



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

Information Packet

Workforce Issues in Child Welfare

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning

A Service of Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

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Summary

Child welfare agencies nationwide have long suffered from high turnover rates among their staff, as workers only stay in the job for an average of less than two years (GAO, 2003). Recruiting, preparing, supporting and retaining child welfare workforce are some of the primary challenges that public and private child welfare agencies need to resolve in order to improve outcomes for children and youth under their supervision (GAO, 2006; CDF & Children's Rights, 2006). The factors causing the high turnover rates can be divided into *individual*, *supervisory* and *organizational* factors (Strolin et al, 2007):

- ❖ Individual: burnout, demographic factors (e.g., age, time in the job, gender and ethnicity), professional commitment, and social work education
- ❖ Supervisory: supportive supervision
- ❖ Organizational: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, general organizational practices, caseload and workload, salary and promotional opportunities

An employee, who is committed to the agency's mission and to professional values and feels competent in his/her social work skills and supported by his/her supervisor, is more likely to stay in the agency (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). To achieve a stable workforce and improve staff retention, child welfare administrators and managers should explore strategies and devote more resources to those factors that positively impact a worker's decision to stay on the job, such as: the role of supervisors and co-workers, competency-based professional development, promotion opportunities, and higher compensation, including salaries, over-time pay and/or ability to take compensation time.

Staff turnover "disrupts the continuity of services and delays the timeliness of investigations and placement decisions, compromising the overall effectiveness of the child welfare system" (Strolin et al, 2007). Indeed, a highly competent and effective child welfare workforce will lead to better coordination and delivery of services, more efficient use of funds, and ultimately improved outcomes for children, youth and families (CDF & Children's Rights, 2006).

A recent study by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research provides agencies with a toolkit for building research partnerships with universities (2008). More research is needed on evidence-based practices related to the agency's macro practice, i.e., organizational culture, agency infrastructure and workforce dynamics (Alliance for Children and Families, 2006). Future research should also examine child welfare outcomes as they relate to the workforce and work place issues, guiding the development of integrated practice models and training programs (Zlotnik et al, 2005).

Facts & Statistics

The 2003 report by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) found that child welfare agencies around the country face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining a competent and well-trained workforce. These obstacles include low salaries, high caseloads/workloads, administrative burdens, risk of violence, limited or inadequate supervision and insufficient training.

- The **staff turnover** in child welfare is estimated to be 30-40% annually nationwide; the average length of employment is less than 2 years (GAO, 2003).
- Over 80% of child welfare workers who stay in their jobs beyond 2 years have completed at least one **social work degree** (Cicero-Reese, 1998);
 - However, only 28% of child welfare staff has a BSW or MSW (Lieberman, 1988) and less than 15% of agencies require caseworkers to have either BSW or MSW (CWLA, 1999).
 - NASW, CWLA, and others recommend that child welfare administrators and supervisors have an MSW and previous child welfare experience, and that direct service workers have at least a BSW (NASW, 2003).
- The average **caseload** is 24-31 children per worker (CWLA, 2001); only 11% have average caseloads that meet CWLA's national standard of 12-15 children per worker (CDF & Children's Rights, 2007).
- Partly due to **low salaries**, 90% of agencies reported difficulty hiring and retaining qualified staff (CDF & Children's Rights, 2007).
- Inadequate **supervision** is likely to lead to caseworker burn-out and turnover (CDF & Children's Rights, 2006).
- Caseworker turnover **affects permanency** for children by leading to: multiple placements while in foster care, families receiving fewer services, failed reunification efforts, longer lengths of stay in foster care and lower rates of finding permanent homes (CDF & Children's Rights, 2007).
 - Children entering care who had only one worker achieved permanency in 74.5% of the cases, as compared to 17.5% of children with two case managers and 0.1% of children with six or seven case managers (Flower et al, 2005)
- Worker turnover has a **fiscal impact**: The cost of worker turnover is about 1/3 of the worker's annual salary (CFD & Children's Rights, 2006)

Policies & Legislation

[Title IV-E of the Social Security Act](#), **Federal Foster Care and Adoption Assistance**, is an open-ended entitlement program funded with a combination of federal and state/local matching funds. Title IV-E covers areas pertinent to child welfare workforce issues, such as *administration* ([45 CFR 1356.60\(c\)](#)) and *training* ([45 CFR 1356.60\(b\)](#)).

