

Reaching Out

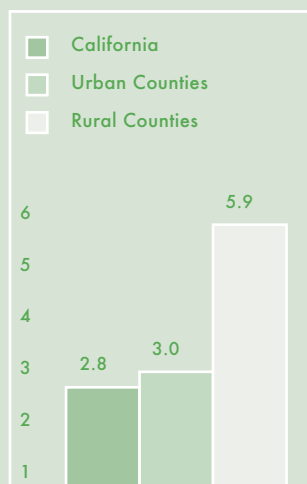
CURRENT ISSUES FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

SUMMER 2005



Rural counties have a higher incidence rate of foster care placement.

(Placements per 1,000 children)



Reference article on page 3:

Database Research Reveals Differences Between California's Rural and Urban Counties

Exactly What is Rural Practice, Anyway?

By Susan Brooks, Director, Northern California Training Academy, The Center for Human Services

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Reaching Out. Produced by the Northern California Training Academy, this newsletter serves as a publication for people working in the child welfare field as well as those in the general public who are interested in child welfare issues. We recognize the important and challenging work of counties and agencies who are engaged in helping families recover from abuse and neglect. This newsletter provides a platform for child welfare professionals to reach out to one another — sharing good ideas and sharing information with their communities about the innovative programs they offer.

This issue's theme reflects on what it means to be part of social service practice in rural areas. People living outside of Northern California are often surprised to hear that California has any rural counties. In fact, according to the Population Reference Bureau, in Washington D.C. (based on 2000 U.S. Census data), 21 of California's 58 counties are classified as "rural" (see definition and map on page 2). Of these 21 counties, six are additionally classified as "frontier" counties because their population is less than seven people per square mile.

We in Northern California know about rural practice because all but two of these rural counties are here. While many social services

issues are the same as in urban areas — child abuse, poverty, substance abuse — we know that rural practice presents its own unique set of challenges, including scarce resources and great distances to travel. Despite these challenges, rural practice flourishes because of its own unique set of strengths, such as the general sense of community and the resourcefulness of staff.

We hope you enjoy reading our first issue.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Introduction	Cover
Rural/Urban Map	2
Rebuilding After Abuse	2
County Demographic Data	3
Child Welfare Definitions	3
Visitation House	5
New MSW Program	6
Rural Advantages	6
Rural Practice Tips	7
Best Practice Research	8
Successful Reunification	9
Administrators' Perspectives	10
Resources	11
Announcements	Back Cover

Rural Counties Defined

The definitions of rural are different depending on who is doing the defining and why. We are using the definition of "rural" used by the nationally-renowned *Annie E. Casey Foundation* in its 2004 publication *City and Rural KIDS COUNT Data Book*. That definition is as follows:

"Rural areas are the sparsely settled areas and the small towns outside metropolitan areas. Like the previous definition, it is county-based: an entire county is either inside or outside a metropolitan area. A metropolitan area has an urban core of at least 50,000 residents... Any county that is not inside a metropolitan area can be referred to as non-metropolitan. All non-metropolitan counties are included as rural."



Back to Reality: Rebuilding and Reconnecting After an Abuser is Dethroned

By Les Craig, Child Welfare Services, Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services

The town is invisible to a tourist driving through. You don't see houses as you drive there, just dirt roads with gates and hand-painted signs: a house number, No Hunting, Fresh Eggs, Keep Out, this way to the school, that way to the volunteer firehouse.

Places like these are a magnet for abusers. Emergency services are stretched over literally hundreds of miles of bad roads. Phone lines may not reach the home, and cellular or CB coverage is spotty. Having no control of car and money can distance a victim from old friends, and rudeness to neighbors can drive off new ones. Home schooling limits the outsiders who speak to the children. Marijuana is common here. Its passive, introverted influence reinforces isolation and brainwashing, and its illegality amplifies the fear of outside authority.

I had my work cut out for me. I am a voluntary services social worker, and the family I worked with here had once been a tiny, suffering banana republic with its own dictator and its own distorted laws. Finally, in one intolerably violent act, the system had collapsed. The abuser was out of the home.

When I stepped in, the mother was cooperative, but her fears were almost paralyzing. I asked her to enroll the children in the local school. Could her husband take the children away if she allowed them to go to public school against his wishes? I asked her to take the kids to a counselor. Her husband had told her she was crazy: wouldn't the counselor lock her up and take the kids away? What would happen when I learned what she was like, heard who she had been, saw how she and her children lived?

The way she and her children lived was intensely familiar to me, since I had raised my own children in a community very much like this one. I knew that when you heat your wash water on the wood stove, doing laundry was a full day's work. I could explain to her that poverty was not abuse or neglect. I could walk her through the social services system, reassuring her every step of the way. I could show her that it was entirely to her benefit to live in a world where the rules did not stop at her property line. It was easy not to judge her, although sometimes it was hard not to cry.

