



SOUTHERN AREA CONSORTIUM OF HUMAN SERVICES

Child Welfare Social Worker Recruitment and Retention: Influential Factors and Promising Practices- Review of the Research

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February 2009



SACHS is a program of the
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Child Welfare Social Worker Retention: Influential Factors and Promising Practices

Executive Summary

The following summarizes numerous studies and literature from across the nation on the various factors that impact the readiness and retention levels of new child welfare social workers.

Organizationally, an empowering and supportive work culture, the removal of administrative barriers, decreasing worker's risk to safety issues and clearly communicating expectations and standards, all positively impact readiness and retention for child welfare social workers. Additionally, having a long range plan (from 2-4 years) for new worker development including: core training, on-the-job training (OJT), opportunities to attend ongoing skill development trainings, mentoring, a gradual build-up of caseloads, opportunities for advancement, and addressing the critical role of the supervisors are found to be effective. Setting up an agency data collection system to track position vacancies and turnover (including employee exit reasons) can help craft future recruitment and retention improvements for a specific agency and/or department.

On an individual level, several characteristics of workers may influence whether they stay in public child welfare. Some predictors of those who stay are people with previous child welfare experience; those who enter the agency following an agency-university partnership social work program; those with a higher level of educational achievement (i.e. a BSW or MSW); those with commitment to the field and a sense of self-efficacy; and those with a greater self-awareness/confidence. These findings have implications for screening applicants specifically for characteristics proven to predict retention during the initial interview phase.

Strategies for selective screening and hiring of the most qualified child welfare workers are outlined in the report. The importance of hiring the "right person," by giving a realistic portrayal of the job during initial interviews so that candidates can self-select out of hiring process has been shown to notably improve job retention and job satisfaction in occupations like Child Welfare Services. Additional tools are referenced that advise not only who is a good fit for the job, but promising practices for the retention of workers once they are hired.

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National Child Welfare Workforce Studies

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2008). *Grant Projects Focus on Workforce Recruitment and Retention*. Available from:
http://basis.caliber.com/cbgrants/ws/library/docs/cb_grants/Blob/64435.pdf?rpp=25&upp=0&m=14&w=NATIVE%28%27docs_de+ph+is+%27%27workforce%27%27+and+fyfund+%3D+2003%27%29&r=1

- **Cost of workforce turnover** in child welfare field is twofold:
 - The **expense of recruiting and training workers**—and then doing it all over again when those workers leave after only a short time—is a financial drain on many child welfare systems.
 - The **negative impact on children and families, who lose their caseworkers, and on agencies, which may experience decreased morale and increased workloads for the workers who remain.**
- In 2003, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services **Children's Bureau funded eight projects around the country to study, develop, implement, and evaluate recruitment and retention strategies for the child welfare workforce.**
 - These **five-year projects** set out to address the difficulties that agencies face in recruiting new child welfare workers, screening and selecting those who will best fit the job requirements, and retaining good workers.
 - The projects were led by universities partnered with agencies, including: *The School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY); The Jordan Institute for Families, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; The Butler Institute for Families, University of Denver; Michigan State University School of Social Work; The University of Michigan School of Social Work; The Maine Child Welfare Training Institute, University of Southern Maine; The University of Iowa School of Social Work; Children FIRST, Fordham University*
 - These projects drew to a close in September 2008 and resulting evaluation data and anecdotal evidence from supervisors and workers trained through the **projects highlighted some of the five broad systemic changes that can improve workforce recruitment and retention and combat high turnover which include: the hiring process; improvements in the workplace culture; training; technology optimization; and customized solutions** (see pages 13; 15-17 for specific strategies).

American Public Human Services Association [APHSA]. (2005). *Report from the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey*. Washington, D.C.

- **APHSA Reported Recruitment Problems (in descending order of importance)**
 1. Perceived imbalance of demands of job and financial compensation
 2. Starting salaries are not competitive with comparable positions
 3. Other attractive labor market alternatives for job seekers
 4. Budget constraints other than hiring freezes or restrictions
 5. Hiring freezes or restrictions
 6. Negative media reports

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- **APHS A Reported Recruitment Strategies (in descending order of effectiveness)**
 1. University-agency training partnerships and/or stipends for students
 2. Job announcements posted on web sites
 3. Early and aggressive recruiting at social work schools
 4. Emphasized continuing education/training and supervision opportunities within agency
 5. Increased personal contact with potential candidates to encourage their application
- **APHS A Reported Preventable Turnover Problems (in descending order of importance)**
 1. Workloads too high and/or demanding, e.g., stress, being overwhelmed, etc.
 2. Caseloads are too high
 3. After hours and unpredictable work interfere with personal and family life
 4. Too much time spent on travel, transport, paperwork, etc.
 5. Insufficient service resources for families and children
 6. Workers do not feel valued by agency
 7. Problems with quality of supervision
 8. Insufficient opportunities for promotion and career advancement
 9. Low salaries
- **APHS A Reported Preventable Turnover Strategies (in descending order of importance)**
 1. Increased/improved in-service training
 2. Increased educational opportunities, e.g., MSW
 3. Increased/improved orientation/pre-service training
 4. Provided technology, e.g., cell phones, laptops
 5. Improved professional culture throughout agency
 6. Enhanced supervisor skills
 7. Implemented new child/family intervention strategies
 8. Increased workers feeling valued/respected by agency
 9. Increased worker safety
 10. Implemented flex time/changes to office hour
 11. Regularly sought and used employees' views
 12. Improved physical office/building space
 13. Special efforts to raise workers' salaries
 14. Increased workers' access to service resources
- **APHS A Reported Reasons for not Implementing Strategies (in descending order of importance)**
 1. We couldn't implement any strategies that required new resources
 2. Agency staff did not have authority to implement strategies
 3. Strategies need to be customized to unique needs of local offices
 4. Crises in child welfare prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements
 5. We had no consensus on which specific strategies would improve outcomes
 6. CFSR and PIP process prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements
 7. We had no confidence that these strategies would improve our recruitment/retention outcomes
- **APHS A Reported Important Factors for Retention (in descending order of importance)**
 1. Good supervision, with a supervisor who cares about the worker as a person
 2. An agency mission/purpose that makes workers feel their jobs are important
 3. Dependable management support of and commitment to workers
 4. Worker's self-efficacy [self belief in success]
 5. Worker's human caring

