



Twelve NCWWI Traineeship Programs: Comprehensive Summary of Legacies & Lessons Learned

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I. Introduction

In 2008, the Children’s Bureau funded the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) to build the capacity of the nation’s child welfare workforce and improve outcomes for children, youth and families through activities that support the development of skilled child welfare leaders in public and tribal child welfare systems, and in private agencies that are contracted by the state to provide case management services that are traditionally provided by the public child welfare system. To achieve this, NCWWI launched three major training initiatives: one for mid-managers, one for supervisors and one for students – the Traineeship program.

The purpose of the NCWWI Traineeship program was to support professional education for current or prospective child welfare practitioners in accredited BSW or MSW programs. A major goal for the Traineeship program was to develop educational experiences that would teach and reinforce core competencies in areas of child welfare practice and leadership. Trainees were expected to participate in a field placement at a child welfare agency, enroll in relevant courses to prepare for professional service and leadership in child welfare, and work in a child welfare agency upon graduation. Traineeship schools were expected to innovate and improve their child welfare curricular offerings and were encouraged to provide additional supports for trainees to support completion of degrees and retention in the field. The traineeship programs also needed to be particularly attentive to addressing diversity within the workforce, local agency workforce needs, preparing future leaders, and understanding systems of care principles.

Twelve traineeship programs were funded: 5 BSW, 3 joint BSW/MSW and 4 MSW programs. The need for a diverse workforce of the future was addressed by five programs that served Native Americans, two that focused on Hispanic students serving the Latino/a population, and two that were particularly attentive to recruiting African American students to serve the African American community. Of the 12, four served primarily rural areas, and four served major urban cities. (See Appendix B for a list of NCWWI Traineeship Schools).

The following summarizes the commonalities across the three program types – MSW, BSW and Tribal¹ and offers the collective legacy – the activities, accomplishments, initiatives in both curriculum and field, in collaboration with agency partners – and provides recommendations for schools of social work interested in preparing students for professional child welfare practice through the provision of traineeships.

An ecological framework is utilized to organize discussion around structures and processes undertaken by the traineeship programs in support of traineeship students. This lens allows for a focus on the interaction between individual students and faculty, the local

¹ This comprehensive summary offers the common themes and recommendations across the three program types – MSW, BSW and Tribal. Each of these program types also developed a separate legacy document to describe their work, including the structures, processes, activities and relationships found critical to the implementation of their particular program type. These reports can be found on the NCWWI website at www.ncwwi.org.

organizational context and a national community of practice. The document is organized by domains using a system focus and provides recommendations based on successful innovations and strategies that were common across schools at the individual student level, at the organizational level for schools, at the organizational level for agencies and tribes, and at the regional and national level. (See Legacy Document Framework in Appendix A).

II. Traineeship Program Recommendations

A major strength of the ecological framework used in the development of the legacy documents is that it provides a lens for viewing the traineeship programs *in context*. Individual stipends to students become part of a complex web of interactions initiated at the national level by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) and carried forward through the organizational structures at schools of social work and child welfare agencies. Each facet of the whole is important – individual students, faculty and field instructors, the organizational support at school and child welfare agencies, and the national resources that enhanced the delivery of the traineeship programs. Just as significant are the *interactions* among these component levels.

The following sections outline recommendations for schools of social work interested in designing and implementing a traineeship program. Recommendations are organized by level – individual, organizational and national, but efforts are made throughout to highlight the dynamic and interactive nature of the systems involved in supporting the traineeship programs.

Individual Level: Students

I. Recruitment: Decide Who to Target

All three program types noted the need to identify *whom* the program would encourage to apply for traineeship stipends. While general recruitment strategies were utilized by some schools, the majority of schools came to believe that recruitment efforts targeting specific students was a better approach. Key student characteristics included either a *commitment* to child welfare or a strong *interest* in child welfare practice. The importance of these critical student qualities is supported in the literature, which has found commitment and interest to be significant characteristics of BSW and MSW child welfare staff who stay in agency practice (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009).