- ❖ **Administration** – activities necessary for the efficient administration of the Title IV-E state plan, e.g., referrals to services, placement of the child, development of the case plan, case reviews, case management and supervision, and data collection and reporting.
- ❖ **Training** – provision of short and long term training for public child welfare staff administering the Title IV-E state plan. Support is provided for university-agency partnerships, direct financial assistance to students, in-service training, etc. Through this child welfare training program, the federal government provides a 75% match, while the states are responsible for the balance.

[Section 426, Title IV-B of the Social Security Act](#) provides discretionary grants to public and private nonprofit universities to develop and improve education and training programs and resources for child welfare service providers. The grants support the training of a skilled and qualified child welfare workforce.

More information on federal funding for Title IV-E and Title IV-B programs:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/index.jsp?idFlag=0
<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/financingfunding.htm>

Recommendations for Federal Policy

Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, in collaboration with the Child Welfare Workforce Policy Group, developed the following five *Federal Policy Options for Improving the Child Welfare Workforce*:

- I. Creating the comprehensive child welfare workforce improvement demonstration
- II. Enhancing training for staff working with abused and neglected children or children at risk of abuse and neglect: improving the Major Federal Child Welfare Training Program (Title IV-E)
- III. Providing incentives to recruit and retain quality staff in child welfare agencies and family courts: expanding loan forgiveness
- IV. Increasing accountability for the child welfare workforce: improving the quality of federal child welfare data
- V. Looking more comprehensively at workforce in the Child and Family Services Reviews

The full report is available at: http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/promoting_child_welfare_workforce_improvements_2007.pdf

Best Practices and Model Programs

The following six practical and relatively low-cost steps can guide agencies in building a more effective child welfare workforce (Robison, 2006):

1. Moving from an “us versus them” to a “together we can” mindset

- Knowing the workforce through exit interviews, focus groups and worker surveys, focusing on two-way communication, and modeling strong teamwork

2. Making a strong match with recruitment and hiring

- Hiring staff with the right competencies for the job, hiring a diverse staff to improve community match, publishing accurate job descriptions, and utilizing internships

3. Investing in high quality supervision

- Strengthening supervisors as teachers and mentors, giving supervisors adequate supports and opportunities to practice skills they can pass along, and using staff feedback to design supervisor training

4. Ensuring that workers have the tools they need

- Worker-friendly information system, use of technology, and meaningful training

5. Recognizing and supporting the private sector

- Making professional development and training available to private agency staff, designing contracting practices to support private agency staff, and partnering with private agencies to develop and improve training

6. Encouraging and rewarding staff performance

- Publicly recognizing and rewarding individual staff, providing accessible and affordable opportunities for professional development, and providing bonuses for language skills that are in great demand

The full paper is available at: http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/six_doable_steps_406.pdf

Cornerstones For Kids funded a series of reports from Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, Inc. through the *Promoting Child Welfare Workforce Improvements Through Federal Policy Changes* initiative (2006). The reports are available at: <http://www.childrensrights.org/policy-projects/workforce-and-systemic-issues/child-welfare-workforce-reform-federal-policy/>.

The *private nonprofit agencies* are increasingly on the front line of the child welfare system due to ongoing privatization and contracting of state and local child welfare activities. The 2006 report by Alliance for Children and Families (underwritten by Cornerstones For Kids) explored the unique workforce factors and challenges that the private sector faces. The report is available at:

http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/child_welfare_implica_606.pdf

Model for Child Welfare Supervision

At the request of the Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS), the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP) and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI) developed an organizational framework to support effective child welfare supervision. The 2009 paper *Building a Model and Framework for Child Welfare Supervision* is a roadmap for agency leadership to build and sustain effective child welfare supervision in their agencies.

The report identifies seven **elements for a model for child welfare supervision**:

- 1) A written description of the organization's practice philosophy and approach
- 2) An identification of the functions and specific job responsibilities of supervisors
- 3) Building and maintaining relationships with supervisees and others in order to carry out supervisory responsibilities effectively
- 4) Manageable standards for caseload size and for supervisor-supervisee ratios
- 5) Clearly defined expectations with regard to the frequency and format for supervision of frontline practitioners
- 6) Clarified expectations for on-going evaluation of frontline practitioners
- 7) Support for supervisors in their roles as unit leaders and change agents

Additionally, to ensure that supervisors can effectively carry out their administrative, educational, and supportive functions, the report outlines the elements of an **integrated organizational framework**:

- An organizational culture that values and demonstrates support for the vital role supervisors play in ensuring positive outcomes for children, youth and families
- A model of supervisory practice that reflects how the organization views the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of supervisors and includes up-to-date, written job descriptions
- Recruitment and retention of individuals who are a "good fit" as frontline practitioners and supervisors
- Professional development opportunities for new and experienced supervisors that includes initial and ongoing training, peer support, mentors, and clinical consultation

The full document is available at:

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/Final%20Building%20a%20Framework%20and%20Model%20for%20CW%20Supervision%20Report%20042309.pdf>

North Carolina Division of Social Services and Family and Children's Resource Program (Jordan Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) recently shared *Tips for Developing and Retaining Family-Centered Staff* (2009). The tips for child welfare supervisors included coaching, rewards and recognition, peer mentoring and helping staff share power.

