GRAND VISION
A comprehensive commitment to children in one Chicago neighborhood

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HELP STABILIZE and improve a poor neighborhood?

More than a decade ago, almost all the people working in the field of community development answered that question with a focus on jobs and affordable housing. Community activists had lobbied to stop disinvestment and redlining in low-income, minority urban neighborhoods, and their work brought tools like the federal Community Reinvestment Act, which helped local community development corporations to buy real estate and, to a lesser extent, develop local economic development.

By the mid 1990s, though, a lot of people were recognizing that housing units and jobs alone weren’t going to be sufficient to make a better life for the families living in these communities. I’m on the advisory board of LISC/Chicago, which provides funding and other assistance to local community development efforts, and I’ve seen LISC take a lead in expanding the field to include providing health care, building local institutions, stopping community violence, improving public education and more.

“Comprehensive community development” is still only a subset of the field of community development, but it’s an idea that has grown in scope and influence. I remember a meeting of the Visiting Committee here at SSA a few years ago, when we were introduced to several faculty members who are experts in this broad approach.

That link between a comprehensive approach and SSA is an obvious one. SSA has always known that to serve distressed communities, families and individuals, we need a full toolkit of ideas, programs and policies, with tools that cross into a number of disciplines. Faculty at the School research and teach about everything from child care to nonprofit management, from mental health to public health.

I now am serving as the chairman of the Urban Partnership Bank, which has risen from the closing of ShoreBank, one of the pioneers in lending to low-income communities. From this work and my association with LISC and SSA, I have seen significant progress in neighborhoods across Chicago because of comprehensive community development efforts.

Unfortunately, I have also seen how these same communities are starting to lose their hard-won gains. The high unemployment, budget cutbacks and foreclosures that have characterized this severe economic recession have hit the poorest neighborhoods much harder than the rest of us. And so, more than ever, the work being done by SSA faculty, students and graduates—from the multifaceted approach to helping young people in Grand Crossing to the research that leads to evidence-based practice on wide array of issues—is crucial to stabilizing and improving our city’s and our country’s poor neighborhoods.

It’s been a pleasure to serve as chair of SSA’s Visiting Committee. I will be stepping down as chair at the end of June, and Peter Darrow, J.D. ’67 (Law), a member of the Visiting Committee, will be assuming leadership. My best wishes to him and to the continuing success of the School.

David Vitale
Chair of SSA’s Visiting Committee
Solving human problems is an enormously challenging business. Problems that social workers persistently face, like poverty, violence, homelessness or mental illness, are not easily resolved with a limited “toolbox” of interventions, let alone understood with a narrow lens that may only partially explain their source. Indeed, the concerns that we as social welfare professionals and scholars encounter are typically caused by multiple forces, including macro-level historic, cultural or economic conditions all the way down to micro-level interpersonal, psychological or even biological origins. Forging real headway in solving such complex problems requires strategies that are devised fully cognizant of this multiplicity of forces. Fortunately, SSA’s own distinctive tradition as an institution centers on gathering together great scholars and practitioners who approach social welfare concerns with a diverse set of lenses and who draw upon training from across more than a dozen different disciplinary backgrounds. There is no question that this robustly interdisciplinary culture at SSA provides a distinctive advantage without parallel in the field of social work education and research.

Building from the eminent interdisciplinary history of SSA, we have just embarked on a new initiative that will take our multidisciplinary problem-solving approach to a new level. The Interdisciplinary Scholar Network initiative at SSA will bring together scholars across disciplinary and professional niches in ways that generate innovative and more comprehensive knowledge and strategies to address intractable social problems. These networks will be anchored at SSA, led by SSA faculty, and bring together many of the nation’s intellectual and professional leaders to generate new evidence-based solutions with greater impact. This past winter, we solicited and received a wide array of proposals from SSA faculty to establish and sustain new organized interdisciplinary networks. From these, SSA will provide initial support to launch two of the most exciting proposed networks, slated to begin their work during the coming year.

The Employment Instability, Family Well-being and Social Policy Network will enhance the capacity of the field to study employment instability at the lower end of the labor market and to develop and evaluate interventions aimed at reducing employment instability and its effects on children and families. Joined by a steering committee of 12 scholars from the fields of social work, human development, psychology, economics, public policy and sociology, Principal Investigators Associate Professor Susan Lambert and Assistant Professor Heather Hill will organize a broad network...
of researchers, employers and policy professionals to stimulate innovative research designed to inform both employer practice and public policy. The network’s planned activities include convening a conference on conceptualizing and measuring employment instability, awarding pilot research grants, and providing training on the development and evaluation of workplace interventions and law. The participating scholars in this network are drawn from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the Congressional Budget Office, CUNY, Penn State, UCLA, the University of Washington School of Social Work, and the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy Studies and SSA.

The STI and HIV Intervention Network (SHINE) will conduct research on the biological, behavioral and structural factors that heighten vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and HIV among ethnic minority communities in the U.S., and will develop and evaluate interventions to alleviate existing STI/HIV disparities. The network, led by Principal Investigator Associate Professor Dexter Voisin and Co-Principal Investigators and Assistant Professors Alida Bouris and Matthew Epperson, will work with 10 scholars representing the fields of social work, psychology, public health, nursing and medicine. These scholars, from Emory University, Georgia State University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Maryland, the University of Toronto and the University of Chicago Medical Center, will collaborate on interdisciplinary research projects. The network will also host research seminars and conferences and provide a centralized platform for faculty, students and community partners interested in addressing STI and HIV prevention among vulnerable communities in Chicago.

I am sure you will hear more about these new networks as they become established and engage in what we expect will become some of the most important scholarship in their respective fields.

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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLAR NETWORK initiative is part of a larger aspiration at SSA to educate and develop knowledge “in the service of service”—to advance our mission of helping vulnerable individuals, families and communities to raise up their quality of life. I often hear questions from many who work in the field about scarce resources and how to weigh one strategy against another: “How do we justify an intervention seeking support and resources?” or, importantly, “Is there any evidence that a given intervention will work?” We hope that SSA Magazine gives you ideas and information that will help you uncover some of the answers to these questions. The question for those of us who are educators and researchers is how do we help develop and translate rigorous evidence so that it can readily be put into practice?

Two of our feature articles in this issue help distill the process of how evidence-based practices and policies are established—and how they can be implemented in practice. “The Science of Social Welfare” covers several ongoing research projects at SSA, peering behind the curtains of how evidence-based strategies are developed and tested. “Training Days” describes many of the challenges of translating the evidence from child welfare research into daily use. Our final feature describes some of the inspiring work that SSA practitioners and students have brought to one of our adjacent neighborhoods in partnership with an outstanding organization that is very close to the SSA family—the Gary Comer Science and Education Foundation.

We are interested in hearing more about what information, data and research you find helpful and informative to your work. And we ask that you continue to support our efforts to advance the field by giving generously this year to the SSA Fund. We simply could not do our great work without your help.

My best wishes to our graduates and their families and to all of you for a happy and safe summer.

Neil Guterman, MSW, Ph.D., is the Dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor in the School of Social Service Administration.

We welcome letters to the editor. Please send your submissions to julie.jung@uchicago.edu.
In 2003, the City of Chicago launched its ambitious, ten-year Plan to End Homelessness in partnership with advocates and service providers from across the city. SSA’s Emily Klein Gidwitz Professor Michael Sosin is working with Christine George, an assistant research professor at the Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning, and Susan Grossman, a professor at the School of Social Work of Loyola University Chicago, on a multipronged effort to measure the plan’s progress, including a survey of existing shelter options, a longitudinal study of individuals in the system and a qualitative analysis of services.

For this issue’s Conversation, Sosin sat down with Nancy Radner, A.M. ’93, the chief executive officer of the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness, which, in partnership with the City of Chicago, implements the Plan to End Homelessness and commissioned its evaluation. Sosin and Radner talked about different ways of understanding the causes of homelessness, the latest research and what it takes to help those who’ve experienced homelessness.

Sosin: Let’s start by talking about what homelessness is.

Radner: Sure. The stigma around homelessness is very extreme in our country. The feeling that it’s all a matter of bad decisions and personal failings, and that these people don’t want to help themselves, is very pervasive.

Sosin: There’s two ways of thinking about the problem. One way is thinking about it as a circumstance, as a situation. And the second way of thinking about it is as a series of attributes in some people that make them more likely to become homeless. And I think the stress probably should be on the first rather than the second. Some attributes are important correlates of homelessness, but the relationships tend to be loose, making intervention difficult. For that reason, recent policies are placing more emphasis on reversing the situation, first, and only then dealing with personal problems and other attributes that contribute to the situation.

Our report found there were three major reasons people are homeless, although this set of reasons doesn’t cover everything. We found that a little less than half [of the homeless people we surveyed] had a place to stay and lost their source of income and simply can’t handle rent—the classic way you think of someone falling into homelessness.

Radner: Pure economics.

Sosin: Right. The group that’s maybe even slightly larger are those who basically had others who they were depending on and no longer can. There are people who had arguments, people who live with their parents and that relationship ended, people who actually lived alone but had income sources from others that dried up.

And then the third group, which is thought about less frequently but probably is equally important, had their expenses increase.

Radner: Interesting. Yes, we as a society don’t think about that as much.

Sosin: That can be a rent increase, but as important is an increase in medical expenses. And these things work together. So, for example, if you can’t work and you lose your home, maybe you wouldn’t be homeless if you had relatives who could take you in. So for most people, two or three of these things occur at the same time.

Radner: The truth is that most homeless people are trying the best that they can to survive. People do recover from homelessness and go on. And so the trick is to help change the circumstances. We just want to make sure that can happen.

Sosin: What do you think of the new policy, the Housing First policy?

Radner: Housing First was a theory that started with practice in the field rather than research. We were finding that when we got someone into permanent housing as fast as possible, that were very successful at keeping them there—their homelessness would be ended, usually for good.

The theory used to be that in order to be in housing, you had to be ready for housing, you had to have all of your problems under control. We found that, no, get someone into housing, they’ll learn all those things. People who’ve been homeless say that when they can shut the door and have a key to the lock, there’s a sense of security that is so important. It’s Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Once they had the food and shelter taken care of, then they could start to think about how to get back on their feet and become independent.

Sosin: So you don’t ignore services. It’s an order thing, right?

Radner: Right. Chicago’s Plan to End Homelessness was founded on two principles: Get someone into permanent, affordable housing and wrap services around them as much as they need them. And that’s proving to have great success. And there’s a third principle: homelessness prevention. Keep someone out of the homeless system altogether as much as possible, whether they are being discharged from a hospital or mental institution, or facing a short-term loss of money.

Sosin: So it would be nice if we could say that the model meant that if someone’s homeless, everyone gets a house. But it’s not quite that simple.

Radner: No, it’s not. The resources available don’t necessarily match the need, which is true with every poverty policy. So then the question becomes: How do you target resources?

Permanent supportive housing is one of our most precious resources, costing anywhere from $8,000 to $15,000 a year for an individual. Studies have found that this type of housing is actually much cheaper for society than if an individual is on the streets, where they use emergency rooms or end up in mental institutions. So there’s major cost savings with permanent supportive housing. But we didn’t start with the idea that we would be saving money. We started with the idea that we would be saving lives.

Sosin: So about how many of those units do you have?
Radner: Chicago has 6,600 units of permanent supportive housing. Since we created the Plan to End Homelessness, we’ve added over 3,000 units. We have one of the largest stocks of this housing in the country.

Sosin: So if there aren’t enough resources, how does the system decide who gets housing?

Radner: The housing that we build is primarily HUD-funded housing. HUD has prioritized people with disabilities, because that’s the housing that existed in the least numbers.

For other folks, folks who are not disabled, we have to piece together different types of housing. So with a number of our advocacy partners we created the rental housing support program, which is a state-funded program that has funded up to 4,000 units across the state for people who are rent distressed, some of whom are homeless. Someone has to have an income to use this housing.

Then we have a third model, which is called permanent housing with short-term support, usually for families that have an employment history but need some time to get to a greater income source. We provide two years of rental support and services wrapped around them, and then they assume the lease of the place that they’ve been living in.

