



Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families

Wisconsin Child Welfare Workload Study

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This study’s overarching goal was to review work activity for Child Welfare (CW) Professionals and supervisory CW Professionals within the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to allow Wisconsin to make informed decisions on work distribution and staff allocation. There were seven objectives that made up this goal. These were as follows:

- Objective 1** – Selecting a Sample of Local Child Welfare Agencies and CW Professionals
- Objective 2** – Conducting Local Outreach with Child Welfare Agencies
- Objective 3** – Data Gathering in Preparation for Time Study
- Objective 4** – Conducting the Time Study
- Objective 5** – Determining Existing Workloads and Caseloads
- Objective 6** – Determining Suggested Workload and Caseload Standards and Staff Needs
- Objective 7** – Developing Suggested Operational Efficiencies

To achieve these objectives, our approach utilized a time data collection, subject matter expert judgments from within DCF, existing family data, and recorded actual family-related and non-family related time spent on child protective services. Further, our team conducted additional research on national and state standards for child welfare service delivery and other efforts to examine work processes and service delivery best practices. This research provided a foundation for comparing the results of the Wisconsin time study to other states, as well as informed the development of suggested operational efficiencies. Our scientific approach, which has been successfully implemented by ICF in health and human services agencies throughout the U.S., provides accurate workload representations.

Summary of Results

Estimated family servicing times, contextual standard caseloads, and staffing translations were derived from data collected during the time study. The table below presents the results of the time study and optimal time workshop analyses of average monthly family servicing times per practice area, in hours and minutes per family, per month. These service times were translated into an estimated contextual standards range (+/- ~10%) of families per month for staff assignment, by Practice Area. Youth Justice Intake and Youth Justice Ongoing estimates have little other benchmarking by which to compare the time study estimates and should be interpreted with caution.

Time Study and Optimal Monthly Family Servicing Time Estimates Related to Monthly Families Serviced by Practice Area

Source	Access	Initial Assessment	Recruiting/ Licensing/ Kinship	Ongoing Services	Youth Justice Intake	Youth Justice Ongoing
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Time Study	2:28	7:32	5:41	11:12	6:21	7:23
Time Study Families per Month	43-52	14-17	19-23	9-11	17-20	14-17
Optimal Estimates	2:40	15:52	7:42	13:07	6:21	7:40
Optimal Families per Month	39-48	7-8	14-17	8-10	17-20	14-17

These state average family service times from the time study were translated into staffing estimates based on workload. The following table provides the application of these estimates into staffing in the State for each practice area. Overall, the model projected current staffing of 1,831 staff, within approximately 6% of actual child welfare staffing levels (total CPS family manager staffing of 1,732 staff) using March 2020 family service time estimates. Comparisons of staffing levels by Practice Area were not possible given the data available at the local agency level regarding staff assignments by Practice Area.

Family Related Child Welfare Professional Hours Per Month	Access	Initial Assessment	Recruiting/ Licensing/ Kinship	Ongoing Services	Youth Justice Intake	Youth Justice Ongoing
Total Families	5,912	5,651	7,431	6,266	2,127	4,199 ¹
Family Related Time	14,571	42,593	42,291	70,193	13,519	30,994
Time Study Estimated Casework Staffing FTE	124.6	364.1	361.5	600.0	115.6	265.0

The following table presents the results of the analysis of CW professional and supervisor staffing estimates based on child welfare workload and a comparison with staffing as of March 2020, at the Region level throughout the State.

¹ Estimated families in Youth Justice Intake and Ongoing services are likely to be inaccurate as reporting reliability is still underway.

Region	Estimated CW Professional Workload (Monthly hours)	Estimated CW Professional Staffing	CW Professional Staffing (March 2020)	Estimated Supervisory Staffing Requirement (March 2020)	Supervisory Staffing (March 2020)
Milwaukee	48,053	410.8	355.3	86.6	76
Northeastern	47,276	404.1	336.5	85.2	91
Northern	23,124	197.7	156.0	41.7	42
Southeastern	30,541	261.1	228.0	55	51
Southern	32,903	322.8	281.3	59.3	73
Western	32,265	275.8	234.2	58.1	52
Total	214,162	1,831	1,732	386	386

Additionally, the following table presents the results of the analysis of CW professional and supervisor staffing estimates based on child welfare workload and a comparison with staffing as of March 2020, based on a categorization of counties as small, medium, large, and extra large as determined by the number of children under 18 in the county, as of 2019.

County Size	Estimated CW Professional Workload (Monthly hours)	Estimated CW Professional Staffing	CW Professional Staffing (March 2020)	Estimated Supervisory Staffing Requirement (March 2020)	Supervisory Staffing (March 2020)
Small	20,028	171.2	164.9	56	36
Medium	40,391	345.3	320.4	77	73
Large	45,185	386.3	383.4	75	81
Extra Large	108,558	928.0	863.1	178	196
Total	214,162	1,831	1,732	386	386

These results were also compiled into a Wisconsin Workload and Staffing Tool (in Microsoft Excel) that can be used to store staffing and family/case data, as well as the estimated staffing requirement based on monthly workload. The Tool uses the average family service time from the time study to provide the relationship between caseload, workload and staffing levels. This Tool can be used to examine caseload and workload over time, supervisors to CW Professional ratios, and how changes in family service provision may affect staffing level estimates.

Multiple factors affect child protective service outcomes and requirements. These include the number of CW Professionals, the policies that impact program implementation, and the efficiency of work processes. While hiring CW Professionals is often a solution used to address workload issues, another solution is identifying ways to more efficiently operate programs and manage resources. The operational efficiencies and best practices described in the final chapter of the report were derived from the information gathering during interviews and focus groups with CW Professionals across the State. This report proposes specific operational efficiencies to

be considered for implementation in the following key areas: Processes and Procedures, Training, Technology, Resources, and CW Professionals Shortages and Employee Turnover.

Among the recommendations identified by category were:

Work Experience

- Keeping CW Professionals engaged and satisfied with their work is a key element to employee retention. Retaining employees is one of the most effective means to maintain service delivery efficiency as turnover causes disruptions in delivery, the need for CW Professionals replacement, training, and other unnecessary byproducts of CW Professional loss.

Process Improvements

- Respondents requested more automation, and quicker and more efficient ways to complete family notes and necessary paperwork.
- DCF may want to review the core processes, procedures, and policies within the Department to determine if additional standardization would benefit CW Professionals as a whole.
- DCF and individual agencies should also consider more clearly communicating policy updates and changes with all CW Professionals, including why the change is occurring, how it will impact CPS work, and any other impacts to CW Professionals.
- DCF should review the forms, reports, and other service requirements currently in use to determine if they are still needed or could be eliminated.
- A common knowledge management or Policy and Procedures system should be set up and maintained to provide greater access to, understanding of, and standardization of critical Child Welfare and Youth Justice services.
- Explore utilizing predictive analytics to standardize processes and procedures by using data to identify the potential outcomes of a family to make decisions.

Training

- Enforce required new CW Professional training and monitor continued training requirements.
- First, identify competencies required for CW jobs and the relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that CW Professionals need to be effective. Next, build and deliver a training system that is grounded in adult learning theories and supports progressive training for both new and experienced CW Professionals.
- Encourage opportunities for formal and informal training.
- As part of the Child Welfare Knowledge Management system, work with the agencies to develop best practices or model templates for standard documents, such as the permanency plans, court reports, referrals, and other common forms.
- Refamiliarize CW Professionals with eWISACWIS documentation standards, which identify the specific data fields that must be completed, define their intent, and describe how data should be entered.

- Increase focus on effective supervision for CW Professionals, and ensure supervisors receive quality support and training.

Technology

- Seek to improve data quality in eWiSACWIS through reducing redundancy or inefficient data entry.
- Explore implementing technologies such as voice transcription to allow CW Professionals to document notes while out in the field.

Resources and Services

- If virtual work from home continues to be a viable option following the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies should continue to provide CW Professionals with the appropriate tools and resources to work from home.
- If continued telework is allowed, agencies may want to establish telework policies and procedures to ensure it is implemented equitably across the state and CW Professionals are working effectively virtually.
- Continue to assess workload related to documentation, communication, and other tasks that can be made more efficient through technological resources.

CW Professionals Shortages and Employee Turnover

- Explore the feasibility of using volunteers (once certified or licensed) to provide transportation services.
- Implement rigorous recruitment and retention of foster parents, including working with private agencies where feasible.
- Due to the stress related to the trauma CW Professionals experience and are exposed to on the job, DCF and individual agencies should focus on building a resilient workforce culture that helps CW Professionals manage stressful situations and recover.
- Larger agencies should continue to support the use of specialists but maintain awareness of possible CW Professionals departures or shortages, and to the extent possible, plan precautions to ensure the proper mix of CW Professionals to caseloads.
- Proactively share the positive impact that CW Professionals have on children and families to attract and retain qualified professionals in the industry.

Community Outreach and Education

- Respond to media reports with educational press releases and explanations.
- Work with the media to share positive news stories and hold press conferences about CW initiatives.
- Continue to monitor other States and their efforts to improve community outreach and education through social media, creative advertising methods and virtual events.
- Utilize social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) to connect with the community and related organizations and advertise community programs and events.