

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs



2011-2012 Executive Summary

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2011-2012 Annual Report

Executive Summary

Quality education and professional preparation are components of an effective child welfare workforce. The Child Welfare Education and Research continuum includes two degree education programs, Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB) and Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL). This academic year, 2011-2012, marks the eleventh academic year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program (CWEB) and the seventeenth year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Leadership program (CWEL) in Pennsylvania. These programs are administered by the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators. **The mission of these programs is to strengthen child welfare services to children and families in Pennsylvania by increasing the number of educated professionals and equipping them to deal with the increasingly complex demands of public child welfare practice.**

These programs are integrated into the framework of public child welfare throughout the state, with approximately 97% of the counties in the Commonwealth participating in CWEB and CWEL. Over 800 students have graduated from CWEB during the program's eleven years and they have been employed in 58 out of the 67 Pennsylvania counties. CWEL has funded students from 62 counties and twelve Pennsylvania schools of social work on both a full- and part-time basis. As of the 2011-2012 academic year, nearly 20% of the child welfare work force has been enrolled in a CWEL program.

"The CWEL program continues to be a great asset and retention program for [the agency's] staff" (Agency director)

"I feel that the CWEB program is a great experience in generalist social work practice because you have to work with families on a number of different levels often to solve a very complex set of issues...." (CWEB student)

"... This program was fabulous, and I never would have continued my education without it." (CWEL student)

"I am engaging in projects in the agency that I am employed which I would have never had the knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage in if it were not for the education that I have received thus far. For example, I am currently engaging in a research project for my agency regarding 'Best Practices for Drug & Alcohol Addicted Parents.' Before my research classes at the master's level I would have never had the skills, abilities, or knowledge to engage in a research project of this magnitude. Moreover, there is a high likelihood that due to this project a percent of families will be able to remain together and be reunified."(CWEL graduate)

".... I feel that the Agency is more accommodating to CWEL students versus others [programs] when arranging work schedules." (CWEL student)

"Collaboration with University of Pittsburgh Faculty helps me stay more current with child welfare issues." (Participating University Faculty)

Every year we review our administrative data and survey our key stakeholders to evaluate how well students and graduates feel that they are being prepared for child welfare work. This year we heard from 67% of the participating schools, approximately 87% of county agencies, 86% of enrolled students, and 69% of our graduates about their perception of the effectiveness of the professional education programs. Below are a few key findings from this year's study:

- **The Title IV-E professional education programs are greatly valued by all of the stakeholders.** Part-time students report that they are refreshing their learning and improving their skills and knowledge base. Full-time students feel privileged to be able to focus on their education. Faculty members in participating schools identify students as highly motivated and committed to working with children and families, and the public agencies view them as valuable employees in their efforts to improve child welfare practices and outcomes.
- **CWEB and CWEL students are valued** by county agency directors who speak very highly of program graduates' skills and knowledge, indicating that advanced degrees increase the quality of child welfare work and retention of employees. School faculty report that former CWEL students are now serving as field instructors and mentors to current students.

