Alumni: Where Are They Now?

Katie Bess is a graduate of the MSW program (class of 2011). While attending the Annual Council on Social Work Education Conference in Washington, D.C., some of the social work faculty had the opportunity to catch up with her and ask where her MSW degree has taken her.

“The School of Social Work program gave me the tools I needed to pursue my career in macro social work policy in Washington, D.C.,” says Katie. With an interest in behavioral health and the criminal justice interface, she applied for multiple internships in D.C. and landed a position as a senior policy intern for the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Development Disability Directors (NACBHDD). NACBHDD is the national voice for county behavioral health and developmental disability authorities and provides education, policy analysis, and advocacy to its members.

During her internship, Katie was able to meet with state and federal stakeholders, assist NACBHDD committees in developing policy platforms, provide grant assistance to county behavioral health authorities, judge the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s voice awards, develop and analyze county surveys on behavioral health, present at a variety of conferences and webinars, and write articles based on her interests and expertise. After interning, she was hired as a research and policy associate at NACBHDD, and also provided consultation services for other national organizations.

Today, she is in the research division of the National Association of Counties in Washington, D.C. She still provides consulting services to NACBHDD and other organizations. Her advice to others is, “Never give up on your dreams; you never know where life may take you.”

Happy New Year! As we start the second semester, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of our field agencies and field instructors for the time and dedication they provide our students. You make a significant contribution to the education of our social work students. The second semester is often when field instructors begin to see the fruits of their labor; students are able to participate in more and more agency activities and carry more responsibility. Field instructors witness the professional growth that accompanies that increase in confidence, skill, and knowledge. We appreciate the responsibility that each field instructor takes on when they agree to have a student placed with them for the entire year.

On that note, the second semester also means that we will start the process of placing students all over again in just a few short weeks! In the coming months, we will admit 30 two-year MSW students, 20 one-year MSW students and approximately 65 BSW seniors. Additionally, we have 37 students in our three-year MSW program that will begin placements in the fall. March 4 is our annual field fair, and this event will kick off the placement process. We will be contacting agencies regarding their plans for student placements. Please take the next few weeks to consider your capacity for hosting social work students. We understand that the commitment is significant and want to give each agency time to consider all of the logistics required to make a placement work: staff time, supervision resources, office space, etc. New staff that have joined your agency may be interested in supervising students. Please consider querying your social work staff to determine their interest; this may help make some decisions about the agency’s capacity to host students.

In closing, I will leave you with a quote from Winston Churchill: “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Supervising students is an opportunity to give back to the profession. Please be assured we are grateful for all that you give and for your continued support of our students.
Substance Abuse

Starting in spring 2012, the School of Social Work’s substance abuse course began using two New York Times bestsellers in lieu of a traditional textbook. Beautiful Boy: A Father’s Journey Through His Son’s Addiction is a memoir by author David Sheff which chronicles the life of his son, Nic. In a very honest way, Sheff takes you from Nic’s seemingly idyllic childhood to his descent into drug and alcohol abuse. Through several cycles of relapse and recovery, a father struggles to understand his son and the disease of addiction. The book focuses not only on the struggles of the addict but also the struggles of the friends and family who surround him.

For a different perspective on addiction, Nic delivers his own story in the autobiography Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines. Written with the same honesty as his father’s book, Tweak reveals exactly what Nic’s meth addiction entailed. Lying, stealing, and cheating his way through years of his life, Nic is ultimately able to embark on a journey towards recovery.

To tie the books into the substance abuse course, students are required to complete a case study using material from Beautiful Boy and Tweak. Through this assignment, students write about the experience of addiction, evaluate the treatment system that is present in the books, and propose an “ideal” treatment approach for Nic. Not just for classroom reading, these two books can be wonderfully helpful to anyone who is dealing with addiction.

Faculty Feature

With a grant from the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, faculty members Susan Roll, Social Work, and Laurie Browne, Recreation, Hospitality, and Parks Management, have launched a pilot project to further the scholarship on how students understand the causes, experiences, and results of poverty in the United States through an experiential learning process.

The simulation students participate in, Welcome to the State of Poverty, is a three hour exercise which simulates four weeks in the life of families struggling to make ends meet. Using their limited resources, families are required to visit agencies including the welfare office, employment support, and utility companies. They quickly begin to understand the trials and tribulations of living in poverty and the many barriers to success that families face.

