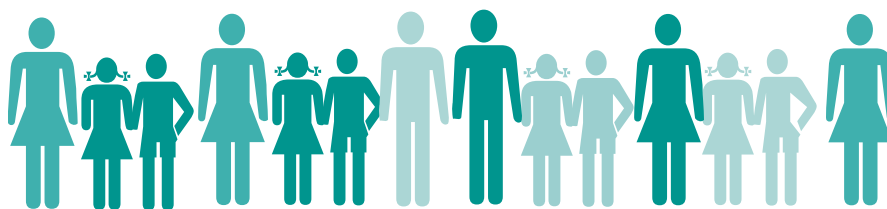


Ohio Child Welfare
Training Program Statewide
Training Assessment

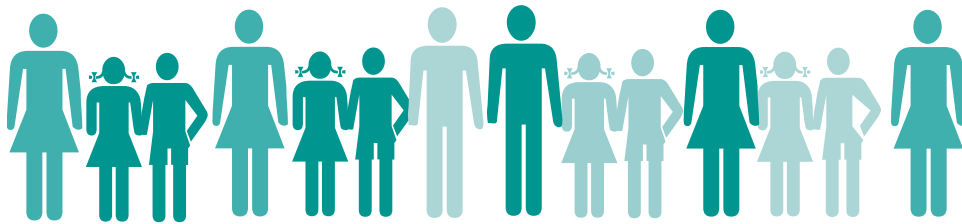
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by the Institute for Human Services
for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services





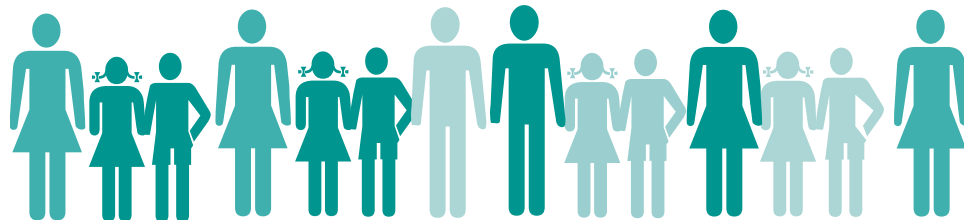
**OHIO
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PROGRAM**



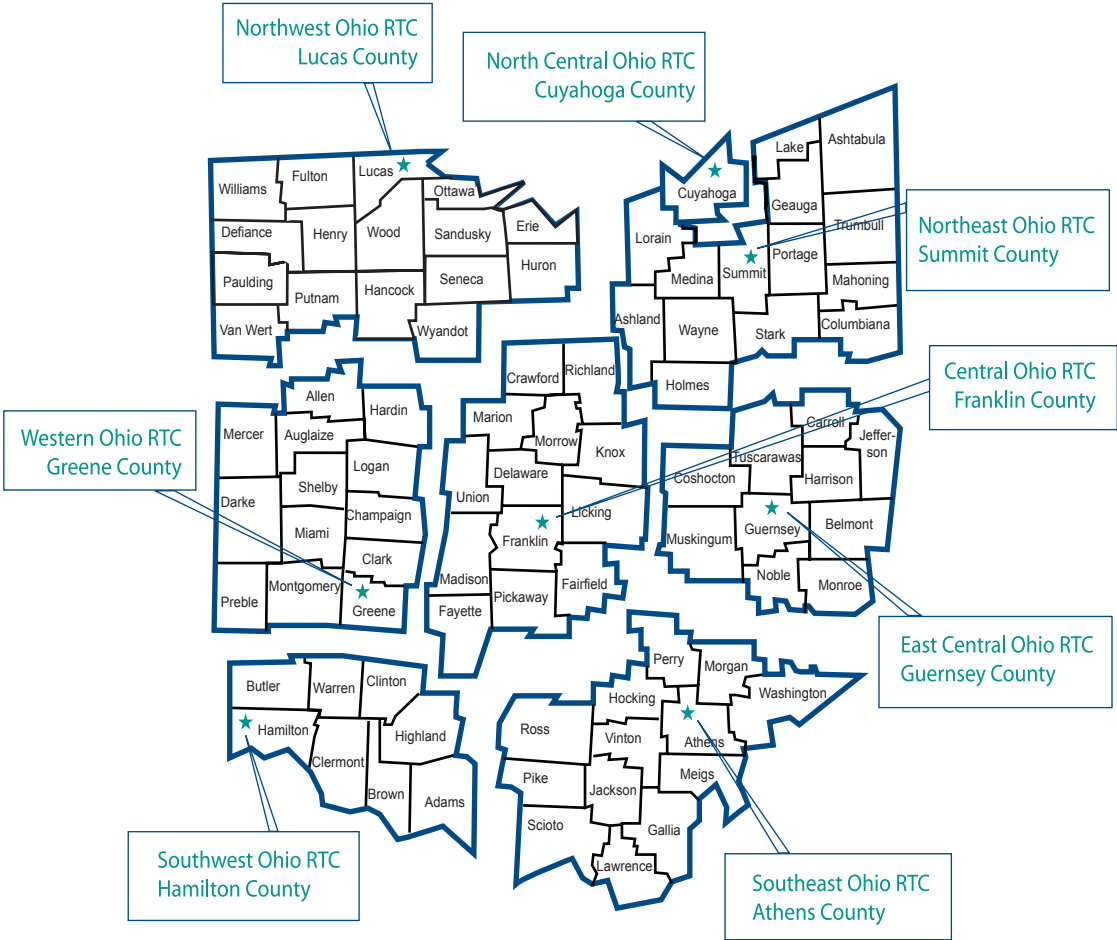
About This Executive Summary . . .

