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Children's Services Practice Notes is a newsletter for North Carolina's child welfare workers produced four times a year by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the N.C. Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In summarizing recent research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace regular supervision and peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

If you would like to comment about something that appears in this or any other issue of *Children's Services Practice Notes*, please do so! Address your comments to:

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TURNOVER IN CHILD WELFARE

Turnover hurts families and children. By leaving their jobs, social workers can compound feelings of insignificance and rejection in kids already hurting from abuse and neglect.

When foster and adoptive parents quit, the effects on foster children—most of whom have already lost one family—can be devastating.

Turnover hurts agencies, too. It lowers morale, reduces efficiency, and eats up time and money as agencies seek, hire, and train new employees. And

turnover prevents us from meeting our goal of one case worker or case work team for each child and family.

In this edition *Practice Notes* explores what researchers, practitioners, and administrators have to say about turnover in child welfare, and we present some ideas for fixing this system-wide problem. Unless we confront this issue head on, we will be unable to ensure that every foster child has a safe, loving, permanent family within one year.

SOCIAL WORKER RETENTION

Few would dispute that turnover is a problem in child welfare. But beyond that, what do we really know? How high are turnover rates? Why do workers leave? What effect does this turnover have on outcomes for families and children? And, more to the point, what can be done about it?

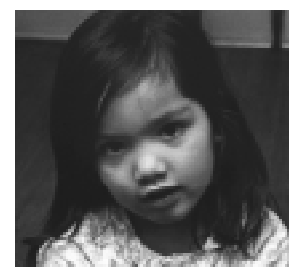
NATIONAL TURNOVER RATES

High child welfare worker turnover rates affect states all over the nation. According to one report by the General Accounting Office, "next to funding, states report that staffing is the most serious issue facing their child welfare systems. In response to an APWA survey, 90 percent of states reported difficulty recruiting and retaining caseworkers" (GAO, 1995).

For example, in the early 1990s Prince William County, Virginia reported a 60 percent turnover rate among child

welfare staff. In 1997 Broward County, Florida, reported an 85 percent turnover rate. In 1996 the turnover among Massachusetts Department of Social Services workers was 300 employees per year, with Taunton County reporting 100 percent turnover.

This phenomenon also occurs in child welfare administration. Testifying before Congress in 1993, David Liederman, director of the Child Welfare League of America, stated, "There is a lack of stable leadership in child welfare. In the last two years there has been a fifty-percent turnover among State directors of child welfare programs. That is outrageous" (Thoma, 1998).



Staff turnover hurts kids. How can we reduce it?

SOCIAL WORKER RETENTION from page 1

TURNOVER IN NC

There is no statewide data on child welfare staff turnover in North Carolina. However, for the past nine years, Ted Bowen, former director of the Eastern Regional Office of the N.C. Dept. of Health and Human Resources, maintained data on DSS staff turnover rates for 30 counties in the eastern part of the state. This region extends north to Virginia, south to South Carolina, and west to the Wilson area. According to these records, rates of turnover *for all DSS staff* ranged from 24.8 to 34.2 percent, with an average of around 29 percent. Many of these counties struggle to recruit qualified employees, who can be difficult to find and attract to the rural settings typical of this area.

In February 1999 representatives of North Carolina's 27 *Families for Kids* and IV-E Waiver counties met to discuss child welfare staff turnover. Although some participants offered statistics ranging from 30 to 110 percent rates of turnover for foster care placement workers, these figures were not official.

During their February discussion counties also brought up the point that turnover rates seem to be higher in

some positions than others. For example, one county estimated the turnover rate at 10 percent in placement staff but at 95 percent in CPS staff. Others agreed that they had difficulty keeping employees in one area, but there didn't seem to be any pattern—that is, in one county the higher turnover rate may have been in placement, but in the next county CPS was the problem area.

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

When agencies lack adequate staff, caseloads and stress levels increase for those workers who stay behind. Miscommunication and mistakes can occur when a child's case is "handed off" to a new person. Many child welfare professionals believe that all of these conditions delay permanence for children (Thoma, 1998), and lower the quality of services they receive while they are in foster care (Well, 1994).

