

## MENTORING VIA THEATRE ARTS: BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE NETWORK FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL THROUGH COLLEGE

Jamie Branam Kridler, Professor in the Human Services program at East Tennessee State University and Gerald Maloy, Associate Professor of Theatre and Music at Walters State Community College presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Education, Society and the Economy in Paris recently. Kridler and Maloy have worked for over a decade in performance arts programs that support healthy development and positive relationships for youth.

Relationships built through performance arts programs are unique and can create a strong lifetime bond for faculty, students and community advocates. Evidence of long term relationships and increased protective factors for young people from an economically distressed area of the Appalachian Mountains provide support for the use of performance arts in working with young people. Case studies on individuals, as well as groups, engaged in theatre arts programs sponsored by community theatre, a social change organization, a local secondary school, a community college and a major university were featured in the presentation. Community groups working with the schools and colleges include the Newport Theatre Guild, Community House Cooperative, Inc., and The East Tennessee Foundation as a long-term funder through their Youth Endowment and Arts Funds. The success of the work is largely tied to the collaboration of all the groups.

Indicators related to building resiliency are evidenced through decreased participation high risk behaviors and increased college attendance and graduation by the youth. The mentoring network created by community and educational institutions, as well as dedication of the adult mentors, are critical in developing and maintaining a supportive safety net for the youth. The experience of working toward a common goal of a public performance through creative skills, hard labor, problem solving, and shared pride are unique to the performance arts. A value added benefit has been the number of parents, previously disengaged from their children, attending performances and affirming the process.

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### SUMMER 2012

\* A special thanks to all members that attended their regional conferences this Spring! We know you had a fulfilling experience and are looking forward to attending the national conference this Fall in Milwaukee before another round of regionals next year.

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# ETHICAL COMMUNITY PRACTICE: CONFIDENTIALITY

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*"Even the most  
rational approach  
to ethics is  
defenseless if  
there isn't the  
will to do what is  
right."  
-Alexander*



I have offered trainings regarding ethics and boundaries for over four years in various settings and teach a graduate level ethics course on-line. It is a rewarding endeavor for me to commune with fellow human service professionals and discuss issues that many of us face on a day to day basis. I am pleased to see that sincere efforts to engage in ethical practice take place in the workplaces of the majority of the training attendees. Numerous issues arise in the trainings, but in the current article I am going to focus on confidentiality. I will summarize common confidentiality issues for consideration in relation to several statements from the NOHS Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals (1996) in the paragraphs that follow.

Over the years, professionals have been refreshingly candid in disclosing confidentiality concerns, and two main issues regarding confidentiality tend to come up repeatedly: 1) issues related to addressing the exceptions of confidentiality (danger to self, danger to others, child abuse, elder abuse, abuse of a disabled person, or court subpoena); and 2) failure to follow confidentiality guidelines. It is common for beginning professionals to express discomfort with verbalizing the exceptions in the first issue, exceptions to confidentiality with clients, for fear that the clients will not be forthcoming regarding issues. I explain to them that the benefits of providing clients with informed consent and discussing the limits of confidentiality are reaped by both human service professionals and clients. How? Disclosure of the limits sets the stage for future interactions; as each party knows the structure within which they are working, and can be referred back to when issues arise that warrant a breach of confidentiality. Some clients indeed won't be up front about issues, but that does not preclude us from following our ethical and statutory guidelines.

Some professionals who have attended my ethics trainings had never considered disclosure to be a prudent part of their interactions with clients. One, in particular, noted that someone else in her agency covered the confidentiality guidelines, so she considered it redundant for her to do the same. She seemed to later have sort of an "a-ha" moment, in which she shared with me her future plans. She would reiterate exceptions to confidentiality regardless of whether or not someone else had covered the information in order to give the client an opportunity to ask questions. For human service professionals, this is an important practice that is in line with STATEMENT 3: "Human service professionals protect the client's right to privacy and confidentiality except when such confidentiality would cause harm to the client or others, when agency guidelines state otherwise, or under other stated conditions (e.g., local, state, or federal laws). Professionals inform clients of the limits of confidentiality prior to the onset of the helping relationship" (NOHS, 1996).

When considering failure to follow confidentiality guidelines, some professionals have shared that they were keenly aware of confidentiality guidelines, yet became complacent with record keeping procedures (i.e. not keeping up to date notes in client files, not following procedures for locking files, etc.) The main reason cited for not keeping up-to-date notes was high client caseloads with immediate needs that tended to supersede documentation. These professionals stated awareness of the importance of documentation, but, due to other pressing duties, considered it secondary to the other duties they performed. Regarding not following procedures for locking files, etc., professionals indicated feeling a level of comfort around coworkers that facilitated a belief that the records were "secure enough" sitting in a pile on their desks or in another area that would not technically be considered secure. These professionals were not asserting a blatant disregard for confidentiality, and expressed a sincere desire to be effective professionals. Regardless, these actions put into question the professionals' adherence to the first sentence of STATEMENT 5, "Human service professionals protect the integrity, safety, and security of client records" (NOHS, 1996), and it is a good reminder to all of us that adequate record keeping and storage is one way we effectively serve our clients.

