

**Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Child Welfare Training
Training for Effective Child Welfare Practice in Rural Communities
Texas State University-San Marcos #90CT0126**

Final Evaluation Report December 29, 2008

I. Executive Summary

Overview of the program

The project developed and delivered a Master of Social Work program to qualified Child Protective Service (CPS) workers in rural areas of Texas. The program delivery used web-based technology, class instruction via interactive television, video-teleconferencing, electronic chat rooms, discussion groups, electronic library resources access, and was supplemented with in-person workshops. Students completed the MSW degree requirements on a part-time basis while maintaining their CPS employment. The curriculum accommodates the specific needs of rural realities.

Process and outcome evaluation findings

- This project has taken the Texas State University School of Social Work MSW program to the rural child welfare worker in his/her own community. The project team focused on five major goals as it prepared to deliver the MSW program on line:
 1. Increase the number of child welfare workers in rural Texas who hold the MSW degree, with specific training in rural child welfare issues and practice skills.
 2. Increase pre-service and in-service training content on effective rural child welfare practice.
 3. Develop a model Master of Social Work curriculum that is directly relevant to effective child welfare practice in rural communities.
 4. Develop and maintain service planning partnerships between the University, the local child welfare agencies, and rural community participants.
 5. Contribute to the knowledge base of delivering education for effective rural child welfare practice.

Lessons learned

- Teaching on-line is very different from classroom teaching. In the face-to-face classroom, for example, faculty can adjust their teaching to students' interests and can sometimes allow themselves the luxury of talking extemporaneously. On-line teaching is much more structured and must be minutely planned, with limited spontaneity on the part of faculty. It is an entirely different approach to teaching. Some faculty found that the format did not suit them well, while others were excited and challenged by on-line instruction.

Successful Strategies and Keys to Success

- The Texas State University School of Social Work is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The on-line MSW program incorporates the same curriculum, learning goals and objectives, types of assignments, and is taught by the same core, doctoral-degreed faculty as the on-campus program. The School can therefore demonstrate that the web-assisted MSW degree program for rural child welfare workers complies with CSWE standards and with the high standards of Texas State University's School of Social Work.

- Students who applied to this web-based MSW degree program were required to meet all admission requirements which apply to other MSW Regular-Track students. The public child welfare agency publicized the educational opportunity and interested individuals applied directly to the School. Applicants were evaluated by the same criteria as other MSW applicants, and were subject to the same admission processes. No student was given credit for life experience.
- In recognition of the fact that on-line education is only as good as the technology the students are using and their ability to use it, project staff made it clear to all program applicants exactly what type of technology students must have to participate in the program and provided them with training and with ongoing technical support on the technical tools and software being used. For the first cohort of students in the project, the public child welfare agency agreed to allow all students to use their office computers. This meant that students have ongoing technical support from both the University and from their public agency.
- The web-assisted MSW program is under the existing School administrative structure. Students directed all questions to their faculty advisor, who also administered the grant program. A student assistant worked exclusively with the on line students to address their concerns and to ensure that communication with the faculty advisor and other faculty members was seamless. The School also has a full-time Administrative Assistant assigned to the MSW degree program, and she is available to assist these students as well as on-campus students.
- In addition to paying the tuition of students participating in the on line MSW program, grant funds are used to purchase books, videos, and other teaching materials that will enhance education for all students. Funds are also used to bring in experts to assist faculty in improving and diversifying their pedagogical skills.
- In the template which is included on each Blackboard and TRACS site, the faculty have included a link to the Texas State Library, which assigns librarians to work with distance education efforts. Librarians have posted instructional material on items such as how to identify scholarly journals, how to locate and assess reputable materials on the web, and how to cite such materials. When they need assistance, students can communicate directly with the Library through instant messaging and other chat options, including email, or by calling the reference desk. They can also use TexShare, the state library program which allows Texas State students to check out material in any state-supported university library close to their home base.
- Students in the program have a faculty advisor (the Co-Principle Investigator for the grant) and are free to work with the faculty teaching them when they need to, or to contact the School Director if necessary. The project developed a template for all courses which addresses student rights, processes for termination, and other elements important for students to know. The template is included on all Blackboard/TRACS sites. In addition, these students received a copy of the MSW Student Handbook. Grading criteria are clearly delineated on the posted syllabi. The student organization includes the web-assisted students on its communication list, so these students know about University activities and are invited to participate to the extent possible.

Challenges

- The students participating in this program, for the most part, did not know one another when they enrolled. They were linked only by their commitment to child welfare, the rural

settings in which they practiced, their desire for education, and their internet sites. The faculty used the web to help them connect with each other through developing student web pages and on line icebreaker exercises. To help to achieve more of a sense of cohesiveness, the faculty also used grant monies to bring the students to campus for a weekend of face-to-face activities during the fall of the first semester and periodically thereafter. The first visit included orientation to the program, meetings with faculty, and opportunities to get together with each other in order to put names with faces. Students also met with the University librarians to receive instruction in on line research and with the Department of Instructional Technology to learn more about successfully using Blackboard and TRACS software. Later visits to campus included similar skill building experiences and focus groups where the students were given the opportunity to share their experiences in the program.

