Symposium
Policy Research to Guide Child Welfare Organizational Decision-Making

RYC

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* Will lead presentation of papers

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Why is this important?

- Results of Federal Child & Family Services Reviews and individual studies have pointed to the need for child welfare systems to improve policies & practices that will lead to improvements in child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families served by public child welfare agencies.

- Implementation science suggests that the process of implementing system reforms should be guided by readiness for organizational change as well as by using the best available evidence to guide the implementation process.

Purpose of this Symposium

- To report on the results of three collaborative studies intended to guide organizational decision-making related to implementing changes to child welfare policies and practices.

Background

- Despite the growing need for social services agencies to use research to guide organizational decision-making, prior research suggests that political and organizational factors may impede true collaboration and the utilization of research results by agency leadership to guide decision-making. (Anderson, 2001).

- Critical elements in this partnership include clarification of both short and long term goals for the research partnerships and having mechanisms to build and refine research projects that will provide meaningful data that can be used to drive organizational decision-making.

Purpose of these Studies

- This symposium reports on the results of three interrelated studies designed to answer questions related to
  - (1) changing policies to set minimally adequate foster care board rates;
  - (2) changing management and marketing practices to successfully recruit and retain foster parents; and
  - (3) waiving pre-service training requirements for MSW graduating students who demonstrate child welfare competencies prior to their employment in public child welfare agencies.

SYMPOSIUM: THREE PAPERS

Three Papers

- <u>Paper 1</u>: Estimating the costs associated with caring for foster children in the United States (Diane DePanfilis, & Haksoon Ahn)

- <u>Paper 2</u>: Conducting surveys of foster parents to guide recruitment and retention efforts (Nina Esaki, Haksoon Ahn, & Diane DePanfilis)

- <u>Paper 3</u>: Assessing a specialized educational program to build competency in public child welfare practice (Elizabeth Greeno & R. Anna Hayward)

Paper 1

- Estimating the costs associated with caring for foster children in the United States
  - Diane DePanfilis
  - Haksoon Ahn

Collaborators

- The original project team included representatives from:
    - Ruth H. Young Center for Families & Children in the University of Maryland School of Social Work
        – Johns Hopkins University
    - Children's Rights, Inc.
    - National Foster Parent Association

Background: Children in Out-of Home Care

- As of 9/30/09, there were **423,773** children in foster care with a mean length of stay of 26.7 months *(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010)*

  - 48% in non-relative foster care

  - 24% in formal relative foster care

  - 10% in institutional care

  - 6 % in group care

  - 4% in pre-adoptive care

Background: What are foster care rates?

- Payments to foster parents that are intended to cover the expenses of caring for children in foster care

- Funded with a combination of federal, state, and local dollars

Background:
Foster Care Board Rates

- Federal policy provides payments to cover the cost of caring for children in foster care (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, daily supervision, school supplies, etc.).

- The methods for setting rates vary widely between states.

- There is a need for a model to estimate the true costs associated with caring for children in foster care in the United States.

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Study Rationale

- Common knowledge that foster care rates do not cover actual expenditures by foster parents on behalf of the children in their care

- Research suggests that low rates impact foster parent recruitment and retention

Study Rationale

- An inadequate pool of foster parents may result in:
  - More children experiencing multiple placements
  - Children placed far from their families and neighborhoods
  - More reliance on residential care
  - Fewer children achieving permanency in a timely fashion

Why else is this study important?

- Inadequate support to meet the basic needs of children in out-of-home care takes an enormous toll on children and youth

Background: Foster Care Rates

- Determined on a state by state basis

- Wide Range (state to state)

  Nebraska $226/month to Washington, DC $869/month (basic rate for child, age 2)

- National Average Basic Rates in 2007

  - $488/month (at age 2)
  - $509/month (at age 9)
  - $568/month (at age 16)

Study Objectives

- The objectives of this longitudinal study were to
    - (1) operationally define a child's basic needs as guided by federal regulations;
    - (2) construct multivariate models to estimate the costs associated with caring for foster children;
    - (3) construct adjustment formulas based on geographical variations in all states;
    - (4) construct cost templates for each state based on the models;
    - (5) construct cost of living adjustments using the CPI-U-RS inflation adjustments for all states.

