

ECI-DP Report Card

# Quality Early Learning Experience Puts Children On Road To Success

Young children in low-income neighborhoods thrived in an intensive early care and education program that offered a high-quality learning experience previously unavailable to them, according to a University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development report.

The final stage of the Early Childhood Initiative in Allegheny County shows that high-quality early care and education can significantly improve the school readiness of children, reduce grade retention, and lower the rate of children entering special education programs in low-income neighborhoods.

ECI, a public-private partnership, also showed that

high-quality early care and education can be cost effective.

“We are narrowing the achievement gap,” said Ronald L. Grimm, Superintendent, Woodland Hills School District, which includes one of the two communities included in the initiative. “Children in at-risk categories who have gone through the Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Projects are performing as well as children from our more advantaged communities when they reach kindergarten and first grade.”

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University Of Pittsburgh Initiative

# Stabilizing The Child Welfare System With Better-Trained Agency Workers

One of the nation’s most comprehensive child welfare training programs, which has reduced turnover and raised the education levels among caseworkers, is making significant contributions to Pennsylvania’s effort to achieve strict federal standards for ensuring the well-being of abused and neglected children.

No state fully complies with the standards, according to reviews recently reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pennsylvania failed to earn passing marks in categories such as the stability of children’s foster care placement, goals for finding them permanent homes, and meeting the educational needs of dependent

children.

But child welfare training – seen as a critical ingredient for improving child outcomes – is one of Pennsylvania’s strengths, thanks in large part to the state Department of Public Welfare’s steady commitment to several training programs bundled as the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Child Welfare Education and Research Programs.

Grants supporting the training initiatives were recently renewed and a new 40,000-square-foot building is being

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ECI was launched in 1996 as an ambitious attempt among private funders to deliver quality early care and education to every low-income child in the county. The initiative that the Rand Corp. described as a “noble bet” was scaled back in 2001 due to financial and logistical problems. Management was shifted from the United Way of Allegheny County to the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

### **Achieved All Goals**

The final phase became a demonstration project to achieve high-quality care and education and fiscal and administrative efficiency. The project was limited to two low-income communities, Braddock and Wilkinsburg, home to the ECI-DP lead agencies, Heritage Health Foundation and Hosanna House.

ECI officials said all of the demonstration project goals have been achieved. Program staff of The Heinz Endowments and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the main ECI funders, are pleased with an independent review by a panel of national experts done a year ago, and other studies that have validated children’s gains. “This ECI demonstration project offers the hard evidence of early childhood learning improvement that so many public officials ask for when deciding on funding for such programs,” said Heinz Endowments President Maxwell King. “The program results underscore the state’s efforts to make early childhood education and care a centerpiece of the education agenda.” It also bolsters, said King, the call in 2002 by the Governor’s Task Force on Early Care and Education to improve access to high-quality early care and education throughout the state. “In terms of program quality, both the [project] center classrooms and the family homes are in the top 1 percent of all early childhood centers and family homes in the state,” said Laurie Mulvey, Director of Service Demonstrations at the Office of Child Development and director of the demonstration project. Only one of the 220 centers and homes in a 2002 Pennsylvania State University child care study of and homes in that study scored higher in quality than the ECI centers.

### **Children Benefit**

High program quality, based on National Association of the Education for Young Children standards, is the likely reason children and families have shown measurable benefits, especially in achieving competencies for early school success. Several gains were reported in a study done by Stephen J. Bagnato, Ed.D, Director of the Scaling Progress in Early Childhood Settings (SPECS) Program Evaluation Research Team at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. The study of nearly 100 ECI children who reached kindergarten and first grade by October 2000 showed that:

- Fewer than 2 percent of the ECI children had to be held back a grade in school districts where the average primary grade retention rate was 23 percent.
- And fewer than 1 percent of ECI children were placed in special education in districts where the average placement rate was 21 percent.