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6. Fair compensation and benefits
 7. Reasonable number of cases
 8. Manageable workloads
 9. Opportunities for workers to learn and grow professionally
- **APHSA Reported Important Agency Actions and Initiatives for Retention (in descending order of importance)**
 1. Reduced caseloads, workloads, and supervisory ratios
 2. Increased salaries that are competitive and commensurate with the work
 3. Improved supervision, support, technical assistance, and supervisory accountability
 4. Career ladders and promotional opportunities, and personal and professional growth
 5. Staff training- pre-service and in-service, and supervisory training

California Child Welfare Workforce Studies

Clark, S., & Fulcher, G. (2005). *The 2004 California public child welfare workforce study*. Berkeley: California Social Work Education Center. University of California, Berkeley School of Social Welfare.

- Following the last public child welfare workforce study in California (Clark & Fulcher, 2005) at the end of the 2002-2003 fiscal year:
 - All 58 counties reported 7,450 child welfare social workers and 1,417 supervisors.
 - Statewide, the **median length of time in their positions for child welfare workers was 3.5 years and for supervisors 4 years.**
 - The **turnover* rate for child welfare social workers statewide was 9.8 percent; for supervisors 7.5 percent.**
 - There were 462 child welfare social worker vacancies and 293 supervisor vacancies in 2003.
 - These **positions stayed open an average of 3.66 months for child welfare workers and 1.64 months for supervisors.**
- Between 1998 and 2004 (when the latest workforce study was completed), the **percentage of vacancies for child welfare social workers had increased 5.2 percent and the percentage of supervisor vacancies had increased 30 percent.**
 - The **seven most common reasons for vacant positions remaining open** were:
 1. **Budget limitations**, which led to hiring freezes and hiring restrictions
 2. **Slow recruitment/hiring process** for reasons including, but not limited to, getting administrative approval and complaints about hiring system requirements
 3. **Inadequate/unqualified candidates** applying for the positions
 4. **Internal reasons**-job promotions, retirements, transfers, persons out on leave
 5. **Normal turnover/ difficulty in retaining workers**
 6. **County's salary** is not competitive
 7. **Lack of benefits for vacant positions.** According to the workers, overtime demands are significant factors in their decision to leave the job.

*For purposes of this study (Clark & Fulcher, 2005), the turnover rate was defined as the number of workers who left the agency by resigning, terminating, or who were terminated during fiscal year July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2003 divided by the total number of positions for each staff category. Workers who moved from one child welfare services unit to another (e.g., from adoptions to emergency response) were not counted.

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William Godsave. (2006). *The County Welfare Directors Association of California Turnover Study*. Full Report Available at:
http://www.cps.ca.gov/upload/images/cpsdocuments/resources/cwda_report_v10.pdf

- The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), Human Resource Subcommittee discussed concern over the inability to retain employees in the field of Social Services. CWDA contracted with CPS Human Resource Services who conducted a survey that was sent to members on the CWDA's mailing list which included all Welfare Directors and County Social Services Human Resource staff in California. The survey's purpose was to identify classifications in Social Services/Human Services that are most at risk of turnover and to identify the main reasons for turnover in each classification:
 - The 23 participating counties included: Alameda, Madera, Amador, Mariposa, Calaveras, Merced, Colusa, Riverside, Contra Costa, San Mateo, El Dorado, Siskiyou, Glenn, Tehama, Imperial, Trinity, Inyo, Tulare, Kern, Ventura, Kings, Yolo, Lassen
- The **majority of individuals that have left within the previous five fiscal years did so voluntarily (resignation, quitting, moving, promotion, etc.)**. There were certain common **characteristics of employees that were involved in turnover**, based on the data collected for this study. The **employees most likely to turnover** are:
 - **Journey Level Social Workers, or Advanced Level Social Workers**
 - **Carrying caseloads (especially child caseloads)**
 - **Within their first 5 years of employment**
- The main reasons that were given for caseworkers voluntarily leaving their jobs included, in descending order from the most common response:
 - Taking another job/position
 - Retirement
 - Promotion
 - Moving out of the area
- Recommendations for county Social Services and Human Services agencies from the CWDA Study:
 - Install continuous **HR data collection systems that track vacancies and turnover (including exit reasons)**. This data is critical for identifying trends and crafting recruitment and retention strategies in a competitive human resource marketplace.
 - Provide prospective caseworker applicants with a **realistic job preview**. Although carrying caseloads were not listed as one of the main causes for turnover, the majority of those that turned over carried caseloads. Therefore, a realistic job preview may help give candidates an accurate picture of the nature of work before accepting a position. This could be accomplished through a site walk-through or even a videotape.
 - **Compare turnover rates according to the specific department** or social welfare program rather than all state or county employees.
 - Offer **tuition reimbursement** if a large number of individuals are exiting employment in order to go back to school (agencies should seek creative solutions to all of their turnover woes).
 - Offer increased **incentives to Journey and Advanced Journey Level Social Workers**, since they appear to suffer from burnout once at these levels. Another option is to consider **rotating caseworker job assignments** to reinvigorate as well as to **cross-train**.

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- **Enhance the value of exit interviews** with employees who are leaving to take another job by probing further to find out what, if anything, is undesirable about the current job, or what is more desirable about the new position.
- **Use newly vacated high level positions left from retirees as a motivational tool** for employees to develop and prepare themselves for promotional opportunities.
- Combat the upcoming retirement surge through **leadership training and mentoring**.
- Expand new employee recruitment efforts to non-traditional local sources if county has a high rate of individuals leaving to move out of the area due to cost of living.
- Instill the expectation that **newly promoted individuals will be responsible for helping their replacements transition into their new roles**. Such “handoff” activities should include written materials as well as verbal briefings on key issues and network contacts.