This case was closed long ago. The kids are doing well in school. The family got help from Public Health, enabling them to coordinate counseling and medical services in the same place on the same day. They even have a cell phone that usually works. They wave at me in town now and then, almost always in the company of one friend or another.

Information from the Population Reference Bureau, Washington D.C., is based on 2000 U.S. Census data



Child Welfare Terminology 101

Every profession develops new terms to reflect its current issues and practices. Some current terms in use in the child welfare field and their definitions are:

Success stories like this require two important tools. The first is something I call “common sense with open arms.” Without warmth and acceptance, you can drive isolated people back into their isolation. Once you become familiar and real, you can tell any truth and eventually be heard. The second is a good Rolodex, constantly improved as you go along. You can’t help a remote rural family by yourself and still maintain your caseload: the travel times are too great.

A final note: use the personal touch. Even professionals in remote areas work better with people they know. The web of familiarity and connection is what makes rural communities work, and you can’t teach it without being part of it.

Database Research Reveals Differences Between California’s Rural and Urban Counties

By Kristin Mick, UC Davis Extension

We know intuitively that California’s rural counties are different from their urban counterparts in a number of ways. The objective of this article is to use statistical research to illustrate some of the ways in which rural and urban counties differ with respect to child welfare statistics. Data was collected from the Center for Social Services Research at UC Berkeley. The time period analyzed and described below is for the year 2003.

Rural counties have a higher incidence rate of foster care placement (see chart on cover)

- 38 of California’s 58 counties had a first entry to foster care incidence rate greater than the state’s overall average incidence rate of 2.8 placements per 1,000 children.
- California’s overall incidence rate of foster care placement is 2.8 incidents per 1,000 children.
- When taken as an average across California’s urban counties, the incidence rate is 3.0 placements per 1,000 children.
- When taken as an average across California’s rural counties, the foster care incidence rate is 5.9 placements per 1,000 children—roughly twice that of urban counties.
- 12 individual counties had an incidence rate of more than twice the overall California incidence rate (more than 5.6 placements per 1,000 children). Of those 12 counties, 10 were rural (83 percent).
- Marin and Modoc Counties had the lowest foster care placement incidence rate of one child per 1,000; Alpine County had the highest incidence rate of 11.5 placements for every 1,000 children.

Continued on page 4 ➤

Evidence-based practice:

A set of tools and resources for finding and applying the best current research evidence to service delivery, and integrating this information with clinical expertise and individual and family values.

Strength-based practice:

This is a social service practice orientation that focuses on an individual or a family’s strengths. It also analyzes certain identity traits such as ethnicity in terms of the strength they provide to a person, family or community.

Many social service practice models focus on an individual’s or family’s weaknesses and problems. Strength-based practice is based on the understanding that analyzing a person’s strengths is an important part of putting together a successful intervention or treatment plan.

Oversight and Accountability:

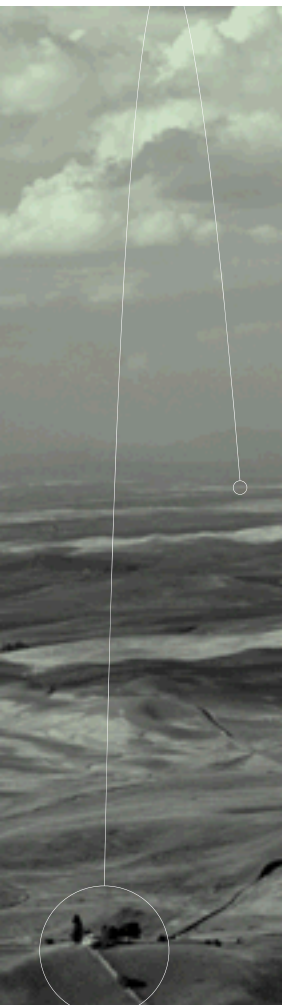
The cornerstone of California’s efforts to improve oversight and accountability for the state’s child welfare system is its implementation of the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636), which went into effect on January 1, 2004. A comprehensive approach to oversight and accountability, California’s new system measures and monitors the performance of each of the state’s county child welfare systems. It operates on the philosophy of continuous improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of outcomes. The new system will allow the state to gauge its performance against national standards while also measuring the performance of counties on other critical outcomes and tracking improvement over time.

Differential response:

This is a graduated system for addressing referrals to the Child Abuse Hotline/Intake involving an initial assessment designed to identify immediate steps necessary to assure child safety and family engagement in such services as may be required to support them in performance of their parenting responsibilities.

