

Family Support Workforce Survey Report

July 2015

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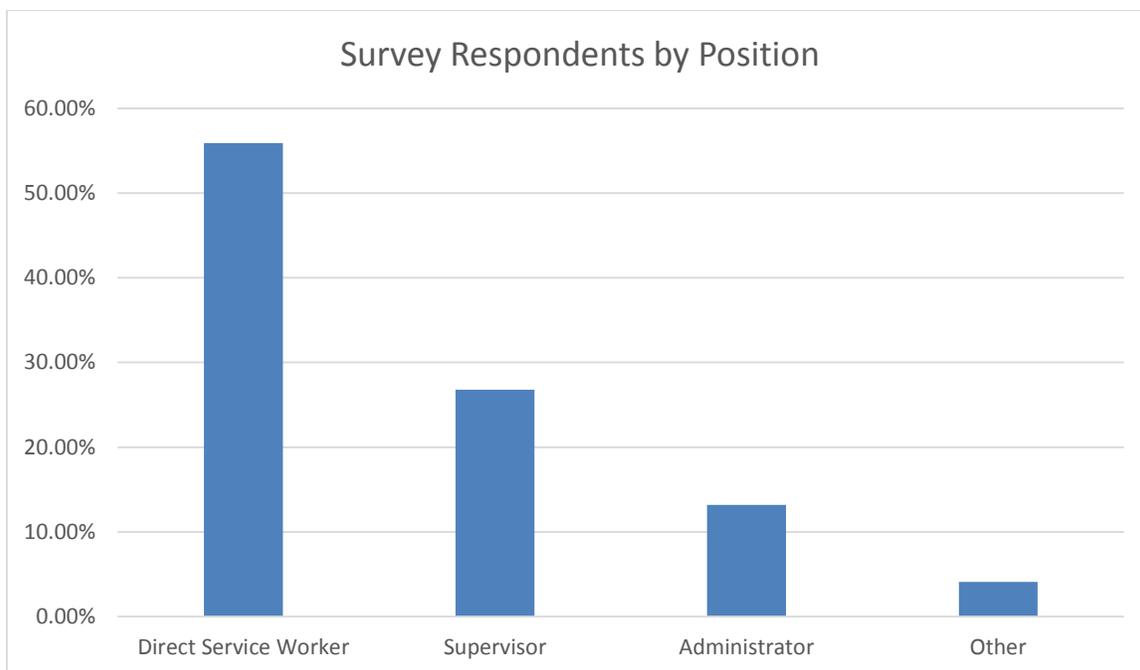
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Funding for this report was provided by contract No.5884CH14 with the Iowa Department of Public Health. 100% of funding for this report was made possible by Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting, Grant No. D89MC235370203 from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The views expressed in written materials or publications do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IOWA FAMILY SUPPORT WORKFORCE SURVEY

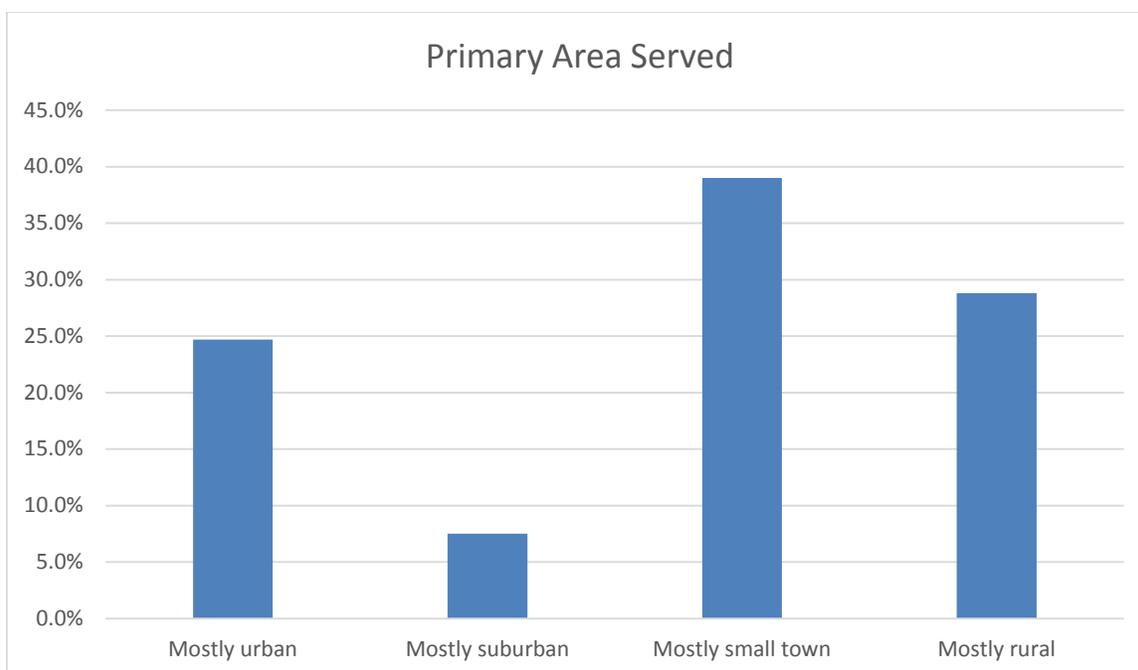
This document is a summary of key findings from a statewide survey of Iowa’s family support program employees, sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health and conducted by the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice at the University of Iowa. The survey sought to better understand the family support workforce and the organizational contexts within which family support services are provided with a goal of strengthening the workforce and improving the quality of family support services. The survey is part of a larger research effort to measure changes in the family support workforce and assess the relationship between workforce experiences and family support outcomes. The full survey results are available in the profile report.

The *Iowa Family Support Workforce Survey* was comprised of questions relevant to the backgrounds, work experiences, and work environments of a variety of family support workers. Topics covered by the survey and included in a previous workforce survey in 2013 were: demographics; geographic information; educational and employment background; organization and job responsibilities; workload; professional development; supervision; promotion and job transfers; pay and benefits; perceptions of the work environment; future plans; and challenges and rewards of family support work. The 2015 survey also included questions regarding the qualities of effective family support workers and parent engagement in services; and questions regarding the family support supervisor certification training. The survey made use of the software program REDCap which allowed for most responses to be pre-programmed. Free responses were also collected for several questions when more qualitative responses were desired. The survey was distributed via email to family support professionals listed within a statewide database as well as to program administrators of other family support programs that were not represented in the database. Over half of respondents (55.9%) were direct service workers; supervisors made up 26.8% of the sample, administrators 13.2%, and a small percentage were classified as “other” (those whose position did not fit within the standard categories).



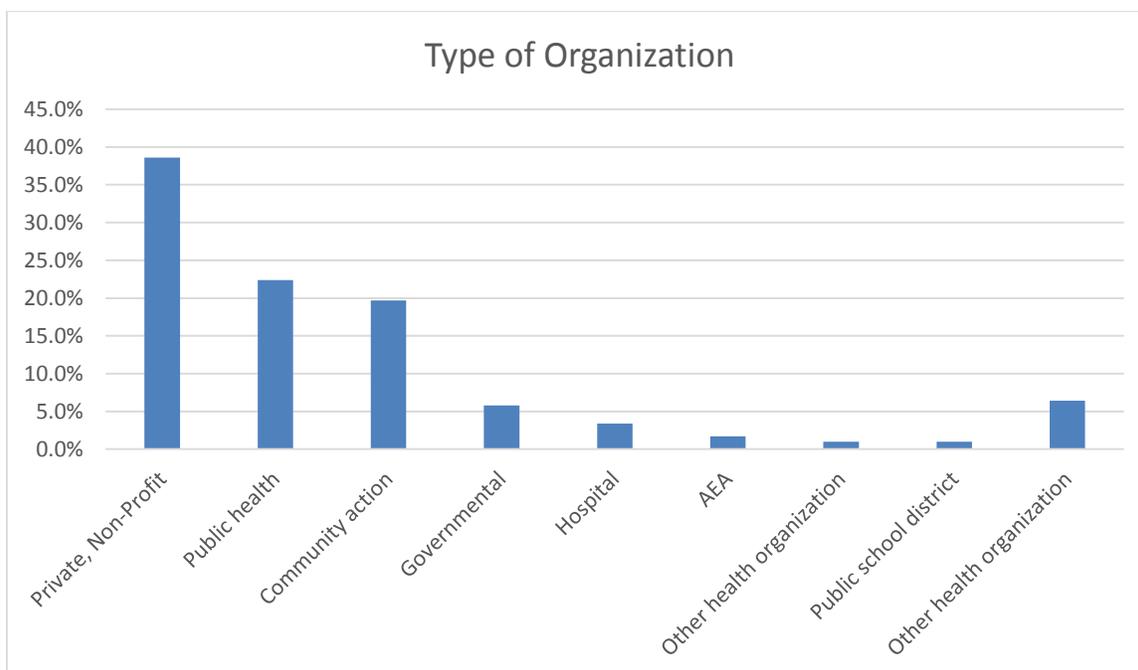
The demographic profile of the family support workforce is primarily female (97.5%), Caucasian (95.5%), and non-Hispanic (95.2%). Over 70% are married (70.5%) and are currently raising a child or have previously (83.6%). These results are reflective of the 2013 survey results.

Respondents most frequently indicated that they serve small Iowa towns (39.0%), though respondents also represent family support organizations in rural (28.8%), urban, (24.7%), and suburban (7.5%) areas of the state. Geographic representation is heterogeneous with almost every county in Iowa represented. Respondents worked in a mean of 2.01 counties, ranging from a minimum of 1 county to a maximum of 10.



The family support workforce is well-educated, with 81% of respondents possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. The educational background of this workforce is primarily in human services, health, or education, and most felt that this academic work prepared them somewhat (55.8%) or very well (41.8%) to do their job. Relatively few individuals (7.8% of sample) self-reported fluency in other languages, most frequently Spanish.

The survey asked respondents to characterize their work experience, organization, and job responsibilities to provide insight into the experience of family support workers. The modal organization type for the workforce is the private, non-profit agency, representing 38.6% of the sample. Substantial proportions of respondents were also employed in public health (22.4%) and community action organizations (19.7%) throughout the state, among other types of institutions. The median length of time employees have worked in the field of family support was ten years, in the current agency for six years, and in the current position for four years.



Respondents most frequently indicated that a desire to help motivated them to enter the family support field (67.6% of respondents). Others were interested by the flexibility of the position (34.1%) and the fit with their personal belief systems (32.4%).

The survey assessed the program models and sources of funding used by family support agencies across the state. Results show that respondents most frequently represented organizations utilizing the Parents as Teachers program model (38.8%), followed by Healthy Families America (27.4%) and other locally developed home visitation programs (26.4%). Most of the individuals (85.3%) reported that their organization utilized only one program model. With regard to funding sources, respondents most frequently noted that they received funding from ECI (72.9%); the majority of the individuals (63.9%) reported that their organization utilized a single source of funding.

Among the family support workers in the sample, workers received an average of 19.9 hours of continuing education in the last 12 months. There were no significant differences in amount of continuing education by position, in contrast with 2014 findings which indicate that supervisors spent a significantly greater number of hours in continuing education compared with direct service workers.