To read the Practice Notes: <http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/v14n1/tips.htm>

Online Training

Training curricula are available online for agencies' use to recruit, support and retain a qualified and effective child welfare workforce.

- A variety of curriculum products developed by California Social Work Education Center are available online at: http://www.csulb.edu/projects/ccwrl/CalSWEC_curriculum_products.htm
- A 6-workbook staff recruitment and retention training series by Michigan State University School of Social Work can be accessed online at:
http://www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/childwelfare_curriculum.html

Model Programs

Many university/agency relationships have proven fruitful in developing model programs and approaches to improve the child welfare workforce around the country. A few examples are provided below.

- Louisiana State University School of Social Work, together with the State of Louisiana Department of Social Services Office of Community Services (DSS/OCS) and the Louisiana University Child Welfare Training Partnership established the **Louisiana Child Welfare Comprehensive Workforce Project** (LCWCWP) with funding from the Children's Bureau. The purpose of this project is to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and youth by building the capacity of Louisiana's child welfare professionals and by improving the systems in the State that recruit, train, supervise, manage, and retain them.
More information and resources: <http://www.lcwcwp.org/>
- The **Recruitment and Retention Project** at the Child Welfare Training Institute (Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine) offers a variety of resources, manuals, and tools on recruitment, screening, supervision, professional development, agency support and evaluation.
More information and resources: <http://www.cwti.org/RR/>
- The **Western Regional Recruitment and Retention Project** at the Butler Institute for Families (Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver) serves five sites in Colorado, Arizona, and Wyoming and provides training and technical assistance on recruiting and retention, supervision, as well as how agencies can implement workforce projects. The SMARRT (Strategies Matrix Approach to Recruitment and Retention Techniques) Manual is a tool to enhance capacity for more effective child welfare recruitment, selection, training, and retention practice.
More information and resources: http://www.thebutlerinstitute.org/projects_wrrrp.cfm

The 2001-2004 Children and Family Services Reviews also identified some promising approaches to train and retain child welfare workers. More information on promising approaches is available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/promise/index.htm>

Online Resources

American Humane Association has measured workload in a number of jurisdictions using its Workload Analysis and Resource Management (WARM) methodology. The reports are available online.

<http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/research-evaluation/workload/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway provides resources for addressing the workforce issues in child welfare as well as information on the impact on services and outcomes. Additionally, the *Child Welfare Workload Compendium* offers information on state and local workload initiatives through its online database and *Child Welfare Workforce Connection* gives child welfare professionals an online forum for discussion and collaboration. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/workforce/>

Child Welfare League of America's Workforce Development Initiative seeks solutions to the child welfare workforce crisis by advocating for policies and practices that strengthen the workforce, and by providing agencies strategies for recruiting and retaining staff. <http://www.cwla.org/programs/workforce/>

Cornerstones For Kids houses and manages the Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI). Created and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the initiative's goal is to increase awareness of the crisis in the child welfare workforce and develop strategies to address this crisis. The *Workforce Planning Portal* provides tools and resources to address workforce challenges. <http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/>

Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research and its Child Welfare Workforce Research Initiative recently published a study, *Strengthening University/Agency Research Partnerships to Enhance Child Welfare Outcomes: A Toolkit for Building Research Partnerships* (2008), that examined the capacity-building infrastructure of child welfare agencies and the funding streams and supports to train and fund the next generation of child welfare researchers. <http://www.iaswresearch.org/>

NASW Center for Workforce Studies conducts studies of the current social work labor force, provides innovative training programs in emerging practice areas; and disseminates timely information and resources on evidence-based practices. <http://workforce.socialworkers.org/>

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, a Service of the Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS), supports the capacity building of the child welfare workforce through development of effective and promising practices, facilitating leadership training, administering BSW and MSW traineeships, and supporting information sharing and collaboration. <http://ncwwi.org/>

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