

## Supervisors as Managers: Understanding and Using Outcome Data

Across the country increasing attention has been focused on the outcomes of child welfare services. At the same time, advances in information systems and the development of user-friendly technology are making outcome information more easily accessible at all levels of child welfare agencies. This opens the potential for child welfare agencies to engage all staff in the critical work of improving performance on outcomes.

This issue highlights efforts to engage supervisors within child welfare agencies – the key link between agency policy and front line workers – in obtaining and using information on outcomes. We feature the emerging role of supervisors as managers and the skills that they need to engage caseworkers in meeting agency goals.

Our main article describes a new curriculum designed to teach supervisors how to incorporate information from automated systems into their day-to-day work to support improved outcomes for children and families.

The curriculum, *Using Information Management to Support the Goals of Safety, Permanency and Well-Being*, is now available free of charge at the Muskie web site [www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/SACWIS](http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/SACWIS). The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement is now disseminating the curriculum and is available to provide technical assistance in its use.

*Continued on page 8*

In October, 1998, the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School a grant to work with child welfare agencies to develop, field test and disseminate a curriculum to help child welfare supervisors in public agencies make more effective use of child welfare data. The grant was awarded to help develop training approaches to build the capacity of supervisors to use information from the statewide automated child welfare information systems (or SACWIS systems) in operation or being developed in most states.

During the first year of the grant, the project team worked with child welfare staff in Maine, Massachusetts and Oregon to develop, pilot and evaluate the curriculum. During the second and final year of the project, the team collaborated with child welfare agencies in five additional states – Kentucky, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming – to field test the curriculum. The curriculum was revised in response to the experience of these pilot sites and is now available to all states free of charge.

The curriculum focuses on child welfare supervisors because supervisors are the link between policy and front line practice. They are expected to guide, direct, support and educate caseworkers, while organizational expectations are constantly shifting. Supervisors need frequent opportunities to be informed about the mission and outcomes of the agency, about current information systems,

and about how those link to their day-to-day work with caseworkers.

This curriculum addresses these needs by focusing on skills in information management, the discipline of using information as an organizational resource to achieve the agency mission and outcomes. It introduces supervisors to federal outcomes requirements and data systems, data available on the state system, and how to use this data with caseworkers.

It also covers the concept of transforming data into knowledge and then into improved practice and teaches data analysis skills that can be used in this process. In addition, it presents strategies supervisors can use to build acceptance of – and commitment to – change among workers. All of these components build skills that supervisors need to understand and use outcome data in their work.

Engaging supervisors and caseworkers in moving towards agency outcomes is especially critical today, as federal initiatives highlight state performance on key indicators of the outcomes of safety and permanency, and call on states to make improvements.

Currently the Department of Health and Human Services tracks the performance of State child welfare agencies through two initiatives, the Child Welfare Outcomes Annual Report and the Child and Family Services (CFS) reviews. Data to inform these initiatives are drawn from the Adoption and Foster Care

*Continued on page 2*

# Supervisors as Managers: Understanding and Using Outcome Data

*Continued from page 1*

Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The Child Welfare Outcomes Annual Reports provide information about the performance of State child welfare systems on 12 measures that assess the attainment of a national set of child welfare outcomes. The reports also include variables relevant to the context of each State's child welfare system, such as the number of children under 18, the percent of children living in poverty, etc. While annual publications of the reports allow trends to be identified over time, the data do not permit a comprehensive assessment of the State child welfare agency operations. This is the role of the CFS reviews.

The CFS reviews were designed to obtain information through a variety of mechanisms to provide an assessment of State child welfare agency operations and to identify changes that may need to occur to improve outcomes for children and families. The structure for this review is based on six outcome measures selected from those included in the Child Welfare Outcomes Annual Report. National standards were developed for these six measures. The State's performance on these measures relative to the national standards along with information collected from case record reviews, stakeholder interviews and other sources of information that the State provides are the criteria for determining a State's substantial conformity under Title IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.

