



NSW Child and Family Workforce Skills Strategy

In partnership with



Parenting
Research Centre



Charles Sturt
University



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

Tree of Knowledge - pokerwork on kangaroo skin, Lynette Riley, 2010

<http://Sydney.edu.au/kinship-module>



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Overview

ACWA), DCJ, AbSec and FAMS, commissioned the Research Centre for Children and Families RCCF), in partnership with Curijo, the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) and Charles Stuart University, to develop a Child and Family Workforce Skills Strategy.

Purpose

- **Identify** the knowledge, attributes and skills required by the NSW child and family social services workforce employed in Permanency Support Program, Intensive Therapeutic Care and Targeted Early Intervention roles.
- **Develop** strategies for delivering appropriate training and professional development.
- **Advise** on how the sector can collaborate for the delivery of efficient and integrated workforce training.

Approach

The Workforce Skills Strategy drew together information from an array of sources:

- **Analysis of the literature** – from academic articles, government reports and non-government reviews.
- **Collation of position descriptions and recruitment criteria** – from NSW agencies delivering a range of child and family services.
- **Conduct of workforce consultations and surveys** – to examine current and future workforce training requirements.
- **Interviews and focus groups with young people, parents, and carers** – to explore their views about the practitioner skills and attributes they most value and find helpful.



Key findings

Need for greater alignment between training curricula and the skills required by the workforce.

Training should incorporate on-the-job opportunities to practice new skills and enhance the transfer of learning to action.


The importance of 'soft skills' such as empathy, self-awareness and communication should be recognised, as well as qualifications.

On-the-job support for staff wellbeing and self-care can help protect against the impact of frequent exposure to trauma.

Cultural safety and sensitivity needs to be an ongoing process, involving continuous learning and quality assurance processes across an organisation, with structures for accountability.

Workforce Strategies

Workforce policy & planning – Significant reforms across the child and family sector in NSW requires the sector to develop specific approaches, techniques, and strategies for working with parents and carers.




Recruitment & Induction – Develop clear, consistent recruitment messages, including realistic job profiles, and professional marketing techniques to attract people from diverse backgrounds.




Skills & Capabilities – Identify skills and attributes that are essential for practitioners, and approaches to training that prioritise efficiency and embed learning into practice.

Workforce Strategies (cont.)

Education & Qualifications - Pursue greater consistency in the type and quality of training offered to practitioners, with content aligned to diverse service requirements.



Engagement & Resilience - Foster self-care and critical reflection through access to on-the-job support such as coaching, mentoring and supervision.



Cultural Safety & Sensitivity - Incorporate cultural safety as an ongoing process, involving continuous learning and quality assurance processes across the organisation, valuing diversity in staff and families.

Feedback from the sector consultations

[We need] a much better recruitment process and you know being very transparent about what people are entering in however, we are so desperate for staff too, right? So, then we sometimes do shortcuts.

Maintaining and protecting their personal boundaries for self-care and helping them to have an understanding of ethical decision making.... We've tended to find the people that fall over when it comes to doing this kind of work, those boundaries aren't there, [it's] affecting them, personally.

It's the supervision, it's the mentoring, it's the reflective practice space. If we're not going to do that bit, then it's kind of pointless doing a whole new qualification.

The skill of being aware of your own worldview, values and perspectives and how that might impact and affect your work and relationship with families. How to have difficult conversations because our work is around difficult conversations every day.



Feedback from young people, parents and carers

"It's definitely valuable to have youth workers who've been in the system because they know exactly what they're going to be providing" (Young Person, FG#1).

"It is it is about communicating to me because as soon as that caseworker changes - and unfortunately, they change constantly - if I'm not aware of where things are up to ... there's so much information that is lost" (Carer, FG#5).

"Have a worker/carer workshop, that is co-facilitated by a parent with lived experience" (Parent, FG#1).

"My biggest thing would be the caseworkers need to follow up because, you know, if you don't do it from the get-go, sadly, a lot of young people will just lose hope into the future" (Young Person, FG#1).



Workforce recruitment and induction

Recommendations:

- Develop clear, consistent recruitment messages.
- Use professional marketing techniques to positively influence public perceptions about child and family welfare work.
- Pursue specific recruitment strategies to target people from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Prepare standardised position descriptions for common roles that reflect core tasks and responsibilities.
- Adopt agreed protocols for staff induction to prepare and support new staff.



Evidence-based training and skill transfer

Recommendations:

- Engage with the education sector (universities, TAFE, and RTOs) to design curricula that is aligned with workforce practice needs and competencies.
- Consider the best approaches to build the skills and competencies for specialised areas, including on-the-job learning.
- Develop entry pathways for people from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds to enter the workforce and gain professional qualifications.
- Support staff to participate in professional development and career progression.
- Foster pathways for staff with experience and life skills to obtain formal qualifications.



Education and qualifications

Recommendations:

- Facilitate engagement between the child and family and the education sectors in the development of training curricula aligned to industry requirements.
- Involve practitioners as active participants in the learning process.
- Provide opportunities for new skills to be trialled on-the-job ensures the effective transfer of learning to practice.
- Encourage peers support and feedback when trailing new skills and practices.



Skills and capabilities

Recommendations:

- Adopt a consistent framework of skills and capabilities across the child and family sector.
- Identify and value the personal attributes needed for roles such as: active listening, empathy, respectful communications and cultural competence.
- Involve experienced practitioners in curricula and training development.
- Foster opportunities for on-the-job learning and skills transfer.



On-the-job learning and support

Recommendations:

- Develop strategies to ensure staff have the capacity to attend and meaningfully engage in training, such as employing relief staff and reducing workloads.
- Encourage reflective practice to assist staff to develop self-awareness and critical evaluation of practice.
- Promote the value of supervision, coaching, and mentoring for staff competency and wellbeing.
- Consider how career progression is factored into workforce planning, such as progression planning and regular review of practice and areas for service improvement.
- Incorporate lived experience through voluntary or paid peer support and advocacy workers.



Coaching support



Coaching is an adult learning strategy focused on building the skills and potential of the practitioner/manager



Benefits for the learner and the organisation



In practice, coaching involves setting goals, observation and feedback and reflection

Culturally safe and sensitive workplaces

Recommendations:

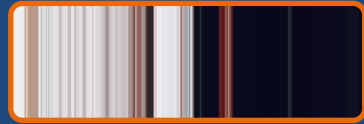
- Engage with a diverse range of cultural groups about their needs and preferences and how these might be operationalised.
- Develop clear guidelines for cultural sensitivity and safety across all levels of organisations.
- Foster a workplace that values diversity and the lived experience of staff and families.
- Promote cultural supervision as an experiential, hands-on learning process that contributes to the development of employee practice competencies.
- Ensure mentoring, coaching, or supervising Aboriginal practitioners is culturally safe and preferably delivered by an Aboriginal person.



Meeting the needs of Aboriginal & CALD staff



Consistent approach to cultural awareness, including helping workers to acknowledge their own biases



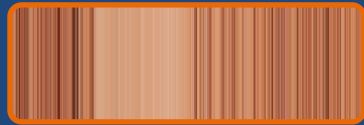
Respect the culture and traditions of families, whilst addressing child safety



Support staff to develop skills in engaging with families and communities from different backgrounds



Engage with community leaders who can advise on and support culturally safe practices



Allow for the cultural and community commitments that Aboriginal and culturally diverse staff may have

Culturally safe and sensitive workplaces

Recommendations:

- Celebrate different cultures and their contribution to the workplace.
- Acknowledge the role that Aboriginal staff play in providing cultural advice and support to their colleagues.
- Support staff to balance their work and cultural obligations.
- Establish connections between practitioners and Aboriginal mentors to reflect on the relationship between practice skills and cultural obligations.



Butterfly – Kangaroo Cloak poker work by
A/Prof Lynette Riley, AO



Next Steps

Identify the key priorities for action in consultation with the sector.

Establish a governance structure, led by ACWA to oversee the implementations of the priority action areas and outcomes.

Form Working Groups of key stakeholders for each priority action area, to progress the desired objectives and outcomes.