

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
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- N.C. State University Department of Sociology/Social Work
- N.C. A & T State University Social Work Program
- Resources for Change, Inc.
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want To Hear from You!

If you have questions or would like to comment about something that appears in *Training Matters*, please contact Rebecca Brigham, Program Administrator, Children's Services Staff Development, N.C. Division of Social Services, 2412 Mail Service Center, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Suite 735, Raleigh, NC 27699-2412, State Courier: 56-20-25, E-mail: Rebecca.Brigham@ncmail.net, Tel: 919/733-7672.

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This issue of *Training Matters* was written by Dan Farrell and edited by John McMahon, both of whom are with the UNC-CH School of Social Work.

The Collaborative

Cara Noblitt was not thinking about school. She was not thinking about what she had been learning in her social work classes at Appalachian State University, nor why she chose to be in North Carolina's Child Welfare Education Collaborative.

Cara's attention was focused on four children. The children were young, but their eyes told a story of lives scarred by neglect and abuse. Cara had to deliver another tough pill: telling the children they were being placed in foster care.

"When the five-year-old asked her mother why she was crying, the mother replied: 'Because mommy is afraid she will never see you again.' I just cringed. It's a very emotional experience—and a tremendous sense of responsibility—to think that the buck stops here," she said.

Few jobs are as emotionally demanding as child welfare. A 1999 survey found, on average, a 44%

turnover rate in North Carolina child welfare positions each year. With the time it takes for recruitment, orientation, and training, each vacancy takes about seven months to fill.

Responding to this crisis, the Collaborative aims to counter high attrition rates within child welfare by fostering committed, knowledgeable practitioners.

A Statewide Effort

Established in 1999 and administered by the Jordan Institute for Families, the Collaborative is a joint effort of participating social work education programs, the NC Division of Social Services, the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services, and the NC Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

Initially executed at three Masters of Social Work (MSW) programs, the Collaborative was joined by three Bachelors of *continued* →

Participating Schools

BSW Programs

- Appalachian State University
- North Carolina State University
- University of North Carolina at Wilmington

MSW Programs

- East Carolina University
- The Joint Masters of Social Work Program
 - North Carolina A&T State University
 - University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Who Benefits?

Families and Children.

Expanding students' knowledge helps improve outcomes.

Scholars.

Educational and financial support prepares students to become visionaries and influence change.

Agencies. Departments of social services are able to recruit and retain qualified professionals.

North Carolina. Increasing the number of skilled child welfare professionals strengthens child welfare practice across the state.



Social Work (BSW) programs in 2000–2001. Seven additional BSW programs and one MSW program are in the process of affiliating. When fully implemented, the program will include all accredited BSW and MSW programs at public universities in North Carolina and anticipates graduating more than 100 students per year.

With more than 115 students currently participating, the Collaborative offers specialized training, courses, field education, and financial incentives. In turn, participants are obligated to work in a North Carolina public child welfare agency one year for every year or partial year they receive support from the Collaborative. A unique component of the program is that students fulfill their state-mandated child welfare pre-service training requirements upon graduation. This represents significant savings to agencies in both time and money.

Dan Ayers, a part-time student at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work pursuing his MSW, fully understands the pressures of child welfare and the need for adequate training. “The field of child welfare is in desperate need of workers that have foundations in social work theories and research-based practice. The MSW course load as well as the training and practice offered by the Collaborative have enhanced my social work skills,” Ayers said.

Cara Noblitt agrees. A nontraditional student, Noblitt returned to school after working in Income Maintenance at Alexander County DSS and will graduate with her BSW degree from Appalachian this May, almost twenty years after starting college. She credits her field instructor and agency personnel in

“We would look very favorably as to hiring future [Collaborative] graduates.”
—Donn Gunderson,
Director, Craven
County DSS

Catawba County DSS with helping her learn. “I’ve learned what the hands-on work will be like, as well as the emotional part of the job. I definitely think that par-

ticipating in the Collaborative helps refine practice skills,” she said.

Students are not alone in their praise. Forty-three students graduated from the Collaborative in 2001 and went to work in twenty-one North Carolina counties. Director of Johnston County DSS Earl Marett employed two such Collaborative graduates. “This is one of the best collaborations with the university system that I have ever seen. I can see nothing but positive things coming out of it. It’s addressing a need in DSS that has not been met before,” Marett said. “Workers are coming into the agency with all the required training. They know the terms, they know the responsibilities, and they know what they’re getting into.”

To create opportunities for current child welfare personnel as well as bring new practitioners into the field, the Collaborative focuses on recruiting the following individuals: current DSS staff, persons who indicate a commitment to careers in public child welfare services, and under-represented ethnic and cultural minorities. The student selection process involves DSS professionals as well as faculty members.

Collaborative Director Evelyn Williams said, “The Collaborative has created a way for the schools of social work to work together toward a common goal and work with the practice community. What we’re doing has the potential to increase the quality of child welfare services.”

In the wake of state budget cuts, Program Administrator of Children’s Services Staff Development Rebecca Brigham is hopeful about the program’s continuation. “The Collaborative is an excellent long-term strategy to ensure that we have professionally educated social workers in public child welfare,” Brigham said. “It is very important to the future of child welfare.”

Given his experience recruiting and training new workers, Earl Marett agrees. “There’s no question that the Collaborative saves the state money in the long run. You’re putting workers into DSS’s that are motivated, trained, and have some degree of firsthand experience. You’re protecting children in North Carolina more than they would have been otherwise.”

While acknowledging the pressures of child welfare, Cara Noblitt is ready: “People come in and burn out very quickly. But a few people are really meant to be there, and I really think that I am one of those people.”

How to Get Involved

- **Become a scholar.** If you are a county DSS worker and are interested in becoming a child welfare scholar with the collaborative, call 919/962-6450 or e-mail <nccwec@unc.edu>.
- **Hire a Graduate.** E-mail your NC county’s child welfare job openings to <childwelfarejobs@listserv.unc.edu>.
- **Become a Field Instructor.** We’re always looking for quality field instructors. For more information, please call (919) 962-6450 or e-mail <nccwec@unc.edu>.
- **Host a “Which Way to Graduate School?” Workshop.** This three-hour workshop is designed for people thinking about pursuing an MSW degree. For more information, please call (919) 962-6450 or e-mail <nccwec@unc.edu>.
- **Learn More.** Visit <<http://ssw.unc.edu/cwec/>>.