By fall 2004, the SPECS team will issue a Phase 2 report for the longitudinal research on ECI-DP and the other state-wide early learning initiatives funded by The Heinz Endowments. Dr. Bagnato said that at this final phase, ECI-DP is showing the same positive results: Children learn early and beat the odds, even those with developmental delays and social behavior problems; parents learn to nurture their child’s development when supported by effective teachers; and dramatically fewer children are retained in grade or placed in special education when they enter kindergarten and first grade.

“The ‘whole child’ approach – family, health, and social services supports – is a productive, effective, and cost-effective way to deal with issues affecting not only education, but also juvenile justice, welfare reform, and workforce development,” said Robert M. Grom, Executive Director, Heritage Health Foundation Of Braddock.

### **Quality Makes Difference**

Steps to improve administrative and financial efficiency

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Universities Children's Policy Collaborative

# When University Researchers Collaborate, Policymakers And Children Gain

A statewide task force asked to examine early childhood care and education in 2002 not only gave Pennsylvania its first-ever blueprint for addressing the critical issue, it also marked the emergence of a university research collaborative likely to be a powerful tool for improving the well-being of children well into the future.

The Universities Children's Policy Collaborative (UCPC), whose research-based evidence was the foundation of the Governor's Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force report and recommendations, is continuing to provide policymakers with research on issues such as child care quality, children's access to health care, and systems that address the needs of children at risk of developing mental health problems.

UCPC was established shortly before its task force work as a way to contribute to the health and welfare of children and families by joining researchers from Pennsylvania State University's College of Health and Human Development, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD), and the Center for Public Policy at Temple University to provide the kind of nonpartisan scientific information that leads to informed policies and programs.

"This collaborative approach offers policymakers a broader network of researchers," said Robert Nelkin, OCD's Director of Policy Initiatives and current UCPC coordinator. "It's a powerful way of addressing issues important to children and their families and of using research to make good policy."

## Evidence-Based Objectivity

During its brief history, the collaborative has been careful to remain objective and not champion specific solutions or points of view. And its nonpartisan stance

has allowed it to work with policymakers of all political parties, including the previous Republican administration of Gov. Mark Schweiker and the current administration of Gov. Edward Rendell, a Democrat.

**"It's a powerful way of addressing issues important to children and their families and of using research to make good policy."**

The collaborative's emphasis is on reviewing documented best practices evidence, evaluation studies, and empirical research to determine effective programs that address specific problems. UCPC researchers make themselves available to policymakers and funders to report on scientific evidence, conduct or supervise original research, evaluate pro-

grams, and provide testimony.

Information they provide includes research reviews, best practices information, original data, case statements, evaluation reports, and critical evaluations of other states' activities and innovative programs.

No project better illustrates the capabilities and benefits of the collaborative than UCPC's work with the early care and education task force.

## A Comprehensive Picture

Early in 2002, Governor Mark Schweiker's office asked UCPC to provide research-based evidence of the state of early care and education in Pennsylvania to the Governor's Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force, which was established to examine the issues and offer recommendations that might shape future policies and programs.

UCPC spent six months investigating the issue, dividing responsibilities among experts in the three participating universities. Their researches assessed studies done throughout the U.S., consulted a range of

## Announcements . . .

### **Free Background Reports Cover Children's Issues**

University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development offers background reports on current topics important to children and families free of charge.

The series of reports, *Children, Youth & Family Background*, is updated with new topics throughout the year.

New reports due in June cover issues such as early childhood care and education, the latest research on bullying and the impact of television violence on children, and preventing problem behavior among children.

The reports, originally produced to keep journalists and policymakers up to date on children's issues, are available free of charge to anyone interested in concise overviews of what is known about topics such as early childhood education, resilient children, school transition, and juvenile crime. The reports are written, edited, and reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

All *Children, Youth & Family Background* reports are posted on the OCD website as portable document files (.pdf) for viewing and downloading at the following address: <http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/backgrounders.asp>. ■

### **Parenting Guide Series Available From OCD**

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The You & Your Child parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children's fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides  
University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development  
400 North Lexington Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15208

The You & Your Child parenting guides are also available on the OCD website as portable document files at: [www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingguides.asp](http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingguides.asp). ■

### **Special Reports**

Special Reports are brief reviews of the scholarly and best practice literatures written for faculty, service professionals, funders, and policymakers. Often they are summaries of major books and reports written by scholars and task forces.

For a complete listing of the Special Reports published by the Office of Child Development, please see our website at [www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/publications/specialreports.asp](http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/publications/specialreports.asp). ■

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## SPECIAL REPORT

# Foster Care: Safety, Permanence, And The Need To Address Children's Development

Recent federal initiatives are applying greater pressure on caseworkers and judges alike to more quickly place the nation's foster children in safe, permanent homes. However, much more needs to be done to improve the outcomes of this vulnerable population, according to two major reports on the child welfare system released this year by The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care and by The David and Lucille Packard Foundation

Nearly 300,000 American children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care every year to protect them from abuse or neglect. In 2001, more than 800,000 spent some time in foster care and more than 530,000 were in foster care at any one time.

These young victims of maltreatment face numerous risks to their development. Like all children, they fare best when given a safe, stable, nurturing home. Unfortunately, foster care does not offer all dependent children such experiences. For too many, inadequate care in foster homes or being frequently moved from one temporary home to the next are facts of life.

While recent federal initiatives have focused on improving safety and shortening the length of time foster children spend in out-of-home placement, tending to their developmental needs remains a serious shortcoming of the child welfare system – one that must be addressed to ensure the well-being of the children it is charged with protecting.

### **The Problem**

Foster care is intended to be a temporary refuge for

children identified as victims of neglect, or physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse. For too many, however, temporary shelter from maltreatment becomes a long-term saga.

Almost half of the foster children spend at least two years in care. About 32% of children stay in the system longer than three years. Almost 20% spend five or more years in foster care waiting to be placed in permanent homes. Some are frequently moved from one temporary home to the other. Many spend these years without what all children should have: loving parents, a stable home life, brothers and sisters nearby, and neighborhoods and schools that are familiar to them.

When children languish in care, even the most dedicated caseworkers are able to provide the attention and support children need. Caseworkers burn out quickly and the annual turnover rate, which drains the child welfare system of experienced workers, is high – 20% for public agencies and 40% for private agencies.

The David and Lucille Packard Foundation's 2004 *The Future of Children* report, *Children, Families, and Foster Care*, describes a foster care system that is an inefficient, uncoordinated patchwork of overlapping agencies – one that fails to provide adequate services to many and poorly tracks how well it attends to the educational, health, and mental health needs of foster children.

None of the states that have completed Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) required by federal law – including Pennsylvania – have met all of the performance measures, which include standards for the stability of

children's foster care placement, goals for finding them permanent homes, and for meeting their educational needs.

Most children enter the child welfare system due to neglect, according to the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), the only large-scale national study of foster children. Children who have been physically abused are the next largest group. A smaller number of foster children have been sexually abused. Half of abused or neglected children in the child welfare system have experienced more than one type of maltreatment.

Such abuse and neglect leave them vulnerable to many factors that threaten development.

### Risk Factors

Nearly all foster children are at risk of serious developmental setbacks before they enter the child welfare system. The neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse they endure is associated with poor outcomes in health, brain development, cognitive and language skills, and social-emotional functioning.<sup>1</sup>

Developmental problems associated with neglect include cognitive, language and academic delays, anxiety, depression, and aggression. A physically abused child risks bodily injury and may experience cognitive delays, aggressive behavior, problems with peers, and post traumatic stress disorder. Sexual abuse may lead to low academic performance, depression, inappropriate sexual behavior, and other high-risk behaviors. Lower cognitive and academic functioning and behavioral problems are associated with emotional abuse.

Abused children often have trouble bonding with caregivers. Attachment disorders can contribute to poor outcomes that can last a lifetime, including poor peer relationships, behavioral problems, and mental health problems. Children are more likely to have attachment problems when they are raised by caregivers who are inconsistent or use inadequate parenting practices.<sup>2</sup>

Abused children also risk changes in healthy brain development that leave them susceptible to heightened arousal and makes it more difficult for them to appropriately regulate emotions – problems that make it difficult for them to exercise self control and impair their ability to focus, remember, and learn.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, some children overcome such risks and avoid developmental setbacks. Characteristics of maltreated, yet resilient, children include high cognitive competence, self-esteem, and persistence.<sup>4</sup> Other factors

associated with resilience include IQ, health, a warm relationship with a parent, being engaged in school, and support outside the family.

### Risks To Foster Children

Foster children are more likely to face multiple risks, including poverty, abuse, neglect, an unstable home life, health problems, and parents who struggle with substance abuse. As a result, their developmental outcomes tend to be more compromised than those of children who do not experience out-of-home placement.<sup>5</sup> For example:

- Foster children are more likely to have perinatal experiences that threaten their development, particularly fetal exposure to drugs and alcohol, which is increasingly being seen in children entering foster care.<sup>6</sup>
- Attachment disorders are a major concern. Studies of orphanages and large-group foster care programs suggest that children with multiple caregivers are more likely to develop insecure attachments and show indiscriminate friendliness.<sup>7</sup>
- Foster children are also more likely to have growth abnormalities and untreated health problems.<sup>8</sup>
- Higher rates of mental health problems are reported among foster children, including depression, lower adaptive functioning, aggression, impulsivity, and poor social skills.<sup>9</sup>
- Learning is a concern. Although the NSCAW reports most foster children score in normal cognitive and academic ranges, a higher proportion than would be expected show delayed cognitive development and compromised academic functioning. Half of the Child Protection Sample, for example, fell in the delayed range on a developmental screener.<sup>10</sup>

### Placement and Risk

Studies suggest that the disruption and uncertainty of being shifted from one home to the next leads put foster children at greater risk of negative developmental outcomes.

- In the NSCAW study, foster children placed in multiple homes had more compromised outcomes across several

domains than children who enjoyed more stable placements.

- In another study, the number of placements children experienced predicted behavioral problems.<sup>11</sup>
- Emotion problems, including aggression, coping difficulties, and low self-concept, are also associated with placement instability.<sup>12</sup>

Some 58% of children in foster care for one year are placed in nonrelative care. Kinship care, however, is a growing trend, with more than 32% of foster children being placed in the temporary custody of relatives. About 9% of children are in group homes or residential care.

How the trend toward kinship care will affect developmental outcomes is unclear. In one study, children in kinship care had higher functioning than those in the care of non-relative foster parents.<sup>13</sup> In another study, adults who as children spent longer periods of time in kinship care had poorer outcomes than those who were cared for by unrelated foster parents.<sup>14</sup> Children who are placed in group home care tend to have the poorest developmental outcomes.

### Intervention

Growing up in a safe and stable home is critical to the healthy development of children.

Characteristics of stable families include parents who are not compromised by mental health problems, a stable relationship between children and caregivers, and appropriate, consistent and positive parenting. Stable homes offer warmth, emotional availability, stimulation, and a cohesive family.

A stable family and home life increases the chances of children accomplishing important developmental milestones. Family stability helps infants and toddlers form healthy attachments with parents or other caregivers and facilitates the development of language and emotional expression. Children of preschool age are better able to master self-regulation and reach other milestones when they are raised in a stable family. Older children do better in school, are better able to regulate their behavior, form identities, and plan for the future.

Children raised in stable families are more likely to have positive health behaviors and experience lower levels of illness.<sup>15</sup> They receive well-child care and necessary im-

munizations. They do better academically and are less likely to be held back a grade or drop out of school.<sup>16</sup> Stability at home also increases the likelihood they will enjoy healthy relationships with peers, develop better social skills, and avoid behavioral and mental health problems.<sup>17</sup>

Studies suggest creating more stable foster care experiences will enhance the development of dependent children. More stable, developmentally-sensitive foster home environments can be promoted several ways. For example:

