

## **PUBLIC HEALTH/ M.P.H. STUDENT TRAINING UNIT**

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**Type of Activity:** Academic training of public health students in two departments of county government-during the practicum (service-learning) phase of their education. The mission of the unit includes the identification of public health research studies that will serve the operational needs of the agency as well as provide a training ground for the graduate public health student. The preceptor of the unit recruits and matches public health graduate students to research studies and specific supervisors/managers within the agency.

**Description of Project:** A full time training unit was originally established in a county health department in late 2001. The unit was staffed by a public health PhD with a background in research and 10+years of practice experience with the agency. In June 2004 the unit was transferred to its current home, a division of County government and Department of Human Services known as the Division of Family Guidance. The responsibility of this unit includes the emotional, psychological and psychiatric treatment services of a population of adolescents and their families who reside in Bergen County. For the most part, clients of this agency are medically uninsured.

The purpose of the Training program is to 1) provide training opportunities in a local agency for public health graduate students and 2) conduct research on programs within the agency that would provide deeper levels of knowledge and understanding for managers and administrators who direct these public health services. The work of the Training Unit is the intensive supervision of students during the last stage of their education, the practicum. The preceptor of the training unit is a PhD public health person whose primary role is to train on a full-time basis. This offers students the time, focus and accessibility to a fieldwork supervisor who helps them produce a professional and valuable research study. Instead of training as an adjunct to administering operations and services, training is the central function of the unit. The rewards of this approach are many.

**Outcome of the Project** As of January 2005, 8 MPHs have completed training in one of the two divisions of Bergen County government through this program .(7 of these MPH students are from the UMDNJ School of Public Health)

**Successes, Difficulties and “The Unexpected”**-Success is indicated by the number (8) of MPH practicums completed through this program within a county government (Bergen County) in northern New Jersey in a little more than two years.

Of the 8 MPHs supervised, 2 plan to continue their public health education training (DrPH) or will attend dental school(1). A paper based on the practicum research experience of another student trained in this unit was submitted to APHA. It was presented at the November 2004 meeting.

Obtaining approvals from the IRB (Institutional Review Board) of the university rapidly for students with tight time deadlines and a limited understanding of the slowness of bureaucracies was usually the most challenging part of each research project.

**Benefit to the Agency and the Community Served by the Agency**

For a county government, access to the technical skills of new MPH candidates who can apply these skills to research questions,(which local governments often do not have the luxury to address due to hiring freezes and the rigors of fiscal austerity,) is very beneficial.