Overview of Child Forensic Interview Training

Video Part 1

>> Colleen Faragon: Hello, and welcome to Overview of Child Welfare Forensic Interview Training. I'm Colleen Faragon. Today we're going to introduce you to the Office of Children and Family Services statewide initiative to deliver a new child forensic interview training called ChildFirst. OCFS has partnered with the developers of ChildFirst, the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center and the Professional Development Program, to provide this nationally and internationally recognized training that both reflects best practice and aligns with current research in the field. We'll begin our program by discussing the joint efforts of OCFS and the Professional Development Program, or PDP, to identify and implement ChildFirst. They'll also preview their plans to make the training available statewide. Then we'll be joined by two guests from the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center, or Gundersen NCPTC. They'll review the history of the ChildFirst training program and discuss its basic guidelines and protocols. And finally, we'll end today by addressing your questions. You can contact us by phone at 518-474-2424, or you can fax questions using the Questions I Have form on page 12 of your handouts to 518-442-6650, and you can also email us at webcast_questions@albany.edu. And we'll share this contact information periodically throughout the training, and you can also find it on your Questions I Have form. Now, let's meet our first two guests. Please welcome Vicky Hiffa from the Office of Children and Family Services Division of Child Welfare and Community Services. Vicky is director of the Bureau of Program and Community Development. She's been leading the implementation of the ChildFirst training initiative. And Wendy Calabrese-Sampone is a Training Program Coordinator for the Professional Development Program’s Department of Child Welfare Training. Wendy has been with the Professional Development Program for 15 years and is a familiar face from the many trainings she's conducted. She's currently working to plan and schedule the live ChildFirst trainings across New York. And thanks to you both for being here. Well, let's begin by talking about this new initiative and OCFS and their partner's efforts to make this training available to you. I'd like to make one last note before we begin. You can follow along with the program graphics starting on page 1 of your handouts. And Vicky, what can you tell us about this initiative?

>> Victor Vieth: Well, as you know, the forensic interview is a very important component in a child abuse investigation. It's very often the only way an agency can really make a determination whether child abuse has actually occurred. Therefore, having trained staff conduct the interview is crucial, and it's one of the standards that OCFS has for our child advocacy centers. So, we at OCFS are very proud of the fact that we have been supporting forensic interview training for many years across the state. However, we are aware that many staff were not able to access this training, and very often there were waiting lists that had developed. So we're really pleased to now be partnering with ChildFirst, which is nationally recognized, and is in line with current research and accepted best practice. We believe it'll meet the needs of New York state in many ways. There will be additional trainings offered, which will, hopefully,
meet the demand for this training. The curriculum is consistent with forensic interviewing best practice but builds on it using current research from the field. We'll also be offeringings, additional offerings on specialized topics as well as advanced training. So we're very excited about that. As in the past, though, we are not mandating that staff attend this training. We're aware there are other trainings available out there. You should just continue to use the training that best suits the need of your community.

>> Colleen Faragon: Wonderful! Well, thank you, Vicky.

>> Victor Vieth: Thank you.

>> Colleen Faragon: Now, Wendy, you've been working very closely with OCFS and Gundersen NCPTC, and we want to hear more about that. So what is the role of the Professional Development Program in this?

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: PDP has years of experience providing quality training to New York state's workforce, and so we're very excited to partner with OCFS and GNCPTC to bring this really important forensic interviewing training to New York starting in April.

>> Colleen Faragon: Ok.

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: We're planning and scheduling 20 five-day ChildFirst forensic interviewing trainings, and we're also planning up to 18 advanced topic trainings. And they're starting in April 2017, and they should continue to March of 2018.

>> Colleen Faragon: Ok. Now, Wendy, what can workers expect from this onsite training event?

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: Well, first of all, we're collaborating with OCFS and GNCPTC to make sure we're customizing the training to New York state.