- Understanding child development, the risks faced by foster children, and a child's individual developmental needs is a key step toward creating a healthier home life.
- Foster parents and agency caseworkers need to be able to work together toward making sure the child's individual needs are met. Foster parents who see themselves as part of an agency team tend to have more successful placements.<sup>18</sup>
- Foster families who empathize with children's needs and experiences, such as early exposure to trauma, increase the likelihood of children experiencing better social-emotional outcomes.
- Foster parents need to recognize and respect the fact that most foster children have many family ties and often feel connected to their birth parents, even when they have been abused or neglected. Kinship foster parents, who studies report are more accepting of family ties, report better relationships with foster children than nonrelated foster parents.
- Awareness and acceptance of racial or ethnic heritage also help children avoid stress and developmental setbacks while in foster care.

### Innovative Approaches

Promising models of foster care are emerging that recognize the importance of relationships and community in the development of dependent children. These include:

- Family to Family foster care, first introduced in Pennsylvania and four other states, recruits foster parents from the child's community to not only care for the dependent child, but to also develop a mentoring relationship with the child's family. The idea is to make separation less

traumatic, help birth parents become better parents, and work as a team with social workers, community liaisons and others to mend troubled families.

- Shared Family care offers planned out-of-home care to parents and their children. Parents and host caregivers share in the caring of children and work toward improving the birth parents' parenting abilities so that they are able to provide a safe, stable and nurturing home. These arrangements tend to work best for parents making progress in substance abuse recovery, those with developmental disabilities, and socially isolated parents.

### Policy

Recent federal reform is focused on the safety of children in care and more quickly placing them in a permanent home.

Among the most significant changes to the child welfare system in recent years has been the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, which set federal goals for the safety and well-being of children in care, but emphasized permanence, by setting strict timetable for finding dependent children a permanent home, whether it means returning them to rehabilitated parents, finding them adopted parents, or finding them some other permanent living arrangement.

The number of children entering the child welfare system appears to be stabilizing – but at a high level. The 534,000 children in foster care in 2002 was almost twice the number in temporary homes in 1980.<sup>19</sup>

Research suggests that improving the developmental outcomes of foster children requires that policies go further to embrace strategies for promoting stable families and meeting the specific developmental needs of children.

### Financing Foster Care

After nearly four decades, foster care continues to operate under a federal reimbursement system that offers counties much more money for out-of-home placement than it offers for services to help mend families and address children's developmental, educational, health, and mental health needs. The reason is found in how the two major federal child welfare funding sources – Titles IV-E and IV-

B of the Social Security Act – are structured.

- Title IV-E, the largest source of federal funding for child welfare, guarantees that states will be reimbursed for a portion of the cost of maintaining an eligible children in foster care. States may claim a reimbursement for every income-eligible child they place in a licensed foster home or institution. Title IV-E accounts for 40% of federal child welfare spending and expenditures are estimated at \$4.8 billion in fiscal 2004.
- Title IV-B provides states with flexible funds that can be used for a wide range of child welfare services, such as family preservation services, community-based family support, time-limited family reunification services, and adoption promotion and support. Title IV-B, however, accounts for only a small share of federal child welfare spending – \$693 million in 2004 compared to \$4.8 billion in Title IV-E funds.

Among its recommendations, The Pew Commission On Children In Foster Care calls for helping states establish a range of services for children in foster care by creating a flexible, Safe Children, Strong Families Grant from Title IV-B and a share of Title IV-E funds.

### Juvenile Courts

Juvenile Court judges oversee the placement and care of dependent children and in that role are highly influential in matters of safety and the child's well-being. But long-standing structural issues in the judicial system interfere with the court's role.

Many courts, for example, do not track and analyze their caseloads, leaving them blind to emerging trends and limiting their ability to address causes of delays and identify children who are languishing in care or entering or reentering foster care at a very high rate. High caseloads and lack of training in child development issues also weaken the courts ability to address the developmental needs of foster children.

Among its recommendations, The Pew Commission On Children In Foster Care calls for adopting court performance measures to ensure that Juvenile Court track and

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analyze their caseloads, providing incentives and requirements for collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies, and giving children and parents a stronger voice in proceedings that deeply affect their lives.

