

Training **MATTERS**



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- N.C. Division of Social Services
- N.C. Association of County Directors of Social Services
- BIABH Study Center at Appalachian State University
- Children and Family Services Association-NC
- ECU School of Social Work
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- N.C. State University Department of Sociology/Social Work
- N.C. A & T State University Social Work Program
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- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Charlotte Dept. of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want To Hear from You!

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The Preservice: A Key First Step

The first step the traveler takes on her journey is often the most important. Taken in the wrong spirit or in the wrong direction, the first step can make the entire journey longer and harder than it has to be.

For the hundreds who set off each year on the journey to become North Carolina child welfare workers, the "first step" is attending a course called *Child Welfare in North Carolina*.

Commonly known as the "Preservice," this 12-day curriculum is designed to give new child welfare social workers a clear idea of their destination—skilled social work practice that helps families and children—and to equip them with the basic knowledge and skills they will need to get through the first part of their trip.

Structure of Preservice

To achieve these goals, the Preservice is structured in the following way:

Week 1: Participants gain an understanding of the roles, mission, vision, and responsibilities involved in child welfare. Various intervention techniques are introduced to engage and empower families to achieve a safe, nur-

ture, permanent home for their children.

Week 2: Participants are made aware of the day-to-day operations in a county department of social services and the philosophical and legal basis for their work in child welfare. Participants learn to identify physical and behavioral indicators of abuse and neglect and apply this information to the continuum of child welfare. The process and practice of CPS intake, functional assessments, risk assessments and investigative assessments are introduced. *continued*→

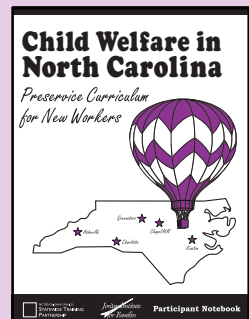
Preservice

Child Welfare in North Carolina is part of the 100 series courses offered by the Training Partnership. It is required of all new DSS child welfare social workers and supervisors who will practice in all areas of child

welfare, except family preservation. Family preservation services workers are subject to different training requirements; for more information, consult your agency's current N.C. Division of Social Services Training Schedule.

Completion of *Child Welfare in North Carolina* is required prior to direct client contact.

If you have questions about the 100 series or training requirements for your position, consult your agency's summer 2000 training calendar (pages 6 and 7) or contact Connie Polk (tel: 919/733-7672; Connie.Polk@ncmail.net).



The Preservice

from page 1

Experiential Learning Week: Participants return to their home agencies to apply on the job the concepts they have learned in the classroom. It is suggested that workers contact community resources and shadow experienced workers during this week.

Week 3: Participants are made aware of the placement and adoption process and its potential effects upon children. An overview of family services case plans (A–D) is given, and visitation plans are introduced and practiced. Participants learn to identify strategies involved with case closure.

What Supervisors Say About Preservice

Child Welfare in North Carolina may be the first step in a long professional journey. Yet supervisors are the ones charged with making sure new social workers reach their final destination of professional competence. Because of their multifaceted relationship with new workers—they are part guide, part mentor, and part boss—supervisors have many opportunities to assess Preservice’s effectiveness.

Therefore, between October 1999 and March 2000 the Training Partnership’s Elizabeth Lindsey conducted a series of focus groups with North Carolina supervisors to find out what they thought about Preservice. In all, 36 supervisors participated.

Supervisors told Lindsey that although Preservice was beneficial, they felt there was room for improvement. They followed up by giving many suggestions for improving Preservice.

Supervisors attending the focus groups gave Preservice good marks for introducing new workers to the important concepts that underlie family-centered, strengths-based social work. Generally speaking, however, they felt Preservice could do a better job addressing certain important skills and knowledge new workers need to do their jobs.

Their concerns are captured in the words of one supervisor, who noted that after Preservice, “Many new workers do not know what to do when they knock on a door. They need to learn practical job skills in Preservice.”

Supervisors identified four content areas they felt Preservice needed to address more fully:

1. Risk Assessment. Supervisors wanted new workers to have a clearer understanding that risk assessment is a process, not a form, and that there is a clear connection between risk assessment and case planning.

2. Case Planning. Supervisors wanted new workers to come out of Preservice knowing how to use and fill out the Family Case Plan. Supervisors also stated that they thought the training should emphasize case planning time frames and should be tied to the standards for the biennial review.

3. Interviewing. Supervisors wanted to see more content on intentional interviewing, information gathering, and follow-up questions and probes.

Supervisors attending the focus groups felt Preservice could do a better job addressing certain skills and knowledge workers need.

4. Forms. Supervisors wanted workers to have a more thorough knowledge of the different forms they will use.

On the plus side, supervisors felt that *Child Welfare in North Carolina*

does a good job of giving trainees a broad overview of the mission, mandate, and purpose of the child welfare system. In addition, they felt the course succeeds in giving new workers a beginning level of knowledge about policies regarding confidentiality, clients’ rights, and work deadlines.

Lindsey adds, “Supervisors noted that training sends a positive message to workers and that they often return from training with a sense of pride in the work they are undertaking and a sense of commitment to that work.”

The Partnership’s Response

The Training Partnership that delivers the Preservice is committed to ensuring this course is an effective first step for new workers. To this end, this focus group feedback, as well as input from trainees, trainers, and other sources, will be taken into account as the Partnership embarks on a revision of the Preservice.

Supervisors and new workers can expect to see a revised version of this course by late spring 2001.