

Child Welfare News #30—Summer 2007

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Studies

[The Impact of Absent Biological Parents in Kinship Care: Importance of Ambiguous Loss](#)

By Priscilla A. Gibson, PhD, LICSW and Amanda B. Harrington, MSW

Kinship care, because of its maintenance of familial relationships, has been cited as the preferred out-of-home living arrangement for children in need of care (Kolomer, 2000; Adoption and Safe Family Act, 1997). As child welfare agencies increasingly rely on kinship care for child placement, one of the major tasks of social workers will be to assist the caregiving relatives through knowledge of family dynamics. One important dynamic in the kinship care arrangement is the emotional construct known as ambiguous loss; in other words the emotional reactions of kinship providers and the children in care towards the biological parents (Boss, 1999).

Ambiguous loss is defined as an emotional reaction to a family member being either physically present but psychologically absent, or being psychologically present but physically absent (Boss, 1999). In either of these described situations, there is incongruence between the physical and psychological presence. As it relates to kinship care, the biological parents are not physically present in the household but are usually psychologically present – on the minds of – not only the child but also the kinship provider (Gibson, 2005).

Knowledge about ambiguous loss is important for child welfare workers who are expected to effectively work with kinship care families despite the lack of a substantial body of literature on the influencing factor of family relations. Working with aunts, uncles, godparents, siblings, stepparents, grandparents and grandchildren in kinship care, is different than working with non-kinship care providers. Working with relatives other than parents often requires the need for the social worker to account for all aspects of the contextual dynamics of their relationship. Kinship caregivers vary in their relationship to the children in care; however, this article focuses on grandparent caregivers who are in the role of surrogate parents. Grandparents accept the role more often than other relations.

Ambiguous Loss

According to Boss (1999), family members experience ambiguous loss by spending time thinking about the absent person but also wondering about their status and activities. Family members are unsure whether the missing person continues to be a part of the family system. While the loss is considered incomplete or uncertain, it is quite common in people's lives. Given the unknown status, the hopes of a return can be alternately raised and lowered.

Ambiguous loss has been found to occur in situations such as adoptions, incarcerations, and soldiers missing in action. These situations are similar in that significant family members are not present in their family roles. Their absence can cause the remaining family members to have conflicting thoughts and feelings. According to Boss (1999), these conflicts cause family members to question their role in the family and their identity.

Ambiguous Loss in Kinship Care

Biological parents who are physically absent from the kinship care household are present in the minds and hearts of the grandparents and grandchildren, which is congruent with Brown-Standridge and Floyd's (2000) description of the parental ghost and shadow that is a part of the grandparent/grandchild relationship. Poindexter and Linsk (1999) stated that the description of biological parents as constituting a skipped generation does not mean that they "are not missed or mourned by the generations above and below them" (p. 65). Both generations think about the biological parents. At times, both wonder about the parent's health and well-being. In some families, the status of the biological parents is openly discussed (Gibson, 2005). Regardless of whether kinship care is formal or informal, or a legal adoption or guardianship has occurred, biological parents remain important figures (Gibson).

As opposed to foster care with non-family members, in kinship care arrangements both grandparents and their grandchildren are usually emotionally connected to the biological parents. Goodman and Silverstein (2001) noted that grandparents grieve the lost relationship with their adult children. They lose the care and attention from a functioning adult child. In addition, the grandparents must deal with their grandchildren's adjustment to the absent biological parents as well as their own.

For grandchildren in kinship care, the parenting role of their biological parents is replaced by their grandparents. It is no wonder that the biological parents in this situation are described as the absent middle generation (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994). Gibson (2005) found that grandchildren experience intense emotions about their biological parents including worrying about and being angry with them. Weber and Waldrop (2000) legitimized the strong feelings of both generations when they stated that both the child in care and the caregiver feel abandoned by the biological parents.

