

Arizona Department of Child Safety Staff Retention, Recruitment, and Training

CONCLUSION: Pursuant to Laws 2016, Ch. 123, §7, the Office of the Auditor General has completed a special report of the Arizona Department of Child Safety's (Department) retention, recruitment, and training of staff in five positions: case aides, caseworkers, program supervisors, program managers, and Office of Child Welfare Investigations investigators. The Department's agency-wide turnover was 30.1 and 28.7 percent in fiscal years 2016 and 2017, respectively, with fiscal year 2017 turnover for these five positions ranging from about 5 percent for program managers to about 35 percent for case aides. The Department has taken various actions to identify and address factors affecting staff retention—including efforts to increase salaries, improve staff training and supervision, reduce staff workload, and implement a peer support program—and it should continue these efforts. In addition, although the positions we reviewed were largely filled as of June 2017, we identified some additional practices for hiring best fit job applicants that could help promote retention, particularly for caseworkers. We also found that the Department should expand its current efforts to strengthen staff training, such as by implementing an annual training requirement and strengthening its monitoring of staff training completion.

Department has experienced turnover

The Department experienced an agency-wide turnover rate of 30.1 percent in fiscal year 2016 and 28.7 percent in fiscal year 2017. For the positions we reviewed, the turnover rates for fiscal year 2017 ranged from about 5 percent for program managers to about 35 percent for case aides. The Department's agency-wide turnover appears slightly lower than turnover rates reported by private social service agencies in Arizona, and national data indicates variability in turnover rates for public child welfare agencies. According to literature, child welfare worker turnover can potentially affect child welfare outcomes and results in direct and indirect costs to an agency. Finally, in analyzing department turnover data, we identified data inconsistencies in the Department's various turnover reports, and it should consider implementing a quality control check to help ensure the consistency of turnover information across its reports.

Department taking various actions to improve staff retention

The Department uses exit surveys and interviews to identify factors affecting turnover, which include salary, training, supervision, and workload. The Department is addressing these factors through various initiatives, which were in varying stages of implementation during our review. These initiatives include raising case aides' salaries, proposing changes to caseworkers' pay structure, revising its new employee orientation class, revising initial caseworker and supervisor training, enhancing supervisors' accountability through its management system, reducing its investigative caseload, promoting a culture of safety and support, and implementing a peer support program to help address staff trauma and burnout.

Recommendations

The Department should:

- Continue to explore opportunities to address staff salary concerns as resources permit; and
- Carry out its plans to implement a peer support program to support staff facing trauma and burnout.

Department can further enhance its efforts to hire best fit job applicants

The Department uses common recruiting and hiring practices and has made efforts to improve its timeliness in filling vacancies. Although the positions we reviewed were largely filled as of June 2017, we identified some additional best practices related to hiring best fit job applicants that could help promote staff retention, particularly for the caseworker position. These practices include taking additional actions to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields; enhancing the use of its realistic job preview (RJP) video; continuing to improve its tools for

assessing caseworker applicants' skill set; and ensuring, when possible, that program supervisors participate in the applicant interviews for caseworker positions in their units.

Recommendations

The Department should:

- Revise its minimum preferred caseworker qualifications and, as resources allow, participate in additional university recruiting activities to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields;
- Enhance the use of its RJP video to help assess applicants' job fit;
- Revise or implement additional tools for assessing caseworker applicants' skill set; and
- Ensure that, when possible, program supervisors participate in the applicant interviews for caseworker positions in their units.

Department monitors compliance with tuition assistance program and should evaluate the program

The Department partners with state universities to administer a federal tuition assistance program (program) for social work graduates to help recruit and retain department employees. Program participants receive financial assistance to help pay for the cost of their education and contractually commit to work for the Department for a defined period of time. If participants do not fulfill this obligation, they must repay a prorated portion of the financial assistance they received based on their length of employment. Prior to our review, the Department lacked a process for monitoring participants' compliance with this requirement after its separation from the Arizona Department of Economic Security. However, it implemented a new monitoring process in February 2017 and created a new policy and procedures for the repayment and collection of monies owed by participants who do not fulfill their obligations. The Department should continue to implement these new processes. As required by federal regulations, it should also conduct an evaluation of the program beyond just monitoring participants' compliance with their employment obligations.

Recommendations

The Department should continue to implement its new processes for monitoring program compliance and, as required by federal regulations, evaluate the program beyond just monitoring participants' compliance.

Department should expand current efforts to strengthen staff training

Training is a critical factor in retaining child welfare staff. As of September 2017, the Department was finalizing a redesign of its initial caseworker training to improve staff retention. In doing so, it should continue to address various issues it identified that affect the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworkers during this training. The Department plans to next revise its initial supervisor training and should incorporate mentoring and networking opportunities for program supervisors as part of this effort. Additionally, the Department lacks a formal training program for program managers and should develop one that similarly includes mentoring and networking opportunities. Consistent with federal requirements and best practice, the Department should also implement requirements for ongoing staff training. Further, the Department's processes for tracking and monitoring staff training completion may not always ensure that staff complete required training within its designated time frames, and it should develop additional methods to ensure training is monitored and completed. Finally, it should continue its efforts to further develop its training evaluation processes.

Recommendations

The Department should:

- Continue to address issues it identified regarding the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworker trainees and monitor and assess whether its efforts result in improved support;
- Carry out its plans to revise its core supervisor training and include mentoring and networking opportunities in this training;
- Develop a formal training program for program managers that includes mentoring and networking opportunities;
- Consistent with federal requirements, develop and implement a documented continuous training requirement for department staff;
- Identify and implement additional accountability mechanisms to ensure training is monitored and completed; and
- Continue to implement its new training evaluation processes, and identify and assess opportunities for further enhancing these processes.