Stability remarkably. There are other cities running experiments where the housing stability of those placed in supportive housing is similar to that found in New York, but where the control group doesn’t fare as poorly. That is, post experiment, the New York control group was as bad off as you can imagine a control group being.

Radner: It proved that you can house people who we previously thought were difficult to house.

Sosin: But there is very little research on models that don’t supply supportive housing.

Radner: I think that’s right. That’s the state-of-the-art in homeless services, to figure out how best to target the resources.

Sosin: Then there are programs like rapid rehousing. You recruit people who are homeless out of shelters who meet the criteria, who you think, again, have or can get some income so they’ll be able to sustain housing. I know there’s a national federal experiment going on that’s trying randomly controlled experiments: One group will get rapid rehousing and another will get a two-year program that’s like the type that you described. But it will be the end of this year at best before we know anything.

Radner: [Programs like rapid rehousing] get people through the crisis that you were describing initially. They were able to maintain housing before something happened to them. They don’t need to be in our shelter system and they don’t need long-term rental support and supportive services. The economy has really put a lot of folks into that situation that they wouldn’t have been in before.

What we don’t know about rapid rehousing is do people need three months of help? Do they need six months? So we’ve been slowly doling out the money to try and figure it out over time. Now, again, with this economic situation, it’s unclear how long it will take before people get back on their feet.

Sosin: Plus, many of these are special demonstration programs. And then the question becomes, what do you do when you have these models?

How do you get from these models to citywide programs?

Radner: I think in Chicago we tend to take big bites. When we said we were going to end homelessness, we didn’t say we were going to end it for chronically homeless people, which some cities did, we said we were going to end it for everyone. Bringing a big initiative like this to scale is more about political will than anything else. That’s where my organization comes in, to say, “We have the five or six interventions and we have the evidence to prove that those interventions work.”

We have more homeless prevention money than we’ve had in the past. And that was because we were able to make an argument to the Obama administration that it was what we needed in this economic crisis. So part of the economic stimulus package was over a billion dollars of homeless prevention funding nationwide. We’re always looking for that window of opportunity.

For more of this Conversation, including a discussion of the predictors of homelessness, how health care reform will impact homelessness, and the work of the alliance, visit ssa.uchicago.edu.
The Power of Family
Rethinking the role of grandmothers when a mother is incarcerated

Since 1980, the number of women behind bars has doubled every seven to eight years—today approximately 200,000 women are in federal and state prisons or local jails on any given day. The majority, as much as 70 percent according to one study, are the mothers of minor children. Most often, the responsibility for caring for these children while the mother is incarcerated falls to the child’s grandparents, and in the vast majority of those cases, the grandmother.

These families are not only taxed by the inherent difficulties involved in grandparent caregiving, but also by the stresses associated with the mother’s incarceration, a high prevalence of substance abuse (up to four in five incarcerated women by one estimate), and often the long-term effects of poverty, trauma and mental health problems.

“There’s growing recognition that one person may be incarcerated, but the entire family does the time,” SSA Assistant Professor Malitta Engstrom says. Engstrom is drawing upon this notion to design family-focused services for women who are incarcerated. Research in this area has largely overlooked the unique roles, issues and responsibilities of grandmothers. “Grandmothers are a vital missing link in these family-oriented interventions,” Engstrom says. “However, there’s been little intervention research that includes them in services for mothers who are incarcerated.”

In 2008, Engstrom wrote “Involving Caregiving Grandmothers in Family Interventions when Mothers with Substance Use Problems are Incarcerated,” a paper in Family Process that examines the theoretical and empirical support for such an approach. In her ongoing work on the topic, including interviews with mothers and grandmothers, she’s found that the families often experience complex challenges related to incarceration, substance abuse, health problems and limited financial resources.

“I have also found that the families often remain close, despite the challenges they face. Building upon the strengths of these bonds is critically important,” says Engstrom, who is currently working with families regarding what a family-focused intervention should look like. “I want to hear from mothers and grandmothers about how they see their strengths, their needs and their service preferences. I want to hear about the types of services they actually want and think would be helpful,” she says. The result, she hopes, will be programs that enhance well-being throughout the family, reduce the negative impact of time served and the risk of substance-use problems and reincarceration. —David Argentar

A Broad Prescription
To impact the social influence on health, practitioners need a wide view

To Eric E. Whitaker, a plan to build a chain of grocery stores on the South Side is clearly a health initiative. Whitaker, the executive vice president for strategic affiliations and associate dean for community-based research at the University of Chicago Medical Center, points out that the stores will not only provide fresh produce in many communities that are now food deserts, they’ll also be a form of local economic development, providing both a paycheck and health insurance to about 100 local residents at each site. “Access to health care has been found to make up only 10 or 20 percent of the health status of a community or an individual. In health, where people live matters, especially in a segregated city like Chicago,” Whitaker said at a talk at SSA in December in the Poverty, Promise and Possibility series, a University of Chicago initiative featuring discussions on practical solutions to poverty from University professors and researchers and local community members.

Research has shown that factors ranging from educational attainment to access to public transportation have an impact on health. Whitaker explained that to tackle the South Side’s disproportionately high levels of infant mortality and chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes, the University of Chicago’s South Side Health Care Collaborative has “a 360 degree approach.”

The collaborative has built a network of more than 30 community-based health centers and five local hospitals, but it also has started discussions in the neighborhoods on topics identified by community groups, such as a play at Perspectives High School in Auburn Gresham about stigma in mental health treatment. Innovative ideas, like a barbershop in a community health clinic in Woodlawn to help bring in African-American men, are welcome.

“I firmly believe that the solutions for improving health status on the South Side of Chicago will be about partnerships in the community,” Whitaker said. “It will be about how do we change the social norms around obesity in the community, how do we get economic development to help the community thrive.” —Carl Vogel
MAGINE YOU'RE THE LEADER of a successful nonprofit whose mission is to provide intensive life and career training to desperately poor individuals. A nonprofit housing developer with a background in rejuvenating foreclosed properties approaches you with an idea for a joint venture: A for-profit property management service for the empty houses. The new company would diversify your revenue and increase your clients’ job training options. But does it fit your mission?

That’s the key question Eric Weinheimer, CEO of The Cara Program, asked participating University of Chicago students in the final session of a workshop series that explores recent sea changes in the nonprofit world. Weinheimer led the students through a case study based on Cara’s real experience deciding whether to take on this social enterprise venture. In the end, Cara pursued it, “and it has been wildly successful,” Weinheimer said.

The Nonprofits and Social Innovation Workshop was created last year for second-year master’s students who are interested in careers within the nonprofit sector. The nine-session non-credit workshop used guest speakers such as Weinheimer to help explore what makes for an effective, innovative and entrepreneurial nonprofit organization—a topic that is rapidly changing in today’s world.

From social enterprise to social media, a wave of innovations is transforming how nonprofits operate

“The urban nonprofit sector is really different now than it was even five or 10 years ago,” points out SSA Associate Professor Scott W. Allard, who facilitated the series, which was hosted by the School. “The goal of the training is to get students thinking about new models of operation, new methods of generating revenue, and new ways to develop opportunities for the people they serve.”

SSA’s graduates will be entering the nonprofit field at a time of generational change. The retirement of the Baby Boomers, plus increasing growth and complexity of the organizations themselves, means that there is a growing need for managerial, organizational and leadership skills. Nearly 80,000 nonprofit leadership positions will open annually starting in 2016, according to the Bridgespan Group, a nonprofit consulting firm. In a survey of human services organizations, Bridgespan found many lacked the resources to find and cultivate new leadership within their organizations.

These changes are happening in concert with a diverse set of new opportunities and challenges that are fundamentally changing many nonprofits. For example, with budget cuts that have only accelerated since this economic downturn, foundation, government and charitable dollars have grown scarcer. In 2009, a Donors Forum of Chicago survey found that more than one-third of the grantmakers surveyed planned further decreases in giving and about 70 percent of the nonprofits had decreased their budgets that year.

Under this pressure, many nonprofits are learning how to quantify results, diversify income and market themselves creatively. Social enterprises—market-based entities with a social change mission, such as Weinheimer’s case study—are one example.

Other sessions of the program looked at how an organization can use marketing and communications. Here too, with social media like Twitter and Facebook, the pace of change keeps accelerating. “I hadn’t realized how important it was to distinguish yourself from all the other nonprofits doing similar work,” said SSA second-year masters student Beth Horwitz at a workshop.

In addition to the workshops, SSA students also have the opportunity to attend seminars from visiting professors and take a variety of courses such as “The Third Sector in Society: An International Perspective,” taught by Benjamin Gidron, a visiting professor from Ben Gurion University in Israel, or “Nonprofit Organizations and Advocacy for Social Change” taught by SSA Assistant Professor Jennifer Mosley. “I think it’s important that future managers understand how to balance the everyday demands of running a nonprofit social service agency with the larger imperative of being an effective agent of social change,” she says.

After two years of offering the workshop series to Chicago students, the next step is to develop a non-degree program targeted to rising nonprofit leaders already established in local agencies. Since last summer, SSA has been in contact with more than 100 organizations and individuals whose support for the idea was “almost unanimous,” says Spruill Weber White, a visiting scholar at SSA and a former program officer at the John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation.

For Allard, both the workshops and the non-degree program are ultimately about building better ways to serve distressed individuals and communities. “By helping tomorrow’s nonprofit leaders learn the state-of-the-art in leadership, we’re helping organizations build effective and sustainable programs,” he says. “There’s a lot going on right now, and it’s only going to be more important that social service nonprofits are ready to meet the challenge.”

— Maureen Kelleher
Time with the Children

Why it matters when a father who no longer

RESEARCH TO DATE SUGGESTS that fathers can contribute to their children's well-being, even when the fathers don’t live at home—but not always in ways you would expect.

Jeong-Kyun Choi, an assistant professor of social work at Winona State University in Minnesota, looked at the influence of non-resident fathers on poor, single-mother families. He examined how the fathers’ efforts, such as playing games and reading stories, affected their children’s behavior and cognitive development. His findings suggest that the fathers’ efforts helped not so much for their effect on the children as on the mother.

In short, the fathers’ parenting helped the children primarily by making the mother a better parent. That the effect is indirect reflects the much greater influence that a single mother has over her children than the father, Choi says.

Choi’s conclusions spring from an analysis of data gleaned from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, which followed 4,998 children randomly selected from all U.S. cities with a population over 200,000. Choi’s study focused on

The Job of Being a Parent

Did welfare reform remove motherhood from consideration as worthwhile work?

WHEN LAWMAKERS revamped welfare a decade and a half ago, they did more than change the rules. They redefined the way we think about parenting, work and citizenship.

Jessica Toft, a professor of social work at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., analyzed the debate in Congress over Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, federal legislation that passed with bipartisan support in 1996. TANF imposed stricter limits on welfare benefits and placed new emphasis on moving recipients quickly into the workforce.

Toft describes her findings in the December 2010 issue of Social Service Review in an article titled “The Political Act of Public Talk: How Legislators Justified Welfare Reform.” Before TANF, she says, Americans were ambivalent about parenting. But ideals of citizenship still accommodated it. Men occupied a public sphere of paid work and politics; for them citizenship meant economic independence. Women were assigned the private sphere of caregivers, a legitimate task. During the Revolutionary War period, Americans glorified what one scholar calls “Republican Motherhood.”

Progressive-era reformers like Jane Addams promoted public financial support for mothers. The Social Security Act of 1935, and with it, Aid to Dependent Children, confirmed parenting as worthy of the state’s support.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, about 90 percent of adults who receive welfare benefits are women. But while parenting, and welfare’s role in supporting it, was seldom discussed, lawmakers repeatedly glorified paid work. “I saw one of my American heroes this morning,” said Rep. John Kasich. “He sells newspapers. He runs from one car to another car to another car. He is out there when it is raining, he is out there when it is snowing…. He does his job.”

How did this shift happen? Toft can only speculate. The economy was poor. Among middle- and working-class families, more women were going to work. People were feeling pinched; they wanted lower taxes. She also sees an element of racial prejudice in the denigration of parenting. One surprise for Toft was the degree of unanimity between Democrats and Republicans—a sign of just how thoroughly the new ideas had triumphed.

