



Executive Summary

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Introduction

Effective training systems lead to better-prepared staff, who in turn will engage in best practices with children, youth, and families, ultimately resulting in better child welfare outcomes. The Butler Institute for Families (Butler), at the University of Denver, conducted a training system assessment sponsored by Casey Family Programs for the Oregon Department of Human Services, Office of Child Welfare. The goal was to determine strengths and challenges in multiple domains and make recommendations for a more effective training system. This executive summary offers a snapshot of findings and recommendations.

Methods

Using the Training System Assessment instrument, Butler looked holistically at the entire training system. To accomplish the training system assessment, Butler conducted listening sessions with 19 groups for a total of 89 participants. Listening sessions were conducted virtually by Zoom and guided by protocols with specific questions relevant to participants' positions. In addition to listening sessions, Butler administered the Training System Assessment Survey online to 2,908 DHS staff (business and office staff, social service assistants, supervisors, office managers, social service specialists, and others) via Qualtrics survey platform. The survey was open November 2 – 17, 2020, and received 1,483 responses for a 51% response rate.

Survey Findings

Key findings from the survey were:

- Of the 1,483 responses, 56% were Social Service Specialists (SS1s), 4% MAPS, 10% Supervisors and Office Managers, 11% SSAs, and 18% Business/Other Staff; of the SSS1s, 21% were newly hired in the past year, 79% were experienced
- Perceptions of training experiences were mixed; new SSS1s reported more positive perceptions of training experiences than other staff
- Staff indicated a need for improved content regarding family engagement (particularly for racially/ethnically diverse and LGBTQIA+ families)

- Staff also wanted more support on earning transfer, particularly performance feedback and supervisor guidance
- Preferred training formats were classroom (ideally 4 hours) and live virtual (ideally 2 hours)
- Proposed training topics that were most important to staff members jobs were: documentation, organization/time management, worker well-being, and family engagement

Training System Assessment

The Training System Assessment instrument guided the interview protocols and document reviews and the review of DHS's training system across multiple areas. The results reported in this executive summary may be from listening session participants, document reviews, or survey findings. More detail can be found in the body of this report.

Overall Strengths

Listening session participants noted multiple strengths including:

- Experienced and skillful trainers
- Leadership commitment to training
- A variety of available trainings

Assessment Area: Management

Strengths:

- Presence of workforce development deputy director on agency's executive management team
- PSU sufficiently staffs all roles in their training department
- Moving toward more stakeholder involvement with a training advisory committee

Areas for improvement:

- No overall or individual PSU or DHS training plans
- No formal training needs assessment conducted on a regular basis
- Insufficient marketing of training opportunities

Assessment Area: Training Array

Strengths:

- Good mix of in-person, online, and web-based training
- Strong Essential Elements training for new SSS1s

Areas for improvement:

- Insufficient training for supervisors
- No job-specific training available for business/clerical staff or leadership/management
- Insufficient course space for SSS1s to complete their required trainings in a timely manner as courses fill up and there is a ceiling on registration

Assessment Area: Infrastructure

Strengths:

- Some local offices provide strong support to staff to attend training

- PSU has policies related to managing training
- An adequate budget exists for training

Areas for improvement:

- Inconsistent formal plans to provide coverage while staff are at training
- Lack of statewide policies around training-related issues
- Lack of flexibility in how the training budget can be administered

Assessment Area: Instructional Design

Strengths:

- PSU has extensive curriculum with a consistent format that includes instructions to the trainer and content to offer
- A wide variety of formats are offered by both DHS and PSU
- PSU's ability to offer classroom experience remotely along with in-person classes

Areas for improvement:

- Keeping virtual classes to a manageable size to fully engage participants
- No competency statements identified in either PSU or DHS curriculum
- No standardized curriculum for trainings provided by DHS
- No ongoing assessment of curriculum, which should occur at least every two years

Assessment Area: Trainer Management

Strengths:

- PSU has a trainer development program and a supervisor observes each trainer at least twice per year
- Some PSU staff have attended conferences on training; DHS staff attended National Staff Development & Training Association conference this year

Areas for improvement:

- No trainer development or ongoing professional development provided to DHS staff trainers
- Lack of ability to ensure fidelity to curriculum

Assessment Area: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Strengths:

- Some efforts to include DEI issues
- PSU has made concerted efforts to address DEI through trainer development, curriculum, and trainee interactions

Areas for Improvement:

