



Rural & Tribal Child Welfare

 Mathias, C., & Benton, A. (2011). Social justice through the education of rural and tribal child welfare workforce. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 5(2/3), 282-296.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Using a needs-assessment process, this study explores needs of the child welfare workforce in rural and remote areas of California. Possible solutions and implications for improving rural workforce development and commitment to social justice, through education, are also discussed. Specifically, this article describes the collaborative, blended-learning based, pilot project initiated to improve the recruitment and retention of rural child welfare workers.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Characteristics of rural social work include a slower pace, informal helping network, lack of resources, greater autonomy and decision-making authority, and increased use of teamwork.

Rural child welfare agencies struggle to recruit and retain professionally trained workers.

Four major themes emerged from the needs-assessment study: recruitment, retention, furthering education, and effective methods for accessing education:

 RECRUITMENT	Lasting vacancies, lengthy hiring process, lower quality applicant pool
 RETENTION	Lack of transition time, increased risk of burnout, isolation, inability for rural agencies to compete with surrounding counties
 FURTHERING EDUCATION	There is a need for workforce development in rural areas
 ACCESS TO EDUCATION	Barriers include budget limitations, time constraints, distance, lack of resources and access to technology

The blended learning education strategy combines face-to-face time with distance learning approaches.

Social justice is a core social work value that can be promoted through education in rural areas.

The pilot program expanded educational opportunities for students by incorporating distance learning technology, providing access to three levels of social work degrees (Assoc., BSW, MSW), financial assistance through Title IV-E, and an educational model with individualized support.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Education must be accessible to agencies in rural and remote areas.

Educated employees become an asset to the community, help foster development and improvement of the quality of services provided to children and families.

Improving access to education may provide means to improve social justice and create change. Using distance education programs could meet the needs of rural counties.

Agencies could improve support for students by offering flex time, field placement opportunities, space for classes, seminars, supervision, internet access, and video conferencing facilities.