- While permission had been granted for students to use their office computers to access the on-line teaching platform, the agency firewalls and other security measures blocked out many Internet sites, including educational sites, and students were initially unable to access the Texas State University site on their office computers. Resolving this problem took extensive negotiation, but eventually, the agency unblocked the students' individual computers to allow the link to the Texas State teaching platform.
- While the state agency had agreed to support this web-assisted MSW degree program and agency leaders were supportive of the effort, support broke down initially at the level of mid-management when employees began working on their degrees that their supervisors and district administrators did not have. The faculty advisor and other participating faculty recognized the need to do a great deal of education and public relations with local child welfare agency management to ensure that students received the educational leave to which they are entitled, and the access to agency computer supports that they were promised.
- Originally, the course design relied heavily on the use of chat-rooms. Instructors quickly learned, however, that unstructured chat-room discussions can present major challenges for faculty. For example, in a Human Behavior and Social Environment class, students were assigned to read *Brokeback Mountain* and to discuss it on line. The 20 students posted 125 comments, many of them vigorous and provocative. Recognizing the limitations on their time and the inability to respond individually to so many comments, faculty found it necessary to set limits on how many postings faculty members would read and assess. Students can, however, continue discussing a topic among themselves until it is no longer of interest to them.
- Faculty learned the benefits of continually reminding students of the need to follow appropriate email etiquette. Since computer postings and chats have a feel of anonymity to them, students sometimes feel emboldened to say things in a more direct way than they would if they were face-to-face with one another. Both faculty and students had to learn to use the internet capabilities in ways that would not offend others.
- As with many social work educators, some Texas State faculty members were resistant to on line instruction. Though this resistance is being whittled away by increasing familiarity with the technology, there are still many social work educators who are skeptical of whether the internet is appropriate for teaching some professional content. For example, Texas State faculty continue to wonder how best to teach interviewing skills on-line. Originally, faculty had on line students develop their own role plays in their home communities, film them, and send in the tapes for faculty review and analysis. With improving technology and increasing skill on the part of faculty and students, students are now able to do role plays and get feedback in real time on line.

II. Introduction and Overview

Overview of the community, population and problem

The degree was offered through Texas State University-San Marcos (formally Southwest Texas State University). Texas State's fully accredited MSW program, with a mission of preparing professionals for public sector work, has a distinguished record of educating child welfare practitioners, particularly for practice in rural areas. Furthermore, the School of Social Work at Texas State had already graduated, in partnership with University of Houston-Victoria, two cohorts of MSW students in Victoria, Texas via a combination of in-person and electronically transmitted instruction.

The existing Administrative Leadership specialization curriculum of Texas State's MSW program provided the basic structure of the proposed degree program, though course content was modified to increase its direct relevance to rural child welfare practice. For example, the two social policy courses will be focused on the impact of current and proposed policies on rural residents and the services they receive, and methods of using local strengths to influence policy development and interpretation. Practice and research courses included community development projects such as initiating community-based efforts to analyze local needs and stimulate efforts to develop needed services. Two new courses were developed to focus on Issues in Rural Practice and Methods of Rural Community Organization. Curriculum was developed by the MSW Curriculum Committee, a committee of CPS senior staff, and a national committee of recognized experts in the areas of child welfare, rural practice, and distance education.

Applicants to the program met Texas State Graduate School standards and School of Social Work admission criteria, which tend to favor practitioners in public agencies, and required the endorsement and cooperation of agency superiors.

Educational Challenges of Logistics

- Texas is an extremely large state which covers some 268,000 square miles. In such a huge state, distances between points can be enormous. The nine universities in Texas offering the MSW are all located east of or near Interstate 35, which runs from Dallas down through Waco, on to Austin, San Antonio, and points south. Potential MSW students in vast areas of the state, particularly west Texas (which covers approximately 130,000 square miles and is predominantly rural), would have to travel 300 to 500 miles and more to the nearest university offering an MSW program.
- As a further indication of the vastness of the geographic area targeted by this project, the largest city in west Texas is El Paso (population 550,000). El Paso is nearly 1000 miles from Beaumont, another community in west Texas, and it is closer to Los Angeles than it is to Austin. The next largest city is Lubbock (population 180,000), which is closer to Chicago than it is to Houston.
- Such vast geographical distances present major barriers to rural child welfare workers who are interested in furthering their education. In order to pursue their MSW degree, they would have to leave their jobs and their families for up to two years, totally disrupting their workplace and their home life. For the majority of rural child welfare workers, especially for the significant

portion of the workforce who are mothers of dependent children, this kind of “dislocation” is impossible.

- Most social work education programs, as well as the majority of policies which shape those programs, ignore the fact that rural practice differs significantly from urban practice in a number of ways. Rural culture tends to be based on more conservative values, more informal relationships, and more fluid time schedules. Formal resources for families and children are few and far between, if they exist at all. Policies and practices need to be modified and informal resources need to be tapped in order to accommodate these differences and to achieve effective practice in rural child welfare.
- A strong partnership exists between the Texas State University School of Social Work and public child welfare agencies in Texas. For 14 years, through Title IV-E funding, the School and its Center for Children and Families (CCF) have been providing child welfare education, in partnership with the Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) agency. For 8 years CCF has sponsored an annual Child Welfare Roundtable, which has grown dramatically in attendance and reputation.
- At the time of the Program Announcement, the School had received numerous requests from a number of outlying communities for extension MSW programs. While the school was able to honor some of these requests, there were simply not enough resources to honor them all. The work of this grant is in response to those requests for advanced professional social work education for state agency staff in rural areas. The online MSW program offers many rural child welfare staff the opportunity to pursue their MSW degrees which they would not have otherwise.
- The students in the cohort were indeed diverse. They were African American, Hispanic, and Anglo. They range in age from 24 to 51, with the majority being in their 20s and 30s. They represent different interests and talents. One raises mules. One has written successful screen plays. Another is a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and another is the minister of a small rural church. One lives in a 1950s Sears Kit Home, which she is retrofitting to a 1960s décor. Another is a US Army veteran who served in Desert Storm. Two others, also members of military families, are living in Europe while participating in the program.
- Without exception, the students were very clear that, without this project, they would not have been able to pursue their degrees. Distance made it impossible for them to commute to a school offering the MSW and they were not in a position to be able to give up their jobs and relocate or to live on campus.
- One student shared that she was an on-campus student initially. She then had a child whose special needs are such that she had to quit work and stay at home to provide care. Baby sitters and child care were not an option for her. Without the program, she would have had to drop out of school and give up her dream of obtaining an MSW degree, but she was able, instead, to move into the distance learning program and continue her education from home while caring for her child.
- Another student, a single mother, said that she could never have afforded to pursue an MSW degree without this program in which her tuition and books are paid by the grant, and she has access to an agency computer for her studies.
- Several of the students in the cohort were first-generation college students. Faculty members understand their issues because over half of the School’s faculty are also first-generation college students.
- Most of the students say they are “lifers” with the public child welfare agency. They are all very committed to their communities and to their jobs.

- One student supervised child welfare workers in a district in which four child deaths had occurred within a year. The judge involved in the cases had been so disturbed by the incident that he has taken an indefinite leave from the bench. Those students hoped that the program would help them develop strategies to deal with the seriously traumatized employees within their agencies.
- Students also spoke of the challenges of participating in the program. As CPS workers, they report that they already work 60 hour weeks. Finding study time is sometimes very overwhelming. Additionally, on line education is really a self-learning process that requires strong motivation and a lot of self-discipline. Students need to be made aware of this up front. They also reported missing the regular face-to-face contact and interaction with other students that is routine for on-campus students

Overview of Program Model

- The MSW-level rural child welfare specialists trained in their own rural communities via technology-facilitated distance education.
- Most of the students reported that they plan to continue their careers in rural child welfare services.
- Various student projects had secondary effects to their rural communities (described below).
- The MSW curriculum of Texas State University's School of Social Work was modified to make it directly relevant to effective rural social work practice in the field of social work.
- The program was successful as 22 students from the "Rural Distance Education Program" graduated with a Master of Social Work degree in August of 2008 (this included students from the original cohort and the self-pay students who were admitted, an indicator of the sustainability of the program). A second (and third) cohort of distance education, MSW students began in August of 2008.
- The knowledge gained from the project has been disseminated through articles in professional journals, conference presentations, and teaching modules.
- A strong partnership already existed between the School of Social Work and the Texas public child welfare agencies. The School and its Center for Children and Families (CCF) has been providing child welfare education through IV-E funding. The project strengthened the existing partnership by responding to the child welfare agencies' requests for professional social worker education for state agency staff in rural areas, areas they identified as having the greatest need.

Overview of the Evaluation

- A primary measurement in regard to increasing the number of child welfare workers who have the MSW degree with specific training in child welfare issues and practice skills in rural Texas were the number of students who were recruited, admitted, and who were Program graduates.
- The number of modules developed that specifically addressed rural child welfare issues was another measurement used in determining the pre-service and in-service training content on effective rural child welfare practice in rural regions of Texas. Pre- and post-tests of in-service participants indicated a marked improvement.
- A course-by-course review of curriculum and teaching materials was used as a measurement in developing curriculum that was directly related to effective child welfare practice in rural communities. End of course evaluations, evaluation of student performance in field placements,

and employer evaluations of graduates were all measurements used to review and revise the MSW curriculum and methods of delivery.

- Satisfaction surveys, task group involvement in student-initiated projects were used as another measurement to develop and maintain the relationships and partnerships between the local child welfare agencies, and rural community participants. The start of a new cohort is also another indicator of the success, as well as the satisfaction surveys from both students and field agencies indicating positive responses to the program and its goals.

III. Project Implementation/ Process Evaluation

Increase pre-service and in-service training consultant on effective rural child welfare practice.

- The School followed its normal application process and employed its usual application criteria to select a cohort of 20 child welfare staff who held baccalaureate degrees in fields other than social work. These individuals came from across the state, from such areas as Del Rio (across the border from Mexico), from the rural area around Corpus Christi on the Gulf, from small communities in far north Texas close to New Mexico and Oklahoma, from wide places in the road in the desolate Midland area, from remote areas in east Texas closest to Arkansas and Louisiana. Students lived as far as 800 miles away from Texas State campus in central Texas, and many had never seen the campus.

Output

Number of curricula developed and/or amended 24

Number of hours of training provided 1661

Percent Total- 100%

Short-term outcome

Number of curricula that are requested by an organization 27

Total number of curricula developed 24

Percent Total- 100%

Number of individuals who complete a traineeship with increased knowledge, skills, or awareness.

22 individuals total (16 grant funded individuals and six individuals who joined the cohort as private pay)

Total number of individuals who completed a traineeship 22

Percent Total – 100%

Intermediate Outcome

Number of individuals that complete traineeships who are currently employed at a child welfare agency

15 individuals are currently employed at Child Protective Services, one student transferred to a foster care agency and continues to work closely with Child Protective Services, two students work with in military social work with children and families, one works in a children's hospital, and one works with the Veterans Administration.

Total number or individuals that completed a traineeship 22

Percent Total - 100%

IV. Project Outcome Evaluation

Goals:

1. Increase the number of child welfare workers who have the MSW degree with specific training in child welfare issues and practice skills in rural Texas.
2. Increase pre-service and in-service training content on effective rural child welfare practice in rural regions of Texas.
3. Develop a Master of Social Work curriculum that is directly relevant to effective child welfare practice in rural communities.
4. Develop and maintain service planning partnerships between the University, local child welfare agencies, and rural community participants.
5. Contribute to the knowledge base of how to deliver training for effective rural child welfare practice.

Outcome No.1

Increase the number of child welfare workers in rural Texas who hold the MSW degree with specific training in rural child welfare issues and practice skills.

- 22 students were involved with the project, 14 CPS employees, one former CPS employee who moved into the private pay category and 7 additional advanced-standing students outside of the CPS cohort.
- 22 students graduated with a MSW degree, 1 graduated in May 2008, and the other 21 graduated in August 2008. During the August 2008 graduation, State Senator Judith Zafirini recognized the cohort during her graduation address, saying that two of the graduates live in her largely rural district, and that their services are sorely needed in the area.
- Most students reported that they plan to continue their current employment with the agency.
- The political environment surrounding Child Protective Services involved workforce issues that have been identified as important performance indicators, low retention, high stress, and increasing workloads. Many of the students were also involved in assisting FLDS children and mothers in El Dorado, Texas. Additional problems of recent hurricane disasters resulting in approximately 300,000 displaced person from neighboring states relocation to a relatively concentrated geographic area of Texas. This along with the concurrent problems of natural disaster relief in Texas and the on-going workforce issues, lead to exceptional professional and personal demands for the participating students. The direct result on the performance outcome was loss to attrition of students.
- This project has taken the Texas State University School of Social Work MSW program to the rural child welfare worker in his/her own community, allowing him/her to maintain employment and to remain with his/her family, throughout the degree program, and providing a curriculum that accommodates the specific needs of rural realities.
- Several evaluations measures were implemented to elicit feedback from the students. A qualitative survey found that students were pleased with the program. Comments included:

I aspire to have a Program Director position with my current agency so as long as the PD position is the sage of service that I enjoy working. Otherwise I prefer to grow in my current position as Supervisor.

I have been with the state for eleven years

I will stay with the agency until I retire

I will be a licensed MSW working with CPS (Child Protective Services)

I will be in Early Childhood Intervention- completing social work visits with families

In five years I will be eligible for retirement with CPS. I plan on working in the community/contracting with CPS and provide the services I see they need.

Hopefully I will be working as an administrator (in the agency).

I will probably still be with CPS; I only have seven years to retire

Focus groups with the students during the campus visits revealed much of the same information. Students reported they were “lifers” with the agency and they had plans to continue with the agency.

Outcome No. 2

Increase pre-service and in-service training content on effective rural child welfare practice in rural regions of Texas.

22 students graduated with a MSW. Students created pre-service training modules for child protective service personnel in rural counties of Texas. The original plan was to develop five; however more were produced as a result of their placement sites. A final evaluation component included a field instructor evaluation. All students received high scores. Besides the specific courses developed for Rural practice, and the in-service modules, there were some of the secondary pre-service and in-service training that occurred by the students in their agencies. Here are some of the comments from the:

(Student) has been involved in researching various topics/strategies for the implementation of Pay it Forward and the Organization work group. She has completed a Pay it Forward Survey for new staff to complete, and is in the process of developing and instrument to compile the data for the surveys. (Student) has created an instrument to gather data from the new staff participants. The survey was sent to new staff since September of 2007 who have participated in the Pay it Forward Program. The Data has been reviewed and presented at the Training Council Meeting.

(Student) has assisted in monitoring cases for compliance with federal, state, and local regulations in this special FLDS assignment. She has been instrumental in assisting in the review of statistics as well as identifying potential correlative issues and identified strategies for affecting outcomes. She has enhanced her understanding of how the agency has attempted to be culturally sensitive to this population in the training of all staff who have

interacted with the population on a direct and indirect way, as well as training providers about the culture who would be providing services to the families.

(Student) has continued to grow in the area of human diversity. (Student) uses cultural sensitivity in her work within the agency and she helps other staff develop skills in this area.

(Student) has developed a good understanding of the disparity issues within the child welfare system and is working with regional management to develop/implement a regional strategy to address those issues.

(Student) has become a trainer during this experience. She has excellent communication skills and is able to speak with people at all levels of the organization. She also was able to demonstrate her ability to speak with large and small groups of diverse individuals within the community. She has good organizational skills and understands the dynamics associated with training adults.

(Student) has provided quality service to CPS clients and at the same time helped CPS staff in overcoming obstacles and prepared them to be better caseworkers by training them to using the strengths perspective when working with culturally and ethnically diverse populations. She is an advocate for social justice and change in Child Protective Services. She was working with the Citizen's Review Team and was able to evaluate CPS interactions with the community and working on their recommendations to better serve the public.

Outcome No. 3

Develop a Master of Social Work curriculum that is directly relevant to effective child welfare practice in rural communities. Students reported that they were more confident in their positions as a result of the training they received; they felt clients in rural communities would be better served, not only by their practice, but by dissemination their knowledge with colleagues.

A course by course review of curriculum and teaching materials was conducted by the faculty. Each course that was modified or created to make it directly relevant to effective rural social work practice in the field of child welfare practice in rural communities.

Technology-facilitated course curricula was developed with the assistance of the Instructional Technology department to enhance distance education to MSW students in rural areas (with the assistance of nationally recognized consultants and advisory board members).

The curriculum through its use in the first cohort of MSW practitioners with expertise in rural child welfare services.

The curriculum was reviewed and revised, including methods of delivery, and prepared for the second (and third) cohort of MSW distance education students, that started in August of 2008.

The curriculum was approved by the local and national advisory groups. 95% of students gave positive evaluations each course. 100% of employers gave positive evaluation of graduates.

Outcome No. 4

Develop and maintain service planning partnerships between the University, local child welfare agencies, and rural community participants.

A project advisory committee was created using rural child welfare administrators and community stakeholders. Students were required to create and work with local task groups around specific child and family issues as part of their practice and policy course requirements.

Local welfare agencies and community constituents in the evaluation of the Project.

The school continues to seek advice and assistance of local child welfare agencies and rural community participants in an on-going partnership to maintain the momentum of the Project. Some of our graduating students will continue to provide input.

Local agencies have documented encouragement to continue the project beyond the funded period. The second (and third) cohort includes students who are part of the IVE project which will assist with student stipends.

Satisfaction surveys are 90% positive

Outcome No. 5. Contribute to the knowledge base of how to deliver training for effective rural child welfare practice.

- Faculty members reported that they consider themselves better teachers as a result of this experience. Instead of focusing on *what* to teach, they now think about the most effective ways of *imparting knowledge*. For example, through video streams they are able to have well-known guest lecturers they would never be able to bring on campus for lectures. These lectures can then be used for multiple classes over time. And, of course, campus students benefit just as on line students do. This is just one of the methods they have identified for teaching in ways that can contribute to traditional, face-to-face classes as well as to on line teaching.
- The School now has a TRACS project site for School faculty. This is essentially a learning community where they post and share teaching material, ideas for web-based teaching activities, and comments on how course problems have been solved. Faculty can examine this material and use it in their courses.
- The school has maintained thorough and evaluative notes and records of the process of the Project. Knowledge gained from the project has been disseminated through articles in professional journals, conference presentation, and modules of teaching, Conference presentations have been local, regional, and national. Some articles are still in the process of review. Requests for presentations continue. Interest in the program has grown; over 400 individuals sought information on the program and over 300 of them submitted an application for the Fall 2008 program.

V. Conclusions

The project had a tremendous impact on children, families, and communities. Students reported that they plan to continue working in the child welfare agencies, and some responded that they aspire to become a program director with the agency. As part of the final field experience, students were required to complete a macro project. The follow are abstracts from their final

macro projects which demonstrate secondary effects of the program to the rural communities in which they provide service:

Cultural Competency Training and Disproportionality

Disproportionality, defined by the article as the over-representation of children of color in the child welfare system, has been an issue of discussion for 30 years and only recently Texas passed Senate Bill 6 to study the problem within the state in order to develop strategies to address problem areas. The state of Texas partnered with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond to provide training ("Undoing Racism") to improve cultural competency of child welfare workers and effect issues of disproportionality. The research question: Does the "Undoing Racism" training have an impact on investigative decision making with regard to African American Families? The results of the study suggest that the training did not impact the investigative decision making process with regard to race. Research was limited to one county, a small sample size, and limited timeframe. The study was an attempt to highlight the lack of information regarding initiative to address disproportionality and recommends future studies involving wider longitudinal studies to develop a clear understanding of how and where to apply resources to most effectively impact disproportionality within the child welfare system.

CPS and Communities Working Toward Permanency

After obtaining interview surveys from staff that work within and alongside CPS in XXXXX and XXXX counties (Texas) and also collecting historical data about the services offered in the mentioned counties, this article brought to light the limitation of services within the community and the need for awareness of these limitations. Because of community limitations concerns arose about the children in the CPS system remaining in substitute care for too long and minimal services available to assist families in rural counties). As a result of the research and investigation, awareness was raised in agencies about the poor resources provided. In the end, to provide for the best interest of the children and families in care collaboration by all local agencies is required and resources can be recruited to provide appropriate services.

Evaluating the Mentoring Program in Children's Protective Services

The retention of child welfare workers within the Child Protective Services (CPS) systems is a nationwide problem that has existed for decades. This article explores the research, possible solutions to employee retention and possible implementation of a mentoring program. This mentoring program focuses on retention of caseworkers in the investigation stage of service, and provide tenured workers (with a positive performance record) to pair with new workers. Evaluation of the mentoring program (surveys sent via e-mail to participants) was also necessary in determining the effectiveness of the program. AS a result of the research and program outcomes, a formal Retention Program was created. This is in conjunction with DFPS' goal to employ highly motivated, diverse, ethical, well-trained and professional staff who are committed to the agency's mission and prepared to produce successful outcomes.

Client's Perspective on What Impacts Behavioral Changes in a Therapeutic Environment/Setting

This article examined client's perceptions on what impacts behavioral changes while in the clinical setting. More specifically the article aimed to study the clients enrolled in the

U.S. Army Department of Substance Abuse (DSAS) to identify the components of treatment that work best. Measures were based on the subjective experience of individuals within the group setting. The results confirm that there is a favorable correlation between the therapist and the client (by way of the therapeutic relationship) and the therapeutic relationship is a powerful determinant of the therapeutic outcome. Recommendations include regular use of client's input be considered as well as using a broader framework (sample size and long term group design).