Study Methods

- Secondary analysis of original national study that used USDA's estimate of expenditures on children by families:

  - Estimated the average cost of all goods that matched allowable categories

  - Predicted costs as a function of children of different ages (0-4, 5-13, 14-18)

  - Made adjustments for categories not available in CES data

  - Made geographical cost of living adjustments

- Calculation of cost of living adjustments using the CPI-U-RS inflation adjustments for all states.

Framework for Economic Model

Eight expense categories allowed by the Title IV-E Maintenance Program of the Social Security Act

1. Food
2. Clothing
3. Shelter
4. Daily Supervision
5. School Supplies
6. Child's Personal Incidentals
7. Liability Insurance with Respect to a Child
8. Reasonable Travel to Child's Home for Visitation

Defining Expenditures within Categories

- For each cost category, the original study considered:

  - Federal Guidance

  - Resources and Literature

  - Advisory group input

Methodology for Development of the Foster Care Rates

1. Use Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES)

   – Same data source on typical family expenses on children used by USDA

   – "Perfect" USDA by removing components not appropriate for foster care rate, e.g., health care, educational expenses, mortgage/rent

2. Identify additional expenses specific to children in foster care and incorporate into rate

3. Adjust for differences in cost-of-living to produce rates for 50 states and D.C.

Study Sample

- Families included in the analysis were:

  - Middle income families
  - Families with 2 or fewer children

Data Analysis

- CES data from 2002-2004 were used and then inflation-adjusted to 2006 (in the original study)

  - Multivariate data analysis with cost variables matched to each of the cost categories.

- Results were adjusted for inflation by using the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U-RS to reflect 2007, 2008, and 2009 values.

Taking into Account Additional Expenses Specific to Children in Foster Care

- Increased Wear & Tear
  - Bedding
  - Furniture / Appliances
  - Books / School Supplies
  - Clothing

- Increased Expenses
  - Food
  - Utilities
  - Daily Supervision

Taking into Account Additional Expenses Specific to Children in Foster Care

Liability and Property Insurance

- Rates developed through this project include the cost of purchasing both property and liability insurance for foster parents

- However, project partners recommend that states provide insurance directly to foster parents in the future

Childcare and Travel

- **Not** included in model rates

- Original project partners take the position that foster parents should be reimbursed for actual costs for
    - Child Care for the working foster parent
    - Travel for visitation
    - Travel for administrative case / judicial review
    - Travel for medical care

- Rationale -- these expenses vary significantly from foster family to foster family depending on:
    - Where family lives
    - Need for full-time child care
    - Who takes the child for their visit & how far they need to travel
    - Travel to administrative case / judicial reviews are funded through Title IV-E Administration and travel to medical care is funded through Title XIX Medicaid

Geographic Cost-of-Living Adjustment

Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates For Children were adjusted to cost of living variations

- Individualized rates for 50 states and the District of Columbia

Original Study Results

	Current Average Rate	Foster Care MARC	To hit the Foster Care MARC, current rate must be increased by:
Age 2	$488	$629	29%
Age 9	$509	$721	41%
Age 16	$568	$790	39%

Original Study Results

Hitting the MARC: Arizona and D.C.

Must raise rates by up to 25%:	10 states
Must raise rates by 26% to 50%:	11 states
Must raise rates by 51% to 75%:	14 states
Must raise rates by 76% to 100%:	9 states
Must raise rates by more than 100%:	5 states