Participating Schools

Bloomsburg University

Bryn Mawr College

California University

Edinboro University

Kutztown University

Lock Haven University

Mansfield University

Marywood University

Millersville University

Shippensburg University

Slippery Rock University

Temple University

University of Pennsylvania

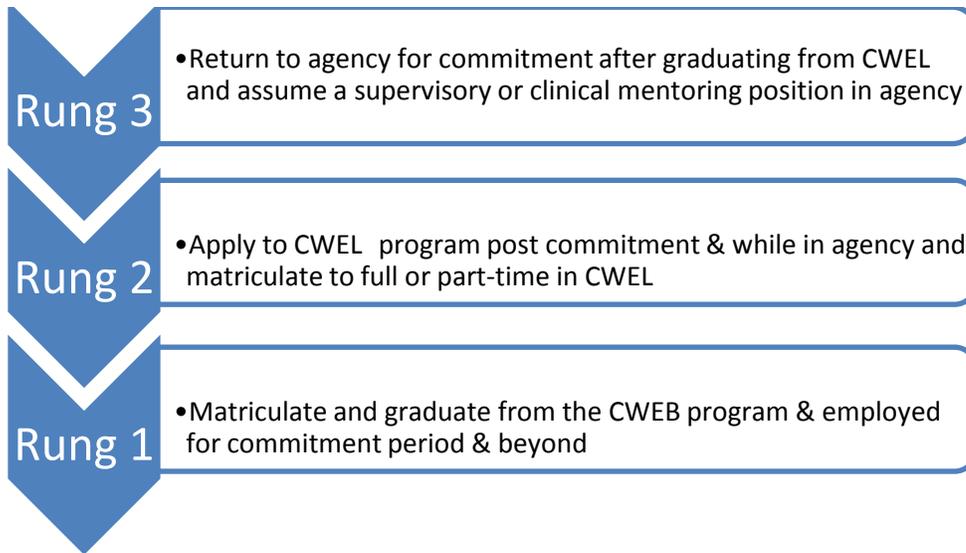
University of Pittsburgh

West Chester University

Widener University



- **CWEB and CWEL programs create an educational career ladder for social workers in child welfare.**

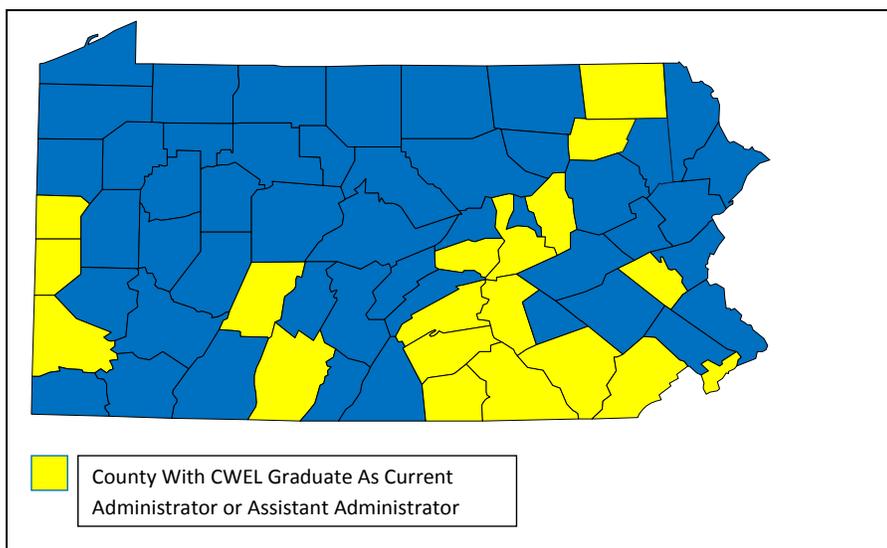


“The CWEB program allows students to interact with clients on a new level, and it is a great learning experience that can contribute to future employment opportunities.”

“[CWEL] helps me obtain an education that otherwise I would have not been able to afford.”

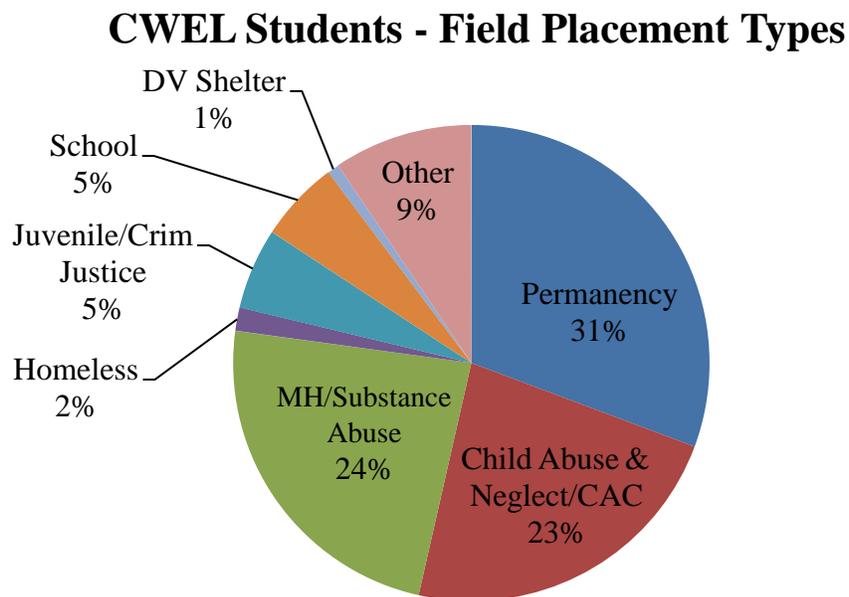
For the enrolled CWEL students who responded to the survey, 24% received their degrees through the CWEB program. Of this group, the majority (82%) are still working in the agency in which they did their post-CWEB commitment. We have observed this CWEB to CWEL progression pattern for the last four years and it suggests that Rungs 1 and 2 are in place

