Evaluation of the Florida Child Welfare Pre-Service Training

Quarterly Report
For Period 7/1/18 – 9/30/18

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Introduction
This report covers the major activities completed for the Florida Child Welfare Pre-Service Evaluation during the second full quarter of the study period, July 1, 2018 through September 30, 2018. The study team includes seven researchers from the University of South Florida’s College of Behavioral and Community Sciences who have combined experience in both qualitative research and child welfare practice. This phase of the study has been focused on a pilot testing of methodology and protocols at a local CBC, and adjustments therein that needed to be made as a result of the pilot test. A second important part of this quarter has been communicating with DCF staff and lead agency staff at each of the six proposed sites to explain the study and gain buy-in. This work has been completed in consensus with study partners, including the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (FICW) at Florida State University and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Rationale for Study
This study is a direct response to Florida Senate Bill 1666, which has prioritized the evaluation of pre-service training for child protective investigators (CPIs) and case managers. Specifically, the bill calls for strengthening the child welfare workforce through the following efforts: 1) Assessing the readiness of case managers and CPIs to begin their job responsibilities, 2) Determining whether pre-service training is at the level it should be at, and 3) Identifying both environmental factors and individual coping strategies of workers that facilitate and hinder knowledge acquisition and skill development while in the role of case manager and CPI. Thorough evaluation of these efforts, as outlined in the evaluation plan, will help to highlight areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement, and it is also likely that findings will shed light on the relationship between pre-service training and job readiness, performance, and satisfaction.

Communications with Sites
The first communication with sites occurred with our pilot site location. Members of the research team emailed this lead agency to request participation and offered to have an initial call to discuss the logistics of the evaluation and participating as the pilot site. Data from the pilot site will not be included in the evaluation, but did help the team refine methodologies and protocols. The lead agency initially contacted for the pilot did agree to participate, and at the
time of writing this report the pilot is partially complete as some evaluation activities needed to wait until newly trained staff were in the field on their own cases.

The second communication with sites went to lead agency and DCF contacts in each of the six circuits that were selected for participation in this study. To determine the circuit of focus within each of the six regions, team members reviewed several variables, including population size, population demographics, number of cases, retention and turnover rates, and any factors that may lead to significant difficulty in obtaining data. For a more detailed discussion of how sites were selected please see Quarterly Progress Report One.

DCF contacts identified were based on guidance from Central Office regarding contacting local community directors in each circuit. An email was sent from the study team to relevant stakeholders that contained a letter explaining the study as well as the revised evaluation plan. Either a follow up call was then scheduled or a brief, in-person meeting was scheduled to occur with each site at the Child Protection Summit. These meetings and calls addressed issues such as an overview of the evaluation, a review of protocols and timeframes for new case managers, a specific review of the interview protocol for agency leadership, discussion around the transition of new case managers to their agencies post training and how to maintain communication with them for study purposes, evaluation team philosophy (e.g., least invasive, open/transparent, etc.), and evaluation timeframes. Following the Summit, DCF identified an additional group of stakeholders at the Regional level that needed to be briefed on the study, so a conference call occurred on September 11, 2018 to introduce the study and answer any questions. All protocols and the evaluation plan were distributed to these contacts immediately after the conference call.

**Progress on Evaluation Activities and Accomplishments**
The study team has made progress on several components of the evaluation, including finalizing all protocols, distributing knowledge assessments at the pilot site, meeting with Community-Based Care agencies (CBCs), establishing a concrete schedule for upcoming training and evaluation activities, and developing an interview protocol to capture important information about training initiatives at each site. A detailed discussion of these activities is below.
Protocol Completion and Revisions

The study protocols for this evaluation had all been completed or were near completion as of the last report submission (6/29/18). A second knowledge assessment for the case manager and CPI specialty tracks was added as a separate measure towards the end of the previous report period in order to investigate how knowledge is transferred after participation in this more intensive component of the pre-service training, rather than just the CORE overview that everyone is provided together. Also, during the current report period, the study team realized the importance of capturing training initiatives at each site, since many are unique to specific environmental factors of each circuit and may help in understanding knowledge application and work satisfaction variations among the circuits.

As of this report, all protocols have been finalized. Based on the pilot test experience to date, the study team made minor revisions to the timeframe of distribution for some protocols in order to best capture important information for the study. Table 1 below includes an updated summary of the protocols and their corresponding method and timeframes for delivery:

Table 1: Protocol method and delivery timeframe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Delivery Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORE Knowledge Assessment</td>
<td>Electronic survey</td>
<td>First and last days of CORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Manager Knowledge Assessment</td>
<td>Electronic survey</td>
<td>First and last days of specialty track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI Knowledge Assessment</td>
<td>Electronic survey</td>
<td>First and last days of specialty track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Checklist</td>
<td>In-person observation</td>
<td>1, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months post-training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Report Survey</td>
<td>Electronic survey</td>
<td>Baseline, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months post-training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFA Secondary Analysis</td>
<td>Data transfer from ACTION</td>
<td>TBD based on availability of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Climate and Workplace Culture Survey</td>
<td>Electronic survey</td>
<td>Baseline and 12 months post-training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Initiatives Interview</td>
<td>In-person or phone interview</td>
<td>TBD based on CBC availability</td>
</tr>
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As discussed below, some of the protocols have already been distributed to the pilot site attendees, and results are being reviewed by the study team in order to inform any changes that may be necessary going forward.
Pilot Study Progress
The study team selected a CBC agency within the Central region for its pilot testing. This pilot site was selected because of the agency’s relative stability, proximity to the team, and existing cooperative relationships between the CBC and USF. The pilot testing began with a meeting with some members of the evaluation team and the leadership and training team at the CBC to discuss plans for the project. Additionally, the evaluation team met with the pre-service trainees on the same day (August 7, 2018). The CORE and case management specialty track assessment items were entered into the software platform, ProProfs, and electronic links were provided to the trainer. The trainer then provided the electronic link to the CORE pre-assessment on August 1, 2018 to trainees during the first day of the training class.