Updated Study Results – Inflation Adjustment by using CPI-U

- Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) Changes, 2000-2010

CPI-U 12-Month Changes, 2000 to Present
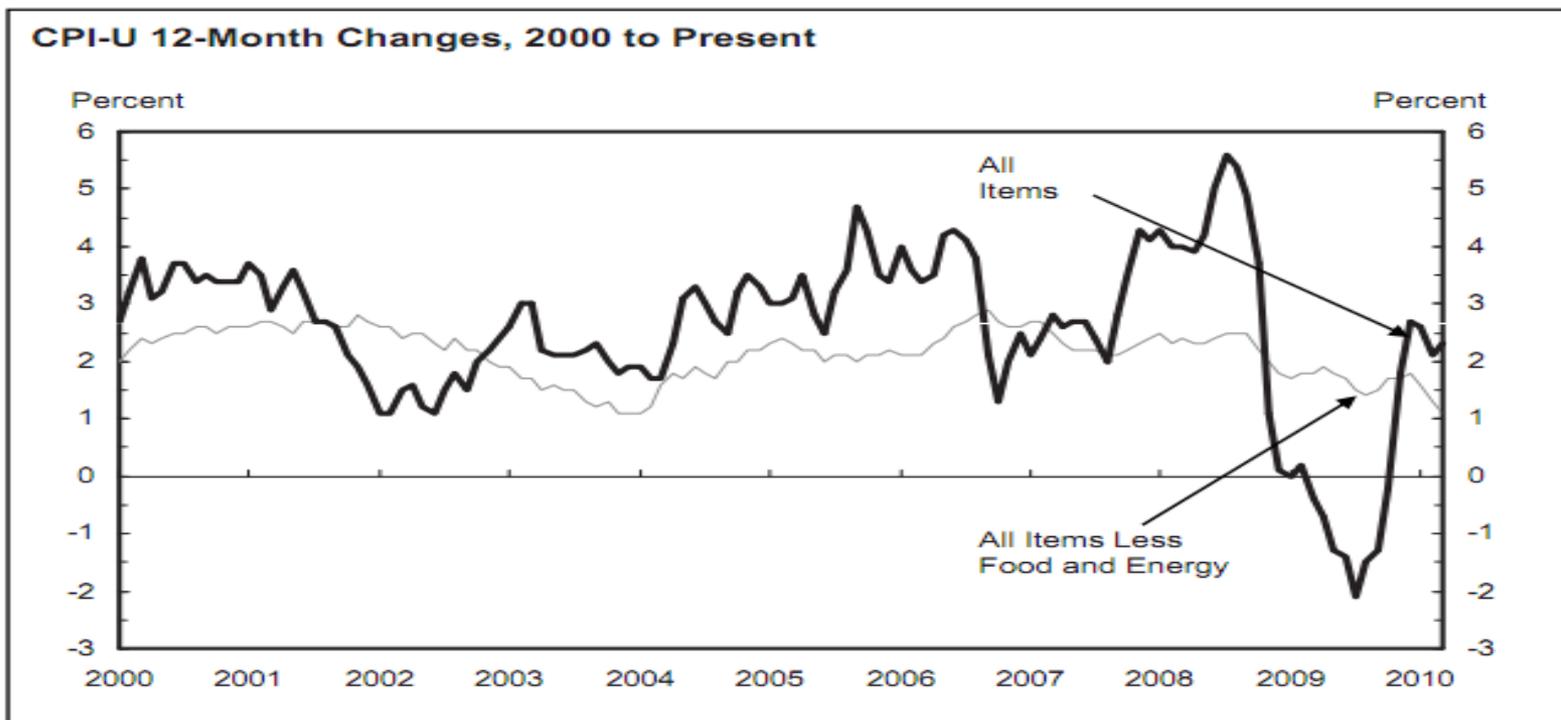
Updated Study Results

US Average	Current Average Rate (2007)	Foster Care MARC (2007)	Foster Care MARC (2008)	Foster Care MARC (2009)
Age 2	$488	$629	$672	$669
Age 9	$509	$721	$770	$767
Age 16	$568	$790	$844	$840

Limitations

- There are no national studies that have tracked the actual costs of caring for children in foster care, thus cost templates were estimated from the best available data.

- Since USDA data matches the costs of caring for average middle class children, the cost adjustments for foster children were approximates and may over or under estimate the true expenses.

Discussion/Implications

- At the time the original study was implemented, few states used any rigorous methodology to calculate their foster care rates.

  – To avoid the negative consequences for children as well as for child welfare systems, more states should use research based formulas to routinely adjust foster care rates to reimburse for the actual costs of caring for children in foster care.