New York Child Welfare Workforce Study

Strolin, J., McCarthy, M., Lawson, H., Smith, B., Caringi, J., & Bronstein, L. (2007). *Should I stay or Should I go?: A comparison study of intention to leave among public child welfare systems with high and low turnover rates*. University at Albany, State University of New York and Binghamton University, State University of New York

- The ultimate goal of this study was to **identify specific organizational and supervisory practices used in low turnover systems that could be transferred to high turnover systems in order to reduce turnover**.
- The participants for this study were selected from a sampling frame of 936 child welfare employees in 24 systems in a Northeastern state.
- Individual items from the workforce retention survey comprised each of eight factors (and a thorough literature review yielded these as the possible causes of turnover and retention)
 - *Clarity and coherence of practice* was defined as having a clear understanding of the tasks necessary to complete the job in an effective manner.
 - *Work-life fit* was defined as being able to balance between the demands of the job and personal life.
 - *Efficacy and job satisfaction* was defined as feeling adequately prepared for the job in a manner that allows for success and fulfillment.
 - *Job supports and commitment* was defined as having supportive and respectful relationships with coworkers and other professionals that foster agency bonding.
 - *Technology and training* was defined as having adequate training and technology to do the job effectively and efficiently.
 - *Supportive supervision* was defined as receiving adequate emotional support and encouragement,
 - *Competent supervision* was defined as receiving knowledgeable advice for managing cases congruent with best practices in child welfare.
- **Significant differences in the expected direction were found on all of the organizational factors except technology and training. The largest mean difference was found in satisfaction with salary and benefits followed by job supports and commitment.**
- **Significant differences on supervisory factors did not emerge** from the statistical analysis.
- Found that **low turnover is not necessarily predictive of a healthy organizational environment**.

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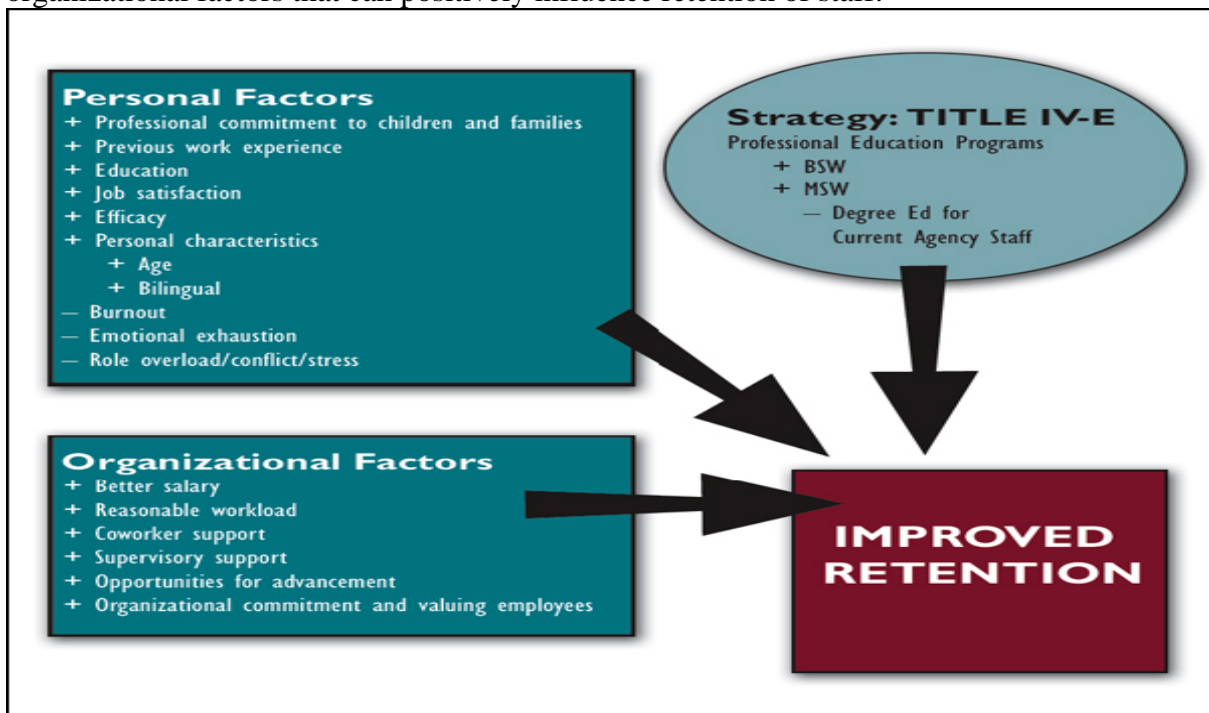
- The participants in the high and low **turnover cohorts differed on several demographic characteristics such as: age, race, tenure on job, and salary** (e.g. there was significantly more ethnic/racial diversity in the workforce of the lower turnover cohort-20% than the higher turnover cohort-4%)
- Participants in systems with **low turnover may spend approximately one half of a day more per week on direct service with clients than those in high turnover systems.**
- Leaders in child welfare may want to pay special attention to **creating organizational improvements that provide more flexibility and better work-life fit for their employees** as this study found **better life-work fit significantly decreases the odds of intention to leave.**
- **High turnover agencies may be less able to utilize clear and coherent best practices, as they are constantly attempting to manage crisis.**

Factors that Influence Child Welfare Worker Retention

Zlotnik, J., DePanfilis, D., Daining, C. McDermott Lane, M. (2005). *Factors Influencing Retention of Child Welfare Staff: A Systematic Review of Research*. Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research in collaboration with University of Maryland School of Social Work Center for Families & Institute for Human Services Policy.

Full report at: <http://www.charityadvantage.com/iaswr/FinalReportCWWI.pdf>

- Well-being of children served by the child welfare system are put at risk by the difficulties child welfare agencies experience in recruiting and retaining competent staff as turnover results in staff shortages and high caseloads that impair workers' abilities to perform critical case management functions
- A synthesis of the qualitative findings and a careful review and comparison reinforced the complexity of addressing retention in child welfare agencies. There are ranges of personal and organizational factors that can positively influence retention of staff:



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Bernotavicz, F. (2007). *Retention of Child Welfare Workers: A Report*. Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service University of Southern Maine. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.