The programs also found it useful to emphasize the characteristics in the student body that mirrored the need in the local child welfare workforce. Thus, one joint MSW and BSW traineeship program recruited solely from its state's Historically Black Colleges for traineeship students in order to help build a workforce for an agency serving inner city African American clients. Others emphasized the need for cultural competency (e.g., language ability, familiarity with tribal culture) in their applicants.

MSW programs need to determine whether they will recruit students *currently* employed, those interested in *preparing for child welfare practice*, or both. Programs focused on preparing students for tribal practice must decide whether or not to include *non-tribal students* in their program. The five Tribal traineeship programs recommend including tribal and non-tribal students in the same program to promote cross cultural learning and to increase “allies” who can provide competent services for American Indian families.

BSW programs should talk to students early in their academic program courses about child welfare. Where possible, expose all social work students to child welfare. In one program there was a 20% increase in students' interest in working in child welfare as a result of this strategy.

Outreach and involvement is also important to the tribal communities. A best practice for recruitment of American Indian students is the infusion of cultural ways, which is time consuming, but provides beneficial results. The importance of relationships between faculty, school administration and agency or tribal representatives cannot be overstated. Outreach also includes participation in cultural activities located within tribal communities.

2. Selection: Have Clear Criteria

Selection criteria must be explicit and clear. For example, it is suggested that students receive detailed information about the nature of public child welfare services, respond to a realistic job preview video, complete a self-evaluation of their "fit" with public child welfare mission and requirements, or have opportunities to discuss values related to family-centered practice in child welfare. Having a committee of child welfare faculty and agency representatives develop the criteria and then be involved in selecting candidates for the project was identified as a best practice approach. It was repeatedly emphasized that as part of selection, *an evaluation of the student commitment to child welfare must be made.*

3. Create Avenues for Student Support

Providing support to students is extremely important, and must go beyond financial support. This requires traineeship programs to have a program coordinator who is different from a faculty advisor, field instructor or liaison. Trainees need to be hooked up with a lot of services and someone has to have the time and charge to make these connections. The coordinator links the traineeship program with students, the social work program, field sites, and the community. This person functions as a navigator, linking with NCWWI program staff, webinars, meetings, and university student services.

Additional avenues of specialized student support include a professional social work mentor with child welfare experience; support and learning teams that are comprised of the student, academic advisor, and a representative from both the agency and school; and specialized child welfare coursework.

Seminars are an additional example of specialized support services for students. One MSW program provided a seminar on leadership for culturally responsive students, which emphasized leadership competencies, and provided mentors for students of color in negotiating intersecting cultural and professional identities. Another school, also preparing students both for leadership and culturally responsive practice, organized a special series of enrichment seminars focused around the disproportionate number of children of color in the child welfare system. This assisted with the development of child welfare leaders as well as the preparation of a more culturally responsive workforce.

4. Facilitate Field Experiences that Enhance Student Learning in Specific Ways

In general, most programs across the three areas worked collaboratively with field agencies and field instructors to create and support field placements that met the needs of students, whether this was with flexible hours, the identification of field instructors matched for language fluency or for participation in an innovative agency project or task force. Having a special field liaison for traineeship students is strongly recommended.

Many schools recommend having a field seminar and offering specialized training opportunities – sometimes through the seminar and sometimes at the agency or tribal setting. Pre-existing relationships between the schools and agencies where students are placed, the willingness of individual field instructors to extend themselves for students, support for the traineeship program from the school of social work's administration, and the time for field representatives to work with agencies to craft effective learning opportunities are important facilitative factors.

Field placements for special populations provide another opportunity for enhancing student field experiences. It is beneficial for programs serving Tribal students to place some trainees on tribal reservations, an accomplishment that can be achieved with the development of working relationships over time between the school and tribe. The use of cultural consultants (Native American Elders) is an important factor in designing a field placement that meets the needs of both students and tribal clients. Traineeship programs dedicated to recruiting and preparing Hispanic students for child welfare practice will be most successful if they develop field placements which provide students with field experiences working with Hispanic families.

5. Support for Transition to Work and Post-Graduation Support is Needed

Most programs recommend greater attention to transition to work and support for alumni post-graduation. Formal mechanisms to support students as they transitioned from school to work were less available than informal supports in most traineeship programs. A few programs worked with the public child welfare agency to develop or identify child welfare competencies needed by employees, and arranged for these to be incorporated either into course work or reinforced in field placements for students. This was an anticipatory strategy, aimed at preparing students for a more seamless entry into the workforce at the public agency. Unique to the tribal programs is the recommendation for a graduation ceremony which incorporates a traditional honor ceremony as a mechanism to facilitate transition to the tribal agency.

Offering assistance in becoming professionally licensed as social workers, completing pre-service training prior to graduation, and then offering peer networking opportunities after graduation are among the strategies believed to help students successfully transition to the workforce.

Formal post-graduation supports were also few. Some programs established opportunities for students to meet at the agency as they were moving into employment. This would seem to work best for students already employed at the agency. One program encouraged employed graduates to become mentors for trainees. Others encouraged trainees to stay connected to the school in various roles, or to serve on agency task forces or advisory boards.

A number of schools recognized the need for schools of social work to maintain an organizational commitment to child welfare that goes beyond the traineeship programs. If schools are engaged in partnerships with agencies where there is an on-going commitment to change, these work environments are more likely to have the resources and capacities to support workers.

Organizational Level: Schools of Social Work

1. Provide Faculty Support

Specifically funded time is needed for faculty to effectively support traineeship program students. While traineeship faculty have responsibilities similar to other faculty in regard to the need to teach and advise students, they also have the additional obligations involved with running a year-round program. They are involved in recruitment, selection, sometimes placement of students, as well as for on-going student support – both in the program and increasingly, beyond graduation. They are also often involved in administration and planning responsibilities.

Continuity of support for the program by school leadership is essential. This means that school of social work leadership must not only understand the program – and the unique challenges faced by faculty, students and field instructors – but also be willing and able to help translate their understanding of the program across the school. Faculty in traineeship programs often serve as a resource to other faculty for: child welfare content, information about agency practice, and education about the child welfare system in general.

A unique need identified by programs serving Tribal students was the importance of educating faculty in general about the learning styles of Tribal students that are often directly related to students' specific cultural knowledge and identity with their Tribal heritage and their lived experience with remnants of historical trauma. The information needed by faculty includes, for example, an understanding of student Tribal responsibilities, such as the need to be present at times of family emergencies or death of an extended family member, which may interfere with attendance at school or field. Faculty who understand these issues then need to be supported to accommodate student needs.

2. Explore Curriculum Innovations that Involve Agency-University Collaborations

Schools emphasized that a 'best practice' approach to curriculum development includes faculty and child welfare agency partners working collaboratively to review existing curriculum and making suggestions for revisions. It is therefore recommended that schools undertaking curriculum revision or reform assure that agency representatives are involved with them in the work.

Schools should organize their curriculum focus depending on whether they are: 1) infusing or reinforcing child welfare content in existing courses, 2) introducing new courses or new specializations, and/or 3) developing innovations that expand learning opportunities beyond the classroom. All three are useful and may depend on the history and development of child welfare curricula at a particular school.

Infusion of child welfare content into existing courses is accomplished through the introduction of specific modules, readings, and/or assignments. Inclusion of content that meets the workforce needs of the future – leadership skills, familiarity with evidence-based practice, trauma and working with diverse populations – may be called for. Innovative assignments, specifically those geared to helping students integrate field and classroom learning will strengthen a program. A specific strategy used by many programs was to include speakers from agencies, tribes or the courts in existing courses.

Where possible, be prepared to develop specific courses which address some of the workforce challenges noted above. Examples include courses on Social Work and the Law, Indian Child Welfare, Systems of Care for Social Work Practice and Traumatic Stress and Social Work. (See the “Collection of Child Welfare Syllabi from the 12 NCWWI Traineeship Programs” for a full review of courses offered by the programs). One challenge experienced especially by programs serving rural populations was the growing need for curriculum approaches that include distance education capacities, although this is viewed as an emerging need by other programs as well.

In addition to the formal curriculum, traineeship programs should consider offering specialized trainings in seminar, workshop or “learn at lunch” formats which are open to field advisors and field instructors as well as students. Consider experimenting with innovations such as a rotational field model, learning teams, specializations and mentoring. Some Tribal programs, for example, emphasized “in-place” learning which included a site visit or attendance at cultural events. One school experimented with technology to connect students in the classroom with an “in-place” learning experience.

3. Advance Child Welfare Competencies

Social work programs are moving toward competency-based education, due in large part to the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards recently adopted by the Council on Social Work Education. The move toward child welfare competencies is also a goal for child welfare agencies (Fitch et.al, 2010). Many *child welfare competencies* have been identified by national, state and local organizations and groups. NCWWI contributed to the pool of existing child welfare competencies in two ways – the evaluation team developed a set of competencies that both students and field instructors use to rate student performance and a set of leadership competencies were identified by NCWWI to inform child welfare leadership.

This movement to identify and utilize child welfare competencies reflects the interest on the part of social work faculty for social work students to emerge with common knowledge, values and skills. Traineeship programs may consider developing competencies around existing state child welfare competencies and incorporating existing ones into course or field work. For schools new to the use of competencies, those developed by NCWWI provide an important contribution.

Traineeship programs support the need for a national set of child welfare competencies, which could be developed to align with the CSWE competencies. While some efforts have already been made toward that effort (Fitch et.al, 2010), it is recommended that

competency development include a focus on the knowledge needed regarding the oppression and historical trauma faced by many diverse groups served by the child welfare population.

4. Encourage an Enhanced Role for Field Education

Be prepared to provide “more than usual” field supports. In cases where non-traditional students are recruited for the traineeship program, faculty advisors or field liaisons may need to provide more frequent or intensive contact and support for students.

For students with no background in child welfare, it is necessary to provide information and learning opportunities to understand the purpose and function of a child welfare system in general. In the situations where students are currently employed, the on-going challenge of providing learning opportunities in field that are different from employment responsibilities need to be addressed.

The continuity of field education involvement in the process – from participating in the design to facilitating student and field instructor support, as well as facilitating learning opportunities throughout the field placement – is critical to traineeship program success.

5. Administration Support from School Leadership is a Key to Success

The need for support from school administration is essential. Tuition support for students above the traineeship stipend, workload credit for faculty, administrative support and funds for both faculty and students to attend conferences and meetings can critical to the effectiveness of the program. The time needed to develop successful agency partnerships is important, and the support in terms of funded faculty/field liaison time or workload credit plays an important role.

For programs with a Title-IV-E program, this existing infrastructure may be useful. It allows schools to enhance programming and provide additional support for students and faculty. Shared resources between a traineeship program and a Title IV-E program is a benefit, and having courses developed for the Title IV-E students open to traineeship students is often useful as well.

Organizational Level – Public and Tribal Child Welfare Agency

1. Targeted Recruitment and Support for Field Instructors

Attention to the recruitment, retention and on-going support of field instructors for a traineeship program is essential. Field instructors must see a benefit to their participation and programs are encouraged to identify incentives for them. Support opportunities for field instructors can include enrichment seminars which count toward CEU credits or preparation for licensure and partnering in review and development of curriculum materials to align with their interest in helping to prepare the next generation of child welfare workers. Advocacy by school faculty and administration with agency partners for staff time to work as field instructors can be an important strategy. Creative use of task supervision to lighten the load for the field instructor, or allocating school resources to provide field instruction directly by a faculty member or other staff when necessary are

additional methods that can be facilitative, especially when staff members with the appropriate degree (MSW or BSW) are not available to provide field instruction.

Schools are encouraged to draw on the professional network of existing field instructors to expand the school's pool of available field instructors. This can include the following strategies: 1) stay connected to traineeship graduates and encourage them to become field instructors in the future; 2) hold events which draw in prospective field instructors, perhaps hosting these in the community or work places of prospective field instructors. For remote placements, programs recommend placing students in pairs; therefore, it is necessary to recruit field instructors who are willing to supervise more than one student or to make the necessary arrangements (i.e. task supervision) so that students could be placed in pairs.

2. Be Open to a Range of Field Placements

The 12 NCWWI traineeship programs strongly recommend providing a variety of agency placement opportunities to match the students' range of interests. There are educational benefits to placing students with special projects or programs sponsored by agencies, as these often provide for innovative and interesting learning opportunities. Other successful placements have included those where students were exposed and expected to use data to understand practice problems. For experienced staff who are returning to school, placements in community agencies or other parts of their agency are often critical for expanding practice perspectives and skills. For BSW programs, a broad range of practical experiences are among the most helpful, supplemented by training provided by the agency, community or university to enhance understanding of child welfare.

Tribal programs noted that although students were placed in tribal, urban and non-tribal agencies, the public child welfare agency was an important partner. One challenge for tribal agencies was the small number of MSW supervisors in rural tribal agencies which necessitated creative field instruction arrangements in order to use the setting.

3. Encourage Enhanced Agency Supports for Students

Traineeship programs can help agencies to recognize the role of field education in recruiting and retaining staff and work together to provide enhanced agency supports for students. For employed students, the traineeship program should encourage agencies to develop social work field placements that provide paid work release or explore the possibility for an agency to hire temporary staff to assume caseload responsibilities for the staff person who is in school. Training supports for students can also be offered by the agency, including both in-service training opportunities and sending students to training outside the agency.

Formal agency supports include: paid student internships, in-kind resources like the use of a state car for transportation, or paying per diem expenses when the student is in the field. Agencies may also find ways to include students in emerging projects and provide group supervision for MSW and BSW students to enhance learning and understanding of respective roles. Informal supports include opportunities for frequent exchange between students and staff or opportunities for mentoring by a senior staff member, especially around a special project or task force in which a student is engaged.

4. Facilitate Agency Support for Field Instruction

Traineeship programs recommend that schools of social work develop a strong relationship with the field agency in an effort to support strong field instruction. Genuine partnerships are reflected in work that school and agency staff do together in regard to community issues, state regulations, curriculum development and planning and participating in training and conferences. Schools also felt that agencies generally appreciated traineeship programs as they are viewed as meeting the agency workforce needs. When faculty provide training at agency sites, it often becomes an incentive for an agency to invest more in the school by, for example, working to provide field placements.

Recognize that barriers will include the time needed, on both the part of the agency and school, to develop and sustain these important relationships. It is imperative that the university and agency partners strategize together to address the lack of available field instructors, the small size of some offices handling large caseloads, and challenges with timely communication between the field and school when a student experiences problems.

5. Strengthen University-Agency Partnerships

Success of a traineeship program hinges on the ability to build on, or create, a strong university-agency partnership. A range of types of partnerships between universities and agencies existed prior to joining the NCWWI Traineeship Program. Programs: 1) had an existing relationship due to other collaborations (i.e. Title IV-E partnerships), which may have needed revitalization, 2) had an active, on-going collaboration, (i.e. when schools and agencies were collaborating in community research partnerships), or 3) needed to develop a new partnership. Schools serving Tribal students noted that a three-way engagement – between the school, public agency and tribe – was essential to a successful Traineeship program and that there is added value when the social work programs/faculty/universities offer training, expertise, collaborative grant writing, and technical assistance to the American Indian communities in a respectful and useful way.

Programs should be prepared for larger system barriers beyond the control of the school or agency which may impede hiring. Despite the partnerships, several schools experienced their students having difficulty finding employment after graduation. In some instances this had to do with hiring freezes and in other instances bureaucratic hurdles beyond the local level that took a significant amount of time and energy by both the school and agency to address.

Regional & National Level

1. Collaborate with Other Traineeship Programs

Linking with other traineeship programs provided important vehicles for information-sharing and program development. Traineeship programs found that opportunities for face-to-face interaction, such as the annual Chicago meeting, were one of the strongest supports for inter-program collaboration. They used these face-to-face contacts as well as meetings via teleconferences to engage in problem solving and troubleshooting, as well as identifying strategies used by other schools which were then replicated. Working in small groups that are organized around substantive, shared challenges are informative and productive, and can result in shared products such as manuscripts for journal articles or book chapters.

Searching for opportunities to produce other collaborative products, such as a Collection of Child Welfare Syllabi and the Collection of Teaching Resources, can be particularly rewarding. Programs which share information about their traineeship models can inform the development of similar strategies at other schools.

