

AUTUMN 2011

# AFFIRMATIONS

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE JANE ADDAMS COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK



The college's work in schools and with adolescents and youth

**UIC** JANE ADDAMS  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK



*Cook County Juvenile Detention Center Deputy Executive Director of the Division for Programs & Professional Services Philippe Magloire, left, is working with College student Tatiana Ormaza on an innovative Poetry Circle project with youth held at the center.*

Art and emotion go hand in hand, as Tatiana Ormaza knows well. The second-year student in the Jane Addams College of Social Work is helping some of Chicago's hardest juvenile delinquents deal with their emotions through poetry and the spoken word. Her Poetry Circle program at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center for youth ages 15-17 is supported by a prestigious Albert Schweitzer Fellowship.

"The Schweitzer Fellowship encourages its Fellows, and the community at large, to turn our understanding of disparity and marginalization into action and change," she says. "Working with this particular population of juvenile delinquents, I've noticed a significant lack of emotional regulation skills. I tell them, 'If you start to feel overwhelmed, get your composition book and write it all out.' A simple composition book can become a very safe space for these young men."

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*Photos on pages 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 13 by Roberta Dupuis-Devlin and Joshua Clark, UIC Photo Services  
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Dear Alumni and Friends,



In addition to the usual activities and excitement associated with the beginning of a new academic year, some interesting new developments have arisen at the Jane Addams College of Social Work. These include our participation as leaders in UIC campus-wide initiatives on diversity and administrative operations and our active engagement in programs that respond to national issues surrounding health reform and health disparities.

We expect to adopt a joint MSW/Masters in Public Health program this fall and are at the forefront in developing interprofessional curricula with our colleagues from the health sciences schools. Our Center for Excellence in the Elimination of Health Disparities, one of 18 funded nationally by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, is beginning its third year. Health-related work on services for older adults, hospice care for prisoners, veterans' services and children's mental health, is ongoing. Our research and sponsored projects portfolio, which makes up more than 70 percent of our annual operating budget, continues to grow with diverse child welfare, mental health, justice system, and substance abuse studies and projects.

The College is also at the forefront in the area of youth development, which is featured in this issue of *Affirmations*. As one of the largest school social work education programs in the nation, the College has built a reputation for excellence in pre- and post-master's preparation and professional development for school social workers. The program has consistently received outstanding ratings from external reviewers and faculty are the recipients of excellence in teaching and learning awards. Research and scholarship on youth development generally and school social work specifically, as shown in this issue, are an important part of that tradition.

We are most appreciative of the support that we receive—for the gifts that enabled us to significantly increase scholarship support this academic year, for the grants and contracts that allow us to engage in the types of meaningful research and community service programs featured here, and for the encouragement we receive from each of you on an ongoing basis. Thank you many times over.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Creasie Finney Hairston". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D.  
Dean and Professor



# INSTITUTE PREPARES

## BETTER SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

**T**eachers may monitor the academic progress of elementary and high school students, but school social workers play critical roles in monitoring their social and emotional well-being. The better trained those social workers are, the better off young people will be.

The Training Institute for School Social Work Professionals, a new initiative by the Jane Addams College of Social Work to provide cutting-edge tools and approaches, seeks to do just that. It provided a “transformative” experience for one school social worker, Debora Beckett, who attended the Institute in 2010 and

came up with a project that “touched a number of lives at different levels.”

That first year of the Institute focused on ways in which school social workers could integrate social and emotional learning and service learning projects into the curriculum. Attendees were told by the instructors, Assistant Professor Cassandra McKay-Jackson and Clinical Assistant Professor Annette Johnson, to plan early and think big by facilitating youth-led projects intended to leave a lasting “footprint” in each school.

Beckett’s project focused on a group of fourth- and sixth-grade boys who came to

school early for basketball and mentoring by male faculty including the gym teacher, school engineer, and other staffers. The response was transformative not only for the students but the adults as well, she says.

“It encouraged the boys not only to get to school but to get to school on time,” comments Beckett. “The thing that was incredible was the way the men reached out to the students. They are continuing it this year on their own initiative. It has developed a life of its own.”

Changing the way school social workers see their role in their respective institutions



“The training institute helped me to quantify my services as a social worker so that I could show administrators, ‘This is where my students improved.’ In the Institute we used an Excel spreadsheet to quantify things that are hard to count: self-esteem building, problem solving, and the good things you do to help a child. That was key for me.”