Impact on Organizational Decision-Making

- Media coverage in over 150 print and tv stories
- Administrative increases in foster care rates in MD and WI
- Legislative increases in Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, Virginia
- Matching MARC rates in Mississippi (Class action suit)
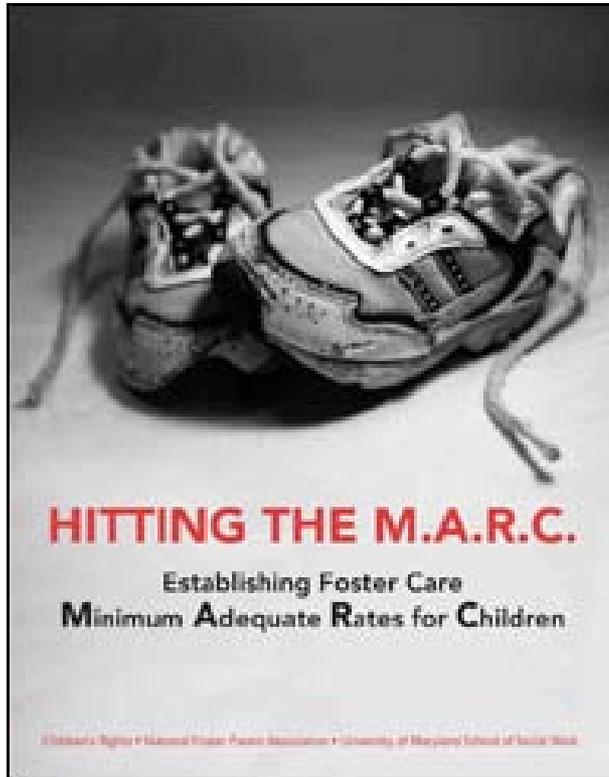- Legislation or suits pending in other states (e.g., California, Indiana, New York)

Example: Impact on Organizational Decision-Making in Maryland

	MD Foster Care Rates			MD Foster Care MARC			To hit the Foster Care MARC, current rate must be increased by:		
	Age 2	Age 9	Age 16	Age 2	Age 9	Age 16	Age 2	Age 9	Age 16
July 2007	735	735	750	628	720	789	***	***	5%
July 2008	835	835	850	646	740	811	***	***	***
July 2009	835	835	850	671	769	843	***	***	***
July 2010	835	835	850	668	766	839	***	***	***

Clarifying Questions

Download the report

HITTING THE M.A.R.C.

Establishing Foster Care
Minimum **A**dequate **R**ates for **C**hildren

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*Serving Families,
Educating Practitioners,
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http://www.family.umaryland.edu/ryc_research_and_evaluation/
child_welfare_research_files/fpr08-07.htm

Paper 2

- Conducting surveys of foster parents to guide recruitment and retention efforts.
  - Nina Esaki
  - Haksoon Ahn
  - Diane DePanfilis

Importance of Foster Homes

- Family foster homes are a critical resource for child welfare
  - On any given day, over 420,000 children and youth are in foster care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).
  - At least two-thirds of the placements are for family foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009)
- High dropout rates and a shortage of foster homes are an enduring concern for most child welfare agencies (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004)
  - Foster parents who currently provide care are dropping out at high rates - 30 to 50% (Christian, 2002)
  - Foster families can find the experience overwhelming and frustrating, causing many to leave foster parenting within their first year (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004)

Study Questions

1. From the foster parents' perspective, how effective was the child welfare agency in preparing them for their role?

2. Which child welfare agency activities best predicted foster parents' perception of the effectiveness of the agency in preparing them for their role?

Method

- Cross sectional survey of continuing (n=254) and, separately, exited (n=223) foster parents of Mid-Atlantic state

- Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews conducted from November 2008 to April 2010

- Response rates of 81% for continuing and 86% for exited foster parents

- Descriptive and multiple linear regression analysis using Stata 11

Measurement

- **Demographics**
  - Marital status, race, age, employment status and education level
- **Adequacy of the training and support (3 point Likert scale)**
  - Training for foster parents
  - Support from the resource worker
  - Support from the child's worker
  - Support from the agency; and
  - Foster parent board rate (compensation)

Dependent Variable

- **"Overall, how effective was the agency in preparing you for experiences you have had as a foster parent?"**

- **4 point Likert scale**
    - 4=Very Effective
    - 3=Effective
    - 2= Ineffective, and
    - 1=Very Ineffective

Sample Characteristics

	Exited (n=223)	Continuing (n=254)
Married	69%	60%
White	29%	45%
≥ 50 yrs old	54%	39%
Employed	60%	66%
College educated	44%	34%

