



**NYSAC**<sup>®</sup>  
— NEW YORK STATE —  
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

## Overcoming Challenges in Child Welfare:

*Addressing County Recruitment and Retention Struggles & Strategies for  
Enhancing Outcomes and Timeliness.*

**Bonadio & Co., LLP**  
Accounting, Consulting & More



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**NYSAC**

# Overview



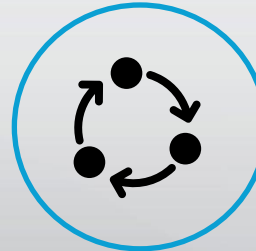
Introductions &  
Background



Critical Issues in Recruiting &  
Retaining Staff and Potential  
Solutions to Implement



Operational & Fiscal  
Impacts of Technology



Policies, Procedures &  
Protocols

**Bonadio & Co., LLP**  
Accounting, Consulting & More



# Introductions/Backgrounds



Josh Bills, Manager  
Bonadio Advisory & Consulting



Courtney Handy, Director  
Bonadio Advisory & Consulting

# Child Welfare Experience

Together, we have over a decade of experience in comprehensive reviews of child welfare agencies.

- Over a dozen comprehensive child welfare reviews – including urban and rural counties
- Reviews stem from
  - Turnover in leadership,
  - High-profile incidents (e.g. fatality)
  - Concerning state-wide metric or pending OCFS PIP
- Include following elements:
  - One-on-one interviews with staff & management
  - OMA Tool case review
  - Evaluation of policies & procedures, and internal controls
  - Analysis of KPIs and other relevant data
- Focus on operations, program and fiscal elements of CPS, Preventive and Foster Care.
- Period of engagement is approximately 9 months.

# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Current Landscape

- The Child Welfare League of America found that annual average caseworker **turnover is between 20-40%**
  - In challenged districts, this can increase to 50%+
- There is **increased demand** due to
  - Population growth
  - Higher reports of child abuse/neglect
  - Increasingly complex family environments

A blue-tinted background image showing a fountain pen resting on a document with some faint handwriting.

# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Current Landscape

- Demand for caseworkers has overtaken supply in last 20 years, due to
  - Strong competition from adjacent departments
    - e.g. TA/SNAP, Medicaid
  - Higher wages and less stress in neighboring fields of work
    - e.g: Schools, Hospitals, Nonprofits
- Rural and urban environments both have challenges:
  - Rural areas typically have fewer qualified workers
  - Urban agencies face higher caseloads and increased burnout

# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Challenges in Recruitment

- Public Perception: Media often focuses on negative elements
- Competitive Job Market: Entry-level often lower than similar fields
- Educational Requirements: States require four-year degree and/or specialized certification & testing
- Workplace Environment: Overwhelming new workers with cases; caseloads often exceed OCFS recommended amount; safety in the field



# Strategies & Solutions:

## Recruitment

- **California's Child Welfare Training Program:** Students receive *stipends and specialized child welfare coursework* in exchange for a commitment to work in public child welfare after graduation.
- **Outcome:** Agencies participating in the program reported a higher proportion of new hires who stayed beyond their first two years compared to those hired from general applicant pools.
- **Why It Worked:** Students enter the workforce with targeted skills and realistic expectations, reducing the learning curve and early-career burnout.

# Strategies & Solutions:

## Recruitment

- **University of Wisconsin-Madison Child Welfare Field Placement:**
- Offers specialized *internships* within county child welfare agencies, pairing students with experienced mentors.
- **Outcome:** Many interns transition directly into full-time roles upon graduation, boosting retention because of the strong supervisor–mentee relationships already established.



# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Factors Contributing to Higher Turnover

- Emotional Toll: Daily exposure to effects of child abuse, neglect or family crisis
- Caseload Volume/Workload: Unsurprisingly, those with highest caseloads indicate greatest dissatisfaction and stress
- Administrative Burden: Paperwork requirements, especially those related to legal duties, visitation and misc. family requests

# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Impact of High Turnover

- Service disruptions created when case shifts from one worker to another. This results with
  - County's relationship with family is reset, loss of established trust
  - Delays in service implementation
  - Family Unmonitored, often for extended periods of time
  - Lack of communication with collaterals and service providers



# Critical Issues in Recruiting & Retaining Staff: Impact of High Turnover

- Caseworker morale suffers as turnover creates workplace instability. Results with
  - Remaining caseworkers absorbing more work, often cases that are left in disarray
  - Inexperienced workers are promoted before they are qualified
  - Potential for “snowball effect” – one worker resigning triggers wave of additional exits



# Strategies & Solutions: Retention

- **New Jersey's Caseload Reduction Initiative:**
- The state set *caseload caps* (e.g., 12–15 families per caseworker) and hired additional support staff to alleviate administrative tasks.
- **Outcome:** Within two years, turnover rates dropped from ~ 25% to ~15%. Caseworkers reported higher job satisfaction due to manageable caseloads.