In Allegheny County, reforms begun in 1998 have had a significant impact on what was an overworked dependency court. With private foundation support, the county hired four hearing officers to share the nearly 18,000 shelter, petition, review, termination of parental rights, and adoption hearings scheduled each year in Juvenile Court – a caseload that forced judges to each schedule an average of 63 hearings a day. Judicial caseloads fell to about 20 cases a day by 2000, which allowed more time for critical hearings, gave parents and children greater opportunities to bring matters before the court, and improved the court's ability to track ongoing cases.<sup>20</sup>

### Improving The Quality Of Care

A major challenge to promoting a developmentally-sensitive child welfare system is to broaden the focus from one chiefly concerned about the safety of children in foster care and finding them a permanent home, to one that also strives to optimize child functioning.

Several opportunities to improve the quality and appropriateness of the services and the care that foster children and families receive have been identified.

For example, researchers who report increased rates of health problems, developmental delays, and mental health problems among foster children call for screening and assessment for physical, developmental, and mental health problems at the time children enter foster care and periodically while they are in care.<sup>21</sup>

Quantitatively measuring how well the health and educational needs of foster children are met, including the measures in data systems, and having states invest in system improvements to strengthen the accountability of child welfare systems are among the recommendations published in The David and Lucille Packard Foundation report, *Future of Children* report, *Children, Families, and Foster Care*.

The report also recommends more intensive training for staff and building the skills of parents to improve the stability of the home life foster children experience. These steps include:

- Expanded training for foster parents and other caregivers so they understand their roles in preparing children for permanent families.

- Fiscal incentives for states to develop and implement successful strategies for improving the recruitment and retention of staff.
- Promoting approaches designed to engage families and communities in partnerships with child welfare agencies to develop support networks for children in communities.

In Pennsylvania, the state-supported University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Child Welfare Education and Research Programs, has helped reduce turnover of child welfare staff and raised the education levels among caseworkers.

The initiative, one of the most comprehensive in the nation, provided 20,000 days of training to agency staff last year, including a program offering graduate-level education for child welfare workers. Some 9,000 foster parents also received training. Program outcomes include a turnover rate of only 3% among workers who have received a master's degree under the program. **(See the article, *Stabilizing The Child Welfare System With Better-Trained Agency Workers*, in this issue of *Developments*).**

These and other measures are examples of the next steps that studies argue are necessary to broaden the approach of the child welfare system to include addressing the developmental needs of foster children to improve their well-being while in temporary care and after they are placed in a safe, permanent home.

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This Special Report, written by Jeffery Fraser, is based on the above-referenced publications. It is not intended to be an original work, but a summary for the convenience of our readers. References noted in the text follow:

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built near Harrisburg to accommodate the growing Child Welfare Education and Research Programs, which has seen its annual budget soar to \$33 million.

“Pennsylvania has taken the position that the best client outcomes depend on the best trained staff,” said Edward W. Sites, PhD, a professor in the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and principle investigator of the programs that fall under the child welfare training initiative. “The better trained, the more professional the staff is, the more likely outcomes will improve. Pennsylvania is pouring this money into training in order to strengthen the services provided children.”

The demand for child welfare services remains high. Poverty, the dissolution of the family, drug and alcohol abuse, and other factors result in a steady flow of dependent children into the child welfare system. Allegheny County alone sees more than 8,000 dependent children a year and across Pennsylvania well over \$1 billion is spent on child welfare services annually.

### **Training Staff To Improve Outcomes**

Child outcomes are measured by a number of factors, including adoption rates; length of time children spend in out-of-home placement, such as foster care; whether they’ve been protected from further abuse and neglect; and whether their health and educational needs have been adequately met. Child welfare staff play key roles in shaping nearly all of these factors.

But the field has been plagued by problems such as high staff turnover within agencies. High turnover is corrosive, disrupting continuity, diminishing oversight, and adding to the caseloads of already overworked colleagues.

