Staying Power!
Recruitment Toolkit

Resources for Attracting Qualified Applicants for Child Welfare Work

Child welfare…it takes a special kind of person.
Staying Power!
Recruitment Toolkit

A Product of the R&R Project
Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention
An Evidence-Based Training Model

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Funded by grant #90CT0114 US DHHS Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau
August 2009
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  Recruitment for Retention: How to Recruit Child Welfare Workers that are Right for the Job
Introduction

Public child welfare agencies were once desirable employment settings for professional staff; however, changes within the last twenty years have made public sector employment unappealing. Such changes include the de-professionalization of child welfare jobs, new employment opportunities in mental health and elsewhere, the attraction of lucrative private practice, and privatization of child welfare services. Additionally, the growth of the national workforce is increasingly lagging behind that of job growth, leading to a “sellers” market for skilled workers and making it even more difficult for child welfare agencies to recruit and hire a sufficient number of child welfare workers. As a result, the growing shortage of a competent and committed child welfare workforce is hampering the ability of agencies to provide essential services to vulnerable families and children.

While much has been written about retention strategies in child welfare, scant attention has been paid to systematic strategies for recruiting and selecting child welfare staff. Agencies increasingly employ marketing strategies to recruit foster and adoptive parents but rarely use similar tools to recruit candidates for child welfare positions. Managers may feel that negative job aspects—ineffective salary and benefits, high workloads, unpleasant work environments, liability and safety issues—will overshadow any attempt to market the profession. Yet, many competent workers remain in child welfare in spite of these negative aspects, and the reasons for their retention—commitment to the well-being of children, desire to help, and personal fulfillment—can be positively cultivated in a recruitment campaign.

This monograph contains resources and materials that are intended to help child welfare supervisors and managers recruit qualified and committed child welfare workers. The Recruitment Toolkit presents a realistic recruitment strategy and includes such recruitment resources as public service announcements, recruitment flyers, posters and brochures, as well as a PowerPoint presentation for use in community settings. In a separate monograph, the Selection Toolkit contains a Realistic Job Preview DVD and a three-pronged competency based selection process. These resources and materials, together with A Supervisors Guide to Child Welfare Staff Retention, are the Staying Power! products of the Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention Project at the Jordan Institute for Families.
Overview

Effective recruitment practices describe and target information about open positions in ways that attract a large pool of qualified applicants. More broadly, recruitment activities also bring information about child welfare work to the attention of the general public (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009). This toolkit describes activities and includes resources that agencies can use to increase the number and quality of candidates for public child welfare employment. The toolkit and resources are located in the Recruitment Section of this CD.

A Supervisor’s Role in Recruitment

Public child welfare supervisors often feel that they have no responsibility, little time and few resources for recruiting candidates for child welfare worker positions. Yet, supervisors are in unique positions for successful recruitment. They are close to the work of child welfare and can readily identify the characteristics candidates need in order to be effective in that job and specific work unit. Supervisors are also integral members of the community and county where many potential candidates reside; therefore, they can devise recruitment plans based on unique community characteristics. For these and other reasons, supervisors should be encouraged to develop and participate in recruitment activities.

Recruitment Research

This Recruitment Toolkit is based on research that shows that the people who are attracted to child welfare positions possess the following characteristics (Ellett, 2000; Harrison, 1995; Light, 2003):

- Desire to help others
- Feeling that they can make a difference in the lives of children and families
- Persistence in the face of multiple challenges
- Thriving in a fast-paced work environment
- Agreeing with the values and mission of the agency

Using these characteristics, the R&R Project has developed a recruitment plan that agencies can use to market the organization and child welfare job opportunities to potential new employees. The recruitment plan is based on communicating a consistent and realistic message through different media and to multiple audiences.

Consistent Recruitment Message

In order to communicate a consistent message, an agency should consider the following strategies1:

- Decide what sets the agency apart from other community services—what does the agency want to be known for?
- Develop clear statements of the agency’s mission, vision and values
- Identify the important characteristics of the agency that can be shared with potential recruits
- Package the agency’s image in a distinctive style that is easily recognizable
- Communicate a consistent message about the agency as a potential employer on an ongoing basis

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Child welfare supervisors walk a fine line between wanting to “sell” the agency in order to attract a large pool of applicants and the need to present realistic information about the challenges of child welfare work (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009). In their work units, supervisors should ask about characteristics of the work and the agency that attracted workers to their jobs and—most importantly—that keep them working in child welfare. While much of the work of child welfare is constrained by standardized policies and procedures, there are striking differences between agencies that supervisors can build on to create the unique image that a particular agency can use in recruitment messages.

