

Child Welfare Worker Recruitment and Retention Project

CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKER RESILIENCY and RETENTION TRAINING EVALUATION

FINDINGS

from

Evaluation: Workshops presented Summer 2005

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Child welfare caseworkers from around the state of Michigan attended one of six trainings during August and September 2005. Trainings were offered as workshops developed as preliminary tests of the recruitment and retention curriculum under development.

For purposes of evaluation participants were asked about their willingness to complete an online survey about their characteristics and workshop content ratings. Willing attendees provided email addresses that were subsequently used to send an online survey link. Email contact was made in late October 2005. This date was four to ten weeks after the addressee's attendance at the workshop. One followup email was sent as a reminder to those participants that had indicated a willingness to evaluate the workshop but that did not initially respond to the survey notification. Of the 112 attendees that provided an email address, 46 completed the online evaluation; a response rate of 41.1%.

Use of the online survey served two purposes. The approach allowed for testing of the utility of soliciting workshop attendee feedback weeks or months after the original training so that they had time to use or integrate the new knowledge and skills acquired during the workshops. Second, the approach provided a test of the effectiveness of online surveying as an evaluation collection format with both public and private child and family services caseworkers. The response rate of over 40 percent indicated the online survey approach was effective when used with training participants that voluntarily provided internet contact information.

The remainder of this report describes the caseworkers that responded to the survey, their position and years of experience in child welfare, ratings of workshop relevance, overall rating, assessment of workshop length, and usefulness of four

workshop content areas. Responses to open-ended items are included in their entirety at the end of the report narrative.

Of the caseworkers responding to the survey, forty-four indicated their gender, 33 were female (75%) and 11 were male (25%). On average respondents reported working in human services for 13 years, with time ranging from 1 year to over 32 years. The standard deviation was 8.3 years indicating that over two-thirds of participants had long-term human services work experiences, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ years to over 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ years. Length of time working in child welfare averaged 10.9 years, with a range of 1 to 28 years. The standard deviation was somewhat lower than noted for human services, 7.6 years. With regard to years of employment with their current agency, experiences averaged 10.7 years, ranged from 1 to 25 years, and had the lowest standard deviation with 7.0 years. These figures indicate a substantial group of long-time child welfare caseworkers with long-term employment at one agency. These individuals have been described in other studies as meeting the definition of resilient workers.

Child welfare positions included 25% of respondents in child protective services roles (n=11), nearly 50% in foster care casework or licensing (n=22), over 17% self-described as services specialists (n=8), one children's services supervisor, two juvenile justice workers, and two family preservation caseworkers. Approximately one-quarter of respondents described holding a position with multiple service area responsibilities (n=11) such as a combination of foster care licensing, protective services duties, and juvenile justice responsibilities. Only one participant identified themselves as a supervisor.

Overall ratings on five point Likert-type scaling were solicited for topic relevance –not at all to extremely , overall training quality – poor to excellent, and appropriate

length of the training – Much too long to much too short. Ratings of topic relevance had a mean of 3.9 and standard deviation of .74. Over 78% indicated the topic held solid or high relevance for them in their job. Training quality rated relatively highly as indicated by a mean of 3.8 and standard deviation of .97. A solid majority of respondents (58.7%) rated the training as very good or excellent. An additional 34.8% described the training as “Good”. Similarly, ratings of appropriateness of workshop length were solid with a mean of 3.3 and standard deviation of .90. Ratings of “Just right” accounted for over half the responses (54.3%). An additional 37.0% indicated the training was short or much too short.

Usefulness of the four training content areas was rated on a five point scale ranging from Not at all (1) to Extremely (5). Content on resiliency had a mean usefulness of 3.7 and standard deviation of .91. Close to two-thirds of respondents (63.1%) rated the resiliency content as useful or extremely useful. Content on listening was rated somewhat higher with a mean usefulness of 4.0 and standard deviation of .83. Over three quarters of the ratings (78.3%) for listening described the content as useful or extremely useful. Content related to formulating open questions has a mean usefulness rating of 3.9 with a standard deviation of .77. Ratings of usefulness were very high with over three-quarters of respondents (78.3%) describing the topic as useful or extremely useful. The topic of **confronting communication issues** had a mean usefulness of 4.0 and a standard deviation of .87. This topic received the greatest proportion of ratings of useful or extremely useful, accounting for 80.4% of respondent ratings. Overall attendees that completed the post workshop evaluation rated the training highly and overwhelmingly found the four topical areas to be more useful than

not. These findings were encouraging and helped to guide ongoing development of the curriculum.

Open-ended comments were solicited in addition to the usefulness ratings. Respondents were asked to identify any of the topics that were not useful for them individually. Few comments were offered in response (n=9). Of these two were related not to content or topics but to training processes or techniques. Seven individuals identified as not useful the resiliency topic (n=3), formulating open questions (n=2), and listening (n=2).

Suggested topics for future trainings or workbooks were offered by nearly half the respondents (n=22). These suggestions included: topics relating to contact or interactions with clients, joint workshops for supervisors/managers and caseworkers, content on resiliency characteristics and ways to bolster resiliency, population specific content, self-care, and styles of learning and working, leadership styles and their congruence with worker styles. It is important to note that the majority of these suggested topics are covered elsewhere in the curriculum and workbooks.

Detailed and varied responses were provided to the question about one new thing learned that the respondent began to use in their work. Over 25 respondents offered a description of content they used after the workshop. The pattern, if any, across these answers is that they are each unique and important applications of the workshop content. Several of the more descriptive replies are listed below:

- Many of my co-workers have had much of the same experiences as myself
- Always park in the street as opposed to the client's driveway

- The process of looking at what I can do to help a situation
- I realized that my resiliency is what has helped me to survive in this work.
- How to write court reports effectively
- No matter how right I think I am, there is always another side to the story.
- That at least there is some consideration being given to worker's points of view and their perspectives might be heard. Understanding the point of view of workers can make the work environment more productive and help resolve conflicts.
- Supervisors have bad days too. To be more understanding of my supervisor's moods.
- How to really listen to what others are saying.
- I really felt the case study that we did and then discussed really helped with starting communication between myself and my supervisor. That gave me some great ideas when there were issues between myself and one of my clients.
- Improved self-care
- That workers who have been with a company for two years or more are considered employees with longevity. This helped me to realize that I am valuable to [my agency] despite the chaos that is in my office setting. If I can stick this out, I can become even more valuable to [the agency] and the people that I serve doing [child welfare].

These responses, in combination with the quantitative ratings, provide a rich picture of the import, timeliness, and need for the curriculum developed as part of this project. The curriculum workbooks largely are targeted at supervisors and upper level management. It is clear from caseworker responses to the workshop topics that the content also is of value to front-line or direct service workers. This information is relevant and potentially transformative for targeted child welfare supervisors as well as the child welfare caseworkers they oversee. These results point to the possibility that

enhancing the recruitment and retention of the child welfare workforce requires training for employees at all levels within child welfare agencies.