

The Family Therapy News

Spring semester 2010

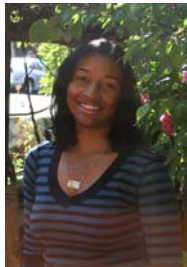
From the director

It's great to see our program changing and growing, most recently with our decision to hire a new faculty member to fill the faculty position that was open due to the retirement of Joe Brown.



Dana
Christensen

The program was fortunate to have several top candidates from around the country. We were even more fortunate to be able to hire Emma Sterrett, who will join us in the fall of 2011. Emma is completing her Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of North Carolina; she received her master's degree in marriage and family therapy at Northwestern University.



Emma
Sterrett

Emma already has a strong record of scholarship and research; she is also an excellent supervisor and a warm and engaging teacher. Her research interests include the role and potential influence of mentors in the lives of high-risk adolescents, as well as issues and concerns that affect the African-American family. We all look forward to her joining us after she completes her internship.

Students may recall that Emma visited the program last year and spent time with the first-year supervision class led by Eli Karam and Joe Brown. Emma and Eli were in school together at Northwestern and share many interests in the family therapy field.

Of course we can't really replace Joe Brown, a co-founder of our program and a leader in the field. At the same time, our newer faculty members are building on Joe's work, including the psycho-educational models he developed for Kentucky's family court system. And Joe's own work continues, even though he's no longer in the classroom -- we catch up with him later in the newsletter.

-- Dana Christensen

Upcoming events

Alumni retreat for 2010 graduates-to-be

It's a tradition for the most recent alums of the MFT program to hold a retreat to help prepare current MFT students -- especially those graduating in May -- for the world of work. The 2010 retreat will likely be in March -- details will be coming soon.

KAMFT conference Feb. 25 and 26

This year's Kentucky Association of Marriage and Family Therapy conference will feature **couples therapist Bill Doherty**, director of the MFT program at the University of Minnesota and author of books for both couples (*Take Back Your Marriage*) and therapists (*Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods*). Register at www.kamft.org.

All Kent first- and second-year MFT students are expected to attend KAMFT and can lower the cost by volunteering. Second-year students Fran Ellers and Jane Owens are **coordinating student volunteers and food** (and they get to attend free as a result). The KAMFT will be looking to next year's graduating class **to fill those slots for 2011!** **Please let Fran or Jane know if you are interested.**

AAMFT conference 2010

The national conference will be Sept. 23-26 in Atlanta. Given that the location is drivable, we hope several UL students and faculty will attend. Student AAMFT members can volunteer and thus attend the conference at a much-reduced rate. More info later this spring at www.aamft.org.

Program news

Curriculum changes

Our transition to a new sequence and schedule of courses is going well -- and for the most part, it will be complete at the end of this year. If you are not familiar with this change, the curriculum was basically spread out some. First-year MFT students now begin in the summer (before the rest of the MSSW students) to prepare for providing therapy in their first-year practicum. First-year students also take critical clinical practice courses in the fall and spring, and that lightens their class load in the second year. As part of these changes, **Dana Christensen will offer a seminar in the 2011 cohort's final semester to help prepare them for professional life.** Dana is developing the seminar this spring with this year's graduating cohort, which is attending on a voluntary basis.

Changing practicum sites

Students are already begun setting up interviews for their first- and second-year practica. Program faculty have been conducting an **ongoing review of the program's practicum sites** to ensure they are meeting the needs of the students and the agencies. In the past, some of the first-year placements have provided limited opportunities for clinical work with families and relationships. Among other things, we are interested in sites which will allow students to provide psycho-education (such as a healthy relationships class or parenting class) and at least one which will offer medical family therapy, a growing part of our field.

Accreditation -- again

We were so happy to be finished with our program accreditation last year -- but evaluation is always ongoing! This coming year, we will be taking part in the **six-year review of our Post-Master's MFT Certificate Program**. Our self-study is already underway; there will be a site visit in about a year and we will receive results of the review in late 2011.

What's new with ...

Students

Faculty search

Rachel Thompson, a two-year student who will graduate in May, took part in all the interviews and colloquia during the MFT faculty search; three candidates came to campus for interviews and presentations. It was a great experience, Rachel said: *"From a student perspective, it meant a lot to have faculty actually solicit my opinion and ideas when it came to who I believed would best fit into this program. Each candidate presented strengths that would have been very beneficial here at Kent School, everything from diverse clinical experiences to unique research passions. Even so, I believe that we were able to choose an individual who will help this program flourish in the years to come."*



Rachel Thompson

KSSA Board

Continuing a tradition of MFT program service on campus, two MFT students are on the board of the Kent School Student Association. **Tauheedah Wallace** is the KSSA social chair/event coordinator & graduate student council representative. **Rachel Thompson** is the group's secretary.