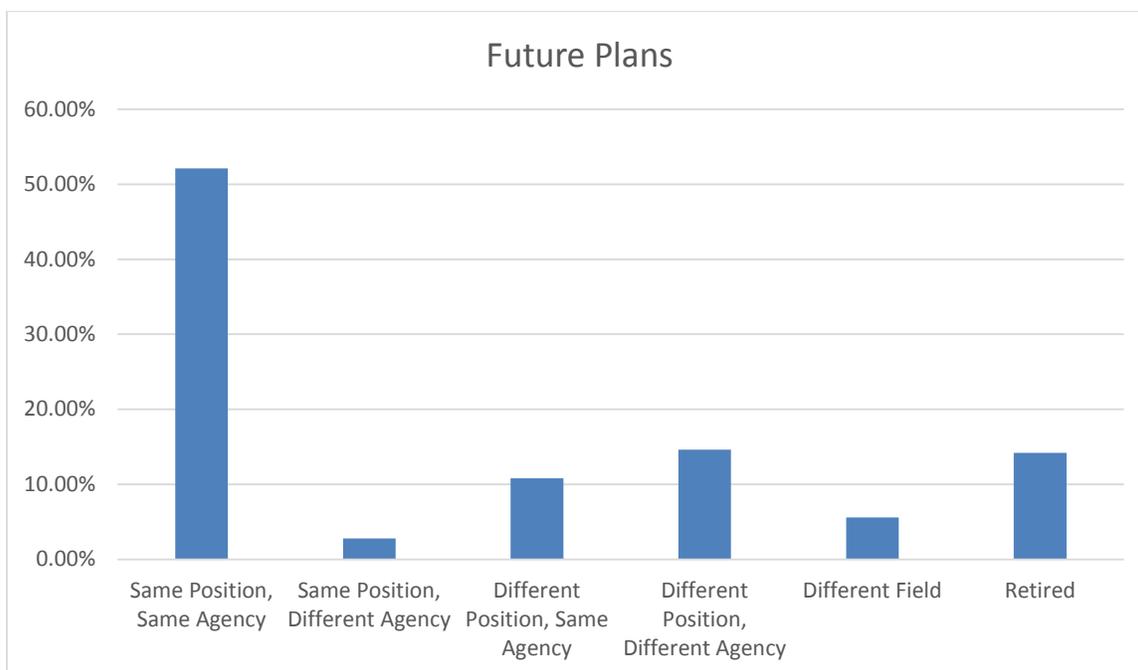
The survey assessed family support workforce capability and preparation for the job with several questions asking individuals to rate their competence in their current position and preparation for specific problem areas. Seventy-four percent of respondents self-reported that they were “highly competent” in the current position; it is notable that no respondents indicated that they were “not very competent” in the job. When asked about preparedness in specific problem areas, survey respondents felt either somewhat prepared or very well prepared to deal with most of the issues presented to them. Respondents most frequently rated themselves as being very well prepared to deal with child developmental delays and child maltreatment. Respondents least frequently rated themselves as very well prepared to deal with substance abuse and child mental health.

Respondents were asked about promotions and job transfers to assess movement within family support organizations. These questions inquired how many times individuals were promoted within their current agencies at a higher salary, promoted within their current agency with no salary increase, and how many times they voluntarily transferred to a different position at the same pay scale. Results indicate that direct service workers are significantly less likely than others to have ever had a promotion. Results also indicate that supervisors are proportionately more likely to be promoted without pay. Voluntary transfers to a different position at the same pay were reported by nearly 17% of respondents.

The survey asked several questions related to salary, available and utilized benefits, and satisfaction with pay and raises. Overall salaries of the family support workforce vary considerably within and across positions from less than \$15,000 to more than \$75,000 per year. In the 2013 survey we were not able to clearly differentiate between full-time and part-time employees, but in 2015 a specific question on work status allowed us to compare these groups. There are significant differences in reported salary—as expected, part-time employees as a whole earn less annually than full-time employees. Two unexpected findings were that part-time employees expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the pay and satisfaction with their pay raises than full-time employees. When asked if their salary provides a living wage, there were no significant difference by position or by full-time or part-time status. With regard to benefits, part-time employees had less access to medical and dental insurance, vacation and sick leave, compared with full-time employees.

The survey measured aspects of the work environment related to job satisfaction, commitment to the agency and to the field of practice, and intentions to remain in the organization and field. Direct service workers perceive less opportunity for advancement within the organization than either supervisors or administrators; lower job security than administrators; and less clear and timely communication compared with supervisors. Direct service workers also perceive a higher degree of job hazard—exposure to unsafe or dangerous conditions—compared with supervisors and administrators. Both direct service workers and supervisors reported a higher level of service orientation (belief in the value of family support work) than administrators. Direct service workers perceived significantly stronger support from their supervisors compared with administrators. Administrators perceived a significantly greater work overload compared to direct service workers. When asked about whether they felt supported at the state level, 67.7% of respondents indicated that they did feel supported. There was no significant difference by position with regard to this item, a difference from the 2013 survey in which higher proportions of supervisors and administrators expressed this opinion.

Respondents were asked to characterize their future plans to assess the likelihood of retention and turnover. The majority of respondents anticipate that they will be working in the same agency five years from now, with more than one-half in the same position and another 11% in a different position. When asked what it would take to keep the family support worker in the field, the most frequently reported response was higher salary (4.7%) followed by more opportunity for career advancement (3.1%).



In 2015, we added a set of questions for family support professionals which assess the qualities that are important in a family support worker and factors that affect parents' decisions to stop participating in a family support program. When asked about the qualities of effective family support workers, most of the attributes are rated as extremely important by the majority of survey respondents. The items most frequently reported include: family support worker treats parent with respect (96.2%), family support worker listens carefully to parent (94.5%), family support worker is committed to helping client grow as a parent (92.7%), and parent finds family support worker easy to talk to (92.5%). When asked about the factors affecting parents' decisions to stop participating in family support programming, the items most frequently rated as extremely important are: parent and worker do not have a good relationship (65.9%) and family's life circumstances change (65.3%). These findings will be compared with those of parents who are participating in family support programs to better understand parent engagement in, and attrition from, family support programs.

Finally, 70% of the sample offered free-response comments regarding the challenges of their family support job and 74% of the sample offered free-responses regarding the rewards of family support work. The most frequently reported challenges include paperwork (20.9%), funding instability (20.9%), and client motivation (missing/cancelling appointments, not putting forth effort, 20.0%). The most frequently reported rewards include seeing families grow and develop (34.6%) and seeing family success/success stories (29.4%). The full report incorporates examples of challenges and rewards in the words of the respondents.

The 2015 family support workforce survey asked several questions pertaining to the supervisor certification program. Out of the 79 survey respondents who identified as supervisors, 55 (70.5%) reporting having completed the certification training. Those who completed the training were asked to assess their supervisory performance in specific areas. Responses indicate that most individuals felt that their skills in each area had improved—either a little or a lot. Few reported no change in their skills in each area. More than half of supervisors who completed the certification training felt that their skills in strength based, reflective supervision, providing feedback to impaired or

underperforming staff, leadership, and addressing staff's stress, resilience and safety improved a lot as a result of the training.

Administering the family support workforce survey at two time points (2013 and 2015) allowed us to assess changes that might have occurred over time. Over time analyses were conducted in various ways. First, we compared responses at the two points for individuals who completed both surveys; second, we compared the two cohorts as independent samples—those who completed the survey in 2013 and those who completed the 2015; third, as a proxy for turnover we compared the email list in 2015 with respondents in 2013, to assess how many individuals who completed the survey in 2013 received the survey in 2015; fourth, since we analyzed many of the questions according to position, we noted when differences in responses by position changed between 2013 and 2015.

At the individual level, the most striking finding from our analysis was that very few changes were found over time. In the cohort analysis, 2013 had a larger number of respondents (448 in 2013 compared with 299 in 2015) and contained a greater proportion of direct service workers than the 2015 sample. However, comparing the two cohorts as independent samples, we also found few differences between them. The two samples were comparable in terms of demographic characteristics, educational background, geographic representation, agency type, work experience, fringe benefits, and future plans. For the most part, the cohorts were also similar in terms of job responsibilities and perceptions of the work environment.

As an estimate of turnover across programs, we compared the email lists of potential survey recipients in 2015 and the 2013 survey, to assess how many individuals who were sent the first survey (at the end of 2013) received the second survey in 2015. Eliminating those that came back undeliverable, out of 650 potential respondents in 2013, 313 of these individuals appeared in the 2015 list. This suggests an estimated retention rate of 48% during the time period between the two surveys. Furthermore out of 441 survey respondents in 2013, 216 individuals (49%) received the survey in 2015, while 225 of these 2013 respondents (51%) did not. Because we could not account for changes in email addresses/names among survey recipients, these numbers might be overstating the amount of attrition.

We offer several recommendations from these findings.

- Greater precision is needed in order to accurately assess turnover and then to develop strategies to prevent unnecessary turnover. Specifically, information from each family support program should be compiled to measure the number of individuals at direct service, supervisory, and administrators, both full-time and part-time, who leave the program annually, and the reasons for their departure.
- There continue to be concerns about the burdens of paperwork and documentation; these were expressed in 2013 and continue to be the most frequently noted challenge of working in family support. Finding ways to consolidate record keeping and avoid unnecessarily duplication of documentation, and providing ongoing feedback to family support programs on meaningful indicators of family progress, would go a long way toward reducing frustration.
- There is clearly a need to recruit more African-American, Asian, and Hispanic employees to the family support field. The demographic composition of the family support workforce continues to be primarily Caucasian, female, and married, while family support consumers

are more diverse in race, ethnicity and family structure. Strategies to increase the diversity of the workforce might be more effectively implemented at the community level, beginning with an understanding of characteristics of client populations at local levels. We examined the geographic distribution of employees by race, ethnicity, and bilingual competence and did note some concordance between employee and consumer demographic; however as the population in Iowa continues to diversify, greater numbers of employees that represent the changing population are needed in family support programs.

- Related to recruitment, it is likely to be increasingly difficult to recruit and retain a diverse family support workforce without attending to concerns about salary, especially among full-time workers, and key benefits which are unavailable for many part-time employees. There has been progress in this area, and we did note that one area of change among individuals matched at the two time points was a significant increase in salary. Continued attention to salary and benefits remain important challenges for family support programs.
- The measure of perceived job security has not changed notably in the past year and a half, but at both time points funding insecurity was one of the greatest challenges noted by respondents in the open-ended question. Stabilizing funding for family support programs or reducing competition for resources are strategies that would help to ameliorate these concerns.
- Family support employees articulate the rewards that their work brings, both in their open-ended comments and in the consistency in responses regarding important qualities of family support workers. They also articulate changes in the client populations served and difficulties in dealing with increasingly complex family situations. In order to provide high quality services and sustain workers' feeling of competence, ongoing opportunities for skill development are important for direct service workers and for those with supervisory responsibilities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF THE IOWA FAMILY SUPPORT WORKFORCE SURVEY 2015

This report provides a profile of Iowa's family support workforce, obtained through a statewide survey of family support program employees under sponsorship of the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). The purpose of this survey was to gain a greater understanding of the family support workforce and its organizational contexts with a goal of strengthening the workforce and improving the quality of family support services. The Iowa Family Support Workforce Survey is part of a larger research effort that will assess changes in the workforce and the relationship between workforce issues and family support outcomes. A previous version of the survey was administered in 2013; this report focuses on current responses while noting changes over time.