- **Graduates of the CWEL program are well-prepared to assume positions of leadership in their agencies. Currently, 19% of Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators are graduates of the CWEL program. An additional 11 CWEL graduates hold Assistant Administrator positions.**

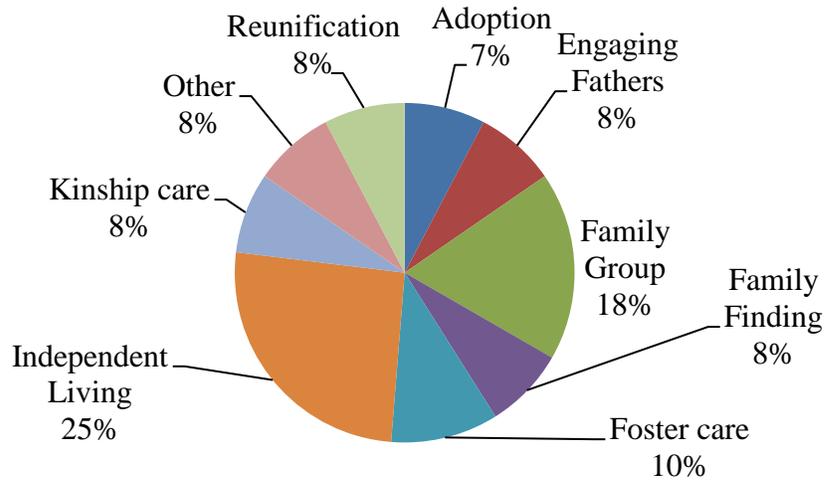


- CWEL students contribute to human service programs in both the public and private sector during the course of their graduate studies through active engagement in field work in a variety of agency settings.** County agencies, in turn, benefit from the expanded knowledge that CWEL students bring to the county as a result of their field and classroom experience. CWEL students have been instrumental in improving cross-systems collaboration, educating provider agencies about child welfare mandates and services, and, in some instances, shifting a pre-existing, negative perception of child welfare practice. CWEL students and graduates are participating in the state Program Improvement Plan, Quality Service Reviews, development of the PA Child Welfare Practice Model, and contributing to committees focusing on the state-wide effort to improve child level outcomes. Participants develop a greater appreciation and understanding of the services, mandates, philosophy, delivery and outcome goals of child welfare provider agencies and programs. All of this occurs as our child welfare students share their expertise and enrich their skills through internships with community and private provider agencies.

CWEL Field Placement Types



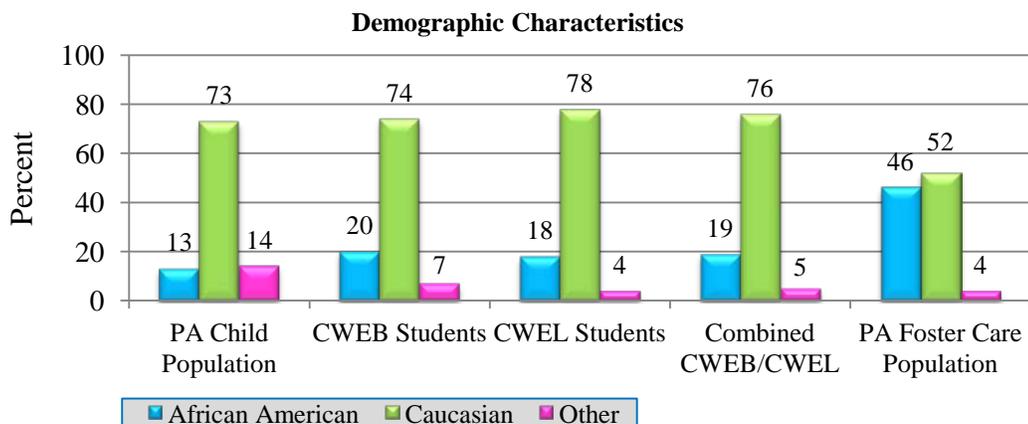
Permanency Placement Types



- We are committed to increasing racial diversity in CWEB and CWEL enrollment.**

According to a 2011 report issued by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, there are approximately 28,000 Pennsylvania children living in foster care. Forty-six percent of these children are African American, yet African American children comprise only 13% of the state’s child population. Caucasian children make up 73% of the state’s child population and comprise approximately 52% of Pennsylvania’s foster care population¹. Within the CWEB and CWEL programs combined, African Americans represent 19% of participants. While the causes and solutions for the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system are complex, we believe that it is crucial that the child welfare workforce be reflective of the population served. We specifically target recruitment of students with diverse backgrounds at the entry level in order to broaden the racial and ethnic diversity of the child welfare workforce.

