



University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work,
Child Welfare Education and Research Programs



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Data Brief 2: July 2024

CWEB Post Hire Interview: Effective Supervision

Introduction

The post hire interview protocol was initiated in August 2020 to provide additional support to CWEB graduates as they enter their county child welfare agencies for employment. The goals of this project can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Interviews are completed by a former county child welfare administrator who is also a CWEL graduate. Interviews are completed once a CWEB graduate is employed for at least 90 days with follow-up interviews at six months, nine months, and up to a year. After the CWEB graduate's commitment is complete, the interviews are concluded. Graduates are encouraged to maintain contact with CWEB program staff and others they have identified in their network of supports.

Figure 1. Goals of the Interview Protocol

Goal 1: Support	Provide graduates with extra support as they start their child welfare career
Goal 2: Intervene	Acknowledge and reinforce the positives that are occurring in the workplace. Identify graduates who are struggling and connect them with the CWERP County Liaison for intervention
Goal 3: Retain	Increase retention time among graduates

In September 2022, the interview questions were revised to comprise two tracts: initial interviews and follow-up interviews. An additional question concerning the Foundations training was added to the initial interview in April 2023.

The literature emphasizes the importance of supervision in a number of areas. Cearley (2004) found that as child welfare workers' reports of supervisor help giving increased, so did the workers' perceived empowerment. Supportive supervision was a predictor for retention of Title IV-E MSW child welfare workers (Jacquet, Clark, Morazes, and Withers, 2005). A study in the United Kingdom demonstrated a strong positive association between the quality of supervision and a worker's work with families on their caseloads (Bostock, Patrizo, Godfrey, Forrester, 2019). However, there are not many studies regarding the characteristics of an effective supervisor. A qualitative study conducted in Australia described eight key components of effective supervision: safety, the supervisor creating a safe environment for the worker by having open and honest relationships; responding to the emotional impact of the work, supervisors who proactively addressed the emotional aspects of the work were a buffer to the nature of the work; learning and growth, supervisors should be educated on all aspects of the job including laws and practice knowledge; leadership; integrity and justice; balancing supervision functions; organizational processes; and community understanding and valuing practice (McPherson, Frederico, & McNamara, 2016).

A study completed by Radey and Stanley (2018) looked at new child welfare caseworker's expectations for their supervision and how many caseworkers had supervisory experiences that met those expectations. The caseworkers interviewed in this study noted four major expectations for an effective supervisor: availability and approachability; consistency of provided information; level of micromanagement; level of support. New caseworkers wanted their supervisors to be available to them in an "ad hoc" fashion to answer questions and concerns, they also wanted reminders of how to complete tasks with step-by-step instructions. Caseworkers didn't feel as prepared to undertake the work and wanted their supervisors to teach and instruct them in the tasks of casework. Caseworkers wanted their supervisors to create a team environment within their units. Only half of those interviewed reported that their supervisors met these expectations. This current project is looking at how CWEB graduates describe their supervisors during their post-hire interviews.

Research

A total of 259 interviews have been completed since the start of the project. The data from 101 CWEB graduates and 12 CWWEF graduates have received at least one interview from August 2020 to May 2024. The findings included in this report are derived from the graduates' descriptions of their supervisors throughout the interview. In September 2022, a new question was added to the follow-up interview that specifically asks graduates to indicate strengths and areas of improvement for their current supervisor. Responses were read and grouped into themes. The themes were then collapsed into distinct categories that encompassed all the interview responses over time.

Results

A total of sixteen themes were identified in the interviews:

- **Supportive**
- **Helpful**
- **Responsive/Available**
- **Teach/Guide**
- **Brainstorming**
- **Informative/Knowledgeable**
- **Caring**
- **Good listener/communicator**
- **Encourages work/life balance**

- **Validates feelings**
- **Strengths based**
- **Works with learning style**
- **Wellness check-ins**
- **Provides reassurance**
- **Refers questions to someone else**
- **Team building**

The four most commonly found themes are discussed in detail in Figure 2.

Discussion

The majority of graduates spoke positively about their supervisors and appreciated the support they received. Since we have multiple time points for most of our graduates, we were able to look at how their description of their supervisor changed over time. It appears that the tone of the descriptions of their supervisor changes from the initial interview to later interviews. While supervisors are still described as supportive and helpful in later interviews, other themes such as knowledgeable and brainstorming were in the top four. This suggests that graduates appreciated the ability to go to their supervisors to help work through a case and didn't need as much teaching or guidance as they became accustomed to their work tasks.

It is notable that the top four supervisor characteristics graduates talked about match the characteristics new child welfare caseworkers wanted from their supervisors (Radey & Stanley, 2016).

We also looked at the amount of supervision that graduates received based on their self-report. The majority reported weekly structured supervision with their supervisor. However, not all the graduates discussed the amount of supervision they receive.

This data brief serves as a reminder that effective supervision is a barrier to burnout and can enhance retention of new child welfare caseworkers.

References:

Bostock, L., Patrizo, L., Godfrey, T., & Forrester, D. (2019). What is the impact of supervision on direct practice with families? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 105, 1-9.

Figure 2. Main Interview Themes

SUPERVISION: TOP FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF CWEB SUPERVISORS

Supportive



Supervisor is supportive in helping the worker with tasks and allowing the worker the freedom to make decisions about cases

"I am well supported by my supervisor, we work well together. My supervisor knows when to step in and be supportive and guides me in what to do. She gives me the leeway to make my own decisions, when appropriate."

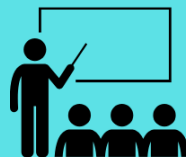
Helpful



Supervisor is willing to help with cases such as going out into the field with the graduate, helping with paperwork, and walking the graduate through the steps of a case.

"My supervisor is very helpful in keeping me on track. She makes lists for me (weekly) of what I need to complete for each case, in three categories - paperwork, phone calls and visits. She lists the phone numbers for all of the calls. She is assisting while not doing the work for me."

Teach/Guide



The supervisor teaches the graduate the necessary tasks of a caseworker and guides their decision making.

"I got a placement case this week, so my supervisor guided me through the process, including court. This was an emergency placement over the weekend, which was assigned to me on Monday. I don't know what all I have to do but I am confident in my supervisor's guidance."

Responsive/Available



The supervisor is available to the graduate for questions or support. The supervisor responds quickly to questions or calls from the graduate

"My supervisor is always available to talk. I can vent or ask questions. If my supervisor doesn't know the answer, she will direct me to another supervisor. She always checks in with us at our desks. She doesn't micromanage, but is very present in our daily work."

Cearley, S. (2004). The power of supervision in child welfare services. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 33, 313-327.

Jacquet, S.E., Clark, S.J., Morazes, J.L., & Withers, R. (2008). The role of supervision in the retention of public child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1(3), 27-54.

McPherson, L., Frederico, M. & McNamara, P. (2016) Safety as a Fifth Dimension in Supervision: Stories from the Frontline, *Australian Social Work*, 69(1), 67-79

Radey, M. & Stanley, L. (2018). "Hands on" versus "empty": Supervision experiences of frontline child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91, 128-136.

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