**Minnesota Child Protection Workforce Stability in the Context of System Reform:
Region 11 Quantitative Findings**

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### Introduction

In an effort to better understand the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of child welfare practitioners during a time of system reform, researchers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare partnered with the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) and representatives of the Child Safety and Permanency Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to carry out the 2016 Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Study. The *Region 11 Quantitative Findings* report provides descriptions of the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, and adoption and permanency in Region 11. It is important to note that one of the main goals of the study was to understand factors that may contribute to workforce instability; thus this report highlights these factors and in doing so does not necessarily acknowledge the strengths of the system and its workforce. Statewide findings are presented for context throughout the report.

### Personal Characteristics

Table 1 shows the personal characteristics of the survey respondents. The majority of Region 11 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, and adoption and permanency that responded to the 2016 Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Survey were working in front-line positions (87%). Region 11 professionals overwhelmingly identified as White (84%). Similarly, professionals largely identified as female (84%). In Region 11, 22% of the workforce reported being 30 years or younger, and 12% reported being 56 years or older. It is important to note that while one out of every eight professionals in the more rural regions of Minnesota was aged 25 or younger, this was not true for Region 11 where less than 5% of the workforce was in this age range. Similarly, one out of every five professionals (and in some regions, one out of every four professionals) was aged 60 or older in Minnesota's north central and northeast regions, suggesting that the workforce may be on the verge of experiencing significant turnover due to retirement; 5% of Region 11 professionals was age 60 or older.

### Educational Background

Table 1 shows a large proportion of Region 11's workforce reported having earned graduate degrees (60%). More than one third of all professionals in the workforce were trained specifically in social work (61%), with 16% reporting their highest social work degree as BSW and 45% reporting having earned an MSW. Regions with institutions of higher education in Minnesota, and particularly those that offered degrees in social work tended to have the highest proportions of professionals with advanced educational training (including Region 11). In Region 11, one out of every six professionals reported receiving specialized education and training in child welfare through Title IV-E programs (18%).

### Tenure in Child Protection, Involuntary Foster Care, and Adoption/Permanency

Almost half (48%) of Region 11's workforce has been in the CP/IFC/A/P field for nine or more years (with 32% reporting tenure of 15 or more years); however, 32% of the workforce has been in the field for two years or less as shown in Table 1.

*Time in Current Position*

While the levels of tenure reported by Region 11 professionals indicate an experienced workforce, recent turnover and hiring within the field is also evident. As shown in Table 1, one out of every three professionals (30%) in Region 11's child protection system has been in his/her current position less than one year and half of all professionals in the region (50%) has been in his/her current position for two years or less. These trends reveal that many professionals were fairly new to their positions and/or agencies. On the other hand, 23% of respondents in Region 11 have been in their current position for 13 or more years.

Table 1. Region 11 and Statewide Personal Characteristics.

| | Region 11 (*Sample size, n=227*) | Statewide (*Sample size, n=734*) |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **Race/Ethnicity (n=227, n=733)** | | |
| White | 190 (83.7%) | 663 (90.3%) |
| Professional of Color | 37 (16.3%) | 71 (9.7%) |
| **Work Position (n=227, n=734)** | | |
| Supervisor | 29 (12.8%) | 110 (15%) |
| Front Line Staff | 198 (87.2%) | 624 (85%) |
| **Gender (n=226, n=732)** | | |
| Male | 36 (15.9%) | 94 (12.8%) |
| Female | 190 (84.1%) | 638 (86.9%) |
| **Age (n=XXX, n=734)** | | |
| 20-25 yrs | 9 (4.0%) | 49 (6.7%) |
| 26-30 yrs | 40 (17.6%) | 120 (16.3%) |
| 31-35 yrs | 30 (13.2%) | 117 (15.9%) |
| 36-40 yrs | 33 (14.5%) | 105 (14.3%) |
| 41-45 yrs | 36 (15.9%) | 104 (14.2%) |
| 46-50 yrs | 30 (13.2%) | 83 (11.3%) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 51-55 yrs | 25 (11.0%) | 68 (9.3%) |
| 56-60 yrs | 13 (5.7%) | 52 (7.1%) |
| Over 60 yrs | 11 (4.8%) | 36 (4.9%) |
| **Graduate Degree (n=225, n=715)** | 134 (59.6%) | 265 (37.1%) |
| **Highest Social Work Degree (n=227, n=734)** | | |
| No SW Degree | 89 (39.2%) | 323 (44.0%) |
| BSW | 37 (16.3%) | 235 (32.0%) |
| MSW | 101 (44.5%) | 176 (24.0%) |
| **IV-E (n=224, n=714)** | 40 (17.9%) | 111 (15.5%) |
| **CP Tenure (n=227, n=734)** | | |
| < 1 yr | 41 (18.1%) | 110 (15.0%) |
| 1-2 yrs | 31 (13.7%) | 108 (14.7%) |
| 3-4 yrs | 20 (8.8) | 85 (11.6%) |
| 5-6 yrs | 11 (4.8%) | 55 (7.5%) |
| 7-8 yrs | 5 (2.2%) | 34 (4.6%) |
| 9-10 yrs | 10 (4.4%) | 52 (7.1%) |
| 11-12 yrs | 10 (4.4%) | 29 (4.0%) |
| 13-15 yrs | 27 (11.9%) | 53 (7.2%) |
| > 15 yrs | 72 (31.7%) | 208 (28.3%) |
| **Current Position Tenure (n=227, n=734)** | | |
| < 1 yr | 67 (29.5%) | 170 (23.2%) |
| 1-2 yrs | 44 (19.4%) | 152 (20.7%) |
| 3-4 yrs | 27 (11.9%) | 99 (13.5%) |
| 5-6 yrs | 9 (4.0%) | 49 (6.7%) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7-8 yrs | 8 (3.5%) | 43 (5.9%) |
| 9-10 yrs | 15 (6.6%) | 45 (6.1%) |
| 11-12 yrs | 6 (2.6%) | 20 (2.7%) |
| 13-15 yrs | 22 (9.7%) | 40 (5.4%) |
| > 15 yrs | 29 (12.8%) | 116 (15.8%) |

