

CAN CALIFORNIA KEEP ITS PROMISE TO ITS CHILDREN?

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A PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE PAPER

COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA

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Our Vision

The California Child Welfare System promises the protection of children, support and strengthening of families and is key to the health and vitality of California itself. This system must be supported by the resources necessary to fulfill that promise. With new knowledge of those resource needs, our vision is that California will now implement a planned and manageable corrective action which addresses newly recognized resource shortfalls and prevents any reoccurrence.

COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

CHILD WELFARE WORKLOAD STUDY STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The enactment of California Senate Bill SB-2030 in 1998 was the direct result of advocacy efforts of the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and other organizations including organized labor.

CWDA and other organizations actively sought and supported this legislation based upon hard data that indicated county child welfare agencies in California were understaffed and inadequately funded in relation to the caseload, regulatory and statutory workload in the state child welfare program. The belief was strongly held then, and continues today, that overburdened systems and their workers cannot fulfill the mission of delivering quality child protection and intervention services and that children and families are at risk.

The SB-2030 legislation required the California Department of Social Services to select a consultant to undertake a study of workload and budgeting methodology and that the study be submitted to the Legislature by January 30, 2000. The legislation specifies that the study is to include recommendations for revising the budgeting methodology, including appropriate caseload levels, supportive services and preventative services. The study is also to consider the impact of such things as law and regulatory requirements, the CWS/CMS automated system and best practices. The legislation also mentions the importance of identifying and evaluating what are termed "best practices," such as family conferencing and wraparound services and determining the impact on workload of obtaining health, mental health, educational and developmental assessments of children and the time needed to coordinate with other systems serving children and their families.

After evaluating competitive proposals, the state let a contract for the study. American Humane Association was selected as the principal consultant contractor, with other firms providing specialized assistance. By January 2000 it became apparent that the study findings would confirm that California's child welfare program is significantly understaffed in relation to the statutory and regulatory expectations of it.

Such a finding is not a surprise in view of the caseload levels being adopted in various other states as a result of similar studies (the reader is referred to the CWDA Issue Paper entitled "Child Welfare Services in California," dated June 12, 1998). The challenge now becomes one of addressing the shortage of professional and support staff and other resources the study will identify as necessary for the state of California to fulfill the promise of its child welfare statutes.

The question is: Can California keep its promise to its children?

The Tragedy of Good Intent

Laws and regulations that require and promise the delivery of activities and services are, regardless of the best of intentions, but hollow promises when the resources required to do so are not adequately addressed.

Such laws and regulations, without adequate resources, are the fields upon which the seeds of government distrust are sown. They are the fields that will later be plowed by investigators, journalists and the courts in a search for the leveling of blame for the tragedies that inevitably occur when the public has relied upon and trusted in that hollow promise. Such an outcome is all the more tragic when that public is the children.

Purpose

Anticipating the magnitude of the state workload study outcome, on January 13, 2000, the CWDA President, Dianne Edwards (Sonoma County), asked Larry Leaman (Orange County), CWDA Vice President at Large, to chair a task force of directors to develop an issue paper setting forth a vision and strategy for the implementation of the Child Welfare Workload and Budgeting Methodology Study report to be finalized and published during late winter/early spring of 2000. The task force members and contributors are identified on the title page of this report (inside front cover).

We are encouraged by the commitment of the state of California to undertake a serious and scientific study in response to SB-2030 and believe that the workload/caseload results of the study are valid. It's clear that significant additional resources are required if the promise of protecting children and strengthening families made in state child welfare statutes and regulations is to be met.

In this paper we suggest a planned approach for implementing the study recommendations over a manageable period of time for California and its 58 counties. We also suggest parallel efforts be undertaken by the state government and individual counties. These efforts should include restructuring of duties and organizational designs, searches for efficiencies, increasing internal and external supports for the workforce, development of local and statewide strategies for increasing the supply of professional social workers as well as vigorous pursuit of state-of-the-art technology improvements.

We now know what it takes to do the job and fulfill California's promise to its children. The challenge before us is to act strategically on that knowledge in a planned and deliberate way.

A SENSE OF URGENCY

SB-2030 and an increase in child welfare funding of 10 percent were both enacted by the state Legislature and the Governor in 1998, reflecting the urgency of addressing a child welfare system and workforce that was nearly overwhelmed.

This sense of urgency was carried forward by the California Department of Social Services, the counties, the oversight advisory group formed in response to the direction of SB-2030 and the study consultant, American Humane Association, to complete a massive study within the legislatively prescribed timelines.

This sense of urgency remains and must result in equally rapid implementation of the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Recommended New Caseload Standards Should Be Adopted

The Caseload Standards developed in the state of California-American Humane Association workload study pursuant to Senate Bill 2030 of 1998 should be adopted by the state of California.