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: So we're doing that. We're also offering some onsite knowledgeable trainers and followup support as well. There's going to be resources in the training itself and then there's some web support that will be available after the training, and they'll also receive a certificate of completion at the end of the five-day training.

>> Colleen Faragon: Ok. And today, we'll meet Victor and Rita, and they're going to be sharing some of those tools and information on the tools for us.

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: Absolutely.

>> Colleen Faragon: Great! Wonderful! Well, I want to thank Vicky and Wendy for sharing information about the initiative and plans for implementation of this new training. Now they will join us again later for our question and answer segment, but right now, we're going to take a quick break and we'll be back with Victor Vieth and Rita Farrell from the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center. And they're going to tell us more about the ChildFirst interview protocol. We'll see you in a few minutes.
Video Part 2

>> Colleen Faragon: Welcome back. Joining us now are Victor Vieth and Rita Farrell. Victor is founder and Senior Director of Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center. Victor develops long-term strategy for expanding programs nationally and internationally. He also teaches, creates programs, and works on public policy issues related to child protection. He is a recognized expert in this field, having trained thousands of professionals in the U.S. and around the world. Victor began his career as a prosecutor in rural Minnesota, giving him great insight into the issues faced by Child Welfare professionals. And Rita is Gundersen NCPTC's Forensic Interview Specialist, and currently runs the ChildFirst program in New York. Rita has worked as an educator, founder, and director of a child advocacy center where she conducted over 1500 interviews with children. She's an award-winning author, speaker, and trainer on Child Forensic Interviewing, and abuse related topics. Now Victor will give us a brief history of this training program, and Rita will walk us about, or through the ChildFirst protocols and guidelines. Welcome to you both, and Victor please take it away.

