Building and Sustaining a Quality Workforce

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Challenges in the Foster Care System

- Increased rates of children placed in foster care
- High re-entry rates
- Over-representation of children of color
- Challenges Recruiting Resource Families
- Lack of supports for foster parents
- High turnover of Resource Families
  - Fewer quality homes, more moves for children
Strategies for Addressing Challenges

• Training/professional development
• Respite care
• Support groups
• Access to mental health and other services
• Adequate supports
Why the Workforce Matters

**CHILD WELFARE WORK ISN’T EASY**

- Demanding caseloads
- A high degree of uncertainty
- Life and death decisions
- Trauma for children and families
- Traumatic stress
- Bureaucratic system
- External oversight and scrutiny

The child welfare workforce provides services and supports to keep vulnerable children, youth, and families safe, stable, and healthy.

**TURNOVER IS COSTLY**

Cost for each worker leaving an agency:

$54,000

**REDUCED TURNOVER MEANS:**

- Timely investigations
- More contacts/visits with children, families, and resource families
- Better service delivery
- Improved safety, permanency, and well-being

Fewer changes in caseworkers... = Increased chances of stability for families and permanency for children
Burnout

Did you know?
The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies burnout as a syndrome.

Child welfare workers experience burnout at a higher rate than other helping professions.

What predicts burnout?
- Caseload size
- Negative organizational climate
- Job stress

Who feels it the most?
64% of burnout is WORK-related
- Paperwork
- Bureaucracy
- Inability to affect change

36% of burnout is CLIENT-related
- Secondary trauma
- Personal safety threats
- Not enough client engagement

Workers who experience burnout are more likely to leave the organization.

This means that child welfare organizations can make a difference!
National Child Welfare Workforce Institute Approach

1. Developing culturally reflective and racial and ethnically inclusive workforce practices

2. Conducting a program-wide comprehensive organizational health assessment (including measures on leadership, worker well-being, and organization climate)

3. Fostering partnerships between child welfare organizations and universities

4. Training for leaders to develop adaptive leadership skills needed to implement systems change

5. Using a holistic workforce development framework for identifying and closing workforce gaps
Workforce Development Framework
Inclusivity/Racial Equity

• Children of color are disproportionately represented in the foster care system

• A diverse workforce can be part of a larger strategy to address disparate treatment of families of color, including policy and practice changes, staff development, using data, community engagement

• Child welfare need better professional development and reflective practice to understand the many pathways to disparity
Recruitment and Selection

Challenges:
• Reputation as a stressful job, workload, public perceptions of the agency, low unemployment, turnover rates, benefits

Strategies:
• Posting job announcements on websites, newspapers, job fairs
• Partnering with HR for streamlined recruitment and selection processes
• Using competency-based, standardized interviewing processes
Turnover Cycle

Agencies caught in the “turnover cycle” struggle with hiring and retaining diverse, qualified candidates.

- Someone leaves
- Cases redistributed – remaining staff work harder
- New worker given too many cases
- Staff work harder to train new worker
- Managers pressured to hire quickly
Practice Supports

• At least 50% of children in care diagnosed with emotional/behavioral problems
  • Lack of treatment leads to failed placements and more trauma
  • Parents quit when they can’t get services, training or support they need for children
• Need trauma-informed service system Where parents, CW and service providers can recognize and respond to trauma
Education and Professional Development

Challenges:

• Need more social workers in CW
• Need for trauma-informed professional development for CW staff
• Cross-systems training with providers

Strategies:

• Develop strong pre-service, in-service and ongoing professional development
• Teach how to engage families in planning and decision-making
• Understand how trauma effects children, families and staff
Supervision

• Quality supervision contributes to job satisfaction and intent to stay on the job

• Supervisors build clinical and critical thinking skills, offer emotional support, provide coaching and feedback, model best practice and are organizational “culture bearers”

• Most staff report high ratings of supervision

• Supervision needs change over time
Leadership

- Leadership is critical to ensuring a positive organizational culture and climate
- Adaptive Leaders are ones that engage staff in decision-making and are able to effectively lead change
- Staff distrust in leadership is high in many child welfare organizations
  - Perceptions of disconnect between leadership and field staff
- Need to strengthen leadership skills at all levels of the organization
Workload

Challenges:

• Child welfare staff burdened by stress and time pressure that result from heavy workload and high caseloads

• Workload is main contributor of burnout and exits

Strategies:

• Establish realistic caseload guidelines

• Assess and improve case flow processes

• Provide adequate resources

• Offer flexible scheduling options
Work Conditions and Benefits

Challenges:
• Physically and emotionally safe work environment
• Salary, benefits, resources

Strategies:
• Programs and resources to address staff stress and trauma, ensure wellness
• Create climate of psychological safety
• Ensure adequate benefits
Organizational Climate and Culture

Positive agency cultures that are inclusive, physically and psychologically safe, and supportive are more likely to retain staff.

Strategies:

• Regularly assess staff perceptions of climate
• Create equitable and inclusive practices
• Include staff in decision-making and allow all voices to be heard
• Ensure career ladders and leadership from every seat
• Effective communication plans
Community Engagement

Challenges:
- Lack of engagement with resource families
- Lack of services, and coordination and communication with providers

Strategies:
- Engage families in planning decision-making
- Be an advocate and steward for families in receiving appropriate services
- Develop strong partnerships with community providers
- Implement diligent recruitment strategies
Workforce Development Framework
Questions? Comments?