Students in focus: Karen Sheets and Laura Wagner, post-master's certificate students

Karen Sheets and **Laura Wagner** are the first two post-master's certificate students in the newly revived program. They'll each accumulate 17 credit hours and 1,000 client hours over the next two years to prepare for MFT licensure. They started their course work with the 2011 MSSW-MFT cohort in the summer of 2009. They will also finish about the same time, in the spring of 2011.

As post-master's students, Karen and Laura are **accumulating their practicum hours at their work sites**; the hours count toward their licensure. Because of the way the program is designed, they arrange for their own supervision under the approval of the program and then contract with their supervisors directly (instead of paying tuition for supervision). **Since there are only two of them in the first year of the new program, they have had their share of problem-solving to do.** Their own friendship has made it easier -- close to the same age, they share a sense of humor and many life experiences, including growing up in Louisville. According to Program Director Dana Christensen, *"We couldn't have been more fortunate to have Laura and Karen as our first students in the revised, more independent program. **They bring something special to each discussion** and they are just positively focused individuals."*

Here's a little more about them, why they returned to school and what their experience has been like so far.

Karen

Karen, 37, received her MSSW at UofL in 2002. She had obtained a bachelor's in psychology from Murray State several years earlier but wasn't ready to go on to graduate school just yet. She waited tables and took entry level jobs at agencies such as Home of the Innocents and Family Place, then enrolled in the Kent master's program aiming to become a therapist, a goal from the time she was a teen.



Karen Sheets

But after taking inspiring classes in social policy and advocacy from Rod Barber and Dan Wulff, Karen changed her focus: **"I wanted to affect as many people as I could."** For several years she worked at Dayspring, which serves people with intellectual disabilities, and later at Seven Counties Services as a case manager in developmental services.

While she enjoyed advocating on behalf of her clients, Karen eventually realized that she really *did* want to move into therapy -- and now that she is a **therapist at Seven Counties West**, she feels she's found her place. She credits her life experience with helping her hit the ground running: *"I'm able to recognize patterns of family dynamics that I might not have been able to see before."* Also, having spent time in therapy herself, she's got a natural frame of reference: *"I don't think I could do this work without having had my own experience."*

Laura

Laura, 38, received her master's in school counseling at Spalding University in 2002. At the time she was teaching at Presentation Academy and was able to get her master's at no cost. She learned along the way she was more interested in doing counseling than the school setting. "***This was always my call.*** *From the time I got the master's I knew I wanted to be a therapist,*" she said.



Laura Wagner

Still, she knew she needed more training and it wasn't in the cards just then -- not with a young daughter and a full-time job. She worked for awhile as a school counselor, then as an academic adviser at UL; she is now an **academic adviser and counselor at Family Scholar House**, working with single parents who are trying to get a college degree. Like Karen, she feels like she's getting her sea legs as a therapist: "*When I leave a session with our clients, I realize it's working. Therapy is a skill and it's intuitive as well.*"

Today, Laura and her husband, Bobby, also have an 20-month old son in addition to their 9-year-old daughter. **Managing the household, job and school -- and their family business, a funeral home -- can sometimes be overwhelming**, Laura said. There are moments when she feels less connected than some of the full-time master's MFT students; on the other hand, she and Karen have received lots of support from them, she said. As post-master's students, "*We're inquisitive, we have a lot to offer,*" she said. "*We also have a lot to learn from our younger counterparts. I feel like I'm kind of just in it with them.*"

Faculty

Publications and presentations

Brown, J., Bledsoe, L., Yankeelov, P., Christensen, D., Rowan, N., Cambron, M. 2000. PACT: A collaborative model for treating high-conflict families in family court. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 60(2), 49-67.

Faculty in focus -- Joe Brown

Dr. Joe Brown, co-founder of the MFT program at UofL, is well known as the therapist and researcher who **developed the Families In Transition (FIT) program** operated by the Kentucky court system for divorcing families. Since 1992 in Kentucky, all divorcing families with children from ages 5 to 17 have been required to spend six hours participating in FIT, which is designed to help children adjust to divorce with the help of their parents. The state Administrative Office of the Courts operates the program.



Joe Brown

After FIT was well underway, Kentucky family-court judges called on Brown and his colleagues for even more help. About 20 to 25 percent of families who go through FIT wind up in court again arguing over custody, visitation, or other issues, tying up much of the court's time. Is there any way to reduce this? The resulting **program Brown developed for high-conflict families, PACT, has been piloted** in Jefferson County for the last two and half years; however, it has not yet been expanded by the AOC because of the state's budget shortfalls during the recession.

In the meantime, **yet another problem has become more pressing** for family courts, and again, judges have turned to Dr. Brown. We asked him to tell us about the new program he is developing with colleagues at the Kent School.

FTN: What is the problem you're trying to address?