>> Victor Vieth: Good morning everyone, it's great to be back in New York and to be with so many old friends. I want to share with you a little bit about the history of the ChildFirst Forensic Interview Training program, and then Rita will chat with you about some of the basics of the course. The program actually, is rooted in a paper called Unto the Third Generation, which sets forth what we have to do as a nation to significantly reduce, if not end child abuse. It wasn't all that long ago in the country where most professionals couldn't access frontline high-quality Forensic Interview training programs. So, at the National District Attorney’s Association we partnered with CornerHouse and began to work at the state level to establish state run programs. That work began in 1998 as a partnership between the National District Attorney’s Association and CornerHouse. We then got a grant from the United Stated Department of Health and Human Services to begin to establish the program at the state level. South Carolina was our test state, the program is still being run out of the Children's Advocacy Center in Columbia in that state. And then came New Jersey, and Indiana, and Mississippi, Georgia and Missouri, West Virginia, Maryland, Illinois. State programs in Kansas, Ohio, Delaware, Virginia, Arkansas, Connecticut, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, North Carolina. We established international programs in the nations of Japan and Columbia. A program at the state level in Alaska and Minnesota through our partner First Witness there. Here's a map showing how quickly the program spread at the state level, and that's just the state and international level. Studies from the National Children's Alliance and others have suggested as many as 60% of all Forensic interviewers in the country teaching through CACs and others have been trained through the ChildFirst Initiative. There's some transitions the course has made over the years. As I mentioned, it began as a partnership between the National District Attorney's Association and CornerHouse back in 1998, that partnership continued until 2007. In 2003, the National Child Protection Training Center was created originally as an NDAA program and began to oversee the ChildFirst Initiative. And then eventually, the National Child Protection Training Center merged into Gundersen Health System, and has continued to operate the program since 2013. In terms of the protocols taught in the ChildFirst Initiative, originally it was RATAC, the old CornerHouse protocol. Many of you know they changed their model in 2013, and as they did, they National Child Protection Training Center at Gundersen working with the state and new national courses developed our own model of the ChildFirst Protocol. Where we literally looked at all the major national and state models, and tried to
pick the best of the best as we implemented the new project. If you're interested in the history of Forensic Interviewing and the significant role we've played in that history, we've played in that history Dr. Kathleen Coulborn-Faller from the University of Michigan wrote a great literature review. It's on the screen, and in that literature, review she notes that "The RATAc interview structure has been very influential, because it was incorporated into the Finding Words curriculum sponsored by the American Prosecutors Research Institute, or the National District Attorney's Association provided by the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse." She notes, "In 2007, the National Child Protection Training Center founded by me entered into contract with CornerHouse. We continued that under the original RATAc protocol, and RATAc and its various iterations became a significant protocol in the United States." Then she notes correctly, "The protocol ChildFirst takes into account the new changes in the CornerHouse protocol, but it's also based on a review of all, every single one of the major Forensic Interviewing protocols in the country and all of the approved national and state courses." So, it really is a model that attempted to incorporate the best of the best in this regard. And Dr. Kathleen Coulborn-Faller also notes one of the unique features of the ChildFirst model is that we tried to take into account relatively new research on poly-victimization. Now, what does that all mean? Dr. David Finkelhor from the University of New Hampshire, and he and he's — he and his research team looked at 11,000 documented cases of child maltreatment. And what they found is a child abused in one way is almost always abused in multiple ways. Typically, they found that 66% of the time, a child abused in one way is abused in at least two ways. And about 1/3 of the time, a child abused in one way is abused in five or more ways. So, as part of the ChildFirst model we built in a poly-victimization screen. So, whatever the presenting problem is, let's say it's sexual abuse, before the interview is done we'll also do a quick screen for the possibility of physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, witnessing violence between caretakers and the like. We're seeing at least antidotally across the country that, more often than not we find that one form or maltreatment is the tip of the iceberg. So, that's one of the unique features of the model, and I think eventually all models will incorporate what we have begun. Another unique feature to the ChildFirst model is the heavy emphasis on getting corroborating evidence. This is a book by Michael Lamb and colleagues where they make the essential point that the Forensic Interview is not the end of the investigation, it's just the beginning. And so, it's critical that forensic interviewers get as many details as is developmentally appropriate from a child. And then it's the job of the MDT to go out and follow-up on those investigative leads. The national standard promulgated by 200 national organizations is there should be at least five or more items of corroborating physical evidence seized in every case. We actually think more often than not, we should be able to seize 30 or more pieces of evidence. In your handouts, there's an article I wrote that kind of walks you through some of that, but when you go to the ChildFirst interviewing course you'll learn in great detail how we go about collecting corroborating evidence. The ChildFirst protocol meets national Best Practice Standards. So, a couple of years ago the United States Department of Justice convened all of the major national programs including those of us at ChildFirst. And we developed this document published by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, it's also one of your handouts. So, you can see that ChildFirst meets all the agreed upon best standards by all the national models. For those of you who work at CACs, we are one of the approved courses, so we meet the standards of the National Children's Alliance for being accredited as a Forensic Interviewer in a CAC. And for those of you who are members of APSAC, our protocol, our training program is also consistent with the Forensic Interviewing guidelines published by
the American Professional Society on the Abuse for Children. And as I mentioned a few moments ago, the model is also recognized in peer reviewed literature, as well as case law. Some of you have asked questions about the use of media, anatomical dolls, and anatomical diagrams, we do follow best practice in that regard. So, when you come through the program you'll read most of the pertinent research. So, here's a 1994 literature review on anatomical dolls, here's a 2005 literature review by Dr. Kathleen Coulborn-Faller. And what many people don't realize is that there's well over published — well over 100 published peer review articles on dolls alone. And the majority of those studies say that if they're used appropriately, they can produce more details, which in turn leads to more corroborating evidence. So, we don't teach you to use dolls, that's a decision you have to make. Instead, we teach you what the research says and if your team chooses to use dolls or diagrams, how to do it consistent with best practice, and something that you can support with the research. We just published a comprehensive literature review, what does the research say or not say about media, both dolls and diagrams. That's also one of your handouts that you can read at your leisure. So, that's a quick overview of the history of the program and how it spread nationally and internationally. In terms of the specifics as to what's taught in the course, and what the ChildFirst protocol is, I'll turn it over to my colleague and friend Rita Farrell.

