II. METHODOLOGY

Assessment Purpose and Design

The purpose of this developmental needs assessment was to provide a multifaceted overview of the current trends in child welfare, as well as the training needs of professional staff working in public children services agencies (PCSAs) throughout the state of Ohio. The specific goals of this assessment, as outlined in the assessment work plan, were to:

- ensure that the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) content and methodologies meet the learning needs of a changing workforce;
- ensure that OCWTP training prepares workers to work with today's clients and their issues in a culturally competent manner; and
- ensure that PCSAs are knowledgeable about, participate in, and receive feedback about the assessment process.

To achieve the purpose and meet the goals of the assessment, information was collected in the following areas:

- workforce characteristics including demographics, job activities and responsibilities, learning preferences, cultural responsiveness, training needs, and practice trends
- client characteristics including culture, demographics, and problems
- skill building and transfer of learning strategies in use, including orientation, shadowing, and coaching, and preferred training delivery methods
- current trends in child welfare practice
- the technological capacities of public children service agencies and staff readiness for increased use of computer-related training strategies

The methodological approach to this assessment was designed to achieve three objectives: 1) to gather the broadest possible quantitative data from the various

populations in the Ohio child welfare system; 2) to gather in-depth qualitative data from specific key informants; and 3) to identify and analyze recent trends, with special attention to changes in child welfare practice. Data collection methods included extensive literature reviews, focus groups, survey questionnaires, and telephone interviews. Caseworkers, supervisors, case aides, child care workers, regional training center (RTC) coordinators and staff, OCWTP trainers, ODJFS technical assistance managers, technical assistance specialists, and licensing specialists, and PCSA executive directors or their designees were asked to participate in the assessment. Additionally, one key informant from ODJFS was consulted to provide additional information about computer technologies.

The following interviews and focus groups were conducted in April and early May 2002:

- 23 telephone interviews with county executive directors or their designees, usually the social services administrator
- eight focus groups with supervisors
- 16 focus groups with caseworkers
- four focus groups with case aides
- four focus groups with residential or group home workers
- one focus group with staff of each RTC, for a total of eight focus groups
- three focus groups with OCWTP trainers
- one focus group with ODJFS technical assistance managers (TAMs), one with technical assistance specialists (TASs), and one with ODJFS licensing specialists
- one key informant interview with an ODJFS Management Information System project manager

The following lists show each population contacted, the methods used, and the subject of the assessment inquiry.

CASEWORKERS

- caseworker demographics: paper survey
- training delivery and learning preferences: paper survey

- current trends in child welfare: focus groups
- culturally responsive services: focus groups
- job activities: focus groups
- skill building and transfer of learning: focus groups

SUPERVISORS

- supervisor demographics: paper survey
- training delivery and learning preferences: paper survey
- skill building and transfer of learning: paper survey
- current trends in child welfare: focus groups
- culturally responsive services: focus groups
- job activities: focus groups
- skill building and transfer of learning: focus groups

CASE AIDES (includes transportation workers, homemakers, service techs)

- case aide demographics: paper survey
- training delivery and learning preferences: paper survey
- culturally responsive services: focus groups
- job activities: focus groups
- skill building and transfer of learning: focus groups

GROUP HOME AND RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE WORKERS

- child care worker demographics: paper survey
- training delivery and learning preferences: paper survey
- culturally responsive services: focus groups
- job activities: focus groups
- skill building and transfer of learning: focus groups

RTC COORDINATORS AND STAFF

- training trends: focus groups
- before and after OCWTP training workshops: focus groups
- technological readiness: focus groups

OCWTP TRAINERS

- trainees: focus groups (two of the three focus groups were conducted via the telephone bridge line)
- skill building and transfer of learning: focus groups
- training technology: focus groups

ODJFS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MANAGERS/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SPECIALISTS AND LICENSING SPECIALISTS

- current trends in child welfare: focus groups
- agency promotion of transfer of learning: focus groups
- skill areas in need of additional training: focus groups

PCSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OR THEIR DESIGNEES

- current trends in child welfare: phone survey
- skill building and transfer of learning: phone survey
- PCSA technological readiness: phone survey

ODJFS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM STAFF

- PCSA technological readiness: meeting

A few of the key concepts that underlie the choice of assessment methods are briefly discussed below.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a common research method used to establish the trustworthiness of both qualitative and quantitative data. Simply stated, the objective of triangulation is to “examine a single social phenomenon from more than one vantage point" (Schwandt, 1997). This approach maintains that collecting data from different perspectives adds weight to the credibility of the analysis. It usually can be assumed that no single data source or group--influenced by its own concerns, priorities, and experiences--can provide a totally accurate assessment of any situation. In triangulation, multiple sources help to verify and elaborate on the data collected (Yegidis, Weinbach, and Morrison-Rodriguez, 1999).