— **Elizabeth Barrera,**  
**School Social Worker,**  
**Jane Addams and Orville T.**  
**Bright Elementary Schools,**  
**Chicago**



“School social workers need to be able to market their skills and articulate what they have accomplished.”

— **Cassandra McKay-Jackson**  
Jane Addams College of Social Work

is just one of the goals of the Institute, according to McKay-Jackson. “We emphasize policy change and the ways social workers can have an impact on a setting.”

McKay-Jackson and Johnson conceived of the Institute as a way to convey the latest practices and innovative approaches to school social workers. The Institute kicks off each summer just before school starts. A series of sessions in fall provide both theoretical knowledge and hands on activities. The 2011 Institute again examined social and emotional learning and service learning. An additional focus examined how school social workers could rethink and realign their services in light of new federal mandates governing the Response to Intervention (RTI) assessment and intervention system.

School social workers learn how to describe their work and accomplishments to administrators, says McKay-Jackson. “They need to be able to market their skills and articulate what they have accomplished.”

Evidence-informed practice requires data to back it up. Accordingly, participants learn to quantify and describe students’ progress and outcomes in a format that administrators can easily understand, such as a computer spreadsheet.

“Social workers are people who provide excellent clinical services, but we don’t always use data to inform our practice,” says Johnson. “Now we are saying to social workers, ‘You have to retool yourself. You have to use data and technology as part of your practice.’”



*Clinical Assistant Professor Annette Johnson, center, with two students at the 2011 Training Institute.*

Such an approach helps social workers “speak the language” of schools, adds McKay-Jackson.

“The school is not only concerned with your rapport with a student. They want data on how well the student is performing and how your work is having an impact on academic performance.”

The workshops aren’t abstract exercises, however. Attendees returning to their schools immediately apply what they’ve learned with real students. “If you don’t use the content within two or three weeks, you’ll never use it,” says Johnson. “We want people to take what we’ve shared with them and really apply it.”

## Former Schools Administrator Brings Experience to College

Annette Johnson knows about the challenges school social workers face. She was named School Social Worker of the Year by the Illinois Association of School Social Workers in 1999 and Midwest School Social Worker of the Year in 2001. For 14 years she served as Director of Social Work Services for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) before coming to the College. In that position she was responsible for 400 school social workers who provided diagnostic and clinical services to more than 450,000 students.

“I bring a large amount of urban school experience and administrative perspective to the College,” she says. “I was a visionary leader who looked at the big picture of how school social workers need to engage school administrators and the community partners in order to improve student achievement.”

# SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

## ENGAGE ENTIRE COMMUNITY



**T**he school social work concentration, one of four areas for students pursuing the Master of Social Work degree, takes an approach consistent with the school's mission.

"Within our course work, we place emphasis on working with students who are at risk," says Assistant Professor Cassandra McKay-Jackson. "They may be facing academic failure, they may have learning disabilities, or they may be at risk of disengaging from school. School social work engages not only the student, but also the family and the community."

School social work serves as a conduit to prevention and intervention services for students in school settings who might not come to the attention of mental health or social services until the problems have escalated.

These services directly connect to the mission of Jane Addams and address students who are marginalized due to issues such as poverty, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, McKay-Jackson says. Jane Addams' school social work concentration supports social workers taking a broad approach to examine policies that have an impact on youth in school settings.

"We are one of the only schools of social work that offers a research course specifically for school social workers," McKay-Jackson adds. "Students learn to look at schools as a place of research and evidence-based approaches in their practices."

The concentration is the largest in the college, with approximately 75 students who graduate with a school social work concentration. Since social workers in school settings have to work with diverse audiences and populations, they need multiple skills, says Clinical Assistant Professor Annette Johnson.

"It's different than walking into a social service agency and seeing a client for an hour," Johnson says. When the school day starts, the best-laid plans may be interrupted by a crisis that affects one child or the entire school community. "There are unique challenges because it is important to work with not only the child but parents, administrators, other school personnel and the community."

Ultimately, Johnson adds, school social work students learn not just to support children in their quest for education, but to help them develop their social and emotional competencies, to become informed and productive citizens.

"You use your skills as a social worker to have an impact on the school board, on the curriculum, and the community the school is in," she says. "You help create a supportive community with the perspective you bring to your work."

# ONLINE COURSE BRINGS STUDENTS FLEXIBILITY

In an increasingly mobile society, more and more activities like attending classes take place online. Now, social workers who want to obtain the certification required to work with students in schools will be able to complete work toward that certificate under the auspices of the Jane Addams College—online.