Issues Affecting Military members and Their Families: Implications for Community Helping Agencies

Unlike wars of the past, America's military is made up of the most-married military members in modern history. This demographic shift has led to significant changes in need and concerns of military members. Leading issues cited by military members and their families include financial concern, educational concerns, child care issues, spousal satisfaction, frequent relocation (negatively impacts spouse's ability to graduate, continue career development, and become hired), lack of available jobs, and general quality of life issues (support, fairly assessed cost of living adjustments for foreign locations, and relationship issues and deterioration). Research survey tools were dispersed (through email) to non-deployed active duty personnel and their spouses (they each had different surveys specific to spouse or military personnel). Results of research found that residence (on base v. off base) plays a large role in ability of military member and family to identify with community and feel supported by their communities. Working, length of overseas deployment, and informal support also was a large factor in spousal satisfaction. The research findings are a starting point for change and further investigation into community building and support within the military.

Effectiveness in Productivity Reporting of Direct Service Staff within VA Social Service Programs: Crucial to America's Veterans

The Veteran's Administration social services programs have been pushed to provide quality care practices with a steady rate of productivity within these programs (medical and mental health services). Veterans make up twenty percent of the nation's population, and as the value of personal and professional autonomy, empowerment and collaborative decision making are on the rise, also rising is the need for evaluation for existing practices. This study provides a baseline of information on already existing practices among VA mental health providers. The information provided by this data will assist service staff to implement quality care while producing results. Data found that there are three methods for increasing productivity: training in self-management, individual self reflection, and the employees need for autonomy offered by direct supervisors. Community implications include that in order to enhance productivity self-management and autonomy is key in obtaining VA organizational goals.

Deployments Effect on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Among Military Families

Since 2003, there have been military personnel have experienced rapid deployments that range from 12-15 months, back- to-back, and in some cases open-ended return dates for both active duty and reserve military. Stress during wartime deployments as mentioned above can affect both military and their families. But, little is known about the effect this stress has on family functioning, and in particular incidences of family violence (domestic abuse and child abuse). Data found that although the deployment itself may not directly

increase incidence of family violence, it is the stress of separation, increased roles and responsibility for spouses and families, trauma endured by military, and emotions of anger, resentment, and anxiety that decrease military families ability to be resilient and utilize effective coping skills. The military community can utilize findings of this study to ensure that services are in place to meet the needs of families and couples during difficult times of transition.

Social Accounting in the 21st Century: An Integrated Approach for the Communities In School of South Central Texas

The integration of social performance measures and financial statements is rarely approached in today's nonprofit marketplace. Without sufficient knowledge of accounting and current gaps in the data required by the IRS, little is known to enhance economic and monetary value at the organizational level for a nonprofit organization in the U.S. Social accounting frameworks are not required in the qualitative measurement of nonprofit organizations, but this article demonstrates that advancements in the development of social accounting measures. These measures will provide useful financial assessments for both funders and policy makers by providing a clear understanding of the economic impact that in-kind contributions, the value added to the organization by volunteers, and agency specific primary and tertiary outputs have on a nonprofit agency. The research lead to implementation of social accounting measures to Communities In Schools of South Central Texas, and has given that non-profit agency the edge needed to access additional donor dollars through visual account of performance and mission output measures.

The Challenge of Obtaining Permanency for Children in CPS Conservatorship

Problems with obtaining permanent outcomes for children in the Conservatorship of Child Protective Services (CPS) have been identified as challenges to the agency. These issues that act as barriers to child permanency include child demographics, disproportionality, Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, and lack of CPS/contracted placements. Data from a survey pertaining to issues faced by CPS staff in permanency planning goals for children was gathered and analyzed. Data revealed that CPS was a sufficient system to meet the permanency needs of children and youth, but only with proper training and utilization of existing resources the agency could become completely effective.

Citizens Review Teams: Visible Changes to Child Protective Services Policy, Practice and Procedure

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) developed a Citizens Review Team (CRT), under the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, in order to evaluate department casework and decision making related to investigations of child abuse and neglect. The purpose of each review team involved: evaluating the adequacy of the investigation, identify barriers to the protection of the children, assess compliance with program policy, and identify staff needs in the areas of training, supervision, and program management. The purpose of this research is to provide results of the CRT recommendations with regard to child protection laws, policies, and practices on a state and national level. Results reviewed explain that both CRT and CPS personnel felt that CRT input was valuable, positive and successful. Recommendations are shared with local administration, providing rich and immediate feedback on the local level. The article also finds the value in finding a CRT that it is representative of its community to ensure the community can most benefit from the CRT.

Disproportionality: The Impact of Addressing Disproportionality on Staff and Families

African-American children are over-represented in the foster care system, are more likely to be removed from their homes, stay in foster care system longer, and are less likely to be reunified with their families (or adopted). The analysis reported in this research describes the impact that Senate Bill 6 (as passed by the 79th Texas Legislature) has had in addressing disproportionality and disparate outcomes for families and children involved with Child Protective Services. Impacts can be seen related to child removals, enforcement actions, reviewed policies and procedures, and development of plans to find solutions to unequal treatment. Since the implementation of diproportionality work, 40% of CPS service delivery staff will have completed cultural competency training and African American children placed with family members have increased 13.7%. More education of staff about disproportionality is required and staff needs to be informed of results of Senate Bill 6 and how they can work to improve the outcomes for African American families.

Adoption Preparation and Celebration: Tools for Minimizing the Risk of Disruption

As a result of legislation affecting achieving timely permanency for children in Child Protective Services (CPS), the number of children adopted from foster care has nearly doubled (in the US). State welfare agencies are focused on outcomes for the children and families they serve and stakeholders are focused on achieving results (for their own public investment). An Adoption Preparation Group in regions 2 and 9 of Child's Protective Services of Texas was established to work to prepare children and adoptive families for the changes they will experience throughout the adoption process, as well as create wraparound services to support these new families. The Adoption Preparation Group initiative enabled CPS and the community to consider the needs of individual adoptees and their families as well as to promote awareness in the community for the children still in need of adoptive placement. Interest generated within the community will help generate a new cycle of educating community members and will spur interest with a new set of community members.

CPS Worker's Perspective: How to Improve Retention

Retention and turnover rates within Child Protective Services which encompass the fourteen counties in the Waco/Bryan/College Station area have historically been an ongoing issue. Both, retention and turnover rates can have a major impact on the permanency, safety, and well being of children, parents, and families. Research was gathered from newly hired CPS caseworkers regarding perceptions of what would be helpful and necessary to improve the likelihood of becoming successful in their jobs. The duties and responsibilities of CPS caseworkers are difficult and turnover and retention is a serious challenge for the agency. The caseworkers who participated in the study believe that resource guides and focus groups are the most effective with future hires. This study clearly indicates the need for additional research related to perceptions of retaining caseworkers and working with CPS to attract and retain employees.

DFPS Region XXXX Parent Collaboration Group: Development and Evaluation

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services agency has developed the statewide Parent Collaboration Group (PCG), which functions under a statewide committee in conjunction with at least one local group in every region of the state of Texas. A growing

body of research indicates that not much practice or research on the subject of parent leadership or affording birth parents previously or currently involved with the child welfare system a real opportunity to have positive or proactive input into the child welfare system. This research evaluates the development of regional application of the PCG and findings of its impact on child outcomes, parental leadership, and agency support. Results of parents attending monthly regional meeting and filling out several surveys found that parents felt that workers had too many cases and were responsible for too many case related tasks. Research suggested that offered the opportunity and resources, parents (who have been recipients of CPS services) will fully participate in a support group, maintain family unity, and affect policy and practice.

Peer Mentoring as a Strategy to Train Child Protective Services Caseworkers

One of the current issues facing Child Protective Services (CPS) is the ability to retain experienced staff in order to enhance positive outcomes for children and families. A peer mentoring program, titled 'Pay It Forward,' was developed in order to aid Child Protective Services in the training of new casework staff. The focus of this research was to implement outcome measures to determine if the mentoring program was effective for CPS in training its new employees. Results indicated that the mentoring program contributed to a 12% reduction in turnover of new staff, as well as reports of satisfaction in all other areas surveyed. A focus group enabled the research to gain recommendations in the program like better mentor/mentee matching, recognizing differences in learning styles, and educating the mentee on reasonable expectations from the mentoring relationship.

A Qualitative Study of Job Retention in Child Protective Services: Those Who Survive and Thrive

The pervasive crisis of employee turnover in the public child welfare agencies throughout the country have been well documented and often debated. This study presents the personal and organizational factors that long-term employees of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Service (DFPS)-Child Protective Services (CPS) named as having enabled them to survive and thrive in their stressful work environment. Recommendations of these committed employees for those newly hired in the agency include the importance of relationships with supervisors, demographic variables (experience, age, gender, and education), coworker support, and caseload size.

The Impact of In-kind Contributions: Hidden Assets for Wellington Opportunity Center, Inc.

Financial information is an important ingredient in determining the health of any business; however many non-profit organizations, especially smaller operations may have limited skilled knowledge of non-profit financial management and reporting process. The Wellington Opportunity Center, Inc. (WOCI) is a smaller operation with an after school and summer youth program serving a rural community of less than 3,000 residents. As opportunities for funding continue to remain competitive, the accuracy and quality of financial reporting is vital in presenting a precise picture of the actual cost of doing business in the non-profit world today. This study is a discussion to address the impact of including in kind/noncash contributions for nonprofit financial reporting, specifically in regards to the WOCI.

Border Crossing Issues Encountered by Non-Citizen Caretakers at Driscoll Children's Hospital

Currently, countless families are being torn apart because undocumented workers come to the US and give birth to children whom are given the rights as American Citizens. Parents of these children have no such status and deportation can mean orphaning a child. Present immigration systems do little to protect the best interests of children and keep families together. This research study was an attempt to shed light on current deportation issues experienced by families at Driscoll Children's Hospital (DCH) in Corpus Christi, TX. DCH is a non-profit organization close to the Texas-Mexico Border. This research provides histories provided by social work and transport team staff members to gather details pertaining to what families are experiencing at Border Patrolman Checkpoints. Due to inflexible immigration laws and strict border security in South Texas, families of ill children being transported to the hospital are unable to care for them, and on occasion are being deported during a critical time in their child's life. Qualitative research gives insight to heart wrenching. Within the study four children passed away while at DCH and two of these children never experienced physical contact with family members. Based on the data provided by participants of the study, it is apparent that this issue is real and quickly becoming a common phenomenon.

Evaluation of Team Building: Does it Affect Employee Relationships and Work Outcomes in Child Protective Services?

In the last two decades the implications of team building on work environment have been studied pertaining to organizations and/or agencies. Some companies explore an expansive use of team building activities that range from socializing to out-of-country trips, while other organizations are simpler. Child Protective Services (CPS) does not employ a formal approach to team building, and it is up to the unit managers to decide if team building is appropriate. Research determined whether team building in units (within CPS) has a positive impact on employee relationships and work outcomes. Data indicates that there is not enough team building being done on a regular basis to be effective in encouraging employees to participate, improved work relationships, and work outcomes. As CPS strives for everyone to work towards a common goal, team building exercises could prove to be valuable if done regularly.