- The literature shows there are **characteristics of caseworkers that can predict retention:**
 - **Length of time on the job** (people who stay more than two years, tend to stay for several years longer).
 - **Prior experience of child welfare work** (people with prior experience tend to stay longer).
 - Advanced education:
 - **Having either a BSW or MSW leads to improved job performance and readiness** as measured by supervisory ratings and employee reports of work-related competencies. Therefore, efforts that focus on educational opportunities may be improving the quality of the workforce as well as the overall retention rate. Other studies have noted that graduates of social work programs who specialize in child welfare are more likely to remain in child welfare and experience greater job satisfaction (The Child Welfare League of America. 2002. *Child Welfare Workforce*. Washington, DC)
 - Studies show that people who have come through **agency-university partnership social work programs** tend to stay in child welfare longer. "People come into the agency ready to do the job," says Joan Levy Zlotnik, Executive Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. "They have two years to get ready for the hardest job, in my mind, in government, whereas people off the street, even with the best training, have about 12 weeks," he says. "Our tracking and research point out much better casework. They make better decisions about child protection. Their attitudes in the agency are better. And the main thing is they are not overwhelmed. That's what our students constantly tell us."
 - Participants in the Kentucky and California Title IV-E program, showed that 86 and 85 percent of those participating continued to work for the agency after their commitment concluded (2003).
 - The GAO report cited research that 93 percent of participants in agency university partnerships continued to work in child welfare following fulfillment of their work commitment.
 - **Sense of mission** (people with a commitment to working with children and families tend to stay).
 - **Sense of efficacy** (people who feel that they are making a difference tend to stay).

Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (DHHS) & DePanfilis, S. (2003). *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers User Manual Series*.

- In response to ongoing staffing crises, some child welfare agencies are trying to address organizational problems and overburdened staff with efforts toward "re-professionalization" of child welfare. To increase the competency of CPS staff, **many States have developed and implemented competency-based training and certification programs. Some of these programs include readiness assessments and competency exams.**

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- There is research that strongly suggests that **higher education is essential for developing caseworker competencies**. Both the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) suggest that CPS staff should have a bachelor's or master's degree in social work (BSW or MSW) or a degree in a closely related field. **Social work education appears to be related to job retention and staff stability, which helps produce better child welfare practice.**
- Research findings support the efficacy of social work education for public-sector child welfare practice. The following are highlights of several key studies:
 - A national study of job requirements for child welfare workers found that turnover was consistently higher in States that do not require any academic social work preparation for child welfare positions and is consistently lower in States that require an MSW
 - A Florida study suggested that workers without education in child welfare work were most likely to leave before 1 year.
 - A study by Hess, Folaron, and Jefferson found that caseworker turnover was a major factor in failed reunification efforts.
 - A Maryland study found that having an MSW degree appeared to be the best predictor of overall performance in social service work.
 - A study of social service workers in Kentucky found that staff members with social work degrees were better prepared for their work than those without them. Not only did they perform better on competency tests but supervisors reported that, compared with other new employees, they were better prepared to handle complex cases, prepared to handle such cases sooner, less stressed, more confident, and more skilled in work with clients, more knowledgeable regarding policy, and more positive about their agencies and their jobs.
 - Abers, Reilly, & Rittner found child welfare staff with BSW and MSW degrees were more effective in developing successful permanency plans for children who had been in foster care for more than two years than were staff without these degrees.

Jacquet, S., Clark, S., Moraze, J., & Withers, R. (Jan. 2008). The role of supervision in the retention of public child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1(3), 27 – 54.

- Contrary to common belief, **having a manageable caseload size may not be critical to the retention of child welfare MSW social workers**. In this study of the retention of 765 title IV-E MSWs in public child welfare, **support from supervisors emerged as a pivotal factor in employee retention**. With analyses regressing retention and intent to leave public child welfare agencies, support from supervisors emerged as a predictor, but caseload size did not. The preliminary findings of qualitative interviews corroborated these results. This study corroborates literature indicating that support from supervisors enhances retention of specially trained child welfare workers.

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Jacquet, S., Clark, S., Moraze, J., & Withers, R. (Aug. 2007). Characteristics of workload management in public child welfare agencies Role of supervision in the retention of public child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 31(3), 95-109.

- This study examines the relationship among supervisor support, availability of resources, worker ability and their impact on workload management. Child welfare caseworkers struggle to maintain their workloads amid tremendously high caseloads and ever-increasing paperwork. Results suggest that **supervisor support and availability of resources have a direct impact on workload management**. Additionally, **supervisor support is significantly associated with worker ability and availability of resources**. While worker ability does not directly affect workload management, it is significantly related to availability of resources. Results of this study can be useful to public child welfare agencies by identifying variables associated with increased manageability of employee workloads.
- **Supervisory support of caseworkers-** Caseworkers, especially those with little experience or who are new to the job, rely on supervisor's support. Numerous research indicates the **role of the supervisor is critical**:
 - **Supervisors set the climate for workers** and are able to provide the environment that encourages a good person/job fit.
 - **For some caseworkers a supportive relationship with their supervisor was their reason for staying, for others the autonomy provided by a detached relationship was a major motivator.**
 - Supervisors can act as gatekeepers, providing space for workers to accomplish their work; or they can overload workers by failing to set priorities or assign work fairly.
 - **Supervisors can help develop workers and mentor them through the crisis period** when they are considering leaving the agency.
 - Support from the child welfare worker's supervisor and co-workers are important for sustaining a sense of well-being (Barak et al., 2001; Harrison, 1995; Koeske & Kirk, 1995).
 - The **importance of supervision in developing professional socialization, improving staff morale, increasing job satisfaction, and decreasing job turnover** is well documented in administration, management, and social work literature.
 - In studies that include staff interviews, **supportive supervision is the most commonly cited variable related to turnover and retention** (CWLA, 2002).
 - The supervisor is the person who best understands the responsibilities of and the demands made on the caseworker, backs up decisions and casework activities, and advocates for both caseworkers and clients (Rycraft, 1994).
 - Two critical functions of child welfare supervisors are to recognize and respond to the needs and concerns of caseworkers and to provide them with direction and guidance (GAO, 2003).
 - **Agency and supervisory support can mitigate the stress of the job and the workload** (GAO, 2003).
- Help supervisors support new caseworkers through the two-three year transition period.
 - **Develop a plan to provide training or clinical consultation to supervisors in preparing new caseworkers for their crisis of commitment as well as how to maximize their staff's ability to move through it smoothly.**
- In 2003, a study that was part of the evaluation of the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC), Chapin Hall Center for Children, analyzed the results of survey responses

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from 572 frontline workers, supervisors, and some senior managers from public child protective service agencies in four diverse locations around the country.