Descriptive Results: Effectiveness of Agency

Effectiveness of Agency

	Exited (n=223)	Continuing (n=254)
Very Effective	35%	29%
Effective	51%	51%
Ineffective	13%	13%
Very Ineffective	1%	7%

Effectiveness of Agency

- More than 85% of exited parents answered that the agency was very effective (35%) or effective (51%)

- 80% of continuing parents answered that the agency was very effective (29%) or effective (51%)

Regression Results:
Predictors of Effectiveness of Agency

Continuing Foster Parents
(F = 11.91, $p < 0.001$)

Variables	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t
Effectiveness of training	0.228*	0.091	2.500	0.013
Support from resource worker	-0.045	0.080	-0.550	0.580
Support from child's worker	0.202*	0.080	2.530	0.012
Support from the agency	0.431***	0.097	4.440	0.000
Adequate parent board rate	0.206*	0.085	2.430	0.016
Constant	-1.361	0.924	-1.470	0.143

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Continuing Foster Parents

- Effectiveness of training had a significant positive impact on the perception of the effectiveness of the agency (β=0.228, p<0.05)

- Support from the child's worker (β=0.202, p<0.05) and support from the agency (β=0.431, p<0.001) were also significant

- Each increase in the perceived level of adequacy of foster parent board rate increased perception of effectiveness of the agency by 21 percent (p<0.05)

Exited Foster Parents
(F =5.64, *p*<0.001)

Variables	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t
Effectiveness of training	0.370***	0.091	4.080	0.000
Support from resource worker	0.204*	0.083	2.460	0.015
Support from child's worker	-0.100	0.080	-1.250	0.214
Support from the agency	0.119	0.093	1.280	0.204
Adequate parent board rate	0.082	0.084	0.980	0.331
Constant	3.730	1.034	3.610	0.000

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Exited Foster Parents

- Effectiveness of training had a significant positive impact on the perception of the effectiveness of the agency (β=0.37, p<0.001)

- Effectiveness of training had stronger effects on the perception of the effectiveness of the agency for exited parents than continuing parents

- Support from the resource worker (β=0.204, p<0.05) also had a significant impact

Summary of Results

- Most of the foster parents perceived the agency as effective in preparing them for their role

- Training was significant predictor for both groups

- Exited foster parents' perception of adequate foster parent board rate was not significantly related while significant for continuing foster parents

- Continuing parents perceived more types of support as contributing to the effectiveness of the agency compared with exited parents

Limitations

- Amount of time that the exited foster parent has been out of the system could change their perceptions

- Analysis was conducted separating the two foster parent samples, to parallel the survey design

- Study used a cross-sectional design

Discussion/Implications

- Adequate training and support can help to reduce the strain and provide foster parents with the tools and information necessary to foster successfully

- A sufficient board rate seemed to be an important component in retaining continuing foster parents

Impact on Organizational Decision Making

- Annual monitoring of foster care board rates to align with M.A.R.C. rates

- Implementation of evidence-supported Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP) program

Clarifying Questions

Paper 3

- Assessing a specialized educational program to build competency in public child welfare practice.
  - Elizabeth Greeno
  - R. Anna Hayward

Maryland's Title IV-E Program

- Education for Public Child Welfare Program partnership between the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the Maryland Department of Human Resources
- Students participate in the following:
  - Specialized coursework
  - Internships (field units)
  - Specialized trainings and workshops
  - Educational stipends
  - Employment obligation

Background: Educational Training Programs & Child Welfare Practice Competency

- Competencies for direct service skills
  - Promoting social work education for child welfare workers can contribute to development of knowledge & skills necessary for practice (Barbee et al., 2009)
- Professional Child Welfare Workforce
  - Preparation to demonstrate a variety of practice skills
  - Retention & professionalization of the workforce (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009)
- Self-efficacy
  - Effect on worker retention (Dickinson & Painter, 2009) & work success (Ellett, 2009)
- Impact of previous child welfare experience
  - Socialization to the profession (Cheung & Tang, 2010)

Why else is this study important?

- Practice competency directly impacts child & family outcomes

Study Question #1

- Is participation in the Title IV-E training program associated with changes in self-reported competency in: engaging families in assessment, service planning with families, collaboration and team work, diversity, assessing abuse and neglect, clinical interventions, working with families in diverse settings, assessing for substance abuse, assessing for sexual abuse, out-of-home placement, permanency planning, working with the courts, and working with youth at various developmental stages?