The University of Pittsburgh initiative bundles several educational programs designed to help counties strengthen their child welfare staff, curb turnover rates, and ease vacancies by encouraging social work undergraduates to look at public child welfare work as a career option.

- **Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL)**, begun in 1995, offers graduate-level education for child welfare workers, who can attend the University of Pittsburgh or another of the seven Pennsylvania schools of social work affiliated with the program. They receive up to

95% of their salary in addition to tuition and other benefits. In return, they agree to work with the sponsoring agency for at least two years.

- **Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB)**, begun this year, offers social work degrees with child welfare content to undergraduates at the University of Pittsburgh and 13 other state schools in an effort to strengthen child welfare agencies. Students receive tuition and fees for their senior year, a stipend, and book allowance. In return, they agree to work at a public child welfare agency for at least one year.

- **Competency-Based Training** program, begun in 1991, was this year placed under the direction of the University of Pittsburgh. The program provides legally-required pre-service and in-service training for 3,800 Pennsylvania child welfare caseworkers and administrators.

- **State Automated Child Welfare Information System** training, begun in 1996, was placed under the direction of the University of Pittsburgh in 2001. The program provides training in the use of the statewide child welfare information management system.

- **Independent Living Program** training for staff who work with dependent children who “age out” of the child welfare system at age 18, but lack the support and skills needed to succeed on their own.

Last year, the Child Welfare Education and Research Programs provided 20,000 days of training to agency staff and trained 9,000 foster parents in addition. The initiative offers training in 15 sites across Pennsylvania to make it easier and less expensive for child welfare workers to attend.

Evaluation is built into the initiative to determine what trainees take away from the training and whether they have used them as part of their daily practice.

A transfer of learning staff, for example, follows up on the learning plan trainees are asked to compose after they have undergone training. Caseworkers and others typically leave the training with a plan for how they will use what they’ve learned. The transfer of learning staff – seasoned child welfare workers – visit the trainee’s office, check on

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(UCPC continued from Page 3)

experts, observed programs, reviewed program evaluations, and conducted original research specific to early care and education in Pennsylvania, including a quality study, study of higher education related to early childhood education, and a survey of families.

Their findings included the following:

- Quality early childhood care and education is in short supply in Pennsylvania, where fewer than 20% of the programs offer the kind of environments that tap the full potential of early learning.
- In Pennsylvania, the number of well-trained early childhood teachers – a key element of quality programs – falls far short of demand and recruiting students into the field is difficult.
- Two-thirds of Pennsylvania families have children in child care or an educational program on a regular weekly basis. Some 43% of children under age 6 spend at least 20 hours a week in child care or early education, and 25% are in child care or a classroom at least 35 hours per week.
- Although quality early childhood services cost more than custodial care, children and society realize benefits worth at least four times the total program costs.

The UCPC reports provided the foundation for the task force report and recommendations and have influenced state government policies, including those of the

current administration of Gov. Rendell.

### Ongoing Demand

The demand for UCPC's evidence-based research has not waned, officials said.

Projects are underway on several fronts. UCPC, for example, is evaluating Keystone Stars, the state Department of Public Welfare's performance-based, tiered rating system that rewards child care providers for achieving quality standards.

The collaborative is working with the state Department of Health to examine children's access to health care, the needs of children at risk of developing mental health problems, early care and education, parent education, and family support services across the state as part of a federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant.

For the Department of Education, UCPC is doing a survey of early childhood research in Pennsylvania.

The collaborative is also exploring possibilities of providing other departments and clients with scientific information to help improve child and family policy and programs, Nelkin said. "We're thinking about how to develop an even more readily-available resource for government and other funders, expand the areas that we're involved in." ■ ■

### Notice to *Developments* Subscribers

To subscribe to *Developments*, a free publication, please mail the following information to our Office (if you have not already done so): name, profession, title/position, work address, and phone number. (See this newsletter's back page for the OCD address.)