# Strategies & Solutions: Retention

- **Clark County, Nevada – Administrative Support Specialists:**
- Introduced a pilot program with paraprofessional “*support specialists*” who handle non-clinical tasks (documentation, data entry), freeing up caseworkers to focus on direct client interaction.
- **Outcome:** Caseworkers reported less burnout; the county estimated cost savings on overtime and a lower first-year turnover rate by approximately 10%.

# Strategies & Solutions: Retention

- **Oklahoma's Secondary Traumatic Stress Initiative:**
- Instituted monthly *group debriefings* led by mental health professionals and encouraged use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).
- **Outcome:** Staff reported increased job satisfaction and “feeling supported,” leading to an uptick in average tenure.

# Strategies & Solutions: Retention

- **Michigan DHHS Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI):**
- Offers robust onboarding and ongoing professional development, including *mentorship and leadership tracks* for experienced workers.
- **Outcome:** New hires who completed the training and mentoring program had lower rates of early departure (first-year turnover dropped from 25% to 15%).



# Critical Issues in Recruiting and Retaining Staff: Progression & Leadership

- The structure of child welfare departments contribute to turnover through
  - Unclear paths to advancement
  - Few formal reviews of employee performance
  - No financial incentive to perform at high-level
  - Inadequate training once next-level achieved
    - Often filling position of someone already left
    - Little formal training for mid-level management





# Strategies & Solutions: Progression & Leadership

- **Ohio County's Training Program for Supervisory Positions:**
- *Internal classes* for staff who are promoted to mid-level management; focus on detailed understanding of duties and expectations as supervisors
- **Outcome:** Employees learned best practices of new position; reported that they felt well-equipped for transition to new role; less mid-level management turnover

# Strategies & Solutions: Retention

- **Kentucky's Internal Leadership Development Program:**
- Provides a *structured route for advancement*: caseworkers can move into supervisory roles after achieving certain benchmarks in performance and education.
- **Outcome:** Workers felt their career goals were recognized, improving morale and reducing voluntary resignations among mid-level caseworkers.



# Strategies & Solutions: Progression & Leadership

- **Massachusetts' Department of Children & Families:** Implemented a *360-degree feedback model*, where feedback is gathered not only from supervisors but also from peers, subordinates and in some cases, partner agencies.
- Balanced this feedback with supervisory input to create a comprehensive performance profile.
- **Outcome:** Provided holistic perspective of worker's strengths and weaknesses
- This fostered culture of continuous improvement and peer-driven collaboration
- Morale improved as strengths were celebrated and weaknesses became areas of focus for improvement

# Strategies & Solutions: Progression & Leadership

- **Michigan DHHS:** Designed *tiered career ladder that directly ties positive performance evaluations to promotional paths*; integrated clear performance benchmarks into evaluation criteria (e.g. job knowledge, collaboration, client outcomes)
- **Outcome:** Workers were motivated to meet performance standards; high performers identified early in careers guided toward supervisory roles; lower mid-management turnover



# Strategies & Solutions: Progression & Leadership

- **Tennessee's Coaching and Reflective Supervision Project:** Trained supervisors in *coaching techniques*, emphasizing strength-based feedback and collaborative problem-solving.
- **Outcome:** Supervisors reported being better equipped to handle staff concerns, and frontline workers cited a more positive work environment, resulting in a marked decrease in turnover among first-year employees.



# Fiscal & Operational Implications of Technology



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	FC	34	Relative	67	Kinship	75	Emerg. Certified	10		
2	Current Homes		106	PL on FH Listing:		98	PL on Child Log:		117	
CURRENT PLACEMENTS										
TRNG Cust	Vendor #			Certified Foster or Approved Relative	Kinship?	Email	Email 2	Capacity	# CAP	School District
		Sibert, Alex	Chambers	Approved Relative	Y			2 M or F 0-18	2	Brighton
		Hirsch, Heather	Rogers	Approved Relative	Y			1 M or F 0-18	1	Fairport
		Geary, Kelly	Rogers	Approved Relative	Y			1 M or F 0-18	1	Greece
		Smith, Marnie and David	Rogers	Certified Foster	N			2 F 0-18	2	Hilton
		Bills, Josh and Stephanie	Rogers	Approved Relative	Y		mm	1 M or F 0-18	1	Hilton
		Dryer, Kevin and Stacey	Rogers	Approved Relative	Y			2 M or F 0-18	2	Hilton
		Bjork, Kristy	Rogers	Approved Relative	Y			1 M or F 0-18	1	Fairport
List of Foster Homes      CERTIFICATION TRACKER      FH Child Log      Abar, Elizabeth & ...      1      4										

