National Child Welfare Workforce Institute

Learning, Leading, Changing

A Service of the Children's Bureau, a Member of the T/TA Network

NCWWI National Webinar Series Session #9

Child Welfare Staff Engagement & Retention in Washington, DC: Alternative Work Schedules, Telecommuting & Other Supports

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Session Agenda

1. Why Address Staff Engagement & Retention?
2. Background & Context in DC
3. Key Components
4. Development & Implementation
5. Impact & Outcomes
6. Accelerators & Decelerators
7. Lessons Learned/Tips for Other Agencies
8. Q & A via web platform
9. Continuing the Conversation & Closing

Why Address Staff Engagement/Retention?

- Caseworker turnover is associated with
  - *Children's multiple placements in foster care*
  - *Lower rates of permanency and longer lengths of stay*
  - *Higher caseloads and burnout of remaining staff*
- Turnover is a major factor in *failed family reunification efforts*, and contributes to *reentry into placement* due to recurrence of abuse/neglect (frequent case transfers lead to periods during which no services are provided and inadequate sharing of critical case information and assignment of cases from uncovered caseloads uncovered to new caseworkers)
- Families with fewer caseworkers are more likely to be *satisfied with the services they receive*.
- Research has demonstrated the *importance of worker consistency in helping relationships*.

Leadership for Staff Retention

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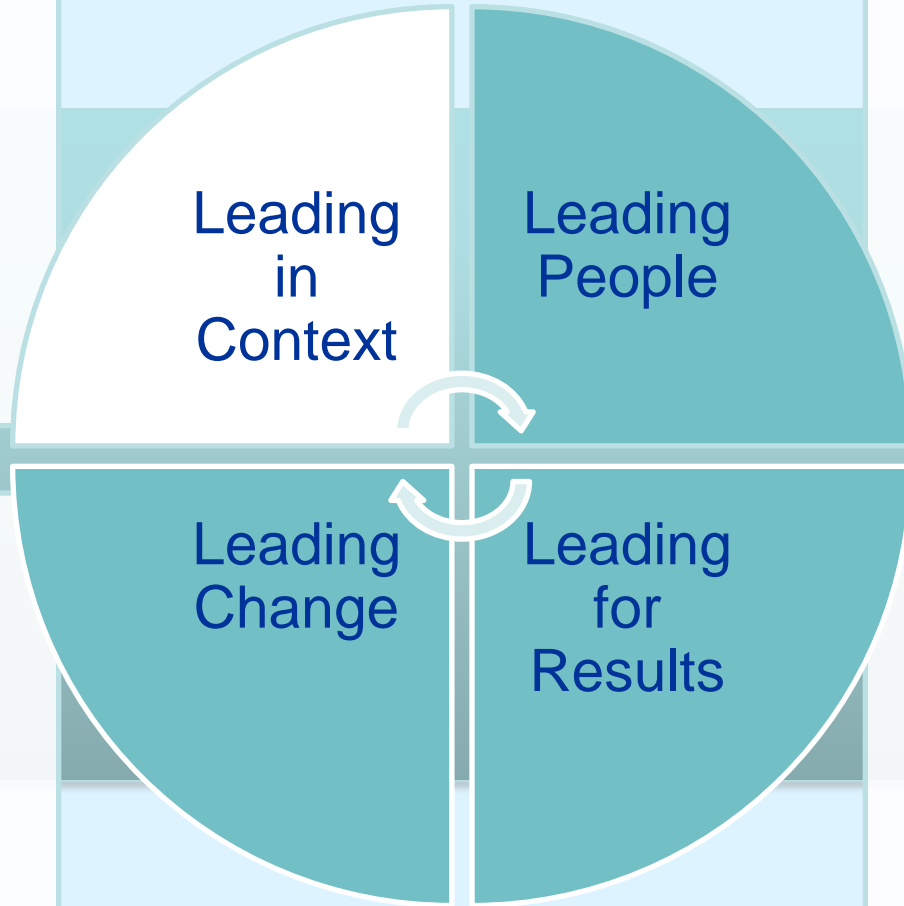
- Partnering
- Political Savvy
- Influencing
- Negotiating

Leading in Context

Leading People

- Conflict Management
- **Developing Others**
- **Team Building**
- Cultural Responsiveness
- Leveraging Diversity

Leading Change

Leading for Results

- **Creativity & Innovation**
- External Awareness
- **Flexibility**
- Strategic Thinking
- Vision

- Accountability
- **Capacity-building**
- Service Orientation
- Decisiveness
- Entrepreneurship
- Financial Management
- Planning & Organizing
- **Problem Solving**
- Technical Credibility

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

DC CFSA

- The Child & Family Services Agency (CFSA) is the District of Columbia's public child welfare agency with the legal authority and responsibility to protect child victims, and those at risk, of abuse & neglect.

- As of June 30, 2013, 3336 children were being served by CFSA via in-home & out-of-home care. 1367 of those children/youth were in foster care.

- Workforce: Staff are social workers with MSWs. Average age of current staff is 40-42. 70% unionized.

- DC HR: Charged with recruitment for most District agencies, but a few agencies have independent HR authority - CFSA is one of them (via court order).

Impetus to Address Retention Issues in DC

1. High turnover rate (30% in 2006)
2. Exit interviews/focus groups indicated low morale and need for employees to feel more engaged and have a better work-life balance.
3. Needed an edge on other jurisdictions (especially the federal government, which had recruitment initiative for SWs into the Veterans Administration; cities/counties in Northern VA; all of MD; DC private agencies) to attract employees and stabilize our workforce.
4. Needed to engage a more tech-savvy workforce.
5. Needed greater communication and partnership between program areas, HR and unions.

Labor Management Partnership Committee

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- LMPCs first initiated in the federal government, then caught on in district government.
- Formally led by mayor's office, but each district agency has authority to develop own LMPC to address own HR/union-related issues.
- CFSA's LMPC created in 2006 to offer employees, HR and union representatives a venue to problem-solve together.
- CFSA's LMPC developed a charter to lay the ground-rules, determined a schedule, and identified topics of interest and issues to address.
- Members: CFSA director, HR director, union president, managers, supervisors, and frontline caseworkers.
- Monthly meetings held in beginning; now meet quarterly.

Effective HR-Program Area Partnership

- HR has been an active partner with all programs and departments in the agency since 2008; HR director regularly meets with all program areas, and attends agency director's monthly management meetings (along with supervisors and training staff) where internal operational issues/needs are addressed.
- Relationship-building between HR and program areas has been supported by top leadership, which has helped move plans forward in timely, focused fashion.
- HR has used the lessons of private industry regarding flexibility and creativity to address employee needs and improve morale.

Alternative Work Schedules (AWS)

- DC CFSA implemented the **Alternative Work Schedules (AWS)** program in January 2007 to enable managers/supervisors to meet program goals while allowing employees to be more flexible in scheduling personal activities.

- AWS program participation is an attractive and useful recruitment and retention tool.

- As employees gain greater control over their time, they can balance work and family responsibilities more readily; become involved in volunteer activities; and, take greater advantage of educational/career development opportunities.

Telecommuting

- CFSA began its **Telecommuting Program** in February of 2013 to provide a flexible and innovative work arrangement for employees and take a first step to beginning the process of creating a more mobile workforce.
- **Telecommuting** enables CFSA employees to perform their assigned work outside of the office, generally within their homes, which eliminates the need for daily commutes to CFSA offices.
- **Research has shown** that telecommuting can:
  - Increase employee morale
  - Improve the quality of employee's work-life balance
  - Increase productivity & add to organization's recruitment/retention efforts
  - Help in reducing energy costs
  - Promote management efficiencies
  - Make an organization more resilient in situations of severe and inclement weather and other unexpected emergencies

KEY COMPONENTS

Alternative Work Schedules in DC

- CFSA AWS Program (as well as DC Government's) was modeled after the Federal Government's AWS Program.
- CFSA's AWS Program permits participating employees to fulfill *bi-weekly 80-hour tour of duty requirement* while maintaining one of the various work schedules available through the program (*flexible core hour* or *compressed*).
- CFSA requires that participation in the AWS Program reflect adherence to **best practice standards**.
- In the event that individual AWS participation adversely impacts client/agency business, CFSA's management team *reserves the right to limit eligibility or terminate participation* based on attendant circumstances and/or organizational need.

Alternative Work Schedules in DC (2)

- AWS subject to supervisory adjustment as needed.
- AWS features two major components: *Flexible Core Hour Schedules* and *Compressed Time Schedules.*

1. ***Flexible Core Hour Schedules*** permit employees to work an 8-hr workday that can start as early as 7:00 a.m. and end no later than 3:30 p.m. or begin as late as 9:30 a.m. and end no later than 6:00 p.m. (or any variation in between).

   - This flexible scheduling permits a **2.5-hour window** that employees can use to work around issues involving child care, taking children to school, early morning doctor's appointments, etc.

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2. ***Compressed Time Schedules*** feature <u>3 options</u> that allow employees to work longer days for part of the workweek in exchange for select shorter days or a day off during the same pay period.
    – Compressed schedules are typically set and are not flexible.

Alternative Work Schedules (4)

- **<u>Schedule A</u>**: Four 10-hr days each week, with 1 day off per week.
  - ➢ E.g.: Employee works 7:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. and has every Friday off.
- **<u>Schedule B</u>**: Eight 9-hr days and one 8-hr day in a two week period, for a total of 80 hours for the pay period, with 1 day off every other week. The day off selected may be any day of either week, but should be consistent. If a change is needed, employee must submit new application for approval by supervisor.
  - ➢ E.g.: Employee works 7:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. for eight days and 7:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. one day, with every other Wednesday off.
- **<u>Schedule C</u>**: Four 9-hr days and one 4-hr day each week.
  - ➢ E.g.: Employee works 7:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. for 4 days and 7:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. for 1 day and has 4 hours off every Monday.

Telecommuting Goal & Criteria

CFSA Telecommuting Program Goal:

- Utilize technology to provide a flexible alternative work arrangement for employees, while continuing to meet the needs of our agency and the clients that we serve.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. Needs of the agency/administration
2. Employee performance
3. Approval by employee's administrator
4. Employee's access to equipment compatible with agency IT infrastructure
5. Compliance with HIPAA policies and procedures

Telecommuting Exclusions & Process

Exclusions

- Due to the unique nature of child welfare and the operations of CFSA Administrations, a Deputy Director may request that one or all of his/her Administrations or Divisions be excluded from participation in the Program.

Application, Approval & Appeal Process

1. Employee application for program participation
2. Supervisory review
3. Approval or denial
   - If approved: Telecommuting Work Agreement completion
   - If denied: Employee appeal & Deputy Director review/ruling

Telecommuting Requirements

General Requirements:

1. Adherence to all Federal, District, State & Local law and all Agency policies.
2. Telecommuting limited to 2 days per week (1 day currently).
3. Employees must be accessible while telecommuting & must have response time of 1-hr for emails & telephone calls.
4. Work performed while telecommuting shall be performed with same degree of professionalism/ etiquette as if performed in the office.
5. Confidentiality of CFSA/client information must be maintained.
6. Employees must immediately notify supervisor in event of an accident or injury that occurs at the alternative work site.

TC Inspections & Coordinator

Telecommuting Inspections

- Supervisors and/or representatives of HR make periodic onsite inspections of alternative worksites.
- Employees entitled to a minimum 24 hour notice before inspections
- Unionized employees entitled to union representation during inspection.

Telecommuting Coordinator Role/Responsibilities

- Provide & collect forms
- Prepare reports
- Monitor participation
- Ensure compliance & provide training

Other Supports

- **Technology Improvements:**
  - All SW staff have *access to laptops & Blackberrys*; well-equipped to begin telecommuting before formally introduced.
  - *Access to and understanding of how to use technology* was essential for telecommuting success.
- **Team-Building:**
  - Attention to and growth of team support on the frontlines
  - *Teaming on cases* and formal/informal coverage during assigned AWS days.
- **Leadership/Organizational Development Opportunities:**
  - *Informal leadership opportunities* for frontline/managerial staff to step in & cover for leadership using flex schedules.
  - *Supervisory leadership program* with Georgetown University (in conjunction with HR & management).

DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

AWS/TC Policy Development

- Development and implementation of CFSA's AWS & Telecommuting policies stemmed from a desire by agency leadership to create scheduling options that would aide in creating a *(1) positive environment for staff, (2) improved working conditions and (3) a better work life-balance for employees.*
- Policy development process inclusive of management, employees and labor partners (unions). The Office of Planning, Policy & Program Support (OPPPS) takes the lead in the creation of all agency policies.
- HR partners with OPPPS on all policies affecting employees and ensures that policies, once finalized and approved, are implemented and complied with.

AWS Process & Status

- Developed/modeled policy after Federal Government's AWS policy.

- Created in partnership with the agency's labor unions through the Labor Management Partnership Committee (LMPC) in 2006; implemented in 2007.

- Once policy framework created, OPPPS enhanced policy into its current form.

- An implementation & communication plan was developed, including rollout timeline, employee informational meetings and the associated forms. The rest is history….

- **175 employees have participated** in the program since its inception. At the present time, CFSA has **158 employees participating in AWS**.

TC Policy Development

- **CFSA's Telecommuting Program** is a variation of DC's policy implemented in 2012 (instituted more for the city's Emergency Preparedness than anything else), which is modeled after the Federal Government's TC Program.
- Due to the nature of CFSA work, the agency decided to develop its own TC policy, which includes some of the elements of both District and Federal Government programs.
- Policy was developed with **heavy input from Social Workers, Supervisors, Management and Labor Unions**.
- **A workgroup was formed** to discuss the major areas of concern to all and to develop a plan that was practical given the unique challenges for CFSA Social Workers.

TC Process & Status

- Once plan agreed upon and policy developed, Deputy Directors decided which Program areas would be excluded. Policy then announced at an all staff meeting and disseminated via all staff email.
- Employees given time to review policy and submit applications to participate.
- Currently, **90 employees** telecommute at CFSA. Since we have just completed the initial 6 months of the program, we will be conducting an evaluation of the program to assess progress and see where improvements can be made.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

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High annual turnover rate
(30% in 2006)
has been significantly reduced
(10.9% in 2012).

Average tenure is now 9 years.

AWS Impact & Outcomes

- Improved work-life balance of participants.
- High interest and longevity of participants is a very positive indicator of AWS success:
  - *90% of participants have participated for all 6 yrs.*
- Positively impacted CFSA ability to recruit potential candidates. AWS gives our agency an advantage, and allows us to be competitive with other child welfare agencies and social work positions.
  - *75 % of new hires ask to sign up for this benefit.*

TC Impact & Outcomes

- It is too early to assess the overall impact and outcomes of this program. A formal evaluation is planned. However, if interest is any indication of future success, TC impact and outcomes will be just as positive as AWS.

- Staff utilizing a telecommute work schedule report *greater productivity*.

- Telecommuting is beginning to catch on as a positive benefit for prospective and current employees and aid the agency in recruiting and retaining high quality, tech savvy employees.

ACCELERATORS & DECELERATORS
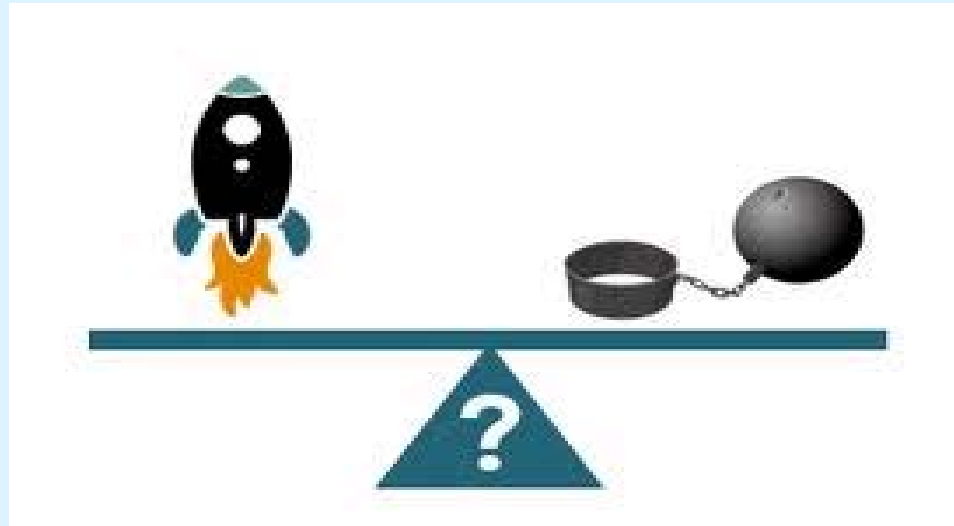
Decelerators

1. **Timing** of the telecommuting rollout was not optimal.
2. **CFSA changing and re-organizing** – in a good way (e.g., implementing Trauma Systems Therapy as a new practice model, using Red Teams in assessing/assigning new cases). But it has been difficult to permit employees to take full advantage of the Telecommuting Program in some areas of the agency. But the commitment is there and we will get to a point in the not too distant future where we will be able to open it up to all program areas.
3. **Management buy-in**: All leaders must understand the problem/issue being addressed and the importance of the remedy selected. It is critical that everyone be committed to ensuring that the retention plan is implemented and that the efforts are genuinely supported from the top down.

Accelerators

1. **Flexible, adaptive Staff.** Top down/bottom up flexibility has been essential to utilization of flexible work schedules. Supervisors have had to adjust to staff not being physically present for the entire 5-day work week, and staff have had to adjust to supervisors managing remotely.

2. **Support of our Labor Partners**. CFSA is comprised of approximately 70% of unionized employees, and the involvement and input by the leadership of our unions, in developing both of these programs, has been invaluable.

3. **Support of Agency Director & Executive Leadership Team**.

4. **Input from employees.** It was important for us to ask the question, "What is it that you want or are looking for?" Even if we couldn't provide exactly what every single employee wanted, we have been able to come up with a number of compromises and program options that have worked well and met their needs.

LESSONS LEARNED & TIPS FOR OTHER AGENCIES

Lessons Learned
recognize mistakes
observe what works
document them
share them

Lessons Learned

1. There is **no magic bullet** or single answer for addressing retention. But don't be overwhelmed because a multi-faceted plan is needed to address it; retention is something that every agency needs to look at. All organizations can **take at least a few steps** to minimize staff going through a revolving door.

2. There must be discussion and support for HR priorities at the **leadership level**.

3. **Exit interview information** is critical to gain insight into problems and issues that employees feel strongly about, and get clues as to what is driving folks away.

4. The **Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM)** is a great resource for training and industry rates/trends.

5. There should be someone positioned to **take the pulse of agency climate and culture**, even if you don't have a strong HR-program relationship. Employees need a **platform** for workforce-related communication and problem-solving.

Tips for Other Agencies

1. Look at **successful efforts at major companies** (corporations like Google &Microsoft). Although we work in child welfare and there are some inherent differences in the nature of our work, make use of some of the benefits and HR strategies/programs that have been implemented at these companies, simply by tweaking them a bit to fit your context.

2. Before implementing any retention program, conduct **surveys or focus groups of employees and management** to identify areas of concern that need to be addressed and get ideas/suggestions on how to make improvements.

3. Don't try to do too much at once. If several areas of concern are identified, **prioritize your list and tackle one**, but no more than two at a time.

Tips for Other Agencies (2)

4. Develop your own vehicle for **labor-management-employee communication and problem-solving**. Create your own charter to lay the ground-rules, determine a schedule, and identify topics of interest and issues to address.
5. Avoid stretching out the planning, development and implementation timelines. Once a decision is made to address a particular issue, **get it done!** You can always go back and make corrections. Employees want to see action.
6. Don't restrict your **brainstorming**. Be creative & think outside of the box.
7. If budget is a concern (isn't it always?), think of ways to include new retention programs **during the next budget cycle**.

Tips for Other Agencies (3)

8. Try **partnering with vendors and healthcare providers**, who are always looking to build goodwill and strengthen relationships. This is especially the case with wellness programs.

9. Investigate **supplementary benefits**, such as *Health & Wellness Programs, Tuition Reimbursement, Employee Assistance Programs, Short & Long Term Disability Insurance Policies, Flexible Spending* and *Health Spending Accounts*. Benefit offerings and benefit costs are among the highest-rated reasons employees stay/leave a company. Check the highest-rated benefits employees desire at: http://www.money-zine.com/career-development/finding-a-job/top-employee-benefits/ for more details.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? IDEAS?

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Continuing the Conversation

1. Visit http://www.ncwwi.org/events/archive.html for the webinar **RECORDING** & **PRESENTER HANDOUTS**
2. Participate in this webinar session's follow-up **LEARNING LAB** on **Monday, August 26 at 3 pm ET** for more discussion with your peers & the presenters (http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e7ooq3ft293d982a&llr=pfnuq9dab)
3. Provide feedback to continue to strengthen future webinars by completing a quick **EVALUATION SURVEY** (via email from Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver)

Additional Resources

1. NCWWI Resource List on Retention: http://cf.umaryland.edu/ncwwi/files/Workforce%20Retention.pdf
2. Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM): http://www.shrm.org JOIN!
4. Office of Personnel Management: http://www.opm.gov
5. Business & Legal Resources: http://www.BLR.com
6. CNN Money (List of Best Places to Work) http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/best-companies/

To learn more about….

DC Child & Family Services Agency – contact Sarah Thankachan at <u>Sarah.Thankachan@dc.gov</u> or Dexter Starkes at <u>Dexter.Starkes@dc.gov</u>

Engagement & Retention Learning Lab – contact Sharon Kollar at <u>skollar@albany.edu</u>

NCWWI National Webinar Series & other NCWWI products – contact Sara Munson at <u>smunson@albany.edu</u>

August 26, 2013 at 3 pm ET

Staff Engagement & Retention Learning Lab

September 11, 2013 at 3 pm ET

Beyond Professional Education & Training: Pennsylvania's Dynamic University-Agency Partnership for Transfer of Learning, Quality Improvement & Organizational Effectiveness

September 18, 2013 at 3 pm ET

Beyond Professional Education & Training Learning Lab