The evaluation team also met with the leadership of the Case Management Organizations (CMOs) who contract with the CBC to complete case management services on August 29, 2018. The evaluation team discussed the purpose and goals of the project. One attendee at the meeting asked to clarify the voluntary nature of the program, as some trainees reported concern that the assessments may potentially reflect poorly on their trainers. It was reiterated that participation is voluntary, and that the purpose is to evaluate the curriculum and the programs in place to support the transfer of knowledge.

To date, the pilot class has completed the CORE pre- and post–assessments, which were completed online the first and last day of CORE training. Trainees have also completed the case management specialty track pre-assessment on the first day of the specialty track curriculum. They will complete the case management specialty track post-assessment on the last day of their class. The evaluation team will begin collecting observational data from trainees in their assigned units via the observation checklist following the first month of the completion of the specialty track training.

Preliminary Results from CORE Knowledge Assessment
Beginning in August 2018, the study team distributed the Knowledge Assessment to pre-service trainees at the pilot site. At this time, trainees have completed the pre- and post-assessment for the CORE curriculum as well as the pre-assessment for the specialty track. Preliminary results of the CORE curriculum (Table 2) show that the average pre-test score was 75.2%, with scores ranging from 60% to 91.4%. When the assessment was administered again at the end of the CORE training, the average score increased to 85.3%, with scores ranging from 71.4% to 97.1%. This provides some preliminary evidence that knowledge was gained as a result of the
CORE curriculum training. However, it is important to note that on the day the survey was distributed, there was a temporary technical malfunction with the survey software which prompted trainees to select another answer if the first one they chose was incorrect, thus leading them to the correct answer. It is not clear how many participants encountered this glitch, and therefore scores must be interpreted cautiously, keeping in mind that the pre test scores may be higher than what was actually the case. Therefore, the difference between pre and post test scores may indeed be greater than depicted in the table below.

The study team has put into place a process for testing the software on the day before distribution and the day of to ensure there are no future malfunctions. In the unlikely event that a complication occurs again, the team will ensure that hard copies of the assessments are distributed by agency contacts. Once data from the specialty track post-assessment has been compiled, item-level analysis of each question in the Knowledge Assessments will help finalize this assessment for use with other sites.

Table 2. Core Curriculum Assessment Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Test (n=15)</th>
<th>Post-Test (n=14)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Range of Scores</td>
<td>60% - 91.4%</td>
<td>71.43% - 97.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Score</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
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Study Site Outreach

In the spirit of cooperation, the study team planned to convene a joint call with the DCF Office of Child Welfare and the regional Community Development Administrators in July, 2018. However, the study team did not receive DCF availability for the July call. Therefore, due to the need to initiate data collection and keep to a data collection schedule, and due to the opportune timing of the Florida Child Protection Summit, members of the evaluation team met with several of the circuit contacts at the conference in early September to introduce the study and answer questions. Following the face-to-face meetings, a joint call with the USF team, DCF, and circuit contacts did occur. During the call, the evaluation team discussed the purpose and goals of the project. Each circuit on the call identified a point person to handle communications about the project, and following the call, the evaluation team sent the study protocols to each contact for review. All conversations have been positive thus far, and the circuits are agreeable to working with the evaluation team on this project. We are continuing to identify the most appropriate
contact person in each area and to acquire the specific dates of pre-service training in order to begin evaluation activities at each site. We are also continuing to review the feasibility of including Miami-Dade as one of the study sites, due to the recent passing of their CBC CEO and the rebidding process for the lead agency contract in that area.

Conclusion
During the period of time covered by this report, the study team has focused most of its efforts on establishing communication with study sites and has been able to hold introductory meetings or calls with representatives from four out of the five lead agencies from selected sites, and with DCF representatives from each of the corresponding circuits. These efforts were time consuming, in that ensuring the necessary contacts were reached and coordinating meetings or calls with appropriate staff often required multiple steps for each site. Though ultimately fruitful, delayed responses from DCF Central Office compounded the process initially. Now that all parties have a cohesive understanding of the study goals and activities, it is expected that communications will be more streamlined going forward.

Additionally, the team has begun implementing study activities at the pilot site and gathering information from this process to help refine implementation steps for future sites. A training calendar for all sites has been developed, and several of the sites will begin their next pre-service training within the next two months. It is expected that by the next quarterly report, the team will have begun data collection at three sites and will be able to provide a more robust report on study findings.

Next Steps
The study team is now positioned to move forward collecting data for analysis at three additional sites, and dates for training and evaluation activities at remaining sites are currently being organized. The first step to implementation at each site will be administering the pre-test for the CORE training, which will occur on 10/8/18 at one site, 10/15/18 at the second site, and early November at the third site. Post-tests for CORE will be delivered approximately six weeks after, followed by pre- and post-tests for specialty tracks.