In the context of this assessment, a triangulated approach was used to combine data from a variety of sources. The modes of data collection included an extensive literature review; examination of administrative data from sources such as FACSIS; state census data; data from survey questionnaires; and focus group data from a variety of staff, including caseworkers, case aides, and supervisors. This triangulated approach has a greater likelihood of yielding a more complete picture of the assessment criteria (Neuman, 2000).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived understanding of a phenomenon. The phenomenon is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this assessment, a modified grounded theory approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the trends in child welfare and the training needs of workers. For example, rather than asking closed-ended questions about cultural competence on a questionnaire, a grounded theory approach includes asking open-ended questions that enable the participants to define, in their own words, their experiences and training needs related to cultural competence.

Data is concurrently gathered and analyzed for patterns, themes, and theories embedded in the words of the participants. The process continues until there is a “saturation” of the emerging themes, and additional data collection does not produce any new information. While this approach may not have the external validity of data collected via a random sample, it nevertheless provides a depth of information that a standardized questionnaire cannot generate.

External Validity

External validity refers to the extent to which findings are believed to apply beyond the cases that are actually studied. External validity determines to what degree the collected data can be assumed to be representative of other cases that were not studied (Yegidis, Weinbach, and Morrison-Rodriguez, 1999). In the context of this assessment process, external validity offers a counterpoint to the data collected using the grounded theory approach. For example, one of the ways supervisors participated in this assessment was by filling out a questionnaire. In order to have a high degree of external validity, the assessment team gathered a stratified random sampling frame to ensure a plus or minus three percent sampling error for a 95 percent confidence interval. This approach offers a high level of confidence in the findings, with a strong probability that the sample represents all supervisors throughout the state.

Overall, the greatest strength of this methodology lies in the emphasis on an approach to data collection that incorporates a careful use of in-depth qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory, as well as a systematic administration of quantitative methodologies, such as stratified random samples that have a high degree of external validity.

Specific Methodologies by Sub-Population

1. Caseworkers

Information from caseworkers was gathered using two distinct methods. First, survey questionnaires were sent to caseworkers throughout the state of Ohio. In order to assure appropriate representation from all portions of the state, a stratified random sampling frame was developed, based on the eight training regions (central, north central, northeast, northwest, east central, southeast, west, and southwest) and county size (small, medium, large, and metropolitan). Given that there are 3,874 caseworkers in the state of Ohio, a sample size of 581 would have been sufficient to ensure a plus or minus three percent sampling error for a 95 percent confidence interval (Dillman, 2000). In addition, a 20 percent over-sampling was added to the sample size.

In spite of over-sampling efforts, the final number of returned surveys was 425, which yielded a sampling error of plus or minus 3.6 percent, with a confidence interval of 95 percent. While the final sample for caseworkers was less than anticipated, it nevertheless provides a high degree of confidence in the findings. Sampled workers received a survey questionnaire that included questions about demographic information, as well as training delivery and learning preferences,

with special emphasis on the incorporation of computer technology into training. A copy of the questionnaire for caseworkers is included in the appendix.

Second, 16 focus groups with caseworkers were conducted throughout the state, again stratifying for region and county size. The focus groups included from four to 12 workers, with a total of 101 workers participating, 96 of whom completed activity lists related to their involvement in ongoing services, placement, intake, or investigation. Using a grounded theory approach, trained group facilitators explored issues, including current trends in child welfare, culturally responsive services, job activities, skill building, and transfer of learning. Copies of the open-ended questions for the focus groups and the activity lists are included in the appendix.

Unfortunately, only four placement workers completed activity lists that were given out in caseworker focus groups. It is likely that some workers from small and medium sized agencies performed a wide range of duties, including placement. These workers evidently chose to complete activity lists for other positions. With only four completed activity lists for placement workers, a quantitative data analysis could not be performed on placement activities; the findings would not be reliable. Data analysis on intake/investigation and on-going activities is included in this report.

2. Supervisors

Information was collected from supervisors using the same procedures that were used for caseworkers. The entire population of 731 supervisors was mailed questionnaires, with a return of 369 completed questionnaires. This sample is above the number required for a confidence interval of 95 percent, and a sampling error of plus or minus three percent. This indicates a high degree of confidence in the findings.

In addition to information covered in the caseworker questionnaire, other topics for supervisors included barriers to providing educational supervision, percentage distribution of work hours by functional responsibility, and number of workers supervised. A copy of the supervisor questionnaire is included in the appendix.

In addition, eight supervisor focus groups were conducted throughout the state, again stratifying for region and county size. Each focus group included from two to ten supervisors, with a total of 42 supervisors in attendance, 40 of whom completed activity reports on supervisory activities. Using the grounded theory approach, trained group facilitators explored issues, including current trends in child welfare, culturally responsive services, job activities, skill building, and transfer of learning. The focus groups also incorporated issues unique to supervisors, such as supervisory barriers to providing optimal supervision.

Copies of the open-ended questions for the supervisory focus groups and activity lists are included in the appendix.

