



UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS
SOCIAL WORK



2016 ANNUAL REPORT



A MOMENT OF REFLECTION WITH
DEAN KORR
| 2002-2017 |

➤ Much has changed since I assumed the deanship 14 years ago. I came to a School with a rich and strong history, poised for growth and change. As I start my concluding year as dean, I would like to take a moment to reflect on past accomplishments as we look forward to a bright future.

Some indicators of growth and change: We had fewer than 300 students and approximately 35 employees in 2002; this year we will have almost 600 students and 140 employees.

The reopened BSW program is the catalyst for most of the growth in student enrollment. As you will read, from freshmen to seniors, these future leaders are learning not only to be excellent social workers, but they are becoming innovators, seizing opportunities to do research and are deeply engaged in community service.

The redesigned MSW curriculum will better prepare our students for the changing, and more integrated, practice environment. We continue to make adjustments to our MSW outreach program to ensure accessibility to working professionals throughout Illinois.

We are committed to workforce development—whether through providing SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) training to our students and to agencies or through supporting new practice models in child welfare across the state in our STEP (Supervisory Training to Enhance Practice) program.

The Community Learning Lab is our signature public engagement and service learning initiative. It responds to community needs by linking requests to class teams for service learning. This initiative extends well beyond our School, with projects in over 25 classes throughout the university.

Our work in social entrepreneurship and social innovation has influenced campus initiatives. The soon-to-launch Design Center has social work principals deeply embedded in its mission. In its first two years, the campus entrepreneurship incubator, the iVenture summer accelerator, has accepted four teams (of 25 total) that began in our undergraduate Social Entrepreneurship class and one from our MSW class.

Accomplishments happen because of the contributions of many people on the team. I want to thank the staff and faculty of the School of Social Work. Our successes are collective ones. My thanks to the alumni and friends of the School for your support. A colleague has taught me to reflect periodically on why do I do what I do. I do it for our students—the future of the profession. It has been an honor and pleasure to serve as your dean at the University of Illinois.

Wynne Sandra Korrr

Wynne Sandra Korrr, Dean and Professor



REFRESHING WITH
FRESHMEN:

➤ A NEW TWIST TO THE BSW PROGRAM

The BSW program—one of the first in the country—was halted in the mid 1990s due to budget concerns. When it was re-opened in 2010, it came back refreshed and strong. And in the fall of 2013, it added a new wrinkle: it began admitting freshmen.

The entry year had long been the junior year, but **Brenda Lindsey**, assistant dean for undergraduate programs, clinical associate professor, and BSW program director, says the School was getting a lot of demand from students for earlier access to the program.

“They wanted to be here for four years,” she says. “We realized it made sense. Coming in as freshmen now, they get a better idea from the very beginning of what social work is. We talk a lot about commitment to diversity and our code of ethics, and they are grounded in that over four years rather than just two.”

The program has 260 majors and 70 minors—an “enrollment explosion,” Lindsey says. “We have grown much faster than we anticipated, and we are quickly running out of space. When we moved into our new building, we thought we’d have plenty of room, but we are pushing the limit, which is a good problem to have.”

Another challenge, Lindsey says, is providing undergraduates the transformative learning experiences they need to maximize their potential. “While undergraduate education is the heart of the university,” she says, “the School has been used to teaching and mentoring graduate students. Undergraduates bring a different level of energy, passion, excitement, enthusiasm, and idealism that is inspiring! But they have different needs than graduate students.”

For now, Lindsey is focused on managing the growth of the program and further strengthening the undergraduate research experience and opportunities (see “Stretching their Wings”).

“We thought admitting freshmen was a better direction to go in and would make our program a lot stronger—and it truly has,” Lindsey says.

STRETCHING THEIR WINGS

Undergrads are actively involved in what Lindsey calls a “strong undergraduate research program.” In fact, the School has plans to launch an Undergraduate Social Work Research Journal this year, highlighting some of the research undertaken by the BSW students.

Various BSW students presented their research this past year at:

- the campus Undergraduate Research Symposium,
- the Society for Social Work & Research, and
- the campus Public Engagement Symposium

Many of the students undertake service learning projects, integrated in their undergraduate social work courses, through the School’s Community Learning Lab. Those experiences give them hands-on learning with agencies around the community—something that benefits the students and the community alike. *Read more about the Lab on pages 6-7.*



HELPING OTHERS AS HE WAS HELPED

Brian Summers '17 went through some anxiety and depression before he got to college, triggered in part by the loss of four grandparents. His experience with social workers was the opposite of fellow classmate Kahlia Halpern's (see "Creating Better Experiences for Others")—his social workers helped him.