This Executive Summary briefly describes the purpose, methodology, and findings of the *Statewide Training Assessment* recently completed by the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP).

A copy of the complete assessment report is being provided to every county public children services agency. It may also be obtained from the OCWTP's web site, located at www.ocwtp.com.



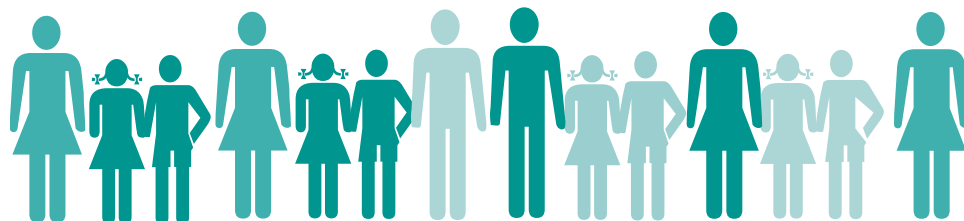
EIGHT OCWTP TRAINING REGIONS



What Is the OCWTP?

The OCWTP is the statewide competency-based inservice training system for child welfare professionals who work in Ohio's 88 county public children services agencies. Currently in its 18th year of operation, the OCWTP is a collaborative partnership of the 88 county public children services agencies, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). The Institute for Human Services (IHS) has been the State Coordinator for the program since its inception in 1986. The OCWTP Steering Committee, whose members are representatives from all the collaborating parties listed above, provides guidance and direction to the OCWTP.

The OCWTP provides standardized Core training to every newly hired caseworker and supervisor in the state, in accordance with the mandates of state law. Other standardized training is offered in specialized practice competency areas, such as culture and diversity, child sexual abuse, and adoption. State law mandates annual ongoing training for both case workers and supervisors, and the OCWTP offers numerous training opportunities to public children services staff every quarter to meet high priority training needs. In State Fiscal Year 2002, the OCWTP provided 2,249 workshops for 38,105 participants. Training is offered through the OCWTP's eight regional training centers.



Purpose of the Assessment

The OCWTP Steering Committee planned and implemented the *Statewide Training Assessment* to assure that the training system would continue to accurately identify and address the training needs of public children services staff in Ohio.