2. Take Advantage of Relationship with NCWWI and/or Other National Organizations

A major benefit of the relationship with NCWWI appeared to be the access to national resources, including the webinars, on-line resources, and access to the Information Gateway. A number of programs endorsed the participation in the national program evaluation undertaken by NCWWI, which enabled them to have access to traineeship program findings on students both during and after graduation, to which they could compare their program. Some noted that this opportunity allowed them to participate in the development of a national child welfare workforce, an experience which they found informative and stimulating.

III. Summary & Conclusion

The 12 Traineeship programs offer a unique opportunity to understand the critical importance of the relationships among individual, organizational and national factors in preparing and sustaining students for child welfare practice. As programs reflected on their processes over the five years it became increasingly evident that the financial stipend offered to students is but a small part of what is needed to prepare and retain social workers as part of the child welfare workforce. The dedication of university resources to support faculty and field department representatives in the development of relationships with child welfare partners is essential. These relationships are crucial to the maintenance of course materials that are relevant to agency practice and policy challenges. They are also essential to the development of quality field placements which incorporate innovations and push the field in directions it needs, and wants, to go.

Likewise, the support of child welfare agencies for the preparation of the next generation of students is indispensable. Through the vehicle of agency-university partnerships child welfare agencies can be encouraged to extend their organizational resources to provide work-study field placements and other supports for both current employees returning to school and students new to child welfare practice. Of vital importance is the need for agencies to think creatively and infuse policies, structures and support for new and returning workers post-graduation.

Opportunities for traineeship faculty and staff to network and engage in problem solving and information sharing with other traineeship programs offer invaluable avenues for improvement, revitalization and concrete support. In this case, interactions occurred largely through the sponsorship of NCWWI, but opportunities are available in other venues as well – through attendance at CSWE, NADD, BPD, participation in the Title IV-E listserv, and connection to Children Bureau initiatives such as the Information Gateway. Opportunities for student networking at both the national and local level is very helpful in this regard as well. As traineeship programs can attest, support of student attendance at local and national conferences often provided extraordinary educational experiences.

The potential for schools of social work to impact future generations of social workers in child welfare is enormous, and traineeship programs which continue to emphasize recruitment of diverse students, preparation for leadership, and trauma-informed practice will be successful in assisting child welfare agencies to meet on-going practice challenges.

IV. References

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Appendix A: Legacy Document Framework

This document was used by the individual legacy document program groups to guide their reflection and articulation of factors important in developing and sustaining Traineeship programs.

Individual Level: Students

- Recruitment and Selection: What have we learned? What works?
- Avenues for student support: academic, financial, peer support, other?
- Field experiences: Facilitating factors and barriers
- Transition to the work force: models? Strategies? Protocols?
- After graduation: what is the role for the school, for NCWWI?

Organizational Level: School of Social work

- Faculty: What is needed to support faculty teaching traineeship students?
- Curriculum: innovation and development
- Child welfare competencies: how and when incorporated
- Role of field department: supports needed
- Role of administration

Organizational Level: Public or Tribal Child Welfare Agency

- Field Instructors: How to recruit, select
- Nature and range of types of placement
- Agency supports for students?
- Facilitating factors, barriers within the field agency
- Partnerships between school and agency: how to develop and sustain; role of agency administration

Regional and National Level

- How have collaborations across the Traineeship Network assisted in developing and sustaining a traineeship program?
- How has the relationship with NCWWI assisted in developing and sustaining a traineeship program?

In addition to these domains, each group addressed the questions, to a greater or lesser extent

- “If I were to identify the one innovation in our program that was most important for studentsthe school.....for the child welfare field, I would say.....”
- “If I were to identify the one way in which participation as part of NCWWI was critical for our traineeship program, I would say.....”

Appendix B: List of NCWWI Traineeship Schools (2009-2014)

1. Briar Cliff University Social Work Department
2. Case Western Mandel School of Applied Social Science
3. Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work
4. New Mexico State University School of Social Work
5. Northeastern State University Department of Social Work
6. Portland State University School of Social Work
7. Salem State University School of Social Work
8. University of Illinois at Chicago Jane Addams College of Social Work
9. University of Maryland School of Social Work
10. University of Montana School of Social Work
11. University of South Dakota Department of Social Work
12. Yeshiva University Wurzweiler School of Social Work