

## I. INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) is to deliver the necessary training and training-related strategies to help children services agencies develop competent and effective staff. The OCWTP is a collaborative partnership between Ohio's 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) is the contracted state coordinator for the program.

As part of its contract with ODJFS, IHS conducted a statewide developmental needs assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to provide a multifaceted overview of the current trends in child welfare and the training needs for Ohio's public children services' workforce throughout Ohio. Assessment data is being used by OCWTP to ensure that staff in Ohio's 88 public children services agencies receive the necessary training and skill-building opportunities they need to perform their jobs.

The specific goals of this assessment were to:

- assess the characteristics of current public child welfare staff, including race, age, ethnicity, gender, immigrant status, field of study, type and length of experience, licensure status, type and level of degree, and retention;
- assess the current job responsibilities and activities of public child welfare staff in Ohio to determine if, and how, these have changed in the last five years;
- assess child welfare practice trends for the past five years;
- identify uses of technology and other methodologies for training, and assess their effectiveness;
- determine learning preferences and preferred training delivery methods of young caseworkers, who are new to child welfare.

To accomplish this assessment, the OCWTP Steering Committee formed an assessment work team composed of ODJFS staff, staff from seven of the eight OCWTP regional training centers, and IHS personnel. The assessment work team and the entire steering committee provided ongoing feedback to IHS staff during the development and implementation of the assessment.

This document presents and discusses the findings from the assessment and implications of those findings for the OCWTP. The OCWTP developed a series of recommendations for training program improvements, also contained in this report.

## Historical Background

The field of child welfare is not new in North America. For centuries, communities struggled to take care of homeless and orphaned children. Child abuse, particularly by parents, was not recognized except in the most extreme cases, and children did not have rights separate from their parents.

In 1874, the first organization was formed to identify and help children who had been abused or neglected. This organization, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, was formed largely as a result of the cruel beatings by her caretakers of a little girl named Mary Ellen. When public leaders became aware of Mary Ellen's plight, they asked the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to intervene, as they could identify no other agency having the legal authority to do so. As a result, Mary Ellen's caregivers were imprisoned, and, in just six years, more than 250 societies for the protection of children had been formed in the United States and Canada.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, in North America, the children's rights movement, begun in the late 1800s, did not recognize Native American, African American, or other children of color as human beings entitled to the same rights as European-descended children. Those non-European children were considered property, were routinely separated from their families, and suffered abuse and deprivation of every kind.

Although many states had child welfare agencies in place, it wasn't until the late 1970s that all 50 states were mandated to create governmental child welfare agencies. At first, these child welfare agencies were established only to receive and investigate reports of alleged abuse. The responsibilities of child welfare agencies have increased dramatically in the ensuing years. Now, agencies investigate abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment. Child welfare agencies are also responsible for providing services to a large number of children and teens labeled "dependent." These children may or may not have been abused, but for a variety of reasons they need child welfare services whether they are living at home or in placement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Field Guide to Child Welfare (Rycus, Hughes, 1998) includes a thorough history of child welfare.

<sup>2</sup>Children who are dependent may have parents who are unable to care for them due to illness or other incapacity, but the classification "dependency" has become a catchall in child welfare and includes children with a variety of problems.

Today's child welfare agencies also must provide services to unruly and delinquent children and teens. While policymakers debate whether the child welfare or the juvenile justice system should provide primary services, county agencies in Ohio meet the needs of many young people who are sometimes violent, drug-addicted, truant, or, in some other way, delinquent.

New mandates from the federal and state governments have greatly expanded the roles and responsibilities of child welfare agencies. In the last 20 years, child welfare agencies have developed and incorporated rules, policies, and programs of many descriptions designed to ensure safety and permanence for children, and strengthening, preservation, and reunification of families. The child welfare system has been transformed many times by federal and state mandates.

Children's advocacy organizations have also impacted child welfare practice, especially with the development of programs like the Family-to-Family initiative, stressing family-centered, neighborhood-based programming, and the Family Group Case Conferencing program, created to increase family involvement in the child welfare decision-making process.

Child welfare service delivery systems have also undergone tremendous change to address new mandates and find effective ways to serve families and children. For example, many Ohio counties, regardless of size, have staff geographically assigned to a region or stationed in neighborhood offices or one-stop community centers. Workers often specialize in a particular area of practice and may work exclusively on sexual abuse cases, with unruly youth, or in a foster care unit. County public children services agencies in Ohio are involved in activities as distinct as investigating abuse, administering schools, collaborating with drug courts, recruiting and matching foster parents with children who need placement, educating the community, and supporting kinship caregivers.