Methodology

The Iowa family support workforce survey covers a broad range of topics pertinent to the backgrounds, work experiences, and work environments of family support employees. The survey was constructed using REDCap, a software program that allowed most responses to be pre-programmed in response categories. Use of this program reduced the likelihood of data entry errors.

The survey was distributed from June to July 2015 through an email message containing a direct link to the electronic survey. Most of the survey recipients were family support employees whose email addresses were contained in a statewide database. An email message was also distributed to program administrators of other family support programs that may not have been represented in the database, with a request to distribute the message to family support staff. Although the exact number of individuals who might have received the survey cannot be determined, we estimate a response rate of about 62%. This estimate is based on a total of 299 respondents out of approximately 484 recipients, after accounting for duplicate email addresses and messages returned undeliverable.

Data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS v. 22. In the descriptive analysis the statistics of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and medians are used. For testing differences between groups, the chi-square statistics, independent and paired samples t-tests, and analysis of variance are used.

Findings are organized in the following manner: First, findings from the 2015 survey are presented according to key areas covered by the survey, beginning with workforce demographics; geographic representation; job characteristics; education and training; supervision; pay and benefits; aspects of the work environment; employees' job satisfaction and commitment; employees' future job plans; attributes of family support workers; and challenges and rewards of family support work. Second, we discuss results from the family support supervisor certification program. Finally, we compare results from 2013 with 2015 to note areas of similarity and change.

The survey respondents represent different positions within family support programs—direct service, supervisor, administrator, or “other” (those whose position did not fit within these standard categories). Because it is reasonable to expect differences by position on work-related questions, many of the results are presented according to position. When we conducted statistical tests to determine whether responses differed significantly by position, we only included direct service workers, supervisors, and administrators in these tests—because the “other” category contained a small number of individuals with varying job types that could not be reliably compared. It should be

noted that four individuals did not report a position, and are therefore excluded from those analyses which present results by position.

Table 1 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents according to their position. Direct service workers comprise over half (55.9%) of the sample, a smaller proportion than the 2013 survey in which direct service workers comprised 64% of the sample. The small number of “other” responses include various positions, ranging from office lead to assistant coordinator.

Table 1. Survey respondents by position

Position	Number	Percent of sample
Direct service worker	165	55.9%
Supervisor	79	26.8%
Administrator	39	13.2%
Other	12	4.1%

Demographic Profile

The demographic section of the survey sought to assess to what extent the current family support workforce is representative of the population of consumers of family support services. Results of the survey indicate that the family support workforce in Iowa is overwhelmingly female (97.5%), Caucasian (95.5%), and non-Hispanic (95.2%). Over 70% of the respondents are married and are raising a child currently or did so in the past. The average number of people living in their household is 3.2, but this varies widely from one to seven. Age did not differ significantly by position, contrary to expectations and to the 2013 results.

Available statewide data indicate that 82% of family support consumers are Caucasian and 10% are African-American; about 15% are Hispanic/Latino. The majority of consumers are female (98%); 43 % are married, 22% are partnered, and 29% are single. The demographic profile of family support consumers differs somewhat from that of the workforce in terms of racial/ethnic composition and family structure.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics by position and generally illustrates the demographic similarities across positions.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics by position

Variable	Direct Service N=165		Supervisor N=79		Administrator N=39		Other position N=12		Total N=295	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender										
Female	155	98.1%	77	98.7%	34	91.9%	11	100.0%	277	97.5%
Male	3	1.9%	1	1.3%	3	8.1%	0	--	7	2.5%
Race										
Caucasian	156	95.1%	76	97.4%	35	92.1%	12	100.0%	279	95.5%
African-Am	3	1.8%	1	1.3%	2	5.3%	0	--	6	2.1%
Asian	4	2.4%	1	1.3%	0	--	0	--	5	1.7%
Multiple	1	.6%	0	--	1	2.6%	0	--	2	.7%
Hispanic ethnicity	9	5.5%	2	2.5%	1	2.6%	2	16.7%	14	4.8%
Marital stat										
Married	113	68.5%	57	72.2%	32	82.1%	6	50.0%	208	70.5%
Partnered	7	4.2%	2	2.5%	1	2.6%	3	25.0%	13	4.4%
Single	27	16.4%	10	12.7%	4	10.3%	2	16.7%	43	14.6%
Divorced	15	9.1%	8	10.1%	2	5.1%	1	8.3%	26	8.8%
Separated	1	.6%	2	2.5%	0	--	0	--	3	1.0%
Widowed	2	1.2%	0	--	0	--	0	--	2	.7%
Raised a child	133	82.1%	66	83.5%	36	92.3%	9	75.0%	244	83.6%
Age	X=41.6 (SD=12.1)		X=43.3 (SD = 10.5)		X=46.6 (SD = 10.2)		X=44.1 (SD = 13.1)		X=42.8 (SD = 11.6)	
N people in household	X=3.2 (SD = 1.4)		X=3.2 (SD=1.4)		X=3.1 (SD=1.5)		X=2.9 (SD=1.7)		X=3.2 (SD=1.4)	

Geographic Representation

Survey respondents are geographically representative of the state of Iowa, with respondents representing 90 of 99 counties in all six IDPH regions.

When asked respondents about the number of counties in which they worked, the mean response was 2.0 (SD=1.9), ranging from one county to ten. When we asked for the county in which they worked the *most*, we noted that 90 out of Iowa's 99 counties were mentioned by at least one individual. Counties with the largest numbers of respondents were Linn (n=17), Pottawattamie (n=16), Dubuque (n=15), Black Hawk (n=14), and Woodbury (n=12).

Due to concerns about the cultural diversity of the workforce in relation to the consumer population, we examined the geographic locations of family support employees by race and ethnicity. Hispanic/Latina employees worked primarily in 11 of Iowa's counties, with higher concentrations in Buena Vista and Muscatine. The small number of African-American employees worked primarily in five counties, with a higher concentration in Black Hawk. The small number of Asian employees worked primarily in four counties, with a higher concentration in Wapello. Caucasian employees were represented in 90 counties.

As depicted in table 3, counties in which respondents worked are representative of each IDPH region. The largest proportion of survey respondents indicate that the county in which they work the most is located in Region 6 (East Central Iowa), and the smallest proportion indicate that they work in Region 2 (Northeast Iowa).

Table 3. Geographic distribution of survey respondents

Region	Number	Percent of respondents
Region 1 – central	43	14.7%
Region 2 – northeast	35	12.0%
Region 3 – northwest	50	17.1%
Region 4 – southwest	46	15.8%
Region 5 – southeast	49	16.8%
Region 6 – east central	69	23.6%

Table 4 highlights the results of the question “How would you describe the area that you serve?” with options including mostly urban, suburban, small town, or rural. Respondents most frequently reported that they served an area that was “mostly small town” (39%) and least frequently reported that they served an area that was “mostly suburban” (7.5%).

Table 4. Primary area served

Primary area	Number	Percent of respondents
Mostly urban	72	24.7%
Mostly suburban	22	7.5%
Mostly small town	114	39.0%
Mostly rural	84	28.8%

Education

The results presented in table 5 suggest that the family support workforce is well-educated. Respondents most frequently indicated that they possessed a four-year college degree (66.1%), and 14.6% possessed a Master’s degree; this means that three-quarters of the workforce has a bachelor’s degree or higher. The percentage of the workforce with no more than a high school diploma is small (5.8%) and primarily at the level of direct service worker or “other” positions.

Table 5. Highest level of education attained

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
High school diploma	12	7.3%	2	2.5%	1	2.6%	2	16.7%	17	5.8%
Associate’s degree	25	15.2%	7	8.9%	3	7.7%	4	33.3%	39	13.2%
Bachelor’s degree	113	68.5%	55	69.6%	22	56.4%	5	41.7%	195	66.1%
Master’s degree	14	8.5%	15	19.0%	13	33.3%	1	8.3%	43	14.6%
Doctorate	1	.6%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	.3%

The majority of family support employees had educational preparation in human services, social work, education, or in an allied field related to one of these areas, as shown in table 6. Few

respondents had degrees in fields that were not related to education, health or human services. The specific majors are varied, including fields as diverse as business administration, English, political science, and speech communication.

Table 6. Field of study

Field	Number (n=288)	Percent of respondents
Human services	55	19.1%
Social work	52	18.1%
Education	63	21.9%
Health care	40	13.9%
Other field related to education, health, human services	65	22.6%
Other field not related to education, health, human services	13	4.5%

The survey asked respondents how well they felt that their academic work prepared them to do their job. As shown in table 7, the largest proportion of respondents (55.8%) felt that their academic work had prepared them somewhat for their job, while another 42% felt very well prepared. A small percentage (2.5%) indicated that their academic work did not prepare them well at all.

Table 7. Academic preparation for job

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Prepared very well	63	39.6%	32	41.6%	19	51.4%	5	41.7%	119	41.8%
Prepared somewhat	91	57.2%	43	55.8%	18	48.6%	7	58.3%	159	55.8%
Not well at all	5	3.1%	2	2.6%	0	--	0	--	7	2.5%

In the area of linguistic competence, relatively few individuals (n=23, 7.8% of total sample) self-reported fluency in languages other than English. Eighteen respondents reported that Spanish was their second language, and other individual respondents listed American Sign Language, Serbian/Croatian, and the combination of Spanish and Romanian. Those who were fluent in another language worked within 18 different counties, with higher concentrations in Boone, Buena Vista, and Wapello.

Work Experience

The workforce survey asked several questions related to work experience: about how long the employee had worked in their current agency, time spent in their current position in the agency, and their total amount of work experience in family support. As was true of the 2013 survey, responses to these items reveal considerable variation; therefore we examined both the means and medians. In addition we examined the percent of respondents with less than one year of experience, by position and in the aggregate. All of these data are presented in table 8.

Table 8. Work experience

Variable	Direct <i>X</i> (<i>SD</i>) <i>Mdn</i>	Supervisor <i>X</i> (<i>SD</i>) <i>Mdn</i>	Administrator <i>X</i> (<i>SD</i>) <i>Mdn</i>	Other <i>X</i> (<i>SD</i>) <i>Mdn</i>	Total <i>X</i> (<i>SD</i>) <i>Mdn</i>
Average number of years					
Years in agency***	6.27 (6.69) 4	10.67 (8.37) 9	12.29 (8.09) 13	7.67 (6.17) 7	8.29 (7.71) 6
Years in position	5.20 (5.17) 3	5.75 (5.67) 4	7.32 (6.38) 5	6.1 (5.1) 6	5.66 (5.46) 4
Total years in family support***	9.10 (7.73) 8	12.51 (7.80) 12	14.42 (9.26) 13.5	12.58(7.17) 12.5	10.83 (8.16) 10
Percent with less than one year	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %
Less than one year in current agency**	28 17.1%	6 7.6%	0 --	2 16.7%	36 12.3%
Less than one year in current position	27 16.5%	10 12.7%	1 2.6%	2 16.7%	40 13.7%
Less than one year in family support*	13 8.0%	1 1.3%	0 --	1 8.3%	15 5.2%

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Because of the discrepancies between means and medians, the median length of time is a better indicator of “average” than the mean, which is affected by very low and very high numbers. These data reveal that the average family support professional has worked in the agency for six years and in their current position for four years. Employees have, on average, ten years of experience in family support. Comparing across positions, direct service workers have spent significantly fewer years in the agency and in family support than either supervisors or administrators, though there are no differences across groups in the average numbers of years in their current position.

