

The Vital Role of Social Workers at CPS

“Research shows that children in the child welfare system who have caseworkers with a Bachelor’s or Master’s Degree of Social Work have better outcomes, including shorter time in out-of-home care, increased adoptions, and a lower likelihood of being removed from their homes.”ⁱ

Background

Social Workers have a long history within the child welfare system, and are vital to developing outcomes that support youth and their families as they seek stability and recovery. Social work degree curriculums always include the fundamentals of child development, systems theory, client-centered approaches to interventions and the framework of the child welfare system in school. This is done within the context of a fundamental belief that a strengths based approach to empowering clients will increase their participation in services and help them achieve their goals towards change and success.

IV-E in Texas

There are 11 schools of social work in Texas that utilize IV-E funds to train and prepare social workers for jobs at CPS.ⁱⁱ The programs at these universities and colleges specialize in integrating key concepts of abuse, neglect and child development into their curriculum, and offer course and faculty support directly related to CPS. Students are immersed in the child protective services system in preparation for their work at the Department. These students complete internships at CPS, and then are required to maintain employment from 8 months to 2 years depending upon the amount of their stipend while in school. This program has produced a multitude of caseworkers over the years, and empirical research shows that they have greater rates of retention and show stronger outcome measures.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other States

In 2014, Florida passed SB-1666^{iv}. It provides a tuition reimbursement for caseworkers who attend an accredited school of social work, and mandates that by July 1st, 2019, “at least half of all child protective investigators and supervisors will have a bachelor’s degree or a master’s degree in social work from a college or university social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.” To achieve this goal the bill requires that 80% of all new supervisors and investigators hired after the implementation date be a social worker. Florida has traditionally had major issues with abuse and neglect, and in 2010 had the highest rate of abuse and neglect deaths of any state with 180 deaths equating to a rate of 4.44 per 100,000 kids.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES: A GUIDE FOR CASEWORKERS

There is research that strongly suggests that higher education is essential for developing caseworker competencies. Both the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) suggest that CPS staff should have a bachelor’s or master’s degree in social work (B.S.W. or M.S.W.) or a degree in a closely related field. Social work education appears to be related to job retention and staff stability, which helps produce better child welfare practice.

Social Work Degrees & Outcomes

The Link Between Higher Education and Improved Child Welfare Practice
A national study of job requirements for child welfare workers found that turnover was consistently higher in States that do not require any academic social work preparation for child welfare positions and is consistently lower in States that require an M.S.W
A Florida study suggested that workers without education in child welfare work were most likely to leave before 1 year.
A study by Hess, Folaron, and Jefferson found that caseworker turnover was a major factor in failed reunification efforts.
A Maryland study found that having an M.S.W. degree appeared to be the best predictor of overall performance in social service work.
A study of social service workers in Kentucky found that staff members with social work degrees were better prepared for their work than those without them. ¹
Abers, Reilly, and Rittner found that child welfare staff with B.S.W. and M.S.W. degrees were more effective in developing successful permanency plans for children who had been in foster care for more than 2 years than were staff without these degrees.

v

Recommendations

That the qualifications for a CPS worker in any line of service (Investigative, Conservatorship, Family Based Adoptions, etc.) not be relaxed, and that a 4 year degree be maintained as a minimum requirement. Additionally, NASW/TX would like to highlight the research that shows social workers achieve more positive outcomes for youth, produce quicker and more stable reunifications, remain at the agency longer and are more cost effective in every aspect of the agency than caseworkers without a BSW or MSW. CPS should increase the number of social workers that they hire until each unit is made up of at least 50% of the profession in order to disseminate the background and knowledge base throughout the agency. This should involve increasing salaries for front-line staff: the long-term retention and outcome data supports this step.

- ***Maintain qualifications of a 4 year degree for caseworker (and above) positions***
- ***Recruit, hire, and retain more degreed social workers***
- ***Develop partnerships with schools of social work to develop an enhanced child welfare specialty that utilizes core components of the Basic Skills Development training to prepare social workers for a smoother integration into the CPS workforce***

ⁱ Department of Health and Human Services Budget Factsheet. <http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy2017-budget-factsheet.pdf>

ⁱⁱ National Survey of IV-E Stipends & Paybacks. http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/_docs/cwep/StipendPaybackMatrix.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Leung, P. Willis, N. (2012) The Impact of Title IV-E Training on Case Outcomes for Children Served by CPS
<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol12/iss1/9/>

^{iv} Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 1666. (2014). <http://laws.flrules.org/2014/224>

^v DePanfilis, D.; Salus, M. (2003). Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/cps.pdf>