Placement Liaison.

***College Liaison:*** A person hired by the college to visit agencies on behalf of the college. This person provides guidance and support to the placement by being a resource to the agency site supervisor and student at the placement site while reporting back to the college Field Placement Coordinator. In some colleges, faculty members perform these duties. Includes other terms used in some colleges such as Field Placement Supervisor, Field Liaison, Faculty Advisor and College Mentor.

***Agency Site Supervisor:*** The agency representative who directly supervises the student on field placement. This person is responsible for the student's evaluation at placement. It includes other terms used in some colleges such as Field Placement Instructor, Agency Field Supervisor and Mentor.

***Agency Placement Coordinator:*** The Agency representative who arranges/oversees field placements. This person is not an Agency Site Supervisor but is a contact from the agency to oversee the coordination of placements by site and students for the organization. It includes other terms used in some colleges, such as Agency Representative.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR DSW STUDENT FIELD PLACEMENTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES AGENCIES

## PRE- PLACEMENT:

### *Agencies*

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**Communicate effectively with colleges:** Establish practices for effective communication with your local college. This includes mutually understanding what forms of communication work best for whom and what timelines are important.

**Communicate and offer placement opportunities to the local college DSW Program:** Provide your local college DSW program with information about available placement opportunities, including the times (i.e. days, evenings) of the placement and the performance expectations for the students.

**Engage in a process to assist in student selection:** The agency can support learning opportunities for the student to practice their technical and behavioural competencies through active participation in the pre-planning stage. Some colleges offer placement fairs or agency interviews with students to assist in assessing a good fit for both the student and the agency. These activities can develop a student's employment search skills to obtain future employment. For example, agencies can conduct behaviour based interviews with potential field placement students to help them practice interview skills.

**Establish a clear process to supervise the student:** Agencies need to provide their employees with clear expectations for supervising placement students. The agency should discuss with the Agency Site Supervisor the role and responsibilities related to supervising field placement students.

Agencies may have one person, such as an HR Manager who is the key contact person for the college to determine the number of available placement sites. Furthermore, there may also be a program manager/supervisor and a direct support employee involved in the field placement process.

Complete internal discussions, in advance of student placement, are necessary or suggested to promote best practices. It is critical to determine who will monitor and evaluate the performance expectations of the student, as well as, who will be the primary contact for the student and the College Liaison. It is critical to the process to formally identify an Agency Placement Coordinator and an Agency Site Supervisor (preferably with a DSW college designation) to ensure the student has a specific agency contact for their first day and the placement duration.

**Prepare your Agency Site Supervisor:** When possible, invite the college faculty to the agency to discuss strategies for effective placement supervision. Some colleges offer sessions or courses on field supervision and a recommended practice for agencies would be to send the employee(s) that will be supporting the learning process and supervising the student to this training.

**Understand the College Expectations:** Each college has a unique placement arrangement that reflects their community, their students and the college at large. It would be beneficial for agencies to proactively engage in conversations with their local college to understand the processes and the intricacies of each DSW program. This includes understanding the mandatory paperwork, i.e. "Work

Education Placement Agreement” insurance forms, as well as, the course requirements, such as the DSW Field Placement Manual.

Some colleges have some restrictions and processes for students entering into a placement. An example of this is an “Ethics of Touch” policy that limits contact with people receiving support for the first three weeks of a placement. Ensure that employees working with the student(s) and the people supported are aware of these policies to avoid confusion and frustration.

**Actively engage the DSW Advisory Committee Members:** The College DSW Advisory Committee provides a formal process for communicating with your local DSW program. Initiate discussions, offer representation, provide ideas for improvement and ensure implementation. Offer information about field placements to the DSW Advisory Committee.

## *Colleges*

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**Prepare students:** Ensure students are prepared to understand and participate in the DSW field placement experience. Have the students complete and provide their field placement agency with copies of workplace training certificates (i.e. Quality Assurance Measures, Non-violent Crisis Intervention, Safe Management, etc...), First Aid and CPR, Criminal Reference Check – Vulnerable Sector Screening, Health Screening, such as immunization records.

The College can prepare students to relate their learning by understanding the agency perspective and policies/procedures, and how these might influence the agency practices.

**Understand the local agency systems:** Have conversations with agencies about student placement, recruitment, hiring procedures and training employees. Communicate through agency networks in your community to inform them of how many placements you will be seeking, what students are looking for in a placement and other capacity building information. Many regions have formal HR Networks established that could facilitate and engage in these discussions.