- Individuals who were surveyed were asked to “rate” how satisfied they were with seven aspects of their jobs including: 1) workload, 2) quality of supervision, 3) salary raises, 4) opportunities for advancement, 5) being valued, 6) agency cultural sensitivity, and 7) physical working conditions. When all aspects were combined into one measure, a generally mixed view of job satisfaction emerged. Within this context, however, **“quality of supervision” received the highest average rating among the seven aspects that can contribute to job satisfaction.** This does indicate that a supervisor can make a difference in how his/her staff feel about their work experience even when an extraordinarily difficult work environment beset with huge cutbacks contributes to fairly low job satisfaction overall. Also **organizational culture**, specifically a culture that empowers workers by valuing openness, creativity, personal development, quality orientation, and personal integrity also had a very large effect on the job satisfaction among the respondents.

Recruiting and Hiring Staff-Promising Practices

Gehrman, R. (2002). Building a better workforce: Strategies for recruiting and hiring. *Hired for Good*, 1(1), 3-5. (weblink: www.cssp.org)

AND

Bernotavicz, F. (2007). Workforce Recruitment and Retention in New England. *Children's Bureau Express* 8(1). University of Southern Maine. (weblink: http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/articles.cfm?issue_id=2007-06&article_id=1351)

Selective screening and hiring of workers:

- To avoid hiring decisions that may later result in turnover or poor performance, some agencies have begun to **screen specifically for the characteristics proven to predict retention, develop additional hiring competencies and questions** as needed, and **use more realistic portrayals of an agency’s mission.**
 - Research indicates that **public human services job require specific competencies such as practical skills for assessment and problem solving.**
- **Create job classification and interviewing questions based on the skills and qualities needed for a specific job** (e.g. in Illinois, the state uses an applicant screening tool to assess the education, writing ability, verbal ability, cultural sensitivity, and ethics and judgment of candidates. The screening requires candidates to complete several verbal or written vignettes that represent realistic situations a child welfare investigator or caseworker might encounter. Candidates are graded on how they resolve situations as well as on technical skills, such as writing and verbal ability).
- **Engage in a mutual decision-making process** in which both the applicant and the agency answer questions about suitability for the job.
- **Compare candidates against 10 core competencies** (see page 17) that may predict long-term success on the job
- If possible, provide **internship, or job shadowing opportunities** prior to hire.

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Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2008). *Grant Projects Focus on Workforce Recruitment and Retention*. Available from:
http://basis.caliber.com/cbgrants/ws/library/docs/cb_grants/Blob/64435.pdf?rpp=25&upp=0&m=14&w=NATIVE%28%27docs_de+ph+is+%27%27workforce%27%27+and+fyfund+%3D+2003%27%29&r=1

- The projects acknowledged the importance of devising a clearly defined recruiting and hiring process. Rather than casting a wide net and hiring candidates who met general specifications, projects found it **more useful to define and describe specific candidate qualifications and job competencies and then to recruit, screen, and hire those who met the requirements.**
- Recruitment strategies include:
 - An emphasis on **realistic job portrayal during interviews and in recruitment materials**
 - Use of a **video that depicts real job experiences or interviews with clients**
 - The realistic job video was developed and used in Arizona and Colorado (by the Denver project), as well as in North Carolina and Maine. Maine also produced a video of interviews with children in foster care that was shown to job candidates. **The video emphasized the direct impact that worker turnover has on children.**
 - Availability of a **staff member who can be on call for job candidates with questions**
 - A marketing approach to recruitment that includes the **use of public service announcements, a logo, and a website**
 - A **competency-based selection process that may include candidates' completion of a realistic caseworker exercise**
 - **Mutual decision-making in which both the applicant and agency discuss job suitability**
- Additionally several projects noted the importance of **assessing candidates' personal commitment** by hiring workers who not only met specific requirements and who **also felt that child welfare work would reflect their personal beliefs.**
 - For instance, the Michigan State project focused its curriculum on **hiring workers "with a strong sense of mission and purpose,"** among other qualities.

CPS Human Resource Services. (2007). *The RJP Tool Kit: A How-To Guide for Developing a Realistic Job Preview and RJP Case Study: Michigan Department of Human Services* are downloadable at the following website: <http://portal.cornerstones4kids.org/content61.html>

- An organization can develop (or purchase) a **Realistic Job Preview (RJP) DVD**. This tool provides the applicant a preview as to what would be expected of him or her if hired:
 - Research shows **many CPS staff leave an agency because of a poor fit between their individual needs and the demands of the job.** Many new hires state being unclear about the true nature of the job and expressed surprise and dismay during pre-service training when they realized what they would and would not be doing as a CPS worker.
 - By watching a video of a real worker's "typical" job experience this can result in significant **increases in job knowledge.** Moreover, often interested people become more interested in the job and uninterested people become less interested in the job.

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- Findings on the effectiveness of the RJP when it was implemented in 2005 by the Michigan DHS were consistent with a larger body of research that demonstrates the effectiveness of the RJP in **improving job retention and job satisfaction in occupations that are often not well understood by job applicants.**
 - Both the turnover data and all of the survey questions asked supported the proposition that the **RJP has reduced early turnover and increased job satisfaction among newly hired caseworkers.** Study found that:
 - **93.8 percent of the newly hired caseworkers who had viewed the RJP stayed with DHS at least one year, compared to 78.4 percent of the caseworkers who did not see the RJP.**
 - **A greater percentage of the RJP group was satisfied with their jobs than of the control group.**
 - **The percentage of employees dissatisfied with their job is generally lower for the RJP group than for the control group,** suggesting that the RJP has caused those who would be a poor fit to “self-select” out of the hiring process.
 - **A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that they were better able to cope with the pressures of the job than the control group.**
 - **A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that DHS had been more honest with them during the recruitment process.**

Bernotavicz, F. (2007). *Retention of Child Welfare Workers: A Report.* Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service University of Southern Maine. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.

