

# Appendix 2

## Stay Survey: Executive Summary



University of Pittsburgh

*School of Social Work*

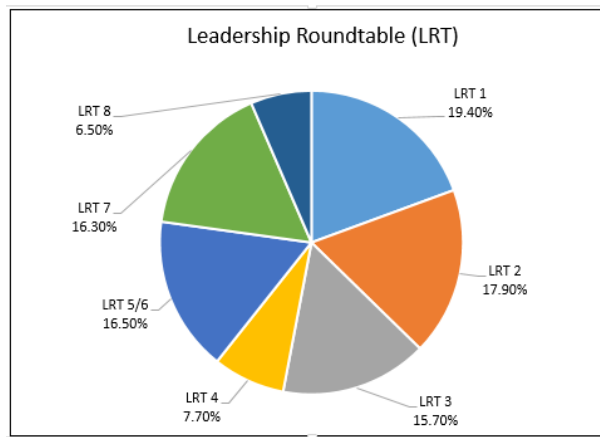
*Child Welfare Education and Research Programs*

*The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center*

Caseworker retention has been identified as a challenge in Pennsylvania’s child welfare system. To better understand factors that may help retain county caseworkers, the AOPC Caseworker Retention Workgroup created and administered a brief, web-enabled survey. The survey was sent via email to all County Child Welfare Administrators on March 23, 2016. Administrators were asked to forward the survey to caseworkers. The survey remained open for approximately 4 months, and 1359 responses were received with representation from all Leadership Roundtables. Findings from this survey provide an important snapshot of public county child welfare caseworker and supervisor perspectives on what may help or hinder their longevity in the field. However, it should be noted that due to the distribution methodology, it is unknown how many caseworkers and/or supervisors received the survey and how representative the respondents are of caseworkers within each LRT or across the state. Given these limitations, the findings described in this report should be interpreted with some caution.

As shown below in Figure 1, although almost 20% of respondents were from LRT 1, we are unable to determine how many workers within LRT 1 received the survey, nor can we determine the county breakdown of responses within that LRT.

Figure 1. Distribution of responses by Leadership Roundtable (LRT).



The majority of respondents (87%) were caseworkers (see Figure 2), but some supervisors (5.4%) and “Other” staff (6%) also responded. Years of service among respondents ranged from less than one year to more than fifteen years (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Distribution of respondent job classifications.

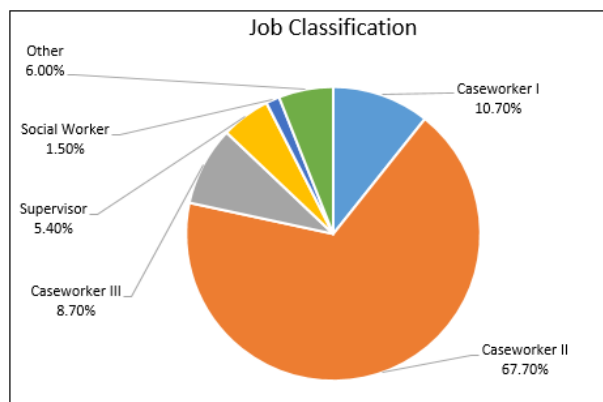
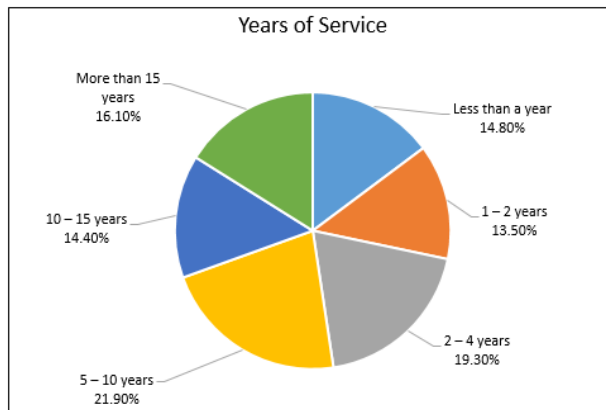


Figure 3. Distribution of respondent years of service



In addition to the demographic information shown above, the survey asked 11 closed-ended and 4 open-ended questions exploring factors that may impact caseworker retention. Questions asked about the following: factors related to staying at the job; factors related to leaving the job; specialized training needs; perceptions of supervisor; stress related to court; technology needs; family life impact; self-care plan utilization; and, what constitutes a good or bad day on the job. A copy of the survey (see Appendix I) and the survey results (see Appendix II) are included with this summary. Additionally, illustrative quotes are included throughout this summary to provide examples of the themes that emerged from a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions. Data were analyzed across categories grouping years of service to determine whether length of time in the field impacted the respondents' response to each question.

A good day at work:  
*"When you can lay your head down at night and know that the children you saw at work today are safe."*

The following themes emerged regarding what caseworkers and supervisors like about their job that would make them want to stay.

- The ability to make an impact on children and families was most frequently selected by caseworkers and supervisors across all years of service.
- Colleagues were also cited as a reason caseworkers and supervisors across all years of service would want to stay at their jobs.
- Flexibility was identified as a stay factor for caseworkers and supervisors with five years of service or more.
- Supervisors were identified as a stay factor for caseworkers with four years of service or less.

Supervisors are frequently involved in the day-to-day work of caseworkers and were most often identified as important or extremely important for caseworkers to stay at their jobs. The characteristics that respondents reported valuing in a supervisor tended to vary by the workers' level of experience.

- Caseworkers with less experience valued supervisors who provided concrete guidance and direct assistance to help workers understand and carry out their work.
- Caseworkers with more experience and supervisors overall valued experienced and knowledgeable supervisors who respect, trust, and support the workers to carry out their duties.

A good supervisor:  
*“Someone you can trust, is supportive and can help you make hard decisions, and appreciates the hard work that we do.”*

Specialized training is one factor that could help caseworkers and supervisors feel more comfortable in their jobs and could promote retention.

- Drug and alcohol, mental health, and trauma are topics for specialized trainings that both caseworkers and supervisors identified would help them feel more comfortable in their jobs. While training on the topics of drug and alcohol and mental health were cited frequently across all years of service for caseworkers and supervisors, trauma was identified most frequently as a training topic among caseworkers and supervisors with two years of service or more.
- Caseworkers and supervisors also identified that a reason to stay at their job is the opportunity they have to gain good experience and knowledge. Training is one avenue to gain new knowledge and skills.

Caseworkers and supervisors were asked to identify factors that would make them want to leave their jobs. Caseworkers and supervisors identified salary/benefits as a factor that would make them want to leave, but stress was the negative factor most frequently cited by both. All of the following were cited as unmanageable and certainly contribute to the stress workers feel.

- Caseload
- Timelines
- Paperwork

*“The average caseload is impossible to manage efficiently and there is a lot of pressure and stress involved in trying to meet all responsibilities.”*

*“I enjoy working with children, but at times I am frustrated and overwhelmed.”*

Some additional factors that would make caseworkers want to leave their job varied by years of service. Caseworkers with less than two years of service identified being on-call and work hours as additional factors that would make them want to leave, while caseworkers with two years of service or more identified leadership/management of the agency as an additional factor that would make them want to leave.

While court was not frequently reported as a reason for respondents to leave their jobs, participating in court and the stress associated with it were further explored in the survey. The factors that made court stressful differed between newer and more seasoned caseworkers and supervisors.

- Testifying in court was identified as the top stressor related to court for newer caseworkers, while newer supervisors identified cross examination as most stressful (four years of service or less).

*“We don’t always know if we will testify, we don’t always know what will be asked of us.”*

- Amount of time spent at the courthouse was identified as the top stressor related to court for more seasoned caseworkers and supervisors (five years of service or more).

In summary, the following should be considered while reviewing this report:

- Although the survey was sent to all County Administrators, it is unknown if all county caseworkers received the survey and had the opportunity to respond.
- Survey respondents were asked to identify their Leadership Roundtable, rather than the county in which they work. The number of counties within each Leadership Roundtable ranged from 5 to 21; therefore, it is unclear which counties are represented by the survey responses.
- Respondents were asked several questions that allowed for a wide range of responses (i.e., “check all that apply”), which inhibited the identification of conclusive findings. However, allowing for multiple responses was helpful in developing a comprehensive list of responses.

While not necessarily representative of all caseworkers in the state, findings from this survey help us to better understand factors that may contribute to caseworker retention in Pennsylvania. Supportive supervisors and specialized training were identified as important components to staying in the field, while high levels of stress (including that associated with participating in court), deadlines, and paperwork were cited as factors that may lead to leaving casework. Further inquiry into these factors may help us determine how to build upon facilitators to longevity in the field, while minimizing barriers.

A special thanks to our University of Pittsburgh Team

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