The ODJFS recognized that during the past several years there had been considerable change in the child welfare system and in the communities served by the system. As a result, ODJFS decided to conduct a comprehensive assessment to assure that its programming and training remained relevant and responsive to these changes. Specifically, the assessment was designed in order to answer the following questions:

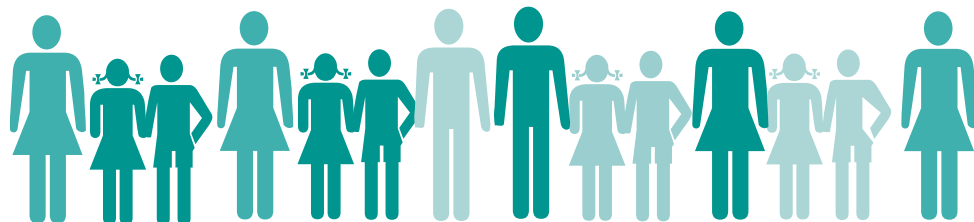
- How have recent national, state, and local trends impacted the practice of child welfare at the county level?
- What are the characteristics of the families and children currently being served by Ohio's public children services agencies?
- What are the demographic and other characteristics of staff currently employed in Ohio's public children services agencies?
- How have the job responsibilities of public children services agencies changed in the past few years?
- What additional training interventions can the OCWTP develop to help staff become highly skilled practitioners of child welfare services?
- How might the OCWTP use electronic and distance-learning technologies to expand training delivery options to best meet staff training needs?
- What staff should the OCWTP train in order to promote best practice in county agencies?

Assessment Methodology

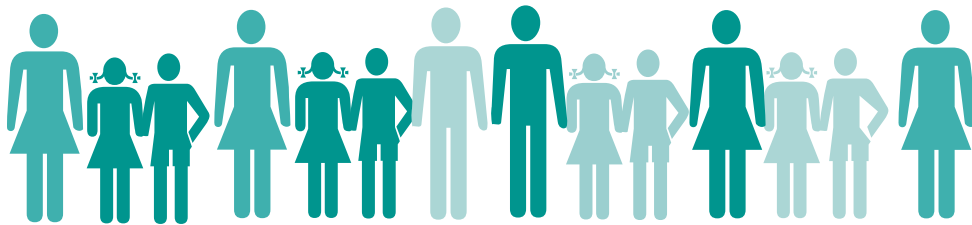
The assessment methodology was designed to gather data from a diverse, cross sampling of respondent groups, including executive directors, social services administrators, caseworkers, supervisors, case aides, child care workers, regional training center (RTC) coordinators and staff, OCWTP trainers, and ODJFS staff, including technical assistance managers, technical assistance specialists, and licensing specialists.

Data collection methods included an extensive review of the child welfare literature, focus groups, survey questionnaires, and telephone interviews.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and compared. A technology called triangulation was used to cross-reference the data to increase the validity of findings and conclusions.



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Assessment Findings

The assessment resulted in the collection of a vast amount of information about the current practice of child welfare in Ohio. Many of the most important findings were highly congruent among multiple respondents, strengthening both the reliability and validity of the data.

I. Major Trends in the Field of Child Welfare

ODJFS was interested in the extent to which the practice of child welfare had changed in the past ten years. The assessment was designed to identify important societal, legal, and professional trends to determine their potential impact on child welfare practice in Ohio, and their subsequent impact on training.

Over the last decade, child welfare practice has changed in response to a number of factors. New federal and state laws have significantly impacted the jobs of public agency staff, as have local county programs and initiatives to enhance services to families and children.

Two recently passed federal laws have prompted significant changes in child welfare practice. They are the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996, also known as welfare reform legislation.

ASFA: One of the most important provisions of ASFA was the establishment of strict timelines for the placement of foster children into permanent homes. According to assessment respondents, this mandate has changed practice at the county level in a number of ways. Caseworkers reported working more intensively with families, earlier in the case, to plan and ensure permanency for children. Caseworkers also reported working simultaneously toward two potential outcomes: reunifying placed children with their families, if possible, and planning a permanent placement alternative, when necessary. This practice, called supplemental planning, increased dramatically as a result of ASFA.

Caseworkers also reported spending much more time preparing for and appearing in court. Caseworkers indicated a need for help in preparing court documentation, understanding courtroom protocol, and providing court testimony.