I generally begin trainings sessions by telling attendees that the information they hear will not likely be new, but talking about it offers everyone an opportunity to review his/her practice guidelines. I don't anticipate that the information in this article is new to most of you, either. However, my hope is that a review of the information prompts useful discussions and diligence in maintaining our ethical standards.

# SOCIAL POLICY: SAFE HAVEN

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There have been numerous stories in the news lately about women murdering their newborn children. The Safe Haven laws, also known as “Baby Moses” laws, have been created to offer an alternative for these women and their children. As of 2008, all 50 states have enacted some form of Safe Haven law. Unfortunately, women who are in crisis often do not know that these laws exist to protect them and their children. I believe better publicity of these laws will help women learn about their alternatives and will save the lives of many infants.

On Monday, September 12, 2011, Lindsey Lowe smothered her twin boys immediately after they were born in her parent’s bathroom (Gebbia, 2011). This mother did not tell her family, coworkers, or friends that she was pregnant. In February of 2011, Jessica Blackham gave birth to her child in the bathroom of sports arena and left him to drown in the toilet (Schafer, 2011). A cleaning crew worker found the newborn and immediately called for help, saving this child’s life. If these two women knew about the Safe Haven Laws in their states would they have still resorted to these extreme measures?

There is no federal law in place addressing Safe Haven. However, every state has enacted a Safe Haven law that provides protection for the infant child and the parent who is relinquishing their rights. Generally speaking the laws have been enacted as an “incentive for mothers in crisis to safely relinquish their babies to designated locations” and will “allow the parent to remain anonymous” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). Anonymity is important to many women who want to relinquish their children to avoid being prosecuted for abandoning their child; however, the Safe Haven laws state that as long as the child is not harmed in any way, the parent will not be prosecuted. To stop parents from dropping of their teenager that is driving them crazy, each state has their own limitations on when a woman is able to turn over their child, ranging from under 72 hours old up to 90 days old. Virginia law states that a parent can turn over a child within the first 14 days of the child’s life (Virginia Law 40.1-103 Section B).

The most common public opinion that I have come across is that more needs to be done to get the word out that these laws exist. Thedailyreview.com (2011) stated, “Clearly, information about Safe Havens is not getting to the most important population.” Most women who are abandoning their children are 15-25 years old. I believe that these laws need to be talked about in schools and wherever these women are known to be. If the Safe Haven laws are taught in sex education classes during high school, at least people will have heard about the law at some point.

An opposing opinion that is common is that if these laws are promoted, then it will also promote irresponsible behavior.

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Agency insisted that there are some “unintended consequences” happening because of these laws (Pertman, n.d.). These include:

- \* Encouraging women to conceal their pregnancies and then abandon their baby instead of giving them up for adoption
- \* Disgruntled family members, boyfriends, etc. abandoning children without the mother’s consent
- \* Inducing abandonment by mother’s who would have otherwise kept the child, because it seems easier than entering a counseling program
- \* Depriving biological fathers the right to care for the child
- \* Ensuring that children that are abandoned can never learn their genealogical or medical histories
- \* Sending a signal, especially to young people, that they do not have to assume responsibility for their actions and that deserting one’s child is acceptable (n.d.).

The main reason people are opposed to the Safe Haven laws are because they do not hold the parent responsible in any way. The laws do not try to find the root cause of the problem. They also believe that the only reason a parent abandons a child is due to denial and desperation.

While I believe that educating young women on all of the safe sex options and abstinence, I realistically know that most young women will act impulsively. If a young woman is sexually active and she does not have a birth control plan, then she could become pregnant. If she is able to hide her pregnancy from her family and friends, I would want her to know about the Safe Haven law in her state so that she knew there was a better alternative to abandoning her child in a dumpster, or worse.

The advocacy efforts I would like to see in the future include educating young women about the Safe Haven laws. I would like to see informational posters in bathrooms, which seems to be a common place for child abandonment. Public service announcements on MTV or other channels that young people watch could be effective, also. Safe Haven laws will only work if the people who need these laws are aware of their existence.

When a mother feels so desperate that her only choice is to murder her newborn baby, there is a definite need that is not being met. These children are being killed for no reason other than desperation on the part of the mother. If the mother was aware of the Safe Haven laws, assured that her identity would remain unknown, she would not have to resort to such drastic measures. Safe Haven laws need more publicity and education.