>> Rita Farrell: Thanks Victor. Hello New York, so glad to be here. Let's talk a little bit about what ChildFirst is going to provide, and what our protocol and process looks like. First, everything we do in the foundation of ChildFirst is in the best interests of a child. We want to make sure that we take a holistic approach, and that's what ChildFirst does. We take a holistic approach, we explore for all forms of maltreatment. We work with the week of training so that you can take back to your jurisdictions a multidisciplinary approach to the training course and the work you do in the field. In the week — the five days, you will have lecture, you will view actual forensic interviews, you will be able to as a participant, participate in a mock interview experience. On Thursday and Friday of the week there is an exam, and we have an overview now of the agenda of what that looks like. Our ChildFirst Forensic Interviewing process is a flexible process. It has four phases, and as Victor mentioned, it really meets all of the best practice for the field and Forensic Interviewing. Our four phases are rapport, transition to topic of concern, explore details, and closure. Let's walk through each phase, so you can see what the components are of each phase. So, in Rapport, we really have a summary here on the screen for you. We have an introduction of self and setting. There's a time where the interviewer gets to know the child, gets to know about their family, things they like to do. And something that we strongly teach in the ChildFirst process is Narrative Practice. Narrative Practice is something in the field that is best practice. Obtaining that episodic narrative from the child, and that's done in our first phase of ChildFirst. Our second phase is Transition to Topic of Concern. Our purpose is to really provide that structure to communicate about any type of maltreatment. Within this phase as you'll see, we have a Decision Tree. The first part of the Decision Tree is an open invitation. After we build rapport with the child we explore family and do Narrative Practice. We have a time where we ask an open invitation question, or what the child knows about being here. This too is recommended in the field best practice. Determining what type of allegation, you have before you, even though we're going to explore all types of maltreatment in our process at ChildFirst, we really have some decisions based on whether a child does make a disclosure in that open invitation or not. Depending on that, you'll either go to introducing anatomical
diagrams, for a bodily injury allegation, or we might go over to explore more about the family relationships that you've already talked to the child about. This is a fluid process here on the Decision Tree, and there's no one right way or checklist that you have to do. It really allows the interviewer to formulate where they need to go in that Forensic Interview with the child. Because as we know, it's child led, it's in the best interest of the child, and we follow the child. From there, if and when we do get a disclosure, we're always going to then explore the details with that child. The third phase of Explore Details really gives us an opportunity to use that Narrative Practice to elaborate on the information that the child is talking to us about. And we're listening and gathering those details at that time. We're going to consider all forms of multiple maltreatment at this time. We have a safety assessment that's within the ChildFirst process for all of our team members to be able to look at the neglect, lack of supervision, risk of harm types of questions that we need to know. We also in this phase, explore for possible other explanations or people that might be involve. Our final phase at ChildFirst is Closure. Our purpose of Closure is to end respectfully with the child. We want to add safety for the child to know that it's okay to tell, and we want to arm the child with those individuals in their lives that would be good to tell in the future. Also, asking if they have any questions, and then bringing them back to a neutral state. One thing about ChildFirst that I think you're going to love is that, it explores all forms of maltreatment and really takes a holistic approach. We're excited to be in New York, and now I believe for questions, any questions?

>> Colleen Faragon: Yeah, we're going to get ready for the Question and Answer. And Victor and Rita, thanks to you both for being here, for telling us about this new training and its history. And now we are going to take a quick break to give you time to phone, fax, or email your questions to us. We'll have our contact information up on the screen, and when we come back Vicky and Wendy will join us, and we'll address as many of your questions as we can. We'll see you in a few minutes.

**Video Part 3**

>> Colleen Faragon: Welcome back, we've certainly given you a lot of information today. Let's take the next few minutes to answer some of your questions. So, we're going through a stack of questions that have come in, and the first question is going to go right to Victor. So, Victor, the question is, "I have been trained in the current New York Best Practice Model, how urgent is it for me to be trained in the new model?"