2. Strategic Implementation Plan and Vision Needed

A strategic plan to implement the caseload standards and suggested strategies of this workload and budgeting study should be developed by the state of California in conjunction with the child welfare agencies of the 58 counties and other stakeholders. That planning process must include the development of a vision for California's children and families.

3. Immediate Budgeting and Staffing Action Should Occur

An immediate increase in state funding of 20 percent should be included in the FY 2000-2001 state budget to enable counties to begin movement to the recommended caseload standards.

This increased state funding should not require a county financial match.

4. A System to Maintain Valid Caseload Levels Should Be Put In Place

The state of California should implement a system for regularly updating caseload standards in relation to proposed and enacted laws, regulations and court decisions. As part of this system, the California Department of Social Services should be aggressive in developing the capacity to analyze the impact on county child welfare agencies and child welfare personnel of proposed laws, regulations and technology prior to the issuance of policy. CWDA stands ready to assist the department in this critical analysis.

5. A Commitment to Development and Deployment of State-of-the-Art Technology Is Vital

The state must invest in bringing state-of-the-art technology to support child welfare staff in completing their responsibilities. Technology exists today which can expedite locating absent parents and allow remote access to the state's automated child welfare system, CWS/CMS, to reduce duplication of social worker documentation activities. The state should pursue the development of these tools and ensure that any future legislative and regulatory changes are tied into the CWS/CMS and take full advantage of current technology.

6. County and State Efforts Are Needed to Develop the Social Work Workforce

The need for significant numbers of social work professionals at the county level to achieve the recommended caseload standards suggests that initiative and leadership is required at both the county and state levels as follows:

State

Collaborate With Higher Education to Develop a Strategic Plan

The development of a strategic plan to develop more four-year degree and advanced degree graduates who enter the public child welfare field of employment is essential.

Such a plan should be developed in conjunction with higher education and must seek to:

Assess the capacity of two- and four-year institutions to accept and educate significantly larger numbers of students committed to social work or a closely related field.

Increase the number of students who enter two- and four-year institutions committed to social work or a closely related field.

Focus upon the chronic shortage of, and need for, bilingual and bicultural social work or closely related field professionals to work in the state child welfare system.

Incentivise Public Service Employment

Incentivise public service employment by offering counties the funding for necessary clinical supervision to enable MSW staff to achieve the state Board of Behavioral Sciences licensure requirements for LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) or MFT (Marriage and Family Therapist) licensure as both a recruitment and employee development tool.

Market California's new caseload standards to social work students and professionals in other states in order to assist California's counties to recruit and retain professionals in social work and related fields.

Recognize the learning curve required of new social workers entering the public child welfare field by budgeting for reduced caseloads during the first 12 months on the job and communicate this supportive strategy to the potential workforce.

Acknowledge the critical job that child welfare social workers perform and publicly support and celebrate the positive accomplishments of individuals and organizations in this field.

County

Assess organizational structure and operational procedures to identify opportunities to improve efficiency and shift tasks that do not necessarily require social work skills to non-social work personnel.

Review state Division 31 regulatory requirements for education and experience (Section 31-070—State Requirements, Section 89155—Adoption Agencies) and evaluate county requirements in relation to labor market, employee relations and community expectations/acceptance.

Current collaborative efforts with colleges and universities to expand the workforce of educated social work professionals should be continued and expanded. Counties that do not currently participate in such collaboration with higher education should explore developing such a partnership locally or joining one of the existing county/higher education collaboratives.

Continue active participation in the CalSWEC (California Social Work Education Center) program for education and training of social work professionals.

Meet with local bench officers, attorneys, Juvenile Justice Commissions and others involved with juvenile court dependency matters and orient them to the implications of the state SB-2030 workload study and the county's ability to retain workers willing to work in the courtroom environment.

Market the new state caseload standards as recognition that lower caseloads are needed and will be achieved. The goal of this marketing is to attract and retain social work and related field professionals to the arena of public child welfare.

Acknowledge the critical job that child welfare social workers perform and publicly support and celebrate the positive accomplishments of individuals and organizations in this field.

THE SB-2030 – CHILD WELFARE WORKLOAD AND BUDGETING STUDY

Adopting the Study's Quantitative Findings Should Lead to Qualitative Impacts

The findings and recommendations of the child welfare workload and budgeting study performed by the state contractor, American Humane Association, are finalized and are, or soon will be, public.

The results confirm that the caseload standards utilized by the state of California in determining staffing and funding levels in the annual budget process, and which in turn dictate the funding available to counties each year to operate the child welfare program, are much too high. They are too high in relation to the time it takes to meet the requirements of state laws and regulations. These are requirements that are both a level of service promise to the taxpayers of California and a mandate to the counties. And, if the mandated level of service cannot be fulfilled, then the qualitative aspects beyond the mandates, such as prevention services and use of best practice techniques, are most certainly not addressed.