Implication for Child Welfare Practice

Experiencing ambiguous loss is normal and family members can adjust to it (Boss, 1999). These feelings do not diminish the strength of the kinship care arrangement. Weber and Waldrop (2000) caution about a "sleeper" effect with grandparents raising grandchildren, in which psychological or emotional issues remain dormant, then suddenly surface. Most importantly, Boss noted that ambiguous loss reactions are amenable to intervention. Educating grandparent caregivers about ambiguous loss is one way to help them understand emotions and behaviors that are difficult to comprehend. The absence of the biological parent ought to be discussed openly among family members (Boss). Open communication is one method that ensures the well-being of both grandparents and children in care can be supported. The following suggestions are provided to assist social workers helping kinship care providers:

Inform grandparents to expect that they and their grandchildren may experience ambiguous loss. Describe the term and provide examples. Explain that it is a normal reaction. Start such conversations by discussing how family members have experienced losses, and then move to a more specific discussion of ambiguous loss.

Encourage talking about the loss as a normal experience. Both grandparents and children in care may have various reasons to avoid admitting feelings of ambiguous loss. Talking about it, whether with a professional or between grandparent and grandchild, will only increase understanding about the feelings of loss.

Boss (1999) encouraged sharing information as a means of empowering family members. Grandparents may need assistance to comprehend that admitting to these feelings does not negate their effectiveness as caregivers or their affection for their adult children and grandchildren. Similarly, grandchildren will need to understand that their feelings of ambiguous loss do not reduce their affection for grandparents and appreciation of their caregiving.

Further, the grandparents may be afraid of further traumatizing the child while the child may not want to upset the grandparents.

Make referrals to community resources when appropriate or if grandparents request such services. Remember that you are dealing with a blood relationship in which both parties are emotionally interrelated. Grandparents and grandchildren should not be pathologized or penalized by those in the child welfare system because of their feelings of ambiguous loss. This family dynamic should be viewed as similar to other dynamics in kinship care families.

Avoid blame. Stress that neither the grandparents nor the children in care are to blame for the situation that prompted the caregiving arrangement. The use of blaming statements such as “the apple does not fall far from the tree” and “intergenerational transmission of poor parenting behaviors” ignore the multiple influences in one’s life in favor of a single reason for human behavior.

Ambiguous loss is an important aspect of the kinship care experience for not only children in care but their caregiving relatives, especially grandparents. In maintaining the caregiving arrangement, child welfare workers should help family members address the emotional dynamics as well as the concrete resources necessary in kinship care.

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CASCW Minn-LInK Project Releases Follow-up on Economic Outcomes of Former Senior Cohort of the Child Welfare High School Graduation Study

February 2007

In 2006 Minn-LInK released a report on the graduation outcomes of a group of adolescents who had had prior contact with the child protection system and found that seniors in the cohort had a 47% high school graduation rate. A follow-up study of the economic outcomes of these former seniors revealed that whether or not they graduated made a significant difference in their wage levels, number of work hours, and whether or not they used Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP, Minnesota’s welfare program for families) two years after leaving high school. Minn-LInK examined public assistance program use data from the Department of Human Services and employment data from the Department of Employment and Economic Development to find that high school graduation was a strong protective factor for economic well-being regardless of race, gender, or poverty in

high school. Practice recommendations revolve around the need for schools and social service agencies to be held jointly and substantively responsible for high school graduation outcomes of adolescents who become involved in child protection. These findings, as well as those from the original high school graduation study will be presented in May at the “Connections Matter” conference sponsored by DHS and the Minnesota Supreme Court.

A full copy of the report is on the CASCW website in the Minn-LInK section.

Discussion Paper on Child Care Assistance and Family Well-Being to be Released

March 2007

A growing body of research shows the short- and long-term child development value of quality early childhood programming and access to high quality child care. Child Care Assistance, which helps low income families pay for child care while they work or attend training, has long been viewed solely as an employment support for Welfare Reform in spite of the fact that two goals of the program have been formally articulated; employment support and the improvement of access to developmentally appropriate care for children, providing two ways in which families in poverty can benefit. Ongoing research on poverty and families has improved our understanding of how being poor hurts children and puts them at greater risk for a number of negative outcomes, including abuse and neglect. Investment and Family Stress Theories have clarified the ways in which children in poverty are deprived materially of the things they need for proper development and the parental care and attention they need to thrive emotionally when families are economically stressed. This paper offers an explanation and discussion for how CCAP, with its dual goals of stabilizing parental employment and improving access to quality child care, is well-positioned to address the needs of families at risk of child maltreatment. At the same time, Minnesota has reduced its investment in the program and fewer families are being served. One practice implication includes the consideration of parental access to quality child care resources when serving families who are low-income and pursuing employment or struggling to maintain employment, or when assisting families with children who have special needs with care options, due for release in summer, 2007. This paper precedes a study of families who lost access to CCAP in Minnesota during the 2003 legislative cuts to the program. These studies are jointly produced by CASCW’s Minn-LInK project and the Department of Human Services.