Using the tenets of Participatory Action Research, a team of 10 MSW and BSW students have been recruited to serve as co-researchers on the project. Their participation will add valuable feedback on the learning process and how the development of new understandings of poverty get translated into the field of practice.

Roll and Browne will be running the simulation four times over the spring semester. Each one requires 18 to 20 volunteers to serve in various roles from police officers to employment counselors and pawn shop owners. Several of our agency field instructors have volunteered to participate. If you are interested in being a part of the project, please contact Susan Roll at sroll@csuchico.edu.
Pravina Lal (MSW class of 2013) has been awarded the Graduate Equity Fellowship. The scholarship is sponsored by the CSU Chancellor’s Office and California State University, Chico to help broaden and expand the pool of academically talented CSU graduate students interested in pursuing careers in university teaching and research. The program provides a $750 per semester stipend and a $2,000 research assistantship for research-related activities under the direction of a faculty mentor.

Pravina is also a HPPAE (Hartford Practicum Partnership in Aging Education) student and will be researching aging adults’ experiences with mental health, isolation, and loss of independence. She is in the process of creating a project to improve access to current services and possibly make them more effective for older adults in the Chico community. Pravina related that she was “humbled and honored to have received this opportunity.”

Suzanne Rindlisbacher (MSW class of 2014) recently wrote and was awarded a $1,000 grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation. Suzanne is completing her field practicum with Safe Place at Butte College and was encouraged to write the grant by her agency field instructor, Stephanie Jimenez.

The mission of the Safe Place and Wellness Program at Butte College is to offer a visible support system for victims of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and LGBTQ+ issues through outreach, crisis intervention, advocacy, and educational programming at Butte College and in the surrounding community. The Safe Place and Wellness Program was recently awarded a $1,000 grant through the local Wal-Mart Foundation (local Wal-Mart 2044). These funds will be of tremendous help to the program.

The grant will be used for community and campus outreach and educational sessions to promote awareness of the prevalence of domestic/intimate partner violence in our community and the toll that this violence exacts on its victims. Additionally, a part of the grant will be used to create an educational forum this coming March on issues associated with the LGBTQ+ community. They will be discussing homophobia, trans-phobia, the high suicide rates associated with the LGBTQ+ community, and the societal stigmatization that is often associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

BSW student Adam Graves has been working with the local Love Chapmantown Community Coalition for his senior field placement this year. His placement has provided him the opportunity to learn about several programs that the coalition is working with in Chapmantown. The farmers market is one program that Adam has learned a great deal about this year, specifically learning how to take advantage of free advertising venues. This work has resulted in an expansion of the farmers market, with more farmers bringing their produce and more residents purchasing fresh food items at the market.

Another project Adam has been particularly interested in is the establishment of a Chapmantown Children’s Choir. Working with another coalition member, he put on a holiday craft party at the community center. The coalition is hopeful that it can begin bringing children and parents together at the community center, and interest in a children’s choir will be one outcome of this community building.

Adam also helped host the Chapmantown Community Coalition Open House event in December. The coalition is responsible for the installation of a number of new streetlights in Chapmantown; the members’ hard work and advocacy are bringing results. Adam’s focus in the spring semester will be on the neighborhood cleanup event and also working with a graduate student on an Assets mapping of the community.
Agency Field Instructor: Words of Wisdom
Featuring Molly Heck, MSW

1. How long have you been a field instructor, and what do you enjoy about working with students? I have been working with students as a field instructor for 10 years, starting at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butte County and now with Catalyst Domestic Violence Services. Students help me be a better leader. They remind me of the important work of building and supporting a healthy team. They remind me how important it is to reflect on our work and how meaningful it is to have someone all to yourself for an hour (or more!). Students help our agency continuously revisit our values, evaluate our approaches, and provide clarity to our decision making.

2. How do you use the learning contract to assess students throughout the year? Do you revisit the learning contract at the beginning of the second semester? The development of the learning contract is a significant part of helping students feel oriented to the agency. I use it as a tool to help set up the placement for the first several weeks and to encourage LOTS of questions about what students will be expected to do, what they want to do, and what their fears and hesitations may be. We discuss the learning contract at the end of the first semester, during the time that we complete the first semester’s evaluation. From there, we make a plan to make changes and adjustments to the learning contract in January when students return.

3. Are there strategies that you have found useful to integrate into the supervisory hour to help address student skill development? The first thing I do when students bring a scenario to supervision that they want support on is to ask the student, “What do you think should be done?” It is vitally important to help students practice their own problem-solving skills, to walk them through decision-making processes, and to give voice to their ideas. We then work through the strengths and challenges of those ideas, connect to social work values, and ensure that the agreed-upon approach is congruent with Catalyst’s values. Our values in some ways are our theoretical approaches. Therefore, making connections between direct services and values is connecting theory to practice. I love these discussions in supervision.

4. Any other words of wisdom that you have for working with students? Anais Nin says, “We do not see the world as it is, we see the world as we are.” There are times in which a student’s personal values/perspectives are in conflict with social work values. Part of our role as supervisors is to help students identify their own worldview and to help them see that each and every person that they work with has a unique and valid worldview of their own. I am deeply committed to promoting social justice and ensuring that students become aware of ways in which their own perspectives may be barriers for the promotion of social justice for the people that they are working with.

Molly is the client and housing services director at Catalyst Domestic Violence Services.

For more information on Catalyst, go to www.catalystdvservices.org
Need money for food?

CalFresh is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that helps provide families and individuals with food monthly. The outreach team at Chico State makes it easier to apply for the program and provides assistance in other ways. They also help with quarterly reporting, answer any questions, and help supply required verifications. Their objective is to identify barriers and seek out anyone who is eligible for this program.

Assistance office hours are Mondays 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at OPT for Healthy Living, Suite E, 1311 Mangrove Ave., or by appointment. Phone number: 530-345-9749

The CalFresh outreach team travel throughout Butte County at tabled events, food distributions, and “eat right classes.” They connect with the public to provide awareness of and assistance with CalFresh. They also work with the Hmong and Hispanic populations and seek out anyone who is eligible or interested.

NASW announced the 2013 National Professional Social Work Month theme as “Weaving Threads of Resilience and Advocacy.” Each March is designated as National Professional Social Work Month and is an opportunity for social workers to spotlight their profession. Social workers perhaps more than most professions understand the important role that resiliency plays in helping individuals navigate through stressful times. By helping others connect with resources, identifying health strategies to deal with stress, and empowering people with a positive view of themselves, social workers weave the threads of resiliency. It is work, however, that often goes unnoticed or unrecognized.

In honor of National Social Work Month, please visit the www.socialworkmonth.org website to consider the hundreds of suggested activities you might participate in to engage, educate, or inspire people to learn more about the profession of social work and the important role that social workers play in a healthy community.

A FEW WAYS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL WORK MONTH...

- Join a professional social work association for one year.
- Watch a program or film that features social work content.
- Send profiles of outstanding social work college students to the media.
- Post the annual National Social Work Month logo to your online profile.
Program Profile: Pathway

The CSU, Chico School of Social Work is a participant in the statewide Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program. We have worked in partnership with the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) and others to increase the number of trained child welfare social workers. The Title IV-E Program provides financial and other support to BSW and MSW students, who, in return, “pay back” the support after graduation by working in public and tribal child welfare agencies.

CSU, Chico’s Title IV-E Program covers the North State, which is comprised of 12 northeastern California counties and includes 18 federally recognized tribes and rancherias. However, after much review of student retention data and county needs, it was recognized that many of the rural and remote areas in the North State were not benefitting from the efforts of the Title IV-E Program in the same way urban areas were benefitting. As a result, the Pathway Program was created.

Pathway, a part-time program offered through the traditional Title IV-E Program, provides financial and other supports for current child welfare workers that live in rural and remote areas of the North State. Pathway provides a bridge between individuals and higher education and, in particular, distributed learning education. This means those who desire a degree in social work can continue working in their communities while attending school through web-based and hybrid course formats (online with scheduled face-to-face time). These individuals will “pay back” their support after graduation by continuing to work in their public and tribal child welfare agencies.

This effort to provide a pathway to greater access to education has embraced the philosophy of a grow-your-own professional workforce.