NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY TRAINEESHIP PROJECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAINEESHIP PARTNER</th>
<th>New Mexico State University, School of Social Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td>Las Cruces, New Mexico</td>
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<td>AREA SERVED</td>
<td>New Mexico and Southeastern Texas</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROJECT TITLE</td>
<td>Hispanic Child Welfare Training Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>TARGET TRAINEES</td>
<td>BSW &amp; MSW Students</td>
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**PROJECT OVERVIEW**

The New Mexico State University's School of Social Work seeks to prepare students for practice with a chronically underserved, Spanish-speaking population. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book*,¹ the State of New Mexico ranks 46th out of 50 states on a range of child condition measures, including infant mortality, child death rate, teen birth rate, school drop-out rate, poverty and unemployment. More than one-half of the state's child population is Hispanic, as is the population of children in foster care.² In addition, the school is located 40 miles from the US-Mexico border in an areas called "Borderland," where a high number of Mexican-American children and families live in unincorporated communities which are typified by substandard housing, lack of roads, police and fire protection, and other infrastructure services such as water, sewer and electric.

In terms of enrollment, the University reflects the demographics of the state, as it is one of the nation's largest Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), and nearly one-half of the students in the School of Social Work identify as Mexican American. However, most of these Spanish-speaking students have never taken a formal Spanish course, as they grew up speaking Spanish only with their family and friends. As a result, most of the students in the School of Social Work - native and non-native speakers alike - are in need of professional and technical Spanish language instruction to allow them to read, write and communicate effectively as social work professionals in Borderland and other underserved, Spanish-speaking areas of the state. Without this specialized instruction, the term "bilingual" has little meaning in the hiring process, as these students are unable to communicate with their clients in Spanish about complicated medical, legal, psychiatric and other systemic issues.

To meet this need, the School's Hispanic Child Welfare Training Project supports six traineeships a year for BSW or MSW students with a focus on Spanish language

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competency related to legal, health, child welfare and mental health concepts. Presently, considerable effort is being invested in developing and implementing a social work curriculum in Spanish. Additionally, students are placed in field placements with Spanish-speaking field instructors and participate in field seminars that are conducted in Spanish only. As co-PI Stephen Anderson, PhD, offers, "we're really expanding the discussion of cultural competence to include a focus on language competence as well, which is key in terms of fully serving the population in needs of services here. There is no standard for bilingual social work, and we'd like to help develop one."

**STUDENTS AND AGENCIES INVOLVED**

Traineeship students must have a working knowledge of Spanish and an interest in child welfare. Given the state demographics, as co-PI Anderson explains, "it is not surprising that many of the prospective students have delayed going to college, maybe have already had children and have care responsibilities for their parents or relatives. Many came back to school in their late twenties or thirties, or have been recipients of welfare services, and many are the first one in their family to attend college. So our students are a little different from the typical college student, and often they are working full time and going to school full time, and struggling with managing it all, and there's stress and difficulties involved with achieving their goals, so the stipend portion of the traineeship is meaningful to them."

The School has an affiliation agreement with the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department, whereby BSW and MSW students are placed throughout the state in foster care, adoption, in-home services and child protection programs with Spanish speaking supervisors. As co-PI Roditti notes, "we already have a close partnership with our local child welfare agency, and, in fact, the Division Chief is currently one of our MSW students. And basically we're the major training partner with the Department, as we do all of their training for staff as well as their core training." Overall, co-PI Anderson relays that "the response from the state has been very positive. The main criticism of our School has been that we haven't paid enough attention to language issues, so this project has been well received and welcomed by our local community, as well as students."

**SPECIAL FEATURES**

The *Hispanic Child Welfare Training Project* offers a number of innovative components:

*Providing Social Work Education to Hispanic Students*

This project is unique demographically, as the trainees are all Hispanic or proficient Spanish speaking students who are preparing for their social work careers working with Spanish-speaking clients. Although the Social Work program has historically had a large number of Spanish-speaking students, those students haven't been very
confident with their translation skills. As co-PI Roditti explains, "Many students and professionals speak a Spanish that is spoken at home, but they don't speak the Spanish that deals with professional issues. For example, a child welfare worker might need to explain to a client something about their court challenges, and they may know the word in English, but not in Spanish. It's the same with medical and behavioral health terminology - we need students to work with clients on higher levels professionally since they really have to make that bridge between the two languages for their clients." Hence, a portion of the traineeship funds also provide students with additional funding to take extra courses in Spanish if necessary.