Second Phase of Racial Disparities Study Completed

March 2007

Susan J. Wells, Gamble-Skogmo Professor in Child Welfare and Youth Policy, recently completed the second phase of a study of racial disparities in the Minnesota child welfare system. The study, initiated by the African American Disparities Committee of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2003, used data from the records of African American/Caucasian pairs of neglect cases (206 cases matched by gender, age, type of neglect, and county) in four Minnesota counties. Dr. Wells served as a consultant in the design and implementation of the case record reading in 2003. Since that time, she and her research assistants have analyzed the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In the qualitative study, analyzed by Maggie Griesgraber and Dr. Wells between September 2005 and December 2006, the text of a subset of 162 case records was analyzed to understand more deeply the characteristics, decisions and outcomes that occurred and whether race was a factor in any of these. Because age of the child is a major factor in risk assessment and decision-making the following age groups were established: less than one, one to four, five to nine, and ten to eleven. Themes emerged within the age groups around the nature of the problem, for example, nature of family crises and type of substance abuse. Within these themes, some racial patterns regarding referral for placement by age group were discovered. The type of parental problem such as drug abuse interacted with race in for some problem types such as parental capacity for child care, availability of resources and drug or alcohol involvement. Two themes appeared to be racially significant across all the age groups: involvement of the police in the case and the county in which the case occurred.

The quantitative re-analysis incorporated the new variables established by the qualitative study with the original quantitative variables. Some of the new variables arising from the qualitative study were: extent of history of maltreatment in the family, interaction of the worker and the family, extent of substance abuse, and existence of poverty. A multivariate analysis was performed to determine what factors predicted more severe interventions; that is, whether the case was referred for reunification services at any time during the intervention process. This analysis revealed racial disparities when the parent had problems with drugs or with the law, when there was a history of maltreatment, when the mother had financial problems (other than or in addition to needing public assistance), and when the parent did not follow through on plans (was uncooperative). Other significant variables that require more study included whether the biological father was in the household, whether the mother had cognitive, physical or mental disabilities, whether the worker indicated a negative judgment, in which county the case was opened, and whether the reporting source was a health professional.

For more information about the study, contact Principal Investigator Susan Wells at 612-624-4721 or swells@umn.edu. Maggie Griesgraber, MSW '06, was the research assistant for the qualitative study. The coordinator of the study at DHS was Maxie Rockymore, MSW '05, and assistance was provided by other staff at DHS and at each of the four participating counties. Others who contributed to the data analysis were Alex Beutel, Louis B. Carter, Scotty Daniels, Ila Kamath, Dinorah Martinez-Osorio, Mary Pfohl, and Nancey Riley.

Events

CASCW Hosts Discussion with 2006 Churchill Fellow Frances Evans

March 2007

On Monday, March 5, 2007, CASCW brought together selected staff and faculty from the School of Social Work for a lively discussion about adoption and permanency planning in Minnesota. Ann Hill, Ombudsperson for Minnesota families, made this arrangement on

behalf of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The School of Social Work and CASCW was one of many stops on an international tour that Frances Evans, a research project manager from Sydney, Australia, is making in order to learn more about best practices in permanency and adoption around the world. Frances is interested in this topic because Australia has had a negative out-of-home care history, associated with the placement of children in institutions and the use of adoption as a harmful social policy towards indigenous Australians. However, vast changes to the traditional notion and practice of adoption, accompanied by poor placement stability with the current system, have led to a renewed interest in legally permanent placements within out-of-home care.

Through this research project, Frances hopes to provide a solid base for the implementation of permanency in the out-of-home care system and impact current policy development in Australia. Her project was made possible through an opportunity from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. The overall aim of this Fellowship is to critically assess service models that promote, sustain and support legally permanent placements, such as adoption or guardianship.