And these ideas implicate all parenting, not just among the poor, Toft says. “I look at some of my friends who are stay-at-home moms. While they value their work as parents, it’s a precarious place to be when Congress mandates paid work and disregards parenting as work. We talk about low-income mothers, but it’s really about the work of all mothers.”

Toft’s study shows how policy makers use language to define groups, in this case citizens and mothers, and then use these definitions to justify policy. One implication, she says, is that people who work in social services for welfare recipients, including researchers, teachers, policymakers and case workers, should use language that defines these groups differently. It can do this by reviving the old ideal of democratic citizenship that animated the founders of social work. “We need to talk with our clients,” she says, “in a way that makes them understand they are citizens.”

The Job of Being a Parent

Did welfare reform remove motherhood from consideration as worthwhile work?

Choi's study doesn't reveal how the father's influence works, but he has some ideas. "The mother might be very stressed because of parenting and holding a job," he says. "The father can visit from time to time, and this might alleviate the mother's parenting stress and improve her parenting efficacy."

Choi says relatively few studies have looked at poor single-parent families, even though such families are often the focus of public policy and debate. Even fewer have looked at fathers. "The father's role has been ignored or seen as residual," he says.

Choi's article, "Non-resident Fathers' Parenting, Family Processes, and Children's Development in Urban, Poor, Single-Mother Families," is part of a broader investigation into the influence of non-resident fathers on their children. His next study compares fathers' parenting—how they engage their children—with frequency of contact and level of financial support. Choi is also examining how uncles, boyfriends and other potential father figures may affect children's behavior and development.


Time with the Children

Why it matters when a father who no longer lives at home spends time with his kids

OR MISTREATED CHILDREN, foster care is usually the destination of last resort. But how children finally end up there is still not fully understood. New research shows that it doesn't depend just on the child or his family. Where he lives matters, too.

A recent study from Denmark, published in the June 2010 Social Service Review, finds that mistreated children are less likely to end up in foster care if they live in communities that spend more on schools, day care centers and other institutions. The same is true if they live in communities with strong social networks that include volunteer organizations like soccer clubs and self-help groups.

"You have people who help you overcome your problems," says Signe Hald Andersen, a senior researcher at the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit in Copenhagen and author of "A Good Place to Live? On Municipality Characteristics and Children's Placement Risks."

Andersen had an unusually rich body of data. Danish records, which track all citizens from birth, allowed her to study the whole population of Denmark, including more than two million children, from 2003 to 2005.

Andersen's study compared placement rates in different municipalities in relation to four categories. "Formal support" was institutional support from local governments, such as schools. "Social support" included voluntary associations. She also looked at social disorganization, indicated by poor housing and high crime rates. Finally, she tracked political preferences—whether local leaders belonged to the Conservative or Social Democratic parties.

Variations across communities in the rate of foster care placement, even when taking into account obvious differences like income and education, have long perplexed researchers. Some studies have found that children in rural areas spend more time in foster care than children from urban areas. But apart from geography, little has been known about what lies behind the variations.

Some of Andersen's findings were predictable. Social disintegration in a community made foster home placements more likely. Others were more surprising. A community's political preferences made no difference, even though local elected officials in Denmark typically sit on the boards that make decisions about foster care.

Social support helped. Andersen speculates that communities with strong social networks and civic organizations cultivate social trust and put families in a position to benefit from neighbors, acquaintances, coaches and others, helping families with their problems before foster care becomes necessary.

Andersen's study does not explain all the variation seen in foster-care placements from community to community. She has lately been examining other factors, such as the tendencies of individual social workers. Meanwhile, her study raises the stakes on efforts to help vulnerable children. "Hopefully it will make policy makers and administrators aware that you can't just address of the problems of vulnerable families," she says, "but also the problems of whole communities."

Bobbie Gottschalk, A.M. ’66, helps Seeds of Peace defuse international conflict by making it personal

BY PATTI WOLTER

OBBIE GOTTSCHALK, 68, HAS MORE THAN 2,600 FACEBOOK FRIENDS. A handful are family, the rest are from around the world, mostly in South/Central Asia and the Middle East. So when thousands of Egyptian youth and young adults united against long-time ruler Hosni Mubarak last January, Gottschalk, A.M. ’66, did what any avid social media user would do: She went to Facebook and Twitter to check in on her friends. Her message to those in Egypt? First, “Are you okay?” And second, “We believe in you.”

Egypt’s uprising, in other words, was especially fascinating for Gottschalk, the co-founder of Seeds of Peace, an organization that brings youth from regions in conflict, such as Israelis and Palestinians, together in an intensive summer camp in Maine, where they learn to talk through their differences and see mutual goals, intelligent risks and shared fun as tools for peace. The teenagers return to their home countries, which include Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Cyprus and the Balkans, but they are forever linked to Seeds of Peace. They lead workshops, attend conferences, publish their own magazine, continue cross-cultural education programs, and ultimately build a lasting web of “Seeds” that promote peace across borders, oceans and conflicts.

“At the most basic level, one of the most important things that Seeds of Peace does is to humanize everyone involved,” says Seed Serena Kefayeh, who was a camper in 1997 and 1998 and then a camp program leader in 1999. Kefayeh grew up in Jordan and today is the director of Georgetown University’s Master’s in Journalism program.

“When campers first arrive in Maine, they have their guard up and have little or no intention of listening to what the ‘others’ have to say. Over the course of the camp, you begin to see the other campers as individuals and as teenagers just like you,” she says. “You start to understand that they’re people who might not be as bad as you initially thought, and that there’s more to them than just their nationality. And Bobbie has been the driving force that has helped keep the Seeds of Peace mission alive and strong for all these years.”

After almost two decades in action, there are some 4,500 Seeds, most of them under 30. Gottschalk is in regular communication with close to 3,000 of them. “From the beginning I have tried to keep the group together,” says Gottschalk, who served as the organization’s executive vice president until 2006, when she transitioned to being a board member. “I am still the consistent person as far as the Seeds are concerned.”

In Egypt, one of the Seeds and his friends created a music video filmed in Cairo’s Tahrir Square (the center of the demonstrations) that received more than 1.4 million views online, and they helped lead cleanup efforts in the square after the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators dispersed. “While this may have been a very internal issue for Egypt, it does show how we can empower young people to make a difference,” says Leslie Lewin, Seeds of Peace’s executive director.

“One of the things that scared me to death was when the Internet was cut off [in Egypt],” says Gottschalk. “That’s the way we keep in touch with these kids. My Facebook page was all about getting the Internet up. And I asked the thousands of other Seeds to post to Seedbook [the Seeds-only social network] and Facebook to encourage their Egyptian counterparts, so that when we got the Internet back, they would see we were all supporting them. When one group of Seeds or even one is in trouble, we rally to their sides. It’s not a political matter; it’s a human matter.”

Providing that personal, deep connection has been a key role for Gottschalk since Seeds of Peace began. She’s attended every one of the summer camps, and she is a common thread for the Seeds. “Every one of our Seeds knows her, which is a unique and special role for her to play,” Lewin says. “She puts an incredible amount of time not only on her own contact with our campers post camp but also their contact with each other.”

BRINGING THE “HUMAN FACTOR” to solving conflicts is what Gottschalk has been trying to do since she first started in social work. She remembers her first field placement with what is now known as Metropolitan Family Services in Chicago’s old stockyard neighborhoods while still studying at SSA in the mid 1960s. “The first client walked in and I wasn’t fully trained yet. I realized I could reduce the impact of that [lack of training] if I related to people as equal human beings,” she says.

Gottschalk’s second placement was with the Chicago Childcare Society, where she worked with foster kids and adoption services. “I had foster children who got placed in adoption. It...
was great. They were all being given a boost in life they wouldn’t have already had otherwise,” Gottschalk remembers. “With Seeds of Peace we work with kids from Gaza and the West Bank, Afghanistan…these kids also have very few opportunities. And any time we can offer them opportunities for scholarships to universities or a boarding school in the U.S. I feel like a boost in life they wouldn’t have had. They were all being given something the person can give back to the group. I have found these things to be true of all human beings in every group,” Gottschalk says.

After graduating from SSA, Gottschalk moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked with the Jewish Social Service Agency. There she started one of the first Jewish residential programs for adults with disabilities, as well as a mental health clinic for people who are deaf.

Starting Seeds of Peace came about as a happy coincidence. Journalist John Wallach had written a book about Palestinians that Gottschalk’s book group was reading. She invited Wallach to come and talk to the group, during which he mentioned he had an idea for a special camp to bring Israeli and Palestinian youth together. Gottschalk, then between jobs, volunteered to help.

In four months, the pair had the first camp up and running, with Gottschalk serving as the sole employee. “It was a huge departure from work-beginning that we should embrace these difficult topics rather than avoid them, and Bobbie offered a lot of leadership in that aspect of our curriculum and its development.”

For campers, Gottschalk’s role in mediating conflict is essential to their experience. Iddo Shai, an Israeli Seed from the camp’s first summer in 1993 and now a content developer in Los Angeles, remembers clearly how Gottschalk helped him through early sessions in which a Palestinian youth started saying the Holocaust never happened. Members of Shai’s extended family had died in the Holocaust and the other youth were demanding proof.

“It was a lot to handle for a 13-year-old,” Shai says of himself. “I shut myself out to anyone who came to talk to me. Then Bobbie came to me and she was very honest. ‘You have to understand where he is coming from and that some people don’t have an emotional connection to the Holocaust,’” Shai remembers her saying. “She wasn’t trying to sugar coat it. She said, ‘People think like that and that’s why we have these camps. At the end of camp he may feel differently, but you have to talk. You have to listen and learn from that experience.’ That’s the moment Bobbie and I clicked.”

Gottschalk’s role at Seeds of Peace has evolved to the bigger picture tasks of a board member, such as fundraising and reporting to the executive committee. Over the years she has won numerous awards for her work, including a Medal of Honor, presented by King Hussein of Jordan in 1997 and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Franklin Pierce University. But she still sits in on the monthly international staff phone conference call and attends every summer camp.

“Her historical perspective and ability to understand all aspects of our growth is absolutely invaluable,” Lewin says. “She has an incredible heart, as big as they come. And at a place like Seeds of Peace, you see that play out on such a huge scale.”
\[ Y_i = \pi_{20} + \chi_i \beta_2 \]
ERSUASIVE RHETORIC and moral appeals have always been used to advocate for social work programs. But while a convincing argument is still useful, it’s the toolbox of science that increasingly tells practitioners and policymakers what interventions and treatments should be adopted and taken to scale.

“In the late 1970s, some people began to ask some tough questions: ‘Well, how do you know if a social work service really works, that it helps people get better?’ says Neil Guterman, the dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor at SSA. “That spurred the use of scientific methods to identify practices and policies that not only sound good but have the evidence to back them up. The skepticism has helped advance the field in much more rigorous ways.”

Today, studies that use randomized trials, longitudinal data and other scientific methodologies to provide statistically valid results have become a major part of social work research. “The field has been developing, and there are more and more rigorous, randomized experiments being done,” says Jeanne Marsh, SSA’s George Herbert Jones Distinguished Service Professor and the president-elect of the Society of Social Work and Research (SSWR). “When the question is, do social programs work, these studies provide an answer. We can find out if an intervention really has the impact that is envisioned.”

With such evidence, policymakers are able to support practices that are known to make a positive difference in people’s lives. Yet the effort required to achieve these results is time consuming, complex and intellectually challenging. The studies have ethical and practical considerations that require careful planning, and real-world complications can derail or detour a study mid-stream. Once a study of an intervention is complete, a research team must gather the data and draw conclusions based on strict statistical guidelines, or else the final results will be of little use.

Take the studies of Moving to Opportunity (MTO), a landmark demonstration project sponsored by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. In 1994, when MTO launched, policymakers and advocates were excited about a big idea: Could the well-being of poor people who live in urban communities with concentrated poverty be drastically improved if they were able to move to a better neighborhood?

MTO was designed to get answers to that question. The housing authorities in five cities worked with local nonprofits to recruit about 4,600 very low-income families who lived in public housing in the poorest parts of the city (where more than 40 percent of local residents live below the poverty line). A third of the participants were randomly chosen to have the option to use housing vouchers that could only be used in a neighborhood where less than 10 percent of the population was poor, a third were offered
standard Section 8 vouchers with no restrictions, and a control group continued to live as they had.