**Engage the student and DS agency in the placement process:** Place students based on preferences i.e. career path and proximity to where they will live upon graduation. Organize career fairs and conduct interviews to determine best mutual fit for the agency and the student. Encourage agencies to conduct behaviour based interviews prior to the placement to assist the students in identifying learning goals and to obtain feedback. After the goals are identified the mentor can assess and measure progress for the accomplished competencies completed in the field placement.

**Prepare agencies for student placements:** Offer support on how to provide effective field placements to DSW students. Some colleges have training/orientation sessions for agency representatives on field placement supervision. Share with agencies what the expectations are for agencies that accept a field placement student, including any preferred or required qualifications for site supervisors, i.e. must have a DSW diploma or what is an equivalent to this standard. Share information with the agency about what limitations or restriction students may have based on college policies and procedures. For example, some colleges have policies on the “Ethics of Touch”, be sure to share this information with the agency in advance of the placement and make it part of the agency orientation process.

**Promote the DS sector:** Make it a requirement for students in the DSW program to have at least one placement in a DS agency; promote the DS HR Strategy website.

**Recognize and ensure the hours in field placement will reflect optimal learning opportunities:** Have discussion with agencies, advisory committees and other colleges to ensure that the students have sufficient placement time to learn, develop and demonstrate skills necessary for the workplace. There is great variety across the province in the number of field placement hours that DSW students have during their education (there is a variance of over 250 hours between the highest and the lowest number of hours reported). This could be positively influenced by sharing of information and practices between stakeholders.

## DURING PLACEMENT

### *Agency*

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**Set high expectations:** Expect students to be professional as you would expect your employees to be professional. This can include professional standards in dress/attire, attendance, punctuality, etc... Expectations should reflect the level of study the student is in their program. For example, the expectations of a student in their final semester placement should be higher than that of a student in their first semester placement. Require students to complete all the placement hours set by the college, including making up missed time with mutual college and agency approval.

**Ensure job readiness for students:** Colleges have the field placement as a major component of the curriculum during the student's last semester. Work with the student and the college to ensure that the student is prepared and evaluated on fit for career readiness in the DS field upon completion of this placement. Accurate agency evaluation of this placement is critical to determine whether the student has achieved job readiness standard and is a key determinant for graduation.

**Offer a rich experience and continuous feedback to students:** Dedicate time to orientating the student to the work site; some agencies do a mini orientation with a management staff facilitating the process. This ensures that students understand the agency's policies/procedures, services, culture, etc...

Capitalize on the field placement opportunity by offering agency based training to placement students. Expose students to all aspects of the profession. If students are not authorized to perform some activities (e.g. administer medication, be the sole person completing the documentation), permit them to shadow staff in these components of work and provide feedback.

Support students to complete college assignments and increase agency familiarity with the Field Placement Manual in a meaningful way.

**Continue to communicate with the college:** Use site visits as opportunities to enhance the experience for the student and the benefit to the agency. Early identify when a student needs extra support and reach out to the College Liaison for support. Promote a high level of communication between the College Liaison and Agency Site Supervisor to confirm any agency changes in personnel, including changes to the placement site or supervisors that may affect the student's success. Support should be offered in a consistent manner to promote student success.

### *College*

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**Communicate and support students and agency:** A number of colleges perform formal agency visits by the College Liaison that promotes on-going monitoring of student's progress and high level of

communication with the placement agency. There needs to be an established standard of frequency for on-site visits by the College Liaison and a clear process for communicating and evaluating students in between on-site visits to maximize potential for student success on placement. Colleges doing less than weekly on-site visits may consider initial frequent visits to ensure that the student is progressing well, and then use discretion for frequency of visits based on actual student and agency support required.

**On-going evaluation:** A minimum requirement of mid-term and final progress reports support agencies to evaluate the success and areas of growth for the student. In addition, weekly or bi-weekly journals and enhancing learning demonstration requirements beyond the completion of a final assignment could also be considered.

**Profile DS agencies:** Engage/invite representatives from agencies as guest speakers during classes, whenever possible.

## POST PLACEMENT

### *Agencies:*

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**Place value on the DSW diploma experience:** Identify DSW graduates as preferred applicants and new hires and include engaging in the DSW placement in your agency's formal recruitment strategy.