At least one study contradicts this belief. In this study R. M. George used data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to track rates of reunification for 851 children in foster care. Surprisingly, George found that more staff turnover in a

particular child's case resulted in swifter reunification for that child. In his discussion of his findings, George gives this explanation: "Although this may seem counterintuitive, action on a particular case may only occur at some procedural or bureaucratic milestone. Thus, the more caseworkers a child has, the more possibilities exist for review and consideration of reunification" (George, 1993).

WHY WORKERS LEAVE

It is not hard to understand why workers leave child welfare. In their 1996 study, researchers Drake and Yamada found that inadequate pay, tough working conditions, lack of recognition for a job well-done, chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and overwork all negatively affect worker retention. During the February 1999 discussion participants named most of these factors, adding to them the pressures of high caseloads, paperwork, and liability concerns.

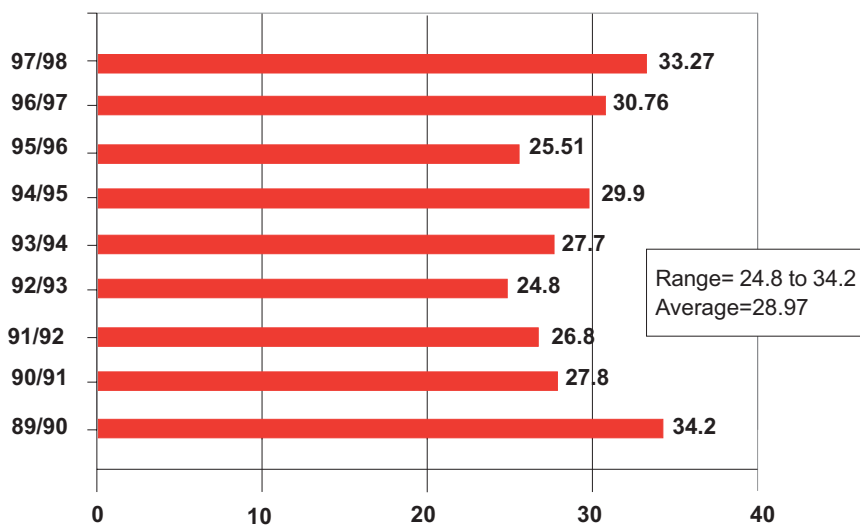
In North Carolina, competition from other county departments of social services contributes to turnover. Because funding for child welfare positions is county-based, workers sometimes leave one agency to take an equivalent job in another county—for better pay and, sometimes, better working conditions.

THOSE WHO STAY

What do we know about the child welfare workers who hang in there? Relevant education seems to be a predictive factor (Dickinson & Perry, 1998).

In Texas, a study found that in the past five years, 67 percent of CPS staff with degrees in social work were still working for Protective Services. There was an 87 percent retention rate among those who, in addition to having a BSW, also had a placement or internship in the social service agency prior to working there. Workers with human service-related degrees such

DSS Staff Turnover in Eastern NC



Source: Ted Bowen, former Director, Eastern Region, NC Dept. of Health and Human Resources.

as psychology or education had a retention rate of 46 percent, while those with a background outside of these areas showed a retention rate of only 37 percent (Texas CPS Training Institute, 1997).

Other studies have found that those who stay in public welfare have worked longer in adoptions and permanency planning than those who have left or plan to leave (Dickinson & Perry, 1998). Those who stay in public welfare also tend to report that they have received higher levels of job-related support from coworkers.

SUPERVISION IS CRITICAL

Supervision may be the most important factor of all. Research shows that those who remain in child welfare are more likely to report that their supervisor is willing to listen to work-related problems and to help them get their jobs done, than are those who leave or are planning to leave. These individuals rate their supervisors as more competent, willing to show appreciation, approachable, and concerned for their well-being than the supervisors of those who leave.

The importance of good supervision was confirmed by the N.C. Division of Social Services' Joan McAllister, who said, "in going to different agencies around North Carolina, I have come to believe that competent, supportive supervision is the single most important factor in an agency's or unit's ability to retain workers. If you find an agency with a stable work force, you will usually find excellent supervisors."