The four-year program has been called the most important social experiment of the past 25 years. It was a massive effort, gathering data from thousands of participants and following families in a longitudinal study for nearly a decade. Eight sets of researchers used the information and have been producing a fascinating and complex set of conclusions, including that adults who moved with program vouchers were more likely to be satisfied with their housing and less likely to be obese or have mental health issues. But they found virtually no significant difference in employment, earnings or rates of adults receiving welfare. It turns out that giving families the option to move out of the poorest parts of a city can help in many ways, but it is no panacea.

Jens Ludwig has been a key researcher on MTO, including as one of three co-authors of a 2005 *Quarterly Journal of Economics* article that found that the offer to relocate reduced arrests for female youth for violent and property crime and reduced arrests for violent crime for male youths, but increased their problem behaviors and property crime arrest. The McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service, Law and Public Policy at SSA, Ludwig says that William Julius Wilson’s influential book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, which argues that low-income families are deeply affected by the neighborhood they live in, made a big impression on him in grad school when it was published in 1987.

“Imagine my surprise when I started to work on MTO and we began to see findings accumulate indicating that the impacts on poor families from large changes in neighborhood environments were more mixed and complicated than most people expected,” Ludwig says.

Trained as an economist, Ludwig also points out that the results of scientific studies such as the MTO research allows policies and programs to be built on real evidence, meaning that dollars and efforts can be allocated for interventions that are known to make a difference. “This experience of working on MTO has made me appreciate how limited our theories currently are,” he says, “and makes me inclined to be relentlessly empirical and open-minded about how the world really works.”

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Neil Guterman’s research includes the creation of a new intervention that aims to improve fathers’ involvement in early home visitation services for at-risk families.

This type of research typically starts with a review of what’s known about an issue. For example, Guterman is now working on building an intervention that is sorting out the complex question of how best to involve fathers in home-based services aimed at reducing a child’s risk of future abuse or neglect. What Guterman and his team have found, though, is that there are no empirically tested strategies for reaching out to the fathers, even though there is a body of research that shows that fathers play a crucial role in shaping family and child outcomes.

“There’s a little research on interventions to improve involvement for fathers, much of which dates back to the 1990s, but these are largely peer support programs and most haven’t been rigorously tested,” says Assistant Professor Jennifer Bellamy, who’s working with Guterman on the father involvement study. “And child and family programs like Head Start have attempted to engage fathers, but that research is also underdeveloped.”

With the relevant research in mind and an understanding of how to craft an effective intervention, Guterman and Bellamy have designed a pilot test for an enhancement that they think, based on the latest evidence, will improve fathers’ involvement in early home visitation services for at-risk families. Their plan will try out the intervention on a small group of families and compare it with families getting only standard services, looking for preliminary signs of its benefits across three home visiting programs in the Chicago area.

Creating a program that can be implemented and be effective across a wide variety of situations is crucial, not only so the intervention is more likely to have a positive impact when tested more broadly in the real world, but...
Giving Parents a Voice

In urban primary healthcare clinics, some mothers are now learning about how to more effectively talk with their adolescent children about sexual risk behavior, thanks to a study that designed and measured the “Families Talking Together” program. Aimed at African-American and Latino youth aged 11 to 14, the program has been shown to prevent sexual debut among youth.

“We started by looking at existing research of mother-adolescent communication about sex, adolescent sexual behavior, and the relationship between maternal communication and youth sexual behavior,” says Assistant Professor Alida Bouris, who was co-investigator on the study, which was published in the January 2011 issue of the Journal of Adolescent Health. “We developed a message where we tell mothers that while it’s important to know the potential health consequences of risky sex, specific social reasons are driving young people’s decisions to engage in sex, so it’s most important to talk about those factors.”

In the randomized clinical trial of 264 mother-child dyads in a community-based healthcare clinic in the Bronx, half the mothers received a 30-minute intervention by a social worker while their child was having his or her annual check-up. They also received a packet of focused parenting materials and activities that could help with conversations at home. After the teen’s physical exam, the doctor endorsed the program with the mother, and the social worker phoned mothers with two post-intervention booster calls in the following months.

At the beginning of the study, 6 percent of adolescents in both the experimental and control cohorts reported that they had vaginal sexual intercourse at least once. Nine months after the intervention, the reports of sexual behavior for youth increased to 22 percent for youth in the control condition but stayed at 6 percent for youth in the experimental group. “A small percentage of effective interventions make it into real world settings,” Bouris says. “To help bridge this gap, I address four elements when developing parent-based interventions: it should be practical and feasible, it should be able to reach a large number of people in the target population, it should be sustainable over time, and the intervention should be based on strong theories of behavior.”

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also if and when it is adopted after the research is done. “The overall purpose of the work is to make a difference. By design, the purpose of intervention research is to improve individual, family or community health outcomes, not just to measure them,” says Assistant Professor Alida Bouris, whose research is centered on adolescent sexual behavior and HIV/AIDS (see “Giving Parents a Voice”).

Before a program can even be piloted, though, it must pass through the University’s Institutional Review Board, an ethics committee of University of Chicago social science researchers who look closely at the methodology, making sure the study will treat all the participants ethically and safely, not only those who will go through the intervention. “They look carefully to be sure that nobody is denied services for refusing to be in the study or because they don’t fit the profile of who is being studied, for instance,” says doctoral student Aaron Banman, who has worked with Guterman on several of his studies.

Once a pilot project is complete, researchers typically “manualize” the program for efficacy trials, where the researcher measures intervention’s impact when it is administered by staff at social service agencies. By providing a painstakingly detailed manual, the researchers try to ensure that the intervention that is administered in the field is delivered as it was intended, without alterations that could skew the results.

For Parents Together, an intervention created and studied by Guterman to help mothers receiving home visitation services to build and optimize their informal social networks, the manual is more than 70 pages long, with sections that explain the research that led to the program’s creation and the goals and activities for each of the six group sessions. Guterman provided guidance on running the program in its first test in New York City and at agencies in and around Chicago in subsequent trials.

“Neil came and spoke with my whole team, and he went through a very specific training with me on how to deliver the model,” says Christina LePage, A.M. ’07, who was the program manager at the Infant Welfare Society of Evanston when the agency ran Parents Together as part of Guterman’s research. “He gave me weekly supervision, and after I’d run a group session, we’d debrief right away. He was very clear on what we were doing, which helped build trust among the mothers participating in the project.”
Another Route to Control

In some cases, creating a randomized control group study simply isn’t possible. For example, over more than two years, a total of 120 mothers participated in Dean Neil Guterman’s study of the Parents Together program, in peer groups of five to 20. However, he knew that the agencies running the program wouldn’t be able to bring in the sufficient numbers of mothers who were eligible for inclusion at any given time that would be necessary to also create a comparable control group.

However, with a tool called propensity score matching, researchers can still bring the power of statistical comparison to their work, shining a light on the impact a specific intervention had on a study group. With propensity score matching, a researcher can use observed predictor factors, usually obtained from a statistical strategy called logistic regression, to create a counterfactual group—essentially building a virtual control group and a virtual treatment group. “In this case, it was a modified compromise that still allowed us to find some very promising trends that are being tested with comparison groups,” Guterman says.

For Assistant Professor Matthew Epperson’s study of defendants with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system, propensity score matching will provide a way to approximate a quasi-experimental design. His study will look at the impact of three court-based programs operating in Chicago: a mental health court, a specialized probation mental health unit that has staff trained in mental health, and standard probation.

“It is possible as a researcher to do randomized control studies in the criminal justice system, but it wasn’t feasible in this case,” he explains. “But with this method, I’ll be able to compare the three programs to each other to see if they have different strengths, if they work better for different populations. I plan to conduct a retrospective analysis to build a longitudinal study next year. I’ll examine arrest data from cohorts of people who graduated from these programs in 2007 and see the impact of each program on recidivism five years later. Evaluations of these specialized court-based programs for persons with mental illnesses are still in the infancy stages, and to my knowledge no study had done a comparative evaluation like this.”

Building comparable groups is as crucial in propensity score matching as it is to create balanced cohorts in a randomized control study.

“Indistinguishable is what we’re aiming for when you’re talking about creating balance between two study groups,” says Assistant Professor Jennifer Bellamy, who has used the methodology in her research of the impact of outpatient mental health treatment for children in foster care. “You need to create statistically equivalent groups. The number of boys and girls, similar baseline symptoms, the history of the different homes they’ve lived in, their experience with child maltreatment—it all needs to be as much the same as possible. Not for each child, but in the aggregate for the group.”

Bellamy mined the huge National Survey of Child and Adolescent Wellbeing to find the data she needed for the study. She found that the outpatient mental health services didn’t make a difference in outcomes for the children in foster care, but she points out that the findings raise a new set of questions. “Many of the kids only received short-term services, and we don’t know the quality of the services or the context in which they were delivered,” she says. “To help these kids, we now know the next step is more research on the best way to deliver services and how to create quality services.”
afternoon. There were a lot of mid-course adjustments.”

Pollack, Fine and others on the team worked with Chapin Hall, the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department to gather the necessary outcome data—another task that a research team has to plan when designing their study. “Those partnerships were really useful, because it meant that almost all the money we raised for the study could be spent on actual services to kids, instead of spending a portion on gathering data,” Pollack says.

With data in hand, the calculations of results can begin. “Cleaning” the data to get to a regression analysis can be a long process. “Everybody talks about the number of cases in your study sample in quantitative research. The smaller that gets, the more each data point is really sacred. It can be a very complex statistical process to find ways to replace missing values,” says Banman, who teaches statistics at SSA. “You have to have a vision for what to do with the data. Working with the U of C statistics department is a really nice resource, and I have been lucky to have Neil [Guterman] as a resource to talk things through.”

Pollack says that what he and his team are learning through the B.A.M. Sports Edition project is invaluable for their ongoing work at the Crime Lab. “Many very practical implementation insights became clearer than ever to us, including how essential it is to have partnerships with community organizations that are prepared to operate in the realistic practice environments of Chicago communities and schools,” he says. “I have to say that B.A.M. Sports Edition has been some of the most challenging work I’ve ever done, and certainly some of the most rewarding.”

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VEN TOOLS AS POWERFUL as randomized controlled studies have their weak points. Ludwig and his research partners have pointed out, for example, that the MTO studies are specifically about families who were given the option to participate. “MTO is silent on the effects of involuntary mobility programs, which is an important point, given ongoing HOPE VI activities across the country to demolish some of our highest-poverty housing projects,” they wrote in a 2008 paper. And there are always unique factors in the time and place where a study was run, everything from the state of the economy to the effectiveness of the local schools, that limit how broadly the lessons can be applied.

Marsh notes that control group studies also aren’t able to answer every question. “Do parents do better in a program if they feel a bond with the social worker? Common sense would tell us they do. But you can’t randomly assign people to have a good relationship,” she says. “We’re getting increasingly sophisticated at applying what kind of research works for which questions. [At SSWR] we support a variety of approaches, including mixed methods, with qualitative and quantitative methodologies working together in one study. It’s really a generative period in the development and application of innovative research methodologies in social work research.”

From Ludwig’s perspective, the limits of randomized social experiments are far outweighed by the knowledge they bring. Statisticians use the term “internal validity” when judging a study’s impact estimates within its boundaries, and “external validity” for the degree to which those impacts can be generalized to other populations or time periods. “Experiments are often criticized for having low external validity,” he says. “But a different way to think about it is that without internal validity you can’t have external validity. I think the way to improve policy is to accumulate experimental findings strategically to try to round out the picture.”

This process of adding information piece by piece and building on what has been learned before is central to the scientific method; it’s what allowed medicine to progress and Guterman argues that the same process is now changing social work. “Scientific breakthroughs are built on progressively creating a rigorous, expanding knowledge base,” Guterman says. “By using these scientific techniques, we can demonstrate the efficacy of interventions and build evidence-based practice.”
Gary Comer wanted to help the children of Greater Grand Crossing, the neighborhood where he grew up. With an investment of more than $75 million and help from SSA, the scope of his impact keeps growing.

THE BELL SOUNDS and students clad in their uniforms of khaki slacks and navy blue polo shirts pour into the airy, day-lit halls of Gary Comer College Prep.