To submit material, write the Office of Child Development. Notices of programs or services will be published at the editor's discretion. All programs must be educational and nonprofit, and any fees charged must be noted. Publication of services does not imply an endorsement of any kind by OCD, its funding agencies, or the University.

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included adopting a comprehensive fiscal monitoring strategy and software, cutting unnecessary cost items and minimizing essential costs, and other procedures, such as increasing enrollment and attendance, which raised the revenue from public sources for demonstration project funding.

A recent study by the National Institute for Early Education Research confirms several previous studies showing that society receives a return of \$4 for every \$1 of program costs in educational and health care savings; increased taxes paid by mothers and, later, the children; and lower public costs for crime and other problems.

The estimated minimum cost per child in ECI's demonstration project is about \$11,500 per year, or less than \$5 per hour, roughly the price of top-quality programming across the nation.

"With the ECI model, quality add-ons made a signifi-

cant difference," said Leon E. Haynes, III, Executive Director of Hosanna House in Wilkesburg. "Things like small class size, higher compensation for teachers, benefits for teachers and inclusion specialists who can work with children with challenging behaviors, assess them better and get them the services they need to move on and be productive young people."

Christina J. Groark, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and ECI-DP Administrator said, "We need to recognize that low-income parents need full-day, full-year care and education and that there is little financial or educational rationale for providing anything less than high quality."

"But there is a gap between what it costs and the current resources available. Government, philanthropy, and private industry must recognize the need for such services, understand the true costs, and invest up front in quality to obtain the long-term financial, educational, and social benefits we know are possible." ■

*(Child Welfare continued from Page 11)*

how the plan is being used, evaluate how effective the training was, and work with trainee and supervisor on refining the techniques learned to improve everyday practice.

### **Turn-Over Rates Improve**

Turnover rates among child welfare staff have dramatically improved throughout the state. In some of the larger counties where the training has been offered, retention has been relatively high. Allegheny County's retained 80% of workers over 10 years and Philadelphia has retained 85.5%.

Among workers who have received a master's degree under the program, the turnover rate is only 3% per year. "A large part of that is the more you know, the more skills you have; the more skills you have, the better job you do; the more satisfaction you get, the more satisfying your job is; the more likely you are to stay, all things being equal – good supervision, reasonable salary, decent agency climate to work in," Dr. Sites said.

To date, some 10% of Pennsylvania's child welfare workers have earned a master's degree under the program.

"Even workers who leave (their agencies), almost always stay in the same county and almost always stay in child welfare services. In fact, one of the biggest beneficiaries of this program is the private sector that is picking up the people we are training who don't stay with their agencies. The human capital that is to be derived from this training, doesn't really leave."

The training initiative's most critical measure of success will be whether the outcomes of dependent children improve. Although the federal Child and Family Service Review, reports on 45 measures of child well-being, the baseline audit was only completed in Pennsylvania in 2003, leaving the impact of training on the well-being of children unclear. "It's too early to tell, right now," Dr. Sites said. "But we are light years ahead of many states because we have invested in this training."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work's child welfare web site at <http://www.pitt.edu/~pittsw/centers.html> or contact Dr. Edward W. Sites at (412) 624-6305; fax (412) 624-1159; e-mail: [esites@pitt.edu](mailto:esites@pitt.edu). ■

## Announcements . . .

### Free OCD Parenting Columns Well Suited For Newsletters

Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities – and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child's chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series of columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for *Parents* magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child's lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents. All columns are available on OCD website at: [www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingcolumns.asp](http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingcolumns.asp).

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects. ■

### OCD Moves To New Website, Changes Its Internet Address

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development has a new website where news about OCD, its projects, events, publications, and other information can be found.

The OCD homepage is located at [www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/](http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/) and provides links to general information about OCD, its divisions, and who to contact; OCD publications, including Special Reports, policy and research, Background reports on issues important to children and families, and newsletters; children and family resources, such as parenting guides and parenting columns; news about trainings and conferences; and more.

PLEASE BOOKMARK OCD'S NEW WEBSITE ADDRESS:

[www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/](http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/) ■

## Developments

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