- **Competency-based recruitment-**Considerable research showed the following 10 **Caseworker Entry Level Competencies** (out of a total of 39) are the competencies that:
 - Are **most likely to predict long-term success on the job;**
 - Make the difference between average and outstanding performance; and
 - Are the most difficult to change through training and supervision.
- Since 1995 Maine has been effectively **using these competencies as part of their screening and hiring process and also includes these as part of their performance management process for all workers. To assess caseworker readiness among new workers these Child Welfare Caseworker Entry Level Competencies can be examined:**
 1. **Interpersonal Relations:** *Awareness of others' feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns*
 2. **Self-Awareness/Confidence:** *Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources and*
 3. **Analytic Thinking:** *Using data to understand patterns and develop concepts*
 4. **Adaptability:** *Flexibility in handling change*
 5. **Observation Skills:** *Ability to describe events factually*
 6. **Sense of Mission:** *Commitment to the welfare of others*
 7. **Communication Skills:** *Open clear communication*
 8. **Motivation:** *Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals*
 9. **Planning and Organizing Work:** *Ordering activities to achieve goals*
 10. **Teamwork:** *Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals*

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- The Maine project also **requires job applicants to complete a realistic caseworker exercise to test specific skills.**
 - Several States are using the hiring process developed by the University of Southern Maine.
 - In North Carolina, a manager who received training in conducting a competency-based selection process for new workers noted, "While this selection process is complicated and time consuming, it has been worth our investment in learning to use it . . . we see a difference in the performance of workers hired since we began using it."

CPS Human Resource Services.(2005). *Tomorrow's Vacancies, Today's Priority: Michigan Family Independence Agency's Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool*. Full report available at: http://www.cps.ca.gov/upload/images/cpsdocuments/resources/tomorrowvacancies/FIA_CCHP_Final_Summary_Rept.pdf

- To combat a workforce plagued by high turnover and staff vacancies, and to improve the quality of newly hired workers the State of Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA), Michigan's public assistance, child and family welfare agency, implemented an innovative hiring model, the Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool (CCHP).
 - The new process centralized the FIA's recruiting and training efforts for nearly all Michigan counties.
 - The CCHP hires and trains new workers in anticipation of vacancies expected to occur weeks into the future. This creates a pool of "just-in-time" new employees resulting in:
 - Reduced number of caseworker vacancies
 - Reduced length of time that caseworker vacancies remain open
 - Improved overall quality of children's services
 - Savings in the cost of the hiring process
 - Other aspects of the CCHP process include online recruiting, behavioral interviewing, competency validation for child welfare positions and a thorough background and reference check process.

Strategies to Reduce Turnover of Child Welfare Workers

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2008). *Grant Projects Focus on Workforce Recruitment and Retention*. Available from: http://basis.caliber.com/cbgrants/ws/library/docs/cb_grants/Blob/64435.pdf?rpp=25&upp=0&m=14&w=NATIVE%28%27docs_de+ph+is+%27%27workforce%27%27+and+fyfund+%3D+2003%27%29&r=1

- Across the eight project sites effective retention strategies included:
 - **Surveys of worker satisfaction—and follow-up activities**
 - **Voluntary focus groups**
 - **Legal training that brings in court officials and attorneys**
 - **Longitudinal surveys of worker satisfaction, job mastery, and personal values**
 - **Development of a strategic plan, with a planning team that includes staff at all levels**

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- **A mentoring program in which a staff member is paired with a supervisor**
- **Development of a leadership institute**
- **Establishment of an HR tracking database that calculates rates of retention, turnover, and vacancy**

- **Effective activities for supervisors** included:
 - **Trainings in core supervisory activities, as well as in secondary trauma**
 - **Training on building a mission-centered agency culture**
 - **Establishment of a Supervisory Academy that focuses on four levels of professional development**
 - **Certificate program**
 - **Graduate-level coursework and credit**
 - **Coursework on leading positive change**

- **Improvements in the Workplace Culture**
 - **Work/life balance**
 - Policies that supported a balance of work life and personal life were important.
 - At one of the sites served by the Denver project, the promotion of this balance, along with a general change in the office culture, helped one worker who was contemplating leaving change her mind, noting that she "couldn't leave them now."
 - In Iowa, one training module for supervisors focused on helping workers deal with workplace stress.
 - **Shared authority**
 - The SUNY project **created a "design team" at each site composed of workers at all levels who focused on solving problems that were causing worker turnover.** This broad involvement was intended to **address workers' greatest area of dissatisfaction—a lack of recognition and respect.** The process also helped workers move from blaming others for agency problems to working as a team to find solutions.
 - North Carolina survey data also showed that agency conditions—including shared authority—were related to a worker's intention to remain on the job.
 - **Input from all levels**
 - Michigan State, whose project resulted in a workbook series on retention-focused supervision, was guided throughout the project by a team of 15 diverse members representing public and private agencies.

- **Customized Solutions**
 - **All projects recognized that certain child welfare workforce problems were unique to each site and required solutions designed to address those specific problems:**
 - *In New York.* SUNY's design teams used job satisfaction survey results and logic models to identify the problems causing turnover at particular sites. For instance, design teams addressed such issues as case record consistency (by developing new agency procedures) and parking problems (by persuading the county to change restrictions). The design teams have been successful in very different environments, from rural to urban agencies and in a Tribal environment.

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- *In Iowa.* While Iowa had relatively low turnover, agencies there faced the problem of a lack of professionally trained workers. A comprehensive model of supervision, including increased use of reflective supervision, supervision tools, and clinical training, has strengthened workers' competency.
- *In the Western States.* The Denver project's customized solutions included flexible working hours in Colorado, an agency-wide newsletter in Arizona, and increased cohesion among staff in Wyoming.
- *In Michigan.* Both the Michigan State curriculum project and the University of Michigan project addressed the specific problems the State faced when large numbers of workers left in 2002 because of an attractive retirement package. Both projects forged new partnerships with the Michigan Department of Human Services. The University of Michigan developed trainings based on focus group responses from Michigan workers, supervisors, and managers. Project staff note that, "To be genuinely useful to members of the child welfare workforce, faculty and staff from schools of social work must enter the world of child welfare work. We need to listen to the workforce and accommodate our agendas to theirs."

Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR). (2005). IASWR Research Brief 1 Child Welfare Workforce Series. Available from:
<http://www.charityadvantage.com/iaswr/IASWRBrief1.pdf>.

- To improve retention outcomes, a diverse set of stakeholders should consider the following questions:
 - People seeking child welfare employment should ask - *Is it what I really want to do?*
 - Staff selecting applicants for child welfare positions should ask – *Does the candidate have the professional commitment and experience to take on this job and deal with the related stress?*
 - Child welfare supervisors should ask – *Do I have the knowledge and skills to provide support and case-focused supervision to my staff and do I have support from my superiors?*
 - Agency administrators should ask – *Does the agency provide the necessary supports—supervisory, career ladder, working environment – that will attract workers and keep them at the agency?*
 - Universities, especially social work education programs, should ask – *Can we strengthen our partnership with state and local child welfare agencies to provide education and training to current and prospective staff and to develop and implement research and program evaluation efforts that can help to guide agency practices?*
- Any agency that implements just one strategy (e.g., reducing direct-service worker caseload but not improving supervision and agency supports, or hiring staff with professional commitment to the job) will probably not be very successful in the long run
 - It is obvious in Texas that despite offering a \$5,000 bonus to newly hired caseworkers, more workers are leaving. This \$5,000 bonus does not seem to be working because they are only working on one part of the problem.

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Gehrman, R. (2002). Building a better workforce: Strategies for recruiting and hiring. *Hired for Good*, 1(1), 3-5. (weblink: www.cssp.org)

- **Taking steps to reduce turnover of workers:**
 - **Buffering staff** from outside critics such as courts and other agencies
 - **Fostering joint supervisor/employee ownership** of the appraisal process
 - **Building in extra support when workers face tough decisions** (e.g. provide support groups to help workers deal with direct or secondary trauma)
 - **Decreasing worker's risk to safety issues**
 - **Provide proper supervision**
- Texas is considering job-sharing and short-term programs to address burnout. Under one proposal, **workers who find themselves struggling with their daily duties after six to eight months would have the option of rotating to a related position that uses their knowledge but doesn't require them to work closely with families. Workers would be expected to return to their original position after a brief respite**, and the agency would hope to hold onto staff that might otherwise walk away.
- In an environment where the problems are often larger than the resources, agencies need to help their workers focus on the ways they are able to have an impact-even the little ways. It's necessary to **recognize that one's ability to help is constrained by systems, time, and funding streams.**
- Human service professionals are particularly vulnerable to burnout because effective practice requires emotional contact between the professional and their client. Those who find it difficult to **separate themselves from the pain, anger, and anxiety of their clients** are not likely to have a long career in the field.
- Other factors related to burnout include **self-efficacy, motivation, job competence, personal responsiveness to the needs of clients, the adequacy of staff development, and the adequacy of training.**

Gehrman, R. (2004). Pay Attention! Support New Hires: The first 12-24 Months are Critical. *Hired for Good*, 2(1). (weblink: www.cssp.org)

- Several efforts and programs demonstrate commitment to new workers and, in turn, garner commitment from staff.
 - **Good supervision is key**-Successful agencies make sure their supervisors are well trained and that they spend time working with their staff rather than on administrative tasks. Employees who stay are "more likely to report that their supervisor is willing to listen to work-related problems to help them get their jobs done."
 - **Mentoring programs are useful if they are well implemented**-Surveys by both the Child Welfare League of America and the U.S. General Accounting Office cited complaints that mentors were often too tied up with their own responsibilities to spend time with new workers. The obvious lesson is that **managers need to free up mentors for these assignments and keep tabs on mentoring programs to make sure they are working as intended.**
 - Utah developed program features and controls to make sure mentoring is implemented as planned. **Expectations for mentors are spelled-out in a**

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formal guidebook. In addition, mentors are given lighter workloads so they have time for the new workers assigned to them. Supervisors ensure accountability by checking to make sure new hires have received and completed mentored assignments.

- Kentucky implemented a pilot program that takes new hires that have not participated in the undergraduate IV-E funded child welfare certification program to **observe and practice newly acquired skills under the tutelage of tenured employees selected for their superior performance in the agency.**
- In Oregon, **new employees must receive six to eight weeks of training, job shadowing, and mentoring before they can be assigned a full workload.** As a result, supervisors are understandably motivated to make sure their new hires get into the training and mentoring cycle as early as possible.
- **Pay attention to working conditions**-New recruits, as well as the toughest survivors, won't stay if the organizational climate is poor. Quickly address staff concerns that surface in focus groups, satisfaction surveys, and exit interviews.
- **Remove administrative barriers to retention**-Most human services staffing studies cite excessive paperwork, or "administrative burnout" as a cause of turnover. This issue may never be comprehensively addressed until **practice is adequately supported by information management technologies.** Even under newer automated systems designed to better focus on case management rather than service or funding eligibility, administrative time remains a barrier to more effective practice.
 - A report by the GAO estimated that direct service staff spend 50 to 80 percent of their time on tasks required by their state's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Other surveys and interviews estimate the time more conservatively, at 40 to 50 percent. By any standards, this is still excessive. Reducing the time workers spend on tasks related to the automated information systems to a more reasonable 10 to 15 percent would be equivalent to adding one-third more caseworkers to the agency payroll.
 - Agencies across the country are struggling to find effective solutions for this specific problem. Durham County, North Carolina, reduced worker stress by off-loading paperwork to casework assistants. Oregon and Alabama similarly allow caseworkers to hand over their notes from field visits to support staff, who then become responsible for getting the data into the agency's database.

Farber, J. & Munson, S. (Jan.-March 2007). Improving the Child Welfare Workforce. *Journal of the National Center for Youth Law*, 28(1).