There are some playful nudges and peals of laughter from the students, but the scene is devoid of traditional high school hallway mayhem. Even more surprising is that within five minutes, the corridors are practically clear and students are settled in their classrooms ready to work. You can tell because nearly every classroom at Comer Prep, a gleaming post-modern structure tucked in the northeast corner of the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood, is walled with a glass panel that offers passersby a birds-eye view of the goings-on inside.

“We believe in transparency and accountability,” says Comer Principal James Troupis. “Our teachers know they’re always on stage. And that’s fine. We want people to see what’s going on here.”

Opened in 2008, Comer Prep is one of 10 schools in Chicago’s Noble Network of Charter Schools, which means that it chooses students by lottery, not based on grades or test scores (children living in the immediate community receive priority admission). As a non-selective school, however, Comer’s mission to ensure that “every single student graduates and goes to college” is lofty.

Students enter, on average, reading at the fifth or sixth grade level. To get them up to speed, they take double reading and double math classes in the first year. The Noble schools operate on a longer school day and a longer school year.

“We’ve been called draconian at times,” says Troupis of the school’s strict demerit system. “But consistency is king here. Every kid, every parent, every teacher knows what the rules are and knows what the consequences are.”

Greater Grand Crossing is a low-income, African-American neighborhood just south and west of Hyde Park and the University of Chicago campus. For a community where gangs and violence can derail a young person’s future, a school like Comer College Prep can be a powerful resource. But one school can only do so much. Luckily for local residents, Comer College Prep isn’t the only resource that has been built in the neighborhood by the Comer Science and Education Foundation (CSEF), the private philanthropy created by and named for the late founder of the Lands’ End clothing line.

Gary Comer, who died in 2006 of cancer at age 79, grew up in the neighborhood. “He knew he couldn’t fix all the ills in the city of Chicago,” says Comer’s son, Guy, now president of CSEF. “He
vision

Gary Comer wanted to help the children of Greater Grand Crossing, the neighborhood where he grew up. With an investment of more than $75 million and help from SSA, the scope of his impact keeps growing.
All told, CSEF has now pumped more than $75 million into the troubled 15-block swath of Greater Grand Crossing that encircles Paul Revere Elementary School, which Gary Comer attended as a child. Before Gary Comer College Prep opened its new 40,000-square-foot high school in August, the high school was housed inside the adjacent Gary Comer Youth Center. Now the two buildings share a campus; students walk across the footpath between them, which Comer had a strong attachment to during his childhood neighborhood. After Gary Comer and his wife, Francis, were major contributors to the expansion of the University of Chicago's 155-bed Comer Children's Hospital, Pediatric Emergency Department and Center for Children and Specialty Care, Comer had a strong attachment to his old neighborhood. “In the '70s, we would always go back to there,” says Guy Comer, 40. “We would visit the house where he grew up.” In 1998, Comer visited his old elementary school and was shocked and dismayed by what he found. Most of its students were performing well below grade level on standardized tests. New computers sat unused because the school didn’t have the staff or money to get them installed or to train teachers how to use them.

“Mr. Comer has the foresight to understand that in order to improve the quality of life in a community you should start with the youth,” says Ayoka Samuels, senior program director of the youth center. “Young people can really make change. After all, they’re the ones who are going to inherit these communities.”

HOW GARY COMER CAME TO THIS
dynamic involvement in his childhood neighborhood is the stuff of local legend. After a career in advertising, the sailing buff launched a company that in 1963 became Lands’ End, which was sold to Sears in 2002 for $1.9 billion. Throughout the building of the Lands’ End empire, Comer developed a reputation as a generous benefactor, particularly around children’s health care, education and climate change. He and his wife, Francis, were major contributors to the expansion of the University of Chicago’s 155-bed Comer Children’s Hospital, Pediatric Emergency Department and Center for Children and Specialty Care.

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Gary Comer among neighborhood children in Grand Crossing.
out of Revere and a small building nearby, the drill team had outgrown its humble beginnings. Comer decided a youth center would be a key component to maintaining the academic gains that were occurring at Revere. “He began thinking that after-school programming was an integral part of the educational mission,” Guy Comer recalls.

“As Gary got more involved, he became increasingly sensitive to the dynamic that the issues and challenges that plague a community are going to impact the students inside that community’s school buildings,” says Gregory Mooney, executive director and vice president of CSEF. “So he wanted to engage in those issues, solely out of a motivation to create a better learning environment for the youth growing up in this community.”

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IN 2004, COMER TURNED TO the University of Chicago, with which he’d had a long philanthropic relationship, for assistance in understanding and addressing the urban issues he was becoming immersed in. He was connected with Henry Webber, then vice-president for community and governmental affairs and an SSA senior lecturer, and Eddie Lawlor, then SSA dean. They helped assemble a team of scholars, including SSA’s Samuel Deutsch Professor Emerita Dodie Norton and Mark Joseph, then a post-doctoral scholar in SSA, on the direction his efforts might take.

Joseph recalls that the conversations with Comer grew into discussions about putting the commitment to a youth center and Revere into a broader community context. They encouraged Comer and his team to do outreach not only to the parents in the community, but to non-parents as well, helping even those who did not have children see that they, too, were stakeholders in what was going on at the school.

“Grand Crossing is evidence of what can happen when a few key ingredients come together: a visionary leader with incredible tenacity, focus and resources, and an institutional anchor like the University of Chicago for support and guidance,” says Joseph, now an assistant professor at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences.

Center of Attention

“This isn’t gym and swim,” says Ayoka Samuels, senior program director at the Gary Comer Youth Center. “We are serious here.”

If your notion of a youth center is a drop-in facility where kids lounge around playing pick-up basketball and foosball, think again. Sure, there is time to blow off steam at the five-year-old GCYC playing hoops or trying out programs in everything from art to African drumming. But the programmatic thrust of the center is to prepare kids for a productive future. That means homework help and training in topics like broadcast journalism and horticulture. The summer college tour is a big draw, sending teenagers as far away as Florida A&M University and Xavier in New Orleans. This summer counselors hope to arrange a trip to Boston to visit students at Harvard who have served as interns at the center.

The center also is a community resource, home to the South Shore Drill Team and Free Spirit Media, a youth-run broadcast and digital production company, as well as a health center run by Access Community Health Network. Though not intended to be a full-scale clinic, the health center is staffed with a nurse practitioner, a social worker and a medical assistant to serve both the center and the high school.

“Our focus is on being a resource around issues of health and wellness,” says Linda Diamond Shapiro, A.B. ’77, A.M. ’78, M.B.A. ’88 (Booth), vice president for strategy, planning and external affairs at Access. “We’re school-linked, because that’s what makes sense, but our goal is to mine the rich resources of the campus to build campaigns around health that will benefit the whole community.”

Put it all together and wrap it up in a stunning building (the center won a 2009 national design award from the American Institute of Architects), and the youth center is more than a sum of its parts. “The Gary Comer Youth Center serves as a positive anchor for this community,” says Samuels. “We’re making Greater Grand Crossing a destination, not just the neighborhood you pass through on your way to Hyde Park or South Shore.”
Mooney says the University of Chicago faculty, students and staff were instrumental in helping shape what he calls the ongoing dynamic integration of CSEF’s programming. For example, Joseph, who was conducting research around the Chicago Housing Authority’s Plan for Transformation, a massive effort to redevelop many public housing developments and relocate residents to lower-poverty communities, helped CSEF analyze data made available by the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research about the impact of student mobility on educational outcomes. This helped jump-start Revere Way, CSEF’s affordable housing initiative. "We realized that one of the ways we could help stabilize the school would be to stabilize the neighborhood and reduce student mobility,” Mooney says. “That got us looking at the development of affordable housing.”

In 2005, Barbara Jackson was asked to join the Comer project as a consultant. “Gary Comer was a heck of a business person, and as a consultant. ‘Gary Comer was entrenched in the community and all that has come together in such a short time. ‘If Gary were here, I’m sure he would tell you it’s not happening fast enough,” Mooney says. A good example is the year-round roof garden on top of the youth center and the two-acre garden across the street, which together produce more than 2,000 pounds of food annually. The harvest is sold in a farmer’s market in the neighborhood and provides healthy meals for the students at the center and school. It also grows vegetables that end up on the tables of trendy Chicago eateries like Frontera Grill and West Town Tavern.

“Gary just had an ‘if we build it, they will come’ mentality about a lot of this,” Mooney says. “There had been a lot of buzz around urban agriculture for eight to 10 years before we broke ground. Gary said, ‘Let’s just put in a green roof and let’s do a green roof like they’ve never seen before.’ So we gave the architect free reign and it has been one of the most dynamic components of our programming. We have more than 80 youth engaged in our Green Teens program, and we’re teaching a gardening and environmental science elective for sophomores and juniors at the high school. None of that was because we had a partner saying, ‘You should do urban agriculture.’ It was just Gary’s vision.”

And the vision continues to expand. Next year, the youth center will house a middle school that is expected to grow to 150 students. Among the foundation’s long range plans is the development of an early childhood education program, stemming from long-standing conversations with the Ounce of Prevention Fund, an early childhood advocacy group.

“Ultimately, our success will be judged by the lives our young people lead as adults,” Mooney says. “That’s a long-term proposition, but we’re making a long-term commitment.”

To read more about Darryl Clayton and his experience as a master’s student at SSA, visit www.ssa.uchicago.edu.
HEN SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS in the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Office of Inspector General had been shown pictures of a toddler who had belt marks across her bottom, some felt that simply meant the child had been spanked. “Welt marks on a 2-year-old’s butt? There’s something off in that picture,” says Denise Kane, A.M. ’78, Ph.D. ’01. “That’s not corporal punishment—it’s brutality.”

Kane, the inspector general of DCFS, and her colleagues realized that child protection investigators did not have sufficient knowledge of pediatrics. “You don’t have a 3-month-old with a bruise. If they don’t cruise, they don’t bruise, so bruises on infants are highly suspicious. By providing studies from well-baby clinics, the training informs investigators on normal childhood bruising,” she says. “Investigators weren’t always given that information, but it’s something they need to know to do their job right.”

In the complex world of child welfare, with a mix of programs and providers across the state, training can literally mean life or death for a young child. “If we
“We need training that works on many levels: preparation of new professionals, continued training of existing professionals, continued research on what the evidence supports.”

want to prepare social workers to be better positioned to deliver evidence-based interventions, we need training that works on many levels: preparation of new professionals, continued training of existing professionals, continued research on what the evidence supports,” says Jennifer Bellamy, an assistant professor at SSA whose fields of interest include mental health services, child welfare, evidence-based practice and fathering.

The trainings implemented by Kane’s office are only one part of DCFS’s determined efforts to implement guidance to bring the state-of-the-art in child welfare research to the day-to-day work: focusing workers on the needs of children and families rather than those of the system, communicating properly with all stakeholders to seamlessly address problems, providing role models to whom trainees can relate.

Tina Rzepnicki, SSA’s David and Mary Winton Green Professor, has worked with Kane on how to ensure the OIG staff was sufficiently knowledgeable on topics from how children bruise to how to best interact with families. “I help them collect data, analyze it and uncover patterns of error that inform the training,” Rzepnicki says. “We talk a lot about quality improvement in social work. We get at that by identifying weaknesses in organizational processes and ensuring that there is sufficient training and other supports to address those weaknesses.”

The OIG training, which began in August 2008, incorporates an evidence-based curriculum based on the principles of high-reliability organizations, which encourage critical thinking and self-examination. The curriculum reviews key components of investigations, including conducting a scene investigation and mock reenactment of the incident, creating a timeline of events, and identifying key informants. Staff learned the latest research on identification and interviewing of child-centered collaterals and better safety planning.

Pre-training analysis found that many investigators thought (incorrectly) that they couldn’t provide information to a doctor because it could bias the doctor’s opinion or violated confidentiality. To address this issue, a DCFS attorney attended each of the trainings to clarify that statute allows investigators to obtain medical information from the physician and that the investigator can share relevant information when requesting a medical opinion. A form was developed to guide workers in conducting a more systematic assessment and assist in the documentation of risks by the investigator and by the physician.

