



## Emphasis on *Continuing*

### *Continuing competence programs blossom at ASWB*

When Lisa Casler joined ASWB as Continuing Competence Coordinator last fall, she stepped into an evolving role within a rapidly expanding set of programs. ASWB launched its Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program in 2000, reviewing and approving continuing education providers that offer courses for licensed social workers. As of 2016, [ACE is recognized](#) as a good source for continuing education by 47 member jurisdictions. In 2014, ASWB expanded continuing competence programs with a contract for the State of New Jersey. ASWB now reviews and

approves continuing education courses for New Jersey, with [more than 850 courses](#) approved in just two years.

“We can turn around a course approval for New Jersey in about 60 days, if everything’s in order,” Casler says. That’s good news, because applications for approval through the New Jersey contract have been steadily increasing, with applications for 2016 up by more than 20% compared to the first months of 2015.

The ACE program has seen similar growth in the past two years, with completed application volume more



*Continuing Competence Coordinator Lisa Casler and Continuing Education Specialist Donna Edwards.*

than tripling between 2014 and 2015. “We changed the application process for ACE and made it more streamlined,” says Jennifer Henkel, director of member services, which explains some of the increase in completed applications. “We’ve also seen growth in ACE as more jurisdictions, including California, recognize ACE in their continuing education requirements.”

With the addition of Casler, a Licensed Social Worker with 15 years of experience, ASWB has been able to simplify the review process for ACE providers. Previously, every application was reviewed by a committee of subject matter experts, the ACE Committee. Now, most of the review is completed by ASWB staff, in consultation with committee members when a question arises. Consequently, the committee has shifted its focus to the broader topic of continuing competence. In fact, the committee’s name now reflects that new focus: the Continuing Competence Committee. The committee met in June and will provide input to the Regulatory Education and Leadership (REAL) Committee in the planning for the 2017 Education Conference, which will focus on continuing competence. “In addition to providing that input,” says Henkel, “the committee will get feedback from ASWB members after the conference.”

To keep up with the pace of continuing education review, Casler’s team will expand this year. Currently, much of the work falls to her and Continuing Education Specialist Donna Edwards, with periodic help from other Member Services staff. Casler and Henkel are currently in the process of hiring a third person to assist with the expanded workload.

ACE will also see a revamped online application process within the next 12 to 18 months, Henkel says. With online applications, ACE staff will receive more consistent information from applicants and will be able to share provider information more quickly. Currently, the online ACE system boasts more than 2,700 courses that social workers can search. The search function allows social workers to look for courses by subject matter or location and includes distance learning opportunities as well.

“As new learning formats come in,” says Casler, “the challenge is making sure we stay up to date with best practices while still meeting our standards.” These new learning formats—largely the result of technology changes—are a boon for professionals, Casler says, because they “tap into all different learning styles.... It’s an exciting challenge.”