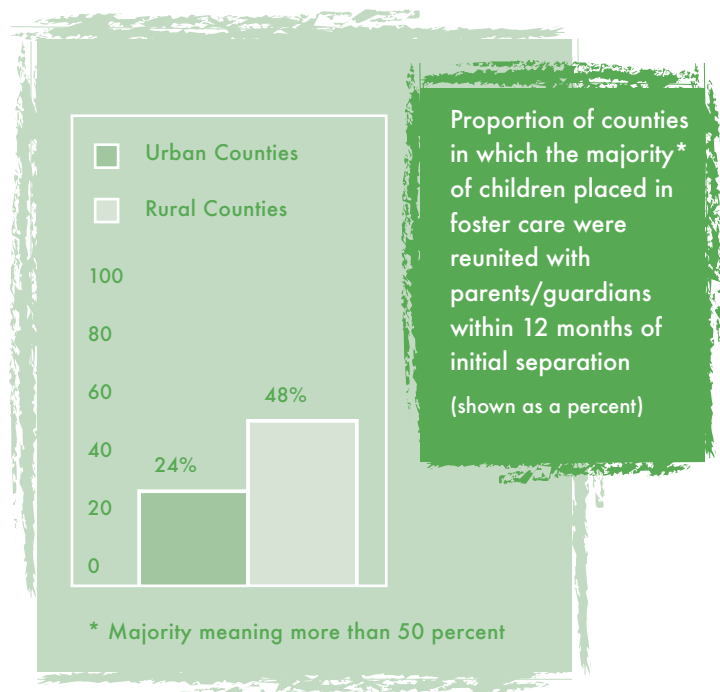
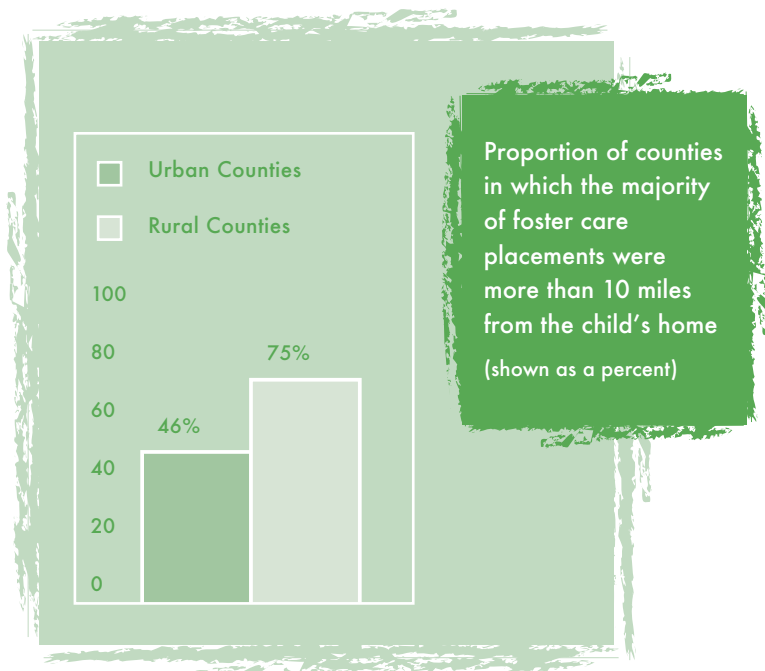
Engagement:

The process of becoming involved with, of connecting with and participating in a meaningful, active way.



Rural counties have a greater travel distance between the child's home address and the foster care placement address

- Data looked at non-kin foster care placements of longer than 12 months in care.
- Data collected from 37 urban counties and 16 rural counties (five rural counties were not part of this analysis because either no data was available or there were no non-kin, long-term placements during the period of study).
- Of California counties surveyed as a whole, 46 percent of all long-term foster care placements occurred in a home more than 10 miles from the child's home address.
- Of the 37 urban counties surveyed, 17 counties (46 percent) indicated that the majority of long-term foster care placements occurred in a home that is greater than 10 miles from the child's home residence.
- Of the 16 rural counties surveyed, 12 counties (75 percent) indicated that the majority of long-term foster care placements occurred in a home that is greater than 10 miles from the child's home residence.
- Four counties — Amador, Inyo, Nevada and Plumas (all rural) — had all of their foster care placements more than 10 miles from the child's home address. Contrarily, none of the placements in Marin County were greater than 10 miles from the child's home address.