Rzepnicki has been working with Kane to evaluate the trainings, and she and the team are publishing the findings in annual reports out of the OIG, journal articles and a book chapter to be published in the fall. “We continue to collect and analyze data after the training occurs to see if there are changes in performance,” Rzepnicki says. “The results are used to inform subsequent training and to determine other supports necessary for sustainable improvement.”

RWIN MCEWEN, A.M. ’98, director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, says the vast reduction in caseload that began under former Director Jess McDonald in the late 1990s—which has taken the number of cases down from 53,000 to 15,500—has opened up room in the budget and in people’s workload to train caseworkers more effectively. “We’re way out front on this,” says McEwen, who served as the department’s deputy director before becoming director a little less than five years ago. “Many states are doing child welfare reform. Illinois is doing child welfare innovation.”

SSA Associate Professor Gina Samuels, who has done extensive research on child welfare in Illinois and nationally and herself was once a child welfare worker, agrees. “Illinois has one of the better state child care systems in terms of using research, what we might broadly call evidence-based practice,” she says.

During the last two years, DCFS has put into place learning “collaboratives” across the state that front-line caseworkers and their supervisors must attend for two days every four months. The 3,000 caseworkers and supervisors taking the trainings from both the public sector and private contracted agencies are learning how DCFS is making fundamental changes to their role. “The focus of our training is to try to create a ‘new normal’ that’s not just about investigation and prevention—but an agency that strives for optimal child
development,” McEwen says.

The trainings have also helped to shift the system’s traditional focus on abuse to neglect, which studies have shown comprise 70 percent of cases faced by DCFS workers, as well as giving participants greater knowledge of the impacts of trauma on people’s lives. “We’re teaching psychological first-aid,” McEwen says, “how to identify and respond to traumatic stress, because that’s the situation many of the children we see are in.”

DCFS’s trainings are also providing strategies to link families to services and to opportunities to better themselves and build a stronger family. SSA Professor Mark Courtney, former director of Chapin Hall, has found in his research that a solutions-based approach toward clients helps parents feel engaged by social workers’ services.

“If it were up to these parents, they wouldn’t have anything to do with the child welfare system,” Courtney says. “The solutions-based approach is based on the assumption that you want to start where the client is, engage them that way and offer them something they perceive to be important.”

For example, in February, DCFS caseworkers who are working with pregnant and parenting teenagers in the system began trainings at four downstate sites on how to address the population’s educational and vocational needs and to involve them in becoming more involved, supportive parents. “My focus is on helping workers and teen parents come to an agreement on an educational plan that will fit for them,” says University of Minnesota social work professor Ronald Rooney, A.M. ’75, Ph.D. ’78, who has built the trainings.

When Rooney first started working with caseworkers serving this population four years ago, the services they provided weren’t consistent and reliable. Too often, caseworkers were focusing on the teens’ deficits in education, work and parenting, which created conflict at the outset of the relationship, with little attention paid to what the teen parents were doing right and in building a constructive alliance around their issues. “While services were mandated and available, there was not a real structure to how they were delivered,” he says.

Rooney and his team found caseworkers who had a more strengths-oriented approach and developed videos of their work. For example, one video focuses specifically on how to handle teen parents who start down the road toward their educational plan and then become discouraged or depressed. “We thought that, instead of having role models of caseworkers from out of state, if you had role models from within the setting, workers might find them more credible,” Rooney says.

The Jewish Child and Family Services agency in Chicago is using ongoing Child Parent Psychotherapy model trainings that helps a therapist start a case by

“The focus of our training is to try to create a ‘new normal’ that’s not just about investigation and prevention—but an agency that strives for optimal child development.”
building their relationship with the parent, who often was not well-cared for as a child. “Usually the focus of the state is, ‘Look at this kid, look at what he needs,’” says Charlotte Mallon, A.M. ’80, the agency’s director of training. “But the parent is saying, ‘Nobody’s giving anything to me, and I have nothing to give.’” The model applies especially well to teen parents, she says.

JCFS research assistant Elisabeth Kinnel notes that the agency has worked with SSA faculty Stanley McCracken and Jennifer Bellamy in developing the training sessions around evidence-based practice. “Some of that comes from the culture of SSA and its interest in research and bringing resources to bear,” she says.

At agencies like Jewish Child and Family Services, budget cuts and high caseloads are everyday realities that must be acknowledged when planning how trainings will work. “It’s hard when you’re relying on money that you can’t predict will be there. It’s very difficult to plan. But we plan anyway because we have to,” Mallon says. “It takes time to teach people to do this. Our staff need to know what they’re doing, and we want to be sure we’re infusing their understanding with evidence-based work.”

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ONE OF SSA PROFESSOR CURTIS MCMILLEN’s research interests is how to improve the poor job that most states do in training child welfare professionals to deal with mental health issues. “Their job tends to be coordinating care for children who have been maltreated,” he says. “And yet they haven’t been well-schooled on psychiatric disorders. They haven’t been well-schooled on how to interact with psychologists or how to provide these services. Every state is having trouble getting mental-health evidence-based intervention to the people who need them. It’s especially hard with the most vulnerable populations.”

McMillen is currently operating and studying a training intervention in Missouri on trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for 150 therapists who work in the child welfare system. Since many of these professionals are low paid and compensated by the hour, it can be difficult to convince them to take the time to leave their offices for expensive training programs. McMillen’s study, a randomized trial, examines how therapists interact with self-directed training, including webinars, on-line training programs, discussion boards and working with other local therapists to improve each other’s skills.

Shaun Lane, A.M. ’91, the deputy director of the division of service support at DCFS and an adjunct professor at SSA, says the department is also interested in rethinking how participants learn through training. DCFS is working toward creating more distance learning opportunities, for instance, with a revised model launched in January that at least 10 cohorts have completed. “The initial satisfaction data from participants is overall quite positive,” he says. “We’re also finding that there is a group for whom it is more of a challenge;
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S IMPORTANT AS IT IS, the process of training staff can be seen as an extra cost, in terms of dollars, time and focus. Even in the current budget crisis, however, funding presents less of a challenge for DCFS than some might think. Federal Title IV-E funding, targeted to foster care and adoption assistance, covers 75 cents on the dollar for DCFS training and 65 cents at private agencies; plus, the Casey Family Programs foundation has provided a $400,000-plus grant for a Supervisory Training Enhancement Program. "[Funding concerns] may be a little worse now, but it’s never going to go away entirely," says Rzepnicki. "The environment will always have constraints attached to it."

The private side faces greater time- and money-related challenges, says SSA adjunct faculty member Victor Bernstein, who sits on the board of an agency with an annual budget of $800,000 which, in early March, was holding a $300,000 IOU from the state. "It’s difficult to talk about training in this economic environment because that’s an extra," he says. "It’s a lot more difficult sell."

One private agency providing support to teen wards of the state had to withdraw from Bernstein’s training because their staff was cut from four to two and the remaining staff had no time for the training, since their workload was not reduced substantially. "They’re overburdened," he says from the private agency staff’s point of view. "If you’re going to introduce something, how are you going to reorganize the demands on their time? That is essential."

McEwen draws a distinction between technical challenges, which simply require the necessary know-how and procedures, and adaptive challenges, which require attitude adjustments. He says moving evidence-based principles into practice has faced greater challenges in culture change than anything else. For example, part of the “new normal” at DCFS will be using the Child Adolescent Needs Assessment (CANS), which McEwen describes as a strength assessment rather than a risk assessment.

"We’re really struggling with that," McEwen says. "They’re so used to risk assessment. People have to change how they think, how they personally behave, how they feel about the population we serve."

Kane says investigators are always skeptical when someone mentions training. The OIG’s office got pushback, for example, when they introduced the new form, which prompts communication between the family’s physician and the investigator about the circumstances of the injury and problems the family may be facing such as domestic violence. "By the time we finished the training, everybody knew the form was there to stay,” she says. “I don’t blame workers; it’s yet another form. All I can say is, ‘We’ve added one more set of eyes to that kid’s future.’”

Rooney’s main obstacle in training workers is also cultural rather than financial. “My evolving view of evidence-based practice is that we cannot afford to present it from an ivory tower, as if there’s a special kind of knowledge that the university has that is universally applicable in agencies,” he says. “That approach is likely to stimulate resistance among staff and agencies. The key is collaboration with agencies around their perceptions of what their problems are.”

Bellamy says that while there’s a lot of research on evidence-based practice, there’s relatively little research on how it is implemented in the real world. “The researchers usually say the social service providers have barriers to implementation. And providers are saying it’s the researchers who need to make adjustment to their research to fit practice,” she says.

In the end, training is just the first step in changing organizational culture and practices. “Training alone isn’t enough,” Rzepnicki says. "It doesn’t sustain your [changed] practices over the long run. Supervisors and their staff will function best in an environment where value is placed on learning from mistakes and good work is supported.”

“My evolving view of evidence-based practice is that we cannot afford to present it from an ivory tower, as if there’s a special kind of knowledge that the university has.”
Marsh Elected President of SSWR

George Herbert Jones
Distinguished Service Professor
Jeanne C. Marsh has been elected president of the Society for Social Work and Research, the nation’s leading association devoted to the involvement of social workers, social work faculty and social work students in research and research applications. Associate Professor Yoonsun Choi currently serves as SSWR’s vice president. Marsh is currently on sabbatical from SSA and is a Chercheé Invitée at the Chaire Sante, SciencesPo in Paris.

Allard Co-Organizes Urban Poverty Conference

Associate Professor Scott Allard and University of Chicago Professor of Sociology Mario Small co-organized the March 10-11 conference “Rethinking Urban Poverty for the 21st Century: Institutional and Organizational Perspectives.” The conference, which is expected to be an annual event, is an initiative of the University of Chicago Urban Network, which works to spur innovation in the study of urban processes and interdisciplinary discourse in urban research, theory and policy. Small is the director of the network and Allard is a member of the advisory committee.

At the conference, Associate Professor Robert Chaskin presented, “Integration and Exclusion: Urban Poverty, Public Housing Reform, and the Dynamics of Neighborhood Restructuring” as part of the Housing and Urban Poverty Panel, and Helen Ross Professor Harold Pollack presented “If Drug Treatment Works So Well, Why are There So Many Drug Users in Prison?” as part of the Health and Urban Poverty panel.

Grogan and Chaskin Visit China

Professor Colleen Grogan and Associate Professor Robert Chaskin participated in a talk for social policy students at the School of Social Work, Sociology and Social Policy at Peking University in China. Chaskin discussed community development work and Grogan discussed U.S. health care reform and policy.

Gidron Serves as Visiting Professor

This winter quarter, SSA welcomed Benjamin Gidron as the SSA Helen Harris Perlman Visiting Professor. Gidron is a professor emeritus at the Guilford Glazer School of Business and Management at Ben Gurion University, of the Negev in Beer-Sheva, Israel, where he founded and directed the Nonprofit Organizations Management Program and holds the David and Dorothy Schwartzman Chair for Community Development. He also served as the founding president and former director of the International Society for Third Sector Research at Ben Gurion.

At SSA he taught the master’s level course “The Third Sector in Society: An International Perspective,” which explored the tremendous growth in the number of nonprofit, non-governmental and civil society organizations worldwide. “I never taught in a school that is clearly related to the origins of social work, led by people about which I myself studied as a social work student some 40 years ago,” he says. “It was both an honor and a pleasure to be associated with such an institution.”

Courtney Receives Forsythe Award

Professor Mark Courtney received the 2010 Peter W. Forsythe Award at the spring forum for the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators in Washington, D.C. on March 26. The award is given annually to a person who shows leadership in public child welfare in support of NAPCWA’s mission. NAPCWA represents child welfare administrators of city, county and state public human service agencies that provide child abuse prevention, family preservation and family support, child protection, foster care, adoption and independent living services to children and families.

Payne Appointed Interim Chief Education Officer of the Chicago Public Schools

Frank P. Hixon Distinguished Service Professor Charles Payne was appointed interim chief education officer of the Chicago Public Schools, the nation’s third-largest school system on February 11 through the end of Mayor Richard M. Daley’s term in May. Payne’s primary task for CPS was leading the process of writing a new educational plan for the district. Payne is a member of the University of Chicago’s Committee on Education and an affiliated scholar with the University’s Urban Education Institute and has provided expertise for the Woodlawn Children’s Promise Community, a project involving 10 public schools, families and community groups in the Woodlawn neighborhood.

