

# National comparison of entry-level training for statutory child protection workers

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# Background

- λ Australia does not have a unified approach to child welfare, rather 8 different systems
- λ Sharing information and experiences across jurisdictions may assist to avoid duplication and to gain maximum benefit from resources expended



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# Audit of child protection training project

- λ In this paper we present preliminary findings from a national audit of statutory child protection learning and development programs in Australia
- λ This project was undertaken primarily to enhance the goals of the Australian Statutory Child Protection Learning and Development Group
- λ Findings are also of relevance to practitioners and policy makers



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# Australasian L&D Group

## λ The goals of the Group are to:

- υ facilitate the sharing of training resources;
- υ discuss approaches to training in each jurisdiction;
- υ discuss what works and what doesn't work;
- υ share initiatives and innovation;
- υ avoid duplication of effort;
- υ identify commonalities and differences between approaches in different jurisdictions;
- υ articulate the link between training, and recruitment and retention;
- υ discuss approaches and strategies for responding to shared problems; and
- υ support research to facilitate the above goals.



# Responsibility for CP Training

	Name of Department	Acronym	Name of the training branch or unit
ACT	Office for Children Youth and Family Support, which is part of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community	OCYFS	The Training and Community Education Unit
NSW	Department of Community Services	DoCS	Learning and Development Branch
NT	Family and Children's Services	FACS	Service System Improvement Unit (SSIU)
QLD	Department of Child Safety	DChS	The Training & Specialist Support Branch (TSSB)
SA	Children Youth and Family Services which is part of the Department of	CYFS	Learning and Development Centre
TAS	Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family	DHHS	At this time the division does not have a training unit
VIC	Office for Children which is part of the Department of Human Services	DHS	Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Professional Development Unit
WA	Department for Community Development	DCD	The Learning Development Unit based at Community Skills Training Centre



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# Comparability of workforce and trainers

- λ Size of training units and the number of staff involved in direct service delivery are not directly comparable across jurisdictions
- λ Multitude of factors combine to explain such differences, including
  - υ Scope of the training unit
  - υ Service demand
  - υ Geography
  - υ Population
  - υ Resources



# Child protection and training staff relative to population size

	Population	Notifications	CP Staff	All Trainers	CP Trainers
NSW	6,774,200	133,636	1479	63	29
VIC	5,022,300	37,523	937	-	9
QLD	3,964,000	40,829	1432	24	24
WA	2,010,100	3,206	1198	-	3
SA	1,542,000	17,473	600	19.6	5.2
TAS	485,300	2,163	-	-	-
ACT	325,200	4,042	115	8	2.6
NT	202,800	2,101	120	7	2



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# Comparability of CP training

- λ All training mapped to some extent to national competencies (although only SA, QLD, and VIC consider their approach to training to be “competency-based”)
- λ All training units reported that they provide training programs for essentially the same purpose: quality service provision



# What is the aim of the training unit?

*“Our mission is to lead and develop professional practice in our staff. This will directly contribute to better outcomes for the children and young people whom we serve” (VIC).*

*“The Learning and Development Centre was established to provide training across all classifications in the organisation in order to ensure that all staff are suitably equipped to provide excellent service” (SA).*

*“We develop staff by running courses that build their capacity to respond effectively to children, young people and their families” (ACT).*

*“To improve our workforce capability and performance by better supporting our staff in the work they do” (NSW).*



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# Entry-level qualifications

- λ Entry-level qualification requirement essentially the same in all jurisdictions:
  - υ Bachelor degree in fields such as Social Work, Psychology or Social Sciences
  - υ In some jurisdictions Diplomas also considered (e.g., Victoria)
  - υ Western Australia was the only jurisdiction where a qualification was not mandatory as part of the entry-level requirements
  - υ Entry-level qualification requirements were lowered in some circumstances (for example, there are no essential entry requirements for Aboriginal staff in New South Wales).