RETAINING SOCIAL WORKERS

Agencies can do several things to decrease turnover. If possible, hire individuals with a human services education. It is also critical to provide your workers with high-quality, supportive supervision and opportunities for skill development. For more ideas, see box at right.

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IDEAS FOR RETAINING CHILD WELFARE WORKERS IN NC

What do directors, administrators, supervisors, and line social workers from North Carolina's county departments of social services think about child welfare staff turnover? In February 1999 representatives of North Carolina's 27 *Families for Kids* and IV-E Waiver counties met to talk about this issue and come up with solutions. Here are some of their ideas:

- **Address liability concerns.** Determine if social workers can be provided professional liability insurance through the county's legal services to allay fears about liability.
- **Improve compensation.** Better pay needs to be paired with adequate staffing and reasonable workloads. Regardless of what someone is being paid, there's only so much she can do. Improved compensation could lure new employees and reward experienced people who stay.
- **Change the caseload standard for foster care.** In general, North Carolina's caseload standards are very similar to those recommended by the Child Welfare League of America—but not in the case of foster care. CWLA recommends 12 families; North Carolina's standard is 20.
- **Improve the reputation of child welfare.** Often the community negatively perceives DSS, which impedes recruitment and indirectly makes working conditions more difficult. Consider a publicity campaign.
- **Improve the climate in the agency.** Although everyone contributes to the mood, the director plays the largest role. Consider formally celebrating workers' successes, offering bonuses, ensuring the administration facilitates the workers' jobs, empowering workers and giving them ownership (e.g., via suggestion boxes).
- **Ease new employees into their jobs.** It is daunting to return from training and receive a full caseload. There was some discussion of giving new employees reduced caseloads initially, but it was also pointed out that the reduced caseload would leave slack to be picked up by other, older staff who might lose morale.
- **Build the pre-service training into the MSW degree.** Students would get credit for the training while they are in school, and they'd be ready to take on a caseload the day they're hired. Building the training into the MSW may also reduce the number of people who take a job only to quit, saying they really didn't know what the job would be like.
- **Implement a dual track or multiple-response system.** The cooperation with law enforcement could help ease stress and reduce the workload.
- **Offer flexible hours.** A flexible work week will enable workers to see their own families and to meet the needs of their clients.
- **Lobby the legislature.** Convince the legislature to contribute more funds for child welfare services so the improvements mentioned above (such as better compensation) can be implemented.
- **Evaluate exit interviews.** Reformat the exit interview so that the agency learns as much as possible about why people leave. What you learn may influence future plans for retaining staff.
- **Reduce inter-county competition.** All counties need to make improvements to reduce competition for employees among counties.
- **Reduce the time it takes to fill vacancies.** To do this, agencies could establish a number of temporary-to-permanent positions to cover when permanent employees are on sick leave or vacation and to fill vacancies as they open up. Those employees would also get the pre-service training when they begin their temporary employment. Once they are hired as full-time employees, they are ready to take on a full caseload. Another idea was to keep a posting for an open position up *at all times*, whether there is actually a vacancy at that moment.

RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Turnover among foster parents poses a serious threat to our child welfare system. As the people we ask to look after kids in need, they play a critical role in our efforts to protect and nurture children.

In North Carolina foster parents are an essential part of two of the five goals for children's services: one stable foster care placement for every child and a permanent home for every child within one year. Without a pool of dedicated, qualified, loving foster parents, we will never

reach these goals.

Yet many of our foster parents are choosing not to foster any more. Nationally, between 1983 and 1992, the number of children in foster care increased about 74 percent, while the number of available foster care placements decreased by 11 percent (OIG, 1994).

WHY THEY STOP FOSTERING

Ask any adoption and foster care worker to explain the difficulty of recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive parents and they will probably give some of these reasons:

- more children with complex problems entering the system
- more households have two working parents
- parents need more support, training, and respite care
- financial reimbursement to parents is low relative to the cost of living
- the "system" gets lots of negative publicity and parents do not want to get involved (Chamberlain & Moreland, 1992).