Children placed in foster care in rural counties are more likely to be reunited with parents/guardians within 12 months

- Of children in foster care for five days or more, the data collected here represents the proportion of children reunited with parents/guardians within 12 months of initial separation.
- There were 19 counties in which the majority (more than half) of children placed in foster care were reunited with parents/guardians within 12 months.
- Just over half of these counties (10 of 19) were rural.
- Of all rural California counties, 48 percent (10 of 21) had the majority of children in foster care reunited with parents/guardians within 12 months of initial separation.
- Of all urban California counties, only 24 percent (9 of 37) had the majority of children in foster care reunited with parents/guardians within 12 months of initial separation.
- Fresno County had the lowest rate at 19.9 percent of children in foster care returning home within 12 months; Mono County had the highest at 100 percent (all) children in foster care returning home within 12 months.

Conclusions

The statistical research provided here shows that not only do proportionally more children in California's rural counties enter foster care as compared to children in the state's urban counties, but those children tend to be placed further away from home as well. On the positive side, children placed in foster care in rural counties tend to spend less time in foster care before returning home.

County-Community Partnership Provides Families a Place to Call Home

By Kristin Mick, UC Davis Extension

There's nothing like the comfort and security that a home provides. Even under the best of circumstances, the visitation rooms of a CPS agency are usually too cramped or too sterile...and always in an environment that simply does not promote a family-friendly visit. The Tehama County Child Welfare Division recognized this shortcoming, and did something about it.

When Randi Gotlieb took a job as project manager of the county's child welfare division in late 1999, she came armed with a novel approach to the traditional family visitation center.

"Forcing children and their parents to come to the CPS office for their visitation automatically sets the tone for a bad interaction," Gotlieb explained.

Cramped quarters filled with junky furniture only added to the problem. Gotlieb liked how Shasta County's visitation center incorporated comfy furniture and home-like décor — but she decided to take things one step further.

Tehama County now leases a three-bedroom house that has been transformed into the county's family visitation center. The Tudor-style home is located in a quaint neighborhood near a park and a bus line...two miles away from the CPS office. It's got a fully-stocked kitchen, a back yard and a garage equipped with ping pong and pool tables.

During visits, families are not forced to talk. They can make a meal together, hang out in the garage and play ping pong or even go to the playground at the nearby park (depending on the level of supervision required), Gotlieb said. The home also contains lots of puzzles, games, books, arts and crafts supplies, outdoor toys and *no TV*.

While the benefits of a "visitation house" for children and their parents are obvious, the social services department wins out too. It has contracted out the management of the visitation center to North Valley Catholic Social Services (NVCSS). With its vision of



healthy children, strong families and nurturing communities, NVCSS seemed a natural choice for such a collaboration.

Once they receive a referral from CPS, NVCSS social workers manage every aspect of the visitation, including scheduling the visits, supervising them and reporting back to the child welfare office on any progress or changes to a case.

"Visits are scheduled anywhere from a half-hour up to four hours at a time, so having more space in and around the home makes longer visits in particular more enjoyable for families," explained Michelle Adams, lead social worker for the visitation center. "If given the choice, parents would prefer to visit with their children in their own homes. But since that's not an option, they tell us this is the next best thing."

*For more information about the
Tehama County Family Visitation Center
call (530) 528-8066.*

We can't publish this newsletter without you.

We welcome your comments and specific story ideas about what's happening in your agency or county. Please send your suggestions to kolesen@unexmail.ucdavis.edu.

The theme for our next issue will be *Native American Communities & Child Welfare Services*





New Master's Program in Social Work Targets Needs of Rural and Native-American Communities

By Ken Nakamura, Humboldt State University

Last fall Humboldt State University launched an innovative, new MSW program aimed at providing progressive, advanced-level social work practice with a special emphasis on rural and Native-American communities.

Social work practices of the past and present have not met the needs of Native Americans in Northern California counties like Humboldt and Del Norte. Through this new graduate program, Humboldt State University is working with county agencies, tribal social services and other Native-American human service organizations to meet the need for more professional social work staff at the advanced-practice level in child welfare, mental health, and substance abuse and recovery work. The MSW program seeks to prepare graduates to work in and across these various systems of care to improve policy and practice for enhanced service delivery, to strengthen integrated care and to address the disproportionate number of Native Americans in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

"Our goal is to join with community partners to increase accessibility, improve quality of care through integrated services and establish meaningful, progressive community-based practices that are socially just, economically sustainable, environmentally balanced and culturally guided," explained Ken Nakamura, associate professor and director of the MSW program at Humboldt State University.

The MSW program offers three distinct degree options: a one-year, advanced standing for candidates with an accredited bachelor's degree in social work, a two-year, full-time program and a three-year, part-time program that will accept new candidates beginning in 2007.

