Students and Faculty Serving Together

“Working with the Community Programs made me realize that as much as we are in different programs and may serve different populations, we are all connected, and we still rely on each other every once in a while for information and referrals for our clients. It has shown me that at the end of the day, social workers will always be connected no matter how different we think our agencies are. The fact that we have a common interest in serving people and people are intertwined means we are still one big family of social workers after all. We are stronger together!”

—Anissa Chitwanga, MSW MasterCard Scholar, who has participated with the Kinship Care Resource Center and this year with Chance at Childhood

“Interning within the School of Social Work has been so wonderful. The skills I’ve learned and the networking I’ve done have been paramount in my growth and have fueled my interest in working in post-secondary education administration and advising.”

—FAME intern and BASW student Ian Jacobs

Community Programs

It is rare for schools of social work to operate direct service programs, because they primarily serve as research and teaching institutions. But the MSU School of Social Work has created a unique niche in this way to help serve our communities. For the last 15 years, the School has slowly built a set of four community programs, and it continues to consider the development of innovative new programs as well.

Key criteria
Three key criteria must be met in order for an initiative to become a School of Social Work community program. It must:
1. Respond to a community need that is not being adequately addressed, and it must offer an innovative service.
2. Fulfill an educational role that is consistent with the School’s central mission of educating social workers.
3. Create a service model that can be assessed and evaluated, with the intent of establishing effective service approaches that can be replicated elsewhere.

Current programs
- Chance at Childhood (CAC)
- Fostering Academics, Mentoring Excellence (FAME)
- Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC)
- Veterinary Social Work Services (VSWS)

The four current community programs are diverse in terms of their service populations and approaches used. However, all of them meet the key criteria. The educational role is especially interesting. Each program adopted by the School must result in the creation of field placements for our students, and all of our community programs are fulfilling this role. Completing such field placements allows our students to work under the guidance of strong social work supervisors while learning about service provision in innovative programs.

Collectively, these service programs and the philosophy underlying them allow the School to be a leader in terms of advancing MSU’s land grant mission and integrating service, education, and research. The programs bring both tangible and intellectual resources to bear on important community problems and, in so doing, provide unique opportunities for our faculty and students to serve as community-engaged scholars and practitioners.

—Steve Anderson, PhD, Director, MSU School of Social Work
Chance at Childhood (CAC)

Mission
Through collaboration with the College of Law, the CAC mission is to promote and protect the well-being of children and families through integrated social work, law, education, and advocacy.

Who we are
CAC's interdisciplinary social work/legal teams represent children in a variety of legal proceedings and consult with practitioners and community members on a wide range of issues involving children's interests. Because children by law cannot retain legal services on their own behalf, courts must appoint advocates for children in those cases where the child requires an independent voice. A number of mid-Michigan family courts regularly appoint CAC teams to protect children involved in custody evaluations, guardianship reviews, and supervised parenting time matters.

CAC teams also represent adults in a traditional lawyer–client relationship when the adults are clearly advocating for the best interest of the children involved. Such cases have included custody, parenting time, child support, adoption, guardianship, and change of domicile matters. Given the unmet community demand for legal assistance, CAC students also staff the Legal Self-Help Clinic within the Ingham County 55th District Court in order to help indigent parties prepare and file legal documents with the court.

New endeavors
CAC both expands and refines services. This year, the program:

- Provided legal representation necessary for a child to be adopted—the first finalized adoption in the history of the program.
- Implemented a grant awarded in partnership with Peckham, Inc., a local agency providing services to youth. CAC students assisted in assessing juvenile court records for potential barriers to employment.
- Partnered with Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan (VAMM) to help children facing school suspensions and expulsions.

Who we helped
16 MSU law students and 17 MSU social work students engaged in field placements in the Chance at Childhood Clinic, providing over 15,000 hours of service to 802 children and families. Specifically, CAC:

- Conducted 13 custody evaluations.
- Performed 68 guardianship reviews.
- Supervised 14 parenting time cases.
- Represented 7 individuals in court proceedings.
- Assisted 500 individuals through the Legal Self-Help Clinic or office consultations.
- Provided 6 community trainings to over 200 people.