**Infusing Spanish Language Competencies into the Curriculum**
This project incorporates child welfare, social work and language competency using the field as a signature pedagogy integrating all three components. The child welfare community needs social workers who can converse in Spanish, as well as able to translate the medical, legal and psychological language. Hence, this traineeship focuses on increasing students' Spanish language proficiency and developing a standard for bilingual social work practice. Students take a summer Spanish language course, and the overall focus of the project is on technical and professional terminology with additional focus on child welfare, mental health and legal terminology. As co-PI Anderson relays, "truly unique features will come out of this program - the focus on language competencies, and that we can say these graduates meet a standard in terms of what they can do professionally in the Spanish language. And that standard can then be used by agencies to inform how they hire and who they hire - to root the term bilingual in a set of real standards that will provide for more competent practitioners. And then all of this can translate into a certificate program in language competency for social work professionals that can be replicated elsewhere."

**IMPACT ON SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM**
Stipend students enrolled for 2010-2011 experienced a class in *Spanish for Social Work*, a child welfare field placement, a weekly all-Spanish integrative field seminar, and courses in both child welfare practice and child welfare policy. Additionally, the traineeship project translated significant parts of text books and articles for student use due to the lack of BSW- and MSW-level materials about child welfare in Spanish. For example, the project translated all of the US Department of Health & Human Services' *Child Maltreatment Annual Report* into Spanish so that students could become fluent in the use of those kinds of terms and concepts.

Because field work is such a major component of the project, the faculty members on the project have participated in BSW and MSW curriculum changes. Foremost among this work has been the linkages made between courses in the curriculum to
the field. Both on a graduate and an undergraduate level, field materials now reflect that integration in learning contracts and assignments.

**OBSTACLES**

Because few of the public agency social workers are fully literate in the Spanish language, the project's biggest challenge continues to be the field instructors' level of Spanish proficiency, and their willingness to speak Spanish in the field, given the fact that there are a number of disincentives to doing so. As co-PI Roditti mentions, “there is a disincentive for someone to identify themselves as having the ability to work in Spanish, as the work just piles on for them. In addition, there are varying levels of competency, so it can be harder for some workers to do so than others. So there is a sense on the frontline that bilingual workers are just exploited – they have a larger workload, get called on frequently to help others, and it can feel like too much on top of an already high workload.”

The project had to replace a student into another part of the child welfare agency 20 miles south of Las Cruces in order to provide the student with access to a more proficient Spanish-speaking child welfare worker and her clients. The course syllabus and learning contract have been translated into Spanish to give students and instructors the opportunity to practice using technical and academic Spanish terms, but, overwhelmingly, instructors still seem to prefer using the English version of these materials, which limits students' opportunities to continue developing and practicing their Spanish skills.

Additionally, as noted previously, there are few social work or child welfare texts available in Spanish, and the project has had to spend time and resources on translation to ensure comprehensiveness of their course offerings.

**NEXT STEPS & OUTCOMES**

In the near term, the project is planning a *Hispanic Child Welfare Symposium* in September, and will be hiring a bilingual MSW student to help with the planning and logistics. The project is currently revising its Hispanic Child Welfare Field Syllabi to include child welfare competencies and its competency-based student assignments using a grading matrix, both of which will be used this coming year.

The project also plans on developing focus groups with Spanish-speaking foster parents, in collaboration with their public child welfare agency partners, and revising the syllabus for its *Spanish for Social Workers* to enhance its child welfare content. The project has hired Spanish speaking students to assist with the translation of book chapters, tables and case scenarios that will be used.
In the future, the project is also considering conducting its interview process in Spanish and involving students in doing foster parent recruitment and training in Spanish for the local child welfare agency.

Longer term, the project hopes to establish and define what bilingual professional social work is, and its related competencies. Co-PI Roditti explains that "even though I don't think we can change the system entirely, little by little, I hope we can move it forward towards real cultural competency, which means real language competency as well. I wanted to do this project to add whatever small amount of our knowledge and expertise to the greater good, and develop a real standard for bilingual professional social work in child welfare."

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