The program was initiated through the financial support of both Del Norte and Humboldt Counties, the advocacy of local public social service representatives and the Yurok Tribe. Humboldt and Del Norte First Five Commissions and the County of Del Norte contributed \$200,000 for start-up costs in addition to a \$300,000 award from the CSU Chancellor's Office.

*For more information, please contact
Ken Nakamura, director of the
MSW program, at (707) 826-4447
or email kkn1@humboldt.edu.*

What's Good About Child Welfare Services in Rural California?

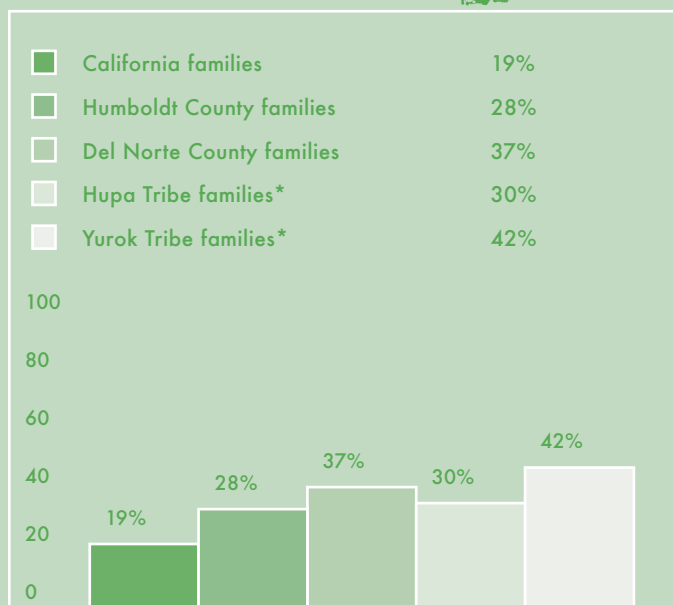
By Randy Gotlieb, Child Welfare Division, Tehama County

By now, you've probably read about the challenges faced by child welfare professionals in small, rural counties. By contrast, I'd like to offer some thoughts about what is good about being small. I'll even go so far as to say that there are definite advantages to doing child welfare work in a small, rural county.

In a small county agency, it is possible to create significant change in relatively little time. Tehama County was one of 13 counties across the state to be part of the CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project, otherwise known as Linkages. Most of the other counties in the project targeted one CalWORKs unit and one Child Welfare unit to coordinate case management, or at most were able to implement Linkages in one of the county's regional offices. With only two employment service units and three child welfare service units, we were able to implement coordinated case management in 100 percent of our joint CalWORKs and Child Welfare cases from the very beginning of the project.

When we decided we wanted to improve our intake system to make it more strength based, the change happened in a matter of days. In Tehama County there is one Intake/First Response supervisor and there

Families with Young Children Living Below Poverty Level
(shown as a percent)



*Hupa and Yurok are the two largest Native American tribes in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties.

are only two hotline screeners. It took one meeting to review some of the question sets other counties had begun using, choose which of these we liked best, re-word a few to our liking, and add the new questions to the list of those to be asked on each call. While larger counties tend to pilot changes such as this on a small scale, and then only after measuring success on the small scale are they able to generalize the change across the board, when a small county makes a change, it is already “across the board.”



Another advantage of doing child welfare service in a small rural setting has to do with collaboration and conflict resolution. Precisely because we are small and resources are few, we cannot afford any duplication among agencies and organizations. Collaboration isn't just a nice concept, it is a necessity of life.

Finally, whenever I have a conflict with another agency (or they have one with me or my staff), I can personally reach the appropriate person in charge, even if that means contacting the head of the agency, to resolve the matter. It doesn't matter whether the problem involves the district attorney or a school principal, a confidentiality breach by an employee of a foster family agency or a referral snafu with Drug and Alcohol Services. Ninety-nine percent of the time, I can make an immediate phone call, email or drop by for a face-to-face visit and we work it out.

In small towns, the colleagues we depend on to “get the job done” are the same folks we see in the grocery and hardware store. Their sister, uncle or father-in-law may be the one who is doing the appraisal on your home or coaching your child's soccer team. My observation is that in small, rural communities, people go the extra mile to make things work. That not only translates to better working environments for us as employees, but more important, it results in better outcomes for the children and families we serve.

