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The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work
PA Child Welfare Resource Center

Charting the Course towards Permanency for Children in Pennsylvania

Module 1:

Introduction to Pennsylvania's Child Welfare System

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Learning Objectives

- Recognize the purpose of the Charting the Course curriculum, its organization, and procedures leading to the direct service worker certificate.
- Examine the Pennsylvania child welfare system, its mission, vision, practice principles and guidelines.
- Identify key federal and state laws and regulations that govern Child Welfare Practice in Pennsylvania.

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Agenda

- Introduction to Charting the Course Towards Permanency For Children In Pennsylvania;
- Introduction to Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice;
- Federal and Pennsylvania Laws and Regulations; and
- Summary.

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Collaborative Partnership of The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program

- The Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators
- Department of Human Service's Office of Children, Youth and Families
- The University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work

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Charting the Course Towards Permanency for Children in Pennsylvania Modules

- Module 1: Introduction to Pennsylvania's Child Welfare System   (1 day)
- Module 2: Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect   (2 days)
- Module 3: Using Interactional Helping Skills to Achieve Lasting Change   (3 days)
- Module 4: In-Home Safety Assessment and Management   (3 days)
- Module 5: Risk Assessment   (2 days)
- Module 6: Case Planning with Families   (2 days)

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Charting the Course Towards Permanency for Children in Pennsylvania Modules, (cont'd)

- Module 7: The Court Process   (1day)
- Module 8: Assessing Safety in Out-of-Home Care   (2 days)
- Module 9: Out of Home Placement and Permanency Planning   (3 days)
- Module 10: Making Connections to Professional Development   (1 day)

Total Days: 20 days
Total Hours: 120 hours

Families First (Caseworker Job Preview 2013)

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Historical Outcomes of Good Intentions

"I would give a hundred worlds like this", wrote one child from her new comfortable home, "if I could see my mother".

- Orphan Trains from 1854 to 1929, carried up to 200,000 children away from their parents and families.
- From 1870 to 1920's over 100,000 Native American Children were forced by the U.S. Government into Christian Boarding Schools.

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Historical Outcomes of Good Intentions, (cont'd)

- In the 1970's, 20 to 25% of Native American children removed from their homes were placed in non-Native American homes.
- In Minnesota, one of every four Native American children under age one was removed from home and adopted by a non-Native American couple."
- African American and Native American children represented 8% of the population, yet they represented "50% of the children in long-term foster care." (2004)
- African American children are more likely:
  - To come into contact with the system,
  - To be placed in out of home care, and
  - To have longer stays in out of home care than Caucasian children.

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Potential Biases

- Bias against biological parents and extended family members – seeing them as unworthy, guilty, damaged or incapable of change.
- Bias against single parents, gay, lesbian birth and resource parents.
- Valuing the comfort of the status quo versus the work and effort involved in implementing a service plan designed to maintain or reunify a child with his or her family.
- Favoring a resource/foster/kinship-provider over the birth parents or extended family.
- Favoring a particular program in which an agency or professional invested time or collaborated with vs. the birth parents' comfort or preferences.
- Other dubious motives/biases such as obtaining gratification from the power and drama inherent in child protection.

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Today's Child Welfare Practice Challenges

- Reject the practice of imposing values and biases on children and families;
- Resist focusing on what is "wrong" with clients and identifying how to fix them; and
- Form "protective partnerships" with parents and families to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

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Comparison of Approaches

Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Approach	Traditional Approach
1. Identify what the client wants.	1. Diagnose the problem.
2. Let the client tell you who he or she is.	2. Gather all available information in order to classify the client.
3. The client is the "expert" about his or her life.	3. The professional is the expert.
4. Identify client strengths that can be used to promote client goals.	4. Identify the web of causality that is supporting the client problem.
5. The professional collaborates with the client to help the client identify ways to accomplish goals.	5. The professional develops a service plan that the client is expected to follow in order to achieve the case goals.
6. The unfolding of the plan may not be step-by-step, but may emerge in ways best-suited to client needs and style.	6. The plan is expected to be implemented in a logical, step-by-step way.

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Components of Genuine Family and Parent Engagement

- Identifying strengths, protective capacities and resilience in parents and family members;
- Building relationships and rapport with parents through empathy and compassion;
- Promoting parents as the experts; and
- Supporting parents' use of community-based resources.

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Developmental Challenges of Children in Child Welfare

- 40% are born premature and/or with low birth weight;
- Experience developmental delay at 4 to 5 times the rate of the general population;
- Have substantially lower grades and test scores;
- Have more school absences and grade repetitions; and
- Have an increased risk of special education needs.

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Developmental Challenges of Children in Child Welfare, (cont'd)

- Poverty is the single best predictor of child abuse and neglect.
- Children who live in families with annual incomes of less than $15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than those with annual incomes of $20,000 or more.
- A 2006 study found that more than half of the children in foster care were identified as having birth families "who had difficulty meeting their basic needs at the time of the investigation.

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Balancing Parents' Rights with State's Interests Leading to Children's Protection

- Historically
- United States Constitution Guaranteed Individual Rights.
- States must demonstrate "Compelling Interest" to interfere with Individuals' Rights.
- Children:
  - Were Parent's Property;
  - Not Individuals; and
  - Had No Rights.

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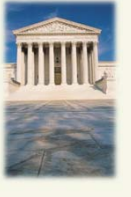Grow Communities*

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Balancing Parents' Rights with State's Interests Leading to Children's Protection, (cont'd)

- Early 1900's
  - Courts and legislators began to recognize:
    - Harm to Children Caused by Parents
    - Country's Future Dependent Upon:
      - Development of Healthy Children;
      - Productive and Educated Citizens, and
      - Protecting Children From Harm and Danger
    - If Parents were unable or unwilling to protect their children; THEN
    - States May Demonstrate "Compelling Interest" to Interfere with Parent's Rights.

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Balancing Parents' Rights with State's Interests Leading to Children's Protection, (cont'd)

- Late 1970's to Present
  - Federal and State Laws Enacted to:
    - Protect Children's:
      - Safety;
      - Well-Being; and
      - Permanency.

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The Testimony of Mary Ellen

"My father and mother are both dead. I don't know how old I am. I have no recollection of a time when I did not live with the Connolly's. .... Mamma has been in the habit of whipping and beating me almost every day... I have now the black and blue marks on my head...and also a cut on the left side of my forehead which was made by a pair of scissors.... I have no recollection of ever having been kissed by any one...I never dared to speak to anybody, because if I did I would get whipped.... I do not know for what I was whipped—mamma never said anything to me when she whipped me. I do not want to go back to live with mamma, because she beats me so. ..." Testimony of Mary Ellen Wilson, April 10, 1874. (Watkins, 1990).

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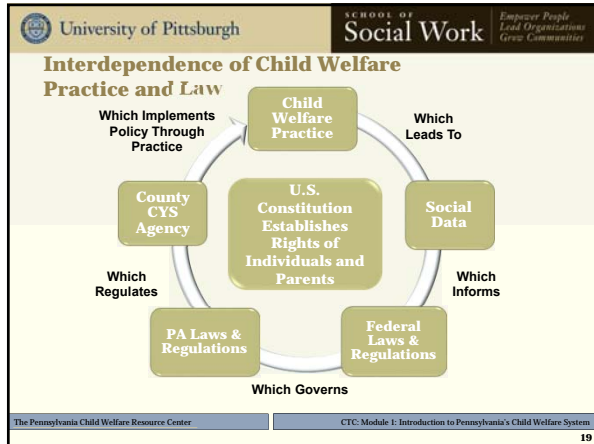
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