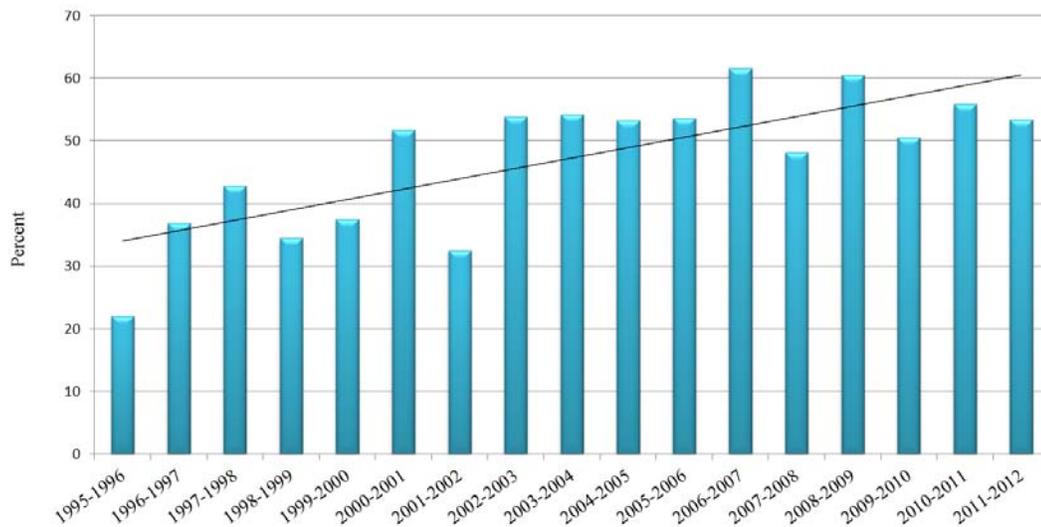
Demographics of PA Child Population and CWEB/CWEL Participants



¹ Statewide Data Package. AFCARS Longitudinal File maintained by Hornsby-Zeller Associates for the PA Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families.

- **A continuing trend is the increase in part-time matriculation by students.** Part-time students have the challenge of managing the work/life/school balance and may have limited field placement options and fewer choices in coursework. They are also at greater risk of dropping out of school. Full-time students have greater choice, but face a sometimes difficult transition back to full-time employment. While continuing to monitor this trend, we are exploring additional ways to meet this population’s evolving needs while still ensuring quality education along with financial and academic support.

Chart 7
Child Welfare for Leadership
1995-2012 Admissions
Part-Time Trend



- **The perception of agency work climate by CWEL and CWEL graduates has been rated as moderate.** The climate surveys among program graduates have been administered and results analyzed for nearly 10 years, spanning graduates of the program as far back as 1995 (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). This year, the Organizational Culture Survey (Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987) was utilized to gauge the organizational climate in child welfare services. Results are consistent with previous years’ findings in that long-term graduates rate the organizational climate as neutral on this new scale. However, graduates of both the CWEL and CWEL program rated the supervision subscale positively indicating that the graduates are satisfied with the quality of the supervision they receive in their agencies. Common areas of work climate strain are role overload—feeling unable to accomplish what is needed—and lack of opportunities for promotion. In addition, graduates’ climate ratings did not improve when considering the amount of time that they have spent in the child welfare workforce. While still regarding public child welfare practice positively, seasoned workers rate the climate similar to less experienced workers, and in some aspects, they feel that the climate is more

challenging (routinization and role conflict). Nearly all the graduates report that they are working in direct services in a county child welfare agency.

The consistency of agency work climate as perceived by multiple samples of program graduates over time suggests that the work climate in Pennsylvania is stable, and not influenced to a large degree by individuals or where they are working. Therefore, interventions that target problem areas such as "role overload" and "opportunities for advancement" may not need to be individualized to a particular agency or region.

Recommendations

Educational programs such as CWEB and CWEL prepare and enrich the workforce, but they are only one component of an overall strategy for educating and retaining a quality workforce. The federal government has stepped up its efforts through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, regional implementation and technical assistance centers, and Quality Improvement Centers for progressive initiatives. Child welfare workforce development continues to be a national-level imperative, bolstered by evidence that the quality of the workforce, in addition to agency climate, impact child level outcomes. For example, a study using a national sample of child welfare agencies confirmed that caseworkers who provide services in a child welfare system that have more engaged climates are more likely to provide a better quality of service (Glisson, 2010).

In partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators, we are committed to extending the impact of the CWEB and CWEL programs through the following recommendations:

- **Increase the depth of undergraduate child welfare curriculum among schools through the development of a certificate in Child Advocacy Studies in collaboration with the National Child Protection Training Center**

Undergraduates currently complete one child welfare course and a public child welfare internship. We are currently in the process of developing the second of three courses in Child Advocacy Studies in an on-line, hybrid format. One or more Child Advocacy Studies courses completed during the senior year, or through the Child Welfare Resource Center shortly following graduation, will strengthen the child welfare knowledge among CWEB participants. An added benefit during undergraduate studies is providing an elective option for students outside of social work who receive little, if any, content on child abuse and neglect during the course of their undergraduate enrollment. This is consistent with the vision of the National Child Protection Training Center, of which the University of Pittsburgh is a consortium member.

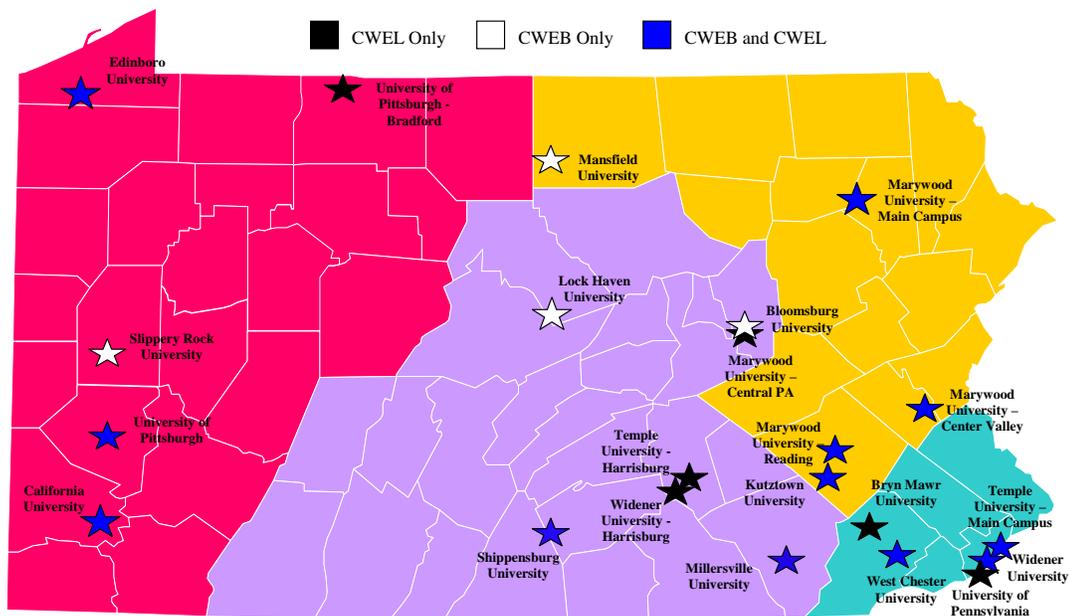
- **Utilize the advanced clinical skills of the CWEL graduates**

Because CWEL students have advanced skills, create specialty positions in order to capitalize on their expertise. A repeated theme among CWEL graduates is the satisfaction that comes from new challenges and opportunities for leadership within child welfare, and the frustration and discontent that results from no recognition of their advanced skills and abilities. Our retention research with long-term graduates has consistently shown that opportunities to utilize advanced skills can often make the difference between staying within public child welfare or seeking new opportunities. We also see evidence of this through the qualitative feedback we receive from program participants. Those who have become involved in state-level initiatives, and who have had the opportunity to develop new programs, provide supervision, and offer mentorship to junior colleagues at their county agencies report much higher levels of job satisfaction compared to those who have not become involved in leadership endeavors.

- **Include additional social work degree programs in Pennsylvania as they become accredited**

Pennsylvania has many remote areas that have a shortage of professionals in specialized services, such as social work, child psychiatry and nursing. Increasing the number of participating CWEL and CWEL schools would allow for greater student access, reducing student commuting time and decreasing program costs. The map below shows the PA schools of social work currently participating the CWEL and CWEL programs.

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs
Participating Schools



Consideration may also be given to including the fourteen private, accredited undergraduate social work programs in Pennsylvania in the CWEB consortium. This offers the potential to double the CWEB enrollment, would provide educational opportunities to a larger network of students interested in child welfare, and would develop a greater pool of eligible employees for the counties.

Although the need among counties for new bachelor-level social work graduates is high, budgetary challenges complicate what may appear as a relatively simple solution. Many counties have had to freeze vacant positions secondary to state budget issues. Secondly, additional funding would be needed from the Department of Public Welfare to expand the CWEB program to additional schools.

- **Incorporate trauma-informed, reflective supervision at the county level**

Current students and graduates speak poignantly about needing supervisory and peer support to manage work-related stress, and of the impact of secondary trauma upon their ability to remain in the field of child welfare. Process-oriented supervision, with a focus upon the impact of secondary trauma, is a concrete way of supporting the workforce and assuring that workers have the capacity to remain committed to child welfare. We believe it is critical to address this issue. Revisions to the Supervisor Training Series developed by CWRC have placed increased emphasis on this particular workforce need and many child welfare course curricula now include this content.

- **Consider an additional component to the CWEL program in order to recruit new employees for the counties**

Currently, only current CYS employees are CWEL program participants. An additional component will allow the CWEL program to admit persons who have never worked in a county child welfare agency before, but who have been adequately trained and have the same length of work commitment that is currently required of CWEL participants. The provision in the federal Title IV-E regulations which permits the training of persons “preparing for [public child welfare] employment”² provides this opportunity. A principal advantage of this additional component is cost savings.

In operationalizing this recommendation, consideration must be given to the ability of the county child welfare agencies to hire MSW-prepared candidates as well as the impact of additional CWEL graduates on the hiring of CWEB program graduates.

² 45 CFR, Ch. II, §235.63 (a).

- **Continue to promote enrollment in the CWEB program in order to provide a professional career ladder**

The CWEB program is an effective way to introduce well-educated and trained child welfare workers into the workforce. Because many counties have experienced periodic hiring freezes for caseworker positions over the past several years, the CWEB program has had to be careful in terms of balancing enrollment with position openings. Nonetheless, it remains one of the most promising aspects of creating a skilled workforce. After fulfilling the legal work commitment and remaining at their county agency for an additional length of time, CWEB graduates are able to apply to the CWEL program. This professional ladder provides a unique opportunity for enriching the child welfare workforce through advanced social work education. An informational video featuring current and former CWEB participants has been developed to assist in recruitment for the CWEB program.

- **Continue to promote enrollment in Charting the Course to CWEB students**

CWEB graduates are better prepared to enter the workforce following completion of their undergraduate social work studies when they have a child welfare internship at a county agency and have begun the competency and skills-based training for new caseworkers. A case management system has been developed in which each CWEB student is assigned to a Regional Training Specialist at the PA Child Welfare Resource Center who facilitates enrollment in Charting the Course (CTC) and begins the students' certification training record. The availability of CTC in an on-line format will permit CWEB students to complete all of the modules during the course of their senior year in school. This will benefit both the students and the county agencies.

- **Provide transition support and ongoing connection among CWEL graduates**

CWEL graduates are a group of well-educated and trained professionals who feel positive about their skills and ability to work productively with families, but are skeptical about the opportunities available to them in a career in child welfare. CWEB graduates have the hope of promotion and the opportunity to continue their education by continuing in CWEL—but no such educational opportunity exists for CWEL graduates. Full-time CWEL students also report that transitioning back to their agencies full-time can be difficult. To address these issues, we suggest a “transition seminar” for students in their last semester of school to provide them transition support and an opportunity to interact and make contacts with other CWEL participants. Practice Improvement Specialists from the Child Welfare Resource Center can also facilitate contact with program graduates during the course of their work with counties.

- **Mentor CWEB graduates**

Mentoring opportunities for CWEB graduates by CWEL graduates (particularly male, Hispanic and African American) can help with their transitions into the workforce and recruitment into the CWEL program. Many CWEB graduates speak of the positive impact that mentoring by a more experienced child welfare worker made on their professional development, especially their sense of competence in managing complicated tasks and responsibilities.

- **Consider the addition of a doctoral-level CWEL option**

This option can provide an additional research arm for the Commonwealth and further our mission of establishing evidence-based child welfare practice across the state. Research at the doctoral level would make an even greater contribution to the Commonwealth and the field through the development of “practice-based” researchers. Finally, it would provide one more “rung” on the career ladder for child welfare professionals who desire an advanced degree while remaining committed to the field.

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