**Ongoing evaluation of the field placement process:** Evaluate the placement with the student (i.e. conduct exit interviews), assess the impact on the agency and identify what strengths, weaknesses and opportunities exist. Provide debriefing and feedback to the DSW Advisory Committee, the College Liaison and College Field Placement Coordinator.

### *Colleges*

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**Demonstrate value for the DS Sector:** Encourage students to understand and consider working in the DS Sector, for example, post employment opportunities/notices at the college and encourage students to be aware of agencies in their area.

**Organize events that promote agency recognition:** Recognize and express appreciation for DS agencies for accepting and supporting field placement students and acknowledging employees that are committed to the placement process and the student's learning experience.

**Engage in formal feedback as part of the quality assurance process:** Engage in a formal process through discussion and/or surveys to evaluate the placement experience from the viewpoint of the student, college and agency.

## SUSTAINABILITY FOR BEST PRACTICES

### *Agencies:*

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**Solicit and provide feedback:** Solicit feedback from DSW placement students. Whenever possible, agencies to conduct exit interviews on students to gather information on what worked well and what might be an opportunity for change in the agencies field placement process. Provide information back to the College Field Placement Coordinator or the Advisory Committee. Information about success or changes in the process can also be shared with the local agencies through HR Networks to encourage best practices.

**Promote the agency through the college:** Attend career fairs and host interview practice sessions with the local college to encourage students and graduates to consider the agency for their career. Offer bursaries in the agency's name to DSW students of the local college. This practice provides good publicity to the agency and supports the local college. Attract and hire DSW graduates.

**Develop a list of agencies that are willing to offer DSW field placements:** Regionally, through Advisory Committees or DS HR Networks develop and maintain a list of agencies that are interested in having DSW placements.

**Strengthen the relationships between colleges and agencies:** make it part of your agency plan to continue to develop and strengthen relationships with your local college.

### *Colleges*

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**Solicit and provide feedback:** Gather information from the agencies through formal surveys or year-end gatherings about the placement process. Also, gather information from the students through surveys. Provide feedback to the agencies about what you notice worked well and what might be an opportunity for change. Conduct exit interviews and provide feedback to the networks the College representatives are connected to, such as the DSW Advisory Committee. For example, members representing agencies on the DSW Advisory could receive a summary of the student exit interviews.

**Promote and demonstrate value for the DS sector:** Make it a requirement for students in the DSW program to have at least one placement in DS agencies, promote the DS HR Strategy website and Facebook page and organize events that promote agency recognition.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

**Continue to understand and evolve the process:** This report is based on information collected from colleges that offer the DSW diploma program. There is value in future research collecting information from agencies and students to understand best practices from their perspectives. Areas for further exploration include investigating the impact and value of site visits by the College Liaison to the placement site and procedural guidelines around suggested frequency of the visits. Through setting a standard, agencies will be better positioned to advocate for the field placement visits in their community.

**Engage in conversations about best practices for student learning when in field placement:** Monitoring evaluation of the field placement process needs to be an ongoing discussion in each community. This can be done by having field placement as an on-going agenda item on DSW Advisory Committee meetings. There may also be an opportunity to engage the regional HR Networks to have discussions with their local colleges to understand and participate in the education process in their community.

**Develop and share resources:** There are a number of tools and resources that could be developed. They would be benefit in developing and sharing consistent tools for evaluating the DSW field placement. An example of a possible tool for development and sharing is an "exit interview" to be used with students and agencies to obtain post placement feedback which would inform the quality assurance process.

## CLOSING STATEMENTS

This document includes topics for discussion within colleges and agencies, between field placement

partners and in communities supporting a DSW program. It is important that each conversation include an understanding of the uniqueness of each college, agency and community and works towards a partnership that includes this understanding. Ultimately the evaluation and success in the placement experience for the student is the shared responsibility of the student, the college and the agency.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The task group would like to thank the college representatives that supported this work by completing and submitting the survey.

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## RELATED MATERIAL

### *[Opportunities to build relationships between colleges and agencies](#)*

The document attached below has been developed by the Program Standards Committee of the Developmental Services Human Resource Strategy in 2010 to highlight best practices to provide opportunities for agencies and colleges to build a strong and collaborative relationship. The material for this document was collected through conversations with representatives from Developmental Service agencies, colleges and DSW Advisory Committees. The strategies presented in this document are for consideration purposes. To read the full document please [click here](#).

*Presented to the DS HR Strategy Steering Committee September 2013*