**Recruitment Strategies**

Once the agency is clear and consistent about its mission and values, it becomes important to enhance the visibility of the agency. Strategies for communicating the agency’s image to potential employees include:

- Printed materials that focus on unique benefits of the job, such as the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life
- Public service announcements on regional cable channels
- Development of a website to communicate the agency’s mission, vision and values to potential employees
- Press releases about positive activities and outcomes in the agency
- Current employees spreading the word about job opportunities to friends and family members
- An expanded pool of potential new recruits
- Presentations to community service clubs, churches and schools

This R&R Recruitment Toolkit includes activities and resources for some of these strategies.

**Printed Materials**

**Posters and Flyers** are designed to acknowledge the challenges of child welfare work, including low pay, large caseloads and upset parents. There is also the acknowledgement that many potential applicants would embrace these challenges because they believe that they can make a difference in the lives of children and families.

Large posters would stand out in a busy setting such as a college bulletin board, health club, an employment office, a church announcement board, other social services agencies or a public library. Flyers would be useful handouts at job fairs, public meetings, community events and for posting in retail store windows. A copy of a flyer is available on this CD.

**Recruitment Brochures** provide more in-depth information about child welfare services and the work that child welfare staff do. Specific recruitment information includes the rewards of working in child welfare, as well as the challenges. Also, there is county-specific information about why working in this particular agency and location would appeal to potential job applicants. These
brochures could be mailed or distributed to individuals who express interest in or curiosity about child welfare work. Bulk mailing could also target graduating college seniors, clubs or services associations. Brochures could also be placed in employment offices or other county offices, local college administrative offices, libraries, churches and health care settings, among other locations. A copy of a recruitment brochure is on this CD.

**Job Announcements** are often boring and unappealing. If the agency uses its recruitment message about the attractive uniqueness of the agency and the special characteristics of workers employed there, the result might look something like this:

Challenging and Meaningful Child Welfare Jobs Available

Are you looking for a fast-paced, supportive and stimulating place to work? We want to hire child welfare workers who desire challenging, meaningful work and want the opportunity to make a difference for families, youth and children. If this describes you, consider applying for a public child welfare position. You’ll never be bored!

**Public Service Announcements**

Two 30-second public service announcements (PSAs) are included on this Recruitment Toolkit section of the CD. These PSAs, entitled *Unimaginable Suffering* and *Abuse & Neglect*, were developed to appeal to potential applicants who want to help children and families deal with problems of abuse and neglect. The PSAs focus on recruiting child welfare workers who have the heart, compassion and drive to help make sure that children are living in safe environments.

Agencies should request that local and regional television cable networks show the PSAs intermittently throughout the year and at various times during daytime and evening programming.

Radio public service announcements are also effective recruitment tools. An agency can use the scripts of these television PSAs to read over the radio.

**Using Inside Recruitment Resources**

Research shows that inside sources are more effective at recruiting job applicants who tend to stay on the job (Wanous, 1992). Inside sources include current and former employees who have direct knowledge about the job, compared with advertisements and employment agencies, examples of outside sources. Inside sources know the agency and the job and are able to communicate a realistic description of what a new employee will likely experience. Moreover, inside sources know the characteristics of workers who are best suited for child welfare jobs and are less likely to recruit applicants who will not succeed. Similarly, the R&R Project research shows that workers who had realistic expectations for the work were less likely to say they intended to leave their jobs (Dickinson, Painter, & Lee, 2007).

Current employees might be more persistent in recruiting friends and relatives for child welfare jobs if they received bonuses, especially for recruiting candidates whose skills match the job and
agency. So, for example, a bonus could be available after the new worker has successfully completed their probationary period or remained on the job for a certain length of time. The bonus could also be given in time increments, so the recruiter receives an immediate reward that grows over time as the new employee proves to be the right match for the job. This incremental approach may also spur the experienced employee to provide help to new recruits through the difficult adjustments to child welfare work (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009).

Expanding the Pool of Potential New Recruits

With greater competition for human services workers, child welfare agencies need to attract applicants from an expanded pool of recruits, including students, older workers and applicants of color. Following are some recruitment strategies geared to the characteristics of these new recruits.

Students

- Target high school and young college students before they become entrenched in other vocational interests
- Encourage student volunteering and service learning activities in the agency
- Investigate loan forgiveness, stipends and agency/university partnerships
- Support paid and unpaid student internships
- Volunteer for classroom visits and guest lectures about the field of child welfare

Older Workers

- Stress job security, benefits and flexibility of child welfare employment
- Appeal to the experience and maturity of the older worker
- Target advertising to the older worker, such as the size and placement of printed advertisements and materials and pictures of older persons
- Provide flexible and reduced schedules, part-time positions, telecommuting, and job sharing opportunities

Applicants of Color

- Feature persons of color in targeted ads
- Deploy minority recruiters and diverse recruitment teams
- Develop a work environment that welcomes diversity
- Establish cultural competency as a qualification and award salary differentials
- Provide internships for minorities representative of local area

Evaluation

Agencies should keep track of their use of recruitment strategies in order to learn about the effectiveness of individual approaches as well as to evaluate overall results. Agency staff could attempt to link the use of recruitment strategies to the county’s level of turnover and vacancy rate, in order to see if the use of these recruitment tools helps to reduce child welfare worker turnover.
References


Slide Presentation

The Recruitment PowerPoint (available on this CD) is meant to be used by agency staff in presentations to community and educational groups about child welfare services and work. Slides at the beginning of the PowerPoint describe child welfare services and work in general. Blank slides are available for individual agencies to record agency-specific information and reasons why people in the audience should consider working in child welfare in that particular agency.
Recruitment for Retention

How to recruit child welfare workers that are right for the job

When the job is right...

…it chooses you

- Child Welfare Work
  - Helping
  - Protecting
  - Partnering
  - Making a difference

Some people are game show hosts

Some people are stock analysts

And some people are called to serve the welfare of children, youth and families

Public Child Welfare

It’s not for everyone...

…it’s for the people who believe they can make a difference in a world of challenges and hard knocks.

What is Child Welfare?

Child welfare addresses harm to children by a parent or guardian, including mental and physical injury, sexual exploitation or abuse and neglect

“In child welfare, you can actually do something to help families...when it all comes together, it’s truly magical.”

—NC Child Welfare Worker
A Critical Component

- Child welfare workers are a linchpin in honoring America’s promise to help its most vulnerable citizens.
- Few jobs depend so greatly on committed, well-trained workers who have the resources to succeed.

Why Child Welfare?

- More than ever, children, youth and families are in dire need of child welfare...
- ...yet qualified child welfare workers are dangerously underrepresented in the field.
- If ensuring safe, permanent, nurturing families for children and youth is a reflection of your deepest values, then child welfare might be for you.

What is the Goal of Child Welfare?

- Child welfare work’s objective is to make a difference in the health of families and communities
- And to protect children from abuse and neglect

What Do Child Welfare Workers Do?

- Form relationships with people
- Partner with families to help identify problems and find solutions
- Promote family stability so families can successfully care for their children

Child Welfare Services

- Promotes family-centered services
- Works closely not only with children, youth and families
- But ALSO with organizations, including the legal, medical, and school systems

Who is a Good Fit for Child Welfare?

- Above all, a child welfare worker is someone who is motivated to make a difference by providing services and opportunities that improve the lives of the people they serve
Child welfare workers are people who desire challenging, meaningful work, and welcome the opportunity to make a difference under challenging conditions.

“The decisions I make, the work that I do—it’s the difference between whether a child is free from being abused or not.”

—NC Child Welfare Worker

How Do You Qualify?

A Social Work degree is preferred, but you may qualify with a degree in a related field such as:
- Sociology
- Psychology
- Child Development

Challenges of the Work

- Low pay
- Heavy caseloads
- Loads of paperwork
- Long hours
- Inability to help some families, despite best efforts

“I think it takes a special kind of person to work in public child welfare. You really have to know this is where you want to be.”

—NC Child Welfare Worker

“Child welfare is the ‘trenches’ and it’s important to come armed with a good dose of social work principles, ethics, and a lot of patience.”

—NC Child Welfare Worker
Rewards of the Work

- Seeing families transform
- Becoming a respected professional in a challenging field
- Hearing thanks...even years later
- Helping create families through adoption

While child welfare is not for everyone

- Those who choose the field...
  - Are guaranteed a challenging career
  - Have the opportunity to make a difference in their communities
  - See kids’ lives get better
  - See families become stronger and reunited
  - It’s truly magical!

How Do You Apply

This Presentation

- Is brought to you by the R&R Project
- A part of the Jordan Institute for Families
- At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work
- Funded by grant #9OCT0114 U.S. DHHS, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau
Retention of well-qualified and committed child welfare workers has become a national crisis. In 2003, the US Children’s Bureau funded the Jordan Institute for Families to conduct The R&R Project to help increase retention rates of child welfare workers in North Carolina.

The R&R Project identifies and implements strategies that influence recruitment, selection and retention of workers who will understand and embrace the challenges and opportunities of child welfare work.

This Staying Power! Recruitment Toolkit contains resources developed by The R&R Project to help directors and supervisors be able to recruit a pool of qualified applicants for child welfare worker positions.

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Funded by grant #90CT0114 US DHHS Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau