

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Maryland Child Welfare Workforce Recruitment, Selection and Retention Study

Executive Summary

May 2007

Prepared in Collaboration with the Maryland Department of Human
Resources/ Social Services Administration

Louis L. Kaplan Hall • 525 West Redwood Street • Baltimore, MD 21201-1777 • 410 706 7790 • 410 706 6046 *fax*

Maryland Child Welfare Workforce Recruitment, Selection and Retention Study

University of Maryland, Baltimore
School of Social Work

Research Project Team

Karen M. Hopkins, Ph.D.

Associate Professor & Principal Investigator

Amy Cohen-Callow, MSSW

John A. Hartford Doctoral Fellow & Research Assistant

Greta Golden

Research Coordinator

George J. Barnes II

Research Analyst

Annette Salliey

Research Database Engineer

Chandra Morton

Research Administrative Assistant

Advisory Group

Patricia Blackwell

Office of Management Services, Department of Human Resources

Catherine E. Born, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor and Director

Family Welfare Research & Training Group, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Jim Cartwright, Ph.D., LCSW-C, Assistant Director

Baltimore City, DSS

Mike Demidenko, LCSW-C, Foster Care Supervisor

Baltimore County, DSS

Nancy Dickinson, Ph.D., Professor and Director
The Jordan Institute for Families at University of North Carolina

Cathy Dougherty, LCSW-C, Assistant Director for Services
Queen Anne's County, DSS

Jeffrey Johnson, Ph.D., Professor and Co-Director
Work and Health Research Center at the University of Maryland School of Nurses
Professor, Department Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the School of
Medicine

Jenny Jones, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Social Work

Debra Linsenmeyer, LCSW-C, Educational Director
Child Welfare Academy, University of Maryland, School of Social Work

Jennifer McMahan, MBA, SPHR, Director
Human Resource Development and Training

Pamela Ovwigho, Ph.D., Research Director
Family Welfare Research & Training Group, University of Maryland School of Social
Work

Debbie Ramelmeier, LCSW-C, JD, Assistant Director for Services
Frederick County, DSS

Judith Schagrin, LCSW-C, Assistant Director for Children's Services
Baltimore County, DSS

April Sharp, LCSW-C, Assistant Director Child Welfare and Workforce Support
Talbot County, DSS

Carnitra White, MSW, Deputy Executive Director
Social Services Administration

Joan Levy Zlotnik, Ph.D., ACSW, Executive Director
Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The University of Maryland, School of Social Work would like to thank all those who collaborated with us and contributed ideas, materials, and insights on the child welfare workforce. We would further like to acknowledge the following individuals, committees, and agencies for the support, encouragement, and dedication that made this research possible:

The **Maryland Department of Human Resources** who generously funded this research.

The Advisory Group who committed their time and energy to offer advice, suggestions, and feedback: Patricia Blackwell, Kerry Ahearn-Brown, Jim Cartwright, Mike Demidenko, Nancy Dickinson, Cathy Dougherty, Jeffrey Johnson, Debra Linsenmeyer, Jennifer McMahan, Pam Ovwigho, Alvin Parks, Debbie Ramelmeier, Judith Schagrin, April Sharp, Carnitra White, and Joan Zlotnik.

Local Departments of Social Services across the State of Maryland, whose cooperative spirits and assistance made our work a delight. Special thanks are extended to all the Human Resource managers, local agency directors and assistant directors, and individuals who helped coordinate the logistics for all of the focus groups across the state.

Many thanks to University of Maryland graduate students Michin Hong and Hae Jung Kim for participating conscientiously in our weekly team meetings and assisting with the focus groups and the report. Also, we would like to give a special thanks to Renette Cowan of the University of Maryland School of Social Work for her assistance.

Additionally, we gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators across the State of Maryland who shared their work experiences, perceptions, concerns, and valuable suggestions in the focus groups and in the surveys.

We give special thanks to Alberta Ellett at the University of Georgia, Helen Cahalane at the University of Pittsburgh, Hal Lawson and Mary McCarthy at SUNY Albany, Charles Glisson and Anthony Hemmelgarn at the University of Tennessee, Jessica Strolin at Yeshiva University, and Cathy Potter at the University of Denver for for sharing their research.

This study was completed for (and in collaboration with) the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR), Social Services Administration (SSA) through a contract with the University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work. The Maryland State Legislature mandated this study in HB 799, The Child Welfare Accountability Act of 2006. Funds for this study were provided by the Maryland Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration. ***Interpretations of the study findings and recommendations to DHR are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the study sponsors.***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In response to the growing national concerns about staff recruitment and turnover within the child welfare workforce, (GAO, 2003), Maryland has made a commitment to assess its current child welfare workforce situation. Recognizing the importance of this issue to the provision of quality care to children and their families, the Maryland state legislature passed House Bill 799/Senate Bill 792 (Child Welfare Accountability Act, 2006) mandating that the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) commission a twelve-month study on child welfare workforce recruitment and retention to be carried out by the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

Researchers in conjunction with DHR advisory members and experts in the field of child welfare research conducted a mixed-method study to better understand the current child welfare workforce situation. Data was collected to describe the child welfare workforce, to guide **actionable recommendations** for change, and to create baseline data for evaluating the success of any future change strategies implemented by DHR.

The findings from this research are consistent with previous research, (e.g., APHSA, 2005; Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; GAO, 2003), suggesting that Maryland DHR faces the challenge of growing turnover, continuous vacancies, and organizational factors (above and beyond personal/demographic factors) related to organizational withdrawal, a continuum of behaviors signaling potential turnover (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999). With this clearer picture of the current Maryland workforce situation, informed decisions regarding intervention strategies can be implemented to recruit, select and retain a talented child welfare workforce.

This report is structured to highlight key issues of interest. It describes the research methods and processes used to conduct the study, DHR turnover and vacancy trends over the last few years, caseloads, supervisor to supervisee ratios, and salaries for the current child welfare workforce (i.e. caseworkers, supervisors). Finally, individual and organizational factors related to withdrawal behaviors and turnover are highlighted through a presentation of themes that emerged from 21 focus groups with 203 case workers and supervisors from across the state, and from data gathered in an online survey completed by 561 Maryland DHR workers.

Study Methods

The focus and scope of this research was to:

- (1) Identify characteristics of the existing Maryland child welfare workforce;
- (2) Compare salaries of Maryland child welfare personnel (caseworkers, supervisors, administrators) with comparable personnel in other states and with other state government employees;
- (3) Establish the rate of caseworker turnover (overall and by agency/region) for a specified time period; and

- (4) Identify organizational, personal, and other factors contributing to retention or turnover.

Data collection was informed by a conceptual framework developed using findings from previous research literature, and tested Glisson’s organizational climate measures that have been refined over time, in order to verify their use with the current study population.

Multiple sources of data were utilized for this study that would allow the researchers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of employees’ perceptions and behaviors. Data was collected from the following:

- DHR and local agency databases,
- Self-report survey, and
- Focus groups, and
- Scanning for best/promising practices.

The self-report survey was created using valid and reliable measures related to the purposes of the study, and included questions about respondents’ perceptions of personal factors and organizational and environmental conditions that contribute to employees’ satisfaction, organizational commitment and identity, effort-reward balance, job and work withdrawal and intent to stay or leave public child welfare. A semi-structured set of key interview questions was developed for child welfare workers and supervisors for the focus groups to better understand current recruitment, selection and retention processes within the local departments and the central office.

Response rates were as follows:

- Survey - 992 child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators from local departments (23 counties, Baltimore City, and the central office of DHR)
- 561 completed a survey for a response rate of 56.5%.
- Focus groups - 332 randomly selected workers, supervisors and administrators proportional to each local department size to insure statewide representation;
- 203 participated for a response rate of 61%.

Overall, there was adequate geographical and demographic representation across the state for both survey and focus group participation (Table 1). The study participants also portray a relatively accurate representation of all child welfare employees in Maryland.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND MARYLAND CHILD WELFARE EMPLOYEES

	Gender		Race			Age	Salary
Child Welfare Employees	Women	Men	White	Black	Other	Mean	Mean
<i>DHR</i>	86%	14%	40%	53%	7%	45 years	\$44,997
<i>Study Participants</i>	89%	11%	53%	32%	15%	42 years	\$46,749

Study Findings

As a starting point to understanding the current state of the child welfare workforce in Maryland, data from DHR and local agencies were collected to create a complete database on information related to staff turnover, vacancies, caseloads/supervisor to supervisee ratios and salary. The following highlights key findings:

- The data collected to assess **turnover** covered 2004, 2005 and 2006 and indicated an upward trend over time as opposed to national turnover trends, which have held steady over the same time period. Many counties that did not necessarily follow this trend had significantly higher turnover than the state average losing approximately a quarter of its workforce, yearly. The results could not be broken down by preventable (i.e. talented people leaving as a result of discontent) and non-preventable turnover (i.e. death, firing) a useful piece of information for future analysis, due to limitations with the data.
- There appeared to be emerging seasonal trends for some local departments. In particular, while vacancies fell after December 2004 (about the time hiring increased), vacancies began to increase soon after. In general, it appeared that **vacancy rates** rose in the fall and in the early spring, and tended to decrease in the late spring and early summer (perhaps corresponding to availability and hiring of new Title IV-E and Masters of Social Work graduates). These trends warrant a continual collection of data, and inquiry and analysis as to the causes.
- Child welfare worker **caseloads** consistently have been found to be related to turnover in the child welfare workforce research. Therefore, researchers provided descriptive data on this key factor. Maryland caseworkers who participated in the surveys appeared to have, on average, comparable or lower caseloads (ranging from an average of 9.33 to 21.33 cases) than that reported by other studies on child welfare workers (APHSA, 2005; GOA, 2003). The data collected in this study may not include cases unofficially carried by staff covering for other workers on extended medical leave and as a result of vacant positions. Additionally, this data does not capture caseloads of those who have actually left the child welfare workforce (information that will be captured in the exit interview portion of the research that will be conducted next). What we do know from this data is that 114 (27%) of survey participants indicated that they carried an average caseload of 20 or more cases and that 46 of these workers reported an average monthly caseload between 30-60, caseloads well above the 12-15 cases recommended by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and above the 18 or less recommended by the Council on Accreditation (GOA, 2003).
- **Supervisor to staff ratios** are also of concern to the child welfare workforce and were described in this study. For all supervisors in the study, the mean number of workers supervised was 5.93 to 9.67. This is close to the 1:5 supervisor to employee ratio recommended by the CWLA and the 1:7 supervisor to employee ratio recommended by COA (GOA, 2003). This is only slightly higher than the

1:6 ratio reported by 18-23 out of 45 states responding to the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey Report (APHS, 2005).

- **Salaries** for child welfare professionals were raised as a critical issue by line workers and supervisors in the focus groups, and were reported as “inadequate” in the survey. The average FTE salary for line workers participating in the study is \$44,213 and ranges from \$26,692 to \$72,100. Overall, Washington County has the lowest average salary and Montgomery County the highest average salary. DHR Headquarter staff who participated in the survey and focus groups, and who indicated they were not supervisors, have an average salary of \$54,118. Child welfare line workers’ salaries were compared to Maryland government workers such as teachers, police officers, and nurses. In fact, these particular professions were often referenced and the disparity in their salaries identified by focus group participants. According to the average salaries reported in May 2005 by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics and converted into 2006 constant dollars, Maryland State elementary/secondary teachers, police officers, and licensed practicing nurses have average salaries that are higher than the average salaries for Maryland child welfare line workers.

The average FTE salary for Maryland child welfare supervisors participating in the survey and focus groups is \$54,477. The lowest salary is \$32,343 and the highest salary is \$87,700. Talbot County has the lowest average salary for supervisors. Montgomery County has the highest average salary for supervisors. On average, the 2006 adjusted salaries for state employees in supervisory positions in selected professions are higher than the average salaries for Maryland child welfare supervisors.

Current Recruitment, Selection and Retention Strategies (Focus Group Data)

A total of 21 focus groups were conducted with child welfare supervisors, workers, and administrators from across the state of Maryland. Each group discussion was tape recorded, transcribed and then coded for emerging themes related to current recruitment, selection and retention strategies/issues across the state.

Recruitment strategies identified include the following: job advertisements, state listings, internal recruitment, college recruitment, position incentives, and Title IV-E recruitment. Neither were they consistently implemented across the state, nor did anyone have any knowledge about their actual effectiveness.

Selection processes also varied across local departments: some local departments used group interviews, and others used individual interviews. Some local departments used standardized evaluation forms, and others did not. Some local departments included writing samples and role-play during interviews, and others did not.

There does not appear to be many universal **retention strategies** currently in place at DHR and the local departments. However, focus group participants offered views about what, at the agencies, either influenced retention or contributed to turnover identifying:

- **salary** as inadequate or unequal to those in other professions with similar status and qualifications (a reoccurring theme brought up in every focus group);
- **reward system** as inadequate and with no methods for rewarding *talented* staff;
- **training** is often inaccessible due to distance, funding, or time, or limited workshop content;
- **negative job experiences** such as dangerous home visits, unhealthy working conditions, inadequate and insufficient supplies (i.e. mobile phones, cars for visits, etc.),
- **negative experiences** with the court system;
- **increased stress** on the job related to more complex cases, ongoing vacancies, increasing requirements to complete administrative paperwork within a failing management information system (Chessie), and the negative image of child welfare workers in the community.
- **differences in generations** a reality of the current workforce such that younger workers changed jobs more often, not necessarily out of discontent with the work, but as a result of various factors such as moving locations, entrance and exit from the work force from child rearing, striving to earn more money, and less commitment to any one organization.

When focus group participants were asked, “*why do people leave,*” seven main themes emerged:

- (1) Chessie MIS,
- (2) dissatisfaction with supervision,
- (3) job location,
- (4) lack of money,
- (5) lack of professional development,
- (6) lack of respect, and
- (7) stress, burnout, and frustration.

When focus group participants were asked, “*why do people stay,*” seven corresponding main themes emerged:

- (1) the job,
- (2) money,
- (3) relationship with clients,
- (4) relationship with co-workers or supervisors,
- (5) retirement or benefits,
- (6) the type of work, and
- (7) waiting for a better job

Perceived Organizational Environmental Factors (Survey Data)

Child welfare survey respondents generally perceived:

- supervisors and coworkers as supportive,
- supervisors competent,
- supervisors willing to “stand up for” them or “back them up” when necessary,

- not being included in decision making, although most indicated that they had access to communication and feedback.

The overall perceptions of the “psychological” climate of the organization were mixed. Overall, respondents tended to report:

- peer cooperation,
- role clarity,
- personal accomplishment,
- relatively low levels of emotional exhaustion,
- relatively low amounts of role conflict,
- moderate concerns about safety,
- low depersonalization of clients,
- few opportunities for professional growth and career development,
- moderate stress from the external environment (negative impressions of the agency by service providers, media and community),
- moderate amounts of respect from other professionals, such as lawyers, judges, physicians, and teachers.

There were various differences in employees’ perceptions of the organizational environment and affective outcomes related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational identity, and effort-reward balance by position (line worker or supervisor), age, tenure, education, and agency size and accreditation status.

Behavioral Outcomes - Organizational Withdrawal and Search (Survey Data)

Organizational withdrawal is considered a more comprehensive measure of “turnover” in that it encompasses two subscales, **job withdrawal** and **work withdrawal**, that capture a continuum of behaviors indicative of turnover, transfer, and unfavorable behaviors that individuals engage in while still on the job (*i.e., absenteeism, lateness, neglecting tasks, failing to attend meetings, making excuses to go somewhere, etc.*) rather than the typical one or two items that inquire about intent to turnover (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999). The other behavioral outcome is **search behavior** that captures job search activities.

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the behavioral outcomes related to organizational withdrawal and search behaviors for all of the survey respondents. Employees at the worker-level and supervisor/manager-level report similar behaviors related to organizational withdrawal (Table 3). The data indicate that both report a moderately low level of intention to leave the organization or transfer out of their current work setting (*job withdrawal*). Both workers and supervisors report high levels of behaviors that would reflect disengagement with their work (*work withdrawal*) (Table 3). Finally, both workers and supervisors/managers report moderate amounts of current job search behavior.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR SEARCH AND ORGANIZATIONAL WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

Behavior Outcomes	Mean	SD	Alpha
Job Search behaviors	2.71 ¹	.92	.73
Job withdrawal (<i>turnover & transfer</i>)	4.46 ²	1.83	.84
Work withdrawal (<i>unfavorable behaviors</i>)	18.63 ³	5.37	.82

N = 561

¹ Scale of 1 to 5; higher scores indicate higher levels of each construct

² Job withdrawal scores range from 2 to 12

³ Work withdrawal scores range from 12 to 60

TABLE 3. ORGANIZATIONAL WITHDRAWAL AND SEARCH BEHAVIORS BY WORKERS AND SUPERVISORS

	Job Withdrawal (<i>Turnover and Transfer</i>)		Work Withdrawal (<i>Lateness, Absenteeism, and Unfavorable Behaviors</i>)		Job Search Behaviors	
	Mean ^a	SD	Mean ^b	SD	Mean	SD
Workers	4.44	1.81	18.7	5.69	2.71	.923
Supervisors/Managers	4.55	1.92	18.2	3.82	2.72	.910

^a Scale of 2 to 12, with higher numbers representing greater levels of job withdrawal.

^b Scale of 12 to 60, with higher numbers representing greater levels of work withdrawal

Factors Explaining Organizational Withdrawal and Search Behaviors for Maryland Child Welfare Employees (Survey Data)

Hierarchical regression analyses were performed on the survey data to determine what factors best explain employees' job withdrawal, work withdrawal, and search behaviors.

Job withdrawal behavior (intent to leave or transfer) is best explained by:

- high levels of “stress” (captured by emotional exhaustion, role overload and role conflict),
- low career commitment,
- low morale (job satisfaction and organizational commitment),
- being confident about finding a better job opportunity,
- being “non-white”, particularly African-American.

Work withdrawal behaviors (absent, late, not completing work, etc.) is best explained by:

- high levels of “stress”,

- poor engagement with clients,
- lack of accomplishment,
- low career commitment,
- being young (< 40 years old)

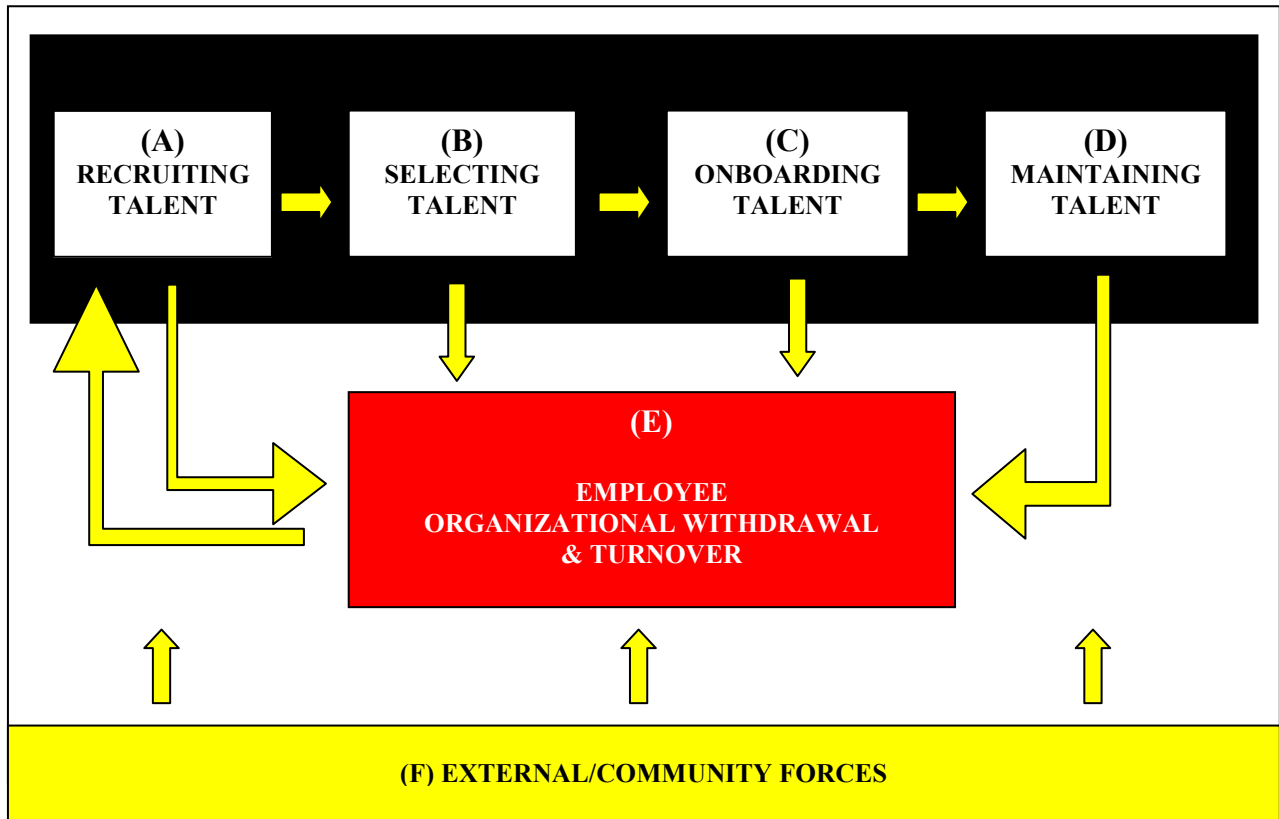
Search behavior (current job search activities) is best explained by:

- high levels of “stress”,
- low career commitment,
- few “esteem” rewards (respect and appreciation),
- higher caseloads,
- exclusion from decision-making,
- being confident about finding a better job opportunity,
- being “non-white”, particularly African-American

Conclusions and Recommendations

Survey and focus group data show that there are many positive practices and long-term committed, skillful employees within the Maryland Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration (DHR, SSA). However, a number of disconcerting findings tend to reiterate what several other child welfare workforce studies have discovered. The results support the idea that many factors occurring within this entire system affect workers’ behaviors. Emerging trends from focus groups complement many of the survey findings, as well as supplementing them. As a result, the following recommendations look at the entire organizational system (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES RELATED TO CHILD WELFARE WORKER WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS AND TURNOVER



External/Community Forces (Sidebar F)

(F) EXTERNAL COMMUNITY FORCES CONCLUSION

- Negative community image

It is widely accepted that organizations with excellent reputations experience less difficulty in recruiting and keeping talented employees while organizations with less favorable reputations struggle in this regard. The Maryland DHR, not unlike other public child welfare agencies, has struggled against a negative perception of “child welfare work” in communities across the state, sometimes fueled by the media, the family court system, and other legal and social entities. This public

image disadvantage seems to be an underlying factor in problems with recruitment and selection. These problems are compounded when the organization utilizes traditional, reactive recruitment practices that fail to provide a talented candidate pool “before it’s needed”.

Recruitment (Sidebar A)

While negative community image affects recruitment making it particularly challenging, reactive recruitment may not only narrow the available pool of candidates, but could also

result in selecting less than the most desirable employees to fill vacant positions (warm-body recruitment). Upon hire, a host of problems can ensue including:

- an inadequate understanding or preparation for the assigned job;
- perceptions of an organizational environment characterized by a lack of appropriate resources and support;
- work overload;
- concern about safety; and
- few perceived opportunities for input or growth.

These issues appear to culminate in organizational withdrawal behaviors – plans to leave or transfer, display of unfavorable behaviors that signal “checking out”, search for another job, and ultimately turnover.

Clearly, there are factors that are beyond the control of DHR, such as the personal characteristics, attributions, and career aspirations of employees, and geographical/community characteristics, etc. However, there are job and organizational factors that are within the control of DHR. While addressing some of these factors will take time and significant changes will be realized over the long-term (i.e., developing allies and advocacy strategies within the state legislature), others are more “actionable” and have the potential to bring about necessary changes in the short-term. **These “actionable” recommendations are outlined below.**



Conclusion: Recruitment for new employees needs to be more proactive, creative, and targeted to the appropriate markets and needs to take place within an environment where there is a more positive image of child welfare work.

Action: Create a more positive image about child welfare work through persuasive, yet realistic, statewide public relations marketing campaign targeted to the general public and policy makers. This effort should be combined with a more aggressive advertising campaign.

- Partner with an area college marketing class to be a “class client” for assistance in developing a marketing campaign.
- Improve the web site of each local department so that it is user-friendly, includes application materials and instructions, and markets the agency in a manner that attracts applicants.
- Secure help to create a realistic video portraying the realities of the job – rewards and challenges – and link it to the DHR website for prospective applicants to view. *Other state child welfare agencies have developed such videos (i.e., North Carolina) and could serve as a model.*

- Regularly recruit at Schools of Social Work through job fairs, fliers and posters, admissions offices informational sessions, speaking in classes, etc. to increase visibility.
- Regularly recruit at community job fairs and community colleges and technical schools to attract applicants for “support” positions – clerical, case aides, etc.
- Use established and affordable electronic recruiting services to target technology-savvy individuals who search for jobs electronically (i.e., CWLA, NASW).
- Institute a universally applied referral and hiring incentive that rewards current employees financially (i.e., \$250.00 bonus) for applicant referrals that result in successful hires.
- Use a standard procedure for signing bonuses for those local departments that have more difficulty attracting applicants (i.e., Baltimore City and outlying rural agencies).
- Pursue a nontraditional growing population of talented older persons interested in pursuing another career (Alliance for Children & Families, 2006) or who are interested in working part-time as they gradually ease into retirement. Provide the necessary training through the Child Welfare Academy and place them in appropriate positions.

Selection (Sidebar B)

Conclusion: Interview and selection processes are flawed and inconsistently applied across agencies.

Action: Develop reliable, valid, universal “selection tools” based on employee competencies and Human Resource Management criteria of knowledge, skills, attributes, qualifications, and professional commitment needed for the various child welfare positions or functions that can be implemented at the local level.

(B) SELECTION CONCLUSIONS

- Flawed Interviewing Process
- Inconsistently applied selection process
- Inefficient hiring process
- Incomplete DHR HQ records

- Human Resources Management staff at the central and local offices need to be integrally involved in cross-collaborative consultations with administrators and supervisors to develop selection tools.
- Develop a valid interview protocol to be used consistently in every local department across the state.

Conclusion: Selection/ hiring process is not efficient or timely due to administrative delays between local departments and DHR central office, resulting in unfilled positions due to lags from vacant positions to “filled” positions. Interested candidates are often lost before the hiring decision or paperwork is finalized because they have taken another job.

Action: Local departments take control over their own selection/hiring processes.

- Streamline selection process from point of vacancy to start date.
- Review and update civil service lists regularly, and create a process for streamlining the lists (i.e., removing inappropriate applicants).
- Consider streamlining job classifications into broader functions for more flexibility in the selection process.
- Consider broadening the practice of hiring for a position before it is vacant to allow for overlap between employees leaving and employees on boarding. Some local departments (i.e., Frederick and Talbot) have used this strategy.
- Develop and maintain an applicant tracking system, both to determine successful recruitment strategies, and for follow-up with appropriate candidates not hired to determine future interest in DHR.
- Streamline the hiring process so that the designated human resource manager for each local department handles the paperwork, background and reference checks, hiring, etc. and notifies DHR central office of the start date, without first having to secure approval.