The observation of a social worker managing over 40 cases of foster children placed in foster homes, but involved in case plans to reunify them with their parents or guardians, serves to address the quality issue:

When I visit one of the children in my caseload in his or her foster home, I should have the time to take that child to the park or to McDonalds to buy him a coke, sit down and talk to him, to find out how he is doing, what is really going on in the home, how is he doing in school, what I can do to help him. I seldom have the time for this quality interaction with a child in placement for I have dozens more like him to see each month as well, in addition to doing court reports, appearing in court for hearings (which are often continued), contacting parents and answering questions of parents and foster parents. I can tell you that on some of the occasions where I have been able to find the time for this kind of one-on-one visit, I find out things that are very important to the physical and emotional safety and well being of that child, things I need to address, that I would otherwise not know.

Often the assigned social worker is the only stable link in a foster child's life. While there are many stories to illustrate this, here is but one:

I went to the junior high school graduation last night of a girl in my caseload who is living in a group home. I was the only one there for her, the only one to embrace her, shake her hand, and congratulate her on her achievement. If I had not been there for her, no one would have been there.

The Challenge of the Findings – Significant, but Not Surprising

The American Humane Association study findings are significant.

Based upon CWDA's 1998 analysis of caseloads adopted in child welfare in other states, often in the form of settlement agreements arising from litigation in which plaintiffs argued

that children were not being adequately protected due to excessive worker caseloads and under-resourcing the state child welfare program,¹ the findings of the American Humane Association study are not surprising. The findings are of such a fiscal, staffing and logistical magnitude that we must develop a strategic approach to their implementation over time.

A Planned Approach, With Immediate Incremental Action, Is Needed – A Strategic Vision

The significant findings of this study require a strategic vision, a strategic plan which moves toward a goal of full implementation. This need becomes doubly apparent when recognizing other activities and policies that soon will, or should, impact California's child welfare system. Some of these are:

New federal outcome or performance measures for state child welfare programs.

An SB-933 mandated review of the role of group homes in California's child welfare system is underway and will produce findings and recommendations.

Impediments are appearing to California's recent policies to stress rapid placement with relatives when children must be removed from their home. Lack of county access to criminal histories of those in the relatives' home and new federal requirements that all such homes must meet state foster family home licensing requirements are jeopardizing the timely utilization of relative placements.

Current pilot projects in various counties, implemented with encouragement of the state, such as wraparound services, family conferencing and structured decision making, have evaluation components that may be the foundation for some form of statewide implementation in all 58 counties.

Federal concerns and other forces are leading to a reassessment of the operation and management of the state's automated Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS), the state system that all counties must use. Concurrently, CWS/CMS is falling behind the pace of technology change in the market place and not meeting user needs.

Noteworthy also is the 1999 report of California's Little Hoover Commission entitled "Now In Our Hands: Caring For California's Abused and Neglected Children."² This critical report described California's child welfare system as a non-system, a series of programs and services resulting from bill after bill enacted "to mend the latest hole in the overloaded safety net." A statement from the Executive Summary of this report, page iii, is telling:

¹ A CWDA Issue Paper, "Child Welfare Services In California," June 12, 1998.

² "Now In Our Hands: Caring for California's Abused and Neglected Children," State of California Little Hoover Commission, August 1999.

Because children are entering the system faster than they are leaving it, the number of foster children is growing at a faster rate than the number of children in California. In many counties, social workers are overwhelmed by this challenge alone. The system is struggling so much to care for the wounded, not enough is being done to stop the harm.”

The Little Hoover Commission report calls for new vision and leadership at the state level to bring multiple state programs intended to serve and protect children into a cohesive effort focused on common goals and to utilize outcome measures.

Based upon all of these forces currently shaping public child welfare policy in California, the SB-2030 child welfare workload and budgeting study is but one of several indicators of the need for a strategic child welfare plan for California. It is CWDA’s hope that such a plan, including a carefully crafted vision statement, will be developed. In the interim the importance of the findings and recommendations of the workload and budgeting study demand a strategic planning effort to address their implementation in a planned and managed approach. Such a plan must recognize the almost constant process of change to and within California’s child welfare program, some of which have been briefly mentioned here.

This strategic planning approach must not be a substitution for immediate action to begin achieving the goals of the SB-2030 study. The next section discusses this perspective.

Study Findings Reflect Urgency

In the 1998 CWDA Issue Paper the Directors of all of California’s 58 counties unanimously agreed that the state’s child welfare system was at risk of collapse. This risk is caused by excessive caseloads in relation to California’s legislative and regulatory requirements as well as the qualitative expectations of an appropriately demanding public. Other factors, such as an overly complex and technologically static statewide automation system, exacerbate this overload.