The information management curriculum has three key features – it is competency-based, it uses a modular approach that can be tailored to state's needs, and it engages trainees in experiential learning. One of the first steps in developing the curriculum was to define new supervisory competencies related to information management on which the curriculum would be based. These new competencies are:

■ **Systems Thinking** – skills such as understanding the concept of information systems, the ability to convert data into information to support decision-making, and understanding and conveying to others the link between entering quality data into records and improving services to families

■ **Information Systems** – knowledge of data, its location and organization in the current system, ability to identify and locate critical data, and an ability to use this information in supervisory practice

■ **Change Management** – skills such as understanding the dynamics of introducing major changes into the workplace, the process for integrating these changes into the work environment, and utilizing strategies to facilitate introduction and management of changes in the workplace

In the curriculum, these competencies are addressed in the learning objectives of the 11 modules. The modular format allows state child welfare agencies to customize the curriculum by selecting the modules and activities that best meet their unique training needs.

For example, in the pilot process, some child welfare agencies successfully implemented all 11 modules in precisely the suggested order; other agencies implemented only some of the modules, other agencies heavily customized, then implemented the modules, and still others reorganized the modules to better suit their needs. At a minimum, states will want to customize the curriculum by replacing the term SACWIS with the name of the state's system, and by incorporating child welfare measures, data and reports generated by that system.

The curriculum can be used by states without a SACWIS system, drawing on data from any automated system or reporting system the state has in place. In addition, some pilot sites found the curriculum was useful

not just for supervisors, but also for workers, managers and administrators.

The curriculum is based on the concept that child welfare supervisors, like other practitioners, learn best by doing. The experiential design of the curriculum is evident in the activities in which supervisors reflect on and discuss their own experience and in the case scenarios that engage supervisors in group-based problem solving around actual experiences in child welfare agencies.

In addition, the final modules of the curriculum ask supervisors to identify exercises they will use with their supervisory units and to convene again within a two- to four-week period to discuss their experiences.

The central modules of the training include:

■ **The Impact of Technology in the Workplace.** This module has participants reflect on the impact that technology, specifically automated information systems, has had on the workplace in general and on the role of the child welfare supervisor.

■ **Systems, Data, Information and Knowledge: Putting the Pieces Together.** This module highlights the ASFA requirements for outcomes and performance measures, the systems – including AFCARS and NCANDS – that collect and store data, and how these systems can support the agency's goals. It introduces the puzzle equation and the concept of transforming data into information and knowledge. (*see box*)

■ **Supervising for Results: Identifying and Locating Key Data.** This module helps supervisors identify some of the data they need for supervision and then to determine its location in SACWIS or other systems. The module includes a "best/most effective practices" exercise, which allows participants to share their own tips and techniques for easily gathering needed information.

### ■ Using Information Management to Support Casework Supervision.

This module allows participants to explore the process of gathering information from case records and supervisory discussions and methods of eliciting the additional data, information or knowledge needed to supervise for results.

### ■ Data Analysis Tips, Tools and Techniques.

This module presents activities to allow child welfare supervisors to understand the varying information needs of people at several levels in child welfare agencies. Using a case study developed by the Oregon Human Services Data Users Group, *Abuse on the Increase in Cascadia County*, and actual reports and data from the SACWIS systems, participants become familiar with analytical tools to sort through data, determine which data matter most, and make critical decisions.

### ■ Technology is Changing the Job of the Child Welfare Supervisor: Are You A Change Leader?

This module uses a case study entitled "*FamilyNet: An Automated Child Welfare Information System*" to explore issues that arise when a major organizational change, such as the implementation of a new information system, occurs in the workplace. The module also presents a three-phase model for building commitment to change and applies the model in several real life exercises.

In November, 1999, five states were chosen to pilot the information management curriculum. Representatives from these states were trained on the curriculum, and then each state held a supervisory training event in their states by June, 2000. Multiple methods were used to evaluate the curriculum in the pilot states, and states were asked to provide lessons learned and feedback at the end of the second project year.

The information management curriculum is designed to be integrated with, not supplant, a state's existing SACWIS and supervisory training. It can be a useful resource as states look for ways to enhance training opportunities to ensure that supervisors understand and use outcome data in their day-to-day work.