The new online course is part of a program that will enable social work professionals who already have an MSW degree from an accredited school of social work to obtain the Type 73 certificate required for certification as a school social worker in Illinois. The program will start in fall 2012.

“It’s a way of increasing accessibility for social workers,” says Faith Johnson Bonecutter, Associate Dean for Academic

Affairs and Student Services. “Most practicing social workers need flexibility because they are employed.”

The Type 73 certificate is required for school social workers to be able to perform specific activities with students, such as social and developmental studies to assess students’ needs, or participation with an interdisciplinary team preparing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a child with disabilities.

The program consists of three components: the online course focusing on social work practice skills and policies relating to school social work; 450 hours of supervised field placement in a school setting; and a special education course on exceptional children.



*Faith Bonecutter, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Services*

The College has a concentration in school social work and, as part of that concentration, current MSW students prepare for Type 73 certification. “The new online certificate program meets the need for graduates who are not able to complete a school social work program within the MSW degree,” explains Bonecutter.



# RESEARCHER EXAMINES FORECLOSURE/PUBLIC HOUSING

**C**ONTEXT MATTERS. That's the core message of research being conducted by Von Nebbitt, associate professor in the College, into the effects of housing and on families and adolescents. Context, in Nebbitt's research, refers to where families under stress live and how they get there.

Nebbitt has two projects underway. The first is a book based on his study "Context Matters: Adolescent Development within the Context of Urban Public Housing," which examines how exposure to community violence and risk, and life in urban housing projects, affects the psychology and health behavior of adolescents. The second, a three-year project funded with a \$390,000 grant from the John and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, examines families who are forced by foreclosure and eviction to move

to a low income neighborhood or to public housing, and how much stress adolescents age 13-21 undergo during the process. In both cases, the focus is the mental, physical and behavioral health of African American adolescents.

"Public housing neighborhoods operate under specific rules—for instance, the 'one strike' rule—and on top of that, the design of public housing buildings can isolate people," says Nebbitt. "I am trying to develop a theory about how life unfolds in that environment."

Nebbitt's theory, integral to the "Context Matters" study, is based on ecology's "trophic cascading effect." "If a higher order organism is removed from an ecosystem the entire ecosystem may be thrown out of balance. In public housing, if you don't have adult males or senior citizens—if you

# PUBLIC HOUSING STRESSES ON YOUTH

don't have the essential ingredients that make a community a community—how do people cope?" he asks.

In the book, Nebbitt uses data collected from public housing residents in St. Louis and several East Coast cities. He examines environmental factors such as exposure to violence and neighborhood cohesion along with negative effects: depression, anxiety, risky sexual behavior, and alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

The foreclosure study also takes a scientific approach to stress and risky behavior. In this case, the study measures the stress young people experience as a result of foreclosure through the levels of the steroid cortisol, which is released in response to stress. Saliva swabs are taken from three groups: adolescents who are undergoing foreclosure; those who live

in the same neighborhoods but who are not undergoing foreclosure; and those who live in what Nebbitt describes as "chronically rough neighborhoods" (e.g., public housing developments).

"Cortisol can be good in small doses but terrible in large doses," says Nebbitt. "We want to see where the foreclosed kids are at in terms of biological responses to stress associated with foreclosure and displacement."

The implications are that recurrent stress and its effects on a young person's immune system may result in drug use and crime later on. Both studies examine the implications of housing stresses for social work. Nebbitt says social workers can help build communities and make life easier for youth experiencing stress. They do so through cooperation with



"Families are losing their homes, and no one is thinking about the children and the long-term implications to families following foreclosure."

—Von Nebbitt  
Associate Professor,  
Jane Addams College  
of Social Work

community organizations and by providing counseling and mentorship.

With foreclosure on the rise, the study and the book are especially timely and touch on current economic issues. "In some counties more than 3,000 households are receiving foreclosure notices monthly. Millions of families are losing their homes and little attention has been directed at understanding the effects of this phenomenon on the smallest victims of foreclosure—children."

# EXAMINING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

“I’ve always been interested in crime,” says Henrika McCoy. As an assistant professor in the College, McCoy’s interest in crime has a particular focus: the disproportionately high numbers of African American boys in the criminal justice system and the relationship between mental health issues and criminal behavior.