"After seeing them in action," Summers says, "I thought maybe this is something I could be good at. I could use my past experience to help people who were struggling with anxiety and depression."

Summers, like Halpern, is part of the initial freshmen class that was admitted to the BSW program three years ago. He was a bit nervous coming in, going from a graduating class of about 200 to a campus with 40,000+ students.

"Social Work is a smaller community and I always knew faces, always knew people who were interested in interacting with me, so that really helped ease my transition to college," he says. "As I've gone through the program I've gotten closer with a lot of students and developed relationships with professors. You have the opportunity here to interact with professors on a name-to-name basis, so that offers an interesting and unique experience that not a lot of U of I students have."

WORK ON INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Summers was asked by Clinical Associate Professor **Janet Carter-Black** if he wanted to be involved in the 4th Biennial International Symposium last fall. The School of Social Work collaborates with the Department of Social Work at National Taiwan University in Taipei, Taiwan on the symposium. Last year's symposium was on Healthy Women, Healthy Societies: New Strategies to Address Global Health Disparities.

"It was a wonderful experience," he says of his work on the symposium committee. "I got to learn about a lot of behind-the-scenes work at the School, and I got to develop closer relationships with some colleagues and professors."

Summers coordinated transportation and housing for the guests from Taiwan, contacted caterers, helped with food preparation, and helped with the creation and printing of the symposium's program material.

The symposium itself allowed him a glimpse into what social work is like for people outside the US, he says.

PLANNING ON LCSW AND CLINICAL WORK

And that's what his three years to date in the School have done: "They've opened my eyes to injustices and problems in the world that I'd never realized were going on," Summers says. "And the School has helped me with professional interaction. Working on the symposium committee helped me learn the ins and outs of interacting on a professional level, and that's very important."

Summers plans on getting his LCSW after possibly taking a gap year after graduation. He hopes to work in a clinical setting with school-age children up through young adulthood.



BRIAN SUMMERS, CLASS OF 2017



CREATING BETTER EXPERIENCES

▶ **Kahlia Halpern's** mother had a stroke when Kahlia was just turning 16. When the assistance from a social worker proved to be less than stellar, Halpern developed a strong desire for helping others in similar situations.

"No one paid attention to what was changing in our lives," she says of that experience. "Who was feeding us, who was taking care of us, how we were getting to school. I had a passion to make a change so that someone else's experience wouldn't be like mine."

Halpern, now entering her senior year at Illinois, is part of the first group of students who were admitted to the School of Social Work as freshmen (previously, students were admitted as juniors). She feels fortunate to be part of that group.

"Coming in as a freshman, you get to figure out if this is the right place for you," she says. "If you want to get that hands-on experience and you have to wait until your junior year to see if social work is a good fit, it limits your potential."

Halpern is making the most of her four years in the program. "One of the strengths of the School is you get the opportunity to be as involved as you want," she says. She has proven that by being a member of several boards, by participating in independent studies and research programs, by being a research assistant and undergrad assistant, and by completing two minors in other colleges in addition to her social work coursework.

MEMBER OF BSW AMBASSADORS

And, since her first semester of her sophomore year, she has been a member of the BSW Ambassadors, a group of students who are selected to represent the undergraduate student body and the School.

"We go to recruitment fairs, majors and minors fairs, Orange and Blue Days, Admitted Student Days, Parkland Pathway Programs, and we represent the School by attending presentations and programs," Halpern says. "We also provide that student connection to alumni and visitors to the School."

Being an ambassador, she adds, has helped her to feel she belongs to the School and form strong bonds with people in all walks of the program—including the faculty.

"Another strength of the School is the one-on-one interaction between students and faculty," she says. "The School offers an excellent support system. You always know there's somebody there to talk to and go to for help. It doesn't have to be your specific professor. Everyone knows everyone."

LOOKING TO DUAL DEGREE TO IMPACT POLICY

Halpern is looking into a dual degree—MSW and law—with an eye toward the policy side of social work. "Social workers have a role in affecting policies," she says. "Rather than working one on one with a person who is struggling, I could work to change the system to make it better for everyone."

In high school, when her mother had her stroke, Halpern was not the type of student to ask for help. She had little self-confidence, she says. "Coming to the School of Social Work, I felt the same way," she says. "But now I feel very confident in myself. I know how to ask for help and that my learning isn't determined by somebody else; it's determined by me. What I am taking away from the School is that if I am confident and passionate about something, there's a way to achieve it."

ROLLING OUT NEW CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

▶ Beginning with the 2016 fall semester, the School of Social Work will feature an MSW curriculum that will better serve the needs of a changing profession. The curriculum now offers a macro practice (leadership and social change) concentration and an advanced clinical concentration.

Students in the advanced clinical concentration may choose a focus area, such as mental health, health care, school social work or children, youth and families. But they will also have flexibility in choosing courses. They will have more opportunities to learn evidence-based practices that are applied in a variety of settings such as Motivational Interviewing, SBIRT (see article), chronic disease self-management, and cognitive behavioral models.

Former Assistant Dean, **Christie Avgar** says, "Students are acquiring advanced clinical skills in all the settings, not just one. And it helps us in moving toward integration of services offered, which is where the field is moving. We are responding to not just the students' desire for greater flexibility, but to the changing field of social work as well."

CURRICULUM IS MORE ATTRACTIVE TO STUDENTS

The move toward greater curriculum flexibility will also make the School more attractive to prospective students—and not just those who are considering studying on campus, but those who are looking into the School's Outreach Program, which is designed for working professionals to pursue a graduate degree while still working full time. Currently the program calls for students to take their concentration courses on campus the semester before they undertake their internship.

The Outreach Program will consist of blended and online courses by 2017, with students no longer having to come to campus once a week for an entire semester.

POSITIVE IMPACT

Our graduates will be more marketable and better prepared with advanced skills to apply across various settings and in new integrated environments.





THE CLL DEEPENS REACH ON CAMPUS AND IN THE COMMUNITY

15

OF CAMPUS UNITS INVOLVED WITH CLL.

27

OF U OF I CLASSES INVOLVED.

242

OF OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

1000+

OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS COMPLETED.

25,311

OF HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDED.

CLL- BY THE NUMBERS

In 2013, when a faculty member mentioned she wished she could do a project in the community, **Sherrie Faulkner** replied, “You absolutely can! We have opportunities in the community all the time.”

Truer words were never spoken—and from those words, the Community Learning Lab (CLL) began in the fall of 2013. It has grown not just steadily, but exponentially (see “CLL- by the Numbers”).

INCREASING INVOLVEMENT ACROSS ILLINOIS CAMPUS

The lab’s growth is measured not only by its ever-increasing impact in the community, says Faulkner, director of the lab, it is also measured in its ever-growing involvement across campus. In its early days, the CLL involved only the School of Social Work; by the spring of 2016, eleven other campus units had become active with CLL (see “Campus Collaborators”).

“The students and colleges outside the School have really embraced the lab,” Faulkner says. “Faculty are excited to be able to engage their students with opportunities outside the classroom, because it gives them an opportunity to grow in different ways.” She adds that student organizations such as Illini Women in Economics have used the CLL, as have individual students who want to increase the strength of their resumes.

“I had a young man come in last summer who said it was all about him the last four years, he had received his degree, and he wanted to give back to the community,” Faulkner says. She set him up to use his specialty, social media, to enhance a community agency’s presence.

WIN-WIN FOR ALL INVOLVED

The CLL sets up a win-win relationship for all involved: the students, the faculty, and the community partners. The experiential learning that faculty can offer is a plus for their teaching, and it enhances the learning, growth, and marketability of the students. As for the community, not only is the CLL’s reach deepened; it is impactful, Faulkner notes.

“Seventy-five percent of the agencies we work with say they would have gone without if our students hadn’t been able to do their project,” she explains. “We’re making a difference.”

The community partners are making a difference, too: Over the three years of CLL’s operation, the partners have spent 5,425 hours in mentoring and supervising students. The value of that mentoring cannot be overstated.

The Community Learning Lab received two awards in 2016: the Larsen Human Development Award for making significant contributions to the campus consistent with the mission of the University of Illinois Counseling Center, and the Illini Spirit Award for contributing to the safety, health, development, and achievement of U of I students.

CAMPUS COLLABORATORS

- College of Business
- College of Education
- College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- College of Media
- College of Medicine
- College of Nursing
- Department of Economics
- Department of English
- Department of Human Development and Family Studies
- Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
- Department of Psychology
- Department of Statistics
- Innovation Immersion Program
- Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations
- SCNO (Students Consulting Nonprofit Organizations)



TRENDS AND NEEDS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ASST. PROFESSOR, LILIAN WINDSOR AND ASSOC. PROFESOR, DOUG SMITH

▶ The one constant about any field—and social work is no exception—is change. Tools, resources, findings, educational approaches, needs, and issues all evolve.

All of that transformation brings about the need for a series of other changes—in workforce development. Such development is made up of many constantly moving parts that together impact both current and future social workers.

Assistant Professor **Liliane Windsor**, Associate Professor **Doug Smith**, and **Monico Whittington-Eskridge**, Statewide Administrator of Coaching & Implementation Support for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) spoke about the trends and needs in developing a strong workforce in social work.

The issues fall into three categories:

- STUDENT EDUCATION
- CLIENT NEEDS
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

STUDENT EDUCATION

> **Providing shorter models to meet the needs of integrated care.**

“SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) is a good example of workforce development in terms of trying to start meeting the needs of integrated care,” says Smith. Today’s social workers may need to be prepared to do full-on psychotherapy in a medical setting or brief versions in a healthcare setting, he says.

> **Offering more training in evidence-based interventions such as SBIRT.**

“In terms of social work education, we tend to be generalist and broad and we touch on describing what interventions are supposed to be, but we don’t typically train people systematically in how to do specific evidence-based interventions,” Windsor says.

> **Helping students master at least one evidence-based practice.**

“I don’t necessarily care which one they learn; that might be different based on what setting they might go into,” Smith says. “One that is broad-based enough to cut across practice settings would be ideal. There’s not necessarily that much magic in which evidence-based practice we choose, because the reality is the more we study things, they all work! It’s really about teaching them the process of learning one in depth, because it gives them that common language, it gives them a great handle on what one practice model is.”

> **Moving toward a more universal design.**

“I’d love to see the field move more toward that type of thinking where it’s inclusive and we’re thinking about everybody as we’re developing things,” Windsor says.

> **Using technology to greater advantage.**

“We teach therapy assuming they’re going to be face-to-face with clients,” Smith says. “We need to think through how therapy is different using technology such as Skype. Arguably it’s a more advanced skill and we don’t know how to sequence it yet.” He mentions some schools that are offering fully online MSWs and using teletraining in motivational interviewing. “That’s where we need to think about going,” he says. “How do we get people comfortable with computer-mediated interventions?”

> **Ensuring high quality internships.**

While Illinois is widely known for its block placement model of internships, safeguarding quality and disseminating evidence-based treatments should be a high priority, Smith says. “We can’t control what happens behind closed doors,” he explains, adding that the School has a vested interest in helping agencies to both learn new evidence-based treatments and to train them on supervising students in their use.

CLIENT NEEDS

> **Using consumers in delivery of treatment services.**

“This trend has become specific to my area of substance use disorders,” Smith says. “We’re seeing a groundswell around using consumers in the delivery of treatment and support services. We need to be thinking about what skills social workers need to work alongside peer recovery support folks.”

> **Training more people to provide substance abuse treatment.**

“The Affordable Care Act will have implications in terms of need,” Windsor says. “There’s not a whole lot of trained people who can provide substance abuse treatment. Social workers are in a really good position to fill some of that gap.”

> **Preparing people to meet the needs of a diverse clientele.**

The US is becoming more and more diverse, Windsor says, so “we’re going to have to figure out how to train people to be attending to the specific needs of a very diverse group of clients.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

> **Building capacity of supervisors.**

As part of her work at DCFS, Whittington-Eskridge oversees two programs: STEP (Supervisory Training to Enhance Practice) and IS (Implementation Support) that are part of the School of Social Work. “Both programs are developmental tools for the workforce,” she says. “Their purpose is to help build the capacity of supervisors and middle managers to be able to effectively supervise their staff and also to enhance the capacity of the field around some key practices.”

> **Focusing on trauma-informed practice.**

“We are focusing on a core model of family-centered, trauma-informed, strength-based practice and how it integrates with other key initiatives,” Whittington-Eskridge says. “How do you pull all of the information we have on trauma-informed practice together in a way that’s tangible and practical to current social work practitioners and students right now?”

> **Equipping supervisors to maintain consistency in practice.**

“The direct-service supervisor is the keeper of the practice,” Whittington-Eskridge says. Supervisors need quality training to be able to guide and direct the work of their staff “so that we can see consistency in practice in every case, every situation, and every day.”

> **Providing coaching within child welfare practice.**

“Coaching has been very successful in the business world and it is a cornerstone piece in education,” Whittington-Eskridge says. “We want to be more effective in utilizing coaching within child welfare practice to help push that practice forward.” DCFS offers coaching and goal-setting specifically in the areas of engagement, assessment, critical thinking, and decision-making.

CHANGING TO MEET SOCIETAL NEEDS

“Social work is trying to figure out its own identity,” says Windsor, “and that has implications in workforce development. Social work is a very broad discipline and I’m not really sure if we have settled that question yet.”