The rapid enactment of SB-2030 in 1998 in response to this unified county plea, coupled with an immediate approximately 10 percent increase in state funding for workload relief, confirmed the level of concern of the Legislature and state Administration. The speed with which the state moved to solicit consultant proposals, issue a contract and the time sensitive administration of the contract itself with its very rigorous time frames is commendable. Also worthy of mention is the intensity of effort by the American Humane Association to produce a quality product within the relatively short period of time allowed for this undertaking.

The urgency with which this issue has been addressed in the last two years is noteworthy and something of which California can be proud. Implementation of the study’s findings and recommendations must be pursued with the same urgency.

Each of California’s 58 counties may be in a different place with regard to the speed with which additional resources can be obtained and deployed to reduce worker caseloads.

However, the experience with the effective utilization of the FY 98-99 state 10 percent increase to the child welfare services appropriation warrants confidence that most of an increase in funding to begin incremental implementation of the findings and recommendations of the SB-2030 study can be utilized sooner, rather than later, to improve the child welfare system in California.

The urgency of need coupled with the commitment of counties to move forward rapidly to make additional progress toward the recommended caseload levels warrants an increase in state child welfare funding of 20 percent in FY 2000-2001.

CWS Not a Static Environment, Caseload Standards Shouldn't Be Either

The state child welfare system is an ever-changing system. Legislation, regulations, court decisions, changing federal law and regulations and new knowledge from practice and research all combine to produce a steady flow of changing requirements and expectations of the child welfare system.

If there is one thing learned from the urgency that developed regarding the enactment and implementation of SB-2030, it is that caseload standards become obsolete due to these changes and that failure to address this reality leads to a crisis atmosphere that is a disservice to children and families.

It is therefore critical that the caseload standards in California's child welfare system be periodically evaluated and adjusted to reflect changes that have occurred as well as changes known to be coming. CWDA recommends that the state adopt a policy that provides for a system to maintain valid caseload levels by means of regularly scheduled updates based on a sound methodology such as that used in the current SB-2030 (American Humane) study. It is suggested this policy provide for such an update every 3-5 years.

Another area for state vigilance is the need for objective analysis of proposed laws, technology and regulations with regard to the impact on the overloaded child welfare workforce. The California Department of Social Services should be required to develop the capacity, if it does not exist, and to assert itself with regard to analyzing and commenting on the workload impacts of proposals that have an impact on the child welfare agency and its workforce. Suggested logic test questions that should be addressed in such analysis include:

Is the proposed change the result of demonstrated effectiveness, tested and researched, with clearly anticipated benefits?

Is this change going to impact the workload of the child welfare agency and its social workers? If so, how?

If a workload is identified, what are the resources needed to address it? Will the resources accompany the impact?

Will the proposed change require a change to the statewide automated system (CWS/CMS)? If so, how long will that take, what is the cost and is this cost funded?

Based upon the above questions, what is the likelihood that the changes being proposed will/can be effectively implemented at the county level?

Such an analytical approach is critical if, in the future, the promise of laws, regulations and other changes is to be fulfilled. CWDA stands ready to assist the department at any time.

The Workforce - Addressing the Social Worker Shortage

There is a national shortage in the workforce of educated people able and willing to accept positions in child welfare. The fact was confirmed to those who attended a Child Welfare League of America conference in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1999 on this crisis.

California is not immune to this national problem and several factors may be converging to intensify the shortage:

A general decline in the image of public service vs. private sector employment.

Image of heavy/unmanageable caseloads in child welfare in California.

Lack of respect for the child welfare system and its staff in the media, the courts and among certain advocacy groups.

Growth of other public programs that require employees with similar or the same skills, including:

CalWORKS

Adult Protective Services

Mental Health (especially children's mental health)

Expanding emphasis on prevention programs (including early intervention)

The SB-2030 study findings warrant the development of a cohesive state vision and strategy to address these and other factors that need to be managed in order to increase the number of people interested and qualified to work in social work in California's child welfare system as well as other programs of the state (some of which are mentioned above).

This challenge is not one that only the state should be called upon to address. Concurrently, counties have a responsibility to take what action they can to increase the number of people willing and able to do this work and to retain and support those who do engage in child welfare work.

CalSWEC – An Important Player in Workforce Supply and Preparedness

CalSWEC is an acronym for the California Social Work Education Center. It is a federally and state funded project that operates out of the University of California at Berkeley. It has two major goals:

1. The redirection of graduate social work education (MSW Programs) to prepare graduates for careers in public social services and human services in California.
2. The promotion of professionalism of public welfare services in California.

CalSWEC works in collaboration with all 13 graduate schools of social work, the California Department of Social Services and the 58 county welfare departments in California. CalSWEC has developed a competency-based curriculum for preparing graduate social work students for careers in the field of public child welfare services. This competency-based curriculum is also used in the preparation of child welfare workers throughout the 58 counties in California. This provides new employee orientation and training including orientation to the laws, regulations, philosophy, court realities and the financing of the child welfare system.