Caseworkers also reported that judicial support for the new permanency timeframes varied. Several caseworkers commented that ASFA was enacted before judges had been fully trained, which created problems in trying to meet mandated timelines.

Welfare Reform: Federal welfare reform legislation eliminated guaranteed cash assistance payments to children and their families and replaced them with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The TANF program limited the amount of time a family could receive cash assistance and also required recipients to find employment. ODJFS was interested to learn if, and how, this change had impacted child welfare practice.

Ohio's two primary welfare reform initiatives were called Ohio Works First (OWF), and the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) Program. The assessment data showed a number of ways that children services practice had been impacted by welfare reform including the following:

- Respondents indicated that some children fared better and some had fared worse as a result of their parents returning to work under welfare reform. Workers reported that more children on their caseloads had been left home alone, but that more children had also been placed in structured child care environments.
- Staff reported that many of the families with whom they worked had fewer financial resources due to low paying jobs. Respondents reported an increase in requests from families for financial help to pay for medications, school clothes, rent, car repairs, groceries, and utilities.
- Respondents indicated that the PRC program had helped them provide additional needed services to families and children that they had not previously been able to provide. Respondents further indicated that recent cuts to PRC funding were forcing them to cut back on vital services to families and children on their case loads.

- Several executive directors reported that illegal immigrants who needed services were unable to receive assistance because a provision in the federal law prohibited it.
- ODJFS technical assistance managers reported an increase in the number of single mothers who neglected their children because of work-related responsibilities. They also observed that more single mothers appeared unable to manage both work and child-rearing responsibilities. Some supervisors reported that in general, parents had difficulty maintaining employment.
- Caseworkers and supervisors reported increased collaboration between child welfare staff and staff at county departments of job and family services, especially in counties where these two agencies are combined.

Worker Safety

According to both the assessment data and the national literature, child welfare caseworkers are experiencing more concern for their personal safety than they have in the past. OCWTP's regional training centers reported increased requests for safety training, and the topic of safety was raised by focus groups of caseworkers and case aides all across Ohio. Workers in rural counties were equally concerned as their counterparts in metropolitan counties. All believed they were more vulnerable to harm because of increased substance abuse, violence, and mental illness in families and neighborhoods.

Ohio's Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)

The Federal Child and Family Services Review measures state compliance with the State Plan requirements under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The review is a two-stage process comprised of a statewide needs assessment and an on-site review of practice in three county public children services agencies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) prepares and transmits state data profiles to the state being reviewed. The data profile provides an overall description of a state's performance in the areas of safety and permanency for children. Following the completion of the statewide assessment, which includes an analysis of statewide data, a joint team of federal and state reviewers conducts the on-site review, which includes an examination of fifty public children services agency

records (including interviews with all persons involved in each case), and interviews with state and local stakeholders. The quantitative and qualitative data are used together by HHS to determine the state's compliance with federal law and rule.

Ohio's Review was conducted in May 2002 and, at the time of this report, findings were not yet available. However, Ohio, like other states, will work with HHS to develop a program improvement plan to bring Ohio into compliance on all required outcomes. The training program may be impacted by the findings, and the OCWTP plans to work with ODJFS and county agencies to address compliance issues.

II. Families and Children Served by Ohio's Public Children Services Staff

The assessment data indicated that many families and children served by Ohio's public children services agencies had changed in the last five years. Agencies reported that, while caseloads had not substantially increased in size, family situations and needs had become more complicated, and many families required longer-term and more intensive assistance. Specifically, the identified changes in families included:

- Increased incidence of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and dependency, and mental health problems;
- Increased number of unruly and delinquent children on caseloads;
- Increased single-parent families and grandparents raising grandchildren; and
- Increased poverty for families.

Immigration has had a major impact on the changing demographics of Ohio's client populations. Children services staff reported increases in the ethnic diversity of families they served, particularly in metropolitan areas. Lucas, Greene, Summit, and Cuyahoga Counties

all reported increases in Hispanic populations; Cuyahoga County reported increases in Arab and Russian Jewish populations; Franklin County reported an increase in immigrants from Southeast Asia and Somalia; Greene County reported an increase in West Asians; and Summit County reported an increase in the Pacific Rim population.

Staff in different portions of the state also reported working with Appalachian, Amish/Mennonite, Native American, Japanese, and Indian families. Some staff reported an increased number of foster parents who were single or lesbian/gay. And some staff reported working with more hearing impaired and deaf clients.

The diversity of families makes the work of children services workers more complex and highlights the importance of the OCWTP's efforts to develop culturally competent staff.

III. Professional Staff of Ohio's 88 Public Children Services Agencies

The assessment data also provided the OCWTP with important demographic information about supervisors, caseworkers, case aides, and residential child care workers currently employed by public children services agencies. These findings included:

- The vast majority of public children services staff had college degrees. According to the data, 94.6% of caseworkers had a bachelor's, graduate, or postgraduate degree.
- Staff turnover and attrition continued to significantly impact county agencies. Tenure for both supervisors and caseworkers declined, and more than 22% of caseworkers and 21% of supervisors surveyed indicated they expected to leave the agency or the field of child welfare within two years.
- Statewide, Caucasian staff comprised 65.7% to 78.9% of professional staff and African American staff comprise 15.9% to 25.9%. Only 2.1% of caseworkers, 1.4% of supervisors, and no case aides were of Hispanic origin.

- Fewer than 16 of the 1,082 caseworkers surveyed said they were immigrants to the U.S., but 8.9% said they spoke English as a second language, suggesting greater diversity in the work force than the immigration statistics reveal.

IV. Changing Job Responsibilities of Staff

This assessment did not identify qualitatively new job responsibilities for professional children services staff. However, it did identify a shift in the comparative importance of certain job activities. For example:

- The increasing scope and severity of many client problems, including mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence, required the adaptation and application of core casework functions in unique ways to appropriately respond to and address these conditions.
- The increased focus on promoting permanence for children, supplemental planning, and shortened permanency time frames increased the scope of caseworkers' responsibilities in the legal and court systems, as well as their scope of responsibility in developing and supporting kinship caregivers.
- Many agencies had developed specialized positions and/or units, either to meet federal and state mandates or as a result of county program initiatives. These positions/units included: school social work programs; diversion, outreach, and prevention programs; placement and kinship units, and quality control units.
- Many surveyed counties had implemented or were implementing Family-Centered, Neighborhood-Based (FCNB) programming which attempts to develop placements for children as close to their homes as possible to minimize trauma and loss and to help sustain important attachments. FCNB programs also employ multidisciplinary teams which require increased collaboration by child welfare practitioners with neighborhood groups and agencies. FCNB programs often

impacted the job responsibilities of staff across multiple units of public children services agencies.

- Supervisors concurred that direct, one-on-one contact with their supervisees represented the most important part of their jobs. However, they also indicated that a variety of organizational barriers routinely prevented them from being able to implement this function. This data is congruent with the findings of previous OCWTP assessment studies.
- Many supervisors also reported a lack of specific casework skills, making it difficult for them to coach and support their supervisees in critical skill areas. Some supervisors also lacked coaching and mentoring skills or were unfamiliar with the concepts and content of OCWTP training programs their supervisees were attending.
- The job responsibilities of case aides varied considerably from agency-to-agency. However, their job responsibilities routinely put them in direct contact with client families, often in a supportive capacity. Case aides reported wanting additional training in casework practice areas.

V. Culture and Diversity: Providing Responsive Services

The assessment data indicated that increasing numbers of families from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds are being served by county public children services agencies. The OCWTP sought information from the assessment to continue to support the development and enhancement of cultural competence of Ohio's child welfare staff. The OCWTP collected data from staff on this important element of service provision. The assessment indicated the following:

- Many respondents appeared to understand the importance of cultural competence in assuring effective and culturally

responsive casework practice. However, when asked during focus groups how culture had impacted their practice, many staff appeared to be confused about the definitions of culture, race, and ethnicity, as well as the impact of culture and diversity on child welfare practice.

- Many supervisors and caseworkers reported using a variety of resources, including the Internet and libraries, to find cultural information to help them work more successfully with families and children from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Many staff reported talking with co-workers who had more experience working with certain cultures, or who were from a particular ethnic, racial, or religious background. Some staff attended college courses to increase their knowledge of culture and diversity.
- Staff also reported appreciation for diversity in the work place. They viewed staff from different cultures as assets to their agencies and a source of information about different cultures. Some workers suggested that their agencies hire additional workers from different backgrounds and cultures.
- Staff reported they needed more information about specific racial, ethnic, and religious groups with whom they worked, particularly groups that had recently emigrated to their communities.

VI. Skill Building and Transfer of Learning (TOL)

The OCWTP has implemented a variety of strategies to promote transfer of learning and skill development in the child welfare work force. These strategies have included Supervisory Core training on coaching and on-the-job training skills; training for trainers in incorporating transfer-of-learning strategies into OCWTP workshops; and recently, the multi-session Skill-Building Certificate Training (SBCT) Programs which address skill development through intensive practice and in-agency coaching. While all of these efforts have been

successful, promoting the development and mastery of critical skills is a major ongoing OCWTP program initiative.

Data from the national literature review and from key informants throughout North America confirmed that building skills requires a continuum of interventions beginning with hiring the right people for the job and continuing throughout their employment. Skills cannot be mastered solely through classroom training; there must also be targeted interventions before and after classroom workshops.

The OCWTP collected the following information from respondents on existing agency skill-building interventions.

- Most surveyed agencies had implemented orientation and shadowing programs to help new workers become acclimated to their jobs. However, respondents also indicated that staff vacancies and/or high caseloads reduced the time they could devote to orientation activities, and limited their comprehensiveness. Agency orientation programs also varied considerably in length and scope. Some programs were only a few hours in length while other programs lasted several months. Some caseworkers received cases almost immediately after hire, while others worked for six or eight weeks before assuming a small caseload. Many caseworkers reported that their agency orientation programs weren't comprehensive enough to allow new employees to fully grasp the nature and scope of child welfare work.
- Managers and supervisors reported that new staff typically received coaching and mentoring either from supervisors or experienced workers. However, caseworker respondents reported they were not getting the coaching and mentoring support they needed.
- Respondents also identified system barriers to on-the-job skill building, including a lack of supervisor time, a lack of funding to support skill building, and, for some counties, too few staff to support a formal in-agency coaching and mentoring initiative.

Assessment participants requested several interventions to help them become more skilled at their jobs. These strategies included:

- Increased opportunities for newly hired staff to shadow more experienced staff;
- Increased opportunities for staff to work with coaches or mentors to develop their skills;
- Enhanced orientation programs that provide staff with information and guidance to help them understand the role of a public children services agency and of other service providers in their communities;
- Supervisory guidance on specific casework practice issues;
- Additional on-site training to allow staff from the same agency to attend training together to maximize peer coaching and support;
- Shortened time frames for training, including half-day and single day sessions; and delivery of training closer to their county of employment to reduce travel time and costs; and
- Additional workshops tailored to the development of specific skill sets, such as interviewing or working with adolescents.

VII. County Agency Technology Capacity

ODJFS was also interested in determining the most efficient and effective ways to help staff develop needed skills. The OCWTP had previously piloted some distance learning techniques and wanted to determine whether to increase the use of such technologies. Electronic strategies could help the OCWTP overcome many of the barriers that prevent staff from mastering essential practice skills through classroom training alone.

The OCWTP collected data on the capacity of computer technology in county agencies. Lack of technology at the local level could impact

the training program's ability to implement electronic training and skill building strategies. This assessment indicated the following:

- A key informant from ODJFS Management Information Systems (MIS) reported that 81 counties were linked to the ODJFS Intranet. All six metro counties and Wayne County Children Services had acquired their own computer equipment and developed their own internal agency networks.
- Every caseworker and supervisor in the state had access to computers equipped with CD-ROM drives and sound cards. However, the assessment also discovered that firewalls and other security devices limited access by many employees to the Internet, and often prohibited them from downloading certain files. These protections can be overridden in some cases for the 81 counties connected to the ODJFS Intranet. The OCWTP will need to work with the other seven counties individually to determine how best to implement computerized-training strategies for their staff.
- ODJFS does not provide training on the use of computer hardware or software to children service agency staff. There is some training available on computer use through the TOPs program.
- Most respondents reported experience with computers and the Internet and were moderately or very comfortable using this technology.
- Respondents reported definite preferences for specific types of electronic learning strategies, even though many reported having little or no experience with these technologies. In general, respondents expressed interest in on-line workshops but indicated a lack of willingness to use electronic bulletin boards, CD-ROMs, or teleconferencing. The reasons for this were not clear from the assessment.
- OCWTP trainers reported having little experience with using technology before, during, or after classroom workshops.

These findings suggest that the use of computer-related and other electronic strategies will require the OCWTP to work with ODJFS and the seven non-networked counties to ensure access to these strategies and to understand the most appropriate use and benefits of some strategies.

VIII. The OCWTP Training Audience

Historically, the OCWTP has provided training primarily to caseworkers and supervisors. However, the OCWTP has historically provided training to a broader group of child welfare professionals to the extent it was organizationally and fiscally able. In order to determine possible future training recipients, the OCWTP asked assessment respondents to identify who should be served by the OCWTP. Three additional populations were recommended for inclusion in future OCWTP training opportunities: 1) Executive directors, social service administrators, management staff; 2) Foster parents; 3) Case aides.

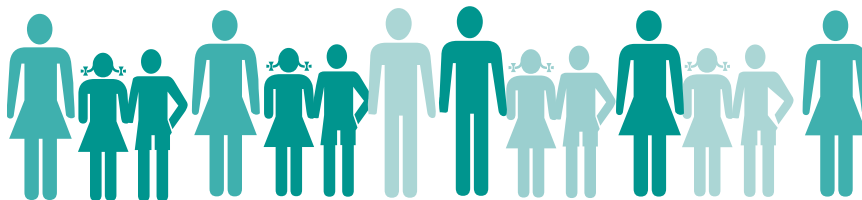
IX. OCWTP Steering Committee Decisions and Planning

The OCWTP Steering Committee met in October 2002, to determine what should be done in the near future to develop strategies that addressed the most significant assessment findings.

The following represents some of the decisions made by the Steering Committee. For a full listing of findings and decisions, please see the complete OCWTP *Statewide Training Assessment* document.

1. The OCWTP will review and revise caseworker and supervisory competencies and Core training to reflect high priority topic areas identified in the assessment.
2. The OCWTP will collect additional information about significant populations of recently immigrated families in each region, and will identify resources to assist the RTCs in responding to staff training needs related to specific client populations. The OCWTP will also continue to stress the importance of staff attending foundation-level training on culture and diversity prior to attending workshops on specific ethnic or cultural populations.
3. The OCWTP will design and develop additional core-level training initiatives in critical competency areas that carefully sequence and incorporate skill-building and transfer-of-learning strategies. OCWTP will work collaboratively with PCSAO, ODJFS, and county public children services agencies to assure state and county support for OCWTP skill-building and transfer outcomes.
4. The OCWTP will pilot and evaluate additional training resources and products, including technology-based strategies as skill-building and transfer of learning interventions.
5. The OCWTP will explore funding opportunities to develop an orientation CD-ROM for newly hired county public children services staff.

6. The OCWTP will collaborate with ODJFS and PCSAO to design and deliver training opportunities for public child welfare executive directors, social service administrators, and other management staff on competencies related to funding, state and federal policy issues, county collaboration strategies, and other high priority topics as identified.
7. The OCWTP will resume training foster parents who are licensed by public children services agencies.



Contact Information

The OCWTP Mission

The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program promotes the delivery of high quality, culturally responsive, family-centered services to children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse, neglect, or dependency, and their families.

We provide competency-based training primarily to the public agency professionals, caregivers, and adoptive parents who serve them.

We collaborate with other service providers to promote the delivery of competency-based training.

We advocate for public policy and practice standards that reflect best child welfare practice.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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