

**TRAINING CHILD WELFARE WORKERS IN MONTEREY COUNTY:
STRATEGIES FOR TRAINING NEW STAFF, DEVELOPING EXISTING STAFF
AND IDENTIFYING FUTURE STAFF**

Ellen Edelstein *
Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

Health and human service agencies face significant challenges in recruiting, training and retaining their workforce, particularly in the high cost-of-living regions of Northern California.

My BASSC interagency exchange took me to Monterey County Department of Social Services, where child welfare training has become a high priority and undergone a major revision in the past two years.

The agency also maintains collaborative relationships with other county agencies, regional colleges and universities, and training academies to provide training and support to new and existing staff.

FINDINGS

In 2000 Monterey County implemented a new child welfare induction program to train and support workers that has resulted in excellent retention of new staff. Key elements of the program model are: 1) the individualized training plans for each new worker; and 2) a collaborative training approach that involves both the training supervisor and the permanent unit supervisor.

The agency has also developed a variety of skill enhancement programs to offer existing staff advanced career opportunities. These include: 1) the Family Development Credential Program offering 18 undergraduate units focused on building skills to work with families, 2) Specialized training for Social Worker I level staff to develop case-carrying skills, and 3) LCSW clinical supervision program that meets the requirements of the Board of Behavioral Sciences.

Further, the agency remains committed to strong partnerships with the educational institutions and is a field placement site for MSW students from San Jose State University and undergraduate students from the Community Health and Human Services Program (CHHS) at California State University at Monterey Bay (CSUMB).

SUMMARY

During my BASSC project, it was clear that Monterey County recognizes the importance of integrating training strategies that: 1) train and support new staff, 2) provide career enhancements for existing staff, and 3) have the potential to attract future staff.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of my observations in Monterey, I submitted the following recommendations to Santa Clara County:

- Develop individual training plans for each new child welfare worker
- Develop a collaborative approach to training that involves the training supervisors and the permanent unit supervisors
- Include the Foster Parent PRIDE program as a training requirement for all new workers
- Provide LCSW clinical supervision program for eligible staff
- Establish formal contact with CSUMB to explore the feasibility of Santa Clara offering field placements to students from the CHHS program

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INTRODUCTION

Recruitment, training and retention of social work staff are high priority issues in Monterey County as well as critical issues statewide. This is particularly crucial in many Northern California Bay Area counties in which the high cost of living creates significant barriers in attracting and retaining a qualified workforce in social work and other related health and human service professions.

In selecting a topic for my BASSC inter-agency project, I met with the agency director and expressed an interest in the issue of training, knowing that it was also a high priority for the agency. Santa Clara County redesigned its induction training program two years ago and continues to dedicate significant staff and fiscal resources in the area of recruitment, training and retention. The director supported this topic and suggested that I also explore an interesting interdisciplinary undergraduate human services program at California State University, Monterey Bay.

When I began my project, I initially focused on Monterey's approach to training new child welfare workers. After meeting with staff and reviewing the agency's materials, I realized that the induction program was only one component of a broader array of strategies that Monterey was utilizing to train new workers, create career paths for existing staff, and attract a future workforce into the field of social work. Although the training supervisor primarily focuses on implementing the induction program, the job responsibilities include oversight for all division training. This integration of work responsibility is enhanced by numerous collaborative relationships the agency and the supervisor have developed with other county departments, colleges and universities, community agencies, regional training academies, and adjacent counties to design and deliver effective child welfare training.

One such partnership is with California State University at Monterey Bay (CSUMB). The newest California University campus offers a unique undergraduate degree program entitled Collaborative Health and Human Services (CHHS). The CHHS degree is an integrated multidisciplinary program that strives to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills and ability to work effectively in the rapidly changing social and political arena of health and human services in the 21st century.

In my BASSC case study I will examine:

- Monterey's individualized approach to training new child welfare workers
- Several strategies that the social services agency is using to develop career paths for existing staff
- The unique health and human services undergraduate program at CSUMB and the collaborative strategies that Monterey County and the university are using to educate and develop future practitioners

In my conclusion I will:

- Review the current child welfare training model in Santa Clara County
- Share my "Lessons Learned"
- Recommend several new strategies for Santa Clara to consider regarding training

MONTEREY COUNTY AT-A-GLANCE

Monterey County is a small to mid-sized Northern California county with a population of approximately 400,000 that encompasses a 150 miles expanse along the Salinas Valley and the picturesque northern California coastline. The population is as diverse as the varying communities ranging from the agricultural "salad bowl" communities in the valley to the leisure and tourist communities of Carmel and Monterey.

The Social Service Agency employs approximately 700 people with offices located in Salinas, King City and Seaside. The agency administers over 70 programs serving the county residents. The children and families division has a staff of more than 70 people offering an array of prevention, intervention and support programs.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW OF MONTEREY'S TRAINING PROGRAM

Until the mid-1990's the training program for new child welfare workers in Monterey County was described by one veteran staff as "informal". New child welfare workers typically completed a 3-day core curriculum program offered through Fresno State University, which was supplemented with on-going regional training and supervision from the unit supervisor. New hires were encouraged to attend training but were often unable to balance the demands of managing an active caseload and continuing to pursue training opportunities.

By the mid-1990's the county had developed additional contracts with the University of California, Davis to augment their induction training program. In 1995 an audit of the Monterey

County Social Service Agency identified social worker training as a major gap and elevated the issue for significant review and redesign. One key outcome of the audit was the creation of a staff development manager position in 1996 and eventually a new training supervisor position in 1999.

The new training supervisor for the children and families division joined the agency in 2000. From the onset, Monterey's vision was to create an individualized training plan for each new worker that incorporates the core child welfare curriculum with the skills and knowledge that the worker brought to the job. This remains Monterey's primary goal for their training program today.

TRAINING PROGRAM IN 2002

Training new child welfare workers in Monterey County has evolved significantly in the last three years, although the program still remains a "work in progress." The addition of a training supervisor in 2000 enabled the agency to create a well-defined training program that incorporates the core child welfare curriculum with a county induction program that is individualized for each new worker.

There was consensus from staff at all levels that Monterey's induction training truly began to crystallize when the training supervisor joined the agency in 2000. The individual hired came with a broad knowledge base about both child welfare and training theory. Equipped with an effective combination of knowledge and skill, this individual also brought a passion and commitment about training to the agency.

Monterey's Training Program Design

Monterey faced some challenges in 2000 when they began to design their new training program. While they had a commitment to an individualized approach, there were some standardized core classes and agency orientations that they wanted every new worker to complete. Unlike Santa Clara County, new workers in Monterey begin the job on a flow basis as they are hired, rather than waiting for a group of workers to start simultaneously. This actually works to Monterey's advantage by enabling new staff to begin more quickly and reducing the amount of time positions remain vacant. Once a worker is hired and on the job, they receive their specific unit assignment, meet with the training supervisor, and begin to design their individualized training plan.

The overall training period for new child welfare staff is typically six to nine months. During this time workers are assigned to their permanent units and are expected to complete the essential components of their individual training plan, which includes:

- 11 core curriculum classes
- Agency orientations and individual meetings with the training supervisor
- Foster Parent PRIDE program

The county contracts with their regional Bay Area Academy to provide the 15-day core curriculum program which includes the following 11 specific classes offered quarterly throughout the tri-county area:

- The Child welfare System: Overview
- The Art of Interviewing
- Child Maltreatment
- Ages & Stages of Development
- Structured Decision Making
- Court Procedures
- Substance Abuse
- Factors to Consider in Case Planning
- Placement Issues
- Organizational Management
- Cultural Competency

The topics covered in agency training and individual meetings with the training supervisor include such basic fundamentals as orientation to the work site, worker safety, time management and written documentation. During the training period the training supervisor also covers practice issues and programs such as social work ethics, cultural competency, adoption and concurrent planning, emergency response, voluntary family maintenance services, family reunification, placement issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, and CWS/CMS. The training modality used is "hands on" with new workers responsible for completing tasks such as shadowing staff from different parts of the agency, and participating in meetings related to all aspects of casework. The individual sessions with the training supervisor are designed to review the learning and monitor the worker's progress.

A unique feature of Monterey's program is the requirement that all new social workers complete the 7-session Foster Parent PRIDE program during their probationary period. The PRIDE program is the orientation and initial training for new foster and adoptive parents that is required for licensure. Monterey's rationale for mandating the PRIDE training is two-fold; first it offers social workers a solid understanding of foster care regulations and issues; and secondly, the training provides an opportunity for social workers and foster parents to have interaction and dialogue about mutual issues of concern. The joint training promotes the importance of positive working relationships between social workers and foster parents. Although the inclusion of the PRIDE training as a required component of the program is fairly new, feedback from recently trained staff and foster parents has been favorable.

During the first 4-6 weeks, new staff meet weekly with the training supervisor to review their progress. By the end of the first month workers begin to receive cases with a gradual increase in case assignments during the training period. The "live cases" raise real issues and provide additional opportunities for learning and dialogue during training meetings. During the second month of training the frequency of meetings with the training supervisor is reduced to twice a month, and continue until the worker has completed their individualized plan. Workers have the option to continue meeting with the training supervisor on a monthly basis or as needed.

The delineation of responsibilities between the training supervisor and the unit supervisor is clearly defined in Monterey's model with specific case related issues addressed by the unit supervisor and the broader child welfare training issues dealt with by the training supervisor.

Key elements in Monterey's program are the individualized training plans and the partnership between the two supervisors. Although the training supervisor maintains primary responsibility for developing the training plan and monitoring the progress, implementation is designed as a coordinated effort between the new worker and the two supervisors. An effective partnership between the two supervisors is fundamental for the successful "transfer of learning" process for the new worker. It is through this collaborative effort that a worker's progress is monitored as well as training gaps identified.

"Buy-in" for this collaborative training model is at varying stages amongst the department's unit supervisors. When the agency first introduced the new training model some supervisors were more receptive to the partnership concept and were able to identify ways to utilize the training supervisor to support their staff. Other supervisors were more resistant to the new training approach and remain unclear about the training supervisor's role. The training supervisor identifies this aspect of Monterey's program as the greatest challenge.

The training supervisor has attempted to address these issues by working closely with supervisors to help them understand the benefit of the training model, being responsive to the training needs supervisors identify for new workers, and creating helpful tools that enable staff to be successful on the job. Thus it has become part of the training supervisor's job to develop tools that will assist unit supervisors in learning how to help new and experienced staff transition from training to performance on the job. One useful tool developed for this purpose is the Supervisor Cook Book, an outline designed to provide supervisors information, materials and specific applications to meet the transfer of learning objectives.

Outcomes and Evaluation of the New Training Model

In July, 2001, the Bay Area Academy held a series of focus groups conducted by Margie Albers, LCSW. The purpose was to gather comparative information from staff who had completed the newly designed training program with those who had been trained in the former model.

The findings of the focus groups clearly indicated that the newer trainees felt better prepared for the job, less overwhelmed and had a higher level of job satisfaction. There were many other findings from the focus groups that provided the agency with helpful information in the development of their training program. Suggestions from participants included requests for more training in the following areas: CWS/CMS, writing court reports and other judicial related issues, time management, and setting work priorities.

Since implementation of the training model Monterey has experienced a favorable outcome in the area of new worker retention. Of the 15 new workers who have been trained the past 2 years, 14 are still with the agency, an improvement from previous retention statistics. Staff stability in general has also improved and is reflected by the number of vacancies, which were 13 in February, 2001, and only 2 currently.

STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP EXISTING STAFF

As Monterey and other counties continue to be challenged by recruitment and retention issues, it has become imperative to create career paths and other training/educational opportunities to develop and support existing staff.

Monterey County is involved in collaborative efforts with other county agencies, regional colleges and universities, adjacent counties, and the training academies to develop and deliver necessary training for new and existing staff at all levels. Some of Monterey's efforts include:

- Monterey County Social Work Training Collaborative: intra-county departmental group for sharing training resources. Also involves local Hartnell College.
- Tri-County Area Staff Development Collaborative: involves social services agencies from Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties; local community colleges, ICCS staff from CSUMB, and the Bay Area Academy.
- Monterey uses contracts with major universities and organizations to augment their training programs. This year their contracts include:
- University of California at Davis Extension contracts for basic and advanced training in an array of child welfare practice topics

Bay Area Academy- contract provides core child welfare curriculum, and expanded training on a variety of issues

Several ways that Monterey Social Services is addressing educational and career development for existing staff include: 1) Family Development Credential Program, 2) Specialized training for Social Worker I level staff; and 3) LCSW clinical supervision program.

FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CREDENTIAL PROGRAM

The Family Development Credential (FDC) program offers staff at all levels in the agency 18 college units applicable to their AA degree. The curriculum is focused on building staff skills for effective work with families. The approach is strength-based, with an emphasis on empowering staff to work collaboratively with families towards solutions that are realistic and attainable.

Monterey County is working collaboratively with community agencies and local colleges to "train the trainers" for the FDC program and expand the availability to social services staff. During 2001, the county trained 10 trainers and the first class of more than 20 staff graduated in December, 2001.

TRAINING FOR SOCIAL WORKER I LEVEL STAFF

Monterey has five levels of social work staff (Social Workers I, II, III, IV, & V) in their agency. Historically, social worker II level staff and above are given primary responsibility to carry child welfare cases. In February, 2001 Monterey began a "pilot" program with three social worker I staff who were given limited case assignments supplemented with intense supervision and

training. The program is designed to promote staff to social worker II positions within one year. The training supervisor reports a favorable outcome of the pilot project and all three staff have successfully moved into social worker II positions, and are entering MSW or other graduate level programs this fall.

LCSW/LMFT CLINICAL SUPERVISION PROGRAM

Monterey County recognizes that advanced clinical licensure has benefits for both staff and the families that receive services. Through a contract with the Bay Area Academy the agency has made clinical supervision available that meets the requirements of the Board of Behavioral Sciences. The contract began in January, 2001 and during the first evaluative period, 7 eligible staff received either individual or group supervision toward licensure.

STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY FUTURE STAFF

After completing my interviews with staff and reviewing their training materials, I began to realize that the challenge in training new staff, developing existing staff, and retaining staff actually begins long before workers are ever hired. Therein lies the greatest challenge for Monterey and all other child welfare agencies: attracting a well prepared future workforce into the health and human services arena that is equipped with the necessary knowledge and skill for careers in the field.

One approach that Monterey is using to attract their future workforce is through on going collaboration with regional universities and colleges. Monterey has a long-standing partnership with San Jose State University and is a site for graduate field placements from the MSW program. Additionally, this academic year San Jose State is offering two first year MSW classes on campus at CSUMB, which creates easier access for tri-county area students.

This year the agency has become a field placement site for junior and senior undergraduate students from the CHHS program at CSUMB. Currently three students are doing field placements in the children and families division. Quite interestingly, the CHHS students are assigned to line social workers that are responsible for supervising the field placements. Thus, this program design provides dual opportunities: field experience for the students and supervisory experience for line workers as part of their own career development.

The necessity and challenge of attracting people into the human services field early in their educational and career development lead me to spend an informative day at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) with staff from their Institute for Community Collaborative Studies (ICCS).

At ICCS I learned about their Collaborative Health and Human Services program (CHHS) which is a unique Bachelor of Arts program that integrates health and human service disciplines with a goal of preparing professionals to work effectively in the 21st century integrated delivery systems. The program was developed six years ago with significant involvement from health and human service professionals from the tri-county region (Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties).

BIRTH OF THE INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE STUDIES AT CSUMB

In the mid-1990's a group of tri-county professionals, including child welfare directors (*one of which is the current director in Santa Clara County*), were interested in finding ways to do the business of health and human services differently. Although this was not a unusual quest for people in the child welfare arena, the particular outcome of their effort was quite remarkable and gave birth to the creation of the CHHS program and eventually the ICCS at the newest California State University in Monterey. The timing of community interest was perhaps fortuitous and coincided with the planning stages for the university. Although the ICCS and the CHHS program were not part of the original plan for the CSUMB campus, an advisory group was formed with representation from all areas of the community including health, education, social services, probation, justice, mental health, the arts community and more.

The advisory group's vision was to breakdown the "silo mentality of human services," and design a program that would enable graduates to master core areas of competencies that are the essential components for all human service practitioners. Armed with their vision and a grant from the Packard Foundation the advisory board gained support from CSUMB and remained focused on their goal. Through their collective wisdom and deep commitment the advisory board established the framework for the CHHS program which strives to prepare graduates who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work in the rapidly changing social and political arena of health and human services.

The ICCS is a uniquely designed university program with three major branches: academic, field, and community programs. The academic component is primarily comprised of the CHHS degree program that offers students a concentration in either community health or social work. The field component, viewed as "the community as a classroom" provides the internship placements for students during their junior and senior years. The community component provides opportunity for students, faculty and staff to work on projects designed to enhance the well-being of the community through problem solving and capacity building. The community program provides consultation, training and technical assistance on a variety of service delivery systems.

COLLABORATIVE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEGREE

The mission of the CHHS degree program "is to research, study, and promote inter-professional, multicultural, collaborative approaches to the delivery of community-based public health and social services, and the development of public policy." This is accomplished through a curriculum that emphasizes collaboration, leadership, innovation and organizational change.

The CHHS program objectives include preparation for graduates to pursue careers in public and non-profit health and human service organizations as well as preparation for graduate programs in public health (MPH), social work (MSW), public policy (MPP), and public administration (MPA).

CSUMB is an "outcome based" university, thus the CHHS curriculum is designed for students to master and demonstrate their skills and knowledge around the following set of identified major learning objectives (MLO):

- Collaboration
- Conflict Resolution, Negotiation and Mediation
- Cross Cultural Competency
- Information Management
- Financial Management
- Knowledge of Health and Human Services
- Leadership
- Professional Communication
- Professional Ethics
- Statistics and Research Methods
- Systems Management

Mastery of the MLOs is combined with a 400 hour field learning component spanning the student's junior and senior year which provides opportunity for "hands on" application and professional development that complements the classroom experience. The field internships are varied and include one semester in a health related program and one semester in a social work related program during the junior year. Students select an area of specialty during their senior year in one year-long field placement.

An important component of the CHHS program design is the acknowledgment of prior learning that is incorporated into the mastery of the required MLOs. A student who is able to demonstrate competency in a specific MLO is given a waiver for that specific area and is then able to focus their effort in building new practice skills and knowledge. An important graduation requirement of the CHHS program is the student's portfolio that supports and demonstrates proficiency in the MLOs.

In May, 2002 CSUMB will graduate their fifth class from the CHHS program. Almost 40% of the graduates go on to pursue graduate programs in social work or other human service related disciplines. Many graduates have remained in the tri-county area and are currently working in an array of public, private and non-profit agencies.

Monterey County maintains several collaborative ties with CSUMB. In addition to offering field placement opportunities, the social services agency director is a member of the ICCS advisory board, and other agency staff participate in reviewing the student portfolios each year.

CONCLUSION

In the short span of two years, Monterey County has developed an approach to training that is aligned with their agency objectives. Retention of newly trained staff is high and they are continuing to develop skill enhancement programs to offer existing staff advanced career opportunities.

The founding of CSUMB and the creation of the ICCS/CHHS program in the late 1990's has created a further avenue for the county to develop a strong university partnership to interest and educate the future workforce in social work.

CURRENT TRAINING MODEL IN SANTA CLARA

Two years ago Santa Clara implemented a new induction program that incorporates the core child welfare curriculum and agency specific training. The training unit is a collaborative effort between the Department of Family and Children's Services and Staff Development.

The program design is a 6-week classroom model that follows a standardized curriculum offered cyclically every 2-3 months. Two social worker supervisors facilitate the training program and supervise the trainees during the 6-week program. The agency provides a majority of their core training with a few of the sessions offered through their regional Bay Area Academy.

All new hires in Santa Clara complete the standardized training program, whether they have many years of child welfare experience or have a limited social work background. The new workers remain in the training unit for the 6 week period and are given their permanent unit assignments during the 4th week of training. Most of the new workers do not meet their ongoing unit supervisor until they have completed the 6-week training program and are ready to begin their permanent assignments.

LESSONS LEARNED IN MONTEREY

- + "One size fits all" may not be the most effective approach to training new child welfare workers

Although the core child welfare curriculum identifies essential competencies for all social workers, effective training should consider the strengths, experiences and gaps that each new worker brings to the job. Monterey's individualized model builds upon the foundation that each new worker already has and adds necessary knowledge and skill to their "toolbox".

- + First line supervisors are critical in the training and retention of staff; therefore it is essential to train the supervisors in the "transfer of learning" process

Induction training programs vary from county to county; however, the permanent unit supervisor plays a key role in the on-going training and support for new workers in every county. Exit interviews in Santa Clara have indicated the importance of the worker/supervisor relationship in these areas and have linked it to retention. The Monterey model acknowledges the important role of the unit supervisor and continues to identify ways to assist the supervisors in meeting training objectives.

- + Training is only one component of a continuum that incorporates recruitment, initial training, advanced training, support, and retention

My BASSC project gave me the opportunity to focus on the issue of training. Through this process I recognized that training, support, and retention are interconnected. In order to avoid fragmentation, counties must integrate these strategies to identify and maintain an effective workforce.

- + Foster parent PRIDE program is an important training component for social workers as well as foster parents

Effective partnerships are essential between social workers and foster parents to strengthen the out-of-home care system for children. I learned that Monterey is similar to Santa Clara in that there are some areas of tension in the relationships between social workers and foster parents. Monterey determined that social workers and foster parents had significant misconceptions about each other and felt the joint training would promote a better understanding of individual roles and common issues. Feedback from recently trained workers and foster parents has been favorable about the value of joint training.

- + Child Welfare agencies need social workers who have competencies in multi-disciplinary areas and the skills and ability to effectively collaborate with other public, private, and non-profit community agencies

Social welfare agencies are challenged by the rapidly changing social, economic and political environments of today and the future. Social workers must have a well-stocked "toolbox" to tackle the complex health and social problems facing the community. Today's public, private and non-profit agencies are becoming more integrated, flexible, outcome based, and driven by technology. This quick paced system requires practitioners who are trained in an interdisciplinary approach and have skills in effective collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Monterey County and Santa Clara County differ significantly in size and in the number of new child welfare workers that complete their respective training programs each year. Despite these differences, I discovered some valuable approaches to training that might be applicable and effective in Santa Clara.

RECOMMENDATION (1)

Develop a collaborative approach to training that involves the training supervisors and the permanent supervisors.

- Make specific unit assignments for new workers on day #1 of training
- Create opportunities early during the training period for trainees to meet with their permanent supervisors
- Provide training for unit supervisors on "transfer of learning" concepts and skills
- Develop a formal feedback process for unit supervisors to share information with the training supervisors

Specific unit assignments made prior to the start of each induction class would result in reduced anxiety for new staff, and enable workers to meet with their unit supervisors as an integral part of the training program. Training the supervisors in "transfer of learning" skills will strengthen the program and enhance the training support that supervisors can provide new and experienced staff.

RECOMMENDATION (2)

Develop an individualized training plan for each new hire which incorporates their strength and prior experience.

- Assess each new worker for prior knowledge and skill to develop an individualized training plan
- Develop alternative training tasks for workers who have sufficient competencies on selected topics

An individualized approach to training is a strength-based model that values staff for prior knowledge and experience. It would also make more efficient use of training time for each new worker.

RECOMMENDATION (3)

Mandate that all new trainees complete the Foster Parent PRIDE program within their probationary period.

Joint training for social workers and foster parents has tremendous potential to enhance their working relationships and improve foster parent and social worker retention. A stronger partnership will also favorably impact children.

RECOMMENDATION (4)

Develop an LCSW clinical supervision program for eligible staff.

Providing LCSW clinical supervision will enhance skills and knowledge for staff which additionally benefits those receiving services. Advanced clinical knowledge should favorably impact the written clinical assessments that social workers submit to juvenile court. Potential to improve social worker recruitment and retention for those interested in clinical licensure.

RECOMMENDATION (5)

Establish formal contact with CSUMB to explore feasibility of Santa Clara offering field placements to students from the CHHS program.

Santa Clara County maintains a strong partnership with San Jose State University and is a field placement site for students in the undergraduate BSW and graduate MSW programs. Outreach

to. CSUMB would establish a new partnership and identify an additional pool of students who are interested in health and human services.

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation to the Monterey County Department of Social Services staff and the faculty at California State University, Monterey Bay for their hospitality, time, and willingness to share information. A special thanks to Laura Dobbs, Monterey County Social Work Training Supervisor, who shared her passion and enthusiasm for training and assisted me on my journey.