*Job Satisfaction*

Less than half of Region 11 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency in Minnesota reported satisfaction with their current jobs (40%) as shown in Table 2.

Input into decision-making and professionals' beliefs that they have a positive impact on clients' lives are aspects that may contribute to job satisfaction (or the lack thereof). Table 2 shows that one out of every three Region 11 professionals reported (36%) that they did not have sufficient input into decision-making in the agencies in which they worked. However, Region 11 professionals overwhelmingly (93%) reported that they had a positive impact on the lives of their clients; this belief was consistent across every region in Minnesota.

Concern for personal and family safety as well as feeling overwhelmed by job duties may also contribute to job dissatisfaction. Concerns for personal and family safety were evident from Region 11 professionals' responses. Across Region 11, Table 2 shows that a vast majority of all professionals (95%) reported being afraid for their personal safety and over a quarter of all professionals (27%) reported being afraid for the safety of their own family at least some of the time. Safety concerns were highest - for both personal and one's own family safety - in the northern and western regions of Minnesota. In addition, a vast majority of all Region 11 professionals reported feeling overwhelmed by their job duties (61%).

Table 2. Region 11 and Statewide Job Satisfaction.

| | **Region 11** (*Sample size, n=58)* | **Statewide** (*Sample size, n=734)* |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **I am satisfied with my job as it currently is** | 138 (60.8%) | 492 (66.7%) |
| **I believe I have sufficient input into decision making in the agency in which I work** | 100 (44.1%) | 466 (63.5%) |

| | Region 11 | Statewide |
|---|---|---|
| **I am sometimes afraid for my personal safety due to the nature of my work** | 215 (94.7%) | 426 (58.0%) |
| **I am sometimes afraid for the safety of my family members due to the nature of my work** | 61 (26.9%) | 261 (35.6%) |
| **I believe that I can have positive impact on the lives of my clients (For supervisors, please indicate if you believe that you can have a positive impact on the lives of the clients your staff serve)** | 210 (92.5%) | 705 (96.0%) |
| **I feel overwhelmed in my job duties** | 138 (60.8%) | 499 (68.0%) |

### Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is also often referred to as *compassion fatigue*, *vicarious trauma*, or *burnout*. STS is defined as indirect exposure to traumatic material that results in symptoms such as hyper-vigilance, hopelessness, avoidance, minimizing, anger and cynicism, insensitivity to violence, sleeplessness, illness, inability to embrace complexity, and diminished self-care. STS is of particular concern for professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency. In Region 11, the vast majority of professionals (83%) reported experiencing STS while carrying out their job duties, with one out of every three Region 11 professionals reporting that these experiences had a negative effect on their ability to carry out their job, shown in Table 3. Of great concern for Region 11 is the reported lack of support available to assist professionals in managing their STS. Almost half of Region 11 professionals (45%) indicated they did not have the support they needed to manage their STS.

Table 3. Region 11 and Statewide Secondary Traumatic Stress.

| | **Region 11** | **Statewide** |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **I have experienced secondary traumatic stress while carrying out my job duties (n=221; n=716)** | 184 (83.3%) | 595 (83.1%) |
| **Secondary traumatic stress has negatively affected my ability to carry out my job duties (n=209; n=684)** | 84 (40.2%) | 254 (37.1%) |
| **I have had the supports I needed to manage my secondary traumatic stress (n=212; n=684)** | 117 (55.2%) | 430 (62.9%) |

*Supervision*
Supervision is a consistent predictor of workforce satisfaction and stability. It is encouraging that a majority of Region 11 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency (75%) reported satisfaction with the supervision they received. As shown in Table 4, professionals in Region 11 overwhelmingly reported that their supervisors trusted their decision-making and abilities (93%) and that their supervisors were willing to help when problems arose (87%). In addition, nearly three-quarters of Region 11 professionals reported that they and their supervisors shared work experiences with one another to improve effectiveness of client services. However, half of all Region 11 professionals reported their supervision centered around administrative aspects, such as monitoring and compliance.

Table 4. Region 11 and Statewide Supervision.

| | **Region 11** (*Sample size, n=58*) | **Statewide** (*Sample size, n=734*) |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **I receive adequate supervision, guidance, and support from my immediate supervisor** | 170 (74.9%) | 571 (77.8%) |
| **The supervision I receive centers around administrative monitoring (compliance) as opposed to support or education** | 115 (50.7%) | 350 (47.7%) |
| **My supervisor trusts my decision-making and my ability to do my job** | 211 (93.0%) | 690 (94.0%) |
| **I find that my supervisor is willing to help when problems arise** | 198 (87.2%) | 657 (89.5%) |
| **My supervisor and I share work experiences with one another to improve effectiveness of client service** | 166 (73.1%) | 570 (77.7%) |

*Agency Processes, Policy, and Support*
Professionals also responded to a number of questions about their perceptions of agency processes, policy, and attitudes of others. Table 5 shows that overwhelmingly, Region 11 professionals (95%) noted that their peers were willing to support and assist each other when

problems arose. More than half of Region 11 professionals (59%) reported that their agencies provided sufficient professional development opportunities and activities. On the topic of policy, 34% of professionals agreed that child welfare staff cooperatively participated with supervisors and administrators in developing new programs and policies in their agencies. However, an overwhelming majority of Region 11 professionals (64%) noted that frequent changes in policy have had a negative impact on their job performance, with over half of all professionals stating that they would be able to better carry out their job duties if explanations of policies were made clearer (56%). Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of professionals (84%) did not believe that the public held their work in high esteem.

Table 5. Region 11 and Statewide Agency Processes, Policy, and Support.

| | Region 11 (*Sample size, n=58*) | Statewide (*Sample size, n=734*) |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **Frequent changes in policies have had a negative impact on my job performance** | 146 (64.3%) | 430 (58.6%) |
| **Professional development opportunities and activities provided by my agency are adequate/sufficient to enhance my ability to do my job** | 119 (58.6%) | 453 (61.7%) |
| **The general public holds employees of child welfare in high professional esteem** | 37 (16.3%) | 159 (21.7%) |
| **If explanations of policy decisions were made clearer to me, I would be better able to carry out my job duties and responsibilities** | 127 (55.9%) | 388 (52.9%) |
| **In this agency, child welfare staff cooperatively participate with supervisors and administrators in developing new programs and policies** | 78 (34.4%) | 365 (49.7%) |
| **My peers are willing to support and assist one another when problems arise** | 215 (94.7%) | 700 (95.4%) |

*Workforce Stability*

Intentions to remain employed in child protection and particularly in professionals' current agencies were a large focus of the Minnesota Child Welfare Stabilization Survey. In this survey,

we asked professionals to identify the job seeking activities in which they participated in the past year as well as their intentions to remain in the field and in their current agencies in the future.

In Table 6, the results of the survey revealed that in the past 12 months more than half of all Region 11 professionals (60%) had looked or applied for a position other than the one in which they currently worked. However, 21% of all Region 11 professionals actively sought positions solely outside of child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, or permanency - referred to as *leavers* in the table below. In Region 11, 39% of professionals sought positions within the field or were inclusive of positions both inside and outside of the field in their job search - referred to as *movers* in the table below.

Table 6. Region 11 and Statewide Workforce Stability, Last Year.

|  | **Region 11** (*Sample size, n=223)* | **Statewide** (*Sample size, n=720)* |
|---|---|---|
| **LAST Year** | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **Stayers** | 91 (40.8%) | 338 (46.9%) |
| **Movers** | 86 (38.6%) | 233 (32.4%) |
| **Leavers** | 46 (20.6%) | 149 (20.7%) |

In Table 7, the results of the survey revealed that the majority of Region 11 professionals (79%) intended to remain in their current positions in the upcoming 12 months. Within Region 11, only one out of every nine professionals intended to move to a position within child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, or permanency in a different agency then the one in which they were currently employed. Similarly, one out of every nine professionals in Region 11 intended to leave the field altogether.

Table 7. Region 11 and Statewide Workforce Stability, Next Year.

|  | **Region 11** (*Sample size, n=217)* | **Statewide** (*Sample size, n=700)* |
|---|---|---|
| **NEXT Year** | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **Stayers** | 172 (79.3%) | 581 (83.0%) |
| **Movers** | 22 (10.1%) | 47 (6.7%) |
| **Leavers** | 23 (10.6%) | 72 (10.3%) |

Table 8 shows the top three factors Region 11 professionals identified as important for retention are increased salary (90%), lower caseload (79%), and fewer administrative requirements (77%).

Table 8. Region 11 and Statewide Factors Important for Retention.

| | Region 11 (*Sample size, n=223*) | Statewide (*Sample size, n=720*) |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **Different work hours** | 85 (38.1%) | 265 (36.8%) |
| **Increased salary** | 200 (89.7%) | 636 (88.3%) |
| **Lower caseload** | 177 (79.4%) | 586 (81.4%) |
| **Fewer administrative requirements** | 171 (76.7%) | 582 (80.8%) |
| **Increased frequency or length of supervision** | 73 (32.7%) | 231 (32.1%) |
| **Higher quality supervision** | 104 (46.6%) | 300 (41.7%) |
| **Better communication about policy and practice changes** | 145 (65.0%) | 443 (61.5%) |
| **Additional opportunities for involvement in policy and practice changes** | 155 (69.5%) | 446 (61.9%) |
| **Additional supports to help deal with secondary traumatic stress** | 134 (60.1%) | 470 (65.3%) |
| **Additional professional development opportunities** | 151 (67.7%) | 514 (71.4%) |

### *Child Protection Reform*

Region 11 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, permanency, and adoption generally reported being aware of the child protection reforms taking place in Minnesota. In fact, 82% of professionals reported being generally aware of the reforms taking place in Minnesota and 70% of professionals were aware of *specific elements* of the reform *and* its resulting impact on their practice, shown in Table 9.

Generally, more Region 11 professionals reported being satisfied with communication provided by their agency than they were with communication provided by DHS. While 49% of Region 11

professionals reported satisfaction with communication by their agency regarding reform, only 28% were satisfied with communication by DHS regarding the proposed changes.

Region 11 professionals also reported that their agencies advocated on behalf of the workforce (54%) and on behalf of the children and families served during the current child protection reform process (57%).

Regardless of their awareness of the reform, their satisfaction about its communication, or their perceptions of advocacy efforts within their agencies, Region 11 professionals overwhelmingly (95%) indicated that there is a need to increase public awareness of their work.

Table 9. Region 11 and Statewide Child Protection Reform.

| | Region 11 | Statewide |
|---|---|---|
| | Number (Percentage) | Number (Percentage) |
| **I am generally aware of the child protection reforms taking place (n=222; n=717)** | 181 (81.5%) | 605 (84.4%) |
| **I am aware of specific elements of proposed child protection reforms in Minnesota AND how those will impact my practice (n=223; n=718)** | 157 (70.4%) | 528 (73.5%) |
| **I am satisfied with the communication from the leadership at DHS about the proposed changes in child protection (n=222; n=716)** | 63 (28.4%) | 247 (34.5%) |
| **I am satisfied with the communication from the leadership in my agency about the proposed changes in child protection (n=223; n=718)** | 109 (48.9%) | 473 (65.9%) |
| **I feel as though my agency has advocated for the child welfare workforce in the current child protection reform process (n=222; n=715)** | 120 (54.1%) | 466 (65.2%) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **I feel my agency has advocated for the children and families served in the current child protection reform process (n=222; n=716)** | 127 (57.2%) | 496 (69.3%) |
| **There is a need to increase public awareness of the nature and value of my work (n=223; n=718)** | 210 (94.7%) | 678 (94.4%) |