Due to concerns about job retention and turnover, we also looked specifically at the percentage of respondents who reported having less than one year of experience in each of the items in Table 8. We note that 12.3% of respondents have less than one year in the agency and 13.7% have been in their current position for less than one year. About 5% have less than one year of total experience in family support.

The survey asked respondents about their motivations to enter the family support field. Respondents most frequently reported that a desire to help interested them in the field, with 67.6% of respondents selecting this answer. Flexibility of the positions (34.1%) and fit with personal belief system (32.4%) were also noted frequently by respondents. These data are shown in table 9.

Table 9. What interested respondents about the family support field

Variable	Number	Percent of respondents
Desire to help	202	67.6%
Fit with personal belief system	97	32.4%
Flexibility of the position	102	34.1%
Job availability	66	22.1%
Personal experience with family support	41	13.7%
Other	32	10.7%

Organization and Job Responsibilities

Type of organization. Family support programs in Iowa are administered through a variety of organizational auspices, and the survey asked respondents to describe the type of organization in which they worked. Table 10 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents employed in various types of organizations. Respondents are most frequently employed in the private non-profit which represents 38.6% of the sample. Public health (22.4%) and community action organizations (19.7%) were also reported frequently. Examples of “other” types of organizations noted by individuals were community colleges, county extension offices, and early childhood initiatives.

Table 10. Type of organization

Variable	Number	Percent of respondents
Private, non-profit	114	38.6%
Public health	66	22.4%
Community action	58	19.7%
Governmental	17	5.8%
Hospital	10	3.4%
AEA	5	1.7%
Other health organization	3	1.0%
Public School District	3	1.0%
Other	19	6.4%

Program models and sources of funding. Survey respondents were asked to identify the family support program models used by their agency; they were able to select multiple models and to specify programs not listed in the question. Results show that the survey respondents represent a variety of family support program models. Table 11 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents from specific programs.

Table 11. Program models

Program model	Number	Percent of respondents
Healthy Families America	82	27.4%
Parents as Teachers	116	38.8%
Early Head Start	39	13.0%
Nurse Family Partnership	5	1.7%
Other locally developed home visitation program	79	26.4%
Other group based parenting program	25	8.4%

Parents as Teachers is the most frequent single program model, with 38.8% of respondents working in a PAT program. Healthy Families America is the second most frequent (27.4%). Other locally developed home visitation programs were noted by 26.4% of respondents, and many different models were listed, including: Best Care for Better Babies, Parent Nurturing, Bright Beginnings, FADSS, Families Together, Family Foundations, Family STEPS, Head Start, Healthy Beginnings, Healthy Start, Homes with Healthy Children, HOPES, Iowa Family Support, KIDS, NEST, Parent Connection, Parent Education and Resources, Parents Anonymous, Parent Partners, Parenting Consortium, Partners for a Healthy Baby, Partners for Healthy Families, Nest, Project Impact, Project WIN, and varied program hybrids without a specific name.

Most of the individuals (85.3%, n=255) reported only one program model; however 11% (n=33) reported two programs models, and seven individuals (2.4%) indicated that their agency provided three or five different models.

With regard to funding sources, respondents were asked which sources of funding support their program, with four options offered: MIECHV, HOPES, ECI, and Shared Visions. Individuals could select as many as applied to their program. Results are shown in table 12.

Table 12. Sources of funding

Funding Source	Number	Percent of respondents
MIECHV	73	24.4%
HOPES	39	13.0%
ECI	218	72.9%
Shared Visions	31	10.4%

Most respondents (63.9%, n=191) reported a single source of funding for their program; however, 48 individuals (16.1%) reported two funding sources, 22 (7.4%) reported three funding sources, and two individuals noted four sources of funding.

Full-time or part-time status. Respondents were asked whether they were considered to be full-time or part-time employees in their family support programs. Full-time employees represented 72.5% of respondents (n=214); part-time employees represented 27.5% of the sample (n=81).

Workload. The survey asked respondents to characterize their typical workloads, with direct service workers asked about their caseload size and supervisors and administrators asked about their supervision responsibilities and additional caseload responsibilities. The results in Tables 13, 14, and 15 are organized by position.

Direct service worker caseloads. The overwhelming majority of direct service workers (93%) described their primary job duty as home visiting. Their caseload sizes varied substantially, with the modal range from 11-20 cases (61.6% of sample). Sizable numbers of respondents carried caseloads of 1-10 and 21-30.

Table 13. Caseload size for direct service workers

Caseload	Number (n=151)	Percent of respondents
1-10	27	17.9%
11-20	93	61.6%
21-30	22	14.6%
31-40	6	4.0%
41-50	1	.7%
51+	2	1.3%

Supervisor workloads. The majority of supervisors reported managing staff sizes between one and ten; supervisors primarily reported that this amount of supervisees was “about right” (88.5% of sample). In addition, about 25 supervisors in this sample also carried caseloads. Respondents most frequently reported that they had 1-10 families on their caseload.

Table 14. Workload for supervisors

Staff supervised	Number (n=79)	Percent of respondents
1-10	73	92.4%
11-20	5	6.3%
21-30	1	1.3%
Number of staff supervised seems		
Too high	2	2.6%
About right	69	88.5%
Too low	7	9.0%
Number of Cases Carried by Supervisors		
1-10	21	84.0%
11-20	3	12.0%
21-30	0	--
31-40	1	4.0%
41-50	0	--

Administrator workloads. Administrators most frequently report that the number of staff supervised is between 1 and 10 (88.2% of sample), a figure which is not unlike the supervision responsibilities of supervisors. It is notable that all but one administrator (97.1% of sample) felt that the number of staff supervised seemed “about right.” A small number of administrators (n=6) also carried caseloads.

Table 15. Workload for administrators

Staff supervised	Number (n=34)	Percent of respondents
1-10	30	88.2%
11-20	4	11.8%
21-30	0	--
31-40	0	--
41-50	0	--
51+	0	--
Number of staff supervised seems		
Too high	0	--
About right	33	97.1%
Too low	1	2.9%
Number of Cases Carried by Administrators		
1-10	2	33.3%
11-20	2	33.3%
21-30	1	16.7%
31-40	0	--
41-50	0	--
51+	1	16.7%

Professional development. The survey sought to assess the availability of professional development opportunities by asking how many hours family support workers spent in continuing education in the last 12 months. Table 16 highlights responses to this question. There were no significant differences by position; this finding contrasts with the 2013 results in which supervisors spent a significantly greater number of hours in continuing education compared with direct service workers.

Table 16. Hours of continuing education in the last 12 months

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	<i>X</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
Hours	19.5	(9.1)	21.0	(8.1)	20.1	(7.0)	17.8	(9.4)	19.9	(8.6)

Job competence. Research shows that employee satisfaction and retention are related to the self-reported level of competence. The survey asked respondents to rate themselves in terms of how competent they felt they were in their current position. The rating options were “highly competent,” “somewhat competent,” and “not very competent.” Results are depicted in table 17.

Table 17. Self-reported level of competence in current position

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Highly competent	127	78.4%	52	68.4%	25	64.1%	9	75.0%	213	73.7%
Somewhat competent	35	21.6%	24	31.6%	14	35.9%	3	25.0%	76	26.3%
Not very competent	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	---

These results portray a workforce that self-reports as highly competent in their positions (73.7%). It is notable that no respondents indicated that they feel “not very competent” in their current positions.

Table 18 presents the results of another set of items which asked respondents to assess their level of preparation to deal with specific problem areas that they might encounter in family support work. The rating options were “not well prepared,” “somewhat prepared,” and “very well prepared.”

Table 18. Degree of preparedness in specific problem areas

Topic area	Not well prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very well prepared	
Child maltreatment	9	3.0%	87	29.2%	202	67.8%
Intimate partner violence	16	5.4%	134	45.4%	145	49.2%
Substance abuse	19	6.4%	143	48.5%	133	45.1%
Mental health (adult)	19	6.4%	131	44.4%	145	49.2%
Mental health (child)	25	8.5%	137	46.4%	133	45.1%
Developmental delays (adult)	18	6.2%	130	44.5%	144	49.3%
Developmental delays (child)	9	3.0%	63	21.3%	224	75.7%
Household/environmental hazards	9	3.1%	117	40.1%	166	56.8%

Overall, survey respondents felt either somewhat prepared or very well prepared to deal with most of the issues presented to them; a relatively small percentage (ranging from three to nine percent, depending on the item) felt not well prepared in these areas. Respondents most frequently rated themselves as being very well prepared to deal with child developmental delays and child maltreatment. Respondents least frequently rated themselves as very well prepared to deal with substance abuse and child mental health.

Supervision received. Due to the importance of supervision in workforce retention, the survey inquired about frequency and quality of supervision for different methods of supervision: in-person individual supervision, group supervision, and electronic supervision.

Individual supervision. Table 19 highlights reported frequency and quality of individual supervision. The majority of respondents (91%) reported receiving individual, in-person supervision. Respondents most frequently reported receiving this type of supervision monthly (40.6%) and least frequently reported this type of supervision several times a week (.7%). Half of

the respondents characterized this supervision as excellent quality and another 37% characterized it as good quality.

Table 19. Frequency and quality of individual, in-person supervision

	Number (n=138)	Percent of respondents
Frequency of supervision		
Several times a week	1	.7%
Weekly	39	28.3%
Every other week	33	23.9%
Monthly	56	40.6%
Less than monthly	3	2.2%
Only as needed	6	4.3%
Quality of supervision		
	(n=137)	Percent of respondents
Excellent	69	50.4%
Good	50	36.5%
Fair	17	12.4%
Poor	1	.7%

Group supervision. Table 20 reports the frequency and quality of group supervision. Sixty-six percent of the sample received group supervision, and respondents most frequently reported monthly group supervision (53.5%). The perceived quality of group supervision was also strong, rated as excellent by 43.4% and good by 41.4% of respondents.

Table 20. Frequency and quality of group supervision

	Number (n=99)	Percent of respondents
Frequency of supervision		
Weekly	23	23.2%
Every other week	9	9.1%
Monthly	53	53.5%
Less than monthly	10	10.1%
Only as needed	4	4.0%
Quality of supervision		
	(n=99)	Percent of respondents
Excellent	43	43.4%
Good	41	41.4%
Fair	13	13.1%
Poor	2	2.0%

Electronic supervision. The frequency and quality of electronic supervision, including methods such as email, Skype, and phone, are displayed in table 21. About 51% of respondents indicated that they received this type of supervision. The frequency of electronic supervision shows great variability, though respondents most frequently stated that they received electronic supervision

“only as needed” (33.3%). Forty-one percent rated electronic supervision as excellent and forty-two percent rated it as good, indicating overall satisfaction with this mode of supervision.

