

National IV-E Roundtable
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IV-E students who are public child welfare agency employees: Enhancing
competencies for career advancement

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Developing meaningful learning experiences for students who have been in the child welfare workforce for several years presents unique challenges for MSW and IV-E programs that are often oriented toward preparing new child welfare practitioners. Thoughtful assessment of the experienced student's goals and expectations for advanced education should form the basis for developing these learning experiences. In this roundtable discussion, we will consider models of IV-E field education that meet these student's goals and examine challenges connecting IV-E field experiences to career development. Examples from the field will provide opportunities for discussion.

I. Public child welfare agency employees and MSW IV-E

A. Student profiles

1. BSW with 1 – 3 years of case management (initial assessment or ongoing services) experience
2. BSW with 4 – 15 years of agency practice experience which could include both case management and supervision (including roles such as 'lead worker')
3. BSW with several years of agency practice experience who is currently a supervisor.

B. Student goals for MSW education

1. Undefined: student / employee unable to articulate specific reasons for MSW education beyond a general desire to obtain graduate degree. May be motivated by externals such as peers and agency pay scale.

2. Defined: student / employee articulates goals related to skill development, practice specialization, system improvement.
3. Advancement: student / employee connects MSW education to career advancement to roles such as supervision, training, program coordination and management.

C. Advanced public child welfare practice roles for MSWs

1. Advanced direct practice – particularly in specialized areas such as family preservation, permanency planning, adoption, etc.
2. Supervision – most common developmental career option
3. Program coordination (foster care, independent living, liaison roles with external agencies)
4. Training
5. Agency administration (county / state)

D. Assessing student / employee goals for their MSW-level IV-E practice

1. IV-E application – by asking them to articulate their goals for the MSW degree as well as for career advancement
2. IV-E interview – by asking the student to identify the advanced practice roles they are working toward, and how they plan to utilize the MSW IV-E program to achieve their goals.
3. Student ability to define their MSW program goals and future advanced practice roles should be a major factor of consideration in their IV-E application.

E. Considerations for field education

1. As most students select advanced direct practice, the most common field placement for agency employees is to place them in a different unit in the agency where they are employed, or, less commonly, in another jurisdiction. If the field placement activities are primarily case management, the likelihood of this placement preparing the student for advanced practice roles is questionable.

2. Constructing a field placement to prepare a student / employee for a supervisory role presents significant barriers and challenges.
 - a. Agency administrators may not view the student as 'ready' for supervision, or as not being a suitable candidate.
 - b. Potential for difficulties related to student's dual roles if they are in a worksite field placement.
 - c. Supervisors' time demands may limit their availability to be a field instructor.
 - d. Agency cultural expectations that the skills for supervision are tied to having many years of practice experience.
3. Constructing a field placement around program coordination and community engagement activities prepares students for advanced practice roles in public child welfare.
 - a. Greater opportunities for 'new learning' for worksite field placements.
 - b. Often the 'line of authority' issue (see 2. b. above) is not present.
 - c. These types of activities are consistent with advanced generalist social work practice.
 - d. By broadening the scope of their learning activities, the student develops a new skill set.
4. Potential field placement options for advanced year MSW students / employees could include:
 - a. Agency director or program manager
 - b. Unit supervisor (separate from employment setting)
 - c. Program coordinator (foster care, special – needs adoption, children's mental health, etc.)

- d. 'Hybrid' placements – housed at public child welfare agency but bulk of the field learning activities take place in the community.
 - e. If IV-E program allows, consider external field placement in community partner child welfare agency (treatment foster care or family service agency).
5. Alignment of field learning activities with student's learning / career goals:
- a. If a student's practice experience has been primarily or exclusively in case management, construct field learning activities that are externally-focused (agency liaison work, community engagement, contracting, working on committees).

Example: for the past five years, we have placed advanced year IV-E MSW agency employee students with regional child fatality review team.

- b. If a student has substantial direct practice experience and plans to remain in direct practice, help / challenge them to identify areas of new learning within the other unit or program where they will intern. Simply learning what case management is like in another unit or program is insufficient for an advanced MSW student to develop advanced generalist practice skills. Have student define advanced skills they will learn.

Examples: learning the Step-Wise interview protocol for child sexual abuse investigation, or, administering the Casey Life Skills assessment for independent living, etc.

- c. Students who are interested in utilizing their MSW program proactively for career advancement should be prioritized for IV-E. This may involve consultation both with the student and agency administration to identify mutual goals. Utilization of IV-E resources to assist agencies with personnel succession planning has mutual benefits for students, agencies and IV-E programs.

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Discussion items

1. What percentage of your advanced year MSW IV-E students are public / tribal child welfare agency employees?
2. In your experience, are the needs and goals of student / employees in your programs different than non-employee students?
3. How does your IV-E program assess a student / employee's learning and career goals?
4. What is your MSW program's policy about workplace field placements?
5. Examples of workplace field placements that worked well / not-so-well?
6. Examples of situations where there was a good alignment between the student / employee's field learning activities and their MSW learning / career goals.
7. Examples of situations where a student / employee had difficulty meeting their MSW learning / career goals.
8. Any other ideas or questions about serving student / employees in your MSW IV-E program?