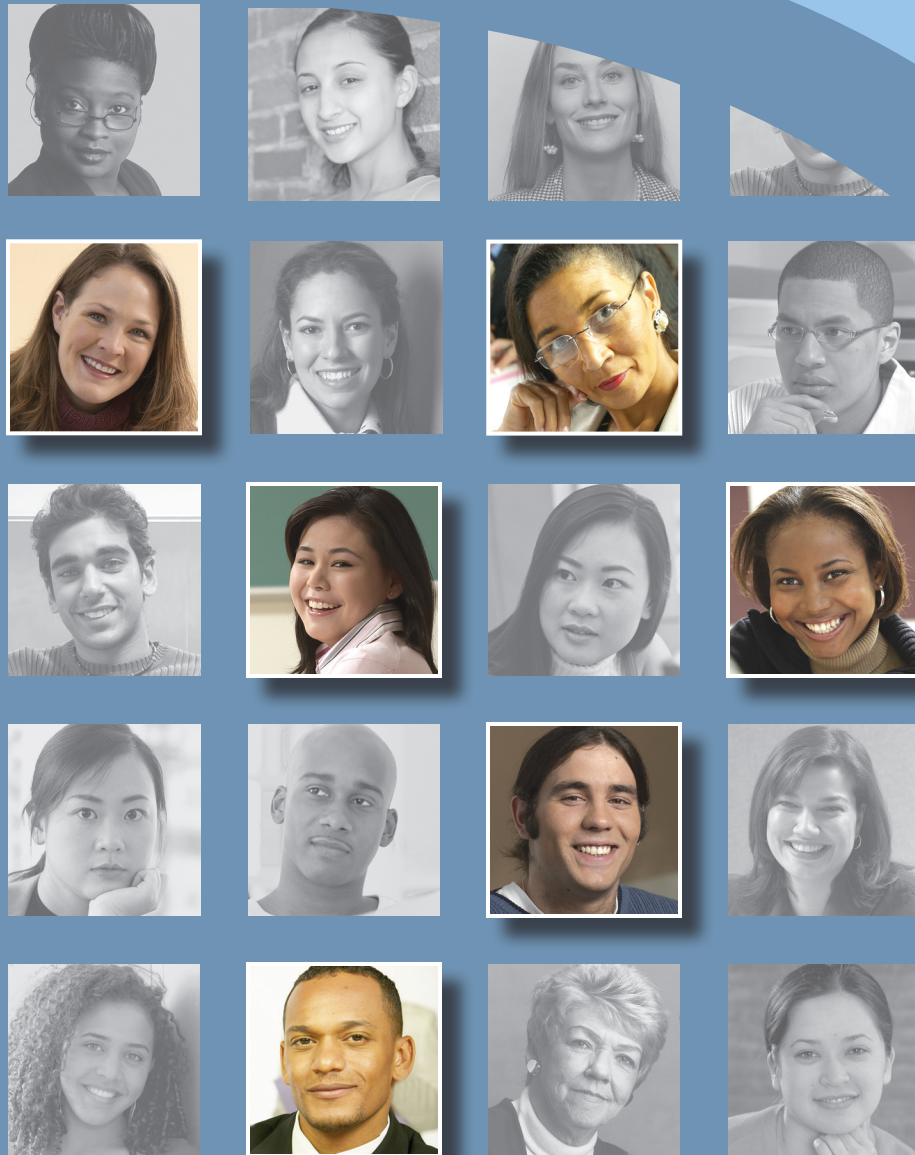


Staying Power! Selection Toolkit

Resources for Selecting Qualified Applicants
for Child Welfare Work



Child welfare...it takes a special kind of person.

Staying Power! Selection Toolkit

A Product of the R&R Project Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention An Evidence-Based Training Model

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Introduction

Public child welfare agencies were once desirable employment settings for professional staff; however, changes within the last twenty years have made public sector employment unappealing. Such changes include the de-professionalization of child welfare jobs, new employment opportunities in mental health and elsewhere, the attraction of lucrative private practice, and privatization of child welfare services. Additionally, the growth of the national workforce is increasingly lagging behind that of job growth, leading to a “sellers” market for skilled workers and making it even more difficult for child welfare agencies to recruit and hire a sufficient number of child welfare workers. As a result, the growing shortage of a competent and committed child welfare workforce is hampering the ability of agencies to provide essential services to vulnerable families and children.

While much has been written about retention strategies in child welfare, scant attention has been paid to systematic strategies for recruiting and selecting child welfare staff. Managers may feel that negative job aspects—inadequate salary and benefits, high workloads, unpleasant work environments, liability and safety issues—will overshadow any attempt to recruit and select qualified and committed workers. Yet, many competent workers remain in child welfare in spite of these negative aspects, and the reasons for their retention—commitment to the well-being of children, desire to help, and personal fulfillment—can be positively cultivated through distinctive recruitment and selection approaches.

Employing effective selection strategies requires job analyses, selection testing and competency-based interviewing approaches, which are often unfamiliar activities to child welfare administrators. Many supervisors and managers have little understanding of, or experience in, translating the complexities of child welfare work into a competency-based selection process that would match the best candidate with the job.

This monograph contains resources and materials that are intended to help child welfare supervisors and managers select qualified and committed child welfare workers. The **Selection Toolkit** contains a Realistic Job Preview DVD and a three-pronged competency based selection process. In a separate monograph, the **Recruitment Toolkit** presents a realistic recruitment strategy and includes such recruitment resources as public service announcements, recruitment flyers, posters and brochures, as well as a PowerPoint presentation for use in community settings. These resources and materials, together with **A Supervisor’s Guide to Child Welfare Staff Retention**, are the **Staying Power!** products of the *Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention Project*.

Acknowledgements

Most of the materials in this ***Staying Power! Selection Toolkit*** are taken from the Child Welfare Caseworker Competency Based Screening Resource Guide (2005), developed by the Child Welfare Training Institute at the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, Freda Bernotavicz, Project Director. The case studies are based on case materials originally developed by ACTION for Child Protection, <http://www.ACTIONChildProtection.org> Child welfare supervisors and managers in Buncombe County Department of Social Services provided guidance on how to apply North Carolina approaches to these case examples.

Because these are legal interview documents, the interview questions, case study materials and scoring guides are not included in this toolkit. When an agency wants to consider implementing this competency based selection process, they may contact one of the following programs for assistance with and training in this process:

- 1) North Carolina Child Welfare Workforce Collaborative Project, Selena Childs, Project Director (sbchilds@email.unc.edu)
- 2) Child Welfare Training Institute, University of Southern Maine, <http://www.cwti.org/RR/>

The Realistic Job Preview section contains original material developed for the *Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention Project. An Invitation to Choose: A Realistic Job Preview of North Carolina Child Welfare Work* was produced for the R&R Project by the North Carolina Campaigns for Kids, Diane Delafield, Director, and Julie Abbott, Producer. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of child welfare, medical and legal professionals in the North Carolina counties of Buncombe and Caldwell. Their honest and unscripted interviews about the challenges and rewards of child welfare work attest to the commitment of many to the well-being and safety of families, youth and children.

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Overview of the Selection Process

Background

Some estimates are that nearly 80% of turnover is due to hiring mistakes (Larson & Hewitt, 2005). That is, if agencies are able to select and hire the right people for the job, turnover would be reduced substantially and retention would increase.

Many North Carolina child welfare workers agree with this assertion. A total of 356 child welfare workers in 33 North Carolina departments of social services completed a web-based survey between May 31 and July 5, 2005. Workers who expressed their intent to leave their jobs within six months were significantly less likely to say they had been given an accurate portrayal of their jobs and less likely to feel there was a good match between their skills and their job duties (Dickinson, Painter, & Lee, 2007). In other words, when an applicant has a clear understanding of the characteristics of the job for which he or she is applying and when the agency selection team can be sure they are selecting the applicant who is the best match for that job, there is a greater likelihood that the applicant will become a worker who will remain on the job (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009).

When an applicant has a clear understanding of the characteristics of the job for which he or she is applying and when the agency selection team can be sure they are selecting the applicant who is the best match for that job, there is a greater likelihood that the applicant will become a worker who will remain on the job.

This ***Staying Power! Selection Toolkit*** is a product of *The Re&R Project: Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention: An Evidence-Based Training Model*, created by the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC School of Social Work. Funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau, the project's objective was the creation of resources that will help public child welfare directors and supervisors increase their ability to recruit, select, and retain a qualified and committed team of workers who understand and are prepared for child welfare work. This Selection Toolkit provides resources for screening, interviewing and hiring applicants for worker positions in public child welfare agencies.

Selection Process Outline

The selection process for child welfare workers consists of four components: Realistic Job Preview, Standard Interview, Fact-finding Interview, and Written Exercise.

Realistic Job Preview

(TIME = 33 MINUTES)

The first selection activity that a candidate participates in is watching a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) DVD entitled “An Invitation to Choose.” This RJP features interviews with actual public child welfare workers who talk about the challenges and rewards of their work, providing a balanced and realistic overview of day-to-day experiences in a variety of child welfare positions.

Preparation for Written Exercise

(TIME = 30 MINUTES)

Before being interviewed by the screening team, the candidate reviews a folder of materials about a typical case in child welfare and is told that he/she will have to write a case analysis at the end of the interview based on this case. The information in the folder is incomplete. In order to prepare an adequate case analysis, the candidate will need to gather more information. The candidate reviews the case material and takes notes in preparation for asking further questions.

Standard Interview

(TIME = 45 MINUTES)

During this first part of the interview, the team asks questions of the candidate in order to screen for competencies. The candidate is also given time to ask questions about the job.

Fact-finding Interview

(TIME = 15 MINUTES)

The second phase of the interview provides an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions about the incomplete case materials. These questions are directed to one individual on the interview team who has additional case information, while other team members observe and assess the process.

Written Exercise

(TIME = 30 MINUTES)

Finally, the candidate writes an analysis of the case based on both the materials provided in the folder and information gathered in the fact-finding session. This analysis can be written on a computer, in order to judge the candidate’s computer skills, or by hand. This analysis is then evaluated by the selection team for demonstration of certain competencies.

Time for the Selection Process

The candidate will be engaged in the process for a total of two hours and 33 minutes. The selection team will be directly engaged with the candidate for one hour. Additional time will be needed for scoring each candidate’s performance and, finally, for making the hiring decision.

Child Welfare Worker Entry-Level Competencies

A competency-based approach to selection gathers purposeful information from an applicant that will predict as accurately as possible how the applicant will behave on the job. The Child Welfare Training Institute in Maine (2005) has based their screening process on entry-level competencies that measure personal characteristics, such as attitudes, values and traits. They assert that these competencies: (1) are likely to predict long-term success on the job, (2) differentiate between average and outstanding performance, and (3) are most difficult to change through training and supervision. The rationale for this approach is that pre-service training programs for new hires in child welfare can teach how to recognize child abuse and neglect or fill out forms, for example, but it's more difficult to help new workers be flexible or change their attitudes about families.

The ten Maine competencies are a synthesis of those developed in 1995 to be used in the performance appraisal process, competencies shown in the literature to predict job retention, and emotional intelligence competencies. Since the Maine Child Welfare Training Institute refined these competencies over a period of several years, the R&R Project decided not to start from scratch with competency development. Instead, we conducted focus groups to determine how relevant the Maine competencies are for child welfare agencies in North Carolina. A total of 161 child welfare supervisors and workers in 7 project county agencies agreed that these ten competencies capture the personal characteristics, attitudes and values that entry level child welfare workers should possess in order to be well qualified for their jobs. Staff felt that all the competencies were important, that none should be omitted, and that no new ones should be added. Finally, these North Carolina child welfare staff were asked to indicate the level of importance of each competency, by placing a number from 1 to 3 by each competency statement, with 1 being Most Important, 2 Very Important and 3 Important. Maine did not prioritize the competencies, but they will be listed here in the order of their importance to North Carolina child welfare staff.

Child Welfare Worker Entry Level Competencies

This R&R Project selection process focuses on the following ten competencies:

1) **Interpersonal Relations:**

Awareness of others' feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns

- Shows respect and tolerance for each person
- Relates well to others
- Demonstrates trust, sensitivity and mutual respect
- Recognizes the contributions diversity brings to job performance
- Demonstrates altruistic empathy—caring for others

2) **Adaptability:**

Flexibility in handling change

- Handles day-to-day challenges confidently
- Is willing to adjust to multiple demands, shifting priorities, ambiguity and rapid change
- Shows resilience in the face of constraints, frustrations or adversity
- Is able to adapt styles and shift gears
- Shows evidence of coping skills
- Innovation: comfortable with new ideas; open to new information

3) **Communication Skills:**

Open clear communication

- Speaks clearly and expresses self well
- Demonstrates attentive listening
- Conveys information clearly and effectively through written documents

4) **Observation Skills:**

Ability to describe events factually and accurately

- Is able to observe and identify key elements
- Recognizes inconsistencies
- Provides accurate and factual descriptions

5) **Planning and Organizing Work:**

Ordering activities to achieve goals

- Is able to assess/reprioritize
- Uses time management tools
- Defines and arranges activities in a logical and efficient manner

6) **Analytic Thinking:**

Using data to understand patterns and develop concepts

- Possesses information gathering skills
- Uses a range of sources
- Is able to formulate hypotheses

- Looks beyond superficial explanations
- Is able to make sound decisions

7) **Motivation:**

Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals

- Commitment: aligns with the goals of the agency
- Achievement: strives to improve, drives for results and success
- Sets high standards of performance
- Displays a high level of effort and commitment to performing the work
- Optimism: persists in pursuing goals

8) **Self Awareness/Confidence:**

Knows own internal states, preferences, resources and limitations

- Accurate self-assessment: knows own strengths and limits
- Self-confidence: has a strong sense of self worth and capabilities
- Emotional awareness: recognizes own emotions and their effects

9) **Sense of Mission:**

Commitment to the welfare of others

- Shows some evidence of child welfare knowledge and/or experience
- Has clear values/beliefs about protecting children and preserving families consistent with North Carolina's Multiple Response System approach
- Desires to make things better for others

10) **Teamwork:**

Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals

- Contributes to organizational goals
- Fosters collaboration among team members and among teams

Child Welfare Worker Competency Assessment

No one part of the selection process measures each competency. The Standard Interview, Fact-finding Interview and Written Exercise, together, insure that each competency is measured at least twice, as illustrated in the table below.

Competency	Standard Interview	Fact-finding Interview	Written Exercise
1. Interpersonal Relations	X	X	
2. Adaptability	X	X	
3. Communication Skills	X	X	X
4. Observation Skills		X	X
5. Planning & Organizing		X	X
6. Analytic Thinking	X	X	X
7. Motivation	X	X	
8. Self Awareness/Confidence	X	X	
9. Sense of Mission	X		X
10. Teamwork	X		X

This assessment approach is the basis of the Child Welfare Worker Selection Rating Sheet. On this sheet, selection team members assign scores to each competency based on the performance of each candidate in two or more selection areas.

The Selection Team

Departments of social services may have selection teams made up of different numbers of people with different roles in the agency. Using a panel of at least two interviewers can help reduce biases and increase the variety of observations and judgments used to score the each applicant's competencies.

The following hints to the selection team will further strengthen and standardize the selection process.

Roles

Prior to each interview, the following decisions should be made:

- Which team member will begin the round of questioning in the Standard Interview?
- How will questioning rotate throughout the team?
- Who will be responsible for recording the candidate's fact-finding questions?
- Who will play the role of resource person during the Fact-finding Interview?

Timing

Have a clock that is visible to all team members, or synchronize watches so that each team member is aware of the time. If a candidate's responses are particularly long, you may prompt the person to focus their answers by reminding them that the interview is designed to take 45 minutes.

Standard Interview Questions

The questions on the Standard Interview script should be asked in order. The suggested follow-up questions do not have to be used if team members feel that the candidate's response to a particular question is adequate. If additional information is required, the follow-ups will serve as prompts to the candidate. During the course of the interview, a candidate may say something you want to know more about. In this case, it is acceptable to ask follow-up questions not found in the interview script. However, be conscious of the time.

Documentation

Interviewers should make notes during the interview for use when rating the candidate. These notes become the justification for rating of candidates and, thus, your comments on the rating sheet should correspond to the notes on your interview script. In your comments, note evidence of the competencies, as well as the content of the response. It's not necessary to record everything that the candidate says—just focus on the key points. All documentation will become part of the employment records.

Administrative Roles

Support

An individual in the agency needs to be responsible for greeting each candidate, showing the candidate to the room where they will view the RJP and review the case materials. This support person will also administer and then collect the written exercise and case materials. Finally, this person will bring the candidate into the interview room and introduce them to the selection team in an effort to put the candidate at ease before they begin answering interview questions.

Coordinator

One person on each interview panel should be the designated timekeeper and record-keeper. Duties entail monitoring the time of both the 45-minute Standard Interview and the 15-minute Fact-finding Interview, as well as collecting the rating materials and the recorded fact-finding questions from the team members. The Coordinator would also be responsible for keeping the selection team on task.

Role of the coordinator in final discussion procedures: to achieve consistency, the team should strive for consensus scoring rather than average scoring.

Coordinator finds a time as soon as possible after the interview to bring the whole team back together to discuss the candidate's performance:

- Review ratings on each of the exercises (Standard Interview, Fact-finding Interview, Written Exercise)
- Discuss performance in each exercise until all questions are answered
- Individually review numerical rating for each exercise
- The Coordinator seeks consensus for ratings of each competency/exercise
- Team members change their individual scores based on the final consensus of the Selection Team
- The Coordinator collects all materials in order to develop the final rating on the candidate
- The Coordinator fills out the final rating sheet and gives it to the person responsible for keeping documentation on the selection process

Selection Process Checklist

The Selection Process Checklist identifies all of the tasks that selection team members and support personnel will need to accomplish for a successful selection process.

Common Errors in Employment Interviews

Everyone has biases and false assumptions that influence their judgment. When interviewing, it is important to minimize these influences so that each candidate is evaluated as fairly and accurately as possible. Reduction of these influences begins by identifying errors associated with the selection process. The following are some common sources of selection error.

Inconsistent Interview Administration

When interviewers fail to cover material consistently with each applicant, they may give one applicant an advantage over another. For example, one candidate may be given more time. In order to be fair to all candidates (and to conduct a legally defensible interview), the selection protocol should be followed consistently for all candidates. This includes issues such as timing and covering the same questions in the same order during the Standard Interview. In the Fact-finding Interview, it is essential that the Resource Person divulge **ONLY** the information provided. Interviewers should never “invent” information about the case.

Contrasting Applicants

This occurs when an interviewer compares one applicant to another, rather than to objective criteria which should have been defined before the interview began. For example, if an average candidate is being interviewed and all previous interviewees were poor performers, the candidate may be given an excellent rating because the candidate is excellent in comparison to the other applicants. In terms of ability to perform the job, however, the candidate is average.

EXAMPLE OF CONTRAST ERROR

“Sophie’s answer wasn’t perfect, but I think I will give it a high rating. In comparison to all other applicants, she was the first one to come close to giving a plausible answer.”

Stereotyping

Sometimes interviewers use stereotypes or labels when evaluating applicants. This can result in (1) matching people to jobs based on traditional race or gender roles, or (2) hiring people who are similar to the interviewer in background instead of based on their ability to do the job.

EXAMPLE OF STEREOTYPING

“Jim and Sue are both excellent candidates for the job, but I think I will hire Sue because she is an Orono graduate. I went to Orono and I know she’ll fit into our office.”

Closure

If an interviewer does not have enough information about someone, they are likely to make a complete picture by adding information that may be questionable until a final judgment is possible. Consequently, an interviewer expecting a good interview answer will typically fill in the desired response when the candidate has not provided enough information. Likewise, an interviewer expecting a poor answer from the same candidate will likely fill in an incorrect response. To avoid this bias, the interviewer should try, as much as possible, to steer clear of preconceived ideas and use as many questions and probes as necessary to ensure that all relevant information is elicited from the candidate.

EXAMPLE OF CLOSURE

“I am not exactly sure if Bill covered all the important points in his response. His answers were excellent in the previous section, though, so he probably had the right idea. I’ll give him full marks.”

Halo and Pitchfork Effect

This term describes the situation when an interviewer allows a general impression or one particular characteristic of a candidate to affect all evaluations of the individual. Some interviewers will consistently rate some individuals higher or lower than others, not because of actual differences in performance but because of a general impression of the individuals. For example, an applicant who is well dressed, groomed immaculately, and an engaging conversationalist may impress raters to such an extent that they may be overly generous in their evaluation of the candidate. Or a candidate may respond poorly to the first two questions out of nervousness, with the result that the interviewers fail to rate fairly their responses to subsequent questions. It is important to rate each question and each component of the selection process on its own merits.

EXAMPLE OF HALO EFFECT

“Even before we started asking questions I could tell that Jim would be a great employee. I was really impressed with how he greeted the selection team and the way he was dressed. I know he will be perfect for the job.”

Responsibility Error

When assessing performance, we often view failure or success as a result of personal factors rather than a result of factors outside the control of the individual. Blame or praise is given to the individual rather than taking into account the circumstance surrounding the behavior. For example, a project that an applicant directed may have been cut due to insufficient funding rather than the quality of the work. Nevertheless, the applicant is seen less positively for failure to complete a project.

EXAMPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY ERROR

“According to Ruth’s resume, she has worked for over 8 years in her job and never was promoted. She couldn’t possibly be a good employee if she is still in the same job after all those years.”

Leniency Error

Some interviewers are reluctant to give candidates a poor rating. This error gives poor candidates an advantage.

Central Tendency Error

Some raters tend to score a candidate using the middle points of a scale, avoiding the positive and negative extremes. This is the safe rating, since no one receives a particularly good or particularly bad rating. The normal impact of this type of error is that it negatively affects particularly good performers while being overly generous with poor performers.

Interviewing Tips

- 1) Allow the applicant to do most of the talking, actively listen to what the applicant is saying.
- 2) Do not show surprise or disapproval in response to any of the applicant's answers.
- 3) Use silence, head nodding, and similar tactics to encourage the applicant to continue his or her answers.
- 4) Use empathic statements (e.g. "That sounds like a difficult experience you had") when the applicant describes a difficult situation that he or she has encountered.
- 5) Avoid arguing with the applicant over the answers he or she provides; conversely, avoid coaxing the answers you want out of the applicant.
- 6) Avoid using nonverbal cues (e.g., moving forward when you are starting to listen carefully) that may signal the applicant that he or she is relaying some negative information.
- 7) Maintain occasional eye contact with the applicant and a pleasant facial expression. Be polite; avoid interrupting the applicant unless absolutely necessary.

Copies should be made for Selection Team members to review before the Standard Interview begins.

Instructions to the Candidates

This selection process has five major components.

- 1) **Watching the DVD, “An Invitation to Choose.”** You will watch this 33 minute Realistic Job Preview (RJP) at one of three points in the selection process: (1) before you complete an application to work in child welfare, (2) before your job interview, or (3) when you are considering a job offer. This RJP features unrehearsed interviews with actual public child welfare workers who talk openly about both the challenges and the rewards of their work, providing a balanced and realistic overview of day-to-day experiences in a variety of public child welfare positions. The RJP also depicts a fictional situation for demonstration purposes only. You may decide after viewing the RJP that child welfare work is not what you want to do. You may withdraw your application at any point without consequences.
- 2) **Review of Case Materials.** You will be given written information on a child welfare case. You will have 30 minutes to read the materials in the folder, make notes and think about additional information you want to have as you make plans for this family. These materials are intentionally missing some information. You may write on these materials as you wish.
- 3) **Standard Interview.** The first part of the interview will be a standard employment interview. You will be asked questions by a selection team to help determine how your knowledge and experience fit the job. You will also have a chance to ask the team questions about the job. This part of the process will last 45 minutes.
- 4) **Fact-Finding Interview.** In this part of the interview process, you will be able to ask a resource person on the team any questions about the family in the case you reviewed. The resource person has information about the family which you can learn by asking specific questions. If your questions are too general, you will be asked to make them more specific. You must phrase your questions to elicit facts and information about the family and not about casework methodology or about non-family case members. This interview will last 15 minutes.
- 5) **Written Exercise.** After your Fact-finding Interview, you will have 30 minutes to write important facts about the case and a brief list of recommendations for further action.

Blank case analysis sheets are provided in the packet of materials for your responses. Please return all of the materials in the folder, along with all of your notes.

Schedule Summary

The five major components of the selection process take approximately two and a half hours to complete. Below is the schedule and length of time for each component.

View RJP	33 minutes	You watch the Realistic Job Preview DVD and decide whether or not to continue with your application for or acceptance of an offer for a child welfare worker position.
Review Case Materials	30 minutes	You review the case materials, make notes and prepare questions.
Interview with Team	45 minutes	You are interviewed by the county selection team.
Follow-up	15 minutes	You interview the resource person on the selection team and obtain the information you need to complete the written exercise.
Review Notes & Write Summary	30 minutes	You review your notes and write information and recommendations.

Realistic Job Preview

Realistic job previews (RJP) are both recruitment and selection activities which are used to prevent inflated expectations and ward off newcomer dissatisfaction (Popovich & Wanous, 1982). RJP strategies include written approaches, such as brochures and photograph albums or scrapbooks; verbal information, such as panel presentations and meetings with current staff; experiential activities, such as job shadowing or internships; and audio/visual techniques, such as radio interviews or videos (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009). Whatever the strategy, an effective RJP includes information about both positive and challenging aspects of the job so that a potential applicant can make an informed decision about whether or not to begin or continue with the application process. While child welfare supervisors may be reluctant to disclose fully the difficulties of child welfare work—especially when the applicant pool is small—research shows significant relationships between RJPs and the retention rates of new hires (McERvoy & Cascio, 1985). Additionally, research information from child welfare workers in 33 North Carolina counties during 2005-2006 indicates that workers who had an unrealistic understanding of child welfare work and felt unprepared for the job were likely to intend to leave the profession, whereas workers who had realistic job expectations were prone to plan on staying on the job.

In the R&R Project, the RJP was used as a job-candidate selection tool that provides applicants information about the job they are considering. Providing an accurate picture of both positive and negative aspects of the job allows applicants to make an informed decision about whether or not to continue with their application.

The R&R Project developed a DVD featuring 33 minutes of interviews with North Carolina child welfare workers, who talk openly about both the challenges and rewards of their work, providing a balanced and realistic overview of day-to-day experiences in a variety of public child welfare positions. The RJP is located on this CD.

While no one can fully understand the profession of public child welfare before actually working in the field, this RJP, called *An Invitation to Choose*, redresses many unrealistic career expectations which a prospective job applicant might have.

RJP Implementation Strategies

An Invitation to Choose is designed to be used in one of three different ways during the selection process, depending on an agency's individual needs and characteristics.

Screening Tool

Before completing an application for a child welfare position, applicants can be required to view the RJP, affording them a better understanding of the profession and an opportunity to self-select into or out of the application process at an early stage. There are several ways that this can occur:

- The RJP can be linked to an agency website that instructs interested applicants to watch before completing an application.

- For agencies that don't require online applications, the RJP can be checked out for home viewing or mailed to applicants before they can turn in completed applications.
- The county employment office can set up showings of the RJP before applications are accepted.

Interview Tool

While preparing for an interview, an applicant for a child welfare position may be required to view the RJP, either individually or in a group. The applicant may then choose to withdraw from the selection process at this point or proceed with the interview. Those who proceed can then ask informed questions based on the RJP. The interview team can also refer to the RJP for questions and discussion points. Sample questions are included below.

Decision Tool

While considering a job offer, an applicant may be required to view the RJP before making a decision about whether or not to accept the offer. The rationale for this approach is that those applicants who are close to making a decision about a job will pay close attention to information that is helpful in their decision-making process.

Using the RJP

Whichever way that agencies choose to implement the RJP, it is important for the agency's selection team to be prepared to answer questions that may occur about child welfare work. A list of frequently asked questions and answers is included in the RJP DVD folder. These questions and answers could be distributed as a flyer to viewers of the RJP and then further discussed in the standard interview.

The extent to which applicants ask and answer questions relative to the RJP during the interview process provides some insight into a candidate's entry-level competencies, especially in the areas of self-awareness, analytic thinking, observational skills, and sense of mission.

RJP Follow Up Questions

Some of the following questions about the RJP could be asked of the applicant at the beginning of the Standard Interview.

- 1) After seeing the RJP, what impression do you have about child welfare work?
- 2) What concerns do you have about public child welfare?
- 3) What examples from the RJP appealed to you about working in public child welfare?
- 4) Which worker position was most attractive to you?
- 5) Which worker position was least appealing?
- 6) What questions do you have as a result of watching the RJP?

Standard Interview

The selection process—screening, interviewing, and hiring new employees—is an opportunity for the selection team to choose from among all of the possible candidates the child welfare worker who is the best match for the job (Dickinson & Comstock, 2009). The process also allows each applicant to assess the child welfare agency. Consequently, there needs to be a balance between standardization in the interview process and creating a warm and inviting climate, so that the candidate feels that this will be a good place to work.

BEGIN

Begin the standard interview process by greeting the candidate warmly and introducing the selection team members by their names and positions in the agency. In the Written Instructions to Candidates, the three-part process of the interview and the time schedule are outlined. You may wish to refer to these instructions and ask if the candidate has any questions about the process.

EXPLAIN

Explain that this part of the selection process includes a set of standard questions that will take about 35 minutes, allowing time for the candidate to ask questions of the selection team. Then there will be 15 minutes allowed for the Fact Finding Interview.

ASK

The questions for the Standard Interview are available from the University of North Carolina or the University of Southern Main. In addition there is a Scoring Guide for each question which gives examples of poor, average and outstanding responses. Follow-up questions are also available, in case selection team members feel the need for more information. These questions are suggested, not required.

Also available are some alternate questions that selection teams may wish to use as substitutes for some of the regular questions in the Standard Interview or as questions for a second interview. Scoring Guides are also available for these questions.

Confidentiality

Interviewing and hiring child welfare applicants is a legal process, and all applicants should be treated fairly and consistently. All interview questions and materials should be maintained in a confidential and secure location and only shared with appropriate staff.

Case Study

The case study materials contain the following:

- 1) Background on administering the case study. This is background information for the Selection Team.
- 2) Case Material: There are two cases. One set of case materials needs to be copied for each candidate. HOWEVER, the first page of each case describes the order in which the materials are to be copied. This is for administrative purposes only and is NOT to be copied for the candidate.

Administering the Case Study

After the candidate watches the Realistic Job Preview DVD, take him or her to a quiet room and provide a folder with the case study materials, Outline of Case Analysis and Instructions to the Candidate. Give the applicant 30 minutes to review the information and prepare for the Fact-finding Interview.

Alternate Versions of the Case

There are two sets of case study materials. To maintain the validity of the process, and prevent applicants from becoming familiar with a case and thereby having an advantage, it is important that a selection team alternate the cases periodically.

Order of the Case Materials

The case study materials are intentionally provided out of chronological order so that the candidate's organizational ability can be assessed. Please make sure to follow the assigned order for each of the cases when you give the package to the candidate. The first page is for your reference only. Do not copy it for the candidate.

Written Exercise

Since using a personal computer is now such an important part of the child welfare worker job, it is suggested that each candidate be provided with a computer for the written exercise.

Materials

When the candidate has completed the Written Exercise, collect all materials including handwritten notes. Do not change the order of the Case Study materials.

Outline of Case Analysis

Primary Risk Factors

Current Family Strengths

Recommendations

Behaviors that need to change:

Activities that will begin to address behaviors:

Fact-Finding Interview

Instructions on the Fact-finding Interview

The purpose of the Fact-Finding Interview is to assess the candidate's ability to ask questions, think on their feet and identify information necessary to write an analysis of and recommendations on the case. The role of the Resource Person is to provide information when the candidate asks questions. The other selection team members observe the candidate's performance and screen for competencies. The Resource Person needs to review the background information prior to the interview, not to learn all the information but to know where it is located. The role of Resource Person can be rotated among team members. At least one other team member should write down the applicant's questions in order to have a record.

Transitioning to the Fact-Finding Interview

Following the 45-minute Standard Interview, the Coordinator should say the following:

“The Standard Interview is now over. It is your turn to ask questions about the family case that you reviewed prior to the interview in order to get ready for the written exercise. You have 15 minutes to ask questions of the Resource Person. I will let you know when the time is up. This is your Resource Person.”

Tips for the Resource Person

The role of the Resource Person is to answer the candidate's questions, using only the information provided. Do not invent information.

Provide information verbatim by reading from the data you have. Try to avoid being overly restrictive or coy with the information or misleading with the answers. As a general rule, all of the information under each sub-heading should be provided to respond to a specific question. Do not volunteer unsolicited information.

Ending the Fact-Finding Interview

At the end of 15 minutes, the Coordinator states:

“Your time is now up. You will have 30 minutes to write your analysis and recommendations.”

Thank the candidate and show him or her to the space where they can work.

Rating of Candidates

Overview

The components of the selection process should be rated separately using the rating sheet provided. To save time and capture an accurate assessment, selection team members should rate each candidate's performance on both the Standard and Fact-finding interviews immediately after the interviews have finished and while the candidate is completing the Written Exercise.

Consult Notes, Scoring Guides and Behaviors for Rating Competencies

In rating candidates, team members should review their notes, referring to the materials and scoring guides on competencies and the section on Behaviors to Look for When Rating Competencies. There are also separate Scoring Guides for the Standard Interview, Fact-finding Interview, Communications Skills and the Written Exercise. It is important to have evidence to support the scoring.

Complete the Child Welfare Worker Selection Rating Sheet

Selection Team members should use the Rating Sheet to record their numerical scores.

Arrive at a Consensus Score

If there is wide variation among the scores given by the team members, it is recommended that the team engage in a consensus discussion in order to arrive at a more consistent score. In this process, team members refer back to their notes and memories to identify specific examples of behaviors to support the ratings. Team members change their individual scores based on the final consensus of the Selection Team as a group.

Complete the Child Welfare Worker Summary Selection Rating Sheet

The Selection Team Coordinator writes the consensus score for each competency in the appropriate blank square on the Summary Selection Rating Sheet. The Summary Composite Score is calculated and becomes the final score for each candidate.

Behaviors to Look for when Rating Competencies

This guide is also a handout suitable for each selection team member to use in rating a candidate's performance.

1) Interpersonal Relations

Standard Interview:

- Makes appropriate eye contact
- Demonstrates appropriate boundaries
- Expression of ideas and feelings
- Acknowledgement of others' feelings and perspective

Fact-finding Interview:

- Questioning techniques are neither too forceful nor too timid
- Shows respect or empathy with clients in the case

2) Adaptability

Standard Interview:

- Ability to compromise during conflict situations
- Ability to cope with stressful situations
- Ability to play a number of roles or quickly redefine their roles in crisis situations

Fact-finding Interview:

- Ability to abandon an unproductive line of questioning
- Quickly assimilating new information elicited through questions
- Ability to respond to information provided by resource person

3) Communication Skills

Standard Interview:

- Ability to express self clearly and appropriately (choice of vocabulary, appropriate grammar, etc.)
- Demonstrates good listening skills (e.g. restating or summarizing question, checking back to see if answer was responsive to the question)

Fact-finding Interview:

- Ability to articulate questions and to listen to information provided
- Ability to use a variety of questioning techniques to elicit information

Written Exercise:

- Clear, concise analysis and recommendations (word choice, grammar, and organization of information)

4) Observation Skills

Fact-finding Interview:

- Ability to track on information, to follow through on a potentially important piece of information
- Ability to pick up key facts and disregard extraneous information

Written Exercise:

- Provides correct information (including number of key facts about the case)
- Accurate and detailed descriptions of the family in the case
- Ability to identify and highlight key elements in the case

5) Planning and Organizing

Fact-finding Interview:

- Uses a checklist or some form of organizer for questions
- Persistence and thoroughness in following through on questions and tracking down information
- Does not get frustrated or give up easily
- Shows awareness of time
- Makes full use of time available

Written Exercise:

- Ability to complete task on time
- Recommendations that include the setting of goals
- Ability to organize information logically

6) Analytic Thinking

Standard Interview:

- Answers reflect insight and thoughtfulness
- Ability to develop hypothesis regarding situations

Fact-finding Interview:

- Logical approach to questioning (evidence of a framework or plan, not a “scatter-shot” approach)
- Ability to synthesize information
- Looks beyond superficial explanations
- Picks up clues and follows up with questions
- Questions focus on the facts of the case and the situation of the family, not on the previous casework or the system

Written Exercise:

- Ability to develop a whole picture of the family
- Hypothesis formation about the family and their situation rather than just a regurgitation of the information they have read and heard
- Ability to group information into topic areas
- Analysis and recommendations focus on the facts of the case

7) Motivation

Standard Interview:

- Responses reflect setting high standards for self and making efforts to live up to them
- Shows persistence in reaching goals
- Expresses support for organizational mission in answers related to work experience

Fact-finding Interview:

- Shows effort and persistence
- Keeps trying to get more information about the case
- Does not give up easily
- Seems to enjoy the challenge of tracking down information

8) Self-awareness/Confidence

Standard Interview:

- Ability to reflect on past behaviors and the impact they may have had on self and others
- Knowledge of own strengths and challenges
- Strong sense of self worth/self efficacy
- How candidate responded to conflict with authority, wrong decisions, crisis situation
- Evidence of reflecting and/or learning from experience

Fact-finding Interview:

- Ability to ask questions and to redirect without becoming flustered

9) Sense of Mission

Standard Interview:

- Firm values/beliefs about protecting children and preserving families
- Evidence of taking active school/community/social role in activities related to children and families

Written Exercise:

- Analysis and recommendations reflect knowledge of child welfare field, family dynamics, issues related to substance abuse, mental health, etc.
- Looks for strengths in family and support system

10) Teamwork

Standard Interview:

- Answers include examples of contributing to and supporting organizational goals
- Draws on other resources in scenario questions (i.e. police, supervisor, neighbors)

Written Exercise:

- Recommendations include bringing people together to support the family and protect the child

Reference Checks

Background

The reference check is the final step in the selection process and needs to adhere to the same standards as the rest of the process: job-related, competency-based, and consistent. Reference checking is a critical tool in collecting information about the candidate's past behavior on the job that can predict how they will perform as a child welfare worker. It also provides information about how the candidate performs within a real work setting, including work habits, reliability, attendance and relationship to their supervisor.

Inform applicants in advance that you will be conducting reference and background checks and may ask each applicant to sign a waiver granting permission for former employers to release job-related information.

To maintain consistency in the reference checking process, there is also a format for conducting a reference check. Written references are generally unreliable and yield little useful information since employers are often unwilling to commit any negative information to paper. It is therefore recommended that agencies conduct a telephone reference check using the interview guide provided in this section. Also included are some tips for effective reference checking interviews.

The most reliable sources are people who have had the best opportunity recently to observe the candidate in the types of duties and responsibilities they would face on the job. Supervisors are typically the best people to ask for references. If the candidate is unwilling to have you contact the current supervisor because they don't know the candidate is looking for another job, explain that any job offer will be contingent upon a reference check with the current supervisor. Try to avoid personal references (clergy, friends, teachers) since they are less reliable in providing job-related information.

Tips for Effective Reference-Checking Interviews

- 1) Plan and ask the same questions of each reference source.
- 2) When contacting the reference, identify yourself and your position; give the name of the candidate and the reasons for your call. Explain how long the questions might be.
- 3) Before asking questions, describe the job and the competencies you are seeking; then make sure the questions are all job related.
- 4) Start with general basic questions and transition into more specific performance-based questions.
- 5) Develop behavioral questions based on job competencies that are included in the job description.
- 6) Ask the reference if they think the candidate will perform these behaviors successfully and seek specific examples from past performance.
- 7) Ask open-ended, rather than yes/no, questions, to collect more information on the candidate.
- 8) Use follow-up questions for clarity and thoroughness.
- 9) Try to obtain job-related facts and relevant information based on past behavior and experiences, rather than opinions. Ask for examples of specific incidents.
- 10) Be alert to signs of evasiveness, unusual pauses or even overly enthusiastic responses.
- 11) Know what laws protect candidates against discrimination. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and other laws suggest certain questions that should be avoided when reference checking, such as questions concerning age, race, sex, religion or national origin.
- 12) Ask if you can call back if you have additional questions.
- 13) Ask for names of other reference sources.
- 14) Thank the reference for their time and cooperation.

Reference Checking Questionnaire

Child Welfare Worker

Candidate's Name	Position being considered for	Date
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Reference (person contacted)	Title
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Organization	Telephone Number
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_____ has been interviewed for the position of _____, and has given your name as a reference. This position involves(give brief overview of the specific worker position).

How long have you known the applicant? In what capacity (supervisor, friend, co-worker)?

Do you believe that the candidate has the ability to assume this position? Please comment.

What are the candidate's major job strengths?

What are the challenges?

Would you rehire him/her? ____ Yes ____ No

Who else should I talk to about the candidate's job performance?

What other information do you feel I should consider in evaluating this candidate?

What concerns or reservations do you have about this candidate?

Additional Reference Check Questions

Questions to verify employment facts provided by the applicant (particularly useful when talking to personnel departments):

- 1) Please verify the dates of employment: from _____ to _____
- 2) What type of work did she/he do? What was his/her title?
- 3) Did he/she hold other positions? If so, what were the other titles?
- 4) What were his/her reasons for leaving the job?
- 5) Has disciplinary action ever been taken against this candidate? ____Yes ____No
Please explain.
- 6) Did the candidate abide by the attendance policy at your agency? ____Yes ____ No
Please explain.

Rating of competencies

Please rate the candidate on the following skills/characteristics from 1 to 5, where 1=poor and 5=superior:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| _____ Interpersonal Skills | _____ Analytic Thinking |
| _____ Adaptability | _____ Motivation |
| _____ Communication Skills | _____ Self Awareness/Confidence |
| _____ Observation Skills | _____ Sense of Mission |
| _____ Planning and Organizing | _____ Teamwork |

Questions related to competencies

Interpersonal Relations: Does the candidate show awareness of other peoples' feelings, needs and concerns? Does the candidate care for other people?

Adaptability: Is the candidate flexible in handling change? Does the candidate have resiliency and good coping skills?

Communication Skills: How would you rate the person's written and verbal skills? Is the candidate a good listener?

Observation Skills: Is the candidate able to describe events factually and to recognize what was important?

Planning and Organizing: How does the candidate follow procedures, work through channels, prioritize, manage a heavy workload?

Analytic Thinking: Does the candidate use data to understand patterns, develop concepts and make decisions?

Motivation: Is the candidate committed to the goals of your agency? Does the candidate set high standards of performance? Show persistence?

Self Awareness/Confidence: Does the candidate show accurate self assessment? Self-confidence? Does the candidate have awareness of their own emotions?

Sense of Mission: Is the candidate committed to the welfare of others and to making things better for others? What are the candidate's values/beliefs about protecting children and preserving families?

Teamwork: Does the candidate work well with others? How does the candidate handle problems or conflicts? Is she/he helpful to others in the unit?

Other questions

Dependability: Does the candidate show up on time? Get work done? Can the person be relied on?

Authority: How does the candidate accept direction? How do they get along with a supervisor?

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THE R&R PROJECT

Child Welfare Staff
Recruitment & Retention
An Evidence-Based Training Model

Retention of well-qualified and committed child welfare workers has become a national crisis. In 2003, the US Children's Bureau funded the Jordan Institute for Families to conduct The R&R Project to help increase retention rates of child welfare workers in North Carolina.

The R&R Project identifies and implements strategies that influence recruitment, selection and retention of workers who will understand and embrace the challenges and opportunities of child welfare work.

This *Staying Power!* Selection Toolkit contains resources developed by The R&R Project to help directors and supervisors be able to hire those applicants who are right for the job of public child welfare work.

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