

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

Department should continue its efforts to improve staff retention, recruit and hire best fit job applicants, and strengthen staff training

Special Report

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A Report to the Arizona Legislature

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Auditor General





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September 29, 2017

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor

Mr. Gregory McKay, Director  
Arizona Department of Child Safety

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, *A Special Report of the Arizona Department of Child Safety—Staff Retention, Recruitment, and Training*. This report is in response to Laws 2016, Ch. 123, §7, and was conducted under the authority vested in the Auditor General by Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1279.03. I am also transmitting within this report a copy of the Report Highlights for this audit to provide a quick summary for your convenience.

As outlined in its response, the Arizona Department of Child Safety agrees with most of the findings and plans to implement or implement in a different manner most of the recommendations.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in the report.

Sincerely,

Debbie Davenport  
Auditor General

Attachment



## 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.



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## Scope and objectives

As required by 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) staff turnover (Chapter 1), retention efforts (Chapter 2), recruiting practices (Chapter 3), tuition assistance program (Chapter 4), and training (Chapter 5). As directed by law, this report focuses on the following positions: DCS Case Aides (case aides), DCS Specialists (caseworkers), DCS Unit Supervisors (program supervisors), DCS Program Managers (program managers), and Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) investigators.<sup>1</sup> Also, as required by law, the report addresses the availability of supportive services for caseworkers (see Chapter 2, pages 15 through 17).

## Overview of positions included in scope of review

The five positions included in the scope of this review—case aides, caseworkers, program supervisors, program managers, and OCWI investigators—are described in Table 1 (see pages 2 through 3), which also includes the positions' education/experience qualifications, salary ranges, and number of budgeted and filled positions as of June 30, 2017. Staff in these positions are part of the Department's Field Operations, which manages and administers the Department's child welfare programs.<sup>2</sup> Field Operations staff are organized into regions, field offices, and units. The Department has established the following five regions, each overseen by a program administrator: Central, Northern, Pima, Southeastern, and Southwestern. Each region comprises three to ten field offices, which are each overseen by a program manager. According to the Department, each field office includes one to seven units, depending on location, that carry out specific functions, such as investigating allegations of abuse or neglect and performing ongoing casework for children in out-of-home care. Additionally, according to the Department, each unit is overseen by a program supervisor and includes approximately six to seven caseworkers. Units are supported by case aides and other support staff.

The OCWI is responsible for investigating criminal conduct allegations of child abuse. Historically, OCWI investigators have conducted these investigations in conjunction with the Department's non-OCWI investigative caseworkers. However, the Department reported that, in July and August 2017, OCWI investigators transitioned to conducting these investigations on their own, without being paired with a non-OCWI investigative caseworker.

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<sup>1</sup> The law directed auditors to review OCWI staff, which includes investigators, management, and other administrative staff. However, because OCWI investigators comprise the majority of staff positions within the OCWI and account for most of the OCWI's staff turnover, auditors focused their review of OCWI staff on the investigator position.

<sup>2</sup> Field Operations includes other support staff, such as secretaries and administrative assistants, who work in the Department's regional field offices, as well as staff who work in other divisions who are involved in or otherwise support the Department's child welfare programs. For example, staff in the Department's Intake Bureau receive hotline calls reporting alleged cases of child abuse and neglect, and staff in the Department's Training Program provide training to the Department's employees, contractors, and volunteers. Other staff work in the Department's Central Administration, which includes various administrative divisions that provide support, management, or oversight to the Department, such as executive management, human resources, information technology, and finance.

**Table 1****Position descriptions, education/experience qualifications, standard salaries, and number of budgeted and filled positions****As of June 30, 2017**

(Unaudited)

Position description	General education/experience qualifications <sup>1</sup>	Standard salary <sup>2</sup>	Budgeted/filled positions <sup>3</sup>
<b>Caseworkers</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Investigative</b>—Assess reports of child abuse or neglect and investigate allegations to determine if a child needs protective services.</li> <li>• <b>Ongoing</b>—Perform tasks such as working with children and families to ensure services are available to them and assessing, monitoring, evaluating, and recording progress toward case goals.</li> <li>• <b>Other</b>—Some caseworkers also conduct other types of specialized casework, such as intake hotline caseworkers who receive reports of allegations of suspected child abuse/neglect from the public.</li> </ul>	Bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited college or university, or 5 years of experience as a department case aide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$33,312 (in training)</li> <li>• \$36,825 (training completed)</li> <li>• \$40,641 (1 year after training completed)</li> </ul>	<b>Budgeted:</b> 1,406  <b>Filled:</b> 1,335
<b>Case aides</b>			
Assist caseworkers by providing clerical support; providing transportation to children, as needed; supervising child/parent visits; teaching parents about home management, parenting skills for child development, and financial management/budgeting; and performing other requested duties.	High school diploma or GED. Some experience in providing child care, such as working at a preschool or as a teacher aide, is preferred.	\$28,392	<b>Budgeted:</b> 311  <b>Filled:</b> 271
<b>Program supervisors</b>			
Supervise an ongoing or investigative unit of caseworkers and support staff such as case aides by performing ongoing evaluations of staff performance, reviewing cases, providing advice to caseworkers, and performing other duties as required.	Bachelor's or master's degree in social work or a closely related field from an accredited college or university and experience appropriate to assignment, as a senior-level specialist in a child protective services agency; or any combination of education and experience that meets applicable knowledge, skills, and abilities.	\$53,300	<b>Budgeted:</b> 232  <b>Filled:</b> 221

**Table 1 continued**

Position description	General education/experience qualifications <sup>1</sup>	Standard salary <sup>2</sup>	Budgeted/filled positions <sup>3</sup>
<b>Program managers</b>			
Manage supervisors and other administrative support staff in a field office by directing staff, consulting with program supervisors and caseworkers regarding cases, monitoring compliance with policies and procedures, conducting case reviews, and conducting staff performance evaluations; monitor workload of units; complete monthly reporting documents; participate in committees, task forces, and advisory groups; develop and monitor purchase of service contracts; and perform other duties as required.	Bachelor's or master's degree in social work or related field; 1 year of experience as a department program supervisor; familiarity with automated case management systems; and experience in child safety assessments.	\$65,000	<b>Budgeted:</b> 40  <b>Filled:</b> 40
<b>OCWI investigators</b>			
Conduct high-profile, complex, and sensitive investigations related to allegations of criminal child abuse and neglect cases that have resulted in the serious injury or death of a child.	Experience as a former or retired law enforcement officer or law enforcement background specializing in crimes against children and child abuse investigations and experience supervising child abuse and sex crimes investigations, or experience in child welfare investigations, including experience as a department investigative caseworker.	\$50,232	<b>Budgeted:</b> 115  <b>Filled:</b> 89 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The qualifications for the case aide, program manager, and OCWI investigator positions are preferred qualifications.

<sup>2</sup> The Department typically pays staff a standard salary for each position, and staff do not typically receive pay increases except for the caseworker position. Caseworkers receive pay increases (1) when they finish their initial training at 22 weeks and (2) 1 year after that (see Chapter 2, page 11, for more information).

<sup>3</sup> The Department is appropriated 1,406 caseworker positions and reported that it determines the number of staff in other positions based on available budget.

<sup>4</sup> Number includes all OCWI staff; the Department does not budget or report filled OCWI staff by position.

Source: Auditor General staff review of department job announcements, department documents, and interviews with department staff.





## Department has experienced turnover

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (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 included in the scope of this review, 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, auditors 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 turnover was about 30 percent in fiscal years 2016 and 2017

The Department measures retention in terms of turnover, which is defined as the loss of staff through voluntary or involuntary separation. Turnover rates are calculated by dividing the number of total separations in a year by the average monthly filled positions for the year, multiplied by 100. The Department's human resources division tracks department turnover monthly for internal and external reporting purposes, including providing a monthly staffing report to the Legislature and other stakeholders required by Arizona law. Using department data, auditors independently analyzed the Department's agency-wide turnover (i.e. for all staff positions) for fiscal years 2016 and 2017. According to this data, 834 of 2,767 total department employees left department employment in fiscal year 2016, and 779 of 2,713 total department employees left department employment in fiscal year 2017, resulting in annual turnover rates of 30.1 percent and 28.7 percent, respectively, for those fiscal years.<sup>3</sup> These turnover rates represent auditors' best determinations based on department data. Although the Department's turnover rate is lower for fiscal year 2017 based on auditors' calculations, auditors cannot definitively conclude that the Department's turnover decreased from fiscal year 2016 to fiscal year 2017 because of concerns regarding data inconsistencies in the Department's turnover reports as discussed on page 7.

Auditors also analyzed the fiscal year 2017 turnover rates for the individual positions included in the scope of this report—case aides, caseworkers, program supervisors, program managers, and Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) staff—and found that caseworker and case aide positions experienced the highest turnover.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, as shown in Table 2 (see page 6), the fiscal year 2017 turnover rates for case aides, caseworkers, and OCWI staff were about or above 29 percent, while the turnover rates were much lower for program supervisors and program managers. Again, these turnover rates represent auditors' best determinations based on department data.

<sup>3</sup> Total number of employees for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 are the average monthly filled positions for each fiscal year.

<sup>4</sup> For the individual turnover position rates, auditors were limited to fiscal year 2017 data because of data limitations with the monthly staffing report.

**Table 2**  
**Total separations and turnover rates by position**  
**Fiscal year 2017**

Position	Total separations	Turnover rate
Case aides	90	34.5%
Caseworkers	439	32.6
OCWI staff <sup>1</sup>	24	28.6
Program supervisors	26	11.8
Program managers	2	5.1

<sup>1</sup> OCWI staff includes investigators, management, and administrative staff. Available data did not allow for auditors to analyze turnover rates for individual positions. Although auditors determined that 18 out of 24 of the OCWI staff separations were investigators, the Department did not have data on the monthly filled investigator positions, which is needed to calculate the turnover rate.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of department data.

Auditors researched comparative turnover information to place the Department's turnover rates in context with other agencies providing similar services. According to a 2016 salary survey from the Arizona Council of Human Service Providers (Council), the Department's agency-wide turnover rate appears slightly lower than that of private social service agencies in Arizona.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the average reported staff turnover rate for social service agencies in Arizona, including child welfare agencies, was approximately 33 percent for all employees in fiscal year 2016, compared to auditors' calculated department turnover rate of 30.1 percent for that year.

Additionally, a 2011 report from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) indicates variability in turnover rates among public child welfare agencies.<sup>6</sup> This report summarized turnover rates self-reported by 79 agencies at various levels of government across approximately 30 states, ranging in size from under 25 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to over 1,000 FTE positions.<sup>7</sup> According to the report, 61 agencies reported annual turnover rates of 19 percent or lower, while 18 agencies reported annual turnover rates of 20 percent or higher.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see pages 9 through 17), the Department has taken steps to identify and address factors driving its turnover.

## Literature indicates that turnover can potentially affect child welfare outcomes and results in financial costs

According to literature, turnover of child welfare workers can potentially affect child welfare outcomes and is costly to an agency. For example, a 2010 study of the child welfare workforce suggests that stabilizing the workforce can play a part in providing quality services.<sup>8</sup> A 2013 turnover study also indicates that a decrease in

<sup>5</sup> The Council is a 501(c)(6) organization whose primary function is to provide legislative and administrative advocacy for member agencies.

<sup>6</sup> Casanueva, C., Horn, B., Smith, K., Dolan, M., & Ringeisen, H. (2011). *NSCAW II baseline report: Local agency* (OPRE Report #2011-27g). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The NSCAW 2011 report is a national longitudinal study of children and families involved in child welfare systems, and includes information on child welfare agencies such as staffing and turnover. Data for this report was collected between March 2008 and December 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The NSCAW II baseline report did not specify whether the number of FTE positions referred to all agency staff or only caseworkers, although a 2013 study based on this data indicates it refers to caseworkers. See Williams, N. J. & Glisson, C. (2013). Reducing turnover is not enough: The need for proficient organizational cultures to support positive youth outcomes in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(11), 1871-1877.

<sup>8</sup> Strand, V.C., Spath, R., & Bosco-Ruggiero, S. (2010). So you have a stable child welfare workforce – What's next?. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(3), 338-345.

caseworker turnover can be associated with improved outcomes for youth in agencies that have a successful organizational culture.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, a California study published in 2006 examined the relationships between staff turnover, the rates of children in the system being re-abused, and the level of functioning of a child welfare agency and found that the counties with the lowest rates of re-abuse also had the lowest turnover.<sup>10</sup> In addition, each worker that leaves a child welfare agency can cost that agency money in the form of direct costs for hiring new staff, such as recruitment activities (job fairs and background checks), and indirect costs, such as errors made by inexperienced workers. For example, using the Annie. E Casey turnover calculator, CPS Human Resource consultants estimated that turnover costs for one child welfare worker may be as high as 115 percent of the worker's annual salary.<sup>11</sup>

## Auditors noted data inconsistencies in department turnover reports

The Department should consider taking an additional step to address data inconsistencies in its various turnover reports. The Department uses and reports turnover information in multiple ways, including in internal management reports and reports to the Legislature. However, auditors identified inconsistencies in the Department's reporting. For example, department staff prepare a monthly turnover report that is provided to department leadership. This report, called the *Turnover by Month* report, shows turnover data by month for fiscal years 2016 and 2017. Each month, as new data becomes available, this report is updated to reflect the most up-to-date turnover information for the most recent month that turnover data is available. Although data from previous months should remain unchanged, auditors found that historical turnover information differed in several versions of this report. For example, in the April 2017 report, the turnover rate for October 2015 was reported as 2.6 percent, whereas in the May 2017 report, the turnover rate for October 2015 was reported as 1.7 percent. Department staff were unable to fully explain differences that auditors noted in the *Turnover by Month* report. Such month-to-month variations in the reported turnover rate that auditors noted can impact the overall reported turnover rate for a given year. For example, the fiscal year 2016 turnover rate was reported as both 31 percent and 27.9 percent in different versions of the *Turnover by Month* report. They can also affect the reliability of the information. In addition, auditors also noted discrepancies between the *Turnover by Month* internal report and the *Monthly Staffing Report*, which the Department provides to the Legislature. The written procedures for producing these two reports indicate that they should contain identical information. According to the Department, some of these differences between the reports occurred because prior staff involved in producing the reports were not always updating past data with new validated information as it became available. Current staff are aware of these issues and reported they were working to address them.

Auditors reviewed the written procedures for producing the two reports and determined these procedures were generally adequate. However, the Department should consider implementing a quality control check to help ensure the consistency of turnover information across its reports.

### Recommendation

- 1.1. The Department should consider implementing a quality control check to help ensure the consistency of turnover information across its reports.

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<sup>9</sup> Williams and Glisson (2013) measured organizational culture using a caseworker survey designed to assess work environments of child welfare, social service, and mental health agencies.

<sup>10</sup> National Council on Crime and Delinquency. (2006). *Relationship between staff turnover, child welfare system functioning, and recurrent child abuse*. Houston, TX: Cornerstone for Kids.

<sup>11</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2004). HR turnover calculator. Baltimore, MD, as cited in Champnoise, C. (2006). *The turnover tool kit: A guide to understanding and reducing employee turnover*. Sacramento, CA: CPS Human Resource Services.





## Department taking various actions to improve staff retention

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) is taking various actions to improve staff retention. Specifically, the Department has implemented processes 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 auditors' review. These initiatives include raising case aides' salaries, proposing changes to caseworkers' pay structure, implementing a revised new employee orientation class, revising initial caseworker and supervisor training, enhancing supervisors' accountability through its management system, reducing its investigative caseload, promoting an organizational culture of safety and support, and implementing a peer support program to help address staff trauma and burnout.

### Department identified factors impacting retention and is taking actions to address them

The Department uses exit surveys and interviews to identify factors impacting staff retention and is taking actions to address these factors. Specifically, in 2015, the Department began asking staff leaving department employment to complete a voluntary online exit survey to understand the reasons why staff were leaving the Department. The online exit survey includes various questions that ask respondents to (1) rate various job factors (such as training, pay, and work-life balance) as either poor, fair, good, and excellent; (2) rate their direct supervisors regarding how frequently they observed them perform certain behaviors (such as demonstrating fair and equal treatment and following policies and procedures); and answer open-ended questions such as describing what they liked least/most about their job and asking what the Department could have done to retain them. Then, in March 2017, the Department also began conducting a phone exit interview with staff who have submitted their resignations to gather additional information regarding their decisions to resign.

