Introduction

In November, 2015, the HBSSW at UWM was awarded a contract from the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) to provide a post-graduate training program leading to the acquisition of greater skills in providing services to adopted persons, birth families, prospective adoptive parents, adoptive families, and kinship families. The licensed training program is called TAC (Training for Adoption Competency). The initiative is funded through a grant from the Jockey International Foundation in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

“The TAC is a 72-hour training program that involves 12 day-long modules (one completed at home) followed by six monthly case consultation sessions designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to practice. The curriculum is fully manualized. It is based on the defined competencies and designed to develop adoption competent mental health professionals as defined by the expert Advisory Board.” The curriculum was piloted in 2009-2010 at the University of Maryland, School of Social Work Office of Continuing Education and a TAC Trainer preparation and credentialing process was developed. TAC is currently being replicated in 14 states: California, Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Nebraska, North Carolina, Virginia, Iowa, Mississippi, and Georgia.

Background

From 2010 to 2014, over 700 children per year were adopted in Wisconsin. The number of children receiving an adoption subsidy in Wisconsin has averaged approximately 7200 per year for the past five years. Adoption failures/dissolutions, or adoptions in which children are returned to state care after finalization of adoption, has been estimated to be between 2 – 10% nationally, but there is not yet good information on the rate in Wisconsin.

According to C.A.S.E. “children with traumatic experiences of abuse, neglect and abandonment and challenging behavioral and emotional responses are at greater risk of presenting with adjustment problems within their adoptive families. These children’s emotional issues are often complex, and adoptive parents often identify these issues as the primary contributors to family stressors post-adoption. Access to adoption-competent mental health services is a critical factor in the outcomes for these children and their adoptive families and the success of their adoptions. Studies show, however, that adoptive families face significant challenges in finding quality mental health services provided by therapists who are knowledgeable about the effects of pre-adoption experiences on children’s intellectual and social functioning, children’s ability to form attachments to their adoptive families, and children’s overall development in light of early abuse and neglect and foster care placements.”

To fill this need, C.A.S.E. has developed the TAC program to increase the numbers of professionals who are able to provide treatment services to these individuals and families. The end goal of increased access
to adoption competent mental health practitioners is improved well-being of adopted children and their families and a decrease in adoption dissolution.

The HBSSW is excited to be selected as a trainer for this important program and partner with C.A.S.E. and practitioners in the greater Milwaukee area. We hope to begin offering the training to a group of 12 – 15 interested professionals no later than early May, 2016.

In the first year of the project, we intend to offer the TAC training in Milwaukee. This training would serve practitioners in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties as well as southeastern Wisconsin (Kenosha, Racine) and northern Illinois. In year two, we would plan to expand the area served to include north eastern Wisconsin (Green Bay, Appleton, Sheboygan areas) and central Wisconsin (Madison, Rhinelander, Waukesha areas). In year three we would consult with the University of Minnesota to determine if there is need to offer the training in the western and northwestern areas of the state (Eau Claire, LaCrosse, Superior areas). In all years, we would continue to offer the program in the Milwaukee area, which is an area of greater population and concentration of social workers, psychologists, and professional counselors.

Identification and Recruitment of Participants

A major key to the success of this project is the recruitment of qualified social work and mental health professionals who have a demonstrated interest in and history of providing services to adopting families. We anticipate training 12 – 15 professionals in the curriculum, beginning sometime in May, 2016. We will partner with Community Advisory Council members and Trainers to recruit through flyers and email messaging to their respective staff. We also plan to recruit participants through our Field Program at appropriate field sites. All participants will receive CEUs for their participation and will be able to participate in the first cohort at no cost. The cost for training subsequent cohorts is estimated to be between $500 - $600 for the program.

Our long term plan is to explore the possibility of developing a certificate in post-adoption services through UWM. This will allow us to integrate the training with other courses offered in several departments and make the training potentially more attractive to clinicians who are looking for advanced certification.

Delivery of classroom based training

The TAC consists of 12 modules on various aspects of adoption practice (see model curriculum). The first module will be delivered in an online format that participants can do at home or at their place of business. Modules 2 – 12 will be delivered in person every other Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm, at UWM’s Child Welfare Training Partnership offices, 4425 N. Port Washington Road, East Lake Towers, Suite 400, Glendale, WI.

Parking is available in lot next to the building at no cost.

Online line modules for each of the in person modules will be developed during this first session. All modules will be taped in order to facilitate this development. These will be used for any participant who is unavoidably absent for one of the sessions.

Monthly ongoing case consultation sessions will occur for six months after the end of the formal training. This case consultation will be conducted by C.A.S.E. staff, curriculum trainers and project officers.