Faculty Speaking

Assistant Professor Matt Epperson presented a lecture and training in Trenton, N.J., on how to incorporate motivational interviewing into the New Jersey Probation Specialized Mental Health Caseload, a statewide expansion of specialized probation services for persons with mental illnesses. Epperson was invited by the State Chiefs of Probation via the Center for Behavioral Health Services and Criminal Justice Research at Rutgers University.
New Faculty at SSA

Professor Curtis McMillen joins SSA from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, where he was on the faculty for 17 years. His current research looks at issues related to the quality of mental health services received by child welfare clients, quality improvement and assurance in mental health organizations, and services for older youth as they leave the foster care system. “My mission in life is to improve mental health services for children and youth in foster care,” he says.

McMillen received his B.A. in Psychology from Trinity University, his M.S.W. from the University of Oklahoma, and a Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of Maryland at Baltimore. He has practiced social work in in-patient psychiatric, residential care and foster care settings. He co-founded and co-directs the Missouri Therapy Network, which conducts research, training and advocacy to improve mental health services to Missourians.

McMillen’s recent research includes a training project to bring intervention-training to therapists who work in the child welfare system (see page 26), as well as an intervention for older youth in foster care, designed as an intensive, community-based step-down program for youth leaving residential care. “As foster kids cycle in and out of placements at alarming rates, they can receive a lot of supports, but those supports are often not as effective as they need to be,” he says.

McMillen points out that Illinois has a long-standing reputation as the state most interested and willing to incorporate child welfare research and data into its programs and policies, and SSA’s many connections to the Department of Children and Family Services and many private child welfare provider agencies is one of the reasons he’s glad to be at the School. He says he hopes his focus on evidence-based practice interventions and quality improvement in social work will be an asset for training SSA’s students in the clinical track.

“SSA has a reputation of intellectual freedom and is willing to pursue ideas and leads,” McMillen says. “I think it’s going to be a privilege and an opportunity to work with such highly intelligent colleagues on the faculty. I’m very excited about being a part of this University.”

Dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor Neil Guterman co-presented “Homevisiting That Works—Preliminary Results from a Randomized Trial” at the Child and Family Maltreatment Conference in San Diego, Calif. on January 25.

Senior Lecturer Stanley McCracken was a panelist for the Experiential Evidence Expert Panel, an event held on February 2-3 as part of the Evidence Project from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Violence Prevention in Atlanta, which proposes an approach to understanding evidence and evidence-based decision-making that helps bridge the gap between research and implementation.

On February 16, Associate Professor Scott Allard presented the lecture “Places in Need: The Changing Geography of Poverty and the American Safety Net” at Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

Frank P. Hixon Distinguished Service Professor Charles Payne gave the second annual John M. Wozniak lecture, “So Much Reform: Maybe a Little Change,” at Loyola University Chicago on February 16.

On March 11, Professor Colleen Grogan presented, “You Call it Public, I Call it Private, Why Don’t We Call it Off?: The Rhetoric Behind Health Care Reform” at the Community Engaged Research in Action Seminar Series, sponsored by the University of Chicago Institute for Translational Medicine at the University of Chicago Medical Center.


Social Work with African American Males: Health, Mental Health, and Policy, on March 15 during the discussion “Everyone Isn’t Obama: Black Men and Social Policy” at the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C., as well as at Central Georgia Technical College on March 23. Johnson is on sabbatical from SSA for the 2010-11 academic year.

Hans and Students Present on Young Mothers

On March 31, Samuel Deutsch Professor Sydney Hans and SSA doctoral students Renee C. Edwards, A.B. ’00, A.M. ’08, Nucha Isarowong, A.M. ’02, Chengshi Shiu, Matthew Thullen, A.M. ’04, and Project Director Linda G. Henson, A.M. ’85 (Social Sciences), presented a poster “Social Support and the Trajectory of Depression in Young Mothers” at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development.

Voisin Named Juvenile Justice Board Member

Associate Professor Dexter Voisin was recently appointed as a board member to the Illinois Statewide Committee for Juvenile Justice Programs, Disproportionate Minority Subcommittee. During the 2010-2011 academic year, Voisin was one of three faculty members selected to serve as an Academic Leadership Fellow to represent the University of Chicago on the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, which is composed of 12 major research universities.
African-American Childhood Conference


Second Annual American Indian Conference at SSA

SSA hosted the “American Indian Urban Families and Communities Living Cultures, Education and Social Work and Policy Conference” on April 2. Organized by SSA first-year doctoral student Tasha Seneca Keyes, the conference introduced attendees to the history of American Indians living in cities and examined the challenges and barriers faced by families in accessing social services and education in Chicago. Arizona State University Distinguished Foundation Professor of History and Affiliate Faculty of American Indian Studies Don Fixico presented the keynote address, “The Modern Indian from Relocation to Cities.”

Migrant Rights Symposium

The symposium “Migrant Rights in an Era of Globalization: The Mexico-US Case” was held on April 13. Panelists discussed the political economy of transnational labor citizenship and emigrant and immigrant organizing in the United States. SSA doctoral students Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro and Jacob Lesniewski co-organized the event, which featured Associate Professors Virginia Parks and William Sites as panelists. The symposium was co-sponsored by the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration, the Center for Latin American Studies, the Katz Center for Mexican Studies, the Human Rights Program of the University of Chicago, and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture.

Poverty, Promise, and Possibility

As part of the year-long series of public discussions, SSA is hosting “Poverty, Promise and Possibility: A University of Chicago Convening on Poverty and How to Combat It,” an initiative to bring together the University’s scholarly resources on issues of poverty. On January 20, Frank P. Hixon Distinguished Service Professor Charles Payne presented “Reforming Urban Schools at Scale,” and on April 7, Associate Professor...
Student in Government
A vision for better public policy helped Ameya Pawar become one of Chicago’s new aldermen

WHEN AMEYA PAWAR, a second-year Administration student at SSA, ran his “Pawar for the People” campaign for alderman of Chicago’s 47th Ward, his goal was to run an independent campaign, to “stay positive” and to build a platform around public policy. Now, with the election behind him, he’s working to find time to fit in school, an internship, work, life—and being alderman-elect.

Pawar, S.M. ’09 (Graham), launched his campaign with his field director, fellow student Jim Poole, soon after they started at SSA in October of 2009. Together, they worked every weekend and knocked on thousands of doors. In February, Pawar won with a 1,000 vote margin over 35-year incumbent Eugene Schulter’s hand-picked would-be successor, Tom O’Donnell. “We ran this on a shoestring budget,” Poole says. “So we worked hard pounding the pavement and meeting ward voters. The size of one’s campaign chest should not decide public policy.”

Pawar says his number one priority as alderman will be to address Chicago’s budget deficit, with education, affordable housing, reducing crime and TIF reform rounding out his ambitious goals. He says he’s also adamant about breaking the “culture of clout” in the city, intending to build transparency, including establishing a ward assembly: a replica city council on the ward level. “Transparency is not just about posting things to a website,” Pawar says. “It’s about putting information together in a digestible way to create community-level discussion that causes systemic change.”

Pawar, who works in Northwestern University’s Office of Emergency Management, says that one of the reasons he applied to SSA’s master’s program was his admiration of the work of SSA Associate Professor Scott Allard, including his book, Out of Reach: Place, Poverty and the New American Welfare State. Scott, remembering Pawar’s time in his class last year, is confident in his abilities. “In class he demonstrated the ability to hear many different sides to an issue, respect different opinions and take alternative perspectives into account when formulating his own views—traits I expect will be useful on the City Council,” he says.

Pawar says he decided to run for office because of a combination of his work at Northwestern and the experience of his first-year SSA field placement with Heartland Alliance. There, he worked to resettle refugees from around the world with Charna Epstein, A.M. ’05, S.M. ’09 (Graham), who was also in Ameya’s cohort in the Threat and Response Management program. Pawar, Epstein and Scott Simon, S.M. ’09 (Graham), recently completed a book, Emergency Management and Social Intelligence: A Comprehensive All-Hazards Approach, which will be available from CRC Press in late 2011. “The authors say that there was an absence of a human side to emergency response and the book gives ideas to formulate better responses.”

Pawar also developed an iPhone application, Chicago Works, in conjunction with his campaign that allows a user to report service problems and provide feedback to their alderman by simply taking a photo of a problem such as a pothole. The app determines coordinates via GPS and sends the photos to Pawar’s campaign office. He hopes the City of Chicago will bid on the app and that all calls will eventually route to the city’s 311 system.

When asked about which SSA classes helped prepare him for his career and public office, Pawar says that Dean Neil Guterman’s clinical core class was one of the most valuable. “Dean Guterman taught us how to talk with people, how to rephrase questions and adapt my message to a diverse range of people,” Pawar says. “This became a very useful skill during my campaign.”

“When Ameya announced he was running for alderman in our class last year—with Jim by his side as his campaign manager—I think his classmates were a bit wide-eyed and at the same time immediately supportive of both,” Guterman says. “It’s this kind of imagination that we like to see and nurture in our students, and now Ameya will have the opportunity to serve his ward and the city with skills and knowledge he’s gained from his studies at SSA.”

Pawar and Poole say that they hope to create SSA field placements in the alderman’s office and hire second-year students to learn and work on policy and advocacy issues. “Working on this campaign with the residents of the 47th Ward has been one of the greatest learning experiences of my life,” Poole says. “There’s no better way to serve this city than by giving that same opportunity to future students at SSA so they can inform their own practice.” — Julie Jung
Scott W. Allard, presented “Places in Need: The Changing Geography of Poverty in the U.S.”

SSA Screens Infant Mortality Documentary

On April 6, SSA screened the documentary film, “Crisis in the Crib: Saving Our Nation’s Babies,” which examines the high rates of infant mortality in the African-American community. The film was produced and written by Tonya Lewis Lee, spokeswoman for A Healthy Baby Begins with You campaign, and wife of filmmaker Spike Lee. Prior to the event, nine SSA students were trained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health to be pre-conception peer educators about issues of infant mortality, healthy relationships, and pre-natal health and obesity. Assistant Professor Alida Bouris was the faculty sponsor for the students.

Speaker Series

Several lectures were offered to the SSA community during the winter and spring quarters. On February 9, Professor Todd Gitlin, chair of the Ph.D. program at Columbia Journalism School at Columbia University, presented “The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel and the Ordeals of Divine Election.” On March 16, SSA Helen Harris Perlman Visiting Professor Benjamin Gidron presented “Social Enterprise: An Analysis of the Concept from an International Social Welfare Perspective.” Flemming Larsen, associate professor at Aalborg University in Denmark, presented “Labor Market Policies and the Danish Welfare State: Current Trends and Issues” on April 28. Ian Shaw, professor of social work at the University of York in England, presented “Practice and Research: Chicago Stories” on May 4.

SSA at SSWR

SSA was once again well-represented at the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research, this year held in Tampa, Fla., over January 13-16. Many faculty members and students gave presentations or presented a poster, including Dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor Neil Guterman, Assistant Professor Jennifer Bellamy, Associate Professor Yoonsun Choi, Professor Mark Courtney, Assistant Professor Malitta Engstrom, Assistant Professor Matthew Epperson, Professor Colleen Grogan, Samuel Deutsch Professor Sydney Hans, Associate Professor Julia Henly, Assistant Professor Heather Hill, Dean of Students Penny Johnson, Associate Professor Susan Lambert, George Herbert Jones Distinguished Service Professor Jeanne C. Marsh, Assistant Professor Jennifer Mosley, Helen Ross Professor Harold Pollack, David and Mary Winton Green Professor Tina Rzepnicki, Emily Klein Gidwitz Professor Michael Sosin and Associate Professor Dexter Voisin.

Assistant Professor Jennifer Bellamy organized the symposium Engaging Fathers in Child and Family Services to Improve Parenting and Reduce Child Maltreatment. Professor Mark Courtney organized the symposium Lessons from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth Organizer. Assistant Professor Matthew Epperson organized the symposium Research That Informs HIV Prevention Intervention Among Women in the Criminal Justice System. George Herbert Jones Distinguished Service Professor Jeanne C. Marsh, with Hee-Choon Shin and Dingcai Cao, organized the symposium Access Services in Substance Abuse Treatment in Specialty and Non-Specialty Settings.

