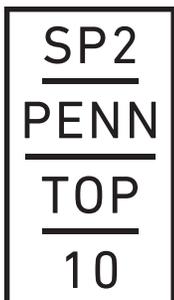


**IMPLEMENTING WHAT WE KNOW IS
EFFECTIVE: INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUTH**

ANTONIO GARCIA, PHD

CHRISTINA DENARD



Today's social workers work within a bureaucracy that overworks them, under pays them and fails to provide adequate support and training. As a result, many of the children they are tasked with helping do not receive the attention they need and do not get the services they require. These underserved children are most frequently African American or Latino.

The U.S. social welfare system is in dire need of restructuring. The system must re-examine its current funding practices to better serve our youth, the segment of society that it is intended to protect the most. Only systemic structural changes that provide social workers with the tools and resources they need can reduce child abuse fatalities and prevent future neglect.

THE SOCIAL WORKER'S CONDITION

- The social worker's average caseload often exceeds the recommended level, frequently by double or more.
- Case workers work in agencies that do not provide adequate training.
- Social welfare agencies face high staff turnover rates.
- Many social agencies face budget crises and hiring freezes, and cannot recruit qualified applicants.
- Federal funding for child welfare services has declined during the last 20 years.

WHY IS THIS ISSUE IMPORTANT?

- There are more than 2 million reports of child abuse and neglect each year.
- About 700,000 reports of abuse and neglect are confirmed annually.
- In 2013, more than 400,000 children were placed in foster homes due to abuse and neglect.
- More than 1,500 children nationally die due to abuse and neglect.
- Of these deaths, about 80% are children younger than 4 years old.
- The total cost of new cases of child abuse and neglect was \$124 billion in 2008.
- In 2010, the estimated cost per victim of nonfatal abuse was \$210,012.
- The estimated cost per victim in fatal abuse cases is \$1,272,900.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Reallocate funding to implement innovative and effective programs.
- Provide more training to help case workers properly screen and assess need and understand effective treatment strategies.
- Fight for more court oversight to ensure case management follows existing federal policy.
- Introduce better decision-making tools to get more minority children access to much needed mental health services.
- Allocate more funding to preventative services and programs.
- Provide social workers more job support.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

VOTE TO IMPROVE FUNDING

The largest funding stream for child welfare services is the Title IV-E provision in the Social Security Act. The amount of money states receive from this funding stream, especially funds for foster care, has steadily decreased during the last two decades because the income criteria that determine whether children's expenses are reimbursable by the federal government has remained unchanged during that time. States are relying on state and local government funds, as well as related programs such as Medicaid and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, to help close the funding gap. Since child welfare agencies now receive a combination of federal, state and local funds, voters can have an impact at many levels. When examining political candidates at the federal, state or local level make sure you consider those who are committed to funding child welfare programs. Their commitment will help provide agencies with more funds for child welfare services.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION ACT

A critical piece of legislation that helps states allocate funds to different welfare services, the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, is eligible for reauthorization in 2016. This means Congress will have the ability to implement changes to the way child welfare federal funds are allocated. This is an opportunity for you, the voter, to contact your congressional representative and senator to advocate for states ability to redistribute federal funds as they see fit. This is an opportunity to provide more states the opportunity to reallocate funds and promote child safety.

ONE AUTHOR'S STORY

ANTONIO GARCIA, PHD | Assistant Professor, Penn Social Policy and Practice

Social workers need support. If the information presented here does not convince you, let my personal experience communicate the seriousness of our situation.

For four years of my career I investigated allegations of child abuse and neglect. I was educated, with a Master's degree in social work, completed a year-long internship in a child welfare agency, yet I was overwhelmed in my position. Not with the volume of cases, but with the severity of needs many of my families had.

There was unimaginable violence and trauma of all forms, substance abuse, drug dealing, mental health problems, poverty, gang violence, and homelessness, to name a few. I came into the office one morning to learn I had been assigned a case in which a mother had stabbed her 3-year-old daughter 26 times. I never met this family before, but quickly found out that a case involving them had previously been closed, despite there being no evidence that the mother received necessary treatment for her bipolar disorder.

Cases like this one, and the realization that many of the kids and families I met were either African American or Latino, motivated me to pursue a doctoral degree in Social Welfare. I want to address the systemic challenges that have been outlined here. Let's hope that we can create child welfare agencies that support caseworkers, receive adequate funding and embrace innovative and effective new programs in the future. I hope for this for the sake of current and future social workers and for the children they help heal from trauma and injustice.