Conclusion: DHR central does not have up-to-date records on current employees and has limited ability to track turnover, vacancies, etc.

Action: Identify information needed and create a system to maintain up to date information on employees related to transfers, preventable turnover, etc.

Action: Assign all employees an identification number (Employee ID), rather than a PIN number, that stays with the employee throughout their employment for tracking purposes. Require all employees to complete an annual employee verification form to update changes in addresses, phone numbers, email, and position.

On-boarding (Sidebar C)

Conclusion: New employees need to have adequate preparation for the job by receiving training, coaching and mentoring at the time of “onboarding”.

(C) ON-BOARDING CONCLUSIONS

- Lack adequate preparation for job
- Lack connections to mentors or coaches

Action: Continue to work collaboratively with the University of Maryland School of Social Work in the development, maintenance, and evaluation of the Child Welfare Academy.

Action: Leverage employee “fit” so that new employees are matched to jobs that adequately reflect skills, abilities, and interests.

Action: Connect new employees with talented coworkers and supervisors in order to build a high-quality network of coaches and mentors that will enhance employee development and performance and sustain commitment.

Action: Connect employees to the organization by helping them understand the “big picture” and how their work contributes to the organization’s success.

Maintaining Talent (Sidebar D)

Structure and Resources (Sidebar D)

Conclusion: Human Resource Management strategies related to the child welfare workforce need to be better connected to the broader organizational (DHR) goals.

Action: Human Resource staff cannot operate at the fringes of the organization. They need to have a broader influence in creating a supportive and responsive environment/climate in which child welfare employees carry out their work. This group needs to move front and center in the change effort.

- Review the capacity of Human Resources in the central office and the local departments to carry out their responsibilities given the resources allocated to this important function.
- Create a forum for regular monthly meetings (rotated around the state) of all HR staff to address recruitment, selection and retention issues and coordinate efforts.
- Give HR staff the tools and resources to take charge of the organizational environment.

Action: Improve communication and access to information between the central office and local departments (i.e., email answered, phone calls returned, visits to locals, etc.)

(D) MAINTAINING TALENT

- RESOURCES AND STRUCTURE
 - HR Strategies not adequately connected to organizational goals
 - Employees lack basic organizational resources
 - Caseload
- COMPENSATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT
 - Limited workforce development
 - Salaries for living in Maryland
 - Salaries for supervisors
- ORGANIZATIONAL/ ENVIRONMENTAL
 - Decision making
 - Cooperation
 - Role Clarity
 - Growth and Advancement
 - Role conflict
 - Role overload
 - Personal accomplishment
 - Personalization
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Job satisfaction
 - Organizational commitment
 - Status rewards

Conclusion: Ensure that employees have the basic organizational resources to do their jobs effectively.

Action: Secure and allocate funds for the purchase of cell phones (and service) for every employee who makes home visits or transports children/family members, and an adequate number of state cars that are in good working condition. Pagers (or an alternative method of communication) should be provided to employees in rural areas where cell phone service is not available.

Action: Hire additional qualified clerical and transportation staff to assist child welfare workers so that they may concentrate their efforts on tasks that are in their job descriptions.

Action: Develop a technological system that supports, not hinders, employees' work performance.

- Make up-to-date computers and relevant technological training available to all staff
- Make the automated information system ("Chessie") work for employees (i.e., ease of access and usefulness) rather than make the employees adapt to a system that does not meet their informational needs.

Conclusion: "Caseload" may not be the best measure of workload. Some cases are more labor-intensive than others; some involve driving long distances to meet with families, and some cases are temporarily assigned to workers but not counted as part of their caseload, etc.

Action: Consider alternative ways to define and measure workload and assess regularly.

Compensation and Career Development (Sidebar D)

Conclusion: The current career development system is problematic and grounded in tenure and promotion, not achievement.

Action: Develop a career ladder with opportunities for growth and development that transcend promotion and tenure, and include clearly differentiated roles, skills, and salary.

- Experiment with job enrichment, job rotation, and self-directed teams that replace promotion as a motivating factor or incentive. Pilot-test it in one program in several local departments.
- Institute a “pay-for-performance” compensation system that rewards better performers financially (rather than penalizes underachievers).
- Incorporate a “skill-banding” approach that: (1) breaks down a job (or function) into specific competencies and skills; (2) identifies the skills needed at specific levels (on the career ladder); (3) encourages employees to learn new skills to progress to the next level; and (4) fosters an atmosphere that encourages cross-functional skill development to keep advancing.

Action: Provide ongoing professional/career development for experienced staff that specifically meets their needs.

Conclusion: Although the salaries of Maryland child welfare employees are in line with child welfare workers in other states, they are still low in comparison to other Maryland government service employees in challenging, demanding jobs.