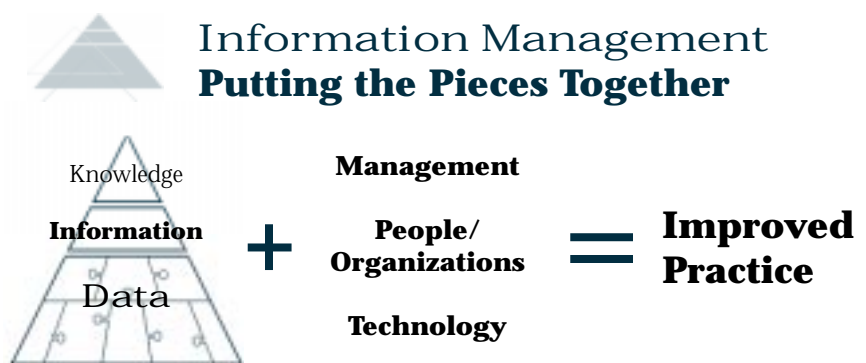
## USING THE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

In October, 2000, the project team mailed copies of the "Using Information Management to Support the Goals of Safety, Permanency and Well Being" curriculum to Child Welfare Training Directors in the 50 states.

Additionally, the team created a web site, [www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/sacwis](http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/sacwis), that contains information on the project, the project evaluation and success stories from five child welfare agencies that used this training material. Also on the site is the Trainer's Guide to the curriculum, including all 11 modules and lessons learned by the pilot states. You can view these materials or save them from your browser to your hard drive, which you can then open and manipulate in any HTML editor.

Additional hard copies of the curriculum are available for cost through the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement Clearinghouse by calling 1.800.HelpKid or e-mailing [clearing@usm.maine.edu](mailto:clearing@usm.maine.edu).

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement is available to provide telephone consultation, on-site technical assistance and content training of trainers to child welfare agencies that want to adapt and deliver this curriculum. Contact Susan Kanak at (207) 780-5840 or [skanak@usm.maine.edu](mailto:skanak@usm.maine.edu) for additional information.



The puzzle equation, presented in the "Systems, Data, Information and Knowledge" module, illustrates the process of transforming data to knowledge and then into improved practice.

**Data** are basic raw facts – for example, a child ID # or a date of entry into foster care. Today's child welfare agencies have huge quantities of data available, as indicated by the entire base of the pyramid.

**Information** is created when someone selects the data to use in decision-making – for example, when a manager gets a list of all the children in her unit and their lengths of stay in foster care. This is the next level in the progression up the pyramid from data to knowledge.

**Knowledge**, distilled at the top of the pyramid, is created when information is combined with experience, context, interpretation and reflection over time. When a supervisor is able to look at trends in length of stay over a year-long period and consider the organizational changes that may have influenced children's move towards permanency, she is developing knowledge about this key permanency outcome.

**Improved Practice** – the equation depicting successful implementation of information management reflect the fact that data, collected through technology, needs to be combined with people and management to lead to improved practice.

In March, 2001, the Resource Center contacted three of the states that had piloted the information management curriculum to learn about their ongoing initiatives to engage supervisors in using outcome data. In addition, we interviewed staff in each state about the outcome data that supervisors use in their day-to-day work.

Staff who participated in the training appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the data available in their own systems and to share ideas about how to access it. In many states, the process of implementing the curriculum made states aware of their need for both more and better reports and for improved access to the reports. After piloting the curriculum, states have worked to improve the technology used to access data and to enhance the human resources devoted to developing information systems and to interpreting the data available through these systems.

Supervisors from the pilot states are using a broad range of outcome data. Data from automated systems are being used to track both critical actions that contribute to improved outcomes and the achievement of key indicators of safety, permanency and well-being. Supervisors in pilot sites have found it valuable to be able to monitor indicators such as timeliness of initial investigations, worker visits to children in care, and whether case plans include current permanency goals.

Automated systems are able to provide supervisors with regular, reliable information on all of the cases in their units. Some supervisors are also looking at and working with staff to improve performance on outcomes such as length of stay, re-entries into care, and the stability of placements.

## Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, the training team previewed the information management curriculum with administrative staff, who suggested revising it to focus more directly on supervisory tools such as reports, summary case information and outcome measures. In addition, actual data from the state's SACWIS system was used whenever possible. Rhode Island then delivered this revised curriculum to almost all of the state's 80 supervisors from child protective services, family services, and juvenile probation.

An important aspect of this training was that the trainers solicited comments from participants and received constructive input on a broad array of policy, workflow, training and systems issues. Rhode Island has channeled many of the comments to the appropriate personnel and has worked to resolve them.

To respond to the system issues raised, the state has significantly increased the number and quality of reports available from the state's SACWIS system. To do this, the state has expanded its data staff from two to eight people who spend part of their time working on data reports. Committees were formed in each division, and staff worked cooperatively to help design new reports.

The state has also worked to improve access to this expanded resource. In the past, the software on desktops for accessing reports, called Info Maker, had a separate icon for each data report. As the number of reports has expanded, this has been changed so that users can double click on one icon to get a list of all available reports.

The state has also added viewers to desktop computers so that regional monthly fact sheets can be viewed and printed directly from e-mail. In the past these reports were sent to network printers and were often mislaid.

Rhode Island is planning another round of training for all supervisors for the spring and summer of 2001. This training will focus on obtaining and using data from the new reports.

One family services supervisor in Rhode Island commented that the initial information management training made her aware of reports she could access to help her manage the cases carried by the four workers in her unit. There are two types of information that she now uses regularly with her staff. One is the AFCARS report, which gives her regular information on what specific pieces of information – such as demographic information or the existence of medical or disability issues – are missing from the case record. The other report tracks case plans for children being served by the agency and flags children whose case plan goal needs to be updated (when, for example, the child is placed in out-of-home care). This helps her ensure that there is a clear permanency goal in the case record for each child within 30 days of placement.





# the pilot sites

## Utah

In Utah, two state trainers conducted the information management training for all the supervisors, community service managers and the associate director in the Eastern Region in two groups. Supervisors were very receptive to using information in the SACWIS system in their supervisory role, and many commented that the training increased their knowledge of available information and ways to utilize the SACWIS system.

Some commented that they were unaware of some of the federal requirements that governed data that must be recorded in the system and that after the training they had a better understanding of why certain data elements had to be recorded. Many felt that they would use reports from the system with increased frequency. Utah is hoping to integrate some elements of the information management curriculum into initial and ongoing training for supervisors.

Utah's information system produces a significant amount of outcome data and allows easy access to it at all levels of the agency. The state publishes an annual outcome report that tracks state performance on the federal outcome measures as well as on a broader set of state outcomes. Over 200 reports are available on the network for staff. The information system allows regional staff to enter their own parameters to generate outcome reports at the regional level, and many of the reports can easily be broken down to the unit and the worker level.

The state has a group of data contacts who produce data at the regional level and promote its use. This year regional data contacts pulled down and duplicated the statewide outcomes report on the

regional level. State staff are also networking with other partners to break down the data and look behind the numbers. For example, they are working with a department level office that oversees the Division of Child and Family Services to examine foster care re-entries, and with university researchers to study recidivism in child protective services investigations.

In addition, data is also used on the unit level by supervisors. Legal and policy requirements and some best case practice issues are set up as action items in the SACWIS system. Supervisors review what action items are completed or not completed to assist them in evaluating how workers are doing in providing services to the child and family. They also look at timeliness in completing these to ensure that the case is progressing. Supervisors use this information from SACWIS when meeting with their workers to review or discuss particular cases or the workers' performance. Examples of action items are regular visits with the family, medical and mental health care, independent living services, prior service episodes, and the status of service plans and progress evaluations.

Supervisors also use reports from the state's SACWIS system to manage workloads. One supervisor in Utah noted that she uses the case list report every week in meetings with Foster Care caseworkers to check the number of cases assigned to them and to determine who should be assigned the newest cases.

