C O M M E N T S

New Director's Cut

By Bill Donelson

I have much to learn as the new Director for FDLRS Galaxy and certainly appreciate the state-level meetings and trainings along the way. I recently attended the CHRIS *Plus* overview in Orlando. It was a great opportunity to spend time with our Child Find team and to learn about this newest version of the database.

The hotel and meeting room were quite pleasant and, refreshingly, the training felt more like a family gathering than a meeting. Folks were very friendly and genuinely excited about the new developments to be shared.

The teams from Miami and Tallahassee were well prepared. I appreciated the historical perspective and consistent use of humor, music and creativity throughout the various presentations. Our group especially valued the opportunity to try out CHRIS *Plus* on computers with the assistance of a training guide and on-site coaching.

My background is in school psychology and student services administration. For years I have wondered why our school-based intervention efforts lack consistency. There are a number of reasons, but the CHRIS *Plus* training gave me renewed hope and sparked a brainstorm. If a detailed database can be developed for Pre-K, then such a tool is possible for regular K-12 education as well!

The proposed reauthorization of IDEA includes a new perspective on the identification of students with special needs. Rather than the historic and reportedly harmful "wait to fail" model using traditional IQ/Achievement discrepancy, national leaders are looking toward the use of a well defined problem-solving system. Response to intervention and other more meaningful factors would guide professionals in determining the degree of services needed. Such a system has been successful in states such as Iowa and Kansas.

Bill Donelson and the FDLRS Galaxy Staff at the Child Find Meeting in Orlando, August 2003.

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In my ideal world, we would have something that might be called CHRIS Columbus! This adventurous new database would be the next level of CHRIS *Plus* with initial focus on students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. The database itself would help structure up the new state-wide problem-solving model. School-based teams could use the web-based interface to easily document each case, monitor timelines, document screening/diagnostic assessment, assist in defining evidence-based interventions, facilitate functional academic/behavioral progress monitoring, and assist in generating summary reports.

Separate forms to document early intervention efforts, Academic Improvement Plans, and Section 504 Plans could be abandoned. CHRIS Columbus could serve as the Swiss Army Knife of regular education. Much like the new electronic IEPs, the program could assist school-based personnel in developing multifunctional and strategic intervention plans for early intervention. Students with high mobility could "pick up where they left off" more easily in this web-based system. Accountability and evaluation of efforts across the state could be obtained quickly and easily.

I am not completely naive and idealistic. I know this would take time and money to accomplish. However, in my opinion, CHRIS *Plus* has evolved into an elegant system, it has many of the elements in place to make this a possibility and such development would provide a much needed linkage between Pre-K and the most critical early years of learning in regular education. Thanks to the FDLRS leadership for this opportunity to share my thoughts on the future and comment on the recent CHRIS *Plus* training!

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CHRIS Plus New User Training at the FDLRS/Reach Associate Center in Ft. Lauderdale, October 2003.

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Q & A Database

I know you must be wondering what ever happened to all the questions you so dutifully wrote on cards at the August Child Find meeting. Well, here's the answer. I have pulled all the questions and suggestions together into a nice little FileMaker Pro database (what else would you expect?) that will soon be distributed to all of you. We actually are planning to incorporate it into CHRIS *Plus* Help as a means of responding to ongoing questions that arise and need to be responded to uniformly statewide. Many of the responses to questions that were raised are also incorporated into the training that is being provided for CHRIS *Plus*.

Questions in the file have been sorted into subject areas. Users can locate information by querying the subjects or by typing a key word in either the question or answer field. Examples of questions and answers from the file are included in this newsletter, along with the subject area they have been assigned.

Examples of Q & A

Subject: Demographics

Q. **If a child is moving to (or lives in) a county adjacent to the county where our FDLRS center is located, should we enter the center's county or the county where the child's physical address is located in order to be able to view the record?**

A. Record access is governed by the FDLRS center service area, not by the physical location of the center. The child's *county of residence* should be the county where the child's physical address is located. The county where the child receives services should be entered in *service county*. If the child is receiving services in more than one county, the county that is the fiscal agent paying for the services should be entered as *service county*.

Q. **What if a child has two residences in two counties? How should that child be entered so the record can be viewed?**

A. If one of the residences is outside the FDLRS service area, enter the county of residence that is within the service area in the child's demographic information. The information regarding the other residence can be entered in the notes field of the significant adult record or records.

Subject: Interagency Release

Q. **How is the Interagency release field supposed to be used?**

A. The interagency release field is used to indicate whether an interagency release of information exists in the child's file. Information should never be released based solely on the presence of an "R" indicator in this field. The "R" stands both to indicate that there is a release and that the information on the release is restricted. By nature all interagency releases are restricted both in regard to information that may be released and by agencies or persons to whom the information can be released. Interagency releases are also restricted by date ranges.

Q. **How are the start date and end date in interagency release used?**

A. The start date and end date in interagency release are used to indicate the term of the release.

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CHRIS *Plus* Training and Upgrade Update

The conversion to CHRIS *Plus* has three parts:

- Training in CHRIS *Plus*
  All users must be trained in CHRIS *Plus* before using the new program. Five hour training sessions have been scheduled throughout the state. A special 90-minute training session is available for users who use CHRIS to a very limited extent.
- CHRIS *Plus* Test Conversion
  Each center will receive a test copy of the converted database containing the center's current data. Any issues will then be addressed and resolved before final conversion.
- CHRIS *Plus* Final Conversion
  During the final conversion process, the center will not have access to CHRIS for approximately one day. When this process is completed, CHRIS *Plus* will be used for all data entry.

The process of training all CHRIS users in CHRIS *Plus* is well underway. By the time you receive this newsletter, most centers will be in the process of testing the converted database or will already be converted to CHRIS *Plus*. If you were unable to attend the trainings offered in your area we have scheduled two additional training sessions: January 21 and 22, 2004. Both sessions will be centrally located in Orlando. Please call the CHRIS Help Desk at 800-231-5747 to register.

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