10 Tips for Social Work Practice in Rural Areas... Direct from the Trenches

- 1.** Carry water. In fact, carry an emergency kit. Some counties have kits that are highly portable and include the following items: a thermal blanket, snack bars, a working flashlight and water. Why not even throw in a crossword puzzle book?
- 2.** Since cell phones usually don't work in many rural areas, have some way to keep in touch with your office. Many county cars in rural areas are equipped with two-way radios set to the frequency of the sheriff's department.
- 3.** Make sure that your office has your daily itinerary with addresses and phone numbers (if your clients have them). Every office should also have a system to check in at the end of the day to make sure that all staff have returned from the field.
- 4.** Maintain a good working relationship with your county sheriff's office. Make sure they know if and when you are going to take a high-risk action with a family.
- 5.** Have a way to check in with other service providers. You may be working with the same families. With the proper releases in place, you can coordinate a treatment plan.
- 6.** Make sure your notes contain clear information that someone else might need to know who may be covering or following up with your cases. Example: “Road is washed out. Down to one narrow lane. Take the compact county car.” One county even enters this in CWS/CMS.
- 7.** If you run into a client (or ex-client) somewhere outside the office, give a nod, but let that client acknowledge you first. A client may feel self-conscious about the nature of your relationship. Conversely, if a client comes up to you and your family outside of work hours and starts talking with you about her case, you can say, “This is not a great time to talk right now. Why don't you call me at the office on Monday.”
- 8.** Consider putting your office address on your checks if you are concerned about people easily finding out where you live.
- 9.** When you get a new case and it is someone with whom you already have some kind of relationship, tell your supervisor. You should then work together to assess the closeness of the relationship weighed against the level of risk. If the connection is too close, ask the supervisor if you can trade cases with another worker.
- 10.** You may have someone in your community confide in you as a friend about her child welfare case. Without breaking confidentiality, you may be in a position to generally provide encouragement about working on her treatment plan. But, it is important not to undermine the efforts of your co-worker. If you have any concerns, bring them to your supervisor.

Thanks to staff from Siskiyou, Plumas and Trinity Counties for sharing what works for them.

A Sense of Community: Best Practice Research for Rural California

By Sabina Mayo-Smith

Life in rural areas of California defies categorization. Some of California's rural counties are in the high Sierra. Others cling to the Northern California coastline. Some rural counties are experiencing population decline, while others find themselves in a population boom caused by the migration of people from urban and suburban areas. While rural counties in California are very different, there are some elements they share. This article examines what social work research suggests are best practices for working in rural communities.

Best Practice Ideals

Leon H. Ginsberg, the editor of a textbook on rural social work practice, elegantly states in the introduction to his most recent edition that: "Social work with rural populations is first and foremost simply good social work practice that reflects and considers the environment in which practice takes place." What do these good practices look like?

- Rural social workers need to be "multi-skilled and multi-talented" generalists, "effectively using a wide range of practice approaches to meet a variety of community needs." Rural social workers "are more often called to cover or fill in for someone than their urban counterparts." They may even need to provide services to clients who would be seen by a specialist in an urban setting but for whom there is no specialist available.
- Social workers need to be independent and autonomous, and to function effectively with minimal supervision. But they also need to remember that "with more authority comes more responsibility."
- A practitioner's personal behavior is often very important to those he or she serves in a rural community. This behavior can include conduct, dress and personal interactions, along with where one shops. A social worker is a role model for community residents and this doesn't end at 5 p.m. Social workers in rural communities need to be able to cope with having a high public profile.
- Related to this, the community must first accept the person who is the social worker before it will accept, utilize and support the agency he or she represents or the services that are offered. Residents judge practitioners by their effectiveness rather than their education or professional experience.
- Rural social workers need to be able to work with limited resources. Social workers must be flexible and imaginative in the use of existing community resources and use initiative and creativity to develop new ones. It also requires strong collaboration with other traditional and nontraditional service providers in the community to maximize client services.
- Social workers need to appreciate that in rural communities there is an emphasis on the importance of informal communication. "Referrals for services are made people to people."
- Rural social workers need to envision "the community as part of the solution rather than seeing all parts of the solution as being dependent only on personal change."



Good Values

Gretchen H. Whitman lists some specific rural social work values in her article titled “Main Street Revisited: Social Work in Rural Areas.” She uses these values to define practice issues and methods.



Self-Reliance: Because of the value that rural residents place on self-reliance, it is vital that clients be involved in any problem-solving or helping process. Rural communities also tend to prefer to take care of their own problems. The astute worker should use local systems

of communication and self-help, always remembering the client’s or community’s right to self-determination.

Helping One’s Neighbors: Rural people prefer to help others in their own way. Rural social workers must be aware of informal, natural helping networks; they must attempt to strengthen and expand these networks without imposing their professional standards on them.

Reliance on Tradition and Resistance to Change: Knowledge of community resources, the organization and delivery of rural social services, and important community forces is a prerequisite to any efforts towards social planning or social change.

Respect for Certain Institutions: Families, schools, churches and cooperative extension services are highly valued in rural areas. Although new social services programs may appear to be free from conflict or competition, the truth is that someone was providing a version of this service before. It may have been informal, but it probably existed. Social workers’ effectiveness often depends on the ability to work with and through existing community institutions, trusted indigenous professionals and community leaders.

According to Maxine Jacobson in her article “Local Realities: A Frontier Perspective on Child Protection Team Practice,” successful programs “grow deep roots in the community..., [and] cannot be imposed from without.” Approaches that fail ignore the power of local knowledge.

By working with the strengths of rural populations and respecting their particular cultures, rural social workers will provide a valuable and appropriate service in the communities in which they work and live.

You Never Forget Your First (Successful Reunification)

By Kristin Mick, UC Davis Extension

With only six foster homes in the entire county, CPS social workers in Glenn County definitely have their work cut out for them. In places like this, family reunification means everything. That’s what social worker Dennis Duncan learned one year ago.

“It was my first family reunification case, and I’ll never forget it,” he said.

In 2003 a married couple in the small town of Willows was arrested on drug charges and their teenaged daughter was placed in the care of her aunt and uncle. In the first few months after the placement, the mother visited her child only sporadically. The father did not visit her at all.

Months went by, then one afternoon, the mother came into Duncan’s office. “I think I’ve made a big mistake,” she said. Those words were music to Duncan’s ears. His client was finally ready to accept responsibility for her actions.

One year after the initial detainment, the daughter returned home to her mother. Today, the teen is thriving — participating in cheerleading, band and a number of other activities. The mother’s turnaround is even more dramatic.

“She is now a leader in the 12-Step community in Glenn County,” Duncan said proudly. “She organizes events for 12-Step activities and has become a role model for other recovering addicts.”

While this particular case had a positive outcome, Duncan is reminded daily of the unique challenges he faces working in a county with scarce resources and a lack of community-based services for children and families in crisis.

“You have to work with what you’ve got,” Duncan explained. For example, a number of people in the county speak Laotian as their primary (and in some cases only) language. “We have only one translator who speaks Laotian. But in addition, he’s also a transporter and a member of our clerical staff. So you absolutely have to be creative in how you provide service.”

If nothing else, the sincere desire to see families heal and thrive fuels the motivations of rural-area social workers to face these unique challenges head on.



Issues Facing Program Administration in Rural Areas

By Sabina Mayo-Smith

Some of the same joys and challenges that social workers encounter in rural areas also hold true for supervisors and administrators of rural agencies and programs. This article examines a few of these administrative joys and challenges.

Wearing many hats

Administrators in rural areas often have to juggle a wide range of tasks. Just as social workers may be called on to address a wide range of issues with their clients, administrators may be called on to perform a much more diverse range of duties than their urban counterparts.

Because of the size of their organizations, administrators in rural counties may provide direct supervision and/or program oversight to staff in a wide range of programs. Along with providing supervision, administrators are often involved with many other aspects of program administration such as contract compliance and quality assurance. They may also be asked to participate in statewide social service efforts.

Rural counties have to comply with the same state guidelines and regulations as urban counties, but with fewer resources and fewer staff.

This requires creativity and ingenuity. As Paula Frick, the founding director of Centacare, notes: "Small populations do not equate small needs."

Rural administrators must be master net workers and collaborators. They may need to think along less traditional lines to identify sources for services. At the same time, administrators need to be mindful of both the mandate and limits of their own programs and agencies. This may mean that their programs have to turn away people in need who may not have a lot of other options.

**Rural administrators
must be master
net workers and
collaborators.
They may need to think
along less traditional
lines to identify sources
for services.**

Personnel and staffing issues

A big challenge for administrators in rural counties is to attract, train and retain qualified staff. Managers may find they need to increase their recruitment efforts just to find a small pool of qualified applicants. But, as Leon H. Ginsberg notes in his introduction to the fourth edition of *Social Work In Rural Communities*, managers have some compelling reasons for attracting and retaining rural practitioners:

- For practitioners who enjoy independence and autonomy, the lack of complicated supervisory structures may be an attraction.
- Because the overall staff is smaller, practitioners in rural areas may find they are promoted faster than they would be in metropolitan areas.
- Because of the scale, there is a greater opportunity for practitioners to become known and admired for their work with the community.
- Also because of the smaller scale, practitioners can more easily see the impact of their work and to connect their contribution to the larger outcome.





Resources to Explore

What are necessary administrative supports for staff in rural communities? Managers must have a strong system to check in with staff. Because staff may spend so much of their time in the field and have to travel great distances, administrators need to make sure everyone is accounted for, particularly at the end of the day.

While independence is a necessary quality for both practitioners and administrators who work in rural communities, there also needs to be an effective way for managers to provide supervision and support to their staff. Because of the wide range of duties and responsibilities and the smaller number of people providing services, collegial networks become crucial. Professional support is critical for both direct service staff and managers. This is especially true because administrators are in the same rural “fishbowl” as social workers.

Confidentiality and Public Relations

Just as with social workers, the community must first accept the person who is the social work administrator before it will accept, utilize and support the agency he or she represents or the services that are offered. This informal and personal system of referrals can provide as much of a challenge for administrators to maintain confidentiality as for their staff. This becomes particularly challenging if there is a dispute between a client and the agency or an unpopular personnel decision. As Kim Strom-Gottfried notes in her article “Ethical Practice in Rural Environments”: “For supervisors and administrators, policy and personnel decisions may be visible in the community and lay people may feel they should have a voice in such actions.” But administrators know that the standard of confidentiality is the foundation of their credibility and effectiveness in the community, and cannot be compromised.

In one of the more difficult balancing acts for rural administrators, they are often also the person responsible for their agency’s public relations. They may be the interview on the local radio station or the person quoted in the local newspaper.

Finally, just like social workers, administrators in rural areas need to have a clear understanding of the culture in the communities in which they live and work. They know that they as professionals are integral members of their local society and that they serve a vital role.

BOOKS, JOURNALS AND ARTICLES

Child Welfare League Of America Vol 81,
#5 September/October 2002. Special Issue:
“The Crisis in Rural Child Welfare.”

“Rural Child Welfare 101”
by Kelly Mack and Steve Boehm.
Children’s Voices. November 2001.
A publication of the Child Welfare League of America.

“Social Work In Rural Areas” Policy Statement. Social Work
Speaks 2003-2006, 6th Edition. NASW Delegate Assembly Policy
Statements.. NASW Press.

Social Work in Rural Communities, 4th Edition.
Edited by Leon H. Ginsberg. CWSE Press. 2005



WEBSITES

Annie E, Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org

Child Welfare League of America
www.cwla.org

Children Now (California-based)
www.childrennow.org

Children’s Defense Fund
www.childrensdefense.org

National Association of Social Work
www.naswdc.org

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect
Information, Administration for Children and Families;
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

U.S. Census Bureau
www.census.gov

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR)

The Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) is a component of California's new Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System which was developed pursuant to State Law (AB 636). The new system, referred to as the California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), focuses primarily on measuring outcomes in safety, permanence and child and family well-being. The new system replaces the former Child Welfare Services Oversight System which focused exclusively on regulatory compliance.

Each county's PQCR is an extension of the county's self-assessment process and is guided by questions raised by the analysis of outcome data and systemic factors. The goal of the PQCR is to analyze specific practice areas and to identify key patterns of agency strengths and concerns for the host county. The PQCR process uses peers from other counties to promote the exchange of best practice ideas within the host county and to peer reviewers. The peer reviewers provide objectivity to the process and serve as an immediate onsite training resource to the host county.

The Northern California Training Academy is supporting and coordinating the PQCR process with counties in Northern California. Sacramento County along with the more rural counties of El Dorado, Inyo, Lassen and Nevada are the first counties to pilot this process in 2005.

The Academy has gained a great deal of knowledge about the process of conducting PQCRs in rural counties from the pilot counties. This will support next year's process.

The PQCR process gives counties the opportunity to have cross-collaboration during this process and focus on continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of program outcomes. For more information contact Susan Brooks and/or Ellie Jones (CDSS).

Race Matters: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Child Welfare System

This new symposium incorporates a panel of four representatives of the Race Matters Consortium who will provide timely information on issues related to racial/ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare system. The event/seeks to be interactive in nature as participants will be encouraged to ask questions as well as share their own knowledge regarding how racial/ethnic disproportionality is being addressed throughout the country. For more information about the symposium, go to www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA Training Academy

Supporting Children & Family Services

About the Northern California Training Academy

The Northern California Training Academy provides training, technical assistance and consultation for 33 northern California counties. The counties include rural and urban counties with various training challenges for child welfare staff. The focus on integrated training across disciplines is a high priority in the region. This publication is supported by funds from the California Department of Social Services.



About The Center for Human Services

The Center began in 1979 with a small grant to train child welfare workers in northern California. It has grown to become an organization that offers staff development and professional services to public and private human service agencies throughout the state. The Center combines a depth of knowledge about human service agencies, a standard of excellence associated with the University of California, extensive experience in developing human resources and a deep dedication to public social services.

Northern California Training Academy
UC Davis Extension
University of California
1632 Da Vinci Court
Davis, CA 95616

Phone: (530) 757-8643
Fax: (530) 752-6910
Email: academy@unexmail.ucdavis.edu
Web: <http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy>