

## Michigan State University's Chance at Childhood Program: Interprofessional Social Work/Law Education, Field Practice, and Community-Based Advocacy

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**Abstract:** *A key component of all graduate level social work programs is the field-based educational experience designed to provide students the opportunity to practice while under the supervision of both a field-based mentor and a faculty member within the school. Social work programs must develop and maintain ties with organizations and agencies within the community to facilitate a wide variety of options for students. Separately, social work schools are increasingly developing relationships with other professional schools, most often with law schools, to allow students to study from an interprofessional perspective. In this article, the authors review existing literature regarding social work interprofessional education, focusing on law and social work. The authors will describe Michigan State University's School of Social Work Chance at Childhood Program, designed to train future social workers and lawyers from an interprofessional perspective in the classroom, in the field, and in a variety of community-based advocacy projects. Finally, the authors will discuss the results of preliminary research efforts designed to measure the program's effectiveness at achieving the program goals set forth in the program's logic model.*

**Keywords:** *Interprofessional education; law and social work; child welfare; children's law; interprofessional outreach; interprofessional field education*

In recent years, educational institutions have placed an increased emphasis on interprofessional education. Schools of social work have joined this trend, seeking partnerships with schools in a variety of other disciplines including law, medicine, and psychology. Interprofessional programs may take a variety of forms, varying in formality of the arrangements and the extent of content being delivered. Social work schools and law schools are frequent collaborators due to the intersection of practice between these two professions, particularly in fields such as child welfare, immigration, adoption, domestic violence, and mental health.

Legal education began as an apprenticeship focusing on the development of practical skills (Wilson, 2018). Yet in recent decades legal education has been often criticized for its *ivory tower approach* to the training of new attorneys (Holland, 1999). As discussed below, many law colleges in recent decades have developed clinical programs designed to focus on the nuts of bolts of effective lawyering. As schools of social work have historically emphasized fieldwork as a key component of the educational experience, this development provides new opportunities for interprofessional collaboration. Because social work educators have long recognized the importance of providing students with experience in

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the field through some form of apprenticeship, schools of social work must develop ties with a variety of community-based organizations to facilitate placement opportunities for students. These relationships also provide the foundation for students, as well as faculty, to work with community leaders to meet pressing community needs, to advocate for social change, and to design, implement, and disseminate research that enhances knowledge regarding social work practice and policy.

One way in which the Michigan State University (MSU) School of Social Work (SSW) seeks to achieve these goals is through the Chance at Childhood Program (CAC), an innovative child welfare program providing interprofessional law and social work education, and community-based advocacy, primarily within a clinical setting. Due to the relatively recent development of interprofessional clinical programs such as CAC, little research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of such programs as a model for interprofessional social work education. Educators seem to have developed such programs by accepting the largely anecdotal notion that an interprofessional approach in areas where the practice of social work and law intersect education will better prepare students for practice, and enable graduates to better serve clients and stakeholders involved in the systems where these professionals practice. While preliminary data demonstrate the program's effectiveness regarding some specific program goals, the study remains ongoing.

In this article, the authors will review the existing literature regarding social work interprofessional education, focusing specifically on law and social work in the field of child welfare. The authors define the term interprofessional education as follows:

*Educators and learners from 2 or more . . . professions and their foundational disciplines who jointly create and foster a collaborative learning environment. The goal of these efforts is to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that result in interprofessional team behaviors and competence.* (Buring et al., 2009, p. 2)

Throughout the literature review, the authors use the term interdisciplinary, as opposed to interprofessional, when the cited authors use that term, even though the programs and/or practices the authors described closely align with Buring and colleagues's definition above.

Special attention will be placed upon interprofessional field education. Second, the authors will describe in some detail the program components of CAC to explain how CAC is designed to provide students with an interprofessional education both in the classroom and in the field, and to also illustrate how CAC effects community-based advocacy as part of MSU broader educational mission. Third, the authors will present preliminary research results addressing the effectiveness of CAC's approach from the perspective of students, patrons of CAC's services, and several different stakeholders.

## **Literature Review**

In the late nineties, universities begun providing students with increased opportunities to participate in interprofessional and/or inter-professional programs (Brandon & Knapp, 1999; Casto et al., 1998; Donnelly, 2019; Institute of Medicine, 2015). Interprofessional

education focuses on more than one discipline, seeking to impart in students not only some amount of general knowledge regarding the student's "non-primary" field, but perhaps even more importantly, an appreciation for the expertise and the ethical perspective of the other field. Inter-disciplinary education and practice refers to actual collaboration among working professionals from more than one discipline or profession (Forgey & Colarossi, 2003; McCroskey, 1998). As discussed below, CAC combines interprofessional education in the classroom setting with inter-disciplinary practice in a field placement; thus, both terms describe the experience of students participating in CAC. Henceforth, the authors will use the term interprofessional when referring to the CAC program, though both terms are descriptive of this program.

Since the 1960s, many institutions of higher education have developed and implemented interprofessional programs through a variety of strategies (Newell, 2001). Professional graduate school programs, including social work schools, have sought opportunities to develop relationships with other schools in a wide variety of human service fields when practice opportunities bring graduates from the different fields together. McCall (1990) notes that, in training students to work with children, youth, and families, several academic departments including psychology, education, sociology, psychiatry, public health, pediatrics, and nursing overlap with social work (p. 1321). Similarly, other authors note the variety of academic disciplines that overlap in practice areas touching upon the dynamics of domestic violence (Lia-Hoagberg et al., 2001). Patti and Hentschke (1998) write that, in the field of child welfare, the social worker "needs the skills and perspectives of the police officer, the doctor, the nurse, and the lawyer at various points in time" to effectively manage a case (p. 258). While any field could benefit from interprofessional training, the field of child welfare has a great need as it requires the expertise of social workers, lawyers and judges, medical and mental health professionals, and law enforcement to address the complex needs of one of the most vulnerable populations.

Methods of delivering interprofessional education to social work students may take a variety of forms, ranging from informal relationships where students are encouraged to take course work in another discipline to formal joint-degree programs through which students earn degrees from the participating schools or colleges (Brandon & Knapp, 1999; Jankovic & Green, 1981; Kopels & Gustavsson, 1996). Brandon and Knapp (1999) point out that regardless of the precise form of the interdisciplinary venture, the underlying premise is that an interdisciplinary perspective will better prepare students for practice in their intended fields and might promote their employment in a competitive marketplace (p. 886).

Practitioners, as well as educators, acknowledge the benefits of an interprofessional perspective as the basis for effective practice in a variety of fields as well as for effective professional education (Brammer, 2020; Brandon & Knapp, 1999; Glynn, 1994; Lia-Hoagberg et al., 2001; Preston-Shoot, 2019). Human service fields in general (including both social work and law) are under special pressure to integrate interdisciplinary themes to better effect service delivery in the field (Brandon & Knapp, 1999, pp. 876-877). Further, the universities' development of interdisciplinary programs is, in large part, a response to

demand from practitioners to create such programs for students who will join them in the field (Brandon & Knapp, 1999, p. 878).

Schools of social work have responded to these demands by developing partnerships with schools in a variety of other disciplines (Jankovic & Green, 1981; Kopels & Gustavsson, 1996). These authors stress the importance of training and education in multiple disciplines for social work graduates to effectively practice in the human service fields. The partnership between social work and law is particularly appealing. Numerous authors have noted that social workers must understand the legal system and legal processes to advocate effectively for their clients (Deck, 2016; Forgey & Colarossi, 2003; Jankovic & Green, 1981; Haight et al., 2015; Kopels & Gustavsson, 1996). Kopels and Gustavsson (1996) stress that:

social work educators have a growing responsibility to make students aware of the implications of the law- including the effects of legal mandates on practice and social worker liability, the legal aspects of the workers' roles in client settings, and the legal rights of social work clients. (p. 115)

Beyond the field of child welfare, law and social work practice intermingle in a number of areas including, criminal justice, work with elders, school and education issues, and issues surrounding mental and physical disabilities. Many educators recognize that social workers require knowledge of the law to practice effectively in these varied areas because practice in these areas regularly require interaction with attorneys, and often appearances in court (Albert, 2000; Madden, 2003; Saltzman & Furman, 1999; Stein, 2004; Deck, 2016). Without some understanding of substantive law and court processes relevant to their practice and area, social workers would struggle to practice in a competent, and thus ethical manner. Glynn (1994) notes that attorneys should be trained from an interdisciplinary perspective, because effective advocacy in many legal specialties requires the knowledge of fields such as social work. For instance, a family law or child welfare attorney without any knowledge or training in domestic violence, substance abuse, or child development would be unable to effectively advocate for a party to a case focused on such issues. Attorneys in these fields only very rarely can rely on qualified experts to assist them given the financial limitations of most clients often dealing with financial stress due to poverty or changes looming as a result of pending or recent divorce. Glynn (1994) adds that students working in an interdisciplinary collaborative process benefit from observing practice from the perspective of a different profession, often a profession with very different values, ethical standards, and definitions of success (p. 619).

Further, effective "family law practice makes it essential that law students have at least a rudimentary understanding not only of the roles that non-lawyers professionals play, but of the theories and assumptions on which they rely" (O'Connell & DiFonzo, 2006, p. 534). The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (2017), Heimov et al.(2017), Faller and Vandervort (2007), Coleman (2001), Maschi (2017), and Deck (2016) echo this sentiment, while stressing the challenges in maintaining ethical practices within interdisciplinary partnerships and with balancing the differing perspectives of the respective professions. More recently, Gerber et al. (2019) refers to the success of a law and social work interdisciplinary team approach for foster care cases. Gerber et al. (2019)

asserts that through providing higher quality services, an "interdisciplinary law office approach to parental representation may save millions of government dollars" (p. 52).

The recognition of the special law and social work relationship has led to the development of a variety of interprofessional law and social work programs. Research conducted by Miller et al. (2008) reveals that the most common interdisciplinary program offered in schools of social work is a partnership with a law school. Other common partnerships include business and law, medicine and social work, and law and medicine.

Taylor (2005) describes how the differing educational experiences of future lawyers and social workers often lead to conflict in professional practice and notes how interdisciplinary education and training may reduce the occurrence of such conflicts and improve inter-professional cooperation. Scarnecchia (1997) describes how an interdisciplinary program at the University of Michigan is designed to address the lawyer's need to integrate social work, psychology, medicine, and education into an effective legal practice. Duquette (1997) recognizes the clinical aspect of this program as integral to providing students an opportunity to develop practical skills in a real-life setting. At Fordham University, Galowitz (1999) notes the importance of social work skills and to promote effective legal practice. Galowitz specifically describes the value of the social worker's ability to "assist the lawyer in understanding or relating to the client, thereby assisting in the delivery of legal services to the client" (p. 2125). While these programs emphasize the need for interprofessional law and social work education, each is a college of law. CAC provides an exception to this rule, as CAC is housed within Michigan State University's School of Social Work. The authors are unaware of any other interprofessional law and social work program that is housed within and funded by a school of social work.

In contrast to the relatively recent focus on interprofessional education, schools of social work have always emphasized fieldwork as a key component of the students' educational experience (Goldstein, 1993; Kourgiantakis et al., 2019; Riitta-Liisa, 2020; Vassos, 2019). Goldstein notes that, as with other professional fields, a "period of apprenticeship remains indispensable to the attainment of professional status" (p. 170). McCroskey (1998) states that the process of "linking classroom and practice sites is essential to student learning and reinforcing for practicing professionals" (p. 13). Further, Foley (1998) concludes that students especially value preparation for inter-professional cooperation when that training includes "extensive experience in a real-world context" (p. 226).

Knapp et al. (1994) emphasize that effective interprofessional education requires application of the interprofessional model to the field practicum site. Limiting the interprofessional perspective to the classroom does not provide students with a sufficiently meaningful interprofessional experience. As Casto et al. (1998) note, students benefit from placements in community-based interprofessional agencies where they can apply and learn from an interprofessional perspective. Oates and Gaither (2001) similarly underscore the value of *service learning*, or experiential learning geared toward the provision of needed community services. Wilson et al. (1994) describe a field practicum site in which students in special education, nursing, social work, and psychology programs worked together and were supervised by professionals in fields different from their own.

In addition to providing students with “real-world” experience, field placements represent one way in which social work schools provide service to the larger community. Universities, particularly those in urban settings, have come under great pressure to assist in the process of solving social ills (McCall, 1990). Placing students within community agencies is one way to meet community needs. Many universities play an important role in developing and fostering such community-based initiatives (Gatz & O’Hearn, 1998). A more directed approach is through the creation of clinical programs, established within the community and focusing on identified community needs, and that are staffed by students satisfying their field placement or other experiential learning requirements.

Lerner et al. (1998) specifically identify the importance of universities integrating knowledge across multiple academic disciplines and diverse professional activities to improve circumstances for children, youth, and families in their communities. As a land-grant university, with a long history of focus on community needs, this theme resonates especially strongly throughout MSU. It is from this perspective that the authors will examine CAC as an example of MSU’s commitment to meet the challenges described above.

### Program Overview

Consistent with its land grant mission, MSU provides, through the efforts of MSU Extension, resources and learning opportunities to individuals, communities, and businesses in all of Michigan’s 83 counties. During the 2017-18 academic year, over 32,000 students participated in Extension supported community-engaged learning and/or community service opportunities. Consistent with MSU’s outreach mission, the MSU School of Social Work created four distinct “community programs,” one of which is CAC. Each community program provides service, outreach, and teaching through field education placements, and seeks to develop best practices, and provide research opportunities to study program development and sustainability. Table 1 sets forth a brief description of CAC’s program components.

Table 1. *Chance at Childhood Program Components*

<b>Program Component</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
1) The Family Advocacy Certificate Program	Allows law students and social to earn a certificate upon graduation indicating they have completed all of the program’s interdisciplinary training components
2) CAC Law and Social Work Clinic	Law and social work students work in teams to advocate in the Michigan Family Court for children and families
3) The CAC IMPACT Center	The Center provides a safe setting for parents to exercise court-ordered supervised parenting time
4) CAC Ingham County Self-help Center	Law and social work students assist unrepresented parties with completing their court filings
5) Other Community Outreach and Advocacy	CAC staff and provide free trainings to professionals as well as many community groups and organizations

CAC’s individual program logic model described in Table 2 for students and community services.

Table 2. *MSU Chance at Childhood Logic Model-Students*

Resource/Inputs	Activities/Outputs	Short Term Goals	Long Term Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Learning Agreement</li> <li>• Field Liaison/Liaison groups</li> <li>• Field instructors/</li> <li>• Other agency staff</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Community Programs infrastructure (policies, procedures)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete student learning agreement</li> <li>• Fulfill requirements of clinic syllabus including law student’s development of providing competent representation; striving to promote justice, fairness, and morality; striving to improve the profession; and professional self-development.</li> <li>• Assign learning experiences and provide opportunities with clients for observation and engagement</li> <li>• Provide instruction, modeling and training by mentors/supervisors</li> <li>• Provide law students with Professional Rules of Conduct modeling and training.</li> <li>• Provide reflective social work supervision about student learning objectives, needs and progress</li> <li>• Complete all required internship and field instructor evaluations</li> <li>• Create portfolio of assignments to demonstrate student learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will increase knowledge related to practice with children and families involved in the family court system</li> <li>• Students will increase skill in core social work competencies and practice behaviors (Field instructor assessments and student self-assessments could be used here)</li> <li>• Law students will increase knowledge of family law and associated advocacy skills for representing children and families in the court system.</li> <li>• Students will increase commitment to social work values</li> <li>• Law students will practice zealous representation of clients within parameters of Professional Rules of Conduct.</li> <li>• Students will increase job preparedness for future employment in with children and families involved in the family court system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAC alumni are involved as leaders, field instructors and mentors in their areas of professional practice</li> <li>• CAC alumni are involved as family court attorneys and working in the court system in their areas of professional practice</li> <li>• CAC alumni remain in social work practice and family law practice</li> <li>• CAC alumni engage in lifelong learning through continuing education and legal trainings</li> </ul>

Table 2. *MSU Chance at Childhood Logic Model-Community Services*

Resource/Inputs	Activities/Outputs	Short Term Goals	Long Term Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding (parking, programming, faculty)</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Space</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Clients</li> <li>• Community resources</li> <li>• Conference Rooms</li> <li>• Office Supplies</li> <li>• Printed Material</li> <li>• Parking availability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ingham County Self Help Center</li> <li>• Clinic Children’s Law Hotline</li> <li>• Represent select clients in domestic relation matters</li> <li>• CAC faculty provide effective legal representation</li> <li>• Provide interdisciplinary professional/CE training in child welfare</li> <li>• Handle court appointments to represent children</li> <li>• Mandated reporter brochures/trainings</li> <li>• Community based partnerships</li> <li>• Outreach to contribute to informed professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents are well-informed about their legal rights and the legal processes involved to protect those rights</li> <li>• Parents are able to file their legal paperwork properly</li> <li>• CAC faculty and students are knowledgeable about and utilize best practices</li> <li>• Courts have the information they need to make effective decisions in CAC cases</li> <li>• Professionals and community partners who provide services/develop policies regarding the family court are knowledgeable about and utilize best practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents effectively advocate for themselves within the court system</li> <li>• Underrepresented populations in Michigan have effective representation in court</li> <li>• Courts efficiently and fairly process pro se cases after self-help center intervention</li> <li>• Social work and legal professionals in Michigan are well-informed about best practices regarding practice in the family court</li> <li>• Children served by CAC are placed in family settings that maximize physical, emotional, and mental well-being</li> </ul>

The SSW's other three community programs are FAME (Fostering Academics, Mentoring Excellence), the Kinship Care Resource Center, and Veterinary Social Work Services (VSWS). FAME is a resource center for MSU students who are alumni of the foster care system, were in kinship care, have experienced homelessness, or are otherwise independent. FAME provides support and resources to these students to improve the odds of their success during their collegiate experience on MSU's campus and during their transition to becoming MSU alumni.

The Kinship Care Resource Center is a non-profit statewide organization. The center supports Michigan kinship families by utilizing research to provide education and outreach for communities, agencies, and individuals serving those families. Finally, VSWS is a collaboration between the School of Social Work and the College of Veterinary Medicine. VSWS provides emotional support and educational and referral services for clients, veterinarians, medical staff, and support staff of the MSU Small Animal Clinic, Oncology Center, and Large Animal Clinics.

CAC differs from these other community programs in a number of ways. First, CAC partners with the MSU College of Law, and is organized around an interprofessional social work/law focus. Further, CAC is the only community program offering students a certificate program requiring specialized coursework and field placement criteria. CAC's broad mission (through collaboration with the MSU College of Law) is to promote and protect the well-being of children and families through integrated social work, and law education and advocacy. Specifically, the Certificate Program, offered to both law and graduate level social work students, is designed to cross-train social work students and law interested in legal advocacy on behalf of children and families involved in Michigan's family court.

CAC is comprised of several components, each designed from an interprofessional perspective. Together these components provide students with both interprofessional classroom education and interprofessional community-based fieldwork. The program focuses on the field of child welfare, which, for purposes of this program, includes all those legal proceedings directly affecting the rights of children. Thus, legal proceedings that many practitioners consider children's law or family law issues fall within the scope of CAC's curriculum.

### **1) The Family Advocacy Certificate Program**

All students seeking to earn CAC's Family Advocacy Certificate must enroll in the CAC Law and Social Work Clinic, described below. In addition, law students are required to choose a minimum of two options from a menu of courses covering topics related to children's law. Most law students have no difficulty meeting this requirement, as the students admitted to CAC tend to focus their studies in the area of family law. Social work students must enroll as "guest students" in the College of Law in order to take one law school elective from the same menu the law students choose from. These students are thus placed with law school students who have had the benefit of already completing at least one year of law school studies, a daunting challenge for any graduate student.

Students from both schools must also complete a graduate-level social work course in child welfare. This course is designed to present students with an overview of the child welfare system from both the practice and policy perspective. In this circumstance, it is the law students who must venture into foreign territory. However, teaching styles among faculty in the SSW are not terribly dissimilar from the teaching methods and techniques those students experienced during their undergraduate careers. This is in stark contrast to the experience of those social work students who are exposed for the first time the Socratic method of teaching that is so common in many law school classrooms, and foreign to students from most other disciplines.

Finally, all certificate students must successfully complete the Integrative Seminar in Law and Social Work. The goal of this seminar is to provide an overview of all areas of the law in which children's interests are directly affected. The content of the course includes child custody, child protection, juvenile justice, adoption, and other areas of family and children's law. The course is not intended to provide students with in-depth knowledge of these areas of law. Rather, the focus of the seminar is to present these substantive areas of law as a means to discuss the lawyer's and the social worker's roles, tasks, and ethical obligations in working with clients involved in such cases.

Given this approach, the seminar is taught by the program director, a JD/LMSW, and includes presentations from other professionals in both the legal and social work fields. In leading the class discussion, the instructor presents an overview of the substantive laws involved in each topic area. Class discussion focuses on how lawyers and social workers can follow the legal standards while adhering to their professional norms and ethical standards, and while ensuring the protection of children's interests. For instance, lengthy, and often passionate discussion tends to arise regarding the conflicting professional ethical obligations involving client confidentiality and mandated reporting of child abuse. Diversity issues are raised in all class discussions to heighten students' awareness of how race, class, gender, and other factors impact practice decisions and court outcomes. Classroom discussions inevitably raise conflicts between the ethical obligations and practices of lawyers and social workers. Adherence to these differing obligations often leads to misunderstanding, if not outright conflict, among social workers and lawyers who do not understand the other profession's standards.

It is not difficult to generate lively class discussions. All the social work students have had at least one prior field placement, and many of them have had some work experience. These students can present and discuss a variety of relevant real-life experiences. Fewer law students in the program have relevant work experience, but many of the law students in the seminar are enrolled concurrently in the CAC Clinic (or have worked in the Clinic in a previous semester) and are thus able to draw upon their clinical experiences that often neatly mesh with the topics raised in the seminar. Thus, seminar discussions tend to be richly based in circumstances and events the students will encounter in their professional practices. Seminar students must also complete an extensive research paper and present their findings to the class. The students' topics must be pre-approved but may cover any topic covered in the seminar. A number of students have had their papers published in peer-reviewed publications. The seminar provides students with a wide-ranging introduction to interprofessional child welfare practice.

## 2) CAC Law and Social Work Clinic

The CAC Law and Social Work Clinic opened in the fall of 2003. The clinic provides students with an opportunity to gain practical experience in a variety of cases involving families and children. Each student admitted to CAC is required to spend a minimum of one semester in the clinic. Due to the differing requirements of the two schools, law students are required to work 16 hours per week for one semester. Law students may complete a second semester if invited to do so. Social work students are required to work 16 hours per week for two consecutive semesters.

Faculty and students advocate for children in a variety of legal proceedings and advise practitioners and community members on a wide range of child welfare issues. The circuit and probate courts in various Michigan counties assign cases to the clinic. Students form two-person interprofessional teams and are assigned cases from at least two or three different counties. Handling cases in different counties allows students to compare how practices differ among counties and increases their opportunities to meet and network with other professionals in the field. Cases assigned to the clinic have included custody, guardianship, adoption, and supervised parenting matters. For several years, under terms established through a state grant, the clinic also contracted with the State Court Administrative Office to modify child support orders for incarcerated persons.

Once admitted to the clinic, students are assigned to two-person teams comprising one law student and one social work student. Law students typically complete courses in evidence, court procedures, and legal ethics prior to joining the clinic. In particular, their experience allows students to make recommendations that are both pragmatic and likely to be adopted by the court. Social work students generally have some specialized knowledge of child development, child-trauma-informed care, mental illness, substance use and disorders, and domestic violence—subjects that are essential to determining the best interest of minor children in many court proceedings. Despite these different skill sets, students work as equal members within their teams. That is, tasks are not divided among team members based on their status as either a law or social work student. Rather, team members work together in every task involved in their cases. Students jointly review legal files, court social files, psychological evaluations, and other reports. Students also jointly conduct interviews, visit homes, prepare reports, and prepare to testify in court.

The student team's combined expertise aids the court by ensuring that pertinent questions are asked, and that a thorough analysis of the evidence is conducted. In one case, for example, a student team discovered that a father had abused the family pet. Recognizing that pet abuse may suggest a high risk of domestic violence or child abuse, the team crafted a recommendation to the court that addressed these specific concerns. In another case, the team's social work expertise led the students to alert the court to a child's potential autism, even before a formal diagnosis had been made. In cases involving parents addicted to heroin, interprofessional student teams were able to educate judges and parent attorneys regarding available treatment programs, and the likelihood of setbacks and ultimate success. Unsurprisingly, the opioid crisis has created an urgent need for an interdisciplinary approach to such cases. In sum, the combined experience and expertise of the law and

social work students provides a more holistic approach to solving the complex problems facing families today.

Many students are initially surprised to realize the extent to which the best interests of the child often conflict with the interests of the child's parent and the interests of other adults involved in the child's life. Exposing the students to this reality is consistent with CAC's mission. The decision to focus the clinic's caseload on court-appointed cases requires a great deal of relationship building with courts to develop a viable student caseload. This partnership with the courts allows students to work as true advocates for children, as opposed to advocating on behalf of adults who often are unable to differentiate between their own interests and the interests of their children.

Though students are scheduled to spend at least four hours each week in the clinic workspace in order to perform telephone intakes, students must maintain flexible schedules in order to conduct interviews, appear in court, and attend meetings outside of "regular" work hours. Most of the students' work takes place outside of the clinic's physical space, often during evenings and weekends. Given the nature of the cases handled in the clinic, students often exceed the number of hours they are scheduled to work in any given week. Additionally, it is impossible to predict which of the clinic's cases may prove more demanding. Some student teams may become overwhelmed with particularly complex cases, while other teams may be less challenged. Faculty directly and clearly apprise students of these challenges during the CAC application process. As a result, students in the clinic tend to be willing and able to adapt to these and other real-life trials.

While the focus on interdisciplinary team approach to cases is crucial to CAC's mission, this approach also poses certain challenges. First, as occurs in any program, students experience conflicts over work ethics, schedules, and sensibilities about and approaches to cases. These conflicts are dealt with as opportunities for learning and improving interpersonal communication skills. Fortunately, clinic faculty have encountered very few of these conflicts, but when they have arisen, faculty have intervened as facilitators, emphasizing that the students must reach an agreement as to their recommendations to the court. Thus far, students have been able to work through their conflicts and differences of opinion.

The team approach has also led to unique challenges when students have jointly prepared reports and then testified in court. As both students sign their reports and recommendations, some attorneys have required that both students testify, which tends to displease the court. In other circumstances, the court has requested one student to testify in the presence of the other student and has then allowed the second student to briefly add to or comment on the first student's testimony. In other cases, the court has had both students testify simultaneously, answering questions posed to them as if they were a single witness. Despite these challenges, through handling real cases in an inter-professional partnership, students are able to gain an understanding of how the law and social work professions complement as well as conflict with one other in child welfare practice.

### 3) The CAC IMPACT Center

CAC collaborates with the Ingham County Friend of the Court to provide supervised parenting time (SPT) pursuant to orders issued by family division judges. CAC will collaborate with other counties when at least one parent resides in Ingham County, or the Impact Center is located roughly halfway between the parents' residences. Courts order SPT for a variety of reasons, most often due to substance abuse issues, domestic violence, and in order to reunify an absent parent with his or her child. Whatever the specific circumstances, a judge must determine that it would be unsafe for the parent to spend time with the child(ren) without supervision in order to qualify for these services. CAC provides center-based supervision, following safety protocols to ensure that children and parents are provided with a neutral, safe, and engaging environment.

The IMPACT Center's space consists of two elementary sized classrooms and a gymnasium on MSU's campus. CAC is able to provide free supervision to parents, typically bi-weekly for 2 hours at a time. CAC students are trained in best practices and shadow an experienced student supervisor before being assigned a case of their own to provide supervised parenting time. Typically, the social worker and law student will team up until they are comfortable doing supervision alone. Following each visit, students produce a report for the court that details everything that transpired during SPT.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this program, and to ensure that all student clinicians conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner, CAC faculty designed surveys to measure parents' and children's satisfaction. IMPACT Center surveys have thus far been collected for only the most recent semester, spring 2019. Ten participating families completed the surveys. Sixty percent of participants identified as female, 30% as male, and 10% declined to answer. Regarding the age of participants, 30% were under 25, 20% were between 25 and 35, 20% were between 30 and 45, and 30% were between 45 and 55. Of the nine participants who responded to the question, 55% identified as the non-custodial parent and 45% identified as the custodial parent. Finally, regarding the ethnic/cultural background of participants, 40% of patrons identified as Caucasian/white, 50% as African American/Black, 10% as Latino/Hispanic, and 10% as Native American or Indigenous Person.

Survey results illustrate that both custodial and non-custodial parents alike felt respected, as 100% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "my student was respectful." Further, when asked if their student was professional, 100% of parents "strongly agreed" or "agreed." Surveys for the children focused on their feelings of safety and the friendliness of the students. Overall, 80% of the children indicated that they felt safer having parenting time in the Impact Center than in some other location. 100% of the children responded that their supervisor is "friendly" and "listens to them."

CAC provides an invaluable service to the community through SPT provided at the Impact Center. Between the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2019, the number of student hours served per academic year increased from 700 to just over 1200. During this time, CAC provided over 3,600 hours of direct supervision, saving the county approximately \$96,000. While CAC typically maintains between 10 and 14 open cases at a time, demand for this service greatly exceeds the program's capacity. As with most of CAC's outreach

efforts, students fill a void within the community, but much more is needed to ensure that all families and children have meaningful access to justice.

#### **4) CAC Ingham County Self-help Center**

The Chance at Childhood Ingham County Self-Help Center is a free service offered at the Veteran's Memorial Courthouse in Lansing, Michigan. This program is designed to aid self-represented patrons involved in domestic relations matters. Most patrons seek help with child custody, child support, parenting time, and divorce matters. During the course of a typical semester, the Self-Help Center operates between six and eight hours per week, at times when the court schedules full family division dockets. On average, the Center serves between 130 and 200 patrons in a semester. All patrons are asked to complete a survey after they receive services. Surveys are designed to gauge patrons' level of satisfaction with the services they received, and to collect demographic data.

During the spring 2018 semester, which is representative of other semesters during which CAC offered self-help services, of the 52 patrons that completed surveys, 52% (27) identified as male and 48% (25) identified as female. 37% (19) of patrons were between the ages of 18 and 29 years old, 38% (20) were between the ages of 30 and 39 years old, 12% (6) were between the ages of 40 and 49 years old, 10% (5) were between the ages of 50 and 59, and no clients were over the age of 60 years old. Given that patrons seek help with active family court cases, it is unsurprising that the demographics skew toward younger adults.

Regarding our patrons' reported highest level of education, 5% (2) of survey participants reported having some high school education, 15% (15) had a high school diploma or GED, 44% (19) completed some college, and 16% (7) were college graduates. Regarding household income, 19% (9) of this group reported a household income under \$10,000, 31% (15) between \$10,000 and \$20,000, 8% (4) between \$20,001 and \$30,000, 13% (6) between \$30,001 and \$40,000, 10% (5) between \$40,001 and \$50,000, and 19% (9) over \$50,000. Finally, regarding the ethnic/cultural background of patrons who participated in the spring 2018 survey, 51% of patrons identified as Caucasian/white, 40% as African American/Black, 4% as Latino/Hispanic, 2% as Middle Eastern, and 2% as multiracial.

Our surveys also seek to capture patron satisfaction. Results from the group described above indicate that 92% (48) strongly agreed that the center was helpful, 96% (50) strongly agreed that the students were respectful, and 96% (50) strongly agreed that they had been respectfully listened to. Moreover, 96% (50) strongly agreed that they were given information that helped them better understand their situation, and 92% (48) strongly agreed that they understood the next steps they needed to move ahead in their case.

#### **5) Other Community Outreach and Advocacy**

CAC provides students with a variety of opportunities to engage in interprofessional community-based advocacy. The Kinship Care Resource Center at MSU opened in 1999 to provide support for kinship caregivers throughout the State of Michigan. Given its mission and services, the center was made part of CAC in 2004, and while it currently

operates now as a separate community program, CAC continues to provide a variety of services to Kinship Care's clients.

The Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC) serves kinship care families across the state by providing information and referrals to resources and services for caregivers and the children they are raising. KCRC also offers support to professionals serving kinship families. Center staff seek to provide resources both from the social services perspective as well as the legal perspective. Specific legal concerns and questions are referred to the CAC clinic. CAC faculty also provide training for professionals working with kinship families, and directly to kinship caregivers. Working with the Kinship Care Center also allows CAC students to help meet this specific population's needs from both the social work and legal perspectives, and