Family Therapist and Diversity Authority Holds Workshop on “Invisible Wounds of Oppression”

March 2007

On Monday, March 5, 2007 the intimate theatrical space of the University of Minnesota Duluth’s Weber Music Hall was home to an audience of therapists, MSW students, professors, human service professionals, social workers, tribal child welfare professionals, church administrators, psychology students and veterans. Audience members traveled from across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Canada to listen to professor of family therapy, Dr. Kenneth Hardy at his workshop entitled, “Invisible Wounds of Oppression: Healing Our Clients, Healing Ourselves.”

“Invisible wounds are the culmination of ongoing experiences with injustice, degradation, and discrimination, which has a profound impact upon the course of therapy and its outcome”, said Dr. Hardy. Therapy and other human service work with members of racially oppressed groups can be complicated by the presence of invisible wounds. A lack of awareness and sensitivity to the wounds of oppression can stifle the joining process and unwittingly contribute to therapeutic ways of being and interventions that are counterproductive to effective treatment. Innocent acts of insensitivity are often unspoken, unacknowledged, micro-acts that contribute to the premature termination of therapy and the perceptions that oppressed people are resistant to treatment.

The geographically and professionally diverse audience, were challenged by Dr. Hardy to explore the idea they could be replicating acts of oppression for their clients and were challenged to explore ways their life experiences could enrich and/or constrain therapeutic work with clients of color. As one participant remarked, “My field is mental health, and some of our clients are American Indian. Dr. Hardy has broadened and humbled my perspective on race related issues and I found it very applicable to working with members

of our community who are mentally ill and oppressed by that stigma. It affects all racial, financial, and gender roles.”

Few professors or consultants have the life experience or training to tackle the complexity of racial oppression as it relates to human service and therapy however, Dr. Hardy was exceptionally qualified and highly recommended. As a Professor in the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy at Syracuse University who speaks nationally and internationally on issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competency he has received much acclaim for his literary contributions in publications such as USA Today, Jet Magazine, and Good Housekeeping. He has also been featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Dateline NBC, PBS, The Discovery Channel, and ABC’s 20/20. In addition to that he is co-author of the book, *Teens Who Hurt: Clinical Interventions for Breaking the Cycle of Youth Violence* published by Guilford Publications.

One of the objectives of the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies, co-sponsors of the workshop, is to teach graduate students about diversity and cultural competency in child welfare especially in relation to American Indian families and children. Teaching graduate students about diversity and cultural competency presents major instructional challenges. It not only requires knowledge about diverse cultures, but also insights into the history and dynamics of oppression in the U.S. Dr. Hardy’s workshop helped to meet this objective. As one student stated “Dr. Hardy had endless thought provoking things to share – I found them all so valuable. I feel very enlightened.”

The Department of Social Work along with the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies is hopeful the workshop facilitated the understanding on multiculturalism and racial diversity for students within the Masters of Social Work program at UMD and the community at large. Gauging by the narrative reactions of the therapists, MSW students, professors, human service professionals, social workers, tribal child welfare professionals, and psychology students present at the workshop – the lessons were well received. “It was the most meaningful workshop I have ever attended, and Ken’s way of pulling everyone together in community was outstanding!”

The presentation was videotaped. If you are interested in a copy of the DVD, please contact Patty Samberg at psamberg@d.umn.edu.

Thanks to a generous donation of Kathryn Martin’s Chancellors Diversity Grant the UMD Department of Social Work and the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies were able to co-sponsor this workshop.

Spring Family Policy Forum: Bridging the Divide between Policymakers and Researchers

February 2007

Although there are divergent views on the extent to which research informs or should inform policy, research reflects a general agreement that little direct communication exists between University researchers and policymakers. Nevertheless, the belief that

policymaking might very well benefit from more input from academic research continues to have support.

To begin to understand what challenges and opportunities exist for strengthening the partnership between policymakers and researchers, CASCW, with financial support from the University of Minnesota Council on Public Engagement, undertook a telephone survey of twenty Minnesota legislators (10 representatives and 10 senators, 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans) in the summer of 2006. The objective of the survey was to learn more about policymakers' views on research, its utility in their work, and what ideas they have for improving the collaboration.

The survey found that the majority of policymakers had experience with academic research prior to serving in the legislature. Most legislators also indicated using research in their work as legislators, primarily on early childhood, education, transportation, and health care issues. The most commonly cited source for obtaining research was nonpartisan House or Senate Research Departments, although legislators listed a number of other sources, including lobbyists, partisan House or Senate research, advocates, and the Legislative Reference Library. The most common purpose legislators cited for using research was to inform their position on a bill.

Most policymakers reported uncertainty when asked if researchers are researching the "right" issues because they are unsure what work is being done at the University. One legislator suggested that the fact that legislators are unsure speaks to the "big chasm between researchers and policymakers" (Male, Democrat). Half of legislators interviewed reported being contacted personally by a researcher, but the majority agreed that researchers and universities should be reaching out to legislators to share their work.

Half of legislators interviewed believe that academic research is generally unbiased, and those that express skepticism reported that researchers are affected by their own biases and that funding sources are biased. Aside from the issue of bias, legislators interviewed reported that academic research is limited in its utility if there is simply too much information, if it is formatted in a way that is inaccessible, and if research timelines are incompatible with the legislative calendar.

Legislators interviewed had numerous recommendations for improving the relationship between researchers and policymakers. The suggestions most frequently mentioned include formatting research findings in a way that is brief and accessible to non-academics, communicating regularly with policymakers regarding research being conducted at the University, sharing findings through multiple modalities besides written reports, targeting specific research findings to relevant legislative committees, and reaching out and building relationships with legislators and legislative staff.

These research findings were the topic of a recent Family Policy Forum on Friday, February 23rd at the McNamara Alumni Center. The 2-hour forum was attended by an audience of University of Minnesota faculty and students as well as community members. A panel, comprised of Representative Nora Slawik, Senator Gen Olson, Deborah Schlick, the

Executive Director from the Affirmative Options Coalition, and Karen Cadigan, the Director of Outreach and Public Policy at the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development, offered commentary on the research findings through their differing lenses as legislator, advocate, and University researcher.

The panel presentation and audience discussion made clear that bridging the divide between policymakers and researchers poses real challenges, including differing institutional cultures, timelines, and perhaps languages. Yet, those who remain consistently nonpartisan, are responsive, and make themselves available have found that the challenges are not insurmountable. In fact, there are some real opportunities for increased collaboration. The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare will continue to try to bridge this divide using the suggestions that came out of this study and forum, and with research and evaluation projects that are relevant to many policymakers at the legislature.

Financing the Future of Child Welfare: The Child Safety Act

February 2007

On Wednesday, February 28, Judith Brumfield was the featured speaker for the spring seminar, which is a required training event for the Child Welfare Scholars. Judith is currently the assistant director of community services at Scott County and has 30+ years of experience in county social service in the metro area. She currently chairs the Children's Committee for the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) which has led to extended involvement with statewide policy development on a plan for the future of children's services in Minnesota.

Judith discussed the status of the public child welfare program in Minnesota using the Child Safety Act proposal developed by the state county task force Financing the Future of Child Welfare. From a brief summary of both policy and financing decisions at the state and federal level the presentation moved to the present state and future potential for child welfare services. Students gained an understanding of how a changing political environment has an impact on what types of services are offered and how children are treated in a child protection system.

Confronting Challenges in Truancy: The Adolescent Involved in Substance Abuse

February 2007

The forum, "Confronting a Major Challenge in Truancy: The Adolescent Involved in Substance Abuse," February 9, 2007, grew out of a major concern that a significant portion of adolescents had records of low school attendance, were known as "chronic truants," and did not graduate from high school. Although the deficiencies in statewide, contemporary data limit our knowledge of the complexities involved in the "educational neglect" of adolescents, we can grasp the dimensions of the problems from the last available published data in 2001. Here, almost 10% of students dropped out of 9th grade, and only 78% graduated, but the startling data is revealed in the disparity rates of students of color. Here, almost 26% have dropped out of 9th grade, and only 50% have graduated.