Table 21. Frequency and quality of electronic supervision

	Number (n=75)	Percent of respondents
Frequency of supervision		
Daily	11	14.7%
Several times a week	17	22.7%
Weekly	8	10.7%
Every other week	5	6.7%
Monthly	6	8.0%
Less than monthly	3	4.0%
Only as needed	25	33.3%
Quality of supervision		
	(n=76)	Percent of respondents
Excellent	31	40.8%
Good	32	42.1%
Fair	10	13.2%
Poor	3	3.9%

Promotion and job transfers. Tables 22, 23 and 24 present the results of questions related to vertical and lateral movement within the organizations employing the family support workforce. The survey asked how many times individuals had been promoted within their current agencies at a higher salary, how many times they were promoted within their current agency but with no salary increase, and how many times they voluntarily transferred to a different position at the same pay scale.

Results indicate that direct service workers are significantly less likely than others to have ever had a promotion. Supervisors are proportionately the most likely to be promoted to a higher position without a pay raise. Overall about 17% of respondents reported a voluntary transfer to a different position at the same pay.

Table 22. Promoted in current agency at a higher salary

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never***	114	69.9%	30	38.5%	11	28.2%	5	41.7%	160	54.8%
1-2 times	39	23.9%	38	48.7%	18	46.2%	7	58.3%	102	34.9%
3-4 times	5	3.1%	9	11.5%	5	12.8%	0	--	19	6.5%
5 or more times	5	3.1%	1	1.3%	5	12.8%	0	--	11	3.8%

***p< .001

Table 23. Promoted in current agency to higher level position with no salary increase

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never*	145	90.1%	59	75.6%	34	87.2%	10	83.3%	248	85.5%
1-2 times	16	9.9%	18	23.1%	4	10.3%	2	16.7%	40	13.8%
3-4 times	0	--	1	1.3%	1	2.6%	0	--	2	.7%
5 or more times	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--

*p<.05

Table 24. Voluntarily transferred to a different position at same pay

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never	132	81.5%	63	79.7%	36	92.3%	12	100.0%	243	83.2%
1-2 times	30	18.5%	16	20.3%	3	7.7%	0	--	49	16.8%
3-4 times	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--
5 or more times	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--

Pay and Benefits

The family support workforce survey asked respondents about the salary and benefits available to them in their job, their use of benefits, and their satisfaction with their compensation. For the analysis of salary, we separated workers who were considered by their agency to be full-time from those who were part-time. These data are shown in table 25 (full-time) and table 26 (part-time), and indicate that salaries of the family support workforce vary considerably both within and across positions.

Table 25. Total yearly income from family support job: full-time employees

Income range	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	%	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
\$15,000 to \$19,999	2	1.6%	0	--	0	--	0	--	2	.9%
\$20,000 to \$24,999	20	16.3%	0	--	0	--	3	37.5	23	11.0%
\$25,000 to \$29,999	43	35.0%	3	5.6%	0	--	1	12.5%	47	22.5%
\$30,000 to \$34,999	24	19.5%	12	22.6%	1	4.0%	0	--	37	17.7%
\$35,000 to \$39,999	19	15.4%	11	20.7%	2	8.0%	1	12.5%	33	15.8%
\$40,000 to \$44,999	9	7.3%	11	20.7%	6	24.0%	1	12.5%	27	12.9%
\$45,000 to \$49,999	3	2.4%	4	7.5%	4	16.0%	0	--	11	5.3%
\$50,000 to \$54,999	2	1.6%	9	17.0%	3	12.0%	2	25.0%	16	7.7%
\$55,000 to \$59,999	0	--	0	--	2	8.0%	0	--	2	.9%
\$60,000 to \$64,999	0	--	1	1.9%	3	12.0%	0	--	4	1.9%
\$65,000 to \$69,999	0	--	0	--	1	4.0%	0	--	1	.5%
\$70,000 to \$74,999	0	--	0	--	2	8.0%	0	--	2	.9%
More than \$75,000	0	--	2	3.8%	2	8.0%	0	--	4	1.9%

Agree that salary provides a living wage	75 61.0%	34 63.0%	23 85.2%	5 62.5%	137 64.6%
	<i>X (SD)</i>				
Satisfaction with pay	2.74 (1.12)	3.02 (1.22)	3.38 (1.36)	3.13 (1.64)	2.91 (1.21)
Satisfaction with raises	2.67 (1.14)	2.93 (1.15)	2.92 (1.26)	3.13 (1.46)	2.79 (1.17)

Table 26. Total yearly income from family support job: part-time employees

Income range	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	%	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Less than \$15,000	13	31.7%	1	4.5%	5	45.5%	2	50.0%	21	26.9%
\$15,000 to \$19,999	9	22.0%	4	18.2%	2	18.2%	1	25.0%	16	20.5%
\$20,000 to \$24,999	7	17.1%	3	13.6%	0	--	1	25.0%	11	14.1%
\$25,000 to \$29,999	4	9.8%	3	13.6%	0	--	0	--	7	9.0%
\$30,000 to \$34,999	2	4.9%	1	4.5%	1	9.1%	0	--	4	5.1%
\$35,000 to \$39,999	1	2.4%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	1.3%
\$40,000 to \$44,999	2	4.9%	4	18.2%	1	9.1%	0	--	7	9.0%
\$45,000 to \$49,999	1	2.4%	2	9.1%	0	--	0	--	3	3.8%
\$50,000 to \$54,999	1	2.4%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	1.3%
\$55,000 to \$59,999	1	2.4%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	1.3%
\$60,000 to \$64,999	0	--	1	4.5%	1	9.1%	0	--	2	2.6%
\$65,000 to \$69,999	0	--	2	9.1%	0	--	0	--	2	2.6%
\$70,000 to \$74,999	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--
More than \$75,000	0	--	1	4.5%	1	9.1%	0	--	2	2.6%
Agree that salary provides a living wage	23 54.8%	15 68.2%	6 60.0%	0 ---	44 56.4%					
	<i>X (SD)</i>									
Satisfaction with pay	3.24 (1.01)	3.65 (1.27)	3.64 (.81)	4.25 (.50)	3.45 (1.06)					
Satisfaction with raises	3.14 (1.10)	3.10 (1.21)	3.36 (1.03)	4.25 (.96)	3.32 (1.12)					

In the 2013 survey we were not able to clearly differentiate between full-time part-time employees, and in response, we included a specific question about work status in the 2015 survey. When we examine full-time and part-time employees separately, there are no differences by position in response to a question about whether or not their salary provides a living wage. Two additional questions asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with pay and satisfaction with pay raises on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Again, there were no differences by position on either of these questions.

Comparing full-time and part-time employees, however, there are significant differences in reported salary—as expected, part-time employees as a whole earn less annually than full-time employees. Two unexpected findings were that part-time employees expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the pay and satisfaction with their pay raises than full-time employees. The average level of agreement regarding satisfaction of full-time employees with their pay (2.74) and pay raises (2.67) are below a 3.0, which falls between the responses of “disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree.” There was no significant difference between full-time and part-time workers on the question of whether their salary provides a living wage.

Table 27 presents the results of a survey question which asked respondents which benefits were available to them and which they utilized when they were available. The benefits available and utilized most often include vacation leave (88.1%), flexible work hours (86.9%), and sick leave (80.5%).

Respondents most frequently indicated that tuition for classes and training was not available to them (39.7%). However, when these benefits are available they are used - nearly 50% of respondents did take advantage of this opportunity while a relatively small percentage (10.3%) did not.

Table 27. Availability and use of benefits

Benefit type	Not available		Available/ doesn't use		Available/uses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Medical insurance	49	16.5%	75	25.3%	173	58.2%
Dental insurance	66	22.4%	62	21.1%	166	56.5%
Vacation leave	27	9.2%	8	2.7%	260	88.1%
Sick leave	38	13.0%	19	6.5%	236	80.5%
Flexible work hours	29	10.0%	9	3.1%	253	86.9%
Tuition for classes/training	116	39.7%	30	10.3%	146	50.0%

The survey asked respondents an open-ended question regarding other available benefits that they used. Among those described were: retirement plans (n=53), life, disability, and/or injury insurance (n=21), vision insurance (n=15), paid time off/personal days (n=7), medical and personal leave (n=7), flexible spending accounts (n=7), and coverage for travel/other work-related expenses (n=7). Fewer individuals also noted flexibility with work location, wellness plans, counseling, and loan forgiveness.

Notably, part-time employees were significantly more likely to report that medical and dental insurance, sick leave and vacation leave, were not available to them compared with full-time employees.

In the sample, 48.8% of respondents believed that their benefit package provided a safety net. These responses did not differ significantly by position, nor by full-time or part-time status.

Perceptions of the Work Environment

The family support workforce survey contained a set of scales measuring various aspects of the work environment that research has found to be related to job satisfaction, commitment to the agency and to the field of practice, and intentions to remain in the organization and the field of

practice. Table 28 provides a list of these scales, a brief definition, the means and standard deviations for all the respondents, and the scale reliabilities. Most of the scales contained three items, each measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 28. Work environment scales

Scale	Description	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	Reliability α
Promotional opportunity	extent to which employee believes that opportunities for advancement within the organization are available	3.13	.86	.78
Job security	extent to which employee believes her/his job is stable	3.31	.76	.60
Communication	degree to which employee believes that communication within the organization is clear and timely	3.68	.85	.76
Agency fairness	degree to which employee believes the system of rewards and punishments within the organization is fair	3.35	.89	.71
Work overload	extent to which employee believes that performance expectations of the job are excessive	3.08	.84	.83
Role clarity	degree to which employee is clear about her/his work role	4.25	.60	.68
Job hazard	degree to which job exposes employee to physically harmful or risky conditions	2.74	.91	.74
Community support	degree to which employee perceives the organization's work is supported by the community	3.96	.63	.74
Coworker support	Extent to which employee believes that peers are supportive	4.15	.71	.85
Supervisor support	extent to which employee believes immediate supervisor provides instrumental (knowledge or skill) and affective (emotional) support	4.03	.80	.88
Organizational support	degree to which employee feels supported by the employing organization	3.94	.83	.86
Other job opportunities	perceived availability of employment opportunities outside of the organization	2.70	.83	.82
Job satisfaction	degree of employee's overall satisfaction with the job	4.19	.63	.85
Service orientation	degree to which employee believes that family support is a valuable service to society	4.40	.56	.91
Commitment-agency	relative strength of individual's identification with and involvement in the employing organization	4.04	.76	.85
Intent to stay-agency	likelihood of remaining with the current employing organization	3.75	.85	.83

Commitment-family support	relative strength of individual's identification with and involvement in the field of family support	4.02	.69	.78
Intent to stay-family support	likelihood of remaining in the field of family support	3.83	.74	.80

We also examined scale means according to position in the agency; these are displayed in table 29. The scales noted with asterisks are those which demonstrated significant differences between at least two positions among direct service workers, supervisors, or administrators. Significant differences suggest that the magnitude of the differences between positions on these items are large enough to conclude that they represent real (not chance) differences.

Table 29. Work environment scales by position

Scale	Direct service		Supervisor		Administrator		Other position	
	X	(SD)	X	(SD)	X	(SD)	X	(SD)
Promotional opportunity**	2.96	(.87)	3.27	(.66)	3.44	(.97)	3.39	(1.07)
Job security**	3.19	(.74)	3.40	(.74)	3.60	(.83)	3.22	(.80)
Communication**	3.55	(.87)	3.88	(.76)	3.85	(.79)	3.56	(.87)
Agency fairness	3.28	(.91)	3.46	(.80)	3.38	(.87)	3.64	(1.20)
Work overload*	2.99	(.82)	3.09	(.89)	3.35	(.80)	3.19	(.83)
Role clarity	4.28	(.59)	4.14	(.59)	4.35	(.56)	4.30	(.66)
Job hazard***	2.93	(.88)	2.61	(.84)	2.30	(.91)	2.36	(1.02)
Community support	3.90	(.60)	4.02	(.67)	4.00	(.70)	4.17	(.58)
Coworker support	4.17	(.79)	4.17	(.59)	3.99	(.66)	4.33	(.57)
Supervisor support*	4.09	(.84)	4.05	(.70)	3.68	(.83)	4.06	(.62)
Organizational support	3.90	(.86)	3.97	(.68)	4.05	(.88)	3.96	(.92)
Other job opportunities	2.66	(.81)	2.61	(.75)	2.89	(.83)	2.75	(1.00)
Job satisfaction	4.15	(.63)	4.24	(.52)	4.26	(.78)	4.19	(.80)
Service orientation**	4.40	(.52)	4.54	(.51)	4.11	(.67)	4.39	(.71)
Commitment-agency	4.01	(.75)	4.08	(.69)	4.12	(.74)	4.08	(.88)
Intent to stay-agency	3.75	(.83)	3.66	(.83)	3.89	(.89)	3.89	(1.03)
Commitment-family support	4.09	(.64)	3.98	(.71)	3.80	(.85)	4.00	(.60)
Intent to stay-family support	3.90	(.72)	3.72	(.71)	3.68	(.85)	3.89	(.70)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Feel supported at the state level	99	62.3%	56	74.7%	28	75.7%	9	81.80%
N/%								

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Specifically, we note that direct service workers perceive less opportunity for advancement within the organization than either supervisors or administrators; lower job security than administrators; and less clear and timely communication compared with supervisors. Direct service workers also perceive a higher degree of job hazard—exposure to unsafe or dangerous conditions—compared with supervisors and administrators.

Both direct service workers and supervisors reported a higher level of service orientation (belief in the value of family support work) than administrators. Direct service workers perceived significantly stronger support from their supervisors compared with administrators. Administrators perceived a significantly greater work overload compared to direct service workers.

One additional item was a yes/no question asking whether the respondent felt supported at the state level. Overall, 67.7% of respondents indicated that they did feel supported. There was no significant difference by position with regard to this item, as difference from the 2013 in which higher proportions of supervisors and administrators expressed this opinion.

Future Plans

Respondents were asked where they expected to be five years from now to assess the likelihood of retention and turnover. Table 30 highlights the responses to the question “When thinking about where you expect to be in five years, which of the following seems most likely?” with options including being in the same agency (either in the same position or a different position); being employed in a different agency (either in the same position or a different position); working in a different field; or being retired from the workforce.

The majority of respondents anticipate staying in the same agency five years from now, with more than one-half in the same position (52.1%) and another 11% in a different position in the same agency. Few (5.6%) plan to be employed in a different field and even fewer (2.7%) plan to be in the same position in a different agency. Nearly 15% of the workforce plans to be retired in five years.

Table 30. Future plans

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Same position in same agency	87	54.0%	37	48.7%	17	43.6%	9	75.0%	150	52.1%
Same position, different agency	6	3.7%	1	1.3%	1	2.6%	0	--	8	2.8%
Different position, same agency	13	8.1%	11	14.5%	6	15.4%	1	8.3%	31	10.8%
Different position, different agency	26	16.1%	12	15.8%	3	7.7%	1	8.3%	42	14.6%
Different field	8	5.0%	4	5.3%	4	10.3%	0	--	16	5.6%
Retired	21	13.0%	11	14.5%	8	20.5%	1	8.3%	41	14.2%

Consistent with the fact that only a small percentage of respondents expect to leave the field of family support, few elected to respond to the follow-up question, “What would it take to keep you in the field of family support?” The most frequently cited factors, shown in table 30, were higher salary (4.7% of sample) and more opportunity for career advancement (3.1%) as necessary to keep them in the field.

Table 31. What would it take to keep you in the field of family support?

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Higher salary	8	4.8%	3	3.8%	3	7.7%	0	--	14	4.7%
More opportunity for career advancement	4	2.4%	2	2.5%	3	7.7%	0	--	9	3.1%
Better benefits	3	1.8%	1	1.3%	3	7.7%	0	--	7	2.4%
More educational opportunities	1	.6%	2	2.5%	2	5.1%	0	--	5	1.7%
Better recognition by management	0	--	3	3.8%	2	5.1%	0	--	5	1.7%
Better supervision	0	--	1	1.3%	2	5.1%	0	--	3	1.0%
Other	0	--	1	1.3%	2	5.1%	0	--	3	1.0%

“Other” responses include greater funding, closer work with the state, more job security and more support from extension staff and council.

Qualities of Effective Family Support Workers and Parent Engagement in Services

With the 2015 survey, we have begun to address the issue of parents’ participation/engagement in family support services. Parent engagement and retention in home visiting programs is important because they predict better outcomes for parents and children (Raikes et al., 2006). However, most parents are enrolled in programs for less than a year. For example, in Anisfeld et al.’s (2004) randomized control trial of Healthy Families America programs, 20% of parents left within three months, 34% of parents left within six months, and 62% of parents left within one year. We were able to identify studies that asked parents why they left programs, but researchers often reported insufficient information to help programs understand what they could do differently to retain parents. For instance, several studies reported parents left because they were no longer interested or because of work or school. Wagner et al. (2000) reported that lack of interest accounted for 70% of dropouts from a Parents as Teachers program.

In the 2015 survey we added a set of questions for family support professionals about the qualities that are important in a family support worker and about factors that affect parents’ decisions to stop participating in a family support program. These questions were added to complement a planned parent survey containing comparable questions.

The items were derived from a review of the literature on attributes related to engagements in family support programs. We identified nine dimensions, each of which is represented in these questions: 1) sociable/likeable; 2) trustworthy; 3) non-judgmental; 4) empathic; 5) respectful/culturally competent; 6) motivated to help; 7) flexible; 8) helpful; and 9) encouraging.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each quality in an effective family support worker, on a 1-4 scale with 1=not important, 2=slightly important, 3=moderately important, and 4=extremely important. Table 32 presents the number and percent of responses for each category, as well as the means and standard deviations for comparative purposes.

Table 32. Qualities of effective family support workers

Quality of family support worker	Not important		Slightly important		Moderately important		Extremely important		Mean (SD)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Parent finds family support worker easy to talk to	0	--	2	.7%	20	6.8%	271	92.5%	3.92 (.30)
Family support worker is very sincere (“real”)	0	--	2	.7%	25	8.6%	265	90.8%	3.90 (.32)
Family support worker does not criticize parent	0	--	7	2.4%	50	17.2%	233	80.3%	3.78 (.47)
Family support worker is honest with parent	0		1	.3%	32	11.0%	257	88.6%	3.88 (.33)
Family support worker truly accepts parent for who she/he is	1	3%	2	.7%	54	8.7%	232	80.3%	3.79 (.45)
Family support worker is likeable	1	.3%	6	2.1%	114	9.0%	171	58.6%	3.56 (.56)
Family support worker listens carefully to parent	0	--	0	--	16	5.5%	275	94.5%	3.95 (.23)
Family support worker is very interested in building a good relationship with parent	0	--	2	.7%	28	9.6%	263	89.8%	3.89 (.33)
Family support worker treats parent with respect	0 -	-	0	--	11	3.8%	280	96.2%	3.96 (.19)
Family support worker is committed to helping client grow as a parent	0	--	0	--	21	7.3%	26	92.7%	3.93 (.26)
Family support worker is flexible when it comes to how time is spent with parent	0	-	4	1.4%	90	0.7%	199	67.9%	3.67 (.50)
Family support worker helps parent feel more confident	0	--	1	.3%	42	4.4%	248	85.2%	3.85 (.37)
Family support worker provides information that parent finds useful	0 -	-	1	.3%	41	14.1%	249	85.6%	3.85 (.36)
Family support worker is very open to rescheduling visits	0	--	10	3.4%	103	35.5%	177	61.0%	3.58 (.56)

These data reveal that most of the attributes are rated as extremely important by the majority of survey respondents. The highest ratings were given for the items: family support worker treats parent with respect (96.2%), family support worker listens carefully to parent (94.5%), family support worker is committed to helping client grow as a parent (92.7%), and parent finds family

support worker easy to talk to (92.5%). Items rated as extremely important by smaller percentages of respondents include: family support worker is likeable (58.6%), family support worker is very open to rescheduling visits (61.0%), and family support worker is flexible when it comes to how time is spent with parent (67.9%). When we compared responses to these items by position, most did not differ. One item: family support worker is very open to rescheduling visits differed by position, with administrators rating this as less important than either supervisors or direct service workers.

Next, respondents were asked to rate, from their experience, the importance of specific factors in parents' decisions to stop participating in the family support program. The same 1-4 rating scale was used (with 1=not important, 2=slightly important, 3=moderately important, and 4=extremely important). Results are presented in table 33.

Table 33. Factors affecting parents' decisions to stop participating

	Not important		Slightly important		Moderately important		Extremely important		Mean (SD)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Parent is overwhelmed with many competing demands	5	1.7%	34	11.7%	153	52.6%	99	34.0	3.19 (.70)
Parent is not motivated to use family support assistance	9	3.1%	46	15.9%	132	45.7%	102	35.3%	3.13 (.79)
The family support services or hours of service offered don't meet family's needs	12	.2%	49	17.1%	105	6.6%	121	42.2%	3.17 (.86)
Parent and worker do not have a good relationship	8	2.8%	15	5.2%	75	26.1%	189	65.9%	3.55 (.72)
Parent never really wanted the service, but felt like she/he "had to" enroll	7	2.4%	47	16.2%	127	3.8%	109	37.6%	3.17 (.78)
Services are not culturally appropriate for the family.	16	5.5%	38	13.1%	80	27.6%	156	53.8%	3.30 (.90)
Parents' goals are reached or needs have been met; services no longer needed	4	1.4%	38	13.1%	92	31.6%	157	54.0%	3.38 (.76)
Family's life circumstances change (move, change of custody)	2	.7%	15	5.2%	83	28.8%	188	65.3%	3.59 (.62)

The responses to factors contributing to parents' decisions to stop participating in a family support program are variable, but the items most frequently rated as extremely important are: parent and

worker do not have a good relationship (65.9%) family's life circumstances change (65.3%). The items with the fewest ratings of extremely important are: parent is not motivated to use family support assistance (35.3%), parent is overwhelmed with many competing demands (34.0%), and parent never really wanted the service, but felt like she/he "had to" enroll (37.6%). None of these items differed according to the respondent's position in the agency.

These findings from the perspective of family support professionals will be compared with those of parents who are participating in family support programs. The objective is to better understand parent engagement in, and attrition from, family support programs over time.

Challenges and Rewards of Family Support Work

In addition to the closed-ended questions that comprised most of the survey, two open-ended questions were included: "What do you feel are the challenges that make it difficult to do your job in family support?" and "What do you feel are the greatest rewards in family support work?"

It is notable that 315 respondents (70% of the sample) offered additional comments regarding the challenges of their family support job and 333 respondents (74%) commented on the rewards. In analyzing these textual data, we reviewed all comments individually and identified a set of key themes that predominated among the responses. As a final step, we counted the number of individuals whose comments reflected each of the categories. These are presented in tables 34 and 35. Many respondents noted more than one issue or reward.

As these tables illustrate, we found considerably more variation in the types of issues that emerged as challenges compared to those described as key rewards. The challenges represented a range of issues pertinent to the demands of the job and the work environment. The rewards of family support centered primarily on satisfaction from helping families and seeing positive outcomes for children and families.

Table 34. Challenges of family support work

Challenge	n	% of all respondents (n=299)	% of indivs who added comments (n=220)
Paperwork (includes reporting demands, data entry)	46	15.4%	20.9%
Funding instability (includes budget cuts)	46	15.4%	20.9%
Client motivation (missing/cancelling appointments, not putting forth effort)	44	14.7%	20.0%
Workload (caseload sizes, getting everything done in the available time)	36	12.0%	16.4%
Inadequate pay (including raises)	34	11.4%	15.5%
Support in agency (from administration, supervisor)	18	6.0%	8.2%
Client problems (severity, complexity, low progress)	17	5.7%	7.7%
Turnover and burnout	11	3.7%	5.0%
Availability of resources to help families with their needs	10	3.3%	4.5%
Unclear job expectations	9	3.0%	4.1%
Client recruitment	7	2.3%	3.2%

Inadequate training	5	1.7%	2.3%
Issues specific to rural areas	5	1.7%	2.3%
Safety (includes conditions of homes they visit)	2	.7%	.9%
Inadequate community support (interagency communication)	3	1.0%	1.4%

Below we provide some examples of the most frequently noted challenges, in the words of survey respondents themselves:

Paperwork

“Continuous data that needs to be recorded in many different programs takes away from the support I could be giving my families.”

“So many paperwork/tracking requirements (attendance, assessments, meal/snack counts, cleaning records, reports, recruitment, etc.) are overwhelming and burn out staff already agreeing to take on a challenging job.”

“It takes me 1 – 1.5 hours to complete the contact log of each home visit.”

Funding instability

“We are in a position to help and encourage families, yet we are not in a position to have job security. Every year we have to worry about whether or not we will have a job due to state funding or grant funds.”

“Without knowing funding far enough in advance we have high turnover as staff do not feel safe.”

“Funding and grant writing makes our jobs extremely stressful. From year to year not knowing if you will be able to serve families.”

Client motivation

“The biggest challenge for me is the families that need the assistance but refuse to follow through with their goals.”

“Lack of motivation to commit to visits from some of the families.”

“When meeting with a family is more my priority than their priority.”

Workload

“The lack of support and the amount of work is often overwhelming...to complete the necessary paperwork, I often end up working from home and that is unpaid.”

“Pressure at work is greater than it’s ever been, and it can take a toll on job satisfaction.”

“Not enough time to do visits, reporting/data entry, maintain quality program while making a difference in families.”

Inadequate pay

“The salary doesn’t align with the vast amount of work that is done in the program and doesn’t compensate for advancement in education.”

“The pay is not enough. Too many of us are using the same resources (benefits) that we refer clients too.”

“Limited pay inhibits good people from applying for positions.”

Support

“I feel that I don’t have the support I need from my agency.”

“It is up to local boards to decide who they will fund...the boards don’t always grasp what these families go through. Families do not fit into boxes. Each is different and unique.”

“My agency is not supportive and does not seem to understand or support my job and what is involved in being a family support worker.”

Client problems

“Home visiting is becoming more challenging due to safety concerns increasing...drugs, weapons, bed bugs, etc.”

“Families are dealing with a lot of different issues and it is hard to keep them stable.”

“We have families that need housing and it is not available. They need food and utilities paid. They don’t make enough money to make ends meet.”

Table 35. Rewards of family support work

Reward	n	% of all respondents (n=299)	% of indivls who added comments (n=228)
Seeing families grow and develop	79	26.4%	34.6%
Seeing family successes/ success stories	67	22.4%	29.4%
Helping families achieve their goals	42	14.0%	18.4%
Helping others (families, children)	29	10.0%	12.7%
Making a difference	28	9.4%	12.3%
Building relationships (families, parents, children)	26	8.7%	11.4%
Seeing children’s growth and development	18	6.0%	7.9%
Receiving positive feedback, thanks from families	17	5.7%	7.5%
Working with great coworkers	4	1.3%	1.8%
Seeing employees succeed	3	1.0%	1.3%

Examples of the rewards of family support work are offered below:

Seeing families grow and develop

“The greatest reward of family support work is making an impact on families and watching them learn and grow from everything I have taught them.”

“I feel honored to be able to witness individual and family growth through this work.”

“Getting to see the children and parents grow and develop and become a stronger family unit.”

Family successes

“Seeing children and families succeed and improve their life circumstances.”

“Seeing success lead to success. See[ing] families give back once they are successful.”

“Helping families as they struggle to get over the hurdles they encounter and when they succeed we all are happy.”

Helping families achieve their goals

“Families make improvements toward their goals and become independent of needing services!”

“Helping families to achieve their goals and create stronger and healthier families.”

“I love when I am able to see the impact I make on families whether they are completing the activities we have done in the visit or that they are able to make use of one of the resources I referred them to.”

Helping others

“Helping families make lasting positive changes.”

“Helping families achieve self-sufficiency and being their advocates.”

“Helping parents find joy in parenting.”

Making a difference

“Feeling like my work is important to society.”

“Having kids come in later (as adults) to tell you made a difference in their lives!”

“I dream that the family will think back to a conversation or a bit of education they had from their family support worker and, based on that information, will use it to make a difference in their life at that time.”

Building Relationships

“Building a relationship of trust with the family so they can follow the encouragement to pursue goals for family improvement.”

“Building relationships with families. That relationship looks different in all families and yet it is all fulfilling and purposeful.”

“Getting a family to fall in love with their child and helping them develop strong bonding in the beginning which will follow them throughout the child’s life.”

Family Support Supervisor Certification Training

During the time period covered in this report (October 1, 2014 – July 31, 2015), 27 family support supervisors completed the requirements for supervision certification. These are in addition to 234 family support supervisors who have completed the certification since 2009.

The 2015 family support workforce survey asked several questions pertaining to the supervisor certification program. Out of the 79 survey respondents who identified as supervisors, 55 (70.5%) reporting having completed the certification training. Those who completed the training were asked to assess their supervisory performance in specific areas. Responses are depicted in table 36, and indicate that most individuals felt that their skills in each area had improved –either a little or a lot. Few reported no change in their skills in each area. More than half of supervisors who completed the certification training felt that their skills in strength based, reflective supervision, providing feedback to impaired or underperforming staff, leadership, and addressing staff’s stress, resilience and safety improved a lot as a result of the training.

Table 36. Assessment of supervision performance

Supervision Skill	No change		Improved a little		Improved a lot	
Culturally competent supervision (generational, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, workplace diversity)	3	5.7%	28	52.8%	22	41.5%
Strength based, reflective supervision	1	1.9%	25	47.2%	27	50.9%
Providing feedback to impaired or underperforming staff	6	11.3%	19	35.8%	28	52.8%
Adapting supervision to staffs’ developmental levels and learning styles	2	3.8%	31	58.5%	20	37.7%
Leadership skills (leading change, running effective meetings)	2	2.5%	23	42.6%	29	53.7%
Addressing staff’s stress, resilience, and safety	0	--	23	42.6%	31	57.4%

To further gauge the impact of supervision training, respondents were asked to provide a specific example of how they have implemented the supervision training in their own work with staff. These

examples, in respondents' own words, are listed below. Some of the wording has been modified to protect confidentiality:

Learning styles

Adapted meeting and supervision style to meet all learning styles of my staff

I now try to make sure that information is delivered to cover all staff's learning styles (verbally and in writing) to make sure we're all on the same page.

Understanding the difference in my staff's learning styles and adapting supervision to meet these needs

Cultural competence

The training increased not only my competence in supervision, but my confidence. I'm a younger supervisor by age and experience, and the information has helped me approach my staff in a more culturally competent manner to earn and maintain respect and confidence of the workers I supervise.

Reflective supervision

I hold bi-weekly reflective supervision sessions with staff

Discussing reflective supervision is a regular part of individual supervision

Helping staff to come up with solutions – less advice giving

I have started using a lot of strength based techniques and open-ended questions to identify why things haven't improved

I have implemented group reflective supervision

Used more reflective supervision techniques and more active listening. Focus much more on the work than just gathering information about the families they are working with (although this is important, too)

Leadership

I used the section on preparing for meetings to hold a more organized meeting

I have used tools provided in the curriculum, and have shared some of the models (leading through change) – as we are all leaders at different levels.

Increased/improved communication with staff on changes that may impact their work-funding, procedures, etc.

Leading by example and also having a case load. Motivational challenges with data and REDCap

Discuss new exciting events for each staff member at our monthly staff meeting

We have implemented regular staff meetings allowing open communication

Underperforming staff

Using 'sandwich' technique for addressing underperformance

Resilience, stress, safety

I have used secondary trauma with staff as a training and a tool

I have used the secondary trauma information to help staff recognize their own stress for working with tough families. We have discussed stress management as a team and individually.

Policy on safety for home visitors

Utilized home safety materials for a training

Overall

I use all of the material we received as a continued resource for myself and also to educate staff

I use the evaluation competencies and task analyses for family support workers along with our agency evaluation. It has really made a difference in how staff see themselves and gives them a benchmark as they progress in family support work.

The competencies were especially helpful to assess worker performance and expectations fairly and appropriately.

Suggested behavioral assessment questions to add to interviews

The entire training just meshed together my supervising skills

An additional open-ended question asked respondents to give an example of how using supervision strategies learned in training has had an impact on staff. The following are examples provided by supervisors:

Learning styles

I am more cognizant of the different learning styles and skills of my staff so I feel that I can deliver information more clearly

New staff that was just hired and trained got to go on home visits with the entire staff to see how different styles and educational strategies are used.

I learned to supervise to the individual and their learning style.

Keeping different learning styles in mind during trainings has helped all staff to have a better understanding of information covered.

Reflective supervision

My staff understand and can see that I'm invested in their success and best practices in their support of families.

They are able to provide better services to families – they can use the parallel process- using active listening and reflection with families.

Asking reflective questions instead of providing the answering and solving the problem for staff, discussing rescue triangle during supervision

I am helping them to see their strengths.

I believe using strength based supervision has helped my relationship with my staff, they are more open with me.

More open sharing in reflective group supervision. Has really created a supportive environment for the home visitors.

The importance of reflection on visits and using supervision as a brain-storming opportunity.

My understanding of reflective supervision and how to guide staff through this process during supervision sessions has increased the richness of the supervision experience for my staff, staff are sharing more and are often able to tell me what did and did not work with a family and why.

Leadership

Staff meetings have more direction and are facilitated by staff need.

Our meetings are more efficient and effective.

Supervision is always an open door policy and staff know they can interrupt with questions or emergencies with families. Very much a team approach.

The staff is more attentive to the need for organized work.