# Aim of Entry-Level Training

- λ The core focus for most programs is around the development of knowledge, skills and abilities that are required for child protection work
- λ Large variation in the time frames when entry level training commences
  - υ Day 1
  - υ Within 6 months
  - υ No fixed time



# Structure of Entry-Level Training

- λ The structure of entry-level training also varies significantly
  - υ 3-wks training, time in field, return to training + 1-wk placement with non-gov
  - υ 7-wk program: 4 practice clinics of 4-days interspersed with time in field
  - υ 5-day induction, essential modules to be completed within 2-years



# Question for group ...

λ When should training start?



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# Content of entry-level training

- λ Significant overlap between Australian jurisdictions in entry-level training, with the same set of core issues being included in most training programs
- λ Range: 17 - 25 modules in entry-level training
- λ Training programs in every state and territory made specific reference to working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- λ General cultural diversity programs were only provided in New South Wales, South Australia, and Western Australia



# Core areas of training

- λ The child protection system
- λ Assessment
- λ Interviewing children
- λ Court matters
- λ Key child welfare legislation/legal context
- λ Case management
- λ Cultural diversity



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# Other common training areas

- λ Other training areas present in most jurisdictions were:
  - υ Dynamics of child abuse and neglect
  - υ Child development
  - υ Collaborative practice
  - υ Out-of-home care
  - υ Responding to hostility and resistance and denial among involuntary clients
  - υ Worker safety, values and professionalism



# Question for group ...

- λ What knowledge is essential to child protection practice?
  - υ Refer - child welfare topics
- λ Should you have this knowledge *before* you are allocated a case load?
- λ Should you have this knowledge before you have *any* contact with families?



# Child welfare topics

- λ Child protection
- λ Child welfare intervention
- λ Separation and loss
- λ Cultural diversity
- λ Assessment
- λ Interviewing
- λ Documentation
- λ Court
- λ Child Welfare Policy and History
- λ Values and professionalism
- λ Human Behaviour and Development
- λ Service Planning

SOURCE: Unrau and Wehrmann (2003, p. 22)



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# Assessing competence

- λ Assessment is conducted to determine if an individual can perform the skills or tasks required to do a job
- λ Assessment is not linked to employment status in any jurisdiction, except Queensland
- λ In QLD, failure to be deemed competent after two re-sits of the assessment can result in termination
- λ A re-sit of assessment is part of the process in NSW & SA
- λ In VIC, practice concerns identified in training are referred to and managed by regions
- λ In the ACT, NT and WA there are no formal assessment processes for core training



# Question for group ...

λ Should the training program be linked to employment status?



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# Unique issues for CP workforce

- λ Internationally, statutory child protection services (CP) experience difficulty in attracting and retaining professionals to provide direct services to children and their families
- λ Graduates are not 'job ready' for CP roles - there is a need for specialist vocational training
- λ CP organisations are increasingly interested exploring link between training and recruitment and retention



# Retention

- λ Retention a problem internationally
- λ US research suggests average turnover of 30-40%
- λ In US, government established pool of funding for child welfare training to:
  - υ Professionalise the child welfare workforce
  - υ Address the recruitment problem by providing a viable pool of applicants
  - υ Assist in retention by bonding employees in receipt of Title IV-E funding



# Questions for group ...

## λ Retention

- υ How long have you been in CP field?
- υ Do you intend to stay?
- υ What attracts you to CP?
- υ What are disincentives to working in CP?
- υ What is most important in decision to leave?
- υ Would training influence your decision to stay/go?
- υ Would higher degree prompt you to stay?
- υ What do you think about US idea of bonding?



# Summary

- λ The scope and size of training units and the structure of the programs and how these are implemented vary
- λ All child protection learning and development units provide training for essentially the same purpose
- λ The structure of entry-level training programs vary
- λ The aims and content of entry-level training is relatively consistent across jurisdictions



# Implications

## λ Policy

- υ Buy places in training instead of developing own
- υ National skills passport

## λ Practitioner

- υ RPL when moving across borders
- υ Informed decisions about career development

## λ Trainers

- υ Share resources - no need to re-invent things
- υ Learn from experiences of other trainers

## λ Community sector

- υ could also purchase training places, share resources,
- υ increased aware of skills of CP workers



# Contact author

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