Ask foster parents themselves, and you'll get a similar—but slightly differ-

ent—answer. For example, when the Federal Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) surveyed current and former foster parents, most of those who left the system said they did so either because of various agency policies and practices or problems with the behavior of foster children (J. Bell Assoc. & Westat, 1994). Foster parents also tend to drop out when they fail to get the support and positive recognition they deserve for caring for their foster children (GAO, 1989).

The extent to which foster parents are treated as respected, valuable members of the team helping the child also affects their willingness to continue their work. To quote one foster parent, "The relationship between myself as a foster parent and my social worker (licensing worker) and my foster child's social worker can be the determining factor in whether or not I choose to be a foster parent on an ongoing basis" (Hoffman, 1998).

One study of the impact of money and support services on foster parent retention bears out what foster parents are telling us. In Oregon, the State Children's Services Division conducted a study of 72 foster families in order to determine the effects of enhanced support and training of foster parents on retention and outcomes for children. They divided the participating families into three groups: Group 1 received enhanced support and training plus an increased payment

of \$70/month; Group 2 received the \$70 but did not receive the increase in services; and Group 3 received no extra support.

The results were not surprising. Of participating families, 9.6 percent of Group 1, 14.3 percent of Group 2, and 25.9 percent of Group 3 discontinued care. Compared to the state average of 40 percent discontinuation of care, the results reflect the positive effect of additional support (training, money, and other services) on foster parent retention.

ACTION STEPS

Once parents have been recruited, the issue becomes retention. How do we keep families in the system when providing quality care is so challenging? Here are several steps you can take in your agency:

1. Clarify foster/adoptive parents' role and recognize their importance to the child, agency, and community. Parents need to understand how they fit into a complex system that includes their own family, your agency, and the larger community.

FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATIONS CAN BE A VALUABLE RESOURCE

As they try to improve their recruitment and retention of foster parents, more and more of North Carolina's counties are strengthening and partnering with their local foster parent associations. Why? Because foster parent associations offer emotional support for foster parents facing challenges with their children, provide a forum for additional foster parent training, and promote working, collaborative partnerships among DSS, foster parents, and birth families. When foster parents feel supported, they are better able to meet the needs of their foster children and more likely to continue fostering.

In addition, many counties are collaborating with their local foster parent associations to recruit and train new foster parents. There is no better advertisement for foster parenting than well-trained, supported, and committed foster parents!

Source: NC Div. of Social Services' *North Carolina Families for Kids Handbook*, 1998.

Nationally, between 1983 and 1992, the number of children in foster care increased about 74 percent, while the number of available foster care placements decreased by 11 percent.

2. Ensure all foster/adoptive parents complete a competency-based preservice training, including a "development plan" that addresses strengths and needs. You can assist parents with the "development plan" by facilitating a strengths-based assessment.

3. Match the needs of a child in care with the skills and qualifications of the foster/adoptive parents. A thorough assessment of the strengths and needs of the child and family is critical if we are to make a successful, lasting match.

4. Create a mentoring program for new parents by asking participating parents to make themselves available to new ones.

5. Through collaboration, include foster/adoptive parents in agency decisions, including policy development. If parents are involved in the decision-making process, they will feel more connected to the program and more invested in its success.

6. Reimburse foster parents for the full cost of fostering. You may control the finances in your organization, but you can advocate for an increase in funding with your supervisor and state legislators.

7. Provide liability insurance to foster parents. Again, advocating for parents' needs is the best way to increase services to them.

8. Give foster/adoptive parents ongoing supervision, monitoring, and consultation. Make sure all foster/adoptive parents are aware of community health and mental health services.

9. Provide foster parents with respite care and child day care services. Making sure that parents have built in "relief" will help them cope with the stress of foster parenting and increase retention rates.

10. Provide foster/adoptive parents with recognition for their accomplishments. Honor the parents in some way, such as through a newsletter or during a group activity.

11. Give foster/adoptive parents access to their own files.

12. Conduct exit meetings to learn why foster/adoptive parents quit. If you know specifically why parents are leaving you can make improvements for the future (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995).