Perhaps that question is not settled yet because as societal needs and workforce development needs change, social work has continued to change to most effectively meet those needs.



A UNIQUE APPROACH TO TREATING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

▶ A study undertaken by **Liliane Windsor** could revolutionize the way substance use disorders are treated—and have an impact on other conditions as well.

“What’s exciting about this work is that it’s looking at addressing substance use by having a discussion about racism and health inequalities,” says Associate Professor Doug Smith, who is a co-investigator on the project for which Windsor is co-principal investigator.

Windsor, an assistant professor, received a four-year, \$2 million grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The institute is a unit within the National Institutes of Health. The project entitled, Community Wise, employs multiple levels of interventions to reduce alcohol and drug use. The study was created by the Newark Community Collaborative Board (NCCB) in New Jersey to address the rates of alcohol and illicit drug use among residents of “DCAAs,” or distressed communities with concentrations of African Americans. (Learn more on their website: www.newarkccb.org.)

The study involves 320 men with a history of incarceration and substance abuse. Some will receive a full intervention, some a partial intervention, and some will not receive anything, Windsor says. Recruiting will likely begin in January 2017, and the men will be placed in cohorts of eight people each.

THREE COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM

“The three components of the program are Critical Dialogue, the Quality of Life Wheel, and Capacity Building Projects,” Windsor says. “In Critical Dialogue, we show them images that depict different kinds of oppression or problems that people face, and we ask them what they see.”

All participants, she adds, will be trained in critical thinking skills about how people acquire knowledge, how they know what they’re saying is true, and so on.

“These kinds of questions are designed to help people be willing to change their minds about a topic,” Windsor says. “In these Critical Dialogue sessions we talk about racism, classism, and sexism and how these things operate on different levels and potentially impact individual behaviors. We try to challenge conspiracy theories and myths that tend to be common among this population.”

Participants also develop a vision for their lives and set specific goals to achieve those visions in the Quality of Life component of the program. The third component, the Capacity Building Project, involves groups of participants being paired with agencies and organizations to tackle community problems that they care about.

“For example, in our pilot, one of the members was interested in changing legislation regarding hiring practices for people who have been incarcerated,” Windsor says. “We connected his group with an organization that was lobbying their city to change legislation on that, and they were successful.”

A few other examples of Capacity Building projects are Rent a Lot, where for \$1 a person could rent a vacant city lot for a year and the city would provide that person with tools he could use to garden on that lot.

PARTICIPANTS WANT TO BE PART OF POSITIVE COMMUNITY CHANGE

Participants are motivated to be part of the study because they haven’t seen an intervention like it before, Windsor says.

“It’s the first time they have a place where they can talk about sexism and racism in light of substance use and re-incarceration,” she says. She adds that the participants in the pilot enjoyed being part of something that can result in positive change for the community and that they played an active role in shaping the program so that it’s meaningful to them and their community.

“Eventually, we want to learn if we can reduce substance use by increasing these individuals’ community-level awareness about structural oppression and how community-level behavior affects individual health. So we will see what’s inside the pill, what is the mechanism through which this treatment produces its effect.”

POTENTIALLY FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

And if these interventions work, Smith adds, the study will have some very interesting implications.

“It’s a really novel approach for treating substance abuse,” he explains. “This is a very social-work based, community organized-based model meant to change individuals’ behavior. If it is effective, it can fundamentally challenge the medical model of treatment for substance use disorders.”

And its impact can be felt beyond substance use issues, Windsor adds. “If it works, it can be adapted to be used in different kinds of conditions that affect marginalized groups disproportionately,” she says.



EXPLORING MINDFULNESS THERAPY IN PREVENTING DRUG RELAPSE AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

LEFT: JORDAN DAVIS, DOCTORAL STUDENT AND BRENT ROBERTS, PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR

A research project at the University of Illinois is examining the use of mindfulness therapy in preventing drug abuse relapse among marginalized young adults.

Jordan Davis, a School of Social Work doctoral student, has been awarded a \$100,000 grant by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to study the effectiveness of Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) at helping young adults stay sober after substance use treatment. The Institute is a unit within the National Institutes of Health.

Modeled after the mindfulness based cognitive therapy used to treat depression, MBRP is a group-based treatment that targets the negative emotions and cravings that often lead to relapse, including the physiologic and behavioral symptoms of chronic stress. The treatment protocol teaches participants to recognize thought patterns and physical symptoms that typically lead to relapse, fostering greater tolerance of these various states and reducing the need to engage in substance use to alleviate discomfort.

Davis' research project is the first study to investigate MBRP's efficacy with young adults, although a handful of clinical trials have been conducted with adults, Davis said.