Out of the thicket of overlapping concerns with troubled adolescents who could be involved in truancy, as a result of substance abuse, mental illness, or developmental delay, one issue in this forum was extracted for consideration: substance abuse.

A special invitation to this forum was issued to caseworkers and supervisors in three components of the human services systems who could be involved with substance-abusing adolescents: school social work; child protection; and probation.

The emergence of substance abuse as a compelling factor in truancy brings major attention to the importance of screening and assessment, as a pathway to treatment.

Ken Winters, Director, Center for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research, and Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Minnesota, provided a broad overview of screening and assessment instruments. He outlined six habits of highly effective assessors. Among these was the importance of using motivational interviewing, with its principle of encouraging the adolescent, in a reflective mode, to assume some responsibility for setting goals and strategies.

As Dr. Winters explained, the operational assumption in motivational interviewing is recognizing that ambivalence is the principal obstacle in overcoming a reluctance to change behavior. "Readiness to change is not a client trait." Developing a relationship in a respectful, counseling environment that elicits and clarifies the adolescent's ambivalence is more likely to mobilize and stimulate behavior change than an authoritative, direct approach.

In recognizing the "stages of change," Dr. Winters observed that it was important to differentiate the adolescent's usage of drugs/alcohol. There is a spectrum of addiction from experimenting to abuse, and finally to deep-end dependence. The validity of self-report in screening and the problem of "co-morbidity" provided the background of a vigorous exchange among forum participants. [Click here to see Dr. Winter's presentation.](#)

In addressing the complicated relationship that exists among practitioners in the settings of school social work, child protection, and probation, the central concern appears to be the issues of confidentiality and the privacy rights of the adolescent. To address these issues, Katherine Engler, Assistant Director, Information Policy Analysis Division, Minnesota Department of Administration, provided two scenarios and then examined the barriers and possibilities in arriving at a stage of shared data. With state and federal law guiding access to data and the penalties for inappropriate disclosure explicated (loss of federal funding, as well as criminal penalties), the systems tread very cautiously in sharing data to assure the privacy rights of adolescents. Engler provided the framework under which schools operate that restrict access to student data, as well as the restrictions under child protection and probation. The possibility of a court order to disclose information exists, but this request must contain an explanation of why access to the data is necessary to serve the adolescent. Given the complexity of laws and practices, advice and consultation is available by

contacting the Information Policy Analysis Division of Minnesota's department of Administration. [Click here](#) to see Katie Engler's presentation.

References for further reading are available on our [Publications Page](#).

This summary was prepared by Esther Wattenberg.

"Completion Study for the Class of 2001," Computation of the Four-year Graduation and Dropout Rates for School Districts in Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning, Office of Information Technologies Systems and Data Unit, August 2002.

CASCW Sponsors Child Well-Being Discussion

November 2007

In November, the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare conducted a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency discussion on child well-being. Attendees were from local county agencies that provide direct services to children and families, state agencies that oversee programs and funding that serve children, and researchers from the University community who study child outcomes. Discussion points revolved around current definitions of child well-being and outcome measures that various agencies use to measure it as well as the ways in which our measures fall short or leave gaps. The need to work across agencies and disciplines repeatedly arose as a theme that deserves more attention – particularly as it related to integrating services to improve outcomes of children and families.

Staff News

The past six months have brought many changes to the CASCW staff! As most of you have probably heard, Karen Moon left the Center in October of 2006 after four years as Associate Administrator. Karen has moved to a new position as an Associate Academic Advisor for the Inter-College Program at the College of Continuing Education. The advising job in Continuing Education will provide Karen with a promotion and the opportunity to expand her advising skills to undergraduates who are developing inter-college majors (which more closely mirrors her own interdisciplinary educational background). She looks forward to new set of challenges. We wish Karen success and happiness in her new position. She will be truly missed!

Along with change comes new beginnings and the Center welcomed Tracy Crudo as the new Assistant Director in January 2007. Tracy graduated with her MSW in Community Practice from the School of Social Work in 2005. More recently she worked as a Public Policy Analyst and Collaborative Services Coordinator at Chisago County Health & Human Services. She will be advising IV-E students and working on other projects through the Center. Tracy is happy to be back at the School of Social Work and looks forward to maintaining her connections in the public child welfare arena as well as developing new relationships with students, staff and faculty. Welcome Tracy!

Shortly after Tracy's arrival, CASCW Director Marcie Jefferys was asked to take a position as Fiscal Policy Coordinator for the Office of the Senate Majority Leader. Marcie has been granted a six-month leave of absence from the Center (through July 31, 2007) to pursue this exciting opportunity. During Marcie's absence, Nancy Johnston will be Acting Director of the Center. We thank Nancy for stepping up and taking on the task of keeping the Center running smoothly in Marcie's absence!

IV-E Alumni News

Reggie Bicha (MSW 2000) has accepted a new position as Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services. Reggie previously served as the Pierce County Director of Human Services. He also served as Interim Director of Public Health for Pierce County in 2003 and 2004. Reggie most currently served as Vice President of the Wisconsin County Human Services Association, which represents all 72 Wisconsin county human service agencies, as well as public officials, to help coordinate and effectively administer human service programs. He was also appointed by Governor Doyle to the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board in 2003, which advocates for safe families where children can grow up strong and reach their full potential. Reggie also understands foster parent issues, having been a foster parent himself from 1995 to 1998. In addition, Reggie currently serves as the Chair of the West Central Wisconsin - Care Management Collaborative, which is a group of nine counties and three private organizations working to develop a public/private managed care system to expand Family Care and serve seniors and people with disabilities.

Ann (Turnlund) Carver (MSW 1999) was recently promoted to the Statewide Adoption Program Manager position for the State of Arizona - Division of Children Youth and Families. Her role includes oversight of Adoption policy and practice statewide including Foster, Adoptive Home Recruitment, IV-E and State-funded Adoption Subsidy, Guardianship Subsidy, Inter-state Compact and numerous "other duties as assigned". Ann says, "The IV-E stipend program and the knowledge obtained through the MSW program (which included a field placement at Hennepin County Long Term Foster Care and a subsequent placement at DHS Adoption Unit) made it possible for me to reach this professional goal. I think of my friends and colleagues in Minnesota often but I'm enjoying the opportunity to work on behalf of the children and families here in Arizona. I also enjoy the weather here, too!"

IV-E Student Perspective

Jessica Vogt, current student Attending Graduate school at the University of Minnesota and being able to receive the Title IV-E scholarship has presented many opportunities. Most importantly, I was able to attend graduate school because I received funding through the IV-E Program. Many of the classes that IV-E students take focus on county child welfare services. This includes Children's mental health, child protection, adoption, kinship care, and children impacted by substance abuse.

One of the best things about the IV-E program at the U of M is the attention and focus on best practices. Many of the projects that students work on focus on best practice and really encourage students to practice in this way and get us to think critically about our cases and what we can do to serve our families using best practices.

There are many classes that have enhanced my learning about county child welfare services. When I entered the MSW Program I felt as though I was fairly knowledgeable in County systems and the services that can be provided. I even thought I knew a lot about best practices. Now, having almost completed my coursework, I realize that there was much to learn. I always thought that with so many years of experience you could have the county system down and fully understand it. This also is not true. Much of the course work that I have taken can now be applied to help the families that I work with and to help the whole county system.

Prior to graduate school, I was not very interested in politics and wasn't very concerned about what was going on at the legislature even though it could impact my employment. Having taken several classes and finally realizing the impact that policies have on our day to day work has made an enormous difference for me. I now have more of a desire to know what is happening at the state level and more apt to get involved and fight for the clients that I serve, the one's whose only voice is that of their social worker. Last week, I encouraged several of my co-workers to get involved and call their representatives. I later talked to one and the response I received was "I am really not that concerned." That is very unfortunate, because not only did the bill that was up in the committee affect our jobs, but it also impacts the clients that we serve and if workers are not concerned about it and clients don't know about it, how are we to help those in need?

The list of benefits from the Title IV-E program is endless. It was always great to get the perspective from other counties and it was a wonderful forum to process through things that were going on at my county in comparison to other counties. It is an experience that will never be forgotten and knowledge to enhance my job performance and that's priceless.