>> Victor Vieth: I think it's beneficial to be trained in the new model, but it's not urgent that you get it done tomorrow. It's important to remember that all of the major national and state models have far more similarities than dissimilarities. They all meet probable the OJJDP best practice standard, so what you're doing is competent, you can continue to do that. And then when you're able individually, or preferably with your team go through the Child First model, and either way you'll be able to defend it in court.

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: Okay, I'm going to follow-up, because I know another question came in. You said preferably with your team, so we had another question that came in that said, "Do staff need
to attend as a team, so Child Welfare, Law Enforcement, as they did before with best practices" can you expand on that?

>> Victor Vieth: Yeah, I mean, Child First is really premised on training a team. So, you do as Rita mentioned, mock forensic interviews, and then you staff it — staff that as a team. So, what do we see here in terms of Child Protection issues? What are Criminal Justice issues here? What are things that may come up in a court of law if this case goes to trial? How are we all going to follow-up together to now collect the corroborating evidence that's been revealed in this forensic interview? So, if you don't come as a team, the experiential learning process is diminished. Now for some reason you can't come as a team, that's okay, we'll try to connect you with an existing team that is in the training. But it's more beneficial if you're able to come as a team.

>> Colleen Faragon: Sure.

>> Rita Farrell: And there's more than just the forensic interviewing process that they're learning, which is what Victor is talking about. And, so, the week-long course really includes other legal lectures that are going to be for New York, and law enforcement lectures, child development, case workers. So, it really is for everyone even if you're not ever going to do a forensic interview, but you're going to observe them or you're going to need to know what your jurisdiction's doing, it's beneficial for all frontline professionals and disciplines. Colleen Faragon: Now Wendy, how will people be notified that this training is available?

>> Wendy Calabrese-Sampone: Once the training schedule is secured, we'll be entering the training into HSLC. We'll also — so, they'll — anybody in HSLC will get the announcements for those, but anybody not in HLSC we'll be also sending emails out to all the CACs across the state. So, everybody should get that information that we have the training scheduled and where it's being scheduled.

>> Colleen Faragon: Okay. Great, all right, we have more questions coming in. The next question is, "How does the Child First model compare and contrast to the current New York Best Practices model?"

>> Rita Farrell: Again, as Victor said, there's more similarities than differences. I think the one piece that we want to focus on is the regular updates to meet the best practice in the field. New research is within the Child First training week, and course and protocol it's the best of the best in the sense of what's newest and recommended for the field of Forensic Interviewing in our work.

>> Victor Vieth: Yeah, and I would just add to that, I mean, one of the nice features of New York being part of the Child First coalition now is, you're not alone. So, your frontline forensic interviewer, or law enforcement officer, or prosecutor, and your seeing something you haven't quite seen before, you're not sure how to handle that, you're able to call or email us. And Rita or Stephanie or one of our forensic interviewers, or if it's a legal issue, me or another one of our prosecutors, we'll get back to you very quickly and we'll kind of walk you through. Or if you have a defense expert is called to attack what you did or didn't do in an interview, you can call us and we'll give you some pointers, we'll give you some sample briefs. We'll help you defend that model in a court of law.
Rita Farrell: In addition, with Forensic Interviewing, it’s really all about the techniques that you chose to do, and being able to have purpose and legally defending what you do. And so, one particular protocol or process may include a technique that the other may not have in it. And that’s okay, that doesn’t make one right and one wrong. What Child First does do in the training week is train on many different topics that — and techniques that interviewers may or may not use. A could of examples would be interview instructions, we teach what our field and best practice says about interview instructions. Truth/Lie discussions, all of those kinds of diagrams and dolls, all of those things are techniques that we have to have purpose we can legally defend. And we teach the right way to utilize and do those techniques within the protocol and process.