*Continued on page 6*

## We'd like to hear from you!

Are there topics that you'd like us to address in future issues? Want to find out more about how agencies are tackling the challenges that you face? Let us know, and we'll do our best to help.

Fill out the form below and mail it to:  
Patricia Nocera  
National Child Welfare Resource Center  
for Organizational Improvement  
PO Box 15010, Portland, Maine 04112

or fax it to us at: 207-780-5817.

Thanks!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

In future issues of *Managing Care*, please address the following topic(s):

☐ I'd like more information about the National Child Welfare Resource Center.

My particular area(s) of interest are:

- ☐ outcome measures
- ☐ strategic planning
- ☐ human resource development
- ☐ information systems
- ☐ interagency collaboration
- ☐ quality assurance
- ☐ case review
- ☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_

# Experience from the pilot sites

*Continued from page 5*

## Kentucky

Kentucky customized the information management curriculum by condensing it into six modules and adapting a data analysis exercise to focus specifically on comparing child welfare data in Kentucky and Missouri. New exercises were also added to enable trainees to work with local reports and case examples.

The state then trained 15 supervisors and office specialists, who felt that the training fit well with the emphasis in their Cabinet on goals and outcomes for staff at all levels. Staff responded well to the local case examples and wanted even more local team and county data.

Like Utah, Kentucky is working to ensure that each region has a data specialist who will produce local data and incorporate it into the day-to-day work at the regional and local levels. In addition, they want to build skills among managers and staff in accessing and manipulating data in the state system.

Kentucky is now offering an EXCEL training to regional administrators, regional office specialists, and field supervisors. The training teaches participants how to locate the reports that track outcomes and to create pivot tables so they can track statistical data over time. Since September, the state has trained 56 managers and specialists, and in some regions, these staff are actively using data.

Another step the state has taken to encourage supervisors at all levels to focus on outcome data is to develop an employee job performance evaluation system that takes into account quantitative data on outcomes in evaluating performance.

In one region, a group of office specialists have taken an interest in the county's performance and have worked with supervisors to make significant improvements. Regional

administrators thought they were doing well, but data reports showed that they were close to the worst region on home visits, with almost 150 cases having no documented home visit, and with close to 800 past due investigations.

One office specialist from this region immediately signed up for the EXCEL training so she could manipulate the reports to find out where the problems were. With the support of the regional administrator, she and other specialists worked with supervisors and staff to review the data and to develop and implement strategies to make improvements.

Staff improved both the way they were entering data into the system and their case practice, so that the county has now decreased the cases with no home visits to 10 and brought the number of past due investigations down to 40. These improvements were accomplished because the data reports were available, and staff decided to act on the information they provide.

Attending the information management training increased awareness among the department's managers of what could be done with data, and the state is now using data much more extensively under a number of initiatives. Kentucky has been selected as a Casey Family to Family site and is in the process of seeking accreditation of its child welfare system from the Council on Accreditation.

The state is also preparing for its Child and Family Services review in 2003.

Use of data from its SACWIS system (TWIST) will enable the state to create longitudinal data files to track the experiences of all children served by the child welfare system at the Casey site. In two of its 16 regions the state is piloting the use of COGNOS software and SPSS statistical analysis software to provide managers and supervisors with both point-in-time data and longitudinal data extracted from its SACWIS system.

TWIST data will include information on children who never entered out-of-home placement as well as data on children in placements. This will enable managers and supervisors to analyze the experiences of all children and families served by the system.

The system generates reports on frequency and type of contact, safety assessments, abuse recidivism, length of stay/placement disruption in out-of-home care, well-being indicators, substance abuse issues, and service plans. This enables supervisors and managers to more easily focus on issues of quality casework rather than compliance with procedural requirements. The data are used by child welfare administrators to measure the impact of child welfare systems on outcomes, and to track improvement over time.



# Resources

## Upcoming Teleconference...

September 11, 2001

### **Innovative Approaches to Outcomes Training for Supervisors and Managers.**

This teleconference presents three innovative, field-tested approaches to outcomes-based training for child welfare supervisors and managers.