The Department reported that, based on its review of information obtained through these processes, the most commonly cited factors impacting staff retention included salary, training, supervision, and workload. Auditors independently reviewed 70 online exit surveys submitted between November 2016 and April 2017 and phone exit interviews conducted during March 2017 and agree these were the most common factors staff cited for separating from the Department.<sup>12</sup> Child welfare organizations, such as the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute and the Child Welfare League of America, have identified similar factors impacting staff retention in child welfare agencies, as well as additional factors such as staff safety and caseworker burnout and trauma.<sup>13</sup> In addition, literature discusses how factors related to employee recruitment—such as recruitment and selection practices and applicants' previous work experience and social work education—can impact child welfare staff retention (see Chapter 3, pages 19 through 27, for additional information and auditors' recommendations related

<sup>12</sup> The exit surveys included 54 completed by caseworkers, 11 by case aides, 4 by supervisors, and 1 by an Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) investigator.

<sup>13</sup> National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2016). *Workforce resource one-page summary: Retention*. Albany, NY: University of Albany, School of Social Welfare; Child Welfare League of America. (2005). *Workforce recruitment and retention in child welfare: A review of literature*. Washington, DC.; National Association of Social Workers. (2013). *Guidelines for social worker safety in the workplace*. Washington, DC.; Zlotnik, J. L., DePanfilis, D., Daining, C., & Lane, M.M. (2005). *IASWR research brief 1: Child welfare workforce series*. Washington, DC. Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research.

to the Department's recruiting practices).<sup>14</sup> Personal factors—such as previous child welfare experience and commitment to the child welfare field—can also impact retention.<sup>15</sup> Further, both literature and a child welfare research expert from the University of Georgia auditors interviewed indicate that multiple factors can simultaneously influence a child welfare worker's decision to stay at or leave an organization.<sup>16</sup>

The Department has taken various actions and has planned additional actions to address these factors. For example, the Department's fiscal year 2017 strategic plan included four retention-related initiatives: reducing the backlog of investigations to reduce caseworkers' caseload, altering the caseworker compensation structure, refining and implementing the caseworker and supervisor training/onboarding experience, and defining and implementing a leadership development program. These and other department initiatives were in varying stages of implementation during auditors' review and are described in more detail in the sections that follow.

Additionally, auditors were unable to draw any conclusions about factors that might affect turnover specifically for OCWI investigators. Only one of the exit surveys auditors reviewed was completed by an OCWI investigator, who reported work-life balance as a reason for leaving department employment. According to OCWI management, OCWI investigators have left for multiple reasons, including illness, other employment opportunities, and retirement. However, as discussed in the Introduction (see page 1), OCWI investigators transitioned in July and August 2017 to conducting investigations on their own, without being paired with a non-OCWI investigative caseworker. As such, the Department reported that it plans to shift its recruitment focus from hiring investigators with general law enforcement experience to hiring investigators with specific law enforcement experience (such as investigating sexual abuse cases) and child welfare investigative experience (such as an experienced caseworker).

## Department addressing salary concerns

The Department has been taking steps to help address salary concerns. Both case aides and caseworkers commonly indicated concerns with salary in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. To address these concerns, the Department has increased case aide salaries, adjusted the timing of existing pay increases for caseworkers, and has been exploring options to add additional pay increases for caseworkers. The Department should continue to explore opportunities to address salary concerns as resources permit.

**Salary was a concern identified in exit surveys**—Both case aides and caseworkers commonly indicated concerns with salary in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. For the 11 surveys completed by case aides, all 11 case aides rated pay and benefits as poor or fair (as opposed to good or excellent). When asked to select one factor from a list of 12 potential factors that prompted them to leave, they also listed pay as one of the top two factors (the other factor was opportunity for career advancement). When asked to elaborate on what they liked least about the job and what the Department could have done differently to retain them, the responses most commonly related to salary. For example, one case aide felt that his pay did not correspond to the level of work.

Auditors noted similar responses in the 54 surveys caseworkers completed. Specifically, 39 of the 54 caseworkers rated pay and benefits as either poor or fair. When asked to elaborate on what they liked least about the job and what the Department could have done differently to retain them, multiple caseworkers cited salary as an issue. For example, one caseworker felt that caseworkers' starting pay was not adequate. Another felt the pay was not equal to the amount of work and stress required by the job.

Further, many staff who leave department employment go to higher-paying jobs in other Arizona state agencies. For staff who transfer to other Arizona agencies, the Department also tracks their new position and salary. According to department data, 78 department staff in positions within the scope of auditors' review transferred to

<sup>14</sup> Child Welfare League of America, 2005.; DePanfills, D., & Salus, M.K. (2003). *Child protective services: A guide for caseworkers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect as cited in Harbert, A. & Dudley, D. (2009). *Child welfare social worker recruitment and retention: Influential factors and promising practices—Review of the research*. San Diego, CA: San Diego State University, Southern Area Consortium of Human Services; Zlotnik et al., 2005.

<sup>15</sup> National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Zlotnik et al., 2005; American Public Human Services Association. (2005). *Report from the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State agency findings*. Washington, DC.

another agency during calendar year 2016. Of these, 63 staff (81 percent) transferred to the Arizona Department of Economic Security and received an average pay increase of about \$1.26 per hour.

**Department taking steps to increase case aide and caseworker salaries**—Adequately paying child welfare staff is an important factor in staff retention. Specifically, child welfare literature states that one way child welfare agencies can increase staff retention is to offer better salaries. To help address salary concerns, the Department has increased case aide salaries, adjusted the timing of available caseworker salary increases, and has been exploring options to increase caseworker salaries. Specifically:

- **Case aides**—To improve case aide retention, the Department has created opportunities for promotion and increased salaries. Specifically, in February 2016, the Department revised the qualification requirements for the caseworker position to allow case aides with 5 years of experience to promote into the caseworker trainee position.<sup>17</sup> Prior to this change, case aides had to obtain a bachelor's degree to qualify for the caseworker position. The goal of this change is to retain quality staff already familiar with the Department and Arizona's child welfare system. Additionally, in July 2017, the Department increased case aides' annual starting salary from \$26,770 to \$28,392, an annual increase of more than \$1,600, or 6 percent. According to the Department, this increase was based on the results of a salary review it conducted to help improve staff retention, especially for case aides.
- **Caseworkers**—To improve caseworker retention, the Department adjusted the timing of its existing pay increases and has proposed creating the opportunity for additional pay increases. Specifically, in July 2016, as part of its fiscal year 2017 strategic plan, the Department accelerated the timing of its set pay increases for caseworkers by moving the initial pay increase from \$33,312 to \$36,825 to week 22, when trainees finish their initial training, and moving the second pay increase to \$40,641 to 1 year after that, which is the maximum salary that can be reached by caseworkers. Prior to this change, caseworkers could receive the initial pay increase when they reached 1 year of employment and the second increase at the 2-year mark. By moving the initial pay increase to week 22, the Department hoped to help offset the financial burden that it felt caseworkers experience as their net pay decreases beginning at week 26, when the State begins withholding their retirement contributions.

Further, the Department has proposed creating additional pay increases as a retention strategy for experienced caseworkers. In August 2016, the Department submitted a fiscal year 2018 budget request for additional funding for caseworker pay increases. Specifically, the Department proposed increasing caseworkers' pay to \$44,705 at 3 years after finishing their training and then to \$49,176 at 5 years after finishing their training.<sup>18</sup> Although the Department reported it did not receive the requested additional funding, department management reported that they are still exploring the feasibility of a pay increase for caseworkers. As of August 2017, the Department reported that it intended to fund additional pay increases for caseworkers using existing department funding. In addition, the Department reported that it is exploring the feasibility of increasing pay for program supervisors.

Additionally, auditors gathered and analyzed salary information from some other states' child welfare agencies to compare Arizona's case aide, caseworker, and program supervisor salaries to those for comparable positions in those states.<sup>19</sup> Auditors also adjusted this information for cost of living differences across the states (see Appendix A, Table 5, page a-2). When adjusted for cost of living, Arizona's starting salaries for these positions fell within the range of starting salaries for equivalent positions in the other states reviewed. For example, adjusted starting salaries for the caseworker-equivalent positions for the other states included in Table 5 ranged from \$31,235 to \$47,693, while Arizona's caseworker salary starts at \$33,312. However, the Department typically pays

<sup>17</sup> The majority of case aides employed as of May 2017 (89 percent) had been with the Department less than 5 years. Case aides had an average tenure of 2.4 years.

<sup>18</sup> As of May 2017, caseworkers had an average tenure of 1.7 years, including the 22-week training period.

<sup>19</sup> Other states included Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Auditors judgmentally selected these states primarily from among western states with state-administered child welfare systems, similar to Arizona. New Jersey was included based on the recommendation of Casey Family Programs, who identified New Jersey as a best practice state for retention.

staff a specified salary for each position (except for caseworkers, who receive the two pay increases discussed previously), whereas child safety workers in the other states reviewed have the potential for increased salaries within these states' specified salary ranges. In gathering this information, auditors also noted that child welfare positions varied widely among the states in terms of job duties, required experience and education, licensure requirements, public employee union representation, and pay structures and bonuses, which likely accounts for some of the salary differences.

The Department should continue to explore opportunities to address salary concerns as resources permit. In doing so, it should consider gathering additional state salary information from other states for benchmarking, as it deems necessary.

## Department improving staff training

The Department is taking steps to improve its staff training. Staff commonly indicated concerns with training in the exit survey auditors reviewed. The Department has implemented a revised new employee orientation class to provide a more centralized, standardized, and improved orientation for all new staff. It is also finalizing a redesign of its initial caseworker training and plans to next revise its initial supervisor training.

**Training was a concern identified in exit surveys**—Staff commonly indicated concerns with training in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. Specifically, 6 of 11 case aides and 35 of 54 caseworkers rated their training experience as either poor or fair (as opposed to good or excellent). When asked to elaborate on what they liked least about the job and what the Department could have done differently to retain them, multiple respondents answered that training was an issue. For example, one caseworker stated that his initial training did not prepare him for the job duties, and this impacted his ability to complete his casework. Another caseworker reported that the onboarding and initial core training did not prepare her to handle cases, and that when she was new to the role, she did not have a mentor or an experienced supervisor to provide guidance.

Providing effective training can be a factor in retaining child welfare staff. Specifically, a review of literature from the Southern Area Consortium of Human Services found that establishing a long-term plan (from 2 to 4 years) for new worker development that includes providing core training, on-the-job training (OJT), mentoring, and opportunities to attend ongoing skill development trainings is an effective way to support child welfare worker job-readiness and retention.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a 2005 study by the American Public Human Services Association found that increased or improved pre-service and in-service training was a top strategy to prevent turnover.<sup>21</sup>

**Department improving orientation and training**—To help address training issues, the Department implemented a revised new employee orientation class in April 2017. Before this change, the Department reported that orientation occurred within its regions, which could result in varying orientation experiences for new staff, depending on the location. The goal of the new class is to provide a more centralized, standardized, and improved orientation for all new staff. Class content covers a broad scope of information, such as the Department's mission and vision, employee benefits, and an introduction to the children and families the Department serves. This new class is more comprehensive than the previous orientation class. For example, previous orientation material did not provide an overview for staff of what to expect during their training, whereas the new orientation content details what staff can expect during training and locations for where this training will take place. The Department used evaluations to collect participant feedback on the new orientation class. Auditors found that the majority of the evaluations identified that the orientation experience provided participants with a valuable introduction to the Department. The Department reported that it will use this feedback to inform quarterly modifications to its orientation class curriculum, as needed.

In addition, the Department is in the process of finalizing a redesign of its initial caseworker training. Specifically, the Department partnered with Arizona State University (ASU) to redesign its approach to delivering caseworker training and to update its training content. As of September 2017, the Department reported that it was piloting the

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<sup>20</sup> Harbert & Dudley, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> American Public Human Services Association, 2005.

revisions and anticipated making adjustments to the revised training through December 2017. The Department next plans to revise its initial supervisor training. See Chapter 5, pages 33 through 41, for additional information about these efforts and auditors' recommendations related to department training.

## Department improving supervision

The Department is taking steps to improve supervision. Some staff indicated concerns with supervision in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. Quality supervision can be an important factor in staff retention, and literature identifies different types of supervision that agencies should practice in child welfare work, including supportive and clinical supervision. Supportive supervision focuses on decreasing staff stress that can lead to burnout and fostering a nurturing atmosphere that helps encourage success, while clinical supervision focuses on casework practice. The Department's existing supervisor training and policies and procedures address these forms of supervision, and the Department plans to further revise its supervisor training in response to the exit surveys. In addition, it has begun using its management system to promote the accountability of its supervisors.

**Supervision was a concern identified in exit surveys**—Some staff identified concerns with supervision in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. When asked to select one factor from a list of 12 potential factors that prompted them to leave, quality of supervision/management was selected by 10 of 54 caseworkers (it was the most commonly selected reason among caseworkers for this question) and 2 of 4 program supervisors. When asked to elaborate on what they liked least about the job, 6 of 54 caseworkers described issues related to supervision. When asked what the Department could have done differently to retain them, 5 of 28 caseworkers who responded to this question described issues related to supervision. For example, one caseworker reported that he did not have a supervisor when he completed the initial caseworker training, and when he was eventually assigned a supervisor, this supervisor was also new to the position and was not able to provide sufficient supervision because the new supervisor was learning how to conduct her own role. Another caseworker stated she did not feel that her supervisor communicated or provided constructive feedback, and she felt that this was causing staff turnover.

**Quality supervision an important factor in staff retention**—Quality supervision can be defined as interactions where supervisors provide both understandable work-related instruction and possess high-quality interpersonal skills.<sup>22</sup> Child welfare literature suggests that providing quality supervision to child welfare staff is an important factor in retention, and that quality supervisory support can influence a worker's stay at an agency in spite of other job stresses.<sup>23</sup> For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau states that frontline supervisors are responsible for guaranteeing that caseworkers have the necessary knowledge, mindset, and skill-level to make critical decisions regarding children and families; evaluate child safety concerns and family needs; and create and implement service plans to support children and families.<sup>24</sup>

Further, literature identifies different types of supervision that agencies should practice in child welfare work, including supportive and clinical supervision. An example of supportive supervision is reflective supervision, a process where caseworkers and frontline supervisors meet on a regular basis, such as once a week for new caseworkers, to reflect on the caseworkers' experiences and feelings connected to their interactions with children and families. Literature states that reflective supervision between a caseworker and supervisor, while time intensive, can increase staff retention and produce positive client outcomes, such as better success at achieving

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<sup>22</sup> Mor Barak, M.E., Travis, D.J., Pyun, H., & Xie, B. (2009). The impact of supervision on worker outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Social Service Review*, 83(1), 3-32, as cited in Munson, S. (2016). *NJ DCF workforce report: A commitment to child welfare excellence through comprehensive workforce and leadership development*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers School of Social Work, Institute for Families.

<sup>23</sup> CPS Human Resource Services. (n.d.). *The causes and consequences of turnover—Research findings*. Sacramento, CA.

<sup>24</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). *Supervising for quality child welfare practice*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

permanency outcomes for children.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, clinical supervision focuses more on casework practice, such as a caseworker's actions, responses, and decisions in providing services to the children and families they serve. Clinical supervision focuses on developing caseworker competencies, teaching social work values and ethics, and developing critical thinking skills. Common activities involved in practicing clinical supervision include conducting a case review and observation to evaluate a caseworker's skills and measure his/her progress. Although both forms of supervision are important, literature emphasizes the positive impact reflective supervision can have on retention.

**Department taking steps to improve supervision**—The Department's existing supervisor training and supervision-related policies and procedures address various supervisory practices, including supportive and clinical supervision. For example, the training covers topics such as managing stress and addressing burnout of supervisees, and ways to reward and recognize staff for their efforts such as providing constructive feedback. In addition, department policies and procedures direct supervisors to engage in various practices associated with different types of supervision, including the two previously discussed. As stated earlier, the Department also plans to revise and improve its initial supervisor training in response to the exit surveys (see Chapter 5, pages 36 through 37, for additional information).

In addition, the Department has begun promoting supervisors' accountability through its management system. Specifically, the Department has implemented a management system to promote agency improvement. One part of this management system includes "standard work" documents listing duties and responsibilities for staff in supervisory roles, such as program supervisors or program managers, to track and evaluate their daily, weekly, and monthly activities. These tracked activities include several supervisory tasks, including program supervisors observing and mentoring caseworkers in the field, program supervisors meeting with caseworkers at key decision-making points in cases to help guide decision making, and program managers observing program supervisors as they conduct a case-related discussion with a caseworker. Department management reported that each person in a supervisory role is then evaluated by his/her supervisor using these standard work documents, which helps to ensure quality of work, including quality supervision. Although many of the supervisory tasks tracked through the management system seem related to clinical supervision, department management reported that supportive supervisory discussions also occur in these meetings.

## Department taking steps to address staff workload

The Department has taken steps to address staff workload. Staff commonly indicated concerns with work/life balance, including workload and job stresses, in the exit survey auditors reviewed. Child welfare literature indicates that having a manageable workload, which encompasses caseload, is a factor in staff retention. The Department has reduced its backlog of investigative cases, thereby reducing the caseload for investigative caseworkers, and is now focusing on sustaining its backlog reduction efforts and using tools to allocate staff to address workload needs. The Department reported that it plans to shift its focus to reducing the caseload for ongoing cases, and auditors will further review the Department's caseload standards and how these standards compare to best practices in a report due to the Legislature by December 31, 2018.

**Workload was a concern identified in exit surveys**—Staff commonly identified concerns with work/life balance in the exit surveys auditors reviewed. Specifically, 7 of 11 case aides and 37 of 54 caseworkers rated work/life balance as either poor or fair (as opposed to good or excellent). When asked to select one factor from a list of 12 potential factors that prompted them to leave, work/life balance was selected by 7 of 54 caseworkers. These concerns with work/life balance appear to be related to staff workload based on open-ended responses in the exit surveys. Specifically, when asked to elaborate on what they liked least about the job, 12 of 54 caseworkers described issues related to high workload and job stress. When asked what the Department could have done to retain them, 4 out of 28 caseworkers who responded to this question described issues related to workload and

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<sup>25</sup> National Council on Crime and Delinquency. (2006). *Relationship between staff turnover, child welfare system functioning, and recurrent child abuse*. Oakland, CA, as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015. Permanency refers to the permanent, legal placement of a child after the child is removed from his/her home. Child permanency can include safely placing a child back with his/her parents, in the care of a relative, and adoption.

job stresses. For example, one caseworker indicated that the high workload did not allow her to spend enough time on her cases. Another caseworker stated that he felt the caseload was unrealistic.

Having a manageable workload, which encompasses caseload, is an important factor in child welfare staff retention. The Child Welfare Information Gateway defines workload as “the amount of work required to successfully manage assigned cases and bring them to a resolution. Workload reflects the average time it takes a worker to (1) do the work required for each assigned case and (2) complete other noncasework responsibilities.”<sup>26</sup> It defines caseload as “the number of cases (children or families) assigned to an individual worker in a given period of time.”<sup>27</sup> Unmanageable workloads can increase caseworkers’ stress levels and cause burnout, as well as make it difficult for them to effectively serve children and families.<sup>28</sup>

**Department has reduced backlog of investigative cases**—To help improve staff retention, the Department’s fiscal year 2017 strategic plan included an initiative to reduce the Department’s backlog of investigations to reduce investigative caseworkers’ caseloads. This backlog consisted of investigations for which no case information had been entered into the Department’s case management system for 60 days, with each investigation involving one or more reports alleging abuse or neglect. According to the Department’s June 2017 Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report, the Department reduced the backlog from its height of 16,014 in January 2015 to 354 in June 2017. According to the Department, it has reduced the number of open reports from an average of 145 open reports per investigative caseworker in April 2015 to an average of 14 open reports per investigative caseworker as of June 2017.

**Department further addressing workload**—The Department reported that it has also taken steps to manage its investigative caseload and prevent the recurrence of an investigative backlog. For example, the Department tracks the number of reports open over 60 days. It also reported that department management discuss the backlog in weekly meetings. In addition, the Department uses a staffing analysis tool to identify staffing needs at the regional and office level and reported that it uses this information to allocate staff positions to help meet the needs of those offices.

The Department also reported that it plans to focus on reducing the caseload for ongoing cases as well. Ongoing caseload is driven by the number of children in out-of-home care, which has decreased in the past year from 18,906 in March 2016 to 16,899 in March 2017, according to the Department’s June 2017 semi-annual child welfare report. Auditors will further review the Department’s caseloads in a report due to the Legislature by December 31, 2018. Specifically, Laws 2017, Ch. 311, §4, requires the Office of the Auditor General to assess the Department’s process for determining its caseload standards, how caseloads are measured, and the reliability of the data used to report caseloads. The report shall also compare the Department’s caseload standards with best practices and other states’ caseload standards, and make recommendations as appropriate.

## Department should implement planned peer support program

The Department should implement its plans for a peer support program to assist staff facing trauma and burnout. Although not identified as a common concern in the exit surveys auditors reviewed, child welfare literature and other states indicate that supporting staff through peer support is a factor that can help reduce turnover. The Department has been taking steps to increase support for staff, including developing plans to implement a peer support program in fiscal year 2018. The Department should carry out its plans to do so.

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<sup>26</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Caseload and workload management*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.

<sup>27</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016.

**Child welfare literature and other states indicate peer support can help reduce turnover**—Child welfare staff face traumatic issues similar to first responders such as fire fighters and police officers.<sup>29</sup> These traumatic experiences can include both physical risk associated with entering a dangerous home situation and the psychological effects of dealing with situations such as child abuse or death. Secondary traumatic stress, which is also known as vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, is the exposure to another person’s traumatic stories that can result in helpers developing their own traumatic symptoms in response. Child welfare staff deal with both this indirect traumatic exposure, as well as direct traumatic exposure. When combined, this exposure can create overall occupational stress.

Other states use peer support models to help manage worker stress and trauma that can lead to burnout. For example, New Jersey uses a peer support model called Worker2Worker. Under this model, in 2013 New Jersey began operating a 7-days-a-week confidential peer counseling support helpline for caseworkers, although it reported that this helpline has not been heavily used. Additionally, New Jersey has implemented a peer mentoring program for newly hired workers, which includes support for new staff by way of monthly followups with an assigned mentor. This Worker2Worker model is a voluntary mentoring program, where retired employees volunteer to provide support and guidance to any protective services staff who feel they need support. The Worker2Worker program also offers Resilience Summits, which include peer support and resilience-building education, self-care, and team-building activities.

**Department increasing support for staff, including peer support**—The Department reported that staff have access to mental health support through the state-offered Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is available to staff working for all state agencies. Services offered through this program include confidential emotional support with trained clinicians for issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress.

The Department has also taken steps to promote an organizational culture of safety and support. Specifically, the Department reported that, in September 2016, it partnered with a contractor to train all executive staff and other department leaders, such as program managers, on safety science. Safety science involves an in-depth, system-wide analysis of how to respond to critical incidents, such as child deaths. For example, rather than responding to a single critical incident with blame, safety science involves a comprehensive review of critical incidents and a system-wide approach to understand the factors that influence both the quality and delivery of services. The goal of safety science is to create a culture of accountability rather than a culture of blame. The Department tracks the number of fatalities and near-fatality cases, and department staff reported that as part of this safety science approach, critical incident cases are selected and workers from those cases (such as caseworkers, supervisors, and program managers) are then interviewed so that everyone involved can review what happened, the decisions that were made, how staff felt about the incident, and how to learn from this incident for future decision making.

Further, the Department reported that it also plans to develop a peer support program to provide additional support to staff. According to the Department, this program will offer support to department staff who work directly and indirectly with cases, and seeks to reduce the stress that workers feel related to a critical incident (such as a child death) or that is built up over time through stressful situations (such as working with angry parents or reading reports detailing child abuse and neglect). The Department reported that it plans to then seek experienced volunteers from its staff to participate in a peer support team. This team’s composition will reflect the Department’s staff composition. For example, the majority of department field staff are caseworkers, so the largest percentage of the team will be caseworkers. There will be an application and selection process to create the team. The team will then be trained by an external partner. The goal of the peer support program is to allow those in need of support the outlet they need to discuss issues with someone who has been through similar issues. If this peer support is not adequate for an individual, the peer supporter can then recommend that person see the EAP clinical counselor. The Department also reported planning to build in automatic check-ins for staff who go through critical incidents, as well as a referral process (both self-referral or supervisor referral) for chronic/

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<sup>29</sup> ACS-NYU Children’s Trauma Institute. (2012). *Addressing secondary traumatic stress among child welfare staff: A practice brief*. New York, NY: NYU Langone Medical Center.

long-term less-traumatic experiences. The Department reported that it plans to implement the peer support program in fiscal year 2018. The Department should carry out its plans to implement a peer support program to support staff facing trauma and burnout.

## **Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Department should continue to explore opportunities to address salary concerns as resources permit. In doing so, it should consider gathering additional state salary information from other states for benchmarking, as it deems necessary.
- 2.2. The Department should 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 to promote retention

To help promote staff retention, the Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) should further enhance its efforts to hire best fit job applicants, particularly for the caseworker position. The Department uses common recruiting and hiring practices and has made efforts to improve its timeliness in filling vacancies. Although the positions included in the scope of auditors' review were largely filled as of June 2017, auditors identified some additional best practices related to hiring best fit job applicants that could help promote staff retention. 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 video; continuing to improve its tools for assessing caseworker applicants' skill set; and ensuring, when possible, that program supervisors participate in the panel interviews for caseworker positions in their units.

## Department uses various recruiting and hiring strategies

The Department uses various common strategies to recruit and hire applicants for the five positions auditors reviewed: caseworkers, case aides, program supervisors, program managers, and Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) investigators (see the Introduction, pages 2 through 3, for a description of these positions).<sup>30</sup> The Department recruits for these positions as needed, which means it is continually recruiting for positions with substantial turnover, such as caseworkers and case aides. For example, the Department hired 543 caseworkers and 103 case aides between June 2016 and May 2017. The Department primarily recruits caseworkers and case aides externally, although the hiring process for caseworkers has additional steps. Program supervisors and program managers, on the other hand, are primarily recruited from within the Department through promotions, and the hiring processes for these positions are similar. OCWI investigators are recruited both from within the Department and externally and have a hiring process unique to OCWI. Specifically:

- **Recruiting strategies**—The Department primarily recruits caseworkers externally by posting job openings on the Department's website and on the Arizona State Jobs website (see text box), which automatically transmits the job openings to a job search engine. The Department also partners with Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU) to recruit Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates (see Chapter 4, pages 29 through 32, for more information).<sup>31</sup> In addition to recruiting caseworkers externally, in February 2016, the Department implemented a new policy to recruit caseworkers internally by allowing case aides with 5 years of experience with the Department to promote into the caseworker

**Arizona State Jobs website**—The official website for State of Arizona government jobs, which can be accessed at [azstatejobs.gov](http://azstatejobs.gov). On this website, potential applicants can search for current job and internship openings in various Arizona state agencies.

Source: Auditor General staff review of [azstatejobs.gov](http://azstatejobs.gov).

<sup>30</sup> The law requiring this review directed auditors to review OCWI staff, which includes investigators, managers, and other administrative staff. However, because OCWI investigators comprise the majority of staff positions within the OCWI and account for most of the OCWI's staff turnover, auditors focused their review of OCWI staff on the investigator position.

<sup>31</sup> The University of Arizona does not have a social work degree program.

trainee position (see Chapter 2, page 11, for additional information). The Department also recruits case aides externally by posting job openings on the Arizona State Jobs website.

In contrast, program supervisors and program managers are recruited internally through promotions. The Department posts internal job announcements when there are openings for these positions, for which eligible staff can then apply. OCWI investigators are also recruited internally from among the Department’s experienced caseworkers and externally from former law enforcement investigators by posting job openings on the Arizona State Jobs website.

- Hiring processes**—The Department requires applicants for all five positions to complete an online application through the Arizona State Jobs website, meet applicable prescreening requirements (see the Introduction, pages 2 through 3, for each position’s minimum or preferred qualifications), and pass an interview (typically a panel interview) to be considered for a position. As shown in Figure 1, the hiring processes for caseworkers and OCWI investigators include additional steps. For the caseworker position, applicants are also instructed to watch a realistic job preview (RJP) video prior to the interview, which provides applicants with an idea of the work demands (see pages 23 through 24 for more information), and they are required to complete a writing assessment before the Department makes a hiring decision. For the OCWI investigator position, the OCWI conducts an initial phone interview prior to conducting the panel interview as part of its hiring process. The OCWI implemented this initial phone interview in August 2016 and reported that it has improved the quality of applicants that are invited to a panel interview.

**Figure 1**  
**Overview of department hiring processes for caseworkers, case aides, program supervisors, program managers, and OCWI investigators**



Source: Auditor General staff review of department policies and procedures and interviews with department staff.

Additionally, the Department has standardized and centralized various aspects of its recruitment process to improve its timeliness in filling vacancies. These include developing standardized job announcements, centrally performing the initial applicant screening process, and centrally performing background and reference checks. The Department has also developed recruitment tracking tools to monitor applicants throughout the process.

Generally, the positions included in the scope of auditors’ review were largely filled as of June 2017 (see Table 1, pages 2 through 3, for these positions). For example, 95 percent of the caseworker and program supervisor

positions were filled, and 87 percent of case aide positions were filled. The Department reported that most of its vacancies result from staff turnover rather than a lack of applicants. In fact, beginning in August 2016, the Department reduced the target recruitment number of new caseworker applicants from 60 to 40 new hires each month.

## Additional actions could enhance Department’s efforts to hire best fit applicants

Although the Department uses common recruiting and hiring practices and has largely filled the positions reviewed, auditors identified some additional practices that could enhance its efforts to recruit and hire best fit job applicants, particularly for the caseworker position. Literature indicates that recruitment and hiring practices can affect child welfare staff retention. For example, some estimates suggest that as much as 80 percent of turnover at human service agencies is due to inadequate hiring strategies.<sup>32</sup> According to child welfare literature, an applicant who has a clear understanding of the characteristics of the job for which he/she is applying and who has been assessed by the hiring agency for the best fit for the position is more likely to remain working at the agency for a longer period.<sup>33</sup> In addition, child welfare research suggests that using various hiring strategies and recruiting for specific educational backgrounds and/or experience, such as targeting people with social work backgrounds, is a key factor that promotes staff retention.<sup>34</sup> Additional practices that could enhance the Department’s efforts to hire best fit applicants include (1) taking additional actions to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields, (2) enhancing the use of its realistic job preview video, (3) continuing to improve its tools for assessing caseworker applicants’ skill set, and (4) ensuring, when possible, that program supervisors participate in the panel interviews for caseworker positions in their units.

### Department should take additional actions to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields—

Numerous research studies have found that the retention of child welfare workers is improved when they have a social work degree. For example, one study found that individuals with a social work degree tend to both arrive better prepared and stay in child welfare longer than those who do not.<sup>35</sup> Child welfare workers who are social work graduates have higher job performance and lower turnover rates compared to their colleagues who are not social work graduates.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, research indicates caseworkers with previous child welfare experience tend to stay longer.<sup>37</sup> Further, social workers are better suited to work in child welfare because the profession’s values of social justice are parallel with those needed in child welfare.<sup>38</sup> Experts auditors interviewed also agreed that social workers are best suited for child welfare work.

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<sup>32</sup> Larson, S.A., & Hewitt, A.S. (2005). *Staff recruitment, retention, & training strategies for community human services organizations*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. as cited in Dickinson, N., Kersgard, M., Gibson, R., Gori, A., & Justice, C. (2009). *Staying power! Selection toolkit*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work, Jordan Institute for Families.

<sup>33</sup> Dickinson, N.S., & Comstock, A. (2009). *Getting and keeping the best people*, in C. Potter & C. Brittain (Eds.), *Supervision in child welfare* (pp. 220-261). New York, NY: Oxford University Press as cited in Dickinson et al., 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Bernotavicz, F. (2008). *Screening and selection of child welfare staff*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service; Whitaker, T., Reich, S., Reid, L.B., Williams, M., & Woodside, C. (2004). *If you’re right for the job, it’s the best job in the world*. NASW Memberlink as cited in Brittain, C., Fitchett, J., Leake, R., & Silverstein, M. (2006). *Western Regional Recruitment and Retention Project: SMARRT manual*. Denver, CO: University of Denver, Butler Institute for Families; Bernotavicz, F. (2007). *Retention of child welfare workers: A report*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service as cited in Harbert, A. & Dudley, D. (2009). *Child welfare social worker recruitment and retention: Influential factors and promising practices—Review of the research*. San Diego, CA: San Diego State University, Southern Area Consortium of Human Services.

<sup>35</sup> Whitaker et al., 2004 as cited in Brittain et al., 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Whitaker et al., 2004 as cited in Brittain et al., 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Bernotavicz, 2007 as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Scannapieco, M. & Connell-Corrick, K. (2003). Do collaborations with schools of social work make a difference for the field of child welfare? Practice, retention and curriculum. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 7(1/2), 35 – 51 as cited in Strolin, J., McCarthy, M., & Caringi, J. (2006). Causes and effects of child welfare workforce turnover: Current state of knowledge and future directions. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1(2), 29 – 52.

The Department partners with ASU and NAU to administer a federal tuition assistance program to recruit social work graduates for the Department's caseworker position and to help retain department staff (see Chapter 4, pages 29 through 32, for more information).<sup>39</sup> The Department recruits about 50 to 65 new hires each year through this program. However, department and university staff reported that resource limitations have prevented expansion of the program as a method for recruiting more social work graduates. According to the Department, it hopes to use this program as its primary caseworker recruitment method as turnover rates decrease and the Department and university partnerships can expand the program.

In the meantime, the majority of new caseworkers are not hired through the tuition assistance program. As discussed previously, the Department hired 543 caseworkers between June 2016 and May 2017. Until the Department is able to recruit caseworkers primarily through the tuition assistance program, it should take additional steps to target applicants with social work or related backgrounds when recruiting caseworkers. Specifically, the Department should:

- **Revise minimum caseworker qualifications**—The Department requires caseworkers to have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, but this degree can be in any field and does not need to be related to social work.<sup>40</sup> However, as discussed previously, literature indicates that caseworker recruitment should target applicants with a social work background. Additionally, some other states auditors reviewed have minimum qualifications that require or give preference to applicants with degrees in social work or related fields (such as education, counseling, and psychology) and/or social work experience. For example, the Utah Division of Child and Family Services (Utah) requires its caseworkers to have a bachelor's degree in social work or a related field, with preference given to applicants with a BSW or MSW degree. Also, although Utah does not require caseworkers to have prior child welfare experience, preference is given to applicants that have relevant experience. The New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department requires investigative caseworkers to have a bachelor's degree in social work or a related field and 2 years of related experience. Similar to Arizona, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (New Jersey) requires caseworker trainees to have a bachelor's degree in any field, but it gives preference to applicants who have a bachelor's or master's degree in social work or a related field with 6 months' experience.

Consistent with these practices, the Department should revise its minimum caseworker qualifications to at least include a preference for applicants with a social work or related degree and/or previous child welfare experience. The Department should then prioritize its recruitment and hiring of applicants in accordance with this preference.

- **Participate in additional recruiting activities at universities as resources allow**—According to a 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey, participating in the federal tuition assistance program, as well as early and aggressive recruiting at social work schools, were among the top recruiting strategies preferred by state child welfare agencies.<sup>41</sup> In another study, 28 out of 31 states found that practicing early and aggressive recruitment at social work schools was "somewhat effective" or "highly effective."<sup>42</sup> Further, according to the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey, forming strong and consistent partnerships with social work schools, such as presence at job fairs and career days, was also an effective strategy for recruitment.<sup>43</sup> Although these reports are several years old, a child welfare research expert from the University of Georgia that auditors interviewed confirmed that these practices are still relevant in recruiting child welfare staff. For example, the

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<sup>39</sup> This program was created by the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 to ensure a well-qualified child welfare workforce.

<sup>40</sup> According to department management, the Department formerly gave preference to applicants with social work backgrounds but revised the educational qualifications to no longer give preference to candidates with social work backgrounds when the Legislature directed it to fill a total of 1,406 caseworker positions beginning in July 2014. Prior to this time, the Department was appropriated 1,320 caseworker positions, according to the Department's July 2014 *Monthly Staffing Report*.

<sup>41</sup> American Public Human Services Association (2005). *Report from the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State agency findings*. Washington, DC.

<sup>42</sup> Cyphers, G. (2001) *Report from the child welfare workforce survey: State and county data and findings*. Washington, DC: American Public Human Services Association as cited in Brittain et al., 2006.

<sup>43</sup> American Public Human Services Association, 2005.

Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services (Maine)—which also participates in the federal tuition assistance program—created a recruitment and retention specialist position in 2012 to develop classroom talks for college classes, create material for and attend job fairs, and support tracking and managing the recruitment process. Maine staff attribute an increase in caseworker applicants to this retention specialist position, which they said indicates a need for continuous recruitment presence at universities.

The Department reported that it does not participate in recruiting activities at the universities beyond its partnerships for the tuition assistance program because of resource constraints. However, participating in some university recruiting activities might help the Department recruit applicants earning social work or related degrees who are not part of the tuition assistance program. For example, department staff could attend university job fairs or collaborate with universities to periodically speak to social work classes, where they can give presentations to educate and inform students about the opportunity to work at the Department upon graduation. Therefore, as resources allow, the Department should participate in additional recruiting activities at the universities to recruit applicants earning social work or related degrees who are not part of the tuition assistance program. As needed and as resources permit, the Department could also consider attending recruiting activities at universities in bordering states, such as Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, to recruit caseworker applicants for rural Arizona cities.

### **Department should enhance the use of its RJP video to help assess caseworker applicants—**

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, RJPs are “designed to present a balanced view of both the rewards and demands of child welfare positions in order to align the goals and expectations of applicants with the requirements of child welfare work. The goal of an RJP is to improve the fit between the applicant and the job, increasing job satisfaction and reducing the number of new staff who quit because their job roles and demands were not what they had envisioned.”<sup>44</sup> Additionally, “states develop their own RJPs to present the unique aspects of their child welfare agency, available positions, geography, and client populations. RJP videos and related materials can be used at a number of different points in the hiring process, including before applicants apply, during the screening and interviewing process, and after an applicant has been hired.”<sup>45</sup> RJPs can also be used as a screening tool by encouraging applicants who were unfamiliar with the demands of child welfare casework to self-select out of the application process if they feel the job is not the correct fit.<sup>46</sup> Lastly, best practices recommend that applicants be required to watch RJPs and that questions related to the RJP be asked during the interview, such as “what worker position was most attractive and least appealing to you?”<sup>47,48</sup>

The Department uses an RJP video and encourages caseworker applicants to watch the video prior to their interviews. The video is titled “A Realistic Look at a Career in DCS Video” and is available on the Department’s website. The video includes core areas highlighted in child welfare research that should be included in an RJP.<sup>49</sup> However, although interviewers ask applicants whether they watched the video, they do not ask additional follow-up questions, as recommended by best practice, to determine whether applicants understood the video’s content and/or to gauge their interest in and fit for child welfare work. In addition, this process does not ensure applicants watch the video prior to the interview, which department staff indicated can occur. For example, the Department’s Chief Human Resources Officer reported observing an interview in which the applicant did not seem to be aware of the video.

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<sup>44</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n.d.) Realistic Job Previews (RJPs). Retrieved from: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/learningcenter/video-series/rjp/>. The Child Welfare Information Gateway is a service of the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It provides access to information and learning tools to improve child welfare practices.

<sup>45</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n.d.) Realistic Job Previews (RJPs).

<sup>46</sup> Dickinson et al., 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Champnoise, C. (2007). *The RJP tool kit: A how-to guide for developing a realistic job preview*. Sacramento, CA: CPS Human Resource Services.

<sup>48</sup> Dickinson et al., 2009.

<sup>49</sup> In August 2017, the Department submitted a contract request to update the existing RJP video.

In contrast, some other states have implemented additional measures to help ensure applicants watch and reflect on their respective RJPs, and which also help assess applicants' job fit. For example:

- **Georgia**—Georgia's Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services (Georgia) has a robust process to ensure that applicants are aware of the caseworker duties and responsibilities and are committed to the demands of the job. Georgia collaborated with the University of Georgia School of Social Work (UGA) to design, pilot, and evaluate a new pre-application process for caseworker applicants where applicants are first directed to read a brief description of the child welfare program and what a typical day looks like, frequently asked questions, and what type of person makes a good fit for the job. Applicants then watch a 26-minute-long RJP video. Applicants then must click that they viewed the video and answer 15 questions related to their commitment level, such as working nights and weekends, and their intentions to work in child welfare. They are then scored by a computer as either "likely to be a good fit and you should apply" or "likely not a good fit and should look elsewhere for employment." The new pre-application process was implemented in 2015 and evaluated in 2017 by the UGA. The evaluation, which included surveys to new caseworkers, found that the process supported the applicants' personal intentions to remain employed in child welfare.
- **New Jersey**—New Jersey requires applicants to watch its RJP video onsite prior to the interview, which ensures all applicants watch the video. According to a New Jersey official, applicants are then asked behavioral questions related to the RJP during the formal interview.

Similar to these states, the Department should enhance the use of its RJP video to further encourage applicants to watch and reflect on the video and help it assess applicants' job fit. For example, the Department could inform applicants that they will be asked questions about the video in the interview and then ask questions based on the video that help the Department assess the applicants' job fit.

**Department should continue its efforts to improve its tools for assessing applicants' skill set**—Research indicates that public human service jobs require specific competencies.<sup>50</sup> Competency-based recruiting stresses the need to identify competencies that are most likely to predict long-term success on the job, differentiate between average and outstanding performance, and are the most difficult to develop through either training or experience.<sup>51</sup> According to child welfare literature, caseworker entry-level competencies include, but are not limited to, interpersonal relations, analytical thinking, observation skills, and communication skills. Supervisor core competencies include establishing clear communication, systematically monitoring progress, delivering feedback, and having good interpersonal skills.<sup>52</sup>

The Southern Area Consortium of Human Services (SACHS) issued a literature review in 2009 that explains that some child welfare agencies have begun to specifically screen for the characteristics proven to predict retention and develop additional hiring competencies and questions as needed.<sup>53</sup> For example, the SACHS review highlighted Maine, which underwent a collaborative effort with its Bureau of Human Resources and the University of Southern Maine (USM) to redesign its hiring process for caseworkers using a research-based competency model. Maine used an approach that was validated in child welfare literature. Specifically, it first conducted a job analysis to determine the tasks that are performed on the job and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the work. Once the job skills were identified, Maine used the research-based caseworker competencies to create screening tools for hiring staff. Literature recommends developing a combination of screening methods to increase the validity of the screening process.<sup>54</sup> Maine created multiple job-related assessments, including a

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<sup>50</sup> Gehrman, R. (2002). Building a better workforce: strategies for recruiting and hiring. *Hired for Good*, 1(1), 3-5 as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009; Bernotavicz, 2007 as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Bernotavicz, 2008; Bernotavicz, 2007 as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Salus, M.K. (2004). *Child abuse and neglect user manual series: Supervising Child Protective Services caseworkers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect.

<sup>53</sup> Gehrman, 2002 as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009; Bernotavicz, F. (2007). Workforce recruitment and retention in New England. *Children's Bureau Express*, 8(1). Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine as cited in Harbert & Dudley, 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Bernotavicz, 2008.

panel interview; fact-finding interview, which requires applicants to ask questions pertaining to a case study to assess the applicants' ability to ask questions, probe for information, and identify key facts; and a written exercise, which requires applicants to produce a case analysis using available facts and case information (see Table 3 for additional information about Maine's assessment tools and list of core competencies). Each of the assessment tools is designed to assess one or more of the core competencies. For example, the "Planning and organizing work" and the "Observational Skills" competencies cannot be assessed through the standard interview, but are assessed through the fact-finding interview and written exercise.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, Maine issued a report on its revised hiring process in 2008 and found that the revised process accurately predicts the performance of employees after 1 year on the job.<sup>56</sup> Further, in 2014, the USM issued a report describing a similar process Maine underwent, in collaboration with the USM, to develop a competency-based model for recruiting child welfare supervisors.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 3**  
Maine's caseworker assessment index

Applicant competencies to be rated	Standard interview	Fact-finding interview <sup>1</sup>	Written exercise <sup>2</sup>
<b>Interpersonal relations:</b> awareness of others' feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns	✓	✓	
<b>Self-awareness/confidence:</b> knowledge of one's internal states, preferences, resources, and limitations	✓	✓	
<b>Analytic thinking:</b> using data to understand patterns and develop concepts	✓	✓	✓
<b>Adaptability:</b> flexibility in handling change	✓	✓	
<b>Observational skills:</b> ability to describe events factually		✓	✓
<b>Sense of mission:</b> commitment to the welfare of others	✓		✓
<b>Communication skills:</b> ability to have open, clear communication	✓	✓	✓
<b>Motivation:</b> emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals	✓	✓	
<b>Planning and organizing work:</b> ability to prioritize activities to achieve goals		✓	✓
<b>Teamwork:</b> ability to create group synergy in pursuing collective goals	✓		✓

<sup>1</sup> A fact-finding interview requires applicants to ask questions pertaining to a case study to assess the applicants' ability to ask questions, probe for information, and identify key facts.

<sup>2</sup> A written exercise requires applicants to produce a case analysis using available facts and case information within a limited time frame.

Source: Bernotavicz, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Several states are using the hiring process developed by Maine, including North Carolina, where a hiring manager reported an improvement in the performance of workers hired since they began using the competency-based selection process.

<sup>56</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services. (n.d.) *Results of the 2005-2008 Evaluation Reports*. Augusta, ME.

<sup>57</sup> Bernotavicz, F. (2014). *A competency model for child welfare supervisors*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service.

Georgia underwent a similar process to Maine. In 2006, it collaborated with the UGA to identify core competencies for the caseworker position, such as interpersonal skills, self-awareness, adaptability, and professional commitment. The UGA and Georgia then created a matrix to identify which core competencies would be assessed by various assessment tools. Georgia piloted the new assessment process in 2007 and implemented a new scenario-based activity in 2015 that instructs applicants to prioritize situations related to safety, permanence, and well-being and explain their reasoning for their decisions. This activity was designed and developed based on research in child welfare recruitment and retention and is used to augment the caseworker assessment process, which already included behavioral-based interview questions. The UGA evaluated the assessment process and found that the use of multiple sources of applicant data to make employment decisions enhances the professional assessment process.<sup>58</sup> The evaluation also cited that most managers, which includes supervisors and managers, felt that the new assessment process had positively impacted the employee selection process by improving and standardizing the vetting process to identify quality applicants who are a good fit for employment.

The Department could similarly enhance its tools for assessing applicants' job fit. The Department currently uses 11 behavioral-based questions to assess caseworker applicants and also requires them to complete a written assessment to demonstrate their writing skills and knowledge of family-centered practice.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the Department is piloting a new assessment tool for caseworker applicants to better ensure alignment between applicants and their actual job duties and improve actual on-the-job performance. As of September 2017, the Department was not using the new tool to help make hiring decisions but to gather data to develop stronger interview questions. For example, one department hiring supervisor that auditors interviewed expressed concern that the caseworker interview questions are too general and do not adequately assess best fit based on the job circumstances, and believed the Department could ask other, more targeted questions. One such question could be how the applicant handles stress or would work with a sex offender to help predict how the applicant would react in such real-life situations. The Department also reported that it plans to use the new tool for other positions.

Additional assessment tools could also help the Department assess some skills that are difficult to assess through an interview, its new assessment tool, or its current written assessment, including observational skills and planning and organizing work skills (see Table 3, page 25, for more information on these skills). For example, similar to Maine, the Department could convert its written assessment to a case study that requires applicants to write a summary of the facts and provide recommendations. Alternatively, similar to Georgia, the Department could develop a scenario-based activity that instructs applicants to prioritize situations related to safety, permanence, and well-being and explain their reasoning for their decisions. Therefore, as the Department continues its efforts to improve its caseworker applicant assessment tools, it should revise or implement additional assessment tools that would help better assess applicants' observational skills and planning and organizing work skills.

The Department should also consider whether there would be benefit in taking a similar approach in its assessment of program supervisor applicants. As discussed previously, Maine developed a competency-based model for recruiting child welfare supervisors after it developed a similar model for caseworkers. As with caseworker applicants, the Department uses ten behavioral-based questions to assess program supervisor applicants. Using a competency-based model might help the Department in its assessment and hiring of program supervisors.

**Program supervisors should interview caseworker applicants for positions in their units when possible**—Applicants who are interviewed by their potential supervisor for a specific team are more likely to be assessed for best fit to the position. A centralized hiring system, where applicants may not be interviewed by their potential supervisor, may be out of touch with the needs of local offices and thus jeopardize a positive fit.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, local office staff can provide a more realistic picture of the job demands at a specific office and know

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<sup>58</sup> Ellett, A.J., Ellett, C.D., Ellis, J.I., Rugutt, J.K., Jennings, P., & Littleton, T. (2017). *Evaluation of the Georgia DFCS employee selection protocol: Final project report*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia, School of Social Work.

<sup>59</sup> According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, family-centered practice is a way of working with families across service systems to enhance their capacity to care for and protect their children. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n.d.) Family-Centered Practice. Retrieved from: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/famcentered/>.

<sup>60</sup> Mendel, D. (2004). Who's taking care in Greenville? *Advocasey* 6(1), 4-15 as cited in Brittain et al., 2006.

the personalities that will integrate more easily at the team level.<sup>61</sup> For example, supervisors in New Jersey do not always conduct the formal interview of the applicants for their team; however, after an applicant has passed the formal interview, staff from the local office with the open position will meet with the applicant at a “meet and greet” to help ensure good fit before the applicant is hired. Similarly, Maine holds a second interview between the applicant and the hiring supervisor that occurs following an applicant’s initial panel interview to help ensure good fit in the program area and supervisory unit.

According to one of the Department’s hiring supervisors who auditors interviewed, supervisors are more vested in helping to ensure a good fit for a new hire when they interview applicants for their unit. According to department staff, interview panels for the case aide, program supervisor, and program manager positions include the hiring supervisors. However, for the caseworker position, department staff reported that supervisors participate on interview panels on a rotational basis, and these panels may not include the hiring supervisor. As a result, caseworker applicants may not be interviewed by their potential supervisor prior to being hired. For example, auditors reviewed the human resources files for 29 randomly selected caseworkers from across the State who were hired between January 2017 and June 2017 and found that only 2 applicants were interviewed by their future supervisor.<sup>62</sup> The Department reported that, in September 2017, it began piloting a change to its caseworker hiring process in one region that will result in applicants applying for and being interviewed for positions at specific field offices. In conjunction with this change, the Department should ensure that, when possible, program supervisors participate in the interview of caseworker applicants for positions in their units.

## Recommendations

- 3.1. The Department should take additional actions to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields by:
  - a. Revising its minimum caseworker qualifications to at least include a preference for applicants with a social work or related degree and/or previous child welfare experience. The Department should then prioritize its recruitment and hiring of applicants in accordance with this preference.
  - b. As resources allow, participating in additional recruiting activities at the universities to recruit applicants earning social work or related degrees who are not part of the tuition assistance program. As needed and as resources permit, the Department could also consider attending recruiting activities at universities in bordering states, such as Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, to recruit caseworker applicants for rural Arizona cities.
- 3.2. The Department should enhance the use of its RJP video to further encourage applicants to watch and reflect on the video and help it assess applicants’ job fit. For example, the Department could inform applicants that they will be asked questions about the video in the interview and then ask questions based on the video that help the Department assess the applicants’ job fit.
- 3.3. As the Department continues its efforts to improve its caseworker applicant assessment tools, it should revise or implement additional assessment tools that would help better assess applicants’ observational skills and planning and organizing work skills. The Department should also consider whether there would be benefit in taking a similar approach in its assessment of program supervisor applicants.
- 3.4. The Department should ensure that, when possible, program supervisors participate in the interview for caseworker applicants for positions in their units.

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<sup>61</sup> Mendel, 2004 as cited in Brittain et al., 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Auditors initially randomly selected 30 files; however, 1 file was left out of the analysis because the caseworker was part of the tuition assistance program discussed in Chapter 4 (see pages 29 through 32), which handles the interview process differently.





## Department now monitors compliance with tuition assistance program requirements and should evaluate the program

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) has reinstated a process for monitoring compliance with tuition assistance program (program) requirements and should evaluate the program. The Department partners with state universities to administer a federal tuition assistance program for social work graduates to help recruit and retain department employees. Through this 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 leave the Department's employment prior to this time, they must repay a prorated portion of the financial assistance they received based on their length of employment. Prior to auditors' review, the Department lacked a process for monitoring participants' compliance with these requirements, although such a process was in place when the Department was under the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). However, the Department 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 for internal management purposes.

### Department administers tuition assistance program

The Department partners with Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU) to administer a federal tuition assistance program (program) to recruit social work graduates for the Department's caseworker position and to retain department employees.<sup>63</sup> The program is designed to assist in paying for the costs of completing a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or Master of Social Work (MSW) degree for either prospective employees or current department employees.<sup>64</sup> In exchange, program participants must make a commitment to work for the Department for a contractually specified time frame, which depends on the program option they participated in (see Table 4, page 30, for the program options and associated work requirements). The program was created under the federal Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980, which allows states with an approved training program to use federal funding to pay for up to 75 percent of the program's costs, including tuition, mandatory fees, and books.<sup>65,66</sup> In Arizona, the remaining 25 percent of program costs are funded by the participating state universities.

<sup>63</sup> The University of Arizona does not participate in the program because it does not offer social work degrees.

<sup>64</sup> The program can pay for up to 2 years of the BSW program.

<sup>65</sup> According to a report from the University of Houston, as of July 2017, 35 states participated in similar programs. Cheung, M. (Ed.) (2017). *National survey of IV-E stipends and paybacks*. Houston, TX: University of Houston.

<sup>66</sup> Title IV-E §474(a)(3)(A) of The Social Security Act has been codified in 42 USC 674(a)(3)(A).

**Table 4****Program participants, type of university degree, length of time for which tuition assistance may be provided, and employment obligation time frames**

Participant	Type of university degree	Length of time for which tuition may be reimbursed	Post-graduation department employment obligation <sup>1</sup>
Prospective employee	BSW part-time or full-time at NAU	Up to 2 years	Up to 2 years
	BSW part-time or full-time at ASU	Up to 2 years	Up to 2 years
	MSW full-time at ASU	Up to 2 years <sup>2</sup>	18 months to 2 years
Current employee	MSW part-time program at ASU	Up to 4 years	1 year

<sup>1</sup> The length of a participant's employment obligation is dependent on the amount of tuition assistance the participant was provided. For example, if a participant in the ASU BSW program is provided 1 year or 24 credit hours of tuition assistance, then that participant must work 1 year for the Department.

<sup>2</sup> Prospective employees in the full-time MSW program at ASU are also given a \$600 monthly stipend.

Source: Auditor General staff review of program policies and procedures.

Prospective department employees may apply for the program through ASU or NAU after first being accepted to a BSW or MSW degree program.<sup>67</sup> Applicants are required to submit an application, including a written essay, to the program coordinator of the university the applicant is attending. Applicants are also advised to explore whether a career in child welfare is a good fit for them through activities such as viewing the Department's realistic job preview video and taking a self-assessment (see Chapter 3, pages 23 through 24, for more information on the realistic job preview video). Applicants must also interview with the Department for a pre-employment assessment and undergo a background check. Applicants who pass these requirements and are accepted into the program must sign a contract with the Department acknowledging their responsibility to repay the financial benefits received through the program if they fail to obtain their degree or work full-time for the Department for the time frame specified in the contract (see pages 31 through 32 for additional information about the repayment process). Program participants must also enroll in classes specific to child welfare work and attend school full-time while completing internships with the Department, which are components of the two Arizona universities' BSW and MSW degrees.

The Department reported that it views this program as an important recruitment strategy because it believes program graduates come to the Department well prepared for employment as a caseworker. The Department recruits about 50 to 65 new hires each year through this program. According to department data, 64 social work graduates from both ASU and NAU were expected to begin working for the Department in 2017. However, department and university staff reported that resource limitations have prevented expanding the program as a resource for the Department to recruit more social work graduates. The Department also reported that it hopes to use this program as its primary caseworker recruitment method as turnover rates decrease and the Department and university partnerships can expand the program.

The Department also uses the program as a retention strategy to provide current department employees an opportunity to further develop their skills and education. Specifically, in 2012, the Department and ASU expanded the program to offer department employees the opportunity to attend ASU part-time to obtain their MSW degrees while still working full-time for the Department. Employees must be in good standing with and have worked

<sup>67</sup> The program began for MSW students at ASU in 1988 and, according to the Department, was later expanded to include BSW students at ASU beginning in 1995. In 2014, the program was further expanded to include BSW students at NAU. According to NAU staff, NAU is preparing to create a MSW degree program by 2019, and students participating in this degree program would be eligible for the program as well.

for the Department for 2 consecutive years to be eligible. Applicants must first submit an application and an essay to the Department to be considered for the program. A panel of department employees then reviews the applications and selects up to 15 employees each year to participate. Selected applicants must then apply to and be accepted by ASU's MSW degree program. As with prospective employees, participating employees must sign a contract with the Department agreeing to the program's terms and conditions, which includes continuing to work full-time for the Department during the program and for 1 year upon graduation. Participating employees are allowed up to 4 years to obtain their MSW degrees, unless a contract extension has been granted.<sup>68</sup>

## Department has begun tracking program compliance and should evaluate program

The Department has begun tracking program compliance and should also evaluate the program's effectiveness. Prior to auditors' review, the Department did not have a process to monitor participants' compliance with their employment obligations, but it began doing so in February 2017. The Department should also evaluate the program beyond monitoring participants' compliance with employment obligations for internal management purposes.

**Department has begun tracking program compliance and collecting repayment of program benefits for noncompliance**—Participants who default on any contract terms or conditions are liable for financial repayment to the Department. In accordance with federal regulations, the Department is responsible for tracking participants' compliance with program requirements, including collecting the repayment of financial benefits from participants who do not fulfill their employment contract. A process to track program compliance was in place when the Department was under DES. However, since the Department was established in 2014, it had not developed a process to track program compliance. Beginning in February 2017, the Department implemented an ongoing process where its human resources staff monitor whether participants fulfill their employment obligations, starting with graduates hired in 2014. Based on department monitoring through June 2017, many of these participants have not completed their full employment obligations. Specifically:

- 18 of the 52 participants from 2014 did not complete their full employment obligations; these 18 participants completed an average of 58 percent of their employment obligations;
- 17 of the 56 participants from 2015 did not complete their full employment obligations, as of June 2017; 4 participants never worked for the Department, and the remaining 13 completed an average of 60 percent of their employment obligations; and
- 8 of the 57 participants from 2016 did not complete their full employment obligations, as of June 2017; 2 participants never worked for the Department, and the remaining 6 completed an average of 33 percent of their employment obligations.

According to the Department, participants who did not fulfill their employment obligations were referred to the Department's Office of Contracts and Procurement to determine and collect the amounts to be repaid.

The Department also created a new policy and procedures for the repayment and collections process in February 2017. According to this policy, the Department will pursue repayment or collection of any tuition, stipend, or fees received by participants who are unable or unwilling to complete their degrees or who fail to fulfill their employment obligation. The amount to be repaid is prorated based on the length of time worked at the Department and must be paid within 30 calendar days of leaving the Department without fulfilling the employment obligation. As of August 2017, the Department reported that it was updating its new policy and procedures to allow former participants to set up a payment plan with the Department rather than be required to make a lump sum repayment. According to department policy, all recovered monies are returned to the program. In cases where an employee or former employee fails to respond to requests for repayment, the Department will refer the matter to the Arizona

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<sup>68</sup> According to the Department, May 2018 will mark the first cohort of graduates because only one employee participated in the first pilot year of the program.

Office of the Attorney General's Bankruptcy and Collections Enforcement Unit. The Department reported that, through these efforts, it had collected over \$82,000 between February and July 2017 from participants who did not fulfill their obligations and that it was working to collect approximately \$699,000 that was still owed since 2010. Department staff indicated that participants who still owe money could be on a repayment plan and in good standing with their repayments but did not provide specific information to auditors about the status of any repayment plans when requested.

The Department reported that it believed that this high rate of participants' noncompliance with their employment obligations resulted, at least in part, from the Department's lack of monitoring and enforcement of program requirements, which led to a perception that there would be no consequence to participants for not fulfilling their employment obligations. However, the Department reported that it also believed its new process for tracking program compliance and collecting repayments will help improve compliance. Therefore, the Department should continue to implement its new processes for monitoring program compliance and collecting repayment from participants who do not meet their employment obligations.

**Department should evaluate program**—Federal regulations also require state child welfare agencies that use federal monies for tuition assistance programs to evaluate their programs in addition to monitoring program compliance. Noncompliance with this requirement could result in federal sanctions. In May 2017, the Department began tracking information such as caseworkers' degrees, whether these caseworkers were program participants, and whether these caseworkers leave department employment. However, the Department does not use this information to evaluate its program beyond monitoring participants' compliance with their employment obligations as discussed previously.

Although federal regulations do not outline what a program evaluation should include, other states evaluate their programs beyond participant compliance. For example, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (New Jersey) has partnered with the Rutgers School of Social Work to evaluate its program participants' retention beyond their employment obligations. According to a 2016 evaluation, 75 percent of BSW graduates hired over the 12-year existence of New Jersey's program were still employed at the agency. The University of California, Berkeley (UCB) similarly evaluates program participants' retention for California's county-administered child welfare system. The UCB is also in the process of evaluating California's program using surveys it administers to program participants to identify factors that impact participants' retention. Further, a 2006 ASU study recommended that the program be evaluated beyond compliance.<sup>69</sup> Specifically, ASU recommended evaluating the program's effectiveness to determine whether participants remained with the Department beyond their contractual obligations, whether there was a difference between BSW and MSW graduates' retention, and whether the Department should favor current employees who are interested in the program over prospective employees based on the retention of those two types of participants.

Therefore, because the program serves as an important recruiting and retention strategy and because it is a federal requirement, the Department should evaluate the program beyond just monitoring participants' compliance with their employment obligations for internal management purposes. For example, the Department could use the caseworker information it is already tracking to evaluate the retention of participants in the different program options to understand their impact with regard to retention and staff performance. The Department could then use the evaluation to guide program decisions, such as how best to expand the program as resources allow.

## Recommendations

- 4.1. The Department should continue to implement its new processes for monitoring participants' compliance with its tuition assistance program and collecting repayment from participants who do not meet their employment obligations.
- 4.2. Consistent with federal requirements, the Department should evaluate its tuition assistance program beyond monitoring participants' compliance with employment obligations for internal management purposes.

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<sup>69</sup> Devine, L. & Krysik, J. (2006). *DCYF and the Arizona Schools of Social Work partnership: Description and future directions*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona Department of Economic Security: Division of Children, Youth and Families & Arizona State University.



## Department should expand current efforts to strengthen child welfare staff training

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) should expand its current efforts to strengthen its child welfare 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 its efforts to address various issues it identified that affect the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworkers during this training. The Department plans to subsequently revise its initial supervisor training, and it 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 it 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 may not always ensure that staff complete their required training within the Department's designated time frames, and it should develop additional methods to ensure training is monitored and completed. Finally, the Department should continue its efforts to further develop its training evaluation processes.

### Training an important factor affecting staff retention

An effective training program is critical to maintaining a qualified, competent workforce. As discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 12), staff commonly indicated concerns with training in the exit surveys auditors reviewed.<sup>70</sup> The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) identifies training as a component of recruiting, developing, and retaining individuals to ultimately achieve an organization's objectives.<sup>71</sup> In addition, child welfare literature suggests effective training can be a crucial factor in retaining child welfare staff. For example, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) considers training an important aspect in developing a competent workforce committed to delivering quality service.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requires state child welfare agencies to develop staff development and training plans in order to receive federal funding and reviews initial and ongoing training as part of its Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs).<sup>73</sup> The CFSRs are periodic reviews of state child welfare agencies designed to help them identify organizational strengths and weaknesses to improve the provision of child welfare services.

The Department's Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI) is responsible for providing and administering child welfare training programs to its staff. For example, the CWTI offers a series of initial training programs (referred to as core training) for the caseworker, case aide, and program supervisor positions. In addition to this core training, the Department requires all staff to complete a series of mandatory computer based trainings (CBTs) within designated time frames. The Department has separate CBT tracks for staff in nonsupervisory and supervisory

<sup>70</sup> Responses in the exit surveys did not identify specific training areas that were inadequate.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2014). *Standards for internal controls in the federal government*. Washington, DC.

<sup>72</sup> Child Welfare League of America. (2013). *National blueprint for excellence in child welfare—Standards of excellence: Raising the bar for children, families, and communities*. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.

<sup>73</sup> The requirement for state child welfare agencies that receive federal funding to develop staff training and development plans is in 45 CFR 1357.15(t)(1).

positions. Examples of the CBTs for nonsupervisory staff include standards of conduct for state employees, diversity, and records management and retention. Examples of the CBTs for supervisory staff include corrective and disciplinary action, day-to-day supervision, and managing performance.

The Department also offers ongoing training opportunities. For example, the Department offers a refresher course intended to provide a review of the Department's automated case management documentation system (the Children's Information Library and Data Source). Caseworkers are also expected to complete advanced academy training, a series of classroom-based trainings, approximately 2 months after completing their caseworker core training. The advanced academy training addresses various topics such as sex trafficking, domestic violence, and staff safety.