Evaluation of Social Services New Proactive Approach in Coordinating Care

Among the growing concerns about health care in the US, social workers too must adapt to ensure the survival of needed programs in the health care field and undertake different approaches to combat continual changes in budget, staffing, and policy. The Department of Social Services underwent changes in their approach to coordinating care for patients, and this research serves as an evaluation of the change in approach. The study took place at University Medical Center (UMC). The study involved collecting existing data by using Saved Days survey, which tracked time saved, interventions used, and the unit experiencing the time saved. In the healthcare field this proactive approach appears to be beneficial to patients and the hospital, and further research needs to be initiated across the US to provide better understanding regarding the best coordination care for patients and maintaining financial viability for the workplace.

*Family Team Meetings: Recidivism Rates for Family Team Meetings for the Texas
Department of Family and Protective Services*

Family Team Meetings allow families the opportunity to come together and work as a unit to find solutions to issues that affect the safety and well being of children who have been victimized by abuse/neglect. These meetings are utilized by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), specifically Child Protective Service (CPS) and are increasing in popularity across the United States. This research attempts to evaluate if family team meetings provide positive outcomes for families who participate in the process, thereby having lower recidivism rates with CPS. A total of 141 cases participated in Family Team Meetings during the period studied. Results show that Family Team Meetings have the ability to instill a sense of responsibility to the disempowered and hopeless and bring in a renewed energy of hope and strength by letting family systems makes decisions about how to overcome dilemmas. Further studies would be beneficial in determining if Family Team Meetings provide a reduction in the number of children entering the foster care system.

IV. Implications of Results and Recommendations

- Preparing a web-assisted curriculum is extremely labor-intensive, requiring a great deal of up-front work and preparation. Participating faculty receive a two-semester, one-course release to develop each on line course they teach. They are very excited about the process and have learned to create on line courses in a rigorous and exciting way, using streaming video and Adobe Connect, as well as web pages, whiteboard discussions, diagrams, color pictures, case vignettes, and on line role plays. They also hold on line chats and virtual office hours.
- Faculty have learned to clearly define expectations and procedures in web courses. Toward that end, Texas State faculty who were involved in the project developed several strategies:
 - They developed and posted on line etiquette for each class.
 - They created “Cyber Lounges” where students could talk with each other on their own time and at their own pace.
 - They used discussion threads, in which the instructor began the thread on a topic. Students must respond. In the normal face-to-face classroom, about one-third of students actively participate in class discussions, while the remaining students are generally quiet. In large classes, this lack of participation can be difficult for faculty to track. On the web, however, student responses are counted and electronically “stamped” with time and date of submission, so the instructor can see how often and when individual students participate and can follow up with those who do not. Students received credit for substantive participation.
 - As a way of combating the isolation of distance learning, faculty give frequent assignments or activities that require students to communicate, creating opportunities for students to “talk” electronically at least weekly. Virtual office hours with their advisor are available via web cam. Students were brought in to the San Marcos campus as a group on a fairly regular basis where they were given the opportunity to meet and get to know each other and the faculty as well as to participate in various learning and skill-building opportunities.
 - In a further effort to create a sense of camaraderie, early in the first semester students were required to construct their own web page, including a picture. The pictures students choose to include on their web pages are interesting and revealing. For

example, one student posted a picture of her eye, a picture which generated quite a bit of discussion. Students received credit for creating their own web page.

- Students received instruction about the elements of copyright law that apply to web-assisted learning.

Successful Strategies and Keys to Success

- The Texas State University School of Social Work is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The on-line MSW program incorporates the same curriculum, learning goals and objectives, types of assignments, and is taught by the same core, doctoral-degreed faculty as the on-campus program. The School can therefore demonstrate that the web-assisted MSW degree program for rural child welfare workers complies with CSWE standards and with the high standards of Texas State University's School of Social Work.
- The program was successful and there is a sustainability measure. Funding is still an issue, as most students reported that without the stipend they would not have been able to obtain the degree.
- Given the requests for professional social work education for state agency staff in rural areas, a distance education graduate social work program would fill the need. Developing, refining, and disseminating a specialize curriculum that addresses rural concerns will bring balance and will facilitate more effective responses to rural child welfare needs while maximizing the strengths of rural communities. Having better-educated professionals translates into better services to children and families. Better services ultimately result in financial savings and social health, because professionals are more effective and more satisfied; they are consequently less likely to leave their positions.
- Technology is expanding and it changed how we teach students online. The University Instructional Technology Office worked closely with the School of Social Work to create the course in a rigorous, exciting way, using streaming video and Adobe Connect.
- Texas State School of Social Work has learned enormous lessons from this project. It has materially changed how we teach and how we think about our horizons. Because the majority of faculty were all new to online teaching, we had to discipline ourselves to learn new teaching skills. We freed ourselves to think more broadly about how to transmit knowledge. We learned new skills about how to frame up a course with extreme attention to learning goals, and how to use non-traditional ways of relating to students and the material
- Mastering new skills has given the faculty a sense of pride. It has deepened our commitment to our mission of preparing students for public service. We have developed and strengthened ties to agencies across the state, and we will be broadening the scope of influence across the state and even national lines in the coming years. This project has been transformative for our School; we have pole-vaulted into the educational future and we feel poised to make a major contribution to social work education for many potential students.