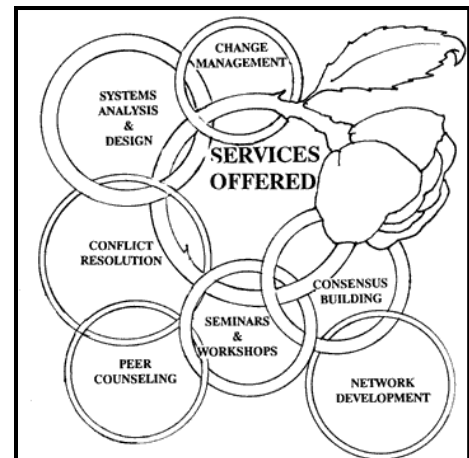
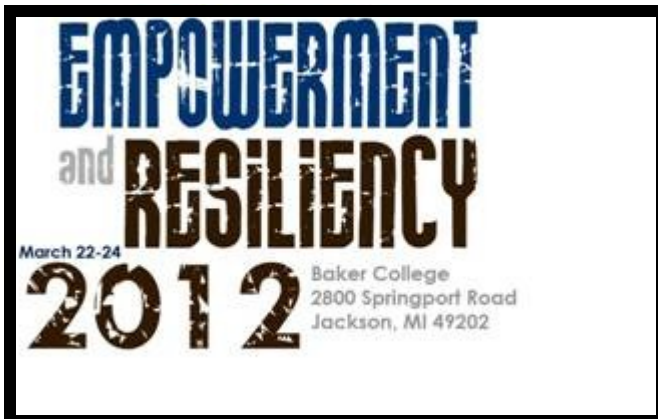
# MWOHS Conference Report

By Tristan Robinson

The 2012 Midwest Organization of Human Services regional conference was fantastic, from the keynote speakers to the breakout sessions and the venue. Jackson, Michigan is not a very large town, but the Baker College campus is very impressive. The Baker system as a whole spans the state of MI with eleven campuses. A visitor from both SOHS as well as NOHS demonstrated that Human Service organizations are also part of a system. The Jackson campus did an excellent job hosting. The meet and greet was standard fare with colleges reuniting and an introduction from the host, Brad Schweda. Having such a friendly group as the people from Jackson welcome us to their campus and city was a real treat.

The second day of the conference was brilliant, kicking off with a very powerful keynote speaker who shared a sad but often recurring story in the cycle of abuse. If nothing else, the keynote speaker reminded everyone of the reality that many clients face daily. The breakout sessions featured very moving presentations building upon the momentum of the keynote. The day proceeded with each breakout being more moving than the previous. Despite being a small town, there was still plenty to do after-hours. Entertainment in Jackson continued and the fun did not stop when conference wrapped up for the day. Saturday's keynote was also great and prompted introspection. The wrap-up for the conference was nice and a smooth transition.

With each new conference we, as individuals, learn a bit more about our peers, our field, and the wonderful work being done to help put Human Services into everyone's ear. 2012's MWOHS conference brought together some of the best people in the region and created a synergy that rivals any national event. One thought comes to mind when I think about the experience of attending conference: hope. After leaving conference, a renewed sense of hope filled me and my peers. This field can be taxing on the individual and can dredge up demons from our past but being surrounded by fellow students, faculty, and practitioners leading the way and making a safer and better place for clients and workers fills me with a sense of hope that things are getting better and change is happening.



# Southern Organization for Human Services

## “ Back to the Basics” Conference

### at Unicoi in Georgia

The SOHS conference this year was a rousing success! Held at Unicoi State Park in Helen, Georgia, the site was perfectly suited for all our group events and with great lodging for attendees. The food was superb, featuring an overflowing buffet with all the Southern Appalachian fare one could consume. The fresh grilled mountain trout was succulent and matched only by the local fried catfish! We began the conference with a picnic held beside a roaring and rocky stream, a great way to spend time with old and new friends. The next day opened with an introductory address by Steve Dennis, a motivational speaker who began his career in Human Services and has continued to contribute leadership in human service organizations. His speech really got the conference started well with his uplifting brand of interactive presentation. Appealing directly to the individual needs of human service professionals and their professional development, the audience laughed uproariously, cried with deep meaning, jumped on chairs to shout, and were filled with the spirit of helping others and making a difference in their lives as well as our own. Steve Dennis was a joy to experience and an inspiration to all.

The keynote address was offered by none other than Drs. Susan Andresen and Paul Newell, very familiar faces to human services. They captivated the audience with their presentation, *Holding the Heart of Human Services: How It Matters*, both an analysis of the evolution of this field as well as a compassionate conveyance of the humanity of the profession. Partnering in presenting, they alternated views of past progress in SOHS and NOHS interwoven with examples of changes over the years in public and mental health systems in the state. Speaking to the critical point currently reached in human services for its growth and development as a profession, the questions were posed, “What drives the *heart* of our field? How do we hold to the central, grounding values and philosophical principles while moving forward?” Of special and heartening interest were the stories of people that illustrate the issues, concerns, and enchantment of experiences in human services. This was artfully connected to the community action event of the conference where participants explored the resort town of Helen with the aim of spreading *heart* and kindness to any and every one.

The conference gave a sense of renewal and energy to attendees, a chance to learn new ideas and gain perspective. Thanks are owed to Georgia State College for their student volunteers and to everyone on the SOHS board who contributed their time and efforts. We’re already starting on next year’s conference, planned for the city of New Port Richey on the Florida Gulf Coast during their annual Chasco Festival, a wonderful weeklong celebration of music and local culture. The faculty and students of Pasco-Hernando Community College officially invite you to what will be a conference to remember.