Staff feel comfortable communicating needs and complications. Strategies are in place to work through and resolve issues quickly and efficiently!

We have weekly supervision which allows for one on one training of detailed processes such as database and REDCap.

I empowered staff to take over and alternate running our team meetings

Underperforming staff

Being able to perceive why a staff member may be underperforming

Resilience, stress, safety

Targeting staff stress levels

Overall

I don't think there was an area in the training that I have not implemented or used.

Helped us in keeping staff longer than usual, decreasing our turnover

Staff performance has improved as they understand their direct impact on programming.

Staff feel more empowered and feel that they are heard.

Staff feel more comfortable talking about what they like and dislike.

Improved flow of information and communication have made some tasks more efficient on both sides, better understanding of how our work contributes to the goals of the program.

I do think that overall staff feel more empowered and have more of a sense of ownership to the work that they are doing.

Change Over Time

Administering the family support workforce survey at two time points (2013 and 2015) allowed us to assess changes that might have occurred over time. Over time analyses were conducted in various ways. First, we compared responses at the two points for individuals who completed both surveys; this was a matched pair analysis that examined change within individuals over time. Second, we compared the two cohorts as independent samples—those who completed the survey in 2013 and those who completed the 2015. This allowed us to examine whether the responses by these two groups were different, although this approach violates the assumption of independence of the two groups (in that the two groups contained some of the same individuals). Third, as a proxy for turnover we compared the email list in 2015 with respondents in 2013, to assess how many individuals who completed the survey in 2013 received the survey in 2015. Finally since we analyzed many of the questions according to position, we noted when differences in responses by position changed between 2013 and 2015. These observations have been noted throughout the report, and are summarized again here.

Matched pairs. The analysis of individual-level change included 119 respondents who had completed the survey in 2013 and 2015. The most striking finding from our analysis was that very few changes were found over time at the individual level.

Although we could not test changes in individuals' positions statistically, we examined these visually. Most held the same position that they had in 2013: 47 out of 51 direct service workers (92.2%); 39 out of 43 supervisors (90.7%); and 12 out of 17 administrators (70.6%). Three direct service workers in 2013 were supervisors in 2015; two supervisors in 2013 were direct service workers and one was an administrator in 2015; and three respondents who were administrators in 2013 described themselves as supervisors and two as 'other' in 2015. The administrator's role thus seems the most fluid.

Comparing responses from the same individuals over time, the single statistically significant change was in salary, with higher pay reported in 2015. However there were no statistically significant changes in organization or workload issues such as caseload sizes or number of staff supervised, number of counties served, frequency or quality of supervision, or hours of continuing education. The same was found for perceptions of multiple aspects of the work environment; responses from the same individuals at two points in time were not significantly different.

These findings were contrary to expectations, especially in light of the funding challenges experienced by family support programs during the present year. For example, we had anticipated some decrease in perceived job security and intention to stay in the agency and in the family support field among these individuals.

In both years respondents were asked there they expected to be five years in the future. Most of the individuals who expected to be in the same position in the same agency in 2013 continue to have this expectation (53 out of 68 individuals, 78%). About 9% of these individuals now expect to be retired in five years, and 3 each expect to be in a different position in the agency, in a different

agency, and in a different field. Out of five individuals who in 2013 expected to be in a different field in five years, only one now has this expectation.

Cohorts. The two cohorts differed in that 2013 had a larger number of respondents (448 in 2013 compared with 299 in 2015) and contained a greater proportion of direct service workers than the 2015 sample. However, comparing the two cohorts as independent samples, we also found few differences between them. The two samples were comparable in terms of demographic characteristics, educational background, geographic representation, agency type, work experience, fringe benefits, and future plans. For the most part, the cohorts were also similar in terms of job responsibilities and perceptions of the work environment.

One difference between the two cohorts was that respondents in 2015 were significantly more likely to report receiving in-person, individual supervision sessions (91% in 2015 compared with 81% in 2013), group supervision sessions (66% in 2015 compared with 52% in 2013), and supervision by electronic means (51% in 2015 compared with 40% in 2013). Ratings of frequency and quality did not differ across time periods. In addition, in the aggregate, administrators in 2015 reported supervising fewer staff than did administrators in 2013; however supervisors did not report any differences in the number of staff they supervised, and there were no significant changes in caseload size between the two time periods.

With regard to perceptions of the work environment, responses were comparable between 2013 and 2015. Respondents in 2013 on average felt more strongly that their job exposed them to dangerous or unsafe working conditions than respondents in 2015; even when controlling for the larger proportion of direct service workers in 2013. Service orientation was lower and intention to stay in the field of family support was higher in 2015, though these cohort differences disappeared when controlling for the proportion of direct service workers.

Turnover proxy. As an estimate of turnover across programs, we compared the email lists of potential survey recipients in 2015 and the 2013 survey, to assess how many individuals who were sent the first survey (at the end of 2013) received the second survey in 2015. Eliminating those that came back undeliverable, out of 650 potential respondents in 2013, 313 of these individuals appeared in the 2015 list. This suggests an estimated retention rate of 48% during the time period between the two surveys. Furthermore out of 441 survey respondents in 2013, 216 individuals (49%) received the survey in 2015, while 225 of these 2013 respondents (51%) did not.

As an estimate of turnover this strategy is limited because we could not account for changes in email addresses/names among survey recipients. Therefore these numbers might be overstating the amount of attrition.

Differences across position. When we compared responses by position across the two survey periods, we noted similar trends in 2013 and 2015, with a few exceptions. These differences were noted throughout the report, but we provide a summary of those differences here.

In 2013, there was a significant difference in age according to position, with direct service workers younger than administrators; this difference disappeared in 2015.

Hours of continuing education did not differ by position in 2015; this contrasts with 2013, when supervisors reported significantly greater hours in continuing education than direct service workers.

In 2015, responses to the items “My salary provides me with a living wage” and “Do you feel supported at the state level?” indicate no significant differences by position; in 2013 supervisors and administrators were much more likely than direct service workers to state that their salary provided a living wage and that they felt supported at the state level.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study of Iowa’s family support workforce, which represents the geographic distribution of family support employees, depicts a well-educated and fairly experienced workforce that is predominantly female, Caucasian, and non-Hispanic. While the greatest proportions are in direct service positions, the perspectives of supervisors and administrators who work in a range of types of organizations are also represented. Most employees are married and have parented children themselves, and have been drawn to the field of family support out of a desire to help others.

Based on the survey results, there is variation in caseload size and in whether or not supervisors and/or administrators also carry caseloads; however there is not an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction or burden with regard to the workload. The areas where there appears to be frustration emerged in the open-ended comments about challenges—especially documentation and paperwork and funding instability.

Respondents are generally pleased with the quality of supervision they receive, and supervisors who completed the family support supervision certification program articulate the value of this program and identify specific ways in which they have used the training materials in their own supervisory practice, with positive results. Most supervisors and administrators have experienced promotions in their organizations, though the majority of direct service workers have not despite long tenure. Pay is a source of dissatisfaction, especially for full-time direct service workers; and based on responses regarding the availability of fringe benefits, sizable proportions of employees do not have access to basic benefits such as medical and dental insurance and sick leave.

We noted some differences by position in certain aspects of the work environment, such as opportunities for promotion, job security, agency communication, work overload, job hazards, supervisor support, and commitment to the agency. In many other respects, however, there were no significant differences by position and, as a whole, respondents scored quite high on their overall job satisfaction, orientation to service, role clarity, support from co-workers, and support from the organization and from the state.

Asked about their plans in five years, the majority of respondents expect to be in the same agency whether in the same position or a different position. The expectation of staying in the same agency is particularly high among supervisors. The aging of the human services workforce is a well-documented phenomenon, and in this sample 13% expect to retire within five years. The percentage is higher among administrators, of whom 30% expect to retire in five years; perhaps this offers potential for needed promotional opportunities. But despite the fact that most employees do intend to stay in their organizations, when asked “what would it take to keep you in the field of family support?” the largest percentage of respondents indicated “higher salary” (54%). This answer was selected by more than twice as many individuals over other factors such as opportunities for career advancement and better benefits.

Family support employees identified varied challenges that they face in their daily work. A couple of issues emerged from the open-ended comments that were not specifically captured elsewhere in the survey. First, there was a sense that family support workers are dealing with increasingly challenging family situations and complex problems in the face of decreasing resources. Another sentiment expressed was frustration with increasing demands for documentation and reporting that were perceived as sometimes duplicative, confusing, and resulting in a reduced amount of time available to work with families. The value that respondents place on working with families is demonstrated in the open-ended comments about the rewards of family support work. This is a population that derives the greatest satisfaction from helping children and families, watching them grow and develop, and feeling that they have played a part in that process.

In examining change between the first survey (December 2013) and the 2015 survey, we were surprised by the consistency of responses, whether at the individual level or between the two cohorts. The size and composition of the samples (with regard to position in the agency) differed, but demographic characteristics, education and work experience, work related issues, perceptions of the work environment, and future plans did not change noticeably over time. We noted a high degree of attrition from the time of the first survey to the time of the second, only about 1.5 years apart. However, assessing attrition through a comparison of email lists does not take into account changes in email addresses, and thus remains a crude measure.

We offer several recommendations from these findings.

- Greater precision is needed in order to accurately assess turnover and then to develop strategies to prevent unnecessary turnover. Specifically, information from each family support program should be compiled to measure the number of individuals at direct service, supervisory, and administrators, both full-time and part-time, who leave the program annually, and the reasons for their departure.
- There continue to be concerns about the burdens of paperwork and documentation; these were expressed in 2013 and continue to be the most frequently noted challenge of working in family support. Finding ways to consolidate record keeping and avoid unnecessarily duplication of documentation, and providing ongoing feedback to family support programs on meaningful indicators of family progress, would go a long way toward reducing frustration.
- There is clearly a need to recruit more African-American, Asian, and Hispanic employees to the family support field. The demographic composition of the family support workforce continues to be primarily Caucasian, female, and married, while family support consumers are more diverse in race, ethnicity and family structure. Strategies to increase the diversity of the workforce might be more effectively implemented at the community level, beginning with an understanding of characteristics of client populations at local levels. We examined the geographic distribution of employees by race, ethnicity, and bilingual competence and did note some concordance between employee and consumer demographic; however as the population in Iowa continues to diversify, greater numbers of employees that represent the changing population are needed in family support programs.
- Related to recruitment, it is likely to be increasingly difficult to recruit and retain a diverse family support workforce without attending to concerns about salary, especially among full-time workers, and key benefits which are unavailable for many part-time employees. There

has been progress in this area, and we did note that one area of change among individuals matched at the two time points was a significant increase in salary. Continued attention to salary and benefits remain important challenges for family support programs.

- The measure of perceived job security has not changed notably in the past year and a half, but at both time points funding insecurity was one of the greatest challenges noted by respondents in the open-ended question. Stabilizing funding for family support programs or reducing competition for resources are strategies that would help to ameliorate these concerns.
- Family support employees articulate the rewards that their work brings, both in their open-ended comments and in the consistency in responses regarding important qualities of family support workers. They also articulate changes in the client populations served and difficulties in dealing with increasingly complex family situations. In order to provide high quality services and sustain workers' feeling of competence, ongoing opportunities for skill development are important for direct service workers and for those with supervisory responsibilities.