

Awardee Spotlight: *Lessons from Washington: Using Workforce Data to Increase Staff Retention*

Ensuring job satisfaction for home visitors is crucial to retaining the workforce and providing effective service delivery. At a time when the care sector in general is experiencing unprecedented levels of attrition, finding ways to retain home visiting staff is more important than ever before.

In 2019, the Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), along with other Region X awardees (Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon), set out to collect data on the strengths and needs of their workforce to inform recruitment, retention, and professional development efforts. “There are so many skills home visitors need to do their jobs,” said Nina Evers, Home Visiting Workforce Specialist at DCYF. “We wanted to figure out the best ways to support them.”

Key Findings

With an Innovation Grant from HRSA, Region X collected demographic data about the region’s home visiting workforce, as well as information about staff’s educational background, the nature of their work, the quality of their work environment, and their general well-being. According to the Workforce Survey, the main predictors of staff turnover were low pay, few promotional opportunities, excessive paperwork, and lack of support from supervisors. Survey data also revealed the following:

- **Being a provider of color was predictive of lower pay.** Almost half of Washington’s home visitors earned less than \$20 per hour, below the living wage. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) made \$1.35 less per hour than white home visitors. The study also found that providers of color were less likely to leave their jobs. These findings led Region X to commission an additional Equity Brief based on study findings which laid out strategies for advancing racial equity, including recommendations on pay equity, professional development and cultivating multicultural supportive workplaces.
- **Despite overall findings of low pay at supervisor and home visitor levels, many providers cited an intent to stay in their jobs.** Employees with a more favorable perception of their work environment, including a sense of autonomy, fairness, supervisory support, and role clarity, were more likely to intend to stay. “[These data]

really highlighted the importance of creating a supportive workplace through reflective practices and organizational culture,” said Evers.

- **A sizable portion of the workforce in Washington had degrees unrelated to human services.** Specifically, 36.3% of home visitors and 32.3% of supervisors had degrees unrelated to human services. For Evers, these data underscored the need for quality in-service professional development, including foundational training on the basics of model and service delivery, as well as on anti-bias and healing-centered practices.
- **Fewer than half of home visitors share common traits with the families they serve.** While approximately 70% of home visitors share a common language with families, only 46% share a common race, ethnicity or cultural traits. This has implications for recruitment and retention of home visitors as well as for family engagement outcomes. “It’s important that the workforce reflects the race and ethnicity of families in the program,” said Evers.

The study results provided DCYF with the knowledge and motivation they needed to take action. “We knew the data could be really powerful as an ongoing source to inform programming for our field,” said Evers. “We didn’t want it to just sit on the shelf.”

Using the Data

Washington continues to move forward with intention, using the study’s findings to inform ongoing supports and future programming. This work includes:

- **Supporting robust reflective practice support at the supervisor, home visitor, and team levels.** “The study linked reflective supervision to factors that contributed to retention. So, we wanted to make sure our programming supported reflective practices at the supervisor, home visitor, and team levels,” said Evers. Programming now includes introductory reflective practice and reflective supervision trainings for new home visitors and supervisors; *Facilitated Attuned Interactions (FAN)* trainings for supervisors and teams that include mentorship, implementation support, and ongoing communities of practice and booster trainings; reflective supervision consultation groups for supervisors and teams; and [Near@Home](#) facilitated learning to prepare home visitors to respectfully address adverse childhood experiences with families.
- **Improving supervisor access to regular, high-quality reflective supervision.** During the pandemic, the state began offering short-term, individual reflective supervision consultation for supervisors who needed support. Nearly half of DCYF-funded supervisors chose to participate. “In addition to increasing short-term retention, we also

saw an increase in supervisor participation in other reflective practice offerings for themselves and for their staff,” said Evers.

- **Providing one-time, hazard pay bonuses.** DCYF used Federal MIECHV ARP funds (\$500,000) and state funds (\$700,000) to issue a one-time bonus payment to home visitors. The payment acknowledged and honored home visiting staff who remained in the field, especially through the economic hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. “We have home visitors across the state who could not pay rent on one paycheck and had to access more public services in order to make ends meet.” said Evers. More than 300 home visiting staff received hazard pay bonuses this year.
- **Developing leadership opportunities for people of color.** “It’s important that our workforce reflects the communities we serve,” says Evers. “Everything is so interwoven—workplace culture, wellbeing, caseloads, equity. How do we build a workforce that reflects the community? And how do we ensure that the workplace is a supportive environment for a more diverse workforce?”
- **Refining onboarding practices.** “We do so much in-service, but we need to start professional development right away, when staff enter the field. Understanding the correlation between onboarding and retention, we are building an onboarding structure to support individual development and support agencies during times of transition” said Evers.

Next Steps

In June of 2022, DCYF used the data from the workforce survey to substantiate recommendations to the Washington legislature for strengthening and expanding home visiting services in the state. Five recommendations specific to workforce development were included in the report *Home Visiting Advisory Committee (HVAC) Recommendations to the Washington State Legislature and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families*. “The findings around pay equity were a huge driver for the recommendations,” said Evers. “If we can improve working conditions and supports for home visitors in our state, it will benefit not just home visiting staff but all families in our state.”

The next step for Washington is to go deeper in understanding what was learned through the Workforce study. “What we’re doing right now is building our capacity to listen and to hear on an ongoing basis,” said Evers. “To get feedback from those most impacted, we’re contracting with an equity and facilitation consultant to keep us accountable and to establish protocols that build trust and ensure safety and inclusion.” DCYF is also looking into establishing a community

government committee that will oversee engagement efforts and reflect community, workforce, ally, and model perspectives.

“The Region X Innovation Grant was an incredible opportunity to learn with, and learn from, other state MIECHV colleagues and to confirm workforce findings across the region. It was the first time our state’s home visiting staff had been asked these questions,” said Evers. “But our field really responds to data, and we think ongoing engagement with them will lead to a deeper, broader understanding of the work we need to do and the supports that are needed to keep good people in the field.” Washington is just beginning to understand the breadth and depth of care its field needs—and deserves—as home visitors continue to provide high quality care for Washington families.