>> Speaker: And you know, Victor and Rita you just really mapped out the need for this five day course, because you’re certainly, you’re covering a lot of information. But one of the questions that did come in is, "Why is this course a five day rather than a three day?" So, I just want to take that question and just have you expand on that.

>> Victor Vieth: Sure.

>> Rita Farrell: Sure, you want me to — I'll start with the agenda, and then Victor can add the — what’s great about the five day is that, it’s not just lecture. There’s — we’re doing, right? You're watching, listening, and doing, so you’re watching interviews, you’re discussing it. At the end of the week you’re doing a mock interview with the Child First process with one of our actors. And you're facilitating that group discussion as Victor said, in that — in those two days we have a final exam. So, we go a little bit further with the hands-on learning as well, in addition to the interviews, so —

>> Victor Vieth: Yeah, and I would add to that two things. One is a practical, if you're going to be a forensic interviewer in a CAC, you have to go through an approved course, and there has to be a least 40 hours of content in that. So, the course has to be five days if you're going to meet that national standard. So, that’s a practical matter, but frankly even if there wasn’t that national standard, I think our course would be five days. The most important part of a child abuse investigation is the forensic interview in sexual abuse cases in particular that ultimately determines whether or not we’re going to be able — be able to protect a child. So, Child First is a very intense course, we don’t apologize for that. There's some pre-course homework you have to do, there’s homework every night, students will read a lot of the pertinent research. There are professionals in the country who think that frontline professionals really don't need to read any of the research, it should be, you know, experts who synthesize what's important. We disagree with that philosophy, we very much believe in frontline professionals. We believe that they're capable of reading and understanding, and applying at a higher level than anyone else. And so, we put a great deal of trust in them. And then, the huge emphasis on experiential exercises. So, you know, 2/5 of the course is getting in the box and actually practicing those interviews and being critiqued. And you couldn’t do that in a three-day course.

>> Colleen Faragon: Okay. All right, thank you. Vicky, during your piece you touched on the requirement or the lack — it’s not required. And here’s the question, "Is OCFS requiring caseworkers to be trained, if they've attended the best practices, do they need to learn these new modules?"
>> Vicky Hiffa: No, we're not requiring, but as Victor indicated that certainly given that Child First is using current research and what best practices from the field, it would be strongly encouraged that at some point in the future if they could attend the training as a team. That would be ideal, but certainly if they've been trained in Forensic Interviewing and best practice, then you know, it's not urgent right away, but we would encourage some point in the future they could do that.

>> Colleen Faragon: All right, thank you. So, another question that we have, "Will this training be able to incorporate trial — child trafficking issues within the training to manage teens and older children, or is this primarily geared towards young children?

>> Rita Farrell: We will be handling all of those topics in the question in our special topic in advanced trainings that we'll be doing this year. So, that would be available in addition to the five week day training course. And those are one day trainings, special topic advanced trainings.

>> Colleen Faragon: Nice.

>> Victor Vieth: Yeah, and this might be a good time to reemphasize the importance of the Polyvictimization screening, which is one of the unique features of the model. So, you know, every single case irrespective of the presenting problem, there's a screen for multiple forms of maltreatment.

>> Colleen Faragon: Okay, and just this person with the question about — for teens, "Will it be open to all partners, law enforcement, CAC, and casework staff as well, these one day —?

>> Victor Vieth: Mm-hmm.

>> Colleen Faragon: Okay.

>> Rita Farrell: Yes.

>> Colleen Faragon: Great. Thank you. Okay. Let me just make sure we have answered all of our questions here, and it looks like we have. You've answered all of our questions. Well, it is time to wrap up today's training, I'd like to thank Vicky, Wendy, Rita, and Victor for being here today, and for sharing information about this new training. Their contact information has been included in your handouts. And we'll end today by asking you to complete your Participant Reaction questionnaire before you leave, and thank you again for your participation, and for all the hard work that you do on behalf of the children and families of New York State. Have a great day.

[ Music ]