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# The County Welfare Directors Association of California

## Turnover Study

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# INTRODUCTION

## Acknowledgements

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) Turnover Study could not have been completed had it not been for the hard work of several individuals. First and foremost, Ted Myers, Agency Director and Committee Chair, was the catalyst that got this study started in the first place and helped appreciably throughout. Much appreciation needs to be given to all of the members of the County Welfare Directors Association's Human Resource Subcommittee, whose continuous feedback and suggestions focused the current study in the most efficient and most effective direction. An enormous debt of appreciation should also go to the several County Directors and their staff that pieced together such a wealth of information. They were Alameda, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Glenn, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Riverside, San Mateo, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo counties.

## Purpose

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), Human Resource Subcommittee discussed concern over the inability to retain employees in the field of Social Services. Staffing positions in this field is an arduous task for several reasons, but anecdotally it has often been assumed that this phenomenon is occurring because of the high level of stress that can be associated with carrying caseloads, bearing the burden of having to remove children from families, or the frustration of being unable to help those in need. The CWDA wanted to identify specific factors that lead to turnover in this field, specifically various levels of the Social Worker classification, Integrated Case Workers, Eligibility Workers, and Employment and Training Workers. Merit System Services, operating under CPS Human Resource Services and on behalf of the California State Personnel Board, agreed to assist the CWDA in gathering this data.

The purpose of the CWDA study was not to identify how each county compares to one another, but was to identify general trends that seem to be emerging throughout California. The desired outcome would be to equip individual counties with vital information that will assist in recruitment and retention resulting in practitioners with a greater breadth of experience directly related to the field of Social Services. This is becoming increasingly important with the predicted labor shortage due to the "baby boomer" generation's upcoming retirement wave.

As a caution, it should be mentioned that this study was an informal trend analysis and that findings presented herein are based on as much data that could be self reported from each county. Several counties had incomplete data, or data that was entered incorrectly; e.g. data fields that when combined should summate to 100%, but yield some other percent, such as voluntary versus involuntary turnover, which based on the given definitions should cover all forms of turnover. However, it will be noted that even though not a purely statistically sound study, several of the trends were consistent throughout most or all counties.

## Background

Turnover has been an ongoing issue for the field of Social Services. Of course, turnover is a concern for any organization, but Social Services has traditionally been believed to be plagued with higher turnover rates which then requires program funds be used for increased recruitment efforts, and training with longer learning curves. Now, with the expected retirement of the “baby-boomer” generation, which is forecasted to be at least 34% of California’s employees retiring in the next five years (according to the California State Personnel Board), retention of employees is becoming more critical.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in conjunction with CPS-Human Resource Services, released a report on workforce planning which determined that turnover is one of the greatest challenges faced by Human Service agencies, especially in children’s services. The report points out the importance for Social Services and Human Services agencies to track as much turnover data as possible. The best way to fix a problem is to accurately identify root causes<sup>1</sup>.

The Annie E. Casey workforce planning report identifies a common phenomenon that much of the turnover data that is tracked is categorized by job classification only, which may encompass multiple programs. The report recommends the importance of tracking these classifications as a first step and to continually narrow down that data to accurately identify problem sources. As a basic example, an agency that has two programs with the same classification could have a high turnover ratio under one program and a low turnover ratio under another. However, if reported in an aggregate form under one classification, the result would average out to a mid-level turnover ratio, missing potential valuable strengths and weaknesses.

An additional issue presented in the workforce planning report is the ambiguity of some turnover definitions. The report found some state laws that define turnover as the number of governmental employees terminating employment as a percentage of total governmental employees. This would mask the true nature of the turnover difficulty that Human Services agencies face, and could potentially result in lack of appropriate funding.

The Annie E. Casey report suggests taking into account classifications, program areas, “problematic turnover” (e.g. quitting, being discharged, etc.), and “acceptable turnover” (e.g. being promoted, retiring, etc.). Though not verified, the reporting agencies believe that turnover was the largest for children’s protective services investigators, and the lowest for prevention and adoption caseworkers.