The study focuses on marginalized populations, particularly people who experienced early childhood trauma and have been dually diagnosed with mental health and substance use problems.

About 80 percent of the participants are involved with the criminal justice system and about 90 percent live below the federal poverty line, Davis said.

"This is a population of individuals who face extraordinary challenges throughout their lives and in their efforts to stay sober after treatment ends," Davis said. "Many have experienced severe trauma such as neglect, abuse and sexual trauma as children. These experiences, coupled with a substance use disorder, make it very difficult to remain abstinent. We are investigating whether MBRP impacts both physiological and behavioral measures of chronic stress, and if it works equally well for individuals who have experienced significant early childhood trauma."

"Mr. Davis' project brings to bear cutting-edge science to help an underserved population and address one of the most intractable problems in treatment—how to keep people well once they have started the path to recovery," said psychology professor Brent Roberts, one of Davis' advisors and the principal investigator on the project. "This grant is a direct reflection of Mr. Davis' insights, hard work and already remarkably prolific research career as a doctoral student. He represents the type of social scientist we aspire to produce at the University of Illinois."

A native of Cumberland, Maryland, Davis earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Auburn University and a master's degree in clinical social work from Syracuse University before entering the doctoral program in social work at Illinois.

While at Illinois, Davis has been a co-author on several research papers, including studies that examined the efficacy of treating withdrawal symptoms among cannabis users, links between bully victimization and substance use, and the use of motivational interviewing and normative feedback in treating adolescents with alcohol use problems.

Written by Sharita Forrest, Education Editor, Illinois News Bureau

FINDING BETTER PAY AND DIGNITY THROUGH CARE COOPERATIVES

When doctoral candidate **Lenore Matthew** saw an internship open up in the spring of 2015 with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the labor agency of the United Nations, she pounced on the opportunity.

"These positions are very hard to get," Matthew says. "I was hoping that both the fit and the timing were right."

It turns out they were—and after finding out she was shortlisted on a list of over 100 applicants, she ended up getting the position after three rounds of interviews, moving to Geneva to conduct primary research and literature reviews on cooperatives in the care economy.

"Although cooperatives are not necessarily in my research area, the care economy is," Matthew explains. "My dissertation is on unpaid care in Brazil, for example. I've followed the ILO's work for years and have always wanted to get experience in the United Nations before heading into the job market."

Matthew quickly moved into the project manager role, leading the design of a survey for organizations in the care sector, the cooperative sector, and in governments working in care. And she conducted 35 follow-up interviews in English, Spanish, Italian, French, and Portuguese.

Matthew returned to Illinois to finish her PhD program but continues to work remotely for the ILO, adding a unique perspective to her ILO team as she does.

"I come from the care sector, which no one else on the team does; some come from economics, others from policy," she says. "Because I'm trained as a social worker, I think my perspective complements the team's perspectives and brings a different focus, centered on people and relationships."

COOPERATIVES: A "VIABLE PROVIDER OF CARE SERVICES"

The ILO, Matthew says, is one of the first organizations to do a large-scale study on cooperatives in the care sector.

"We found out that cooperatives certainly are emerging as a viable provider of care services and are doing so for myriad populations. They are providing services to populations that have diverse needs—this is where a social work perspective came into play," she says. "While cooperatives are emerging to provide care services, they're also emerging as employers that extend gainful work options to employees—especially low-income women."

After a cooperative gets off the ground, she says, cooperative members are invested in them because of the democratic membership and ownership. "Cooperatives tend to pay higher salaries and offer more professional and life skills development programs for their workers," Matthew notes.

"Cooperatives are professionalizing care jobs that are highly exploitative, like paid domestic work and home-based personal care. There's something psychological that goes with that, in being proud of your job, but there are also policy implications in professionalizing this type of work," she adds.

BRINGING DIGNITY TO THE CARE SECTOR

Oftentimes the public, and sometimes workers themselves, see care work as not really work at all. This is especially true for home-based care. "But we're saying, 'no, you're helping somebody with their day-to-day living activities and functioning that they could not do without you,'" Matthew says. "This is work—hard work—and it deserves to be compensated as such. In cooperatives, there's this ownership in providing care and ownership in receiving it, too. I think that as a social worker, that's the most important thing. Cooperatives are bringing dignity to care on both the supply and the demand side. They are bringing this sort of social interconnectedness to the care sector that benefits both workers and care recipients. That's an exciting and interesting contribution of cooperatives."

Matthew says she was surprised to discover how many home-based care cooperatives there are in the US. "That's promising, because home-based personal care is one of the fastest-growing professions, and also one of the lowest-paying," she says. "With cooperatives, there's an exciting possibility for growth of gainful jobs in the care sector."



MARIA PIÑEROS-LEAÑO, DOCTORAL STUDENT

CREATING INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD OBESITY

While doing cognitive behavioral therapy with Latina mothers, doctoral student, **Maria Piñeros-Leaño** noticed that many of the children were overweight or obese. She approached Associate Professor **Janet Liechty**, who is one of 13 I-TOPP (Illinois Transdisciplinary Obesity Prevention Program) faculty members across three colleges.

“Dr. Liechty told me about the program and asked me if I was interested in it. I told her I was very interested, as it was trying to address the issue, particularly among the Latino community,” Piñeros-Leaño says.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY: A BIG PROBLEM FOR LATINOS

As Piñeros-Leaño began her research for I-TOPP, she was surprised to find that childhood obesity is a much bigger problem for the Latino population—“almost twice as much as compared to Asian kids,” she says. “One study by Ogden and colleagues shows that almost 40 percent of Latino children are overweight or obese, compared to 19 percent of Asian kids. Compared to white kids there’s a 10 percent difference as well.”

Before becoming involved with I-TOPP, Piñeros-Leaño, who has a BS in Psychology, an MSW, and a Master of Public Health all from the University of Illinois, was studying the issue of depression among Latinos. “Depression is also very prevalent in this population,” she says. “I wanted to see how maternal depression can impact childhood obesity. So I started looking at that link.”

Piñeros-Leaño is using a dataset from the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Study, a study by Princeton University and Columbia University that is following a cohort of nearly 5,000 children born in the US between 1998 and 2000 (about three-quarters of whom were born to single mothers). The dataset has a large sample of Latinos, Piñeros-Leaño says, but she is not confining her dissertation research to Latinos alone.

Risk factors for all children, but particularly Latinos, Piñeros-Leaño says, include having mothers who are obese or overweight when they get pregnant; an environment that emphasizes fast-food eating; schools with unhealthy vending machine choices; and policies that can increase childhood obesity. She is also studying breastfeeding, noting that lack of breastfeeding is associated with higher childhood obesity.

“It’s a combination of factors that place children at a higher risk for developing obesity,” she says.

I-TOPP’S INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Piñeros-Leaño enjoys the interdisciplinary approach to I-TOPP. “In my case, I am trying to combine issues of psychology, social work, and nutrition as we look at this problem more in depth,” she says. “We’re trying to go beyond just getting different disciplines together and really try to understand the disciplines” in attempting to identify the problems and create interventions, she adds. Piñeros-Leaño’s advisors on her project are Professor Janet Liechty and Professor Karen Tabb, and she is also working with Professor Sharon Donovan from the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at Illinois.

GETTING LATINA MOTHERS WHAT THEY NEED

“We want to identify the problems, translate the research, and bring it back to help communities, particularly disadvantaged communities,” Piñeros-Leaño says. “We want interventions to be predominantly formed by the people who are most affected by it.”

To that end, Piñeros-Leaño has been interviewing Latina mothers to find out what they need: more information, programs on nutrition and exercise, information on how to cook healthfully, and so on.

Many Latina immigrants are not used to the foods in the US and have greater difficulty accessing fresh fruits and vegetables. “So we said, okay, what can we do to promote better access to fresh foods?” Piñeros-Leaño says. “We’d discuss issues of a community garden. What would it look like? Would they access it?”

“Those are some of the things we touched on in the interviews to get to the bottom of it and eventually to help create an intervention.”

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS: GIVING A VOICE TO FOSTER CHILDREN

It's no secret that child welfare systems were never designed to be the long-term caregivers for children. The older youth are the less ideal placement settings are for them. So when Assistant Professor **Judy Havlicek** observed some Foster Youth Advisory Board meetings a few years back in Urbana-Champaign, a lightbulb went on for her.

"I had never seen anything like it in social work," she says. "It was a program for youth run by youth in foster care. It's a youth empowerment program. As I watched these young people over about a year's worth of meetings, I saw these 18-year-olds go from being angry or withdrawn to being softer around the edges and becoming leaders."

That hooked Havlicek, because she knows the dire outcomes of foster kids who age out of the system: They are less likely to graduate from high school. Less likely to go to college. More likely to be unemployed. More likely to be homeless and involved in the criminal justice system.

About 800 to 1,000 youths age out of Illinois' system each year (meaning they turn 21 when they are still in the system; the age-out age for most states is 18).

Havlicek received a grant in 2013 to study the Illinois State Youth Advisory Board (YAB). "Illinois has the fifth such board that was started in the US," she says. "The Illinois Youth Advisory Board has been instrumental over time in guiding the DCFS regarding independent living services and policies for older kids in foster care."

THE NEED FOR YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS

That need for guidance is there, Havlicek says, because despite the best of intentions, the child welfare system gets it wrong in many areas: program offerings, placements, relationships with caseworkers, turnovers in placements, siblings, to name a few.

"The research would say our child welfare systems do a poor job of preparing youths for adulthood," Havlicek says. She notes that many foster children come out of the child welfare system devoid of the relationships and independent living skills they need to be successful in adulthood and many have to cope with wounds and scars from the trauma they have experienced.

"I don't think the child welfare system does a really good job of addressing that trauma before kids exit the system," she says. "But the Youth Advisory Board does."

THE POWER OF VOICE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The board addresses the trauma in part by giving foster youth a voice. "When you've been maltreated and you're in foster care and no one is giving you a voice to express yourself, that can be problematic as an adult," Havlicek says. "You may not learn the skills you need to be assertive or ask questions or even to talk to people in appropriate ways. On the boards there is an emphasis on expressing yourself, on giving speeches, on telling stories, on verbal expression that seems to help foster youth get things out and learn the skills that become really valuable later in life."

A core strength of the YAB is in one of the central elements missing in so many foster children's lives: relationships. It's not surprising that these young people are engaged by a program that places emphasis on building relationships. Many have conflicted relationships with their families and have unresolved losses during foster care.

"It's really grounded in relationships," Havlicek says. "The board wants foster youth talking with their peers about their rights and about programs offered to foster youth in the child welfare system. The YAB wants young people to go back to their placements and talk about these things with other foster kids. The members of the YAB are the conduits between DCFS and the YAB. They do that by building or rebuilding trusting relationships with adults."



Through those new or repaired relationships with adults, the foster children can address the relationships that went bad for them in their childhood. "They learn to rebuild connections with their peers and with adults," Havlicek notes. "They learn how to network, how to build strong supports that are going to help them as adults."

THE BOARD IS FOR THOSE READY FOR CHANGE

Illinois has a statewide YAB and seven regional boards; monthly regional meetings are held for foster children ages 14-21. About 5,000 youths fall in that category in Illinois, Havlicek says, but the boards are not for everyone. She notes that there typically are anywhere from 10 to 40 foster youth at each YAB meeting.

"The young people who are engaged by it are really looking for something," Havlicek explains. "They've gotten in trouble, they know they're heading down a troubling road, and they don't want that for themselves. The youth who stick with it and who it really helps are the youth who are really ready for it."

For those who are ready, Havlicek often witnesses growth and maturity through their responsibilities on the board that commands a newfound respect from their peers. This is particularly true for those who go through the rather arduous process of becoming elected officers of the board. "Once youth start gaining the skills to keep themselves in check and relate to others in a positive and respectful way, their peers start respecting them and following their requests," Havlicek says. "It serves as an interesting reinforcement of their positive behaviors."

Each board has a segment called Youth Issues and Concerns. "All the adults leave the room and the young people can disclose what's happening in homes or in cases with other foster youth. The elected members of the YAB try to resolve the issue," Havlicek says. "That's a powerful experience for them because not many programs really want to allow them to have a voice."

BUILDING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SKILLS

In that emphasis lies both the uniqueness and the power behind the YAB: giving a voice to those who have not heretofore been heard.

"In observing the boards I've learned how they cultivate youth voice," Havlicek says. "It's an interesting process that builds professional and personal skills. The professional skills come from these elected officer positions. They are really developing all these skills that most kids are learning from their parents. Youth lead their regional meetings. They come up with their agendas, they organize speakers. It's a powerful responsibility for them."

These skills ensure that when youth speak out, their voices are respected by child welfare decision-makers. This process occurs in tandem with a heavy emphasis on the personal or the caring relationships that young people develop with adult facilitators and peers. Through these relationships, foster youth learn how to turn individual difficulties into collective challenges, which enlivens the advocacy process.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Perhaps best of all, Havlicek sees positive change in their lives, change that bodes well for their futures.

"In one way or another it changes their identity," she says. "They tell me they go from being angry, disengaged, and unsure of themselves to having confidence and hope for their futures. They find their purpose and their meaning for life to help other foster youth. It gives them this strength and courage to overcome their past. They define their futures, not their parents. Many of their parents have told them they'll never amount to anything, and for the first time they're challenging that and saying 'You know what, I graduated from high school and I'm going to go to college.'"

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