Study Abroad Students Share Experiences from Mumbai

At the 2010 Study Abroad Report Back Panel on February 7, eight students who accompanied Associate Professor Robert Chaskin on the August fieldwork trip to Mumbai highlighted their experiences in the presentation, “Poverty, Marginalization, and Challenges to Community Practice in India.” For more than three weeks they studied in the classroom at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and in the field in Mumbai, India’s largest city.

Spring Award Season

Mental health luminaries receive the Edith Abbott and

Jona Rosenfeld is widely regarded as an architect of research-informed and tested mental health services for the State of Israel. The first full professor at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Professor Rosenfeld was the first mental health officer in the Israeli Army and much of his clinical work has been with Holocaust survivors. He is the author of more than 100 publications and studies, including five books. His research and work have had a direct impact on international thinking about how to engage populations who experience extreme poverty and marginalization.

Charles Curie is the former Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Appointed by President George
New Grants and Gifts
Total $1.25 million

Philanthropic foundations, corporations and individuals have made grants and gifts to SSA totaling $1.25 million in the first four months of 2011. The largest set of support for SSA was for the work of Hermon Dunlap Smith Professor Melissa Roderick with Chicago Public Schools, which garnered a total of $684,000 in grants from various private Chicago foundations including, Polk Bros. Foundation, McDougall Family Foundation and the Spencer Foundation, as well as from JP Morgan Chase. SSA is working closely with CPS to improve high schools’ capacity to help seniors identify colleges that match their interests and prepare themselves more thoroughly for successful college life.

The University of Chicago Crime Lab, led by SSA’s McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service, Law and Public Policy Jens Ludwig and Helen Ross Professor Harold Pollack, received major support from the McCormick Foundation and Joyce Foundation for its implementation of an intervention trial that teaches youth nonviolent and respectful approaches to resolving conflicts and disagreements at 12 urban schools.

The Irving B. Harris Foundation has continued its multi-year support for SSA training programs for social workers whose clients are disadvantaged mothers. Led by Samuel Deutsch Professor Sydney Hans, School researchers are creating a professional development tool-kit for supporting social workers and paraprofessionals who provide childbirth education and support to adolescent mothers.

Other grants for SSA researchers include support for Assistant Professor Alida Bouris’ study of training to reduce substance use and HIV rates in minority communities by the National Institutes of Health and the University of California at San Francisco. The National Institute of Justice and Rutgers University have provided support for Assistant Professor Matthew Epperson’s comparative evaluation of court-based responses to offenders with mental illnesses and an evaluation of a specialized mental health caseload program in New Jersey.

More than $200,000 has been contributed by SSA alumni since January for strategic initiatives and student support. Special gifts from Claire Axelrod, A.M. ’43, Christina Ledley, A.M. ’58, Renee Logan, A.M. ’70, Linda Kelly Lymburn, A.M. ’80, Beatrice Mayer and Marilyn Rusnak, A.M. ’71 have supported program developments in violence prevention, international social work study abroad, field education endowment, facilities and student scholarships.

For information about charitable giving contact Steve Gilmore, associate dean for external affairs, 773.702.1146 or write to sgilmore@uchicago.edu.

Stephanie Kutzen, A.M. ’78, was named Social Worker of the Year in the NASW Illinois Northeastern District at an awards ceremony on March 10. Kutzen is founder and director of Employee Consultation Services, a human resources consulting firm in Chicago. She specializes in designing, managing and evaluating services related to corporate social responsibility, specifically the relationship between corporate activity and social issues. She is also an adjunct professor at the Jane Addams School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago and at the Dominican University Graduate School of Social Work.

Donna Barrows, A.M. ’79, and Muriel Quinn, A.M. ’98, hosted an alumni reception at Barrows’ Oak Park home on January 30. Dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor Neil Guterman discussed SSA’s Interdisciplinary Scholars Network, the growing International Program and his path into becoming a social worker whose interests include the prevention of child maltreatment.

ConverSSAtions, sponsored by the SSA Alumni Association’s Network and Professional Development Committee, is a workshop and networking series that provides an opportunity for alumni to discuss a theme-based topic central to social work. The 2011 series kicked off on February 8, as Nicole Hirycy, A.M. ’04, a program analyst for the General Office of Evaluation and Inspections at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, led the discussion “Social Work and the Impact of Evaluation and Health Care.” On March 8, Program Supervisor Jacob Dancer, A.B. ’89, A.M. ’04, led the discussion, “Therapy and Beyond-The Role of Social Work” at UCAN. At the Ounce of Prevention Fund on April 12, Margie Wallen, A.M. ’83, Joyce Weiner, A.M. ’82, and Karen Yarbrough, A.M. ’01, led the discussion, “Improving Public Policies for Young Children.”

Alumni gathered at the home of Donna Barrows for a reception on January 30.
During his career, Wulczyn’s work has focused on defining social problems, developing social policy and assessing the impact of public investments. Wulczyn pioneered electronic records analysis to better understand the experiences of children and families in the welfare system, and he was the architect of Chapin Hall’s Multi-state Foster Care Data Archive. In collaboration with Argonne National Laboratories, Wulczyn’s latest work connects data resources to agent-based simulation models, further expanding the research base in the field.

As of March 1, Metropolitan Family Services named Ricardo Estrada, A.M. ’93, president and chief executive officer. Metropolitan Family Services provides a wide range of services, from early childhood programs to elder care, to more than 45,000 families in Chicago and suburbs. Estrada most recently served as first deputy commissioner for the City of Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services; prior to working for the city he was president and chief executive officer of Erie Elementary Charter School in Chicago and president of Erie Neighborhood House.

Jinnie English, A.M. ’99, hosted the career preparation workshop for the University of Chicago Office of Multicultural Affairs, “Your Ick Factor” on January 26. English, the CEO of the personal and professional development firm Chicago High Achievers, shared her experience and expertise on understanding the laws of social attraction and rejection, and how these laws can be used to better connect with colleagues in professional settings.

Emily Sameth Shafer, A.M. ’50, died away on February 19. During the 1950s, she worked as a caseworker in Los Angeles and after moving to Seattle she joined Neighborhood House, an organization that helps people with limited resources attain self-sufficiency, financial independence, health, and community building. She served on the organization’s board and worked with children in its Head Start Program.

Katherine A. Kendall, Ph.D. ’50, died in December 2010 at the age of 100. Her dissertation at SSA formed the basis of the First International Survey of Social Work of the United Nations and led to the U.N. resolution on the need for social work education. Active in the International Association of Schools of Social Work for 60 years, Kendall was the child administrative officer of the association from 1954 to 1978, when she retired and became a lifetime member of the IASSW board of directors. At the age of 90, Kendall wrote about the early development of social work training in Great Britain and continental Europe in her book, Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe, which traces Victorian reformers’ efforts to remodel charity work as scientific philanthropy, as well as the establishment in 1899 of the first school of social work. Kendall received SSA and University alumni awards in 1971, 1981 and 1993.

Robert Barnes, A.M. ’68, died on March 5 after a prolonged illness. Barnes was employed with Metropolitan Family Services for 40 years. She worked in several offices that provide schools-based and counseling services and created the Life Management Skills program that helped increase the graduation rate at Chicago’s Marshall High School more than 12 percent in 1995.

Patricia Doi, A.M. ’69, died on February 3. She was in private practice for 30 years as a psychotherapist working with individuals and families. Toward the end of her career, she was also a life coach and she facilitated a support group for women with breast cancer. She lived in Denver.

SSA Magazine has learned of the death of Judith Hope Glassman, A.M. ’78.
PROTECTING POLICY GAINS

Threats to government investments in child care are shortsighted

An oft-touted success of the 1996 welfare reform was the authorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), federal funding to states to assist low-income working families with their child care expenses. Indeed, federal funding for child care more than doubled in the first five years after welfare reform. Through the CCDBG, the federal government signaled its commitment to supporting parents’ work efforts and children’s well-being.

Many states followed suit, supplementing federal CCDBG dollars with a combination of state general revenue dollars and additional funds diverted from their Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programs. All told, more than $12 billion dollars was spent by state and federal governments to subsidize the child care costs of low-income families in 2009.

But state child care assistance programs are currently in crisis. At the federal level, CCDBG funding remained flat through most of the last decade, despite serious unmet demand. The much-welcomed $2 billion CCDBG supplement provided to states as part of the 2009 stimulus package prevented steep declines in state child care spending during the Great Recession. However, stimulus funds are quickly drying up, many states remain in serious fiscal crisis and child care caseloads are falling. In Illinois alone, the average monthly number of children served by CCDBG funds in 2009 was 68,000, down from 82,200 in 2006 and 103,000 during the strong economy of 2001.

Should we see further declines in child care spending next year—encouraged by state and federal governments to make their budget cuts and rapidly grow their unemployment insurance programs, the vast majority of eligible participants, and additional cuts would undoubtedly spur further caseload declines. Moreover, spell lengths are short (often just a few months) and there is considerable cycling off and on the subsidy system over time. This instability—even when parents remain eligible for benefits—suggests that the current system is not realizing its full potential. Further research is needed to understand the factors that explain subsidy instability, but short eligibility periods and cumbersome application procedures are likely contributors, as are fluctuating and unstable employment circumstances that make it difficult for recipients to successfully comply with program requirements.

To increase stability, there is growing interest in revising eligibility criteria to reduce the transaction costs of application and recertification and to relax the overly tight link between work schedules and child care schedules. Such measures would be a welcome step toward increasing subsidy duration and reducing instability for current recipients; however, unless funding were to increase, these changes might have the unintended consequence of further limiting program access to new entrants. Expanded child care funding, then, is a critical piece of improving the operation of the subsidized child care subsidy system and its full potential.

Child care spending is economic stimulus. Reducing government spending on child care assistance may undermine our already sluggish economy. A recent economic impact analysis by Illinois Action for Children found that child care and early education spending acts as an economic engine by increasing the workforce participation of parents receiving subsidies, directly contributing to job creation in the child care and early education sector, and indirectly fueling growth in other industries as new workers (parents and providers) purchase services with their new earnings.

Funding declines could exacerbate ongoing program challenges. Current funding levels for the child care subsidy system do not cover the vast majority of eligible participants, and additional cuts would undoubtedly spur further caseload declines. Moreover, spell lengths are short (often just a few months) and there is considerable cycling off and on the subsidy system over time. This instability—even when parents remain eligible for benefits—suggests that the current system is not realizing its full potential. Further research is needed to understand the factors that explain subsidy instability, but short eligibility periods and cumbersome application procedures are likely contributors, as are fluctuating and unstable employment circumstances that make it difficult for recipients to successfully comply with program requirements.

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Number of children who receive child care subsidized by state and federal government

For full citations for this column, visit ssa.uchicago.edu.

Julia R. Henly is an associate professor at SSA.
There are many ways you can contribute to SSA. Consider making a gift this year: http://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/givingtossa/givingtossa.shtml
Or contact ymodley@uchicago.edu or 773.702.1431

D. MICHAEL COY, AM ’06, LCSW

“I give to the SSA Fund, as well as have donated my time to the School, because I am deeply committed to supporting continued excellence in education and fostering an abiding sense of community for students and Alumni alike.”

ROANNA COOPER, AM Candidate, 2011

“I have been struck from the very beginning of our time at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai, India by the overwhelming foundation of self-empowerment that exists in notions of “social work” [in India].

SUSAN ROSAS, AM Candidate, 2011

“My SSA field placement, the International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA), has really mobilized behind my research last summer in Cambodia about what happens to youth when they “age-out” of orphanage care. I am grateful not only for the opportunity to receive a stellar education at the University of Chicago and to educate myself on this issue, but to be able to communicate my findings and galvanize support for this severely marginalized and entirely overlooked population.”

LAURA SLOMAN, AM Candidate, 2011

“Without this scholarship, I honestly don’t know how I would have afforded this magnificent education. I’ve known for years that I wanted to work in schools, and my coursework in the concentration has only solidified that desire. I am very happily busy running groups, writing case studies, and providing individual clinical services to a wide variety of students. My placement has pushed me in so many ways, considering the diverse population and the needs of the students. I am surely twice as skilled a practitioner now.”