- Need for more training related to LGBTQIA+ or persons with different abilities

Assessment Area: Transfer of Learning

Strengths:

- Robust materials, including a supervisor manual and portfolios for SSS1s
- Transfer of learning is addressed in Essential Elements training
- MAPS staff provide strong support to new SSS1s in the field

Areas for improvement:

- Perception that Essential Elements from PSU does not reflect actual practice
- Significant implementation issues related to transfer of learning

- Lack of follow through on transfer of learning tasks
- New SSS1s possibly assigned cases prior to completion of training

Assessment Area: Training Evaluation

Strengths:

- PSU and DHS evaluation tools are concise, well-worded, and collect relevant and useful data
- Thorough individual evaluations (Portfolios of Learning and Professional Development) for SSS1s

Areas for improvement:

- Lack of consistent evaluation practices across all DHS training
- Lack of clarity about how PSU and DHS utilizes training evaluations (particularly aggregate data from EE and other DHS training evaluations) for decision-making
- Insufficient use of portfolios for SSS1s and supervisors to structure post-training support

Organizational Support for Training and Barriers

Strengths:

- Some local agency leaders strongly support training

Areas for Improvement:

- Funding
- A perception that training is more about compliance
- Traveling to Salem when located far away

Workforce Development

Other components impacting workforce development include:

- Heavy workloads
- High turnover
- Ongoing recruitment

Perceptions of positive supervision help mitigate these issues

Curriculum Assessment

PSU curricula from Essential Elements were assessed using Butler's curriculum assessment rubric.

Competencies/Learning Objectives

Strengths: Learning objectives provided and training content matches the objectives

Areas for improvement: Need for competency statements

Training Methods

Strengths: Vary throughout curriculum assessed

Areas for improvement: Much didactic material in the classroom curriculum. Incorporate flipped classroom approach

Curriculum Instructions

Strengths: Detailed lists of required training material for each module

Areas for improvement: Need for more specificity and incorporation of timelines

Content

Strengths: All curriculum contains thorough content

Areas for improvement: Move knowledge content to online learning platforms

Sequencing of Content

Strengths: Generally moves from broad to specific

Areas for improvement: Need for DEI integration and engagement

Format

Strengths: Consistent formatting and training information is easy to locate

Areas for improvement: Use trainer notes consistently and present content in bulleted format

Attributions

Strengths: N/A

Areas for improvement: Need for citations and reference list/bibliography

Online Courses

Strengths: N/A

Areas for improvement: N/A

Transfer of Learning

Strengths: Offered throughout the curriculum

Areas for improvement: N/A

Recommendations

Based upon the training system and curricula assessments, Butler offers the following recommendations to improve the overall Oregon training system (more detail for each recommendation is in the [Recommendations](#) section):

1. Strengthen the partnership between PSU and DHS through shared visioning and implementation efforts to build trust, relationships, and stronger training.
2. Consider developing a strong practice model complemented by a competency model approach.
3. Infuse all training from DHS and PSU with content to build skills around diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. Have current DHS field personnel conduct an intensive audit of PSU's Essential Elements to understand how the content can better align with current field practice.
5. Revise transfer-of-learning activities for new caseworkers to better prepare them. As appropriate, assign these responsibilities to others.
6. Develop formal supervisor and manager curriculum and implement training with fidelity.
7. Develop standards for all PSU and DHS curricula including:
 - a. Use of a competency-based approach
 - b. Use of citations and current research to support all content
 - c. Use of a consistent format across all curricula provided to DHS employees
 - d. Detailed instructions to guide the trainer and ensure fidelity

- e. Ensure inclusion and integration of significant themes such as DEI, trauma, and engagement
8. Employ coaching techniques and train all MAPS and others providing transfer-of-learning functions.
9. Prepare curriculum developers and trainers through formal training and ongoing coaching and support.
10. Explore options to provide “flipped” training, where knowledge-level content is provided through online courses and skills are developed in the classroom (virtual or in person).
11. Explore ways to train MAPS and supervisors to use training evaluation findings (in addition to Essential Elements staff portfolios – see Recommendation #5).
12. Hold regular CQI sessions including both DHS and PSU to review evaluation data and identify ways to increase training quality.

Conclusion

Oregon’s training system has many strengths as well as some opportunities for improvement. Engaging in this comprehensive assessment demonstrates Oregon’s commitment to delivering the best possible training system to ultimately ensure better service delivery for the children and families served.