## Department should continue efforts to improve trainee support as it finalizes caseworker core training revisions

The Department should continue its efforts to improve the support provided to trainees as it finalizes its redesign of caseworker core training. As of September 2017, the Department was in the process of finalizing revisions to its caseworker core training to improve caseworker training and retention. As part of this effort, the Department identified various issues that affect the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworkers during their training and should continue to address these issues.

**Department is finalizing redesign of caseworker core training**—Caseworkers and Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) investigators undergo a 22-week core training program. As one of its fiscal year 2017 strategic plan initiatives for improving employee retention, the Department partnered with Arizona State University (ASU) to redesign its approach to caseworker core training and update its training content. Prior to these revisions, trainees completed 3 consecutive weeks of classroom training, with the remaining time spent in field training, where they began handling case-related work. Classroom training covered various topics such as family engagement, domestic violence, and identifying child neglect and abuse. After classroom training, trainees were expected to complete a series of field training activities outlined in a field exercise checklist. The checklist outlined a total of 18 different activities trainees should have either participated in or observed before completing core training, which included observing a caseworker on two home or placement visits, conducting a joint interview with a more experienced caseworker, and observing or participating in a case that involves sexual abuse. Throughout field training, trainees were expected to interact with a field training officer (FTO), their program supervisor, and a mentor (see textbox). The Department's field training manual defines the training support roles and responsibilities of these positions.

Under the revised core training, trainees are still expected to interact with FTOs, program supervisors, and mentors during field training. However, instead of providing 3 weeks of classroom training followed by field training, the Department reported that it has segmented core training into three sections, with each section containing classroom training followed by field

### Roles and responsibilities of staff involved in caseworker field training

- **FTOs** are CWTI employees who support classroom trainers and program supervisors in training caseworkers, as needed. For example, FTOs may meet routinely with trainees to discuss their development, provide training, or observe and provide feedback to trainees. They are responsible for maintaining regular contact with both trainees and their supervisors throughout the training program.
- **Program supervisors** are responsible for identifying and assigning mentors for the trainee, scheduling regular meetings to discuss any questions and debrief on field training activities, designating staff for the trainee to shadow, and having a plan that provides opportunities for the trainee to complete the field exercise checklist.
- **Mentors** are more experienced staff who assist trainees with questions and demonstrate skills necessary to perform tasks by leading job shadowing opportunities. Depending on availability and region, a trainee may be designated more than one mentor.

Source: Auditor General staff review of the Department's field training manual and staff interviews.

training activities that reinforce this training.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the Department has replaced the field exercise checklist with multiple structured activities forms. These forms describe various activities that trainees should discuss with a mentor, observe, or participate in. According to the Department, trainees should review their activity forms with their program supervisors and FTOs to help ensure they achieve the expected performance measures for the structured activities. For example, trainee performance measures in the staff safety and self-care activity form include trainees' ability to articulate three ways to promote staff safety and the benefits of a self-care plan as well as their ability to identify three strategies to promote self-care. As of September 2017, the Department reported that it was piloting these revisions and anticipated making further adjustments to the revised training through December 2017.

**Department should continue to address issues related to trainee support**—The Department's use of mentoring and field training is consistent with child welfare best practices. For example, the CWLA considers mentoring, job shadowing, and quality supervision all best practices that should be part of training programs for child welfare employees.<sup>75</sup> The GAO also identifies mentoring as an important component of staff professional development.<sup>76</sup> In addition, caseworker training programs in other states' child welfare agencies, such as New Jersey's Department of Children and Families (New Jersey), incorporate mentoring as well. According to New Jersey staff, caseworkers are mentored by their supervisors and training staff. The Department's caseworker core training includes these recommended practices by design as it required that trainees complete field training activities, be assigned a mentor, and have routine contact with their supervisors and/or the FTO to discuss questions and developmental progress throughout the training program.

However, as part of its redesign effort, the Department identified inconsistencies in the quality of support given to trainees and indicated that trainees may not always receive proper on-the-job support or training to be successful in their role. Specifically, according to a department internal assessment of its caseworker core training and interviews with department staff:

- **FTOs not always able to provide effective support**—The Department reported that FTOs are not always able to provide effective training support to trainees, largely because of resource constraints. As of August 2017, the Department reported it had 7 FTOs who supported 229 caseworker trainees across the Department's field offices. The Department assigns one or two FTOs to each of its five regions and their respective field offices (see the Introduction, page 1, for additional information about the Department's regions and field offices). FTOs in urban regions support a high number of trainees, which one FTO reported can make it challenging to spend adequate time with each trainee. For example, as of August 2017, the Central region had 2 FTOs who each supported 46 trainees. FTOs in rural regions support fewer trainees but cover larger geographic areas. For example, as of August 2017, the Northern region had one FTO who supported 31 trainees but who covered Arizona's five northernmost counties. According to another FTO, covering a large geographic area makes it challenging for FTOs to spend adequate time with trainees because they have to travel farther.

Additionally, although the Department's field training manual defines FTOs' and program supervisors' roles and responsibilities, the manual provides limited guidance on how they should collaborate with one another to ensure trainees receive proper support. For example, FTOs are not mentioned once in the program supervisor roles and responsibilities in the field training manual.

- **Program supervisors vary in support provided to trainees**—Department staff indicated that program supervisors vary in the support and time they dedicate to caseworker trainees. For example, one FTO—who works with trainees' program supervisors throughout caseworker core training—noted that some program supervisors proactively monitor a trainee's progress and collaborate with an FTO, as needed, to develop an action plan for helping to ensure that trainees receive adequate support. However, this FTO noted that other

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<sup>74</sup> Utah's Division of Child and Family Services (Utah) follows a similar approach to its caseworker training program, where caseworkers receive classroom training followed by field training and then additional classroom training.

<sup>75</sup> Child Welfare League of America, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> U.S. GAO, 2014.

program supervisors may not be as attentive and fail to identify when a trainee is having issues with grasping concepts or conducting case-related work. Auditors shadowed two trainees and observed differences in the time spent and level of interactions between these trainees and their supervisors.

- **Mentors inconsistently assigned**—According to the Department, program supervisors do not always assign a mentor to trainees as required by the field training manual. The Department indicated that assigning mentors can be challenging because of resource limitations. For example, some field offices may not have more experienced staff that can serve as mentors or that have the time to serve as mentors.

According to the Department, creating additional FTO positions is not feasible due to resource and budget limitations. However, the Department has revised the “standard work” document for FTOs to help provide additional guidance on collaborating with program supervisors to help support trainees.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the Department reported that it was exploring options for ensuring trainees are consistently assigned mentors but had yet to identify a solution. The Department should continue with its efforts to address these issues, as well as the issue of varied support provided by program supervisors. It should also monitor and assess whether its efforts result in improved support for trainees and, if not, identify and take additional steps to improve trainee support, as needed.

## Department should enhance its supervisor training

The Department should enhance its supervisory training. Specifically, the Department plans to revise its program supervisor core training and should incorporate mentoring and networking opportunities for program supervisors as part of this effort. In addition, the Department should develop a training program for program managers that also includes mentoring and networking opportunities.

**Department should implement its plans to revise supervisor core training**—As discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 13), some department staff identified concerns with supervision in the exit survey auditors reviewed. In an effort to develop general management and leadership skills for its supervisors, the Department reported that it plans to partner with ASU to revise its supervisor core training once it has completed revising its caseworker core training. The Department requires recently hired or promoted program supervisors to complete a supervisor core training, which comprises 76 hours of classroom training on various topics, including information systems, policy, procedures, and legal issues, as well supportive supervision (see Chapter 2, pages 13 through 14, for more information about supportive supervision). As mentioned previously, the Department also requires program supervisors to complete a series of managerial-focused CBTs. As of July 2017, the Department was still in the process of revising its caseworker core training and had not started revising its supervisor core training.

A 2012 Arizona State University (ASU) assessment of the Department’s supervisory core training identified some improvements the Department should make when it undertakes this effort.<sup>78</sup> Specifically, this assessment found that, although program supervisors indicated the training topics and content were sufficient, the Department did not officially incorporate mentoring or networking opportunities into its supervisory training. According to ASU’s report, program supervisors identified mentoring, coaching, and meeting with peers, such as other program supervisors, as important in helping them apply information learned during classroom training to real-life scenarios. Although the report indicated some supervisors informally received mentoring opportunities, these opportunities were not standardized. As mentioned previously, incorporating mentoring as part of staff training and development has been identified as a best practice for child welfare organizations.<sup>79</sup> Thus, ASU recommended that the Department (1) create a department-wide mentoring program for program supervisors and (2) increase opportunities for program supervisors to interact with one another. To help facilitate opportunities

<sup>77</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 14), the Department’s management system includes the use of standard work documents listing staff duties and responsibilities to help track and evaluate their daily, weekly, and monthly activities.

<sup>78</sup> Lietz, C. & Hayes, M. (2012a). *Supervisor core evaluation*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona State University, Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy. The Department—then the Division of Children, Youth and Families under the Arizona Department of Economic Security—contracted with ASU to evaluate its supervisor training.

<sup>79</sup> Child Welfare League of America, 2013.

for supervisors to interact with one another, ASU recommended that the Department consider incorporating learning circles, or meetings between program supervisors that allow them to learn from another with the help of a facilitator. Other states' child welfare agencies reported that they are also incorporating some of these concepts into their frontline supervisor training programs. For example, staff from Utah reported that they are revising their current supervisor training program and that one of the planned changes is to incorporate various activities in which new supervisors shadow other more experienced supervisors.

Therefore, the Department should carry out its plans to revise supervisor core training. As part of this effort, the Department should (1) incorporate mentoring into the supervisor core training and (2) increase opportunities for supervisors to interact with another.

**Department should develop program manager training that includes mentoring**—Although the Department offers training opportunities for program managers, it should develop a formal program manager training program. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see page 20), program managers are recruited internally by promoting program supervisors to this position. Therefore, program managers should have completed the training requirements for program supervisors, which include supervisor core training. In addition, CWTI indicated that program managers were able to take leadership courses offered through the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA). ADOA's leadership courses covered various topics, including a 2-day course that taught participants how to successfully manage difficult conversations. However, according to CWTI, space was limited for these courses, and department management had selected only some program managers to attend. Further, the Department and ADOA reported that ADOA stopped providing these courses beginning June 1, 2017, although CWTI reported that the Department was negotiating with ADOA to determine if it can purchase these courses to continue to offer them to program managers. Finally, the Department indicated that many of its program managers went through ASU's certified public manager program, but the Department has not sent staff to participate in this program since 2015.

Despite offering program managers these training opportunities, the Department has not developed formal training requirements for the program manager position. ASU conducted another assessment in 2012 to identify program managers' training needs and recommended that the Department develop a mentoring program for its program managers and support ongoing networking opportunities among program managers so that they could leverage each other's knowledge.<sup>80</sup> In addition, auditors interviewed two program managers hired in early 2017 who indicated that mentoring from their supervisors and from more experienced peers was critical to their success. Although these program managers indicated that they had received these opportunities for mentoring and networking with peers, the Department has not formally incorporated these opportunities into a training program to ensure all program managers have similar opportunities.

Therefore, the Department should develop a formal training program for its program managers that includes mentoring and networking opportunities.

## Department should develop an annual staff training requirement

The Department should also develop an annual staff training requirement. According to department officials, the Department provides continuous training opportunities beyond the mandatory core training and CBTs by offering additional courses that staff may take, as well as other trainings developed to address policy changes. However, it has not established a continuous training policy, such as requiring staff to complete a certain number of annual training hours. CWLA standards of excellence indicate that providing continuous educational opportunities for child welfare staff is critical to ensuring staff remain competent and can perform their roles successfully.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the HHS requires state child welfare agencies to provide ongoing training in order to receive federal funds and reviews this training as part of its CFSTRs. The Department's 2015 CFSTR noted that the Department

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<sup>80</sup> Lietz, C. & Hayes, M. (2012b). *Assistant program manager training needs assessment*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona State University, Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy. The Department—then the Division of Children, Youth and Families under the Arizona Department of Economic Security—contracted with ASU to evaluate its program manager training.

<sup>81</sup> Child Welfare League of America, 2013.

required staff to complete 24 hours of ongoing training annually, but the CFSR also noted that stakeholders reported that staff did not consistently complete the training, and some were not aware of the requirement. The 2015 CFSR also indicated that the Department lacked a state-wide tracking system to monitor compliance with the annual 24-hour training requirement (see the next section for more information regarding the Department's process for monitoring training completion). In another report that the Department submitted to the HHS in June 2016, the Department again stated that it recommends staff complete 24 hours of ongoing training annually. However, despite reporting this to the HHS, department management reported that they did not believe the Department actually had an annual training requirement and was not able to provide any such documented policy.

Other states auditors reviewed have formalized continuous training programs by requiring staff to complete a certain number of training hours annually. For example, according to New Jersey staff, caseworkers and their immediate supervisors are required to complete a minimum of 40 hours of continuous training annually. New Jersey also provides an annual course catalog that includes the course title, course length and duration, required prerequisites, the number of continuous education units offered for that class, and a brief synopsis of the class. Examples of courses that qualify for the continuous education requirement include child traumatic stress, managing personal and professional boundaries, and cultural competency. According to Utah, it requires staff to complete a minimum number of annual training hours, although these requirements vary depending on position. For example, Utah's caseworkers and supervisors are required to complete 40 hours, while its case aide-equivalent position is required to complete 20 hours.

Therefore, consistent with federal requirements and best practice, the Department should develop and implement a continuous training requirement and document this requirement in policy. In doing so, the Department should determine the amount of training its staff should complete on an ongoing basis, such as a minimum number of annual training hours, and how to track this training's completion (see the next section for additional recommendations about tracking training completion).

## Department should improve processes for tracking and monitoring staff training completion

The Department should improve its processes for tracking and monitoring staff training completion to help ensure that staff complete their required training within the Department's designated time frames. The Department uses a centralized learning management system (LMS) to track employee training completion. According to CWTI, the Department switched to a new LMS in April 2017 under a state-wide ADOA initiative. The LMS allows staff to register for required trainings and provides both administrators and employees access to their training records. According to the CWTI, three main groups use the LMS to monitor staff training completion:

- CWTI staff are responsible for tracking and monitoring core training completion. These staff also manually upload class roster sign-in sheets into LMS so that employee training records are up to date. They may also coordinate with trainees and their supervisors to schedule makeup dates for missed trainings and send email notifications regarding missed courses.
- Supervisors are responsible for tracking and monitoring staff completion of mandatory noncore trainings, including CBTs.
- Employees are responsible for ensuring they comply with department requirements for completing mandatory trainings within the Department's designated time frames.

Despite assigning these monitoring responsibilities, auditors' test work indicated that staff may not always complete their required training within the Department's designated time frames. Specifically, auditors randomly sampled 30 of 400 caseworkers hired in calendar years 2016 and 2017 and who were no longer in core training, and compared their LMS training records to the Department's caseworker training requirements to determine if these employees had completed their required training within the designated time frames. Based on auditors' review, department training records showed that:

- 25 of the 30 caseworkers had completed their caseworker core classroom training requirements.
- Only 3 of the 30 caseworkers completed all the activities on their field exercise checklist and submitted the checklist to the CWTI as required. As discussed previously, the checklist outlined specific activities that a trainee should have observed or participated in during the field training component of his or her core training.
- On average, caseworkers completed approximately 12 of the 19 mandatory CBTs within the designated time frames.<sup>82</sup>

The Department has generally lacked written documentation describing its training tracking and monitoring processes and outlining the roles and responsibilities of those involved. As a result, various department staff auditors interviewed provided inconsistent or incomplete descriptions of how and who monitors training completion. In addition, although department staff reported that employees are primarily responsible for ensuring they complete all required trainings, the Department had not established formal mechanisms to hold staff accountable for complying with the Department's training requirements. There are potential ways of doing this. For example, the CWLA standards state that staff performance evaluations should include whether staff have complied with training requirements.<sup>83</sup> However, the Department does not use performance evaluations as a tool to do this. Therefore, the Department should identify and implement additional accountability mechanisms that ensure (1) staff responsible for tracking and monitoring training completion do so in accordance with department processes and (2) all staff comply with the Department's training requirements for their positions.

## Department should continue its efforts to further develop training evaluation processes

The Department should continue its efforts to further develop its training evaluation processes. The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI), a service of the HHS Children's Bureau, identified training evaluation as a key strategy for further developing child welfare agencies' training systems.<sup>84</sup> According to the NRCOI, training evaluation traditionally occurs at multiple levels, including tracking and assessing attendance, trainee satisfaction, trainer competency, content efficacy, transfer of learning, and at the highest level, impact on child/family and organizational outcomes." The Department has implemented various training evaluation processes and is currently developing additional ones. For example:

- As discussed previously in this chapter, the Department has periodically contracted with ASU to evaluate certain aspects of its training programs and partnered with ASU to redesign its caseworker core training. It also plans to partner with ASU on the redesign of its supervisor core training. Texas reported that it similarly contracts with the University of Texas at Austin to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of new caseworker and supervisor training programs.
- The Department asks staff to complete course evaluation surveys at the end of training courses to assess the trainees' reaction to the training presentation, delivery, and information. Other states also use such surveys. For example, Utah, New Jersey, and Texas' Department of Family and Protective Services (Texas) reported using course evaluation surveys to evaluate their training courses. New Jersey reported that it administers surveys to both trainees and trainers and develops survey trend analysis reports to identify opportunities for training improvement.
- As part of its redesign of caseworker core training, the Department has developed a pre/post test to assess knowledge transfer for each of the three segments of classroom training in its revised training.

<sup>82</sup> Auditors excluded three caseworkers from the sample because they were recently hired and still had time to complete some of the required CBTs according to department time frames.

<sup>83</sup> Child Welfare League of America, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Kanak, S., Baker, M., Herz, L., & Maciolek, S. (2008). *Building effective training systems for child welfare agencies*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.

- The Department uses an online form where staff can request revisions to current, or propose new, training curricula. The Department has created a process to review and address these requests.
- The Department is implementing a quarterly and annual curriculum review process. According to the Department, this process will be used to periodically review each of its approximately 70 classroom and CBT trainings to determine whether revisions are needed based on department policy changes or other input. The Department reported that it was in the process of scheduling these reviews and was in the process of reviewing three classes as part of finalizing the caseworker core training revisions.
- According to the Department, it is also in the early stages of developing an internal audit process for its classroom training. The Department reported the intent of this process is to ensure the correct curriculum is being used in trainings, ensure that curriculum is implemented as intended (curriculum fidelity), and review classroom management.

The Department should continue to develop and implement these training evaluation processes. It should also continue to identify and assess opportunities for further developing its training evaluation efforts. For example, the NRCOI has developed a training system assessment tool that child welfare agencies can use to assess whether their training system includes components necessary for positively impacting children’s safety, permanency, and well-being.<sup>85</sup> The Department could use this assessment to identify potential improvements to its training. In addition, the Department could revisit recommendations from a 2014 ASU report that proposed a tailored, comprehensive approach the Department could adopt for training evaluation.<sup>86</sup> This evaluative approach was intended to help the Department (1) identify areas that support training goals in order to better allocate department resources accordingly, (2) determine learning methods that best develop a competent workforce, and (3) identify ways to continuously develop the Department’s training programs. This proposed evaluation approach included various strategies such as identifying the Department’s training stakeholders, assessing the development and training needs of staff, determining how to efficiently allocate existing training resources, and identifying training models and factors that influence positive change and outcomes. The Department could review ASU’s recommendations to identify additional actions that may strengthen its training evaluation. Finally, the Department could determine whether it can incorporate its practice improvement reports as part of its training evaluation. The Department’s Practice Improvement unit reviews cases in each field unit and then aggregates the results into an annual report detailing common errors in casework practice that occur department-wide. The CWTI could use these reports to identify potential practice issues that can be addressed through additional or revised training.

## Recommendations

- 5.1. The Department should continue its efforts to address the issues it identified regarding the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworker trainees. It should also monitor and assess whether its efforts result in improved support for trainees and, if not, identify and take additional steps to improve trainee support, as needed.
- 5.2. The Department should carry out its plans to revise its core supervisor training. As part of this effort, the Department should (1) incorporate mentoring into the supervisor core training and (2) increase opportunities for supervisors to interact with another.
- 5.3. The Department should develop a formal training program for its program managers that includes mentoring and networking opportunities.
- 5.4. Consistent with federal requirements, the Department should develop and implement a continuous training requirement and document this requirement in policy. In doing so, the Department should determine the

<sup>85</sup> Kanak et al., 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Krysik, J. (2014). *Arizona Child Welfare Redesign initiative: Findings and recommendations*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona State University, Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy. The Department contracted with ASU to examine its training program and suggest improvements.

amount of training its staff should complete on an ongoing basis, such as a minimum number of annual training hours, and how to track this training's completion.

- 5.5. The Department should identify and implement additional accountability mechanisms that ensure (1) staff responsible for tracking and monitoring training completion do so in accordance with department processes and (2) all staff comply with the Department's training requirements for their positions.
- 5.6. The Department should continue to develop and implement its training evaluation processes, such as the quarterly and annual training reviews and training audits. It should also continue to identify and assess opportunities for further developing its training evaluation efforts.





## Multi-state salary comparison

Auditors compared the Arizona Department of Child Safety's (Department) salaries for the case aide, caseworker, and program supervisor positions to those for comparable positions in other states' child welfare agencies.<sup>87</sup> Auditors also adjusted this information for cost-of-living differences across the states. This comparison is presented in Table 5 on page a-2. In gathering other states' salary ranges, auditors noted that child welfare positions vary widely among states in terms of job duties, required experience and education, licensure requirements, public employee union representation, and pay structures and bonuses, which likely accounts for some of the salary differences. Additionally, for some states, the duties of an Arizona caseworker or program supervisor are performed by multiple positions within the other state agency. For example, New Mexico employs investigation caseworkers, permanency planning caseworkers, in-home services practitioners, and placement caseworkers. Further, some states have multiple levels for the same position type. For example, Oregon employs social service specialists, social service specialists 1, and social service specialists 2 as caseworkers. Although each of the position levels perform casework, a social service specialist 2 has more responsibility than a social service specialist 1. Auditors reported salary ranges by including all of these relevant positions and levels.

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<sup>87</sup> Other states included Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Auditors judgmentally selected these states primarily from among western states with state-administered child welfare systems, similar to Arizona. New Jersey was included based on the recommendation of Casey Family Programs, who identified New Jersey as a best practice state for retention.

**Table 5****Multi-state comparison of salary ranges for positions equivalent to the Department’s case aide, caseworker, and program supervisor positions (unadjusted and adjusted for cost of living)<sup>1</sup>****As of July or August 2017**

State	Case aide (or equivalent position)		Caseworker (or equivalent position)		Program supervisor (or equivalent position)	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Arizona <sup>2</sup>	\$28,392	\$28,392	\$33,312 to \$40,641	\$33,312 to \$40,641	\$53,300	\$53,300
Nevada <sup>3</sup>	N/A	N/A	\$48,337 to \$71,806	\$47,693 to \$70,850	\$52,743 to \$78,613	\$52,040 to \$77,566
New Jersey <sup>4</sup>	\$30,123 to \$57,368	\$25,360 to \$48,297	\$49,264 to \$83,804	\$41,475 to \$70,554	\$64,677 to \$101,040	\$54,451 to \$85,064
New Mexico	\$20,800 to \$30,659	\$21,106 to \$31,110	\$31,200 to \$61,568	\$31,659 to \$62,474	\$44,368 to \$69,035	\$45,021 to \$70,051
Oregon <sup>5,6</sup>	\$31,764 to \$48,264	\$30,929 to \$46,995	\$35,952 to \$73,992	\$35,007 to \$72,047	\$47,316 to \$80,076	\$46,072 to \$77,971
Utah	\$25,293 to \$44,678	\$25,137 to \$44,403	\$31,429 to \$62,171	\$31,235 to \$61,788	\$43,494 to \$65,354	\$43,226 to \$64,951
Washington	\$33,336 to \$44,400	\$30,958 to \$41,233	\$36,648 to \$62,748	\$34,034 to \$58,273	\$52,788 to \$71,040	\$49,023 to \$65,973

<sup>1</sup> Auditors adjusted for cost-of-living differences using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ regional price parities, which produces a price-adjusted wage that allows for a comparable standard to assess purchasing power across different geographic areas.

<sup>2</sup> The Department typically pays staff a standard salary for each position, and staff do not typically receive pay increases except for the caseworker position. Caseworkers receive pay increases (1) when they finish their initial training at 22 weeks and (2) 1 year after that.

<sup>3</sup> Salaries reflect ranges where retirement contributions are made by both employee and employers. According to Nevada, the employer-paid contribution plan is also available to employees at a reduced gross salary.

<sup>4</sup> According to New Jersey, caseworker trainees receive automatic salary increases after 6 months and 1 year in their positions.

<sup>5</sup> In Oregon, more senior caseworkers have some supervisory oversight over less senior social service specialists. The salary range for the supervisory column includes both those senior caseworkers and managers who perform the majority of supervision.

<sup>6</sup> According to Oregon, new state employees receive an automatic salary increase after 6 months of employment primarily to cover the cost of their retirement contribution.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of information obtained from the Department, other states’ child welfare agencies, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



## Methodology

Auditors used various methods to meet the report objectives related to the Arizona Department of Child Safety's (Department) staff retention, recruiting, and training practices for the five positions included in the scope of this review as required by law—case aides, caseworkers, program supervisors, program managers, and Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) investigators.<sup>88</sup> Specifically:

- Auditors interviewed department officials and staff, including executive management, field office staff, OCWI management, and staff in the Department's human resources, budget and finance, contracts and procurement, training, and other department divisions.
- Auditors reviewed literature and best practices in child welfare worker retention, recruiting, and training, as cited throughout the report. Auditors also interviewed experts or stakeholders regarding these areas from the Arizona Council of Human Service Providers, Arizona State University, Casey Family Programs, Children's Action Alliance, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Northern Arizona University, Southwest Human Development, and the University of Georgia.
- Auditors interviewed staff from other states' child welfare agencies and reviewed documentation provided by them related to their retention, recruiting, and/or training practices. Auditors originally selected: (1) New Jersey, based on the recommendation of Casey Family Programs, who identified it as a best practice state for retention; (2) Texas, which formerly had an office similar to the Department's OCWI; and (3) Utah, also based on a recommendation from Casey Family Programs and because the Department indicated it had been reviewing its training programs. With regard to recruiting practices, auditors also selected Georgia based on the recommendation of an expert from the University of Georgia, as well as Maine based on a review of literature that identified it as a best practice state for recruitment and hiring strategies.
- Auditors analyzed the Department's agency-wide turnover rates for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 and the individual position turnover rates for fiscal year 2017 for the five positions included in this review.<sup>89</sup> To calculate these turnover rates, auditors relied on data from the Department's publicly reported monthly staffing reports and internal turnover reports to obtain the average monthly filled positions and department human resources data to obtain the number of staff separations.
- To determine reported reasons for staff turnover, auditors reviewed department exit surveys and phone exit interviews for the five positions included in this review. These included 70 online exit surveys completed between November 2016 and April 2017 (including 54 exit surveys completed by caseworkers, 11 by case aides, 4 by supervisors, and 1 by an OCWI investigator), and 22 phone interview responses from March 2017.
- To review the Department's retention efforts, auditors interviewed department management and staff and reviewed department documentation such as strategic plans, salary documentation, orientation and training documentation, the Department's management system standard work documents, and quarterly benchmark progress reports submitted to the Legislature.

<sup>88</sup> The law requiring this review directed auditors to review OCWI staff, which includes investigators, managers, and other administrative staff. However, because OCWI investigators comprise the majority of staff positions within the OCWI and account for most of the OCWI's staff turnover, auditors focused their review of OCWI staff on the investigator position.

<sup>89</sup> For the individual turnover position rates, auditors were limited to fiscal year 2017 data because of data limitations with the monthly staffing report.

- To assess the Department's recruitment practices, auditors reviewed department documentation, including applicable policy and procedures, position job announcements, assessment tools, and application materials, and reviewed information from the Department's website. Auditors also reviewed the human resources files for 29 randomly selected caseworkers from across the State who were hired between January 2017 and June 2017 to determine if the caseworkers were interviewed by their future supervisors.<sup>90</sup>
- To review the Department's tuition assistance program (program), auditors reviewed applicable department policy and procedures, federal law and regulation, the Arizona State University website with relevant program information, and department monitoring and collection tracking tools. Auditors also interviewed Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University program staff.
- To review the Department's training practices, auditors reviewed applicable federal law, department documentation, and department-contracted reports developed by Arizona State University that provided in-depth analysis on department training programs; interviewed department staff; and conducted observations of department meetings related to revising its training programs. Auditors also shadowed two caseworker trainees.
- To assess department staff adherence to the Department's training requirements, auditors randomly sampled 30 of 400 caseworkers hired in calendar years 2016 and 2017 and compared their training records to the Department's required trainings. Auditors excluded three caseworkers who were recently hired from the computer based training (CBT) completion calculation, as these caseworkers still had time to complete some of the required CBTs and adhere to the Department's required time frames.
- To compare Arizona's salaries for the case aide, caseworker, and program supervisor positions to those for comparable positions in other states, auditors reviewed salary information from Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, and adjusted the information for cost of living differences using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics regional price parities. Auditors judgmentally selected these states primarily from among western states with state-administered child welfare systems, similar to Arizona. New Jersey was included because, as discussed previously, auditors also reviewed this state for its retention, recruiting, and training practices.

The Auditor General and staff express their appreciation to the Department's Director and staff for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit.

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<sup>90</sup> Auditors initially sampled 30 files; however, auditors excluded 1 file because the caseworker was recruited through the tuition assistance program, which handles the interview process differently.

# AGENCY RESPONSE



September 27, 2017

Ms. Debra K. Davenport  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, AZ 85018

Dear Ms. Davenport:

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide this response to the Auditor General's special report on recruitment, training and retention of field staff. The Department is pleased that the Auditor General acknowledged the Department's many current activities to address recruitment, training and retention. In fiscal year 2017, the Department identified a five-year strategic priority to improve performance and quality of services through employee retention. Current strategic actions include realignment of pay structure and job classification for the Department of Child Safety Specialists (caseworkers); improvement of onboarding, training and coaching of all case carrying staff and supervisors; and development of general management and leadership skills in supervisors and managers. These activities, and the others noted throughout the *Arizona Department of Child Safety – Staff Retention, Recruiting and Training* report and the Department's response to the report, were selected by the Department following exploration of need, fit, resources, evidence of effectiveness, agency readiness, and capacity to implement. This exploration is necessary to select the strategic initiatives that are most likely to result in sustained success, and responsibly use state resources for the greatest positive effect.

The Department is thankful for the Auditor General's research about additional promising practices in recruitment, training and retention; and has carefully considered each recommendation. The Department is selective when choosing strategic initiatives, and follows a guiding principal that effective and sustained change occurs when a small number of initiatives are implemented at one time, to allow assignment of sufficient resources and evaluation of intervention effectiveness. The Department engages in continuous improvement, which includes monitoring the effects of the initiatives and adjusting activity if the desired outcome is not being achieved. If the Department's current initiatives do not achieve the desired results, the Auditor General's recommendations will assist the Department by offering promising practices that the Department could implement following exploration of need, fit, agency resources, evidence of effectiveness, agency readiness, and capacity to implement.

The Department's response to the recommendations in the Auditor General's report is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Gregory McKay  
Director

Enclosure: DCS Recommendation Response

### DCS Recommendation Response

**Recommendation 1.1** *The Department should consider implementing a quality control check to help ensure the consistency of turnover information across its reports*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that there should be quality control in data reporting but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees with the auditors that previously there were data inconsistencies in the historical turnover reports that were reviewed by the Auditor General. The data inconsistencies with the *Turnover by Month* and the *Monthly Staffing* reports referenced in the Auditor General's report were corrected prior to the audit. A standard operating procedure for producing the reports was developed and implemented. The procedures specify that the two reports should contain identical information. The procedure outlines specific steps for validated data. The Auditor General's report found the procedures to be "generally adequate." Additional quality control checks beyond the specified procedures for validating consistency between the reports is not necessary. The Department will continue to follow the written procedures for producing the two referenced reports to ensure accuracy and consistency.

**Recommendation 2.1** *The Department should continue to explore opportunities to address salary concerns as resources permit. In doing so, it should consider gathering additional state salary information from other states for benchmarking, as it deems necessary.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the recommendation will be implemented.

The Department values the hard work of its staff and has been pursuing increases to compensation as resources allow. The Department appreciates that the Auditor General's Office agrees with the Department and recognizes that adequate compensation is an issue. As indicated in the Auditor General's report, salary concerns have been identified in exit surveys for case aides and DCS Specialists. The Department increased salaries for the case aide position and accelerated the timeframe for standard DCS Specialist pay increases so that they receive them more quickly. The Department will continue to explore opportunities to address salary concerns.

**Recommendation 2.2** *The Department should carry out its plans to implement a peer support program to support staff facing trauma and burnout.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the recommendation will be implemented.