- **Assess the workloads of frontline staff when defining caseload limits.**
- **Increase clerical supports to alleviate caseworkers' paperwork and transportation burdens.**
- **Allow job-sharing and team approaches to cases.**
- **Create specialized, on-call staffing units to ensure that qualified, trained caseworkers are readily available to fill vacancies.**
- **Position staff in community settings so they are closer to the children and families served.**

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Kresnak, J. Bailey, R., Lam, T. (2007, January 30). Overhaul may be only hope: Faster adoptions, smaller caseloads seen as solutions. *Detroit Free Press*.

- In the mid-1990s, with their caseloads, caseworker turnover and the number of children in foster care at an all-time high, to facilitate a turnaround the State of Illinois organized the following:
 - Began using **performance-based contracting** with public and private foster-care agencies. They used a system of rewards and punishments to ensure that agencies were working toward positive outcomes for children.
 - All public and private **agencies in the system were required to be accredited** through the Council of Accreditation for Services to Children and Families of New York. Without accreditation, agencies were no longer eligible to manage foster children in Illinois.
 - Illinois **changed the jobs of hundreds of state employees** who monitor foster-care cases assigned to various private agencies because they represented a redundant layer of supervision for foster children already under an agency's care. Hundreds of those employees in Illinois got new assignments.
 - Many became foster-care case managers, **helping to reduce workers' caseloads from 25 or more foster children to 14 or 15.**
 - Other employees were assigned to licensing, and still others provided closer monitoring of struggling private agencies as **part of performance teams.** Redeploying these staff gave Illinois the opportunity to improve accountability of private agencies.
 - To cut the number of children in foster care they intensified services such as family-preservation programs to keep families intact
 - Additional effects:
 - **While Illinois' caseworker turnover rates were high at 50% or more each year in the early 1990s its caseworker turnover rate dropped to less than 10% with the reforms.**
 - **Illinois had a peak of over 51,000 kids in foster or institutional care in 1991. In 2006, the number took a striking decline to 16,600.**
 - Illinois officials stated that meeting accreditation standards of lower caseloads, reduced supervisor-to-staff ratios, and increased emphasis on professional credentials has improved the agency's attractiveness to applicants and enhanced worker morale and performance. These directly affect retention of their workers.

McKenzie, J., McKenzie, J., & Jackson, R. (2007). *Training Series: Staff Retention in Child and Family Services*. Michigan State University School of Social Work

- The purpose of this **training series of workbooks is to increase child and family service agencies' effectiveness in developing and retaining their staff by applying information from research and best retention practices to their work.**
- Case materials, tools and skills integrated throughout this workbook series intend to honor and support leaders and supervisors as they cope with the value dilemmas and emotional content found in the “real world” of child and family services
- The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to improve retention practices and outcomes for child and family service agencies. With such an end in mind everybody wins: the staff, the agency,

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the families and children, and especially the supervisor, whose life is vastly improved by having a stable, loyal workforce.

- Workbook Curriculum has been designed with a series of workbooks. A workbook is provided for each of the following subjects in the core curriculum series. (available at: http://www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/childwelfare_curriculum.html)
 - **Workbook 1 – The Role of Leaders in Staff Retention:** provides information, tools and methods for leaders to use to support supervisors in creating and sustaining a positive culture for staff retention.
[Download Workbook](#)
 - **Workbook 2 – The Practice of Retention-Focused Supervision:** provides research information and supervisory competencies for retaining effective staff, including self-assessment and planning tools. It includes methods and tools for setting objectives, structuring the supervisory process and managing stress in the workplace.
[Download Workbook](#)
 - **Workbook 3 – Working with Differences:** provides understanding, methods and tools for tailoring supervision to the diverse characteristics, learning and behavioral styles and professional development needs of staff.
[Download Workbook](#)
 - **Workbook 4 – Communications Skills:** provides specific information, tools and activities to adapt communication skills to the supervisory relationship.
[Download Workbook](#)
 - **Workbook 5 – The First Six Months:** provides a structure, methods and tools for orienting, supporting and training new staff during their first six months on the job, with particular attention to helping staff cope with and manage the stressors of the job.
[Download Workbook](#)
 - **Workbook 6 – Recruiting and Selecting the Right Staff in Child and Family Service:** provides information on promising practices and tools for recruiting and selecting front line staff; includes profiles of desirable qualities needed in front-line supervisors and staff and methods for developing effective collaborations with universities.
[Download Workbook](#)

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Additional Resources

The following list of the eight Children's Bureau grantees includes links to the project website (where available) and citations of relevant *Children's Bureau Express* (CBX) articles along with additional resources, including developed curricula, workbooks and online trainings.

- The School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, State University of New York (New York State Social Work Education Consortium)
 - CBX article—"Design Teams Facilitate Workforce Recruitment and Retention" (April 2007)
 - Project website: www.ocfs.state.ny.us/ohrd/swec
- The Jordan Institute for Families, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 - CBX article—"Worker Recruitment and Retention Project in North Carolina" (September/October 2006)
 - Project website: <http://ssw.unc.edu/jif/rr/>
- The Butler Institute for Families, University of Denver
 - CBX article—"Workforce Recruitment and Retention in Three Western States" (November 2006)
 - Project website: www.thebutlerinstitute.org/projects_wrrrp.cfm
- Michigan State University
 - CBX article—"Workbook Series Addresses Michigan Workforce Issues" (March 2007)
 - Project website: www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/childwelfare.html
- The University of Michigan
 - CBX article—"Workforce Retention in Michigan" (February 2007)
 - Project website: www.ssw.umich.edu/public/currentProjects/rrcwp/
- The Maine Child Welfare Training Institute, University of Southern Maine
 - CBX article—"Workforce Recruitment and Retention in New England" (June 2007)
 - Project website: www.cwti.org/RR/index.htm
- The University of Iowa
 - CBX article—"Training Supervisors to Retain Workers" (February 2008)
 - Project website: www.uiowa.edu/~nrcfcp/research/
- Children FIRST, Fordham University
 - CBX article—"Building Management Capacity for Workforce Recruitment and Retention" (May 2007)