CalSWEC oversees three regional training academies including: San Francisco Bay Area Academy, the Central Academy and the Southern Region Academy. It also has cooperative ties to other consortiums including the University of California at Davis and the Los Angeles County Consortium.

CalSWEC is also known as the lead agency in social work research and is periodically called upon by the state Legislature and the California Department of Social Services, as well as other stakeholders, for research assistance and analysis.

There is a need to develop a strategy to assist the private colleges and universities that offer social work degrees to fully participate in the CalSWEC MSW program. This may require a state financial commitment to address the matching fund requirement of the federal Title IV-E funding stream as this match requirement is apparently a barrier to greater participation by these private institutions.

CalSWEC should be an integral part of state and county strategic efforts to address the need for significant numbers of social workers arising from the implementation of the SB-2030 workload and budgeting study.

Social Work Workforce Development – What Should the State Do?

There are parallels between the currently recognized teacher shortage in California and the need for significant numbers of qualified people to work in the public social services sector (as well as the private non-profit sector—many such agencies provide child welfare services under contract to the counties). As with the teacher shortage, state leadership is critical in addressing the shortage of social workers.

By means of the state college and university system, many of which have schools of human services, social work or closely related fields, state government has the capability to impact the supply of students entering and graduating from such schools. This is true for the private colleges offering such coursework and the community colleges as well.

The development of a strategic plan by the state of California, in collaboration with the major employers including but not limited to counties, higher education and other stakeholders, to develop more four-year and advanced degree graduates that are prepared to, and do, enter the public child welfare field of employment is a critical need.

Virtually all counties report a shortage of bilingual bicultural social work personnel, with resultant heavy caseloads. This shortage is intensifying as the demographics of California continue to evolve. It is therefore recommended that such a state plan address the capacity of these higher education institutions as well as the recruitment of students with bilingual and bicultural skills and knowledge to enroll.

One perspective on the opportunity for the state (as well as counties) to collaborate with higher education is described in a paper from the Center for Collaboration for Children at California State University, Fullerton. This paper appears as an Appendix.

Another opportunity for the state to assist is in the area of incentivising public service employment in the social work field. This should be done by agreeing to fund county positions that are partially or totally dedicated to providing necessary supervision for MSW level social workers to reach the number of supervised hours to achieve licensing as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT).

The availability of the supervision required by the state Board of Behavioral Sciences, the agency that licenses LCSW's and MFT's, is a consideration to many new MSW graduates. Put simply, many want to work for an organization in which it is possible to obtain the supervision and guidance required by the state board to become licensed as a LCSW or MFT.

The level of supervision required to assure that a county can offer that supervision as a recruitment incentive to new graduates is a cost that is not currently funded in the state's caseload driven child welfare budgeting methodology. It is recommended that the state fund necessary MFT or LCSW supervisory positions in those counties interested in offering such an employment incentive. It is believed significant numbers of counties would take advantage of this opportunity, not only as a recruitment tool, but also because counties are generally interested in having as well trained and skilled staff as possible.

The state can and should play a major role in the support and recognition of child welfare personnel to recognize those who perform these tasks as important to the health of California and its families and to celebrate accomplishment and success. In a program where there are many critics, it is clear that there is a need for communication from the highest levels in state government that the work done and the people doing it are appreciated and valued. Such a positive tone has recently been voiced by the Governor with regard to public school teachers and the critical shortage of people entering that profession in relation to the need and can serve as a model for a similar message to social workers and other child welfare professionals.

The state must intensify its attention to technology and constantly assess state-of-the-art developments that can improve the efficiency of the child welfare system in California and

better support the workforce. The massive state administered child welfare services case management system (CWS/CMS) now deployed in every county needs attention. Enhancements to the programming is an ongoing task that must be addressed to make the system more user friendly and responsive. But, such programming enhancements are not enough. Attention also needs to be given to the applicability of new technology that appears rapidly in the market place, such as palm pilots and similar devices that can reduce data entry redundancy and improve field work. A major ongoing state management commitment to both technology maintenance and pursuit of state-of-the-art enhancements to this system is needed.

Social Worker Workforce Development – What Can the Counties Do?

While there is clearly a need for statewide vision and leadership as discussed above, counties share the challenge to recruit, support and retain social workers in their child welfare services programs. Opportunities ranging from restructuring and workflow simplification to local partnerships with institutions of higher education exist to varying degrees in the counties.

It is important to understand the wide variations in county size, demographics, geography and capacity. Counties range from millions of residents in high density urban settings with hundreds of employees in the child welfare agency managing thousands of cases, to rural counties with less than 50,000 residents spread over a wide geographic region with fewer than 10 child welfare workers handling cases that may be several hours drive from one to the other. Thus, the environment in counties, their capabilities, their access to institutions of higher education varies widely.