The California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) also released a turnover report on California’s county public child welfare agencies for the fiscal year of 2002-2003. The CalSWEC study identified that in the fiscal year of 2002-2003, the turnover rate for

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<sup>1</sup> The counties that responded to the current survey appear to be tracking turnover data through exit interviews and internal tracking. However, because over half of the counties did not respond to the survey, it is difficult to determine if it is due to lack of data, or for extraneous reasons such as lack of time or personnel to complete the survey.

administrative support personnel in Social Services was 7.1%, which had not been assessed in their previous studies. Social work assistants had a turnover rate of 9.8%; child welfare workers had a turnover rate of 9.5%; and child welfare supervisors had a turnover rate of 8.6%. However, it should be noted the CalSWEC study did not include “acceptable turnover.” The current study includes these reasons of turnover because they still result in loss of productivity and available services. For example, if an employee leaves to go back to school, that situation could have been mitigated by a fostered approach such as tuition reimbursement. The result would not only be retention of an employee, but a more educated employee who could potentially provide better services. The resulting analysis should then be a cost-benefit analysis comparing the cost of tuition to the cost of turnover which is up to \$9,500 for social workers.

An extensive nationwide child welfare workforce study in 2004 was also conducted by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA). One observation made by APHSA was that between 2000 and 2004, the average Child Protective Service worker salaries rose by 6.3%, in comparison to the federal cost of living index of the same time periods which rose by 9.7%. The APHSA study indicated that the average tenure of workers leaving due to “preventable turnover” was five years for child protective service workers and in-home protective service workers, three years for foster care and adoption workers, and nine years for supervisors. Preventable turnover ranged from 49% of those that have turned over (supervisors) to 69% (in-home protective service workers). The APHSA study defined preventable turnover as any reason other than death, marriage/parenting, returning to school, or spousal job move. However, with creative solutions, some of these “non-preventable” reasons for turnover could be addressed and become preventable (such as the returning to school example mentioned above).

With regards to recruitment and retention, most respondents of the APHSA survey indicated that budget limitations and constraints were the strongest determinant of turnover, followed by having tragedy response. The APHSA study identified several problems that agencies encounter regarding recruitment efforts (Appendix C, Table 5a). The largest recruitment problems identified were the perceived imbalance of job demands and financial compensation. Compensation is an issue that is not easily remedied by public agencies, since the decisions rest upon higher authorities (boards, state and federal funding, etc.). However, if agencies have information like that presented in the APHSA study, it may better equip them to request additional funding from the appropriate entities. The APHSA study further indicated strategies to better recruit. The top recruitment strategies were establishing University-agency partnerships and/or stipends for students, and job announcements posted on web sites (Appendix C, Table 5b).

Other factors assessed by APHSA were preventable turnover problems (Appendix C, Table 6a) and preventable turnover strategies (Appendix C, Table 6b). The highest rated reasons for preventable turnover were workloads being too high and/or demanding, as well as caseloads being too high. As a retention strategy to combat these similar issues, the APHSA study suggested agencies to give applicants a realistic job preview. This could be accomplished through a site walkthrough, a videotape, or even just a frank discussion. These efforts could eliminate applicants who underestimate the stress level of the field. The top rated strategies to decrease turnover were increased or improved in-service training, as well as increased educational opportunities (Appendix C, Table 6c). The APHSA report identified organizational

and personal factors that are important to increase retention (Appendix C, Table 7a). The highest rated organizational and personal factors were good supervision, with a supervisor who cares about the worker as a person, and an agency mission/purpose that makes workers feel their jobs are important. These higher level, less tangible qualities are often forgotten about, though by having the right supervisor, or the right mission, many of the common reasons for turnover could be alleviated. Lastly, oftentimes after identifying problems agencies can have a view of where they want to be, but have trouble deciding where to start. The APHSA report proposes that the most important actions to increase retention, are reducing caseloads, workloads and supervisory ratios (Appendix C, Table 7b).

# METHOD

## Survey

The specific components of the survey were identified by the County Welfare Directors Association, Human Resource Subcommittee as information that would be most useful to Directors and Human Resource staff. Additionally, the subcommittee identified that they would like to see data from the past five fiscal years (i.e. '2000-2001' to '2004-2005'). A concern was raised that it may be difficult or impossible for counties to produce data covering five years, however the members of the subcommittee indicated that many of them track that data through exit interviews and would be able to report the information. A subsequent pilot test of the survey confirmed this assumption.

## Classifications

The classifications that were included in this study were Social Worker, Integrated Case Worker, Eligibility Worker, and Employment and Training Worker. The classification of Social Worker was separated into four categories; entry-level, journey level, advanced journey-level, and professional. Initial research revealed that not all counties used the same levels within the classification. For example, several counties defined these four levels as levels I, II, III, and IV. However other counties had as many as nine levels and some used entirely different criteria. Participants were provided with definitions for each classification (Appendix A), and were asked to use the classification in their county that most closely matched the description.

## Measures

The first factors assessed were the number of people that left in each classification within a fiscal year, and how many positions in that classification were actually occupied. When computed together, these factors yielded the turnover rate for that fiscal year. The rationale for specifically asking for "occupied" positions is that in the initial research it was identified that in many counties there are positions in classes that remain unoccupied for various reasons for an entire year or more. Therefore, if the number were computed the totals would be skewed because an individual cannot leave a position if there is no one occupying that position.

The next factors assessed were individuals left due to termination (involuntary turnover) or resignation (voluntary turnover). Involuntary turnover was further defined as being fired, laid off, released during probation, or any other reason that someone was released and not of their own choice. These definitions of involuntary turnover are fairly consistent with generally understood conceptions of involuntary turnover. However, for the purposes of the CWDA study, voluntary turnover or resignation as presented in the survey was defined as any departure from the given classification that is directly a result of the individual's decisions or actions, and not the result of departmental decisions or actions. Specifically, this would include an employee resigning, quitting, moving to a different area, etc. However, one factor unique to the CWDA study is that this definition includes promotion as the Human Resource Subcommittee felt that it was important to identify individuals leaving a classification for *any* reason. To elaborate, if there are a large number of people leaving the Social Worker classification (as an example) to

accept a position elsewhere in the same county and same department, it may be well received by that county that they are retaining that individual, but the issue still remains that for one reason or another that individual was not content with being a Social Worker. Additionally, regardless of the circumstances, the department will still be in the position of having to refill the position, train a new employee, etc. This inclusion of promotion as turnover is expected to make the overall turnover rate higher than previous studies. Therefore a promotion in this study was still counted as a vacated position.

The next question asked required practitioners to indicate how many of the individuals that left at each level of the Social Worker classifications carried caseloads. This question was included after feedback was given by the County Welfare Directors Association, Human Resources Subcommittee that indicated that some counties had classifications that would fit into the Social Worker classification but that carried no caseload. It was agreed upon that this distinction would be an important one to make since the general assumption was that caseloads are a major cause of stress within these classifications, and therefore could be hypothesized to be a determining factor that could affect turnover rates.

One area of interest that was asked to be identified was how many of the employees in the Social Worker classifications that left carried child caseloads rather than adult caseloads. The initial assumption was that Social Workers that carry a child caseload may have a higher degree of stress due to the fact that some decisions may lead to separation of a child from their family. Therefore, this distinction was assessed in the survey.

The last of the broader questions were directed in identifying tenure or seniority of the individuals that left. Four possible timeframes were offered as options: less than twelve months of service; between twelve months but less than five years; between five and ten years; and more than ten years.

The following section of questions was geared towards narrowing down specific reasons for turnover that may be shared throughout the state. The survey asked the practitioner to indicate the specific reasons that employees left their position based on the numbers gathered from the questions above. These specific reasons were: *promotion; demotion; moved out of the area; dissatisfied with salary/promotional opportunities; workload/caseload too difficult/demanding; too many hours required; another job offering more (money, flexible hours, benefits, etc.); not enough face to face time with clients; problems with supervision; no room for advancement; medical reasons; left to pursue education; retirement; family obligations; and release during probation period.* Additionally, there was a blank area below these reasons in case there were some individuals that left for reasons not listed above.



## Participants

The electronic survey was sent to members on the County Welfare Directors Association's mailing list which included Welfare Directors and County Social Services Human Resource staff. There were 23 county Social Services and Health and Human Services departments (see table below) that participated in this survey (over a third of all counties in California).

**Table 1. Participating Counties**

Counties	
Alameda	Madera
Amador	Mariposa
Calaveras	Merced
Colusa	Riverside
Contra Costa	San Mateo
El Dorado	Siskiyou
Glenn	Tehama
Imperial	Trinity
Inyo	Tulare
Kern	Ventura
Kings	Yolo
Lassen	

## Analysis

The overall turnover rates were calculated by dividing the number of individuals that had left in a given fiscal year by the number of positions occupied within a specific classification. Because the number of positions occupied is for the most part static, unless there is an allocation change that adjusts the number of occupied positions (although this often begins when a new fiscal year begins), and the number of people leaving is dynamic, there is the possibility of having a turnover rate over 100%. For example, if a county has 20 allocated positions filled, and 30 different hires during the year, there would be a perceivable turnover rate of 150%. All other calculations were made as a percentage of the people that left (e.g. how many people that left did so within their first 12 months, as a percentage of the total number that left). The author of the study chose percentages based on the wide range of overall department sizes between counties.

**Turnover Ratio Calculation:** Number of people that left in a fiscal year [**divided by**] average number of occupied positions

***Example:*** If during a fiscal year a county had 6 people that left, and a total number of occupied positions of 100, the turnover ratio would be 6%.

**Turnover Specifics Calculation:** Number of people that left for a specific reason, or characteristic [**divided by**] total number of people that left

***Example:*** If during a fiscal year 78 people left due to voluntary turnover out of 100 people that left in that year, then 78% of people that left that year did so voluntarily (and therefore it can be inferred that 22% left involuntarily).

# RESULTS

## Turnover by Classifications

The distribution of turnover by classifications was calculated by summing all of the people that left within a classification across all 5 years, divided by the sum of all filled positions in that classification across all 5 years. This means that these percentages should be interpreted as the percent of employees within a class that left. For example, Entry Level Social Worker has a rate of 10.6%. This means that throughout all five years, and throughout all counties, 10.6% of the Entry Level Social Workers left the position for any reason. This should not be misinterpreted as out of all people that left from all classifications combined, Entry Level Social Workers make up 10.6% of the total. Because certain classifications traditionally have higher numbers, this number would not represent the relative size, and would therefore inflate some percentages, and deflate others. These percentages represent, of all the Entry Level Social Worker positions in a given fiscal year, roughly 10.6% of those Entry Level Social Workers could be expected to vacate the position. As can be seen, the largest turnover percentage was for Journey Level Social Workers, followed by Advanced Journey Level Social Workers, and then Eligibility Workers.

**Table 2. Turnover by Classifications**

<b>Classifications</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Journey Level Social Worker	<b>18.4%</b>
Advanced Journey Level Social Worker	<b>14.9%</b>
Eligibility Worker	<b>14.8%</b>
Professional Level Social Worker	<b>12.8%</b>
Employment and Training Worker	<b>11.4%</b>
Entry Level Social Worker	<b>10.6%</b>
Integrated Case Worker	<b>8.8%</b>

## General Turnover Findings Across Five Fiscal Years

The primary factors that were measured in the general turnover section were the turnover ratio, voluntary and involuntary turnover, whether or not Social Workers carried caseloads and whether those caseloads were child or adult caseloads, and tenure of workers that turned over. The overall turnover ratio (18.1%) was somewhat higher than some other studies, mainly because certain factors that were considered acceptable turnover in other studies and not included, such as promotion and retirement were included to get a more comprehensive view of what California Agencies may be facing in regards to staffing shortage no matter what the reasoning. The majority of individuals left voluntarily (85.2%), and as well, the majority of Social Workers that turned over in the past five fiscal years carried caseloads (78.2%). Of those that carried caseloads, the majority carried child caseloads. The highest rate of turnover by tenure was for employees that left after being with the agency between one year and five years (37.3%). However, followed closely was the next highest turnover percentage based on tenure which was within the first twelve months (33.2%). Therefore, taken together it can be summated that within the past five years 70.5% left within the first five years, and 86.9% within ten years of employment within the agency.

**Table 3. Turnover Breakdown**

	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Percent that Left*</b>	<b>18.1%</b>
Voluntary Turnover	<b>85.2%</b>
Involuntary Turnover**	<b>14.8%</b>
<b>Carried Caseloads (Social Workers)</b>	<b>78.2%</b>
Child Caseloads	<b>79.4%</b>
Adult Caseloads	<b>20.6%</b>
<b>Tenure</b>	
Left Between 1 Year and 5 years	<b>37.3%</b>
Left Within First 12 Months	<b>33.2%</b>
Left Between 5 Years and 10 Years	<b>16.4%</b>
Left After 10 Years	<b>13.1%</b>
<i>*Note: Average number that left across five fiscal years, divided by the average number of occupied positions for each year</i>	
<i>**Note: Involuntary turnover includes dismissal, release during probation, and involuntary demotion</i>	

## Specific Reasons for Leaving

It should be reiterated here that the specific reasons for leaving do not summate to 100% because those filling out the surveys were given the option of entering specific reasons in the “other” category if they had a reason that did not match any of the reasons listed. The highest rated reason for leaving was to take another job (25.5%), followed by retirement (13.0%), promotion (12.9%), and moving out of the area (9.0%).

**Table 4. Specifics Breakdown**

	Percentages
<b><i>Specific Reasons for Leaving*</i></b>	
Took Another Job	<b>25.5%</b>
Retirement	<b>13.0%</b>
Promotion	<b>12.9%</b>
Moved Out of the Area	<b>9.0%</b>
Release During Probation (involuntary)	<b>7.7%</b>
Family Obligations	<b>3.5%</b>
No Room for Advancement	<b>2.3%</b>
Medical Reasons	<b>1.8%</b>
Workload/Caseload too Demanding	<b>1.5%</b>
Demotion(involuntary)	<b>1.3%</b>
Pursuing Education	<b>1.1%</b>
Lack of Advancement/Promotional Opportunity	<b>0.7%</b>
Problems with Supervision	<b>0.6%</b>
Required Work Hours/Time	<b>0.2%</b>
Lack of Face-to-Face Time with Clients	<b>0.1%</b>
<i>*Numbers do not add to 100%, due to miscellaneous “other” option</i>	

### **“Other” Category**

Development of a questionnaire that would encompass all possibilities of turnover would be nearly impossible, and would most likely yield a low return rate due to the length and completion time. Instead, the specific reasons for turnover that were assessed were determined by the County Welfare Directors Association, Human Resource Subcommittee. Therefore, the specific reasons listed above do not summate to 100%, because those filling out the surveys had the option of adding other reasons that may have occurred. These “other” reasons make up 18.4% of the reasons people left employment, but individually they do not hold much predictive resourcefulness. Additionally, many of these reasons could be categorized with the above reasons.

Other reasons for leaving a position were *no reason given, didn’t like the job, death, irreconcilable differences, opened own business, unhappy, layoff, discharged, personal, end of*

*assignment, extra help hours used up, absenteeism, did not like commute, transportation, failed to return to duty, neglect of duties, disagree with area assigned, relations with other employees, fraud, job abandonment, marriage, no match for experience, and internal/external changes.*

## DISCUSSION

The CWDA Turnover Study attempted to identify trends across the State of California Social Service and Human Services agencies. Several trends did in fact emerge, some of which would be expected, but others may be surprising.

### ***Turnover by Classification***

The Journey Level Social Worker was identified as the highest risk to turnover of the classifications investigated in the survey, followed by Advanced Journey Level Social Workers, and then Eligibility Workers. The results for Social Workers tend to suggest that most people that leave do so based on some level of burnout. The Entry Level Social Worker classification showed the second to lowest turnover rate, so it appears that once the Social Worker remains in the position, their tolerance for the nature of work declines. One possible explanation of this, however, is that many agencies have their Entry Level Social Workers promote to the Journey Level after a short period of satisfactory performance (usually one year). There may need to be added incentives added for Journey and Advanced Journey Social Workers to remain in the position. Additionally, the nature of work could be shifted and rotated to give the Social Workers a change in the environment.

### ***General Turnover Findings***

The overwhelming majority of people that left within all classifications were based on voluntary circumstances. This also should not be a surprise, as when most speak of the “turnover problem” within the Social Services, they often are referring to individuals quitting. However, the magnitude of how many leave voluntarily may be shocking to some, since almost all of the employees that have left, have done so voluntarily. This emphasizes the importance of bringing this issue to the forefront and taking any steps possible to lower this rate. Furthermore, the data indicated that the majority of individuals left carried child caseloads. However, the issue of caseloads should be assessed further. Even though a large majority of individuals that left carried caseloads, only a small amount indicated that the caseloads were too demanding. This helps to create a prototype of the most at-risk individuals.

Lastly, the overwhelming majority (70.5%) of those that left did so within their first five years (this included two survey categories; leaving within first twelve months, and between one year and five years). Therefore, this study has identified that those who are Journey Level Social Workers that carry child caseloads and have tenures of less than five years are most likely to leave the organization. According to these results, if agencies can retain employees for at least five years, they could greatly reduce overall turnover numbers. Now that there is a profile of the most at-risk employees most likely to turnover, next the reasons why the person might leave will be discussed.

## ***Specific Reasons for Turnover***

Although there were several reasons for turnover that were very nominal (0.1% to 7.4%), there were many trends that emerged. The highest reported reason by far (almost twice the percentage of the next highest reported) was that individuals who left had done so to take another job. Unfortunately this reasoning is convoluted. There are often reasons that cause an employee to take another job, especially if they actively sought other employment. Many of the specific reasons of turnover in this study that had low percentages, could have been masked by this more general response of taking another job, such as problems with supervision, caseload too demanding, lack of promotional opportunity, required work hours, family obligations, promotion, or moving to a different area. To elaborate, when departments are gathering turnover data and this reason comes up, the department should follow up with a line of questions. Why is this person taking a different job? What are the advantages of the other job that outweigh staying at the current position? What are the disadvantages of the other job that, when compared to the current position, are not compelling enough to have one stay? These issues and more should be addressed, as this is often a category assessed that in essence could be a form of a “miscellaneous” or “other” category. There are too many variables that need to be extracted for departments to get a more accurate view of areas that need improvement.

The next highest-rated reason for leaving a position is retirement. Unfortunately this number is more likely to rise than fall. The CWDA study showed each year higher turnover rates were attributed to retirement (with the exception of 2003-2004 which took a 2.5% drop, and then rose back to the prior year’s level by 2004-2005). As mentioned before, the “baby-boomer” generation is ready to retire which will create record level waves of retirements exacerbated by recent early retirement incentives. Of course, this is not as easy an issue to prevent. For instance, it may be highly challenging to reverse early incentive programs. However, it is important data nonetheless in the planning arena. With much of the other cases of turnover, it is difficult to predict, beyond looking at trends addressed in studies such as this one. In the case of retirement, however, departments can think proactively by increasing training, mentoring (to pass on institutional memory), and emphasize the imminent upper level vacancies that will be opening up. This can be used as a powerful tool for those newer employees who feel that there is no “point” in aiming for the higher level positions as a career path because they feel that “the same person has been in that spot and will never leave.” Now there will be a myriad of new high level openings that they can strive for through hard work, development, and loyalty. Additionally, knowing that there will be a wave of retirements, agencies should start to invest more resources towards training the staff that will be filling these vacated positions.

The next highest-rated reasons are promotions and moving out of the area. If individuals say that they are moving out of the area, a follow up to that should be asking why they are moving and if there is something undesirable about the area. It may be a small town and the person feels more comfortable in a big city. However, there are several individuals in big cities that would give up everything for a chance to live in a small town. The goal really in this case is to find candidates of optimal fit, which is determined in the recruitment and selection periods. One possible step is to proactively identify the optimal candidate and seek them out. For instance, if a department surveys individuals that have long tenures and compares them to turnover data, the department can determine characteristics of the ideal candidate. So using the



above example, the department may want to extend their recruitment effort to a major city, even if it is beyond their standard recruiting area.

As far as losing individuals to promotions, this is probably the most desired voluntary turnover as it is a good move for the organization as a whole. One step that could be taken to make this process more beneficial for the department that loses the employee is to utilize that individual to train new employees in the department (if their promotion is directly vertical, and not lateral). In a culture such as the one just described, this process becomes almost a self-sustaining system. Although the loss of an individual is often detrimental to any work teams that may be present, an individual will assume a specific role, and others assume their specific roles, and all fit together. When one of those elements of the team is lost, the overall process is affected.

## SUMMARY

Previous studies on turnover in the Social Services and Health and Human Services found that Children Services have one of the highest instances of turnover throughout all departments. The importance was raised regarding tracking data and identifying specific causes of why these turnover rates are so high. Additionally, the issue was raised that many states or agencies define turnover differently, oftentimes including confounding data that mask the true nature of turnover in Social Services, and Health and Human Services. Many reported turnover data are based on all state or county workers including those outside of these departments. Lastly, it was identified that on a national level, Child Protective Service workers have received salary increases in the past five years that are lower than the federal cost of living index.

The current CWDA study identified specific causes for turnover in Social Services and Health and Human Services. The majority of individuals that have left within the previous five fiscal years did so voluntarily (resignation, quitting, moving, promotion, etc.). There were certain common characteristics of employees that were involved in turnover, based on the data collected for this study. The employees most likely to turnover are:

- Journey Level Social Workers, or Advanced Level Social Workers
- Carrying caseloads (especially child caseloads)
- Within their first 5 years of employment

The main reasons that were given for caseworkers voluntarily leaving their jobs included, in descending order from the most common response:

- Taking another job/position
- Retirement
- Promotion
- Moving out of the area

Finally, several recommendations for county Social Services and Human Services agencies emerged from the CWDA Study:

- Install continuous HR data collection systems that track vacancies and turnover (including exit reasons). This data is critical for identifying trends and crafting recruitment and retention strategies in a competitive human resource marketplace.
- Provide prospective caseworker applicants with a realistic job preview. Although carrying caseloads were not listed as one of the main causes for turnover, the majority of those that turned over carried caseloads. Therefore, a realistic job preview may help give candidates an accurate picture of the nature of work before accepting a position. This could be accomplished through a site walk-through or even a videotape.
- Compare turnover rates according to the specific department or social welfare program rather than all state or county employees.

- Offer tuition reimbursement if a large number of individuals are exiting employment in order to go back to school (agencies should seek creative solutions to all of their turnover woes).
- Offer increased incentives to Journey and Advanced Journey Level Social Workers, since they appear to suffer from burnout once at these levels. Another option is to consider rotating caseworker job assignments to reinvigorate as well as to cross-train.
- Enhance the value of exit interviews with employees who are leaving to take another job by probing further to find out what, if anything, is undesirable about the current job, or what is more desirable about the new position.
- Use newly vacated high level positions left from retirees as a motivational tool for employees to develop and prepare themselves for promotional opportunities.
- Combat the upcoming retirement surge through leadership training and mentoring.
- Expand new employee recruitment efforts to non-traditional local sources if county has a high rate of individuals leaving to move out of the area due to cost of living.
- Instill the expectation that newly promoted individuals will be responsible for helping their replacements transition into their new roles. Such “handoff” activities should include written materials as well as verbal briefings on key issues and network contacts.

Due to the expected rise of retirements from the baby boomer generation, counties can expect an acute challenge in hiring quality staff and keeping turnover low. In addition to the standard mantra of nurturing high morale workplace, the above recommendations should help county Health and Human Services agencies manage their staffing challenges.

## REFERENCES

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# Appendix A

## Classification Definitions

Position/Level	Class Characteristics
Entry Level Social Worker	This is a closely supervised trainee class that receives on-the-job training and learns to independently manage a caseload. This class does not require a Master's degree.
Journey Level Social Worker	This class carries a full caseload of moderate complexity and difficulty and works with greater independence than the entry level social worker. This class does not require a Master's degree.
Advanced Journey or Lead Level Social Worker	This class handles the most difficult and complex social services activities. In some counties, this may be a lead level. This class does not require a Master's degree.
Professional Level Social Worker	This class carries a caseload of the most difficult, sensitive, and complex cases. This class requires a Master's degree.
Eligibility Worker (all non-supervisory levels)	These classes determine eligibility for multiple public assistance programs. Duties include interviewing applicants and recipients for public assistance programs; analyzing financial and eligibility information to determine initial or continuing eligibility for multiple aid programs; explaining regulations, rules, and policies to clients and apprising them of their rights, responsibilities, and eligibility for participation; maintaining current knowledge of program regulations and procedures necessary for multi-program caseload administration; initiating and processing casework through an automated system; identifying needs and making appropriate referrals for health, social, and/or employment services; ensuring accuracy and completion of application and declaration forms.
Employment and Training Worker (all non-supervisory levels), including positions dealing with CalWORKS and Workforce Development, if applicable	These classes provide employment counseling services to applicants and recipients of state and federal employment programs to assist them in becoming vocationally self-sufficient. Duties include conducting job searches and related workshops; assessing participants' potential barriers to employment and assisting them to overcome employment barriers; evaluating participants interests, education, and experience to determine possible program placements; counseling participants in interviewing skills, techniques, and etiquette for employment interviews.
Integrated Case Worker (all non-supervisory levels)	These classes determine eligibility of applicants and recipients for multiple public assistance benefits and provide basic employment services to clients. Duties include conducting group orientations and workshops to inform applicants and recipients fundamental policies, programs, changes in rules, individual rights and responsibilities, and participation requirements; assisting orientation participants complete applications and employment readiness evaluation forms for a variety of programs and services; interviewing, advising, and guiding a diverse population of clients to ascertain employability, isolate barriers to employment, evaluate need for public assistance, determine benefit eligibility, identify need for ancillary services/payments, and authorize benefits and ancillary services/payments; analyzing financial, employment, family, and personal information to determine and authorize initial or continuing eligibility for multiple aid programs.

# Appendix B

## Survey

Position	Entry Level Social Worker	Journey Level Social Worker	Advanced Journey or Lead Level Social Worker	Professional Level Social Worker	Integrated Case Worker	Eligibility Worker (All Non-Supervisory Levels)	Employment and Training Worker (All Non-Supervisory Levels; including positions dealing with CalWORKS and Workforce Development)
<b>TOTAL</b>							
# That Left in Recent Fiscal Year							
Average # of occupied positions (by class) in the Past Year							
<b>BREAKDOWN OF THE TOTAL</b>							
# That Left in Due to Termination (Involuntary, Firing, Layoff)							
# That Left Due to Resignation (Includes Promotion, or Voluntary Departure)							
# That Left that Carried Caseloads							
# That Left That Were <b>Child</b> Social Workers						N/A	N/A
# That Left That Were <b>Adult</b> Social Workers							
<b>TENURE OF WORKERS THAT LEFT</b>							
# That Left Within First 12 Months							
# That Left After Being in That Position for Less Than 5 Years (and More Than 12 Months)							
# That Left After Being in That Position Between 5-10 Years							
# That Left After Being in That Position for More Than 10 Years							
<b>Reasons for Leaving</b>							
(Mark the Number of People that Left for Each Reason)							
Promotion							
Demotion							
Moved out of area							
Dissatisfied with salary/promotional opportunities							
Workload/Caseload too difficult/demanding							
Too many hours required							
Another job offering more (money, flexible hours, benefits)							
Not enough face-to-face time with clients							
Problems with supervision							
Medical reasons							
No room for advancement							
Left to pursue education							
Retirement							
Family Obligations							
Release during probation period							
Other (Please List, Including Numbers)							

# Appendix C

## APHSA Findings

**Table 5a. APHSA Reported Recruitment Problems**

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**Problems in descending order of importance**

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- Perceived imbalance of demands of job and financial compensation
  - Starting salaries are not competitive with comparable positions
  - Other attractive labor market alternatives for job seekers
  - Budget constraints other than hiring freezes or restrictions
  - Hiring freezes or restrictions
  - Negative media reports
- 

**Table 5b. APHSA Reported Recruitment Strategies**

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**Strategies in descending order of effectiveness**

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- University-agency training partnerships and/or stipends for students
  - Job announcements posted on web sites
  - Early and aggressive recruiting at social work schools
  - Emphasized continuing education/training and supervision opportunities within agency
  - Increased personal contact with potential candidates to encourage their application
- 

**Table 6a. APHSA Reported Preventable Turnover Problems**

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**Problems in descending order of importance**

---

- Workloads too high and/or demanding, e.g., stress, being overwhelmed, etc.
  - Caseloads are too high
  - After hours and unpredictable work interfere with personal and family life
  - Too much time spent on travel, transport, paperwork, etc.
  - Insufficient service resources for families and children
  - Workers do not feel valued by agency
  - Problems with quality of supervision
  - Insufficient opportunities for promotion and career advancement
  - Low salaries
-

**Table 6b. APHSA Reported Preventable Turnover Strategies**

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**Strategies in descending order of importance**

---

- Increased/improved in-service training
  - Increased educational opportunities, e.g., MSW
  - Increased/improved orientation/pre-service training
  - Provided technology, e.g., cell phones, laptops
  - Improved professional culture throughout agency
  - Enhanced supervisor skills
  - Implemented new child/family intervention strategies
  - Increased workers feeling valued/respected by agency
  - Increased worker safety
  - Implemented flex time/changes to office hours
  - Regularly sought and used employees' views
  - Improved physical office/building space
  - Special efforts to raise workers' salaries
  - Increased workers' access to service resources
- 

**Table 6c. APHSA Reported Reasons for not Implementing Strategies**

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**Reasons in descending order of importance**

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- We couldn't implement any strategies that required new resources
  - Agency staff did not have authority to implement strategies
  - Strategies need to be customized to unique needs of local offices
  - Crises in child welfare prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements
  - We had no consensus on which specific strategies would improve outcomes
  - CFSR and PIP process prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements
  - We had no confidence that these strategies would improve our recruitment/retention outcomes
-



**Table 7a. APHSA Reported Important Factors for Retention**

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**Personal and organizational factors in descending order of importance**

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- Good supervision, with a supervisor who cares about the worker as a person
  - An agency mission/purpose that makes workers feel their jobs are important
  - Dependable management support of and commitment to workers
  - Worker's self-efficacy [self belief in success]
  - Worker's human caring
  - Fair compensation and benefits
  - Reasonable number of cases
  - Manageable workloads
  - Opportunities for workers to learn and grow professionally
- 

**Table 7b. APHSA Reported Important Agency Actions and Initiatives for Retention**

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**Agency actions and initiatives in descending order of importance**

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- Reduced caseloads, workloads, and supervisory ratios
  - Increased salaries that are competitive and commensurate with the work
  - Improved supervision, support, technical assistance, and supervisory accountability
  - Career ladders and promotional opportunities, and personal and professional growth
  - Staff training- pre-service and in-service, and supervisory training
-