

Child Welfare Education Project CWEP NewsLine

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UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**
GRADUATE COLLEGE of SOCIAL WORK

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Arnitia Walker



Welcome to all of the Fall 2016 Incoming CWEP Students!

By making the choice to enter the Child Welfare Education Project, you have made a commitment to not only furthering your education, but you have made the decision to continue to work with the most vulnerable citizens in the state of Texas.

Children are our highest priority and it is up to you to ensure that they have safety, well-being and permanency.

The staff at CWEP is committed to ensuring that all of your educational needs are met here in the Graduate College of Social Work. We want to make sure that you maintain a positive work, life and school balance. Please feel free to call on any of our CWEP staff, mentors and returning students for guidance and support during your enrollment in the GCSW and beyond. We hope that you will use our CWEP website to become familiar with the numerous resources that are available to you. We are here to serve you and look forward to working with you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



INCOMING CWEP STUDENTS!

August 2016

Herbert Canada	Melissa Eglund
LaDreamer Harrison	Tekeisha Lewis
Kimley Meredith	Cari Schroeder
Cheri Shamlin	Erin Shephard
LaTesa Spencer	Rachael Taylor
Crystal Valmont	

ADVISING TIP

FROM

BRUNESSIA LEWIS

Students, the first stipend may be delayed a few weeks, so use the emergency loan option in financial aid to defer your full tuition payment.

FIELD TIPS

FROM

VANESSA SHIPPARD

- ✓ Be quick to listen and slow to speak.
- ✓ Work hard and over deliver.
- ✓ Ask questions.
- ✓ Be observant.
- ✓ Take advice.

CELEBRATING CWEP

BY CLAIRE CRAWFORD

CWEP students, 2016 graduates, honorees, family members, and other members of the CWEP faculty and staff gathered on May 5, 2016 at the Rockwell Pavilion for the annual “Celebrating CWEP” dinner. During the course of the program, the audience heard speeches by such venerable guests as Scott Dixon, CPS Regional Director, Dean Alan Dettlaff, dean of the Graduate College of Social Work, Deborah Elizondo-Brady, Director of the GCSW Alumni Association, and Arnitia Walker, Director of CWEP.

Bella Alex, a medical social worker for the Texas Children’s Hospital Child Abuse Prevention team, served as the keynote speaker. Ms. Alex received her MSW from the GCSW and worked at CPS for 30 years before retired. She has previously been named a CWEP Field Instructor of the Year. Ms. Alex delivered a heartfelt and meaningful keynote speech to send the new graduates into the challenging yet rewarding field of child welfare. She shared personal stories of how she was first introduced to the child welfare system as a child through a friend she met at school, igniting a passion for protecting children. This relationship grew into a lifelong personal and professional friendship that inspired Ms. Alex to strive to improve the child welfare system, as she continues to do today.

The student honorees included graduating students Kari Alanis, Saleeta Curl, Tovie Davis, Sonya Folwer, Shaunquette Garrette, Sahmarah Ochum, Virginia Pierre, and Savannah Stevenson, and Elizabeth Wade. Additionally, the program celebrated the mentorship provided by CWEP alumni Jaysa Curry, Meredith Atkinson, Yolette Sneed, and Ashley Smalls. The graduating CWEP students walked to the front of their room when their names were called to receive a graduation cord, a pin, and a gift from the CWEP staff.

The program additionally honored Cindy Reibenstein, LCSW, ACSW as the 2016 CWEP Field Instructor of the year. The award was presented by Jamie Parker, Director of Field Education at the GCSW.

Vanessa Shippard, a member of the CWEP Staff, and Mr. Willis Corbin catered a fabulous barbecue dinner for the guests to enjoy during the ceremony.



Bella Alex
Key Note Speaker



Dean Dettlaff with CWEP Graduates



Jamie Parker (L) with
Cindy Reibenstein, 2016 CWEP
Instructor of the Year

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Angela Mason



What is your current job position?

I have been employed as a caseworker with DFPS for 6 years. Before starting with CPS, I worked as a Customer Service Associate for Bank One Corporation. I received a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Texas Southern University where I completed an internship at DFPS & later hired by the department. I worked 4 years in Investigations in the disproportionality unit. I was later transferred to Foster Adoptive Development, where I am currently working as a FAD Specialist. My field work has allowed me to investigate reports of child abuse or neglect to determine whether the validity of reports. On the other hand, working as a FAD Specialist, I make sure that minimum standards are rules that child-placing agencies must follow when verifying, approving, and supervising foster and adoptive homes.

What motivated you to join the MSW program?

One of the many things that motivated me to apply to the MSW Program was to further my education & my desire to help individuals and families experiencing mental health challenges, as well as helping families recognize their strengths. What I've often found while working as a caseworker is most have been diagnosed with developmental disabilities, mental health disorders, & are taking psychotic medications. Joining the MSW program has enhanced my knowledge, skills, & ability to thoroughly assess families & children with mental health problems. I've also learned the importance of advocacy with all systems in order to receive relevant services.

Tell us about your achievements in Child Welfare?

One of the things I desire to see is a big happy smile on adoptive parent faces once they consummate an adoption. Adoption provides the most stable, legally binding relationship for these children & their adoptive parents. My job is to assist, help, & guide these parents through the adoption verification process. This process can take up to 6 months to be complete. Often times I find that adoptive parents struggle through this process & at times want to give up. I encourage them not to give up, advocate for these families, provide counseling, & resources to families due to financial instability. So far, I have helped 6 families consummate adoption & those children were all adopted by relatives. This is the best achievement I could ever experience. I will continue working with children & families through connecting families with services, partnering with organizations in the community, & ensuring the safety & well-being of all children through achieving & maintaining permanency.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Ruprekha "Roopa" Baruah

What is your current job position?

I've been with CPS for 18 years. I am a Family Services Specialist under the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Program & I primarily work with youth transitioning out of foster care. This is one of the most satisfying positions in my CPS career because the youth bring so much energy & joyfulness to these meetings & I've gotten to see how the meetings have positive impacts on them.

How did CWEP or your MSW program prepare you for your job?

CWEP opened a wide passage to professional social work. Through CWEP, I was able to obtain my MSW without paying a penny out pocket. My education helped me develop new skill understand concepts, & keep abreast of current practices that have helped me do a better job. Additionally, CWEP led me to obtain my professional licensures - LMSW & then LCSW, paving the way to develop my career further in the field. I am ever so grateful to the CWEP & MSW Program at UH, with which my ambition to further my education would have been so difficult.

Tell us about your achievements in your work.

I have worked in various capacities and programs within DFPS & my education undoubtedly helped me obtain these posts. I was involved in the FGDM Pilot Program in Region 06, where I helped coordinate some of the first Circles of Support Meetings & Family Group Decision Meetings. Once the FGDM Program was implemented statewide, I moved from Foster Adoption Supervisor's position to be a Family Services Specialist. I often train/mentor newcomers in the program. My greatest achievement is when I see a spark of light in youth's eyes as I inspire them to sit at the head of the table & lead their own COS Meetings. This idea was further developed by our program manager with Fort Bend CASA into a new pilot project, Youth Led Circles of Support Meetings - an initiative that received statewide acclaim. I'm excited to be a part of another new CPS initiative: the implementation of the evidence-based Structured Decision Making/Family Strengths & Needs Assessment (SDM/FSNA) tool to ensure safety, well-being, & permanency of children/youth in CPS in a collaborative & expeditious manner.

What advice do you have for our current CWEP students?

Hang in there because it's worth while. No other field in social work will provide such a rich gamut of experiences. This is an exciting time to be working in CPS in Texas because the agency is moving along with other professional fields of Social Work by implementing evidence-based practices for better outcomes.



DFPS SPOTLIGHT

CJ Broussard-White



What is your current position with CWEP or CPS? How long have you been working in this position? What prior experience(s) did you bring with you to this position?

I'm the Regional Director of Region 6a for CPS. I've been the Child Welfare Director for almost 3 years. Prior to becoming Director, I served as the Inter-Regional Managing Attorney for DFPS covering Regions 4, 5, & 6. I was responsible for overseeing legal practice for both CPS & APS. I also worked as a direct delivery case worker with my law degree when I first started government social service in 2005. I served as a Guardianship Caseworker in Region 5. As an attorney in private practice, I handled service cases involving families & children from divorce proceedings to criminal defense. I also served as a Volunteer Mediator with the Houston Dispute Resolution Center. I'm a graduate of Texas A & M with a BS in Sociology; UT Law School with a JD, and UH Law Center with a LLM.

What has been the greatest reward working in the CPS family?

Despite the many challenges in child welfare, the greatest reward is knowing that the work I do will leave a positive impact on children and families who have no other voice to speak for them. Families that are strengthened through learning parenting skills, getting assistance with substance abuse, domestic violence, & coping skills can only benefit our communities and our future. Children who have no one to speak for them have been given a voice through my legal career and my career as Child Welfare Director. In addition, being able to work to improve a system that will have long-lasting impact is a rare & precious opportunity I've been graced with.

What advice do you have for CWEP students?

As you move forward in your career, remember that you're in a social SERVICE agency. SERVICE is the key word. As you gain the tools & ability to understand how to do this work, remember you're here to SERVE the children & families we help. While this comes with many challenges, understand you have the education and training to be the expert. But without a servant's heart - one can easily lose sight. Also, remember to take care of yourself because our children & families NEED YOU.

CWEP STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Kathleen Stuart



What is your current job position?

I was a GA during school starting in Feb 2015 until May 2016. I've since graduate and have been hired as a Temporary staff for the summer to assist Dr. Leung. I have experience working with children in a variety of settings such as the YMCA, an emergency shelter for foster children, and lots of babysitting. 😊 While my work experience didn't initially seem as applicable to this position, I have an organized and detail-oriented personality. These skills have been useful given the nature of what I do which involves working in SPSS inputting data, editing manuscripts, and writing up reports for the data I analyze.

What have been the greatest rewards working in the CWEP family?

I think a big reward working within CWEP has been getting to learn what being a researcher can look like. Dr. Leung always has several projects going on that he allows me to help with. I have learned so much about what to look for in a good research proposal, how to analyze data from studies, etc. Dr. Leung has a great deal of knowledge and it has been an honor to learn from him!

What advice do you have for our current CWEP students?

The best advice I could give CWEP students would be to soak up as much as you can from your professors and supervisors. They have experience and knowledge that you can only benefit from!

MINORITY MENTAL HEALTH MONTH (JULY)

POEM BY TRANG-THU DUONG

For the ones who weren't allowed to speak,
and the ones who were told to wait their turn.
For the ones who can't speak the language,
and the ones who don't know they have a voice.

Being free of drugs
does not have to do with addiction,
but everything to do with our sanity.

And the things called our weaknesses,
have become walls not built for us,
by people who don't look like us.

And when our pain is looked on as anger,
and our anger is taken as violence,
our suffering is used against us.

But words have the power to hold us,
so that names like, *lazy* and *fragile* and *possessed*,
are labels that bury us
into a history of silence.

But our power comes from words.

To say that the mental illness that exists in our blood,
Connects us to the strengths
of our ancestors.

And our trauma is the sun
that can burn through our skins, and our children's skins,
and give us heat
that strengthens our bones.

When our words become pillars
that lift our voices
our minds are free to fly.

So that every time they go low.
We go high.