One training approach concentrates on training via web-based training modules to use client data to measure and assess program performance and client outcomes. A second approach, Using the Medicine Wheel to Evaluate Native American Children's Care, uses the balance among four spheres of mental, physical, social and spiritual health to gauge a program's effectiveness. The third approach describes how the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families prepares supervisors and managers to use data from the state's case management system and related reports to make case-based decisions, mentor staff and measure outcomes.

For more information and to register for this teleconference, contact the Resource Center at 1-800-435-7543 or e-mail [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu).



## Online Network of Child Welfare Training Resources

This web site is designed to assist the child welfare training community in locating the most current training materials and resources and to facilitate information sharing between colleagues on training issues. The site includes state and Children's Bureau training resources, featured training web sites, publications, funding and conference information, and a listserve.

<http://www.childwelfaretraining.org>

## **COMING... Curriculum on ASFA**

The Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Kentucky Department of Community Based Services, recently received funding from the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to develop a curriculum entitled **Understanding and Implementing ASFA**. The goal of this project is to develop, field test and disseminate nationally a train-the-trainers curriculum for state child welfare managers and supervisors that will enhance their capacity to understand and implement the mandates of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

Based on a 'promising practices' model and related competencies, the ASFA curriculum will build on the fundamental concepts presented in the **Using Information Management to Support the Goals of Safety, Permanency and Well Being** curriculum to enhance the skills of child welfare managers and supervisors in using state child welfare data to improve outcomes for children and implementing ASFA in their states. They will come to understand ASFA from a variety of perspectives including regulatory, managerial, supervisory, system reform and improved child welfare practice.

Information on this project is available by contacting the Project Director, Susan Kanak at (207) 780-5840 or by e-mail at [skanak@usm.maine.edu](mailto:skanak@usm.maine.edu) or at the project's Web site, [www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/asfa](http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/asfa)

### **Practice Exchange: Supervisors Using Outcome Data**

The project staff that developed the information management curriculum and is now providing technical assistance on its use would like to know about your successes in encouraging supervisors to use outcome data. Are there strategies you have used that you would like others to know about? Tell us about them, and we will spread the word! Send by e-mail or regular mail to Patricia Nocera, Attn: Outcomes for Supervisors at [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu) or Patricia Nocera, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, 1 Post Office Square, P.O. Box 15010, Portland, ME 04112-5010.

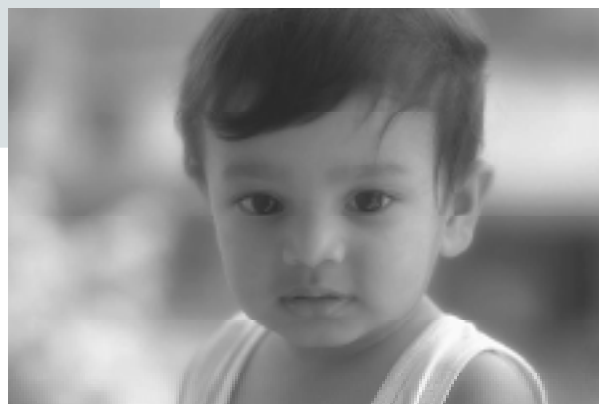
## From the Director

*Continued from page 1*

In addition to highlighting this new resource, this issue features the experience of three states – Rhode Island, Utah and Kentucky – that piloted the information management curriculum and have continuing initiatives to encourage supervisors to use outcome data. We also include other resources we hope will help you in your efforts to increase the ability of supervisors to understand and use outcome data.

Finally, we issue an invitation for you to share successful efforts you have undertaken to increase supervisors' use of outcome information, with a promise that we will report on the results in a future issue. We hope to hear from you!

*Kris Sahonchik*



# ManagingCare FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Published by the  
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement  
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service  
University of Southern Maine  
PO Box 15010, One Post Office Square  
Portland, ME 04112

Kris Sahonchik, Director



Tel: 207-780-5810  
Toll Free: 1-800-HELP KID  
Fax: 207-780-5817  
TTY: 207-780-5646  
email: [patn@usm.maine.edu](mailto:patn@usm.maine.edu)

Nonprofit Org.  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 370  
Portland, Maine 04101