PLACEMENT—MOVE—INCIDENT REPORT

Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name	DOB	M/F	Race	Relig	CIN #	SI#	SSI#

Bio-Mother (Also list any natural parent living out of household.)		Bio-Father (Also list any natural parent living out of household.)	
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:	Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:	Phone:	Phone:

Home school district at time of removal: \_\_\_\_\_ Retain? \_\_\_\_\_

Child currently placed at: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Placed: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of foster care placement (Examples: Sullivan County home, Barkshire, Kila Pears etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for placement: Neglected, no suitable resources available

List relevant behavior problems: none known

List child's known allergies/medical problems and all medications: \_\_\_\_\_

List any upcoming or regular appointments or court dates: \_\_\_\_\_

List any preferred type of placement or social needs, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

What arrangements have been made for the child's clothing, medication or school books? \_\_\_\_\_

Name any resource or resource available to prevent foster care or interposed in custody: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Place	Moved From	Moved To	Date

Hour	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
8	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
9	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
10	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
11	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
12	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
13	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
14	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
15	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
16	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
17	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
18	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
19	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
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25	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
26	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
27	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
28	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
29	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
30	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			
31	Laura	Lexie	Roberta	Joan			

FIRST NAME LAST NAME  
COMMISSIONER

TEL XXX-XXX-XXXX  
FAX XXX-XXX-XXXX

Insert county logo  
COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_  
Division of \_\_\_\_\_  
Department of Social Services  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to inform you that CHILD'S NAME (DOB: X-X/XXXX) is placed in the care and custody of the Sullivan County Department of Social Services. He/She is currently residing in the certified foster home of FOSTER PARENT NAME(S); FOSTER PARENT ADDRESS. Mr./Mrs. LAST NAME have permission to obtain appropriate medical care for CHILD'S NAME as necessary.

If you require any additional information please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned worker at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Triage IV-E Eligibility Checklist

Instruction: This form is to be completed each time a removing caseworker notifies the Triage Unit that a child has been placed in the legal care and custody or guardianship of the commissioner of social services under Article 10

CASE NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

CASE ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Caseworker/Supervisor Name and Ext: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

CIN: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: F ☐ M ☐

Was this a 1017 placement prior to foster care placement: Y/N \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DCFS Custody/Foster Care Placement Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How was the child placed in foster care? Circle one: Placement at Court \_\_\_\_\_ Consent to place \_\_\_\_\_ Police Removal \_\_\_\_\_ Commissioner's pull \_\_\_\_\_ Petition/Mod. Petition \_\_\_\_\_ Voluntary \_\_\_\_\_

Removal Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Removal Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of FH / facility child was initially placed: \_\_\_\_\_ Vendor ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of placement: \_\_\_\_\_

ANY MOVEMENT'S POST INITIAL PLACEMENT?

PLACEMENT LOCATION	VENDOR ID	DATE

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# Fiscal & Operational Implications of Technology

- Challenges with generational gaps and limitations of required child welfare system
- Common Opportunities to Leverage Technology:
  - *Paper forms* (visitation, triage, foster care child movements)
  - *Inter-office Messaging* (e.g., Teams)
  - *Methods of Retaining and Sharing Critical Information Needed by Multiple Departments*

# Fiscal & Operational Implications of Technology: Areas with the Largest Impact

*Document Management applications to compliment functionality of Connections (e.g., file sharing, searchable case notes)*

# Fiscal & Operational Implications of Technology: Areas with the Largest Impact

*Applications to Automate Workflows/Send Worker and Supervisor Updates (e.g., overdue visits and assessments)*



# Fiscal & Operational Implications of Technology: Areas with the Largest Impact

## Methods of Tracking and Reconciling Critical Points in Foster Care Processes

- *Multiple people involved in the end-to-end process with lack of a centralized platform*
- *Most costly area for child welfare agencies*
- *Area susceptible to error and inefficiencies that impact federal reimbursement dollars and cause vendor overpayments*



# Policies, Procedures & Protocols

- “Three Ps” in the following child welfare areas should be established, documented, reviewed by leadership, available in an easy-to-locate shared space and updated on an as-needed basis.
  - *Intake & Screening*: Guidelines for receiving & distributing new SCR hotline reports as well as determining which cases qualify as CPS vs FAR
  - *Accepting & Closing Preventive Cases* (especially for non-court ordered/voluntary)
  - *Case Transitions* (from Investigations to Preventive and/or Foster Care)
  - *Removals (Emergency & Non-Emergency) with legal department*
  - *Visitation & Transportation*

# Questions?