Community outreach
CAC staff serve on a variety of community groups and offer students opportunities to participate in projects associated with these groups:

- Michigan Court Improvement Program Statewide
- Michigan Child Death Review Team
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Case Management Work Improvement Team Taskforce
- National Association of Social Workers—Michigan Chapter Social Policy Committee
- Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan

facebook.com/MSUChanceatChildhood
Chance at Childhood (CAC) - continued

What we do

- **Child custody evaluation:** Child custody is a term that refers to legal rights and responsibilities between a parent and child. When the parents are unable to agree on how child custody should be arranged, the court orders an objective party to investigate the matter and present to the court a recommendation in the best interests of the child. CAC is unique in that all custody evaluations are completed by an equal partnership between a social work student and a law student under the supervision of CAC staff.

- **Guardianship review:** Legal guardianship is the term to describe transferring legal authority to care for a child or children. When children under the age of 6 are placed in the care of a legal guardian, the court’s family division requires an annual report and home visit to assess the child’s well-being and also consider whether the terms of the guardianship need to be changed. CAC performs these visits and reviews using a social work and law student team.

- **Supervised parenting time:** When time with a parent proves risky for a child’s safety and/or well-being, a court may order parenting time to be supervised by an objective third party. CAC students and faculty can serve as this third party or supervisor. The parenting time supervisor is responsible for ensuring the child’s safety and for reporting observations to the court. Faculty and students also consider the circumstances that led to the need for supervised parenting time and make referrals for parent education, free legal consultation for parents, and mental health treatment.

- **Legal Self-Help Clinic:** Within the Ingham County 55th District Court Family Division, CAC faculty and students help people respond to and prepare a variety of legal orders and documents. Patrons most frequently request help with child custody, parenting time, and child support matters.

The gap we fill

Thousands of individuals involved in Michigan court family division proceedings lack the resources to retain an attorney to represent them. CAC fills this gap through direct representation in select cases, conducting free telephone and in-person consultations, and operating the Legal Self-Help Clinic.

Additionally, numerous studies have exposed the poor state of Michigan’s system in providing children with a court-appointed counsel, also called lawyer-guardian ad litem (LGAL). LGALs are not required to have any special training regarding child representation.

They have large caseloads, and they are woefully underpaid. In response, CAC provides legal services on behalf of children to a number of counties and also advocates for policy changes addressing these shortcomings in the existing system.

Contact us: 517-336-8088
Fostering Academics, Mentoring Excellence (FAME)

Mission
FAME’s mission is to increase the educational outcomes of students at Michigan State University who have experienced foster care, kinship care, or had similar experiences by promoting access to, and successful completion of, higher education programs. This mission will be accomplished through establishing campus and community partnerships, developing supportive networks, and providing individualized services to students.

Who we are
FAME works with other campus and external partners to connect with all youth accepted to MSU who have experienced foster care, homelessness, or other out-of-home placements. FAME staff and social work interns invite contact through fun, useful, resourceful activities, and ongoing social media and newsletter dissemination to these youth. In addition, FAME seeks to create a sense of pride with the identity of experiencing out-of-home placement and to reduce stigma both for FAME-eligible students and within the campus at large.

So often, youth in out-of-home placements are either left to figure out the world on their own or forced to receive services by court order whether desired or not. FAME is grounded in the philosophy of self-determination, the right to make our own choices, and to direct the course of our lives. Consequently, FAME does not mandate involvement, but rather seeks to establish a safe and interesting environment to help students move forward.

New endeavors
First Year Success (FYS), an effort prompted by the generosity of an anonymous donor, allowed FAME to offer college supplies and targeted services for incoming freshman from the Detroit area who were accepted to MSU and met FAME eligibility. College supply starter kits consisting of dorm living essentials were distributed. These included: bedding, lighting, backpacks, storage, cleaning supplies, toiletries, USB drive, etc. Additionally, FYS students are eligible for a fitness scholarship, receive coaching and mentorship, and are invited to participate in other FAME activities and events.

Who we helped
MSU social work students completed 1,560 internship hours and, along with FAME’s coordinator and graduate assistant:

- Provided 66 FAME-eligible students the following: coaching, mentoring, health insurance referrals, fall welcome packages, referral to a Campus Champion, winter and spring semester finals week care packages and events, and winter break housing assistance.

In addition to direct service support, interns and staff facilitated educational, social, and advocacy events and opportunities.

- Involved 265 FAME-eligible students in a FAME-related event, including: life skills training (budgeting, housing, academics, mental and physical health), FAME Student Activity Board event or meeting, or public speaking on behalf of FAME.