Action: Lobby to increase salaries to a level comparative with other Maryland government service workers – i.e., police, firefighters, and teachers. Subsequently, reward workers on the basis of achievement and skill-banding (pay for performance).

Conclusion: Supervisor salaries are problematic because there is little difference in pay between supervisors and workers, and in some cases, line workers have a higher salary than supervisors do.

Action: Increase current supervisor salaries to levels above line workers to create an incentive to become a supervisor. Then, reward supervisors on the basis of achievement (pay for performance).

Organizational Environment/ Psychological Climate (Sidebar D)

Conclusion: Maintaining a talented workforce means creating a work environment that is conducive to retaining talented employees who want to continue to be a part of DHR/DSS child welfare (instead of the current vicious cycle of turnover and vacancies).

Action: Develop mechanisms for increased participation in decision-making.

- Create “employee forums” that meet regularly in the central office and each local department (with elected representation from each program in the larger

departments) for employees to bring forth issues, concerns, suggestions, and solutions to pressing problems.

Action: Develop mechanisms for formal and informal recognition and rewards for effective performance, collaborative efforts, and personal accomplishment (*i.e.*, *recognition committees in California*).

Action: Instill a culture that promotes open communication, flexibility, and risk taking that fosters employee engagement.

Action: Build a learning organizational culture, at the supervisor-worker level, unit/team level and at the administrative level.

- Continue to train supervisors through the University of Maryland Child Welfare Academy so that they are prepared to use supervisory practices that support and facilitate the work of staff (*i.e.* on developing and implementing performance feedback, etc.)
- Clarify performance expectations with specific, outcome-focused goals.
- Require written individualized career development plans that become part of the performance appraisal process, and demonstrate a commitment to employee development by supporting and implementing the plans.
- Provide targeted formal and informal feedback (at every supervisory level) to individual employees and units/teams, emphasizing strengths and specific suggestions for improvement.
- Charge supervisors with the responsibility of setting learning goals in their units/teams and creating opportunities for growth and development.
- Encourage units/teams/departments to provide tangible solutions to specific work challenges, and share solutions across the organization.
- Collect data in an automated and systematic process across all local departments related to vacancies, turnover, transfers, employee demographics, etc. Regularly analyze data and use credible information to make administrative and programmatic decisions.
- Take advantage of opportunities for research, evaluation, and assistance in understanding and operationalizing the results.

Conclusion: Consistent with other research on both the nonprofit and for-profit workforce (American Humanics, 2006; Bridgestar, 2005; Catalyst, 2001; Families and Work Institute, 2004; Halpern, 2006), this study also uncovered generational differences in employees' perceptions of the organizational environment and their reports of

organizational withdrawal. As a large percentage of the nonprofit workforce, in general, is near retirement, the attitudes and behaviors of younger employees are already having an impact on recruitment and retention, and will likely have an effect on the nature of child welfare work.

Action: Understand that while “Generation X and Y” employees demonstrate high career commitment, they also have higher expectations for career development, desire more work/life balance, want fair compensation for their effort, and perceive themselves as “undervalued and unappreciated” by superiors than previous generations. This underscores the importance of addressing the organizational environment, structural and resource-related recommendations.

Conclusion: The study findings support the need for a shift in organizational climate, and to some degree, changes in job and organizational structure (i.e., salaries, workload, and role of human resources). Both survey and focus group data highlighted the importance of organizational environment and climate on worker behaviors and turnover, a factor that research shows can be changed.

Action: Implement the “*Availability, Responsiveness, and Continuity (ARC)*” organizational intervention strategy for child welfare turnover, climate and culture (designed by Glisson, Dukes, and Green, 2006). This intervention focuses on the use of specially trained facilitators as “change agents” in concert with small action teams (workers, supervisors and managers) engaged in systems-based interventions within an evidence-based model (pre-post tests, randomized experimental design). It is one of the strategies that has been tested and shown to reduce staff turnover and improve organizational climate (Glisson, Dukes, and Green, 2006).

Future Directions

This report outlines the findings from one year of assessing Maryland’s current child welfare workforce. The next step includes exit interviews and dissemination of the survey used in this study to all employees who left the Department of Human Resources during the study period. This will allow the researchers to gather more in-depth qualitative data about the reasons for actual turnover, and directly compare the survey results of those employees who left with those who remain. A supplemental report from this wave of data collection will be provided to DHR.

The researchers strongly encourage DHR to take the next leap into improving recruitment, selection and retention by making implementation of the strategies described in this report a priority. The research team is committed to helping DHR and the local departments prioritize and make these recommendations a reality.

It is also recommended that the results of this study be openly shared with child welfare employees throughout the state who care deeply about these issues and openly shared their views and suggestions with the research team.