NEW STATEWIDE RECRUITMENT PARTNERSHIP

In addition to the steps mentioned above, consider consulting the N.C. Division of Social Services, which has established new partnership with the General Baptist State Convention and UNC-G and N.C. A & T University to facilitate the process of recruiting and licensing foster and adoptive parents.

Under the new partnership, 4,000 Baptist pastors will recruit parents in their congregations to adopt children from foster care, and the universities will help prospective parents through the sometimes difficult adoption process.

Over the course of the next year the Division will hold meetings to plan recruitment efforts in the state's 10, 10-county areas, making full use of the resources these new partners have to offer. For more information, contact Amelia Lance or Gwen Horton at 919/733-3801.

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ASSESSING YOUR AGENCY'S NEEDS

Because children in different counties have different needs, your agency might want to consider conducting an assessment designed to focus your foster parent recruitment efforts in the most needed areas. The Child Welfare League of America recommends the following variables be included in an assessment:

- the number of children who are projected to need family foster care
- the child's age; gender; membership in a sibling group; culture and ethnicity; and special developmental, behavioral, or medical needs
- the number of children in the above categories who are placed with foster families that have the strengths, skills, and supports to meet their needs, as well as the number of children who are not and will probably need another foster family
- the number and needs of children in the above categories who are projected to transition from family foster care
- the number and characteristics of children placed in other or more restrictive settings because appropriate foster families are not available
- the number of foster families who are projected to leave the program

Once you determine your needs, involve the local community "in developing and implementing a comprehensive, culturally responsive, community-based, strategic recruitment plan" (Pasztor & Wynne).

The plan should include public awareness and education, positive themes and messages, specific strategies (such as notices in congregational and community newsletters, display ads in the phone book, and collaboration with your foster parent association), and targeted campaigns, depending on the needs of your agency's kids.

The final step is to develop a positive and well-organized system for responding to calls and contacts from people interested in becoming foster parents.

Source: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995.

REVIEW OF RECENT FEDERAL LAWS AND HOW THEY AFFECT THE WAY WE RECRUIT FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Federal child welfare laws have changed significantly in the past decade. In this article we will explore the reasons for these laws and their impact on child welfare practice, paying particular attention to how they affect recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents.

Two of the most important pieces of recent legislation are the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994. Both of these laws, and several others we will discuss, alter the practices that had been mandated by the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA) of 1980, practices that have become second nature to child welfare workers.



In response to federal law and state goals, more agencies are seeking foster families who would be willing adopt their foster child.

In fact, many of the concepts that guide our practice, such as making “reasonable efforts” to reunite foster kids with their biological families and taking race and ethnicity into consideration when facilitating adoption, are derived from the 1980 law (Gelles; D’Agostino). Old habits die hard, and some agencies in North Carolina and across the nation have yet to come into compliance with the new legislation. But in order to maintain funding, meet ethical and legal requirements, and, most importantly, successfully address the needs of children, child welfare agencies must quickly learn and enact the new policies.

REASONS FOR NEW LAWS

Historically, children have languished in foster care for years before being either adopted or placed back with their biological families (Gelles; Spake). In 1980, Congress passed AACWA, which demanded that states receiving federal funds make “reasonable efforts” to reunify kids with their birth parents (Gelles).

But what is reasonable to one social worker, foster parent, or judge is not necessarily reasonable to another. For more than 15 years, AACWA tied up the adoption process in endless red tape. Of the 500,000 children in foster care in a given year, only 27,000 were adopted (D’Agostino). Terminating a birth parent’s rights was extremely difficult, even in cases where the parent had seriously harmed the child in question or even killed that child’s siblings. Under AACWA, the safety and emotional stability of children was no more important to the courts than the due process rights of parents (D’Agostino; Gelles).

As cases of deaths by abuse and the number of children waiting for adoption grew, child welfare advocates convinced

President Clinton to take action. In 1997 he asked Congress to pass legislation that would double the number of public adoptions by 2002 and grant foster children “what should be their fundamental right—a chance at a decent, safe home” (Clinton). The result was a series of laws designed to achieve this goal. Amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act made convictions for homicide, manslaughter, or seriously injuring a child grounds for the termination of parental rights.

ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT OF 1997

Since ASFA, child welfare agencies can override the “reasonable efforts” requirement with concerns about children’s safety, which must be the “paramount concern.” This is a real victory for child welfare advocates, because it represents the recognition that kids are not the property of their parents, but individuals with rights and needs independent of any biological ties (Gelles; D’Agostino; Spake).

Before 1997, terminating parental rights required that states show with “clear and convincing evidence” that parents had “substantially and consistently” failed to maintain contact with their child (Gelles). This process was extremely burdensome and often left kids in dangerous or unstable situations (D’Agostino; Spake). Now, states must initiate a petition to terminate parental rights when:

- a child has been in foster care for 15 of the previous 22 months
- a court deems the child an abandoned infant
- the parent attempts to murder one of his or her children
- the parent commits voluntary manslaughter of a child
- the parent commits felonious assault resulting in serious injury to a child (CQWR; Gelles; D’Agostino).

Terminating parental rights does not require that one of these conditions is met, but if one is, the state **must** petition to terminate parental rights.

ASFA has begun to make the adoption process faster and more focused on the safety of children. On the other hand, some child welfare advocates have criticized the law, saying the timetables are too short and inflexible, and that they prevent agencies from helping biological parents improve their parenting skills (Spake). The balance between parental rights, preserving families, and the welfare, safety, and stability of the child may not yet have been found. But the government is listening more to practitioners, which is good news.

ASFA also provides financial incentives for an efficient adoption system. Before ASFA, more than 80 percent of federal money went to the child welfare bureaucracy, with under a fifth of federal money actually finding its way to caretaker families. Now, if a state finds adoptive homes for more foster children than it did the preceding year, Washington awards the state \$4,000 for each of these “additional” children (\$6,000 for children with special needs). The new legislation

IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITING PARENTS

therefore speeds up the adoption process in several ways. There have always been timetables for how long children can stay in foster care, but now those guidelines are more responsive to the needs of the kids (CQWR; Gelles).

MEPA AND ITS 1996 AMENDMENT

The 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act was also designed to speed up adoptions and to respond to critics of race-based adoption, which has long been a contentious issue. MEPA barred the practice of “categorically deny[ing] to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent solely on the basis of race” but allowed “cultural, ethnic, or racial” considerations to be “one of the factors used to determine the best interests of the child.”

This flexible position was changed by the “Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption” provision of the 1996 Small Business Job Protection Act. Current law prohibits the denial or delay of adoption or foster placement based on race. This means, for example, that white parents interested in adopting black children have as much a legal right to do so as black parents (Spake).

This presents a difficult dilemma for child welfare workers. Many people believe that black children will lose their cultural identity if placed with white families (Spake). In a nation already struggling to honor its citizens of color, this concerns and disturbs many Americans. However, for children who may be difficult to place, the amendment to MEPA removes one barrier to adoption. There is simply no consensus on this controversial issue. We can all expect laws regarding foster care and adoption, especially with respect to race and parental rights, to change times during our careers.

It does seem that the safety of the child will, however, remain the most important consideration (Mason). Since we who work in child protection agencies have long considered this our priority, convincing lawmakers to model legislation in this way is a major accomplishment. It is also a step towards better retaining the services of foster families who may have otherwise grown dissatisfied and frustrated with the adoption process (Spake).

