



Preparing the Child Welfare Workforce: Colorado State Child Welfare Stipend Program Outcomes

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WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article summarizes a ten-year retrospective study of a child welfare stipend program involving four university social work programs in partnership with the Colorado Department of Human Services. The study included 245 stipend graduates and examined the program's influence on their organizational commitment, professional identity, and intent to stay in the field.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Students involved in the program receive stipends to support completion of their social work degree. For each year a student receives a stipend, they are expected to complete one year of employment in a county department of social/human services or within a tribal child welfare program following graduation.

Findings:



Organizational Commitment | 92% of graduates surveyed completed or were in the process of completing their employment obligation. Graduates spent an average of 4 years working in child welfare after graduation. 51% of survey respondents indicated they were currently working in child welfare.

Child Welfare Professional Identity | Students new to child welfare said the stipend allowed them to transition and build their commitment to child welfare. Those already working in child welfare started with a strong professional identity and saw the stipend as a recognition of their child welfare experience. Students identified agency recognition of their commitment to child welfare and completion of a social work degree as important.



Work Perceptions and Intent to Stay | 72% of stipend graduates anticipated staying in child welfare long-term. Intent to stay was positively related to organizational climate, job satisfaction, and peer support in the workplace and negatively related to pressure and work-related burnout.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

- Stipend programs help new workers develop a strong child welfare professional identity and recognize current workers' skills and experience, increasing agency commitment and overall workforce retention.
- Graduates who feel prepared and supported in child welfare work express an intent to stay beyond minimum stipend pay-back periods. Universities and agencies can continue to engage and support program participants after graduation.
- Stipend program graduate networks can be a source of peer support and create learning and emotional support for graduates in the field.