Given this understanding, it is clear there cannot be a one size fits all approach to what counties can do. What follows are suggestions for study and review of various county operations and opportunities. In undertaking such analysis, it is of critical importance to partner with the workforce, the social workers and others on the line delivering the services. The perspective of that staff, their experience and knowledge, will be invaluable in such a process. An approach based on identifying what works and building upon it vs. identifying what is not working and trying to fix it will probably prove to be of the greatest value in terms of building an atmosphere of teamwork and produce useful results. This is a strengths-based, collaborative approach to system analysis and design.

Assess Structure and Procedures

Counties can review their organizational structure and work flow to determine if work flows as quickly and efficiently as possible. Are there delays transferring cases from unit to unit that can be mitigated organizationally or by better procedures? Why are we doing that? How is it that part of the organization has little difficulty meeting requirements? These and similar questions leading to a work flow and systems analysis may produce findings that will make the task of the social worker less burdensome, thereby enhancing not only services to the children and families but also leading to reduced worker turnover.

Task Reassignment

Task reassignment is based on an analysis of social worker activities and an assessment of whether each activity requires the knowledge, skills and time of social workers or could it be provided by other staff, thereby freeing the time of social workers to concentrate on core duties. For instance, some counties have developed pools of clerical staff to relieve social workers of CWS/CMS duties, hired utility drivers to transport children, contracted with community-based organizations to monitor parent/child visits and staff specialized units such as parent/relative search with workers not yet qualified to be case managing social workers. The message of this approach is to use a scarce resource, in this instance social workers qualified through education and experience to carry a child welfare caseload, only for core social work duties, while assigning tasks to other personnel or contractors where feasible.

Review the Need for Masters Level Social Workers (MSW's)

Under current law and regulation counties have some latitude concerning the educational and experience requirements for case carrying social worker positions in their child welfare programs.

State regulations impose requirements as follows:

Section 31-070 of Division 31 regulations of the California Department of Social Services "Staff Requirements" specifies that at least 50 percent of the professional staff providing emergency response services and 50 percent providing family maintenance services shall possess a masters degree in social work or its equivalent in education and/or experience as certified by the state Personnel Board or a county civil service board. Also, that 100 percent of the supervisors of staff providing emergency response and family maintenance services shall possess a master's degree in social work or its equivalent in education and/or experience as certified in the same manner. Lastly, it requires that the remaining emergency response and family maintenance professional staff shall possess a bachelor's degree in social work or its equivalent in education and/or experience with the same certification required.

The regulation permits a county to request a waiver from these requirements by submitting a plan to the California Department of Social Services asking for the waiver and outlining a plan to achieve compliance.

Section 89155 applies to Adoption Agencies and requires that adoption social workers have a master's degree from an accredited college. Waivers of this graduate education requirement may be approved by the California Department of Social Services if a county demonstrates a substantial and consistent effort to recruit and retain graduate level social workers and a hiring plan is in place that assures graduate level social workers are employed first.

Counties experiencing a chronic shortage in qualified social worker applicants for available positions should review their qualifications for the positions in comparison to these regulatory requirements and assess if more stringent requirements are serving as a barrier to filling positions. Consideration could also be given to requesting a waiver from the state for a period of time as described above.

The collective bargaining environment in each county, as well as the expectations of the community, the court and the local labor market itself are factors that make each county unique. This discussion is provided solely to suggest that if counties are unable to fill caseload justified positions, a review of position qualifications as an alternative to significantly understaffing caseload is an option for consideration.

Collaboration With Local Community Colleges, Colleges/Universities

Several counties have developed collaborative partnerships with local junior colleges and universities to bring college level coursework in human services, social services or closely related fields to the workplace in order for county social service employees to work toward an AA, BS/BA or a master's degree.

Much of the work associated with welfare reform (CalWORKs) has moved from an eligibility to a case management function. With this change from gatekeeper to case manager, a career path that might begin in the eligibility field but lead to social work is developing in some counties.

As an example, Orange County has developed such a partnership with Cypress Community College and California State University, Fullerton. The staff of the agency have responded with enthusiasm, with approximately 12 percent of the agency's workforce enrolled in such college level coursework. Orange County provides tuition reimbursement of up to \$550 per fiscal year per student and adjusts work hours to accommodate after work attendance, in many cases at the work site. Several other counties have developed similar models.

A paper from California State University, Fullerton that comments on this and other concepts concerning professional development and the challenge the state and its counties face in addressing the growing demand for social work personnel is contained in the Appendix.

Education and Marketing

Many counties report particular difficulty in convincing current staff to accept caseload assignments that require involvement with the juvenile court. Similarly, counties sometimes experience high turnover in such caseloads as workers seek to transfer away from court related cases.

The perceived undesirability of court related cases is attributed to the heavy caseloads and the adversarial environment of the court process. In this environment the work of the social worker is often challenged from several fronts as attorneys for the parents, the child and perhaps relatives or foster parents seek to have the court

support their views as to the proper disposition of the case. From time to time, a bench officer will join in the criticism of the social worker's judgment and work. Similarly, Juvenile Justice Commissions, as a body or via individual member comments, can develop a reputation of severe critic in a personalized manner. Add to this environment a high caseload, and it is understandable if workers prefer to work elsewhere.

When an environment of perceived court hostility exists, it is advisable for the child welfare agency to meet with the judicial officers of the court as well as the other practicing attorneys and/or the juvenile justice commission and make certain they understand the difficulty of attracting employees to take these assignments and to stay with them. Courts and those associated with them have been known to become more responsive and sensitized to this reality and to even conduct social worker appreciation events. Such awareness and action can help with the recruitment and retention of social workers into what so often seems to be a high-risk, thankless job.

Another marketing opportunity is the fact that the SB-2030 study has been completed and recommends significant reduction in worker caseloads. Perhaps one of the greatest tools counties will have to recruit and retain qualified workers, assuming the state of California commits to a strategy of reaching the recommended caseload levels, is the fact that caseloads are being lowered to a manageable level. Such caseloads afford the opportunity for workers to feel a true sense of accomplishment in providing services to children and their families as well as reduce anxiety concerning vulnerability to criticism and/or liability for what is not getting done. Counties should utilize this positive news (assuming a state commitment is made) in their recruitment and retention efforts.

Support the Workforce, Celebrate Success

As discussed in the section of this report "Social Work Workforce Development – What Can the State Do?", there is a need to express an appreciation and value of the social workers and other professionals who work within the child welfare system. There are many critics of the system, those who work in it and the case decisions that are made. However, there are few ongoing efforts to report on and publicize the good, life-saving work performed daily by all who work in the system.

Many positive stories exist, many remarkable achievements of the workforce are worthy of recognition. Counties, as well as the state, should make every effort to support and recognize child welfare employees for their work, to let them know they are appreciated and valued. Success should be celebrated and publicized. They are many avenues to achieve this, from recognizing the annual National Social Worker month in a ceremony before the county Board of Supervisors to merit awards, results-based performance incentives and formal public relations projects.

The differences among counties, their community and their organizational culture suggest different approaches to workforce support and celebration of success from county to county. The important point is that counties can, through such efforts, make the job of child welfare worker a more attractive career choice.

APPENDIX

California State University, Fullerton, School of Human Development and Community Services,
Center for Collaboration for Children, analysis and suggestions.




CAL STATE
FULLERTON


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February 23, 2000

TO: Larry Leaman
Director, County of Orange Social Services Agency

FROM: Soraya Coley, Dean 
College of Human Development and Community Service

Sid Gardner, Director 
Center for Collaboration for Children

RE: Social Worker Supply Project: Strategies and Options

As you requested, I am forwarding a report that was prepared by Sid Gardner regarding our concerns about the supply of well-trained human service professionals.

The CWS workload study mandated by Chapter 785, Statutes of 1998, was performed by McDonald and Associates and was delivered to the Department of Social Services in late January. This draft was reviewed by DSS staff and the McDonald staff are making further changes; the Department says it does not expect public release until late March.

It is clear, however, that the caseload studies have already documented the need for additional social workers. This new demand raises several issues about the supply and utilization of social workers:

1. How to increase the total number of students who enter four-year institutions of higher education committed to careers in social work;
2. How to increase the total number of graduates of four-year institutions who enter schools of social work;
3. How to attract career-changing professionals and others to careers in social work;
4. How to determine what responsibilities now performed by social workers can be performed wholly or in part by four-year university graduates and others, including graduates of community colleges, who may require further training

- and education while they are on the job; how to deal with "credential creep" in state licensing and reimbursement formulas that require advanced degrees for work that can be performed with more appropriate blends of education and more experience at the community level;
5. How to diversify and vary university instruction so that current professionals and paraprofessionals can return to a university to work toward SSW degrees while still employed part-time; this would require re-examining differentiated practice that would allow for the larger numbers of bachelor's level prepared individuals who may wish to work in social services;
 6. How should the content of new SW training and education differ from current subject matter and teaching methods;
 7. The extent to which information system demands have decreased the net effective time available to social workers in interacting with clients (some estimates are that 10-25% of front-line workers' time is devoted to CMS entry and tracking), and how to use state-of-the art technology (Palm Pilots, etc.) to decrease the time required in "feeding" information systems (this issue may be given new urgency by reports of a recent complete freeze-up of the statewide system that affected most of the 15,000 users, forcing even longer delays in data entry and retrieval);
 8. How to insure that a proportionate amount of the new social workers are diverse and representative of the communities in which they will work and the clients with whom they will work, as well as possessing much-needed linguistic competency;
 9. How to reduce turnover among existing caseworkers so that more experienced workers stay in agencies and increase retention of qualified workers (this approach would also be affected by the proportion of current professionals who are nearing retirement age); and
 10. Given the supply of MSW's in relation to the demand, California also needs to examine the extent to which other related professional preparation programs (e.g., counseling, psychology) can be a part of an expanded strategy to increase the numbers of child welfare agency workers.

Each of these has a net effect of lowering workloads or improving the quality of casework--or both. Each of these is a different facet of the problem, and each would require a separate response. Some of these are direct efforts to increase personnel, while others are efforts to reduce workloads by using current personnel better--to "work smarter" by changing the rules under which child welfare agencies provide services, as well as changing the total number of workers providing those services.

Taking advantage of the momentum created by the CWS workload report is critical. At the same time, it would appear that in the short run a multi-front effort is needed, since increasing personnel is at best a medium-range strategy and for the most part ignores the experience base of workers already in the agency. One new social worker is the equivalent of ten existing workers with a

10% reduction of their workload in data reporting--and the new worker comes without experience.

Therefore, at least four strategies can be set forth:

1. Efforts to increase the total number of MSW's available to public child welfare agencies;
2. Efforts to increase the total number of students enrolled in MSW programs;
3. Efforts to increase the amount of work that can be done by non-MSW personnel which reduces workloads; and
4. Efforts to change the rules governing child welfare staffing in ways that reduce workloads, including use of technology and those rules that burden staff with information requirements that detract from their ability to provide direct service.

The increase in social workers required to respond to the CWS workload study appears to be well in excess of what could be produced by the twenty-one social work programs in California universities. Expanding these programs to their maximum potential should be a priority of an effort to respond to the need, but going beyond that potential and working upstream will also be essential. That means taking stock of the undergraduates and current employees of child welfare agencies who could become social workers or who could perform a significant portion of their functions.

California's 21 Schools of Social Work annually graduate approximately 900-1000 MSWs, who join a total of 6000 child welfare workers statewide. Of these graduates, approximately 200-300 work in public child welfare agencies at the county level. MSW's make up only about 30% of the total child welfare professional work force in California. So if it were possible to immediately *triple* the number of MSW's going into CWS jobs, it would still mean that almost two-thirds of all child welfare workers would be non-MSW's.

The Professional Development Institutes proposed for expansion in the Governor's 2000-01 budget would build upon training programs funded last year. These programs would train 70,000 additional teachers with an allocation of \$115.5 million. These institutes are focused primarily upon existing teachers, so they do not expand the supply of new teachers significantly. But a version of the Institutes applied to social work could work on strategies #3 and 4 above, in training non-MSW staff to perform higher-order functions and in training all child welfare staff to work more efficiently under revised rules.

"Teacher Track" is another initiative that has supported the preparation of more individuals for the teaching profession. Funds have been provided for Teacher Aids who wish to pursue a credential. These individuals, who may have some college, are "tracked" from community college, through the CSU major, on to

the credential program. It takes a longer time to achieve the credential, but these workers come with rich experiences in working with diverse student populations in districts where there are larger numbers of non-credentialed teachers. Funding for faculty release for support and advisement are a part of the budgetary support.

The professional development options also present important challenges to universities—both those with MSW and MFCC programs and those with B.A.-level human services degrees. If efforts were expanded to build upon current training of eligibility workers, a combination of alternative hours, off-site locations, and on-line courses may be needed to accommodate the work and family schedules of existing workers. This could build on recent experience gained with the Nursing program's efforts to expand B.S.N. programs to respond to the nursing shortage, using on-line courses. Returning students have proven to need first-rate counseling and support services from universities. Clarity about the critical competencies needed, and whether existing university courses teach those competencies, is another area that universities would need to address in depth. Those competencies should include skills of collaboration with other agencies, case management, working directly with clients with problems of substance abuse, mental health, and other barriers to employment and good parenting, and working with diverse clients and in a diverse workforce. Finally, universities would need to add to their own assessment abilities to insure that returning professionals are fully credited for experience which is equivalent to course work.

Options for Targeting

Targeting current University students who have not yet elected a career in social work

Targeting current professionals and paraprofessionals already working for child welfare agencies that would need additional credentials or training to work on current caseloads and reduce caseload numbers

Targeting community college students who have not yet elected a career in social work.

Depending upon the directions taken by the final report to be issued in May, several of the added non-human resources options described above, i.e. technology and information systems changes, may also be appropriate.

In order to implement the first three options, resources would be required to work with these students and employees. A survey similar to that administered to SSA employees should be a first step, along with focus groups with current college students to explore their attitudes toward careers in social work. The same incentives used for teachers should be on the table for new social workers

willing to work with child welfare agencies : loan forgiveness, salary supplements, language bonuses, and housing subsidies for workers willing to live in the areas where they work.

Given the obvious equity issues of offering these incentives to new employees without making them available to existing employees, a version of the incentives should also be provided to those social workers willing to take on added duties as mentors to new social workers.