

Key Field Experience Activities for UPP Interns: A Guideline

Introduction

Graduates of Ohio's University Partnership Program (UPP) are making a positive impact working as caseworkers in Public Children Services Agencies (PCSA) across the state. An essential part of their training is the completion of an internship in a PCSA.

A variety of considerations must be made in organizing a productive field experience for UPP interns. The work assigned must be meaningful yet not overwhelming for someone who is still a student. The range of experiences should provide a comprehensive view of key agency services, yet the process should follow a plan or a sequence to the degree this is possible in the hectic world of child protective services. Finally it is critical that UPP interns go through "real life", "hands-on" experiences in dealing with clients and case situations, but without testing the liability concerns and accountability mandates of the local PCSA and the state.

In Ohio, there are state mandates that do affect the field placement experience, but much of the day-to-day involvement of interns can be shaped by the host agency. More specifically, under Ohio policy all cases must be officially assigned to a PCSA caseworker/employee. That employee must perform certain specifically noted case functions (e.g., making a monthly visit to a child in substitute care; making "face-to-face contact" once a month with the principals involved in an in-home services case).

But interns can also play a key role in these types of cases and can carry out a variety of other functions as well. For example, they can accompany caseworkers on home visits, monitor parent-child visitations, and make auxiliary home calls. The principles that should guide the scope, nature and intensity of intern involvement are: (1) a prior assessment of intern's skills; (2) preparation; (3) close supervision. With a plan in place to execute these principles, the host PCSA can engage the intern in a variety of very important learning experiences.

Listing of Key Activities for UPP Interns

The list that follows provides an inventory of activities compiled from the suggestions of PCSA field supervisors and administrators, social work educators, child welfare training experts, and the professionals who operate the UPP network. The objective is to have every UPP intern involved in each of these activities to guarantee a meaningful field experience.

To organize this listing, the activities have been classified into three categories: **Lessons** interns should learn from their field supervisor or other appropriate agency personnel. **Observations** of situations or child welfare activities that every intern should witness. **Participation** – a listing of the key activities in which interns should play an active role.

1. Lessons to Learn

- Confidentiality
- Personal safety techniques
- Key agency policies which guide caseworker activity
- The purpose of key forms and procedures and the techniques involved in completion (e.g., especially the CAPMIS Safety Assessment and Family Assessment, etc. and the rudiments of SACWIS)

2. Observations

- The screening of a new referral and an initial investigation home visit
- A Juvenile Court hearing involving a child abuse/neglect action
- A child removal

(over)

- The process of placing a child in out-of-home care
- A sexual abuse investigation interview with a child and/or an alleged perpetrator
- A permanency or adoption placement staffing
- Observe children of varied ages and assess their level of development
- A multi-disciplinary team meeting or family team meeting
- A semi-annual review (SAR)
- Shadowing caseworkers from all of the agency's service departments

3. Participation

- Visit several community service agencies
- Monitor a parent-child visit
- Visit a child in placement
- Interact one-on-one with a child with a pre-planned purpose
- Conduct a client interview to practice engagement skills
- "Lead" a home visit
- Complete a case plan
- Complete documentation entries based on actual client contacts
- Have some responsibility for the management of an open case (that is officially assigned to a PCSA employee)

NOTES ON ACTIVITIES:

- The above category listing is meant to be flexible and is designed to set "at minimum" standards.
- The "participation" activities may be carried out along with a caseworker or the field supervisor or solo based on agency policy and with due attention to the situation and the readiness of the intern.
- It is important to remember that the primary purpose of taking on interns is not to bolster staffing levels or to have substitute caseworkers. Interns are students. There are key mandated case functions that must be performed by the PCSA caseworker.

Closing Statement

The above list is not meant to be all inclusive. Direct assistance, collaboration and consultation is available from UPP and the participating universities to any PCSA that has an interest in hosting interns. Also, a publication for students (University Partnership Program of Ohio: Child Welfare Practicum Handbook) is available as a tool to assist agencies in structuring the field placement.

The support for UPP by Ohio's Public Children Service Agencies has been remarkable. It is hoped that this guideline document will be helpful to PCSA partners as they join in the challenging, exciting and important process of educating the next wave of professionally trained caseworkers.

The UPP Network

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August 11, 2011