Study Question #2

- Is prior child welfare experience associated with higher levels of perceived competency prior and following participation in the Title IV-E program?

Study Sample

- 322 MSW & BSW Title IV-E Students

- 2003 to 2009 (6 cohorts of students)

- 48% (n = 125/261) reported having some public child welfare experience prior to their participation in the Title IV-E program

- Demographics for past 3 cohorts (N = 128)
  - 90% (n = 114) Female
  - 59% (n = 75) White
  - 30% (n = 39) Black

Measurement

- Self-Assessment Child Welfare Competency Survey
  - Survey developed for Maryland's IV-E program based on the Council on Social Work Education competency guidelines (see Zlotnik, 1997).
- Survey taken at the beginning and end of academic year
- 10 point scale measures level of confidence to perform 13 practice skills related to public child welfare practice

Data Analysis

- Initially pursued multilevel modeling

- For research question#1, 13 paired sample t-tests with .01 Bonferroni adjustment

- For research question #2, three one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted

Results

- Self-Assessment Child Welfare Competency Survey demonstrated high internal reliability
  - .95 for pre-test
  - .99 for post-test

Results for Question #1

Practice Skill	Mean Pre-test score	Mean Post-test Score	*t* value	Sign. (2 tailed)
Engaging families in assessment	6.75	8.15	10.99	.000
Developing a service plan	6.55	8.01	10.69	.000
Collaborating as a team member	6.90	8.32	10.43	.000
Diversity & use of self	7.34	8.28	8.28	.000
Assessing for abuse and neglect	6.11	7.55	11.69	.000
Using clinical skills	6.10	7.54	9.46	.000
Working in other settings	7.19	8.61	10.34	.000
Assessing and intervening for substance abuse	5.76	7.08	8.89	.000
Assessing and intervening for sexual abuse	5.05	6.41	7.79	.000
Arranging out-of-home placement	5.15	6.86	9.96	.000
Permanency planning	5.83	7.34	9.24	.000
Working with the courts	5.10	6.91	9.42	.000
Working with developmental stages	7.12	8.31	9.29	.000

Results for Question #2

Difference between students with and without prior public child welfare experience

		N	Mean Score	F	Sig.
Total Pre-IV-E Competency Score	**No prior Experience**	**136**	**5.9106**	**14.483**	**.008**
	Prior Experience	**125**	**6.6853**		
Difference between Post- and Pre-Program Competency Scores	**No prior Experience**	**136**	**1.7025**	**7.040**	**.008**
	Prior Experience	**125**	**1.0447**		
Total Post-IV-E Competency Score	**No prior Experience**	**136**	**7.6131**	**.701**	**.403**
	Prior Experience	**125**	**7.7299**		

Total N =261

Limitations

- Other factors influence students' self-reported competency in public child welfare
  - —Demographic information
  - —Contextual data
  - —Field placements

- Self-reported data

Discussion/Implications

- Results from study suggest positive benefit from participation in Maryland's Title IV-E educational training program across all 13 measured child welfare practice skill areas

- Varying levels of change for practice skill areas

- Prior experience was found to be associated with higher initial competency, but following program participation there were not differing levels of competency

Impact on Organizational Decision-Making

- Title IV-E program can provide skill based training, preparation, and competency for career in public child welfare

- Title IV-E program can be a valuable addition to the knowledge & expertise workers gain from direct experience in the field

- Skill based training may be beneficial for all workers, even those with previous experience

- Implications for new employees with prior child welfare experience

  - Pre-service training programs

Future Directions

- Administration of Self-Assessment Child Welfare Competency Survey (measure 3 times points)

- Follow retention of Maryland's Title IV-E program graduates

- Implementation of child welfare competence on the job

Clarifying Questions

Conclusions

- The impact of research on organizational decision making is improved when:
  - Multiple stakeholders are involved
  - The host agency has an investment in using the results, prior to the study being designed and are actively involved in all stages of the research.
  - Keeping agency representatives invested in using the results (particularly when results only support an existing initiative) is challenging but worth it.
  - Partnerships on one project can lead to new opportunities for research collaborations.

Questions & Discussion

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