In recent years, lawmakers have been increasingly focused on agency accountability. For example, The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), passed by Congress in 1997, mandated shortened time frames for children awaiting adoption, requiring agencies to achieve permanence for children within a specified time frame. This continuing trend is driven by policymakers to hold child welfare agencies accountable for the use of public funds supporting child welfare activities.

Although child welfare systems have changed, much about child welfare practice itself remains the same. According to the *Field Guide to Child Welfare*, (Rycus and Hughes, 1998) child welfare professionals continue to believe in the following outcomes:

*All children have an absolute right to a safe, permanent, stable home, which provides basic levels of nurturance and care, and is free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.*

Child welfare professionals are also guided by social work values that have remained consistent for much of the last century. According to Rycus and Hughes (1998) the most important values include:

- all human beings are valuable;
- all human beings have a right to self-determination and privacy;
- all human beings have a right to justice;
- all human beings have a responsibility to help others maintain their rights and achieve their potential; and
- all human beings can change.

Furthermore, child welfare professionals have defined the ways these values are to be applied to child welfare practice. They include:

- the child welfare system must protect children;
- the child welfare field must provide family-centered services;
- child welfare services must promote permanence for all children;
- child welfare services must be culturally competent; and
- children who need out-of-home placement should always be placed in the least restrictive, most home-like environment, as close to their own home as possible.

In light of these values and norms, child welfare practice continues to require social workers to develop long-term, collaborative relationships with their clients, founded on mutual trust and respect; to individually assess the strengths and needs of each child and family; and to develop and provide service interventions to achieve individual case goals and objectives.

## **Ohio Child Welfare Training Program**

As the practice of child welfare has evolved, the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program has responded to address changing needs. In 1985, as a result of the Roe v. Staples consent decree, the state of Ohio recognized the need for

standardized training for child welfare professionals. The OCWTP started with a few trainers and a few workshops for caseworkers and supervisors. Since that time, it has become a respected, comprehensive, competency-based inservice training program for child welfare professionals throughout North America.

The foundation of the OCWTP is the universe of competencies that delineates all awareness, knowledge and skills needed to achieve “best child welfare practice.” These competencies are the basis of all curricula and activities of the program. The mission of the program is provided below.

***The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program mission is to promote 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.***

Today, OCWTP provides Caseworker and Supervisory Core training to every new worker and supervisor in the state, as mandated by state law. In addition to Core, workshops on culture and diversity, sexual abuse, adoption, and foster care have been standardized and are offered routinely at the OCWTP’s eight regional training centers.<sup>3</sup> State law also mandates ongoing training, and workers in Ohio have a lengthy menu of child welfare-related workshops to attend every quarter. For example, in 2001 the OCWTP provided 2,887 days of training for 22,836 participants.<sup>4</sup>

Other important components of the program include individual training needs assessments (ITNAs) and transfer of learning (TOL) components. ITNAs help caseworkers, supervisors, and foster parents determine their specific, individual training needs so training resources can be used wisely. Transfer of learning activities are designed to help workers apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom to their work.

Taken together, these components of a competency-based inservice training program are designed to help county agencies build and maintain a workforce that can provide effective and efficient services to children and their families.

Much of the information in this document represents the opinions of child welfare agency executive directors or their designees, supervisors, caseworkers, case aides, residential child care workers, staff of the eight Ohio regional training centers, OCWTP trainers, and staff of the Ohio Department of Job and Family

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<sup>3</sup> See Regional Training Center map on inside front cover.

<sup>4</sup> The OCWTP Annual Report for 2001 is due to be published in August 2002.

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Services. It is important to note that this report does not represent the opinions of all child welfare staff. And, when examples are given of county agency practices, they do not represent all the policies and programs throughout the state. Instead, this document tries to highlight significant characteristics and practices of the Ohio child welfare system regarding recent trends, the workforce, the clients, culturally responsive services, training program feedback, and skill-building and transfer of learning strategies. When possible, secondary sources have been reviewed to confirm or expound upon the validity of the opinions solicited.

This report also includes decisions made by the OCWTP Steering Committee at its October 2002 retreat. The Steering Committee reviewed and discussed all the assessment findings and identified 27 activities for the OCWTP to pursue in the coming years. These decisions are presented at the end of each section. At times, the reader will find the same decisions repeated in multiple sections of the report because different assessment findings supported the same decisions.

Everyone associated with the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program greatly appreciates the time devoted by child welfare staff throughout Ohio to answering questionnaires and participating in phone interviews and focus groups. Their insights into child welfare practice will help OCWTP improve the training to help them in this important work.