3. Case Aides, Group Home and Residential Child Care Workers

Other populations were also included in the assessment, including case aides, which includes transportation workers, homemakers, and service techs, as well as group home and residential child care workers. All 402 case aides and 429 child care workers were mailed a questionnaire, given the high proportion of subjects needed to produce an adequate sampling error and confidence interval. A total of 143 case aides completed questionnaires, which yielded a sampling error of 5.5 percent, and a confidence interval of 95 percent. While this sampling error is larger than anticipated, it nevertheless provides an adequate degree of confidence in the generalizability of the findings.

One hundred forty-five child care workers also completed the questionnaire, which yielded a sampling error of 5.5 percent, and a confidence interval of 95 percent. Once again, this sampling error is larger than anticipated, but it nevertheless provides an adequate degree of confidence in the generalizability of the findings. Child care workers received a survey that included questions about demographic information, as well as training delivery and learning preferences, with special emphasis on the incorporation of computer technology into training. Copies of the questionnaire for case aides and child care workers are included in the appendix.

Four focus groups for case aides and four focus groups for child care workers were conducted throughout the state and stratified for region and county size. Because the prevalence of case aides and child care workers varies widely across the counties, the focus groups were conducted in regions that have a high number of these staff. The focus groups for case aides included from five to nine case aides, with a total of 35 case aides participating, all of whom completed activity surveys on case aide activities. The child care focus groups included a range from three to eight workers, with a total of 23 workers participating, all of whom completed activity reports on group home worker activities. Using the grounded theory approach, trained group facilitators explored issues, including current trends in child welfare, culturally responsive services, job activities, skill building, and transfer of learning. A copy of the open-ended questions for the focus groups with case aides and child care workers, as well as the activity lists, are included in the appendix.

4. RTC Coordinators and Staff

Regional training center coordinators and staff participated in the assessment process through eight focus groups, one held in each region. RTC staff did not complete questionnaires. Specific issues relevant to RTC coordinators and staff included training trends, transfer of learning strategies implemented both before and after OCWTP training workshops, and county technological readiness. A copy of the open-ended questions for the focus groups with RTC coordinators and staff is included in the appendix.

5. OCWTP Trainers

OCWTP trainers participated in three focus groups but did not complete questionnaires. Individuals who had trained for at least two years with OCWTP, and had offered training sessions at least four times a year, were asked to participate in the focus groups. Focus group issues included frequency of training, changes in worker training needs, skill building, transfer of learning, and training technology. A copy of the open-ended questions for the focus groups with OCWTP trainers is included in the appendix.

Unfortunately, only 15 trainers participated in focus groups and two of these groups were conducted using the telephone bridge line. Trainers' schedules made it difficult for them to attend focus groups and several scheduled focus groups were cancelled because trainers could not attend. Therefore, the feedback received from trainers should be viewed with caution. Fifteen trainers is not a large enough sample to generalize their comments.

6. ODJFS Staff

ODJFS technical assistance managers (TAMs), technical assistance specialists (TASs), and licensing specialists participated in one focus group each, with an emphasis on client trends, agency promotion of transfer of learning, and skill areas in need of further development after training. Copies of the open-ended questions for the focus group with TAMs, TASs, and licensing specialists are included in the appendix.

7. PCSA Executive Directors or Their Designees

Public children service agency (PCSA) executive directors or their designees participated in telephone surveys. A sample of 24 of the 88 county executive directors or their designees was randomly selected from a sampling frame stratified for region and county size to ensure a balanced representation of the directors throughout the state. Interviews were actually conducted with 23 directors/designees; scheduling problems of the social services administrator made one of the interviews impossible to conduct during April or early May.

The telephone interviews consisted of open-ended questions that focused on current trends in child welfare, skill building, transfer of learning, and PCSA technological readiness. A copy of the open-ended interview questions with the executive directors or their designees is included in the appendix.

8. ODJFS Management Information Systems

Frank Myers, ODJFS management information systems (MIS) project manager, met with two IHS staff members to discuss county computer technology. A copy of those discussion questions is included in the appendix.

Data Collection

Focus groups for each job category were assigned two designated facilitators who conducted the specified number of focus groups throughout the state. This ensured consistency in data collection and a greater potential for saturation of emerging themes, patterns, and theories. During each focus group, one facilitator took notes while the second facilitator conducted the focus group. The facilitators met after each focus group to discuss and clarify the data collected and to draft a report summarizing the session. The grounded theory approach required this ongoing refinement and modification of the data collection process in order to identify consistencies and patterns among responses.

Questionnaires were mailed to subjects from each job category with a brief explanation of the assessment process. Questionnaires included a stamped return envelope, and the completed questionnaires were mailed directly to the research consultant, Dr. Tim McCarragher, who was responsible for data entry and initial analysis.

Data Analysis

Dr. McCarragher received and entered the questionnaire data and conducted data analysis, using the Statistical Package for the Social Services (SPSS) for Windows 10.0.

Qualitative data from focus groups and telephone interviews were analyzed as they were collected. This provided the opportunity to modify the questions asked in subsequent focus groups or interviews to improve the scope and quality of data. Findings were collated and summarized at the completion of qualitative data collection by Dr. McCarragher, focus group facilitators, and interviewers.