The Department agrees with the importance of implementing a peer support program to address trauma and burnout of staff. To that end, the Department reported during the review that it is in the process of developing a peer support program to support staff facing trauma and burnout. As indicated in the Auditor General's report, the Department will identify a peer support team that will be trained by an external expert. The team will be available for staff who experience a critical incident or stressful work-related situations. The target date for the implementation of the peer support program is fiscal year 2018.

**Recommendation 3.1** *The Department should take additional actions to recruit caseworker applicants with backgrounds in social work or related fields by:*

**Recommendation 3.1a** *Revising its minimum caseworker qualifications to at least include a preference for applicants with a social work or related degree and/or previous child welfare experience. The Department should then prioritize its recruitment and hiring of applicants in accordance with this preference.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that recruiting social workers may improve retention but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees that retention may be higher among DCS Specialists who have a social work degree, but does not agree with changing the minimum qualifications of the DCS Specialist. Many factors influence whether or not an applicant will be successful as a DCS Specialist. One such factor is workload. The Department's primary avenue to improve retention a year ago was to fill vacancies with suitable applicants who could be trained so that workload would be reduced, as workload was cited as a reason for leaving the Department. As noted in the Auditor General's report, the Department previously allowed preference to DCS Specialist applicants with social work backgrounds but revised the educational qualifications to remove these preferences in July 2014 in order to fill positions. Additionally, in an effort to strengthen recruitment practices, the Department revised the minimum qualifications for the DCS Specialist position to allow for previous child welfare experience (specifically, five years of experience as a DCS Case Aide II), as stated in the Auditor General's report.

The Department has not seen strong evidence of a positive correlation between a social work degree and retention, and therefore cannot conclude that preference for this degree would improve and not damage retention. The Department has reviewed materials available through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute that demonstrate there is not conclusive evidence nor consensus that child welfare hiring practices should give preference to individuals with social work degrees. While some materials recommend preference for social work degrees, others suggest seeking applicants with diverse majors and degrees, giving greater weight to competencies over degree, and considering factors such as the linguistic match to communities served.

With a decrease in both vacancies and workload, the Department is better positioned to review the degrees of the applicants, as well as other traits that have been shown to increase success as a DCS Specialist. The Department can consider preference of those applicants with a social work degree or a related degree without changing the minimum DCS Specialist qualifications.

**Recommendation 3.1b** *As resources allow, participating in additional recruiting activities at the universities to recruit applicants earning social work or related degrees who are not part of the tuition assistance program. As needed and as resources permit, the Department could also consider attending recruiting activities at universities in bordering states, such as Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, to recruit caseworker applicants for rural Arizona cities.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is not agreed to and the recommendation will not be implemented.

The Department does not agree with the finding of participating in additional recruiting activities at universities to target social workers and will not implement the recommendation. As stated in the Auditor General's report, resource constraints do not allow the Department to participate in additional university recruitment activities in-state and in bordering states. In addition, the Department is not experiencing a shortage of DCS Specialist applicants. Given that there is not strong evidence of a positive correlation between a social work degree and retention, the Department believes that attending recruiting activities in bordering states would not be the most responsible use of state resources.

The Auditor General's report acknowledges that the Department's recruitment and retention partnership with Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU) for the tuition assistance program helps recruit staff. As another recruitment strategy, the Department supports the placement of interns, who are not part of the tuition assistance program, to provide on-the-job experience in their enrolled area of study with the Intern Management Policy that was implemented on June 21, 2017. The partnership with the ASU training units and other internship programs incentivize and encourage social workers to work for the Department. The Department will continue the tuition assistance program and internships, and expects these university partnerships will become the primary recruitment activity for recruiting DCS Specialist applicants.

**Recommendation 3.2** *The Department should enhance the use of its RJP video to further encourage applicants to watch and reflect on the video and help it assess applicants' job fit. For example, the Department could inform applicants that they will be asked questions about the video in the interview and then ask questions based on the video that help the Department assess the applicants' job fit.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it is important for applicants to understand what the job entails, but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department currently requires DCS Specialist applicants to view the RJP video, which includes the core area highlighted in child welfare research and referenced in the Auditor General's report. Although applicants are not asked to reflect on the video, the current hiring process helps to ensure alignment of applicants' expectations with the requirements of the job. As referenced in the Auditor General's report, applicants are asked if they viewed the video. Although applicants are not asked specific interview questions to assess their understanding and reactions to the video, the current behavioral-based questions help to assess the applicant's expectations with the requirements of the job. Applicants are also required to sign the *Job Functions and Employment Requirements* Form that clearly outlines the job functions and requirements.

The Department does not agree to enhance the use of the RJP video to further encourage applicants to watch and reflect on the video. It is not possible to fully capture the aspects of the DCS Specialist position in an RJP video, and these are better understood through on-the-job training in the field. To that end, newly hired DCS Specialists attend two weeks of initial CORE training and then are sent into the field to shadow a case manager. This actual, real life, field experience, within two weeks of beginning the job, is much more effective in giving new DCS Specialists insight into the job duties than a video.

**Recommendation 3.3** *As the Department continues its efforts to improve its caseworker applicant assessment tools, it should revise or implement additional assessment tools that would help better assess applicants' observational skills and planning and organizing work skills. The Department should*

*also consider whether there would be benefit in taking a similar approach in its assessment of program supervisor applicants.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that an assessment tool is important for assessing applicants, but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees that it should continue efforts to improve its tools for assessing applicants' skill set. As stated during the review, the Department has utilized the Predictive Index (PI) Behavior Assessment for DCS Specialist candidates since November 2016 as a pilot to establish behavioral requirements for the DCS Specialist position. The PI is a reliable resource for predicting performance potential in new hires. The assessment gathers information about the applicant's self-concept that includes: self-awareness, confidence, interpersonal relationships, self-concept, etc. The assessment also provides a list of characteristics relevant to a the DCS Specialist position in the following areas: pace and variety of activities, focus, decision-making, communication, collaboration, delegation and leadership styles.

As stated in the Auditor General's report, the Department is gathering data for the creation of interview questions at this time. As of March 14, 2017, all candidates for the DCS Specialist position began receiving a link to complete the PI. The Predictive Index is available, upon request of the hiring supervisor/manager, for all job classifications.

The current utilization of the PI will continue and revised or additional assessment tools will not be implemented at this time.

**Recommendation 3.4** *The Department should ensure that, when possible, program supervisors participate in the interview for caseworker applicants for positions in their units.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the recommendation will be implemented.

The Department agrees that applicants who are interviewed by their potential supervisor may be more likely to be assessed for best fit in their position. Supervisors do currently participate in interview panels to evaluate potential DCS Specialists for vacancies in their units in some areas of the state. It is not always feasible for future supervisors to interview potential DCS Specialists hired for their vacancies. The supervisor participating in the interview panel typically has a vacancy they need to fill. However, the DCS Specialist may be placed in an office that is in closer proximity to their home. In some instances, the DCS Specialists are assigned to their supervisor at a future point in time after the hiring process has taken place. The current interview process of DCS Specialist applicants will continue and Program Supervisors will participate in the interview for DCS Specialist applicants for positions in their units, when possible.

**Recommendation 4.1** *The Department should continue to implement its new processes for monitoring participants' compliance with its tuition assistance program and collecting repayment from participants who do not meet their employment obligations..*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it should continue to implement its current processes for monitoring compliance with its tuition assistance program and the recommendation to continue the current program will be implemented.

The Department agrees that tracking participants' compliance with the tuition assistance program and collecting repayment from those participants who do not meet their employment obligations is important. Although the tuition assistance program is a recruitment strategy, monitoring compliance and collecting repayment from the participants of the program is not viewed as part of the recruitment strategy, and is therefore outside the scope of this audit<sup>i</sup>.

The Department implemented this recommendation and refined a process to monitor the fulfillment of DCS Specialists' obligation to the Department after hire. A policy for the repayment and collection of funds for those who do not fulfill their obligation was published on February 8, 2017. With the publication of the policy, no further action is necessary to implement the policy, as the policy is active and will be enforced.

**Recommendation 4.2** *Consistent with federal requirements, the Department should evaluate its tuition assistance program beyond monitoring participants' compliance with their employment obligations for internal management purposes.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it should continue to comply with federal requirements around the tuition assistance program, and will continue to comply with the federal requirements as recommended.

The Department agrees to follow the federal requirements of evaluating its tuition assistance program, in accordance with 45 CFR § 1357.15. The Department will continue to follow the goals and objectives described in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for fiscal years 2015 – 2019 for the evaluation of the tuition assistance program. Section VI of the CFSP describes an objective and a benchmark of continually reviewing the tuition reimbursement programs as measured by vacancy and turnover rates.

**Recommendation 5.1** *The Department should continue its efforts to address the issues it identified regarding the consistency and quality of support provided to caseworker trainees. It should also monitor and assess whether its efforts result in improved support for trainees and, if not, identify and take additional steps to improve trainee support, as needed.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it should continue its current efforts to address quality of support issues in training and the recommendation to continue the current process will be implemented.

The Department agrees that providing quality support to DCS Specialist trainees is critical. The Auditor General's report indicates the Department's use of mentoring and field training is consistent with child welfare best practices. The report also identified mentoring and supervision as a way to provide trainee support.

The Department will continue to support the field training model to the extent that resources allow. The Auditor General's report indicates the Department is finalizing the redesign of the DCS Specialist core training program. Considering the lack of resources for additional Field Training Officers (FTOs), this mentor role has to be filled by someone in the field. The Department's Training Administrator continues to attend regional supervisor meetings to discuss the need and importance of the mentor role for new hires. These meetings are an opportunity to hear from the field about what barriers they may be faced

with in assigning the mentors, and discuss how they can be supported to ensure this necessary role is fulfilled. There are plans to meet with all regional program supervisors by October 31, 2017. The next steps will then be determined.

**Recommendation 5.2.** *The Department should carry out its plans to revise its core supervisor training. As part of this effort, the Department should (1) incorporate mentoring into the supervisor core training and (2) increase opportunities for supervisors to interact with another.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it should continue its current plans for revising core supervisor training and the recommendation to continue its current process will be implemented.

The Department agrees it should enhance its supervisor training. In fiscal year 2017, the Department identified a five-year strategic priority to improve performance and quality of services through employee retention. Current strategic actions include training and coaching of all case carrying staff and supervisors; and development of general management and leadership skills in supervisors and managers.

As referenced in the Auditor General's report, the Department plans to partner with ASU to revise its supervisor core training. The Department has a 25-year history with Arizona State University, along with a shared commitment to child welfare training and social work best practices. The Department will continue to identify any necessary revisions and will continue to leverage that partnership.

The Department is developing a draft career roadmap and leadership competencies for all levels of leadership that is due by December 31, 2017. Once the roadmap and competencies are developed, curriculum will be developed and implemented for the first time leaders by June 2018.

The Department is exploring the "mentoring" structure for supervisors but is also considering the supervision circle model that was developed by ASU.

**Recommendation 5.3** *The Department should develop a formal training program for its program managers that includes mentoring and networking opportunities.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the recommendation will be implemented.

The Department agrees with developing a formal training program for its program managers. The Auditor General's report indicates the Department does provide training opportunities for Program Managers and Program Managers are typically promoted from Program Supervisors; therefore, have completed supervisor core training. The Department continues negotiations with the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA) to purchase the leadership courses previously offered by ADOA. As stated in the Auditor General's report, there are opportunities for informal mentoring and networking with peers. The Department is developing a draft career roadmap and leadership competencies for all levels of leadership that is due by December 31, 2017. Once the roadmap and competencies are developed, curriculum will be developed and implemented for the first time leaders by June 2018.

**Recommendation 5.4** *Consistent with federal requirements, the Department should develop and implement a continuous training requirement and document this requirement in policy. In doing so, the Department should determine the amount of training its staff should complete on an ongoing basis, such as a minimum number of annual training hours, and how to track this training's completion.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that the Department should follow federal requirements regarding staff training but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees that providing continuous training is critical to staff being successful in their roles, and will continue to provide ongoing training opportunities as required by federal regulation. Federal regulation (45 CFR § 1357.15(t) requires that the State's Child and Family Services Plan include a "staff development and training plan in support of the goals and objectives in the CFSP...," and that "Training must be an ongoing activity..." The federal regulation does not require that states identify a minimum number of annual training hours.

The Auditor General's report notes that the Department currently offers ongoing training opportunities to staff "beyond the mandatory core training and CBTs by offering additional courses that staff may take, as well as other trainings developed to address policy changes." The Department identifies training topics throughout the year, as needs arise, and will continue to do so.

The Department submits a training plan to the federal government annually, as required by federal regulation. The Arizona Staff and Provider Training Plan submitted in June 2017 to the federal Children's Bureau provides the following information about the Department's ongoing training opportunities for caseworkers and supervisors:

*Ongoing and Advanced Training* – Several opportunities for ongoing and advanced training are offered to Department staff. One-on-one coaching and training on an array of topics (such as CHILDS) is available at the request of the field. This may be provided in a variety of methods, including classroom setting, on-site by CWTI, or through contracted providers. Additionally, Computer Based Training (CBT) is developed by CWTI at the request of the field. These trainings are considered short-term and the duration varies by topic. Trainings include policy refreshers, supervisory summits on multidisciplinary practice, behavioral health coordination, workload management, and new topics not yet incorporated into General Core Training.

The following short-term, part-time Advanced Training courses were developed and are provided by CWTI.

- Staff Safety
- Advanced Joint Investigations
- Partnering with Foster Parents
- DPS Reading a Rap Sheet
- CHILDS Refresher
- Preventing Sex Trafficking
- Domestic Violence
- Engagement
- Independent Living Certification training
- In-home

- Team Decision Making (TDM)
- Team Decision Making for Facilitators
- Hotline Specialist Core
- Fostering Sustainable Connections (FSC), A Family Finding Model

In addition, DCS Program Supervisors and Program Managers attend a two-day Leadership Summit annually, which provides education about a variety of topics relevant to child welfare practice. One hour monthly webinars, known as Quality Conversations, are also available to DCS employees and provide information about current policy and practice. Recent topics include: Safe Sleep Campaign, Placement Stability, Reunification Planning and Services, Assessing Safety in Families Experiencing Domestic Violence, After Care Planning, Family Functioning Assessments, Parent Readiness for Change and High Quality Contacts with Parents. In June through August 2017, all DCS Specialists, Program Supervisors, Program Managers and Program Administrators attended either two or five days of training on the Department's safety assessment and safety management practice model.

The Department's supervisors, managers and administrators all have access to the administrative side of the Learning Management System (LMS) to review and track their direct reports training history.

The Department will continue to design and deliver ongoing training opportunities such as those described above.

**Recommendation 5.5** *The Department should identify and implement additional accountability mechanisms that ensure (1) staff responsible for tracking and monitoring training completion do so in accordance with department processes and (2) all staff comply with the Department's training requirements for their positions.*

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees to continue tracking and monitoring staff training completion but does not agree that it is necessary to identify and implement additional accountability mechanisms. As referenced in the Auditor General's report, supervisors are responsible for tracking and monitoring the completion of mandatory training of their direct reports. All supervisors, managers and administrators all have access to the administrative side of the Learning Management System (LMS), so they can review direct reports' training transcripts. The employees can also view their transcripts in the LMS. Administrative access has been provided to various roles in the Department who have the authority to pull reports. The LMS has an online Participant User Guide that includes instructions for the user to query training transcripts for direct reports.

The current training tracking process will continue.

**Recommendation 5.6.** *The Department should continue to develop and implement its training evaluation processes, such as the quarterly and annual training reviews and training audits. It should also continue to identify and assess opportunities for further developing its training evaluation efforts.*

**Department Response:** The Department agrees with the Auditor General that it should continue to develop its training evaluation process but a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

The Department agrees to continue its efforts to further develop training evaluation processes. Quarterly and annual curriculum reviews to update training have been scheduled. In addition, ASU and the Department continue to meet with field supervisors and trainees, soliciting input surrounding the effectiveness of training. Course content is modified as appropriate. Data is evaluated from pre-tests that establish a baseline of subject matter understanding, and post-tests that are completed by each trainee after each DCS Specialist training module to measure comprehension of the training.

An audit process is also being developed to ensure all trainers have the most current materials and training is conducted uniformly. The target date for finalizing the training program is December 31, 2017.

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<sup>i</sup> As required by Laws 2016, Ch. 123, § 7, the report “shall review the department’s recruiting, training, retention and use of staff who are critical to the mission of child safety, including caseworkers, supervisors, case aides, assistant program managers and office of child welfare investigations staff, compared to other states and best practices.”

