NATIONAL Child Welfare WORKFORCE INSTITUTE

Learning, Leading, Changing

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Morris, T., Mathias, C., Swartz, R., et al. (2013). The Pathway Program: How a collaborative, distributed learning program showed us the future of social work education. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 33,* 594-606.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?	This article offers assessment data on the **Pathway Program**, a workforce development strategy which provides accredited social work education, beginning with advising and developing an academic plan and leading to BSW or MSW degree through distance learning modalities, to those who are unable to attend on-campus degree programs because of geography or family commitments.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Social work programs have had limited success in reaching remote regions and counties. Colleges and universities can no longer assume that long-prescribed campus norms represent equity and best practices for the majority of the potential social work workforce. Through Title IV-E funding, distance education has been offered as an opportunity to address needs of human service agencies to enhance staffing in remote areas.

Starting the program: Initial needs assessment

Barriers To Education	Main Categories Of Services
Commute to college campus	Student readiness (assessment tools and preparedness resources)
Lack of financial support	Student orientation (technological, course-related, and university expectations)
Job and family commitments	Student supports (help with technology, access to online communities, and mentoring programs)

Implementing the program: Building the infrastructure

Core Elements			
Community outreach	Student recruitment	Faculty advising	Course conversion to online

Evaluating the program: Future development

Lessons Learned
Record data on student, faculty, and community member experiences and complexity of tasks
Communicate and coordinate with participating community colleges
Coordinate Title IV-E student funding with campus bookstores and tuition fee payments
Support transfers from community colleges and 4-year institutions
Identify and refine program procedures and logistics
Develop curriculum protocols for field placements
Further faculty development and student mentorship

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Technology and web-based tools can make higher education more accessible and redefine a university as not just a physical, campus-based location, but a medium that can deliver education in different settings. While challenging, creating a collaborative, distributed learning environment can deliver the knowledge and skills necessary to improve agency practice and, by extension, the range of services available to support children and families in underserved regions.