Brown: *Judges are having tremendous problems with unmarried parents in their teens or 20s. The rates of violence for this population have been increasing. In general, domestic violence is underreported when people are not married, but it gets reported in family courts.*

So they asked us to come up with a program for this population and we did -- it's called Parenting Time. It lasts eight hours and focuses on three areas -- taking on parental roles and responsibilities, developing healthy relationships and working cooperatively on issues such as custody and visitation. Their goal is to stay out of the court system and decrease violence.

FTN: How do you get people to participate?

Brown: *They're referred to the program through family court in Jefferson County and there's a small fee. We have offered FIT through the courts but we're offering Parenting Time through Neighborhood Place because often these families often require social services and Neighborhood Place can provide them. (We're also building on our previous partnership with Neighborhood Place on the Within My Reach program on healthy relationships for unmarried individuals.)*

Our first pilot, at South Central Neighborhood Place, ended in December. We had a total of six families (12 parents) complete it. It went very well. We are conducting research on a variety of purposes and will keep tabs on them. We're getting ready to pilot this with a different Neighborhood Place in the first week of March.

FTN: When will you expand Parenting Time?

Brown: *Once it's evaluated, revised and fully field tested, we hope to expand it to other parts of the state. Becky Antle will be involved in the research and we intend to apply to several federal agencies for grant funding so we can continue to test it.*

I'm also hoping we'll be able to expand PACT soon. There's not much you can do when there's just no money in the state budget for additional programs. But we're developing research support for it. I'm very encouraged.

FTN: What does the research show?

Brown: *We found that parents assigned to the PACT program were able to reduce their level of triangulation and overall conflict versus a control group, though there were no significant differences in regard to parents returning to court. This was likely due to the fact that there was not enough time between the end of the program and the evaluation period (less than a year).*

Moreover, judges were more likely to refer the highest conflict parents to the PACT program, which may have increased the likelihood that PACT parents returned to court. Overall, upon completion of the program, the majority of PACT parents would recommend the program to others.

Alumni

Practicing successfully out west



Ephraim Hanks and his family

We were delighted to hear from 2005 graduate **Ephraim Hanks, LCSW, CMFTI, who is now clinical director at Diamond Ranch Academy** in Hurricane, Utah. Diamond Ranch is one of the largest residential treatment centers for adolescents in the U.S.

(www.diamondranchacademy.com). Immediately after graduating from the two-year MFT program at Kent, Ephraim worked as a school counselor at St.

Andrew Academy in Louisville, then he and his wife moved back to Utah in 2006. He was hired as a

therapist at Diamond Ranch and worked his way up.

Ephraim reports that he is the proud father of 3 little boys ages 4, 2, and 1. He adds, "I **use my MFT training daily in helping struggling teens and their families.** I am so grateful for my Kent School training and the experiences my wife and I had while living in Kentucky. We have fond memories of our time in the Midwest. Hope all is well at UofL. Go Cards!!" You can contact him at ehanks@diamondranchacademy.com or (435) 635-4297, ext. 106.

Where are they now?

We like to keep track of our graduates and what they're doing upon leaving the MFT program. All of the 2009 graduates are now working in the field. Here's what they're doing:

Kimi Amy -- therapist, Seven Counties Services

Peggy Carter -- therapist, Seven Counties

Harriet Clarke -- therapist in private practice, Barbados

Andrew Davidson -- therapist, Morton Center

Chris Davis -- therapist, Family & Children's Place

Jennifer Hoertz -- therapist, Brooklawn

Kelly Lee -- therapist, contracting for Transformations which provides Impact Plus services through Kentucky Medicaid to eligible children with complex behavioral problems

Enrica Macklin -- community care social worker for Wellspring, running groups for clients with dual diagnoses; assessment clinician for Our Lady of Peace

Debra Mudd -- remains employed at her original job at the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs in the mental health substance abuse unit; she is interviewing for therapist positions in the department

Charese Taylor -- therapist, Seven Counties

We want your stories!

We're eager to pass along more news about what alums are doing now. Please write Fran Ellers at fran.ellers@louisville.edu to let us know where and how you're using your MFT degree.

Reaching out to others

If you know an email address or phone number for a Kent MFT alum, please let us know. We're trying to update and expand our records. Email administrative assistant Nancy Bruner at nancy.bruner@louisville.edu.

Contact us

Program director **Dana Christensen** can be reached at dana.christensen@louisville.edu or 852-8975.

MFT program administrative assistant **Nancy Bruner** can be reached at nancy.bruner@louisville.edu or 852-0383.

Newsletter coordinator **Fran Ellers** can be reached at fran.ellers@louisville.edu or 502-641-2937 (cell).

You are receiving this newsletter because you are student, faculty or staff member, alum or friend of the Kent School Family Therapy program. If someone has forwarded this newsletter to you and you'd like to be added to the list, please send us an email (nancy.bruner@louisville.edu) with your full name and email address. We will be happy to add you. If you wish to be removed from this list, please send an email with "Remove" in the subject line to nancy.bruner@louisville.edu and we will remove your name.