Another boon to foster and adoptive family retention is the Safe Adoptions and Family Environments (SAFE) act, which is still being considered by Congress. SAFE would allow many adoptive families to receive financial assistance even if the

- **Understand the law as it relates to race and recruitment of foster and adoptive parents.** Based on the amendment to MEPA, no county or state agency may routinely use race, color, or national origin as the basis of *placement decision*. However, the law does not prohibit targeted recruitment of foster or adoptive parents from specific racial or ethnic groups. But “targeted recruitment cannot be the only vehicle used by a State to identify families for children in care, or any subset of children in care, e.g., older or minority children.”
- **Consider recruiting more parents willing to foster/adopt.** In response to the time frames talked about in ASFA and North Carolina’s own goal of finding a permanent home for every child within one year, more agencies are finding it beneficial to seek families who are willing to consider adopting their foster child.
- **Be careful how you use culture in assessing foster and adoptive parents.** Agencies should not use routine cultural assessments or generalizations about a parent’s cultural group in a manner that would circumvent the prohibition against the routine consideration of race, color, or national origin. Consideration of a family’s preferences and competence with regard to culture and race is only permissible *within the context of individualized placement decisions*.
- **Offer cultural competency training and support for parents.** Parents who foster or adopt children of an ethnicity different from their own may benefit from training that shows them how to help their children stay in touch with their ethnic and cultural heritage.
- **Make it clear to birth parents** or other family members that you cannot honor a request to place a child with foster or adoptive parents of a particular race or ethnicity. This is true regardless of whether the child was voluntarily or involuntarily placed with DSS.
- **Ensure that home-finding agencies** your agency contracts with understand that they may not dissuade or otherwise counsel a potential foster or adoptive parent to withdraw an application or not pursue foster parenting or adoption, even if he or she has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills.

Source: “Answers to GAO QUESTIONS Regarding the Multiethnic Placement Act” <<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/policy/im9803a.html>>

adopted child did not qualify for federal aid as an individual. SAFE would also allow Social Security Income to follow adopted children to new families if their caretakers died or the adoption was dissolved for any reason (NACAC).

Other legislation currently before Congress would require states to review the status of foster children every six months, rather than once a year as current law demands (NACAC). *Practice Notes* will keep its readers up to date on legislative developments in this area.

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Register to attend “Measure Twice, Cut Once: Using MEPA/IEP to Develop Foster Family Recruitment and Retention Strategies.” Offered by the N.C. Division of Social Services, Children’s Services Section, this three-day training session teaches you how to plan and implement an effective, inclusive, and non-discriminatory foster parent recruitment effort in your county. For more information consult your fall 1999 staff development training calendar.

A PROFILE OF CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS WHO STAY

In 1993 researcher R. Reagh conducted a small study of child welfare workers who had been in the field for at least five years. Although the sample consisted of only 18 respondents, this study is interesting because it identifies a number of characteristics shared by those who stayed with their agency after the “honeymoon.”

Those who stayed, Reagh found, like to feel needed, to make a difference, and to be quiet contributors. They also shared similar credentials—each had either earned a BSW or related degree or were license-eligible in Ohio. And all but one of the respondents had personal reasons for being in a helping profession: they had experienced victimization, the death of someone close to them, illness, or disability and felt these factors led them to the field. They felt that as child welfare workers they could make things better for children and families who, like themselves, had difficult experiences.

The social workers in Reagh's study found meaning in their work, despite their chaotic environment. They felt supported by their colleagues and supervisors and attempted to do their jobs as creatively as the system allowed. Although all of the participants reported feelings of burnout at some time in the past, they felt the maturing they had done personally and professionally made coping easier.

Reagh, R. (1994). Public child welfare professionals: Those who stay. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 21(3), 69–78.

BOOST YOUR JOB SATISFACTION



1. Take time regularly to renew your commitment to your work.
2. Learn as much as possible from interactions with children and your colleagues.
3. Talk to supervisors or experienced workers who seem to be enjoying what they are doing. Watch and learn from them.
4. Pay attention to your physical health, stay in shape, and eat and sleep well.
5. Be prepared. Take a little extra time to plan.
6. Take time to play.
7. Challenge yourself. Learn a new skill, pursue new ideas, and be creative.
8. Go after what you want. Think it through, develop a constructive proposal, and try it.
9. Focus on and savor the good moments with the kids, and laugh with your colleagues.
10. Join a professional association and meet others who have made child and youth care their mission.

Source: Krueger, M. (1996). *Job satisfaction for child and youth care workers*, (Third ed). Washington D.C.: Child Welfare League of America Press.

IN THIS ISSUE: TURNOVER IN CHILD WELFARE

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