Connect to learn more:
facebook.com/msufame
@MSUFAME
msu_fame
What we do

- **Life skills coaching:** Students meet with a trained coach on a regular basis to establish accountability, set and review goals, and connect to other campus supports.

- **Mentoring:** Volunteers from the community are trained to provide personal and professional support and networking in areas of particular interest to the student.

- **Campus navigation:** Students are connected with Campus Champions who advocate for students in a variety of areas such as financial aid, housing, Office of the Registrar, and the counseling center.

- **Life skills educational and social events:** FAME hosts one event a month focusing on one of seven life domains—employment, housing, physical and mental health, cultural and personal identity formation, life skills for campus living and career preparation, supportive relationships, and community connections—incorporating materials developed by Casey Family Programs.

- **FAME Student Activity Board (SAB) advising:** Registered as a University Activity Board, the FAME SAB meets monthly to plan events meaningful to students eligible for FAME services and their support network. Activities include organized study tables, pumpkin painting, cooking classes, bowling, developing a public awareness video, and hosting a foster care awareness event.

- **Outreach and education:** FAME offers multiple on- and off-campus events focused on college access for youth who are experiencing or have experienced out-of-home placement. In addition, FAME staff and interns offer educational events for community groups and professionals about college access, resources, and options for youth who age out of the child welfare system.

- **Basic and comfort care:** FAME offers emergency care items for students, including toiletries, nonperishable food, school supplies, and other items donated for FAME-eligible students, especially around finals week (survival kits) and the beginning of the school year (welcome packages.)

The gap we fill

- **84%** of youth ages 17–18 with experience in foster care report a desire to go to college.

- **50%** will go on to graduate from high school by age 18.

- **20%** will attend college.

(Fostering Success in Education, 2014)

FAME exists to promote access to and successful completion of post secondary education programs for young adults involved in the foster care system. Traditional student retention programs do not appropriately address the unique and specific barriers experienced by foster care alumni who often lack a stable family support structure. By engaging in community outreach and partnering with existing campus departments, FAME is able to identify this under-served and under-recognized student population and link them to a network of support, resources, and community on campus. FAME partners with students to reduce barriers and to proactively address obstacles that could potentially disrupt their progress toward degree attainment.

Contact us: 517-353-5537
Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC)

Mission
The KCRC mission is to support Michigan’s kinship families by providing education and outreach to communities and agencies supporting kinship families, and to offer information and referral and case management services to caregivers raising relative children.

Who we are
KCRC is an information and referral service that supports Michigan kinship families needing assistance with legal information, finding support groups, and locating any resources that aid in helping kinship parents take care of their child(ren).

KCRC engages in community education and outreach on behalf of the needs of kinship caregivers.

New endeavors
Over the past year, KCRC staff and students:

- Met with ten legislators and provided testimony before the House Committee on Children, Families, and Seniors on the benefits of kinship care as well as the challenges faced by these families.
- In conjunction with Chance at Childhood, completed a survey of 59 of 83 Michigan county courts on the process to complete an uncontested relative adoption, resulting in findings of large variations in processes and fees across counties.
- Drafted recommendations on ways to improve the process to increase permanency outcomes for children.
- Performed follow-up surveys to determine if KCRC referrals were helpful. KCRC users reported 86% very satisfied and identified “lack of opportunity to follow up on the provided referral” as a main reason for dissatisfaction. In response, KCRC waits an additional two weeks prior to making follow-up calls.

Community outreach
KCRC partners with other community agencies representing the interests of kinship caregivers through collaborative partnerships and coalitions. KCRC program representatives are participants with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Collaborative Council. A representative from the KCRC also holds the role of secretary for the Michigan Kinship Coalition, an informal network of kinship care providers invested in education and advocacy support.

Who we helped
1 Advanced Standing summer and 3 academic year MSU social work interns completed 1,600 internship hours and, along with the KCRC coordinator:

- Assisted 214 individuals seeking one or more referrals related to:
  - 56% legal assistance
  - 35% financial assistance
  - 15% support
  - 10% child medical or behavioral health referral
- Delivered 5 educational programs to over 180 people including social work professionals about the needs of, advocacy efforts on behalf of, and supports available for kinship care providers.
- Provided holiday support for a grandmother who took on responsibility for raising two of her grandchildren.

Contact us: 800-535-1218
The gap we fill

Over 19,000 children in Michigan live in kinship placements without a biological parent present. Kinship care providers are left to their own devices to find resources and advocate for themselves. Unlike some other states, Michigan does not have a kinship navigator program, so there is no centralized resource where kinship caregivers can receive help other than the KCRC. The KCRC helps to fill this service void by facilitating caregivers’ access to resources and by providing appropriate referrals and information, while also offering them a supportive person with whom to speak.

Although some kinship families have access to the Internet, many do not; thus, KCRC’s 1-800 number is an important resource for families. For those with access to the Internet, the KCRC provides multiple electronic emails each year and also distributes information via social media. Regardless of how a person contacts the KCRC, our staff and student interns work diligently to provide the information necessary to enable families to make decisions in their best interests.
Community Programs Annual Report 2015-2016

Veterinary Social Work Services (VSWS)

Mission
Through a collaboration with the College of Veterinary Medicine, the VSWS mission is to provide emotional support, education, and referral services to the clients, veterinarians, medical staff, and support staff of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital as well as the community at large.

Who we are
The MSU College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) and the MSU School of Social Work created the partnership that formed Veterinary Social Work Services (VSWS) in 2006, with the vision to professionally assess and deliver services necessary to support those responsible for the care of animals at all levels of service, including animal owners.

The VSWS also provides services for clients of area veterinarians. These clients are usually referred by a private veterinary clinic or are online or self-initiated referrals.

New endeavors
Several events were offered this year that continued to elevate the recognition and awareness of compassion fatigue, which is the experience of caring to such an extent as to render one exhausted, depleted, and overwhelmed. These events included a series of interactive webinars with a national expert offered to all faculty, staff, and students.

Thankful Thursdays also was piloted. A cart filled with self-care items was made available outside VSWS and aimed to highlight both appreciation for the work of faculty, students, and staff but also to highlight social work availability and access.

Client quotes
“Sharing about others’ losses helps us realize we aren’t alone.”
“I don’t feel so alone.”
“It was helpful to talk about my dog’s death for the first time since it happened.”

Who we helped
4 master’s-level social work students engaged in field education, contributed over 1,900 hours of service, and with the support of licensed social work faculty:
- Provided 134 animal owners direct one-on-one support services.
- Responded to 1,752 phone calls or emails, offering support after the death of an animal.
- Facilitated 34 new people attending meetings of the Pet-Loss Support Group offered throughout the year.
- Welcomed 70+ attendees at the annual Memorial Service for the Loss of a Companion Animal.

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Community Programs Annual Report 2015-2016

Veterinary Social Work Services (VSWS) - continued

What we do

- **Crisis intervention services**: VSWS faculty and students initiate contact with people in the MSU Veterinary Medical Center waiting room or when asked to consult a person who is navigating difficult decision making such as the possibility of euthanizing an animal.

- **Pet-Loss Support Group**: A group is offered twice a month throughout the year to provide a space for people to share their experiences after losing a beloved animal. Attendance varies between 7 and 14 people.

- **Grief support and outreach**: This program provides outreach through email and/or phone calls to people who have lost an animal served by the MSU Veterinary Medical Center. An invitation to join the Pet-Loss Support Group is also made at this time.

- **Compassion fatigue prevention**: Workshops, speakers, and activities are offered throughout the year to allow faculty and staff access to topics such as meditation, self-care, recognizing signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue, where to go for support, and coloring for a mindful break.

- **Annual Memorial Service for the Loss of a Companion Animal**: Every year, a service is held at the MSU Veterinary Medical Center where people who have lost a companion animal are invited to share in communal recognition and honor the loss of an animal dear to them.

The gap we fill

Experiences of grief and loss associated with the illness and death of an animal, professional compassion fatigue, and ongoing need for referral and support for clients with ill animals are not new circumstances. However, services dedicated to this field of practice are rare, and this is the gap we address.

In addition, a recent national study revealed veterinarians are three times more likely to think about suicide than the national average.

VSWS aims to engage in proactive support of all VMC faculty, staff, and students, as well as provide responsive and immediate opportunities for debriefing stressful circumstances that naturally arise with the difficult work they perform.

The specific partnership and services VSWS offers are unique. We do not know of another social worker hired by a hospital or animal clinic in Michigan who also works with social work students, the next generation of practitioners, to train them in this unique and specific field of service.

Contact us: 517-432-5967