McCoy is analyzing data gathered while principal investigator of “A Strategy for Promoting the Mental Health of and Decreasing the Negative Trajectories for Juvenile Offenders,” a study funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s New Connections program. The study examines data from two St. Louis, Missouri-area juvenile detention facilities. It seeks to identify patterns between young people’s

mental health issues and the offenses with which they are charged.

“When kids have mental health disorders, how does that precipitate their involvement in crime?” McCoy says. “The numbers range widely, but some studies indicate that as many as 85 to 90 percent of juvenile offenders have mental health disorders. Are we going to see kids with low mental health concerns commit low-level crimes? If their mental health worsens, do they subsequently commit more serious crimes?”

McCoy also plans to analyze the neighborhoods in which juvenile offenders live to see if environment plays a role in mental health. “When kids live in neighborhoods with fewer parks and more

liquor stores, do they have more anxiety or exhibit more mental health problems than youth in better resourced neighborhoods?”

The project addresses what McCoy sees as a gap in the scholarly literature. “There is a lot of literature about juvenile delinquents, and some about the prevalence of psychological disorders for juvenile offenders, but no literature I’m aware of that looks at how the two relate.”

McCoy’s interest in youth exposed to the criminal justice system was solidified when she was a family therapist for children and their families. “I worked with an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of African American boys in the juvenile justice system, and research shows they are there often because they don’t have access to

*Henrika McCoy, right*

“Studies indicate that as many as 85 to 90 percent of juvenile offenders have mental health disorders. Are we going to see kids with low mental health concerns commit low-level crimes? If their mental health worsens, do they subsequently commit more serious crimes?”

— **Henrika McCoy**  
Jane Addams College  
of Social Work



mental health services. The system is overwhelmed. They don't get help, they get a criminal record, and it becomes a nasty cycle.”

The ultimate goal is to analyze patterns between mental health and juvenile crime and identify the most appropriate interventions for adolescents.

“Traditionally, offenders are put in the same treatment group regardless of their mental health concerns, but maybe that's not the best way to handle them,” she says. “Maybe there is a way to provide a different intervention for a juvenile offender who is considering suicide and who committed a violent crime as opposed to one who is experiencing anxiety and who committed a nonviolent offense. Can we treat them early on? If we decrease their mental health issues, we may also decrease the likelihood they'll commit future offenses.”

# ALUMNUS BECOMES ALLY

# TO COMMUNITY YOUTH

**J**oe Hollendoner has firsthand knowledge of how difficult it can be growing up gay and a teenager in the city. He faced homophobic comments growing up in Chicago, and felt alone and isolated. Things turned around when he found the right social service agency—Aunt Martha's Youth Service Center, which provides a drop-in program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and questioning youth.

"As a young person who was struggling with my own sexual identity, I saw how powerful and impactful an adult ally trained as a social worker could be," he says.

Hollendoner's experience was so transformative that he decided to devote himself to helping others as he had been helped. "I thought it was my responsibility as an adult to create the same opportunity—to be such an ally. It's really a difficult time in a young person's development, and the more folks who can create a safe, affirming space for young people, the better."

At age 30, Hollendoner can already look back on a history of accomplishment in Chicago's LGBT community. He went on (at age 16) to become a counselor at Aunt Martha's, including a stint as HIV Prevention Program Coordinator. From 1997-2003 he served in several positions, including Program Coordinator, with the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network of Chicago. And since 2001, he has been with the Howard Brown Health Center of Chicago, one of the nation's largest LGBT health care organizations, where he currently serves as its vice-president and chief program officer.

While working full-time, Hollendoner obtained two degrees from the College: a BSW in 2003 and MSW in 2004.

"One thing that drew me to Jane Addams was its focus on community," he comments. "Community is an important thing in people's lives, something that can create a better environment. Community-level social work has always guided my practice, and was a unique focus that Jane Addams had that other programs didn't have."

While at Howard Brown, Hollendoner was able to address the needs of young people in the community when he became the founding director of the Broadway Youth Center. The center now serves more than 5,000 LGBT and other at-risk youth each year, providing free-of-charge HIV testing and counseling, support for LGBT homeless youth and job training. His commitment was recognized in 2010 when he was named one of ten recipients of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Leaders Award, which honors individuals who have overcome significant obstacles to address challenging health and health care problems facing their communities.

Hollendoner calls the opportunity to help LGBT young people a "gay it forward" moment. "I had the good fortune to have a supportive family for my coming out process," he says. "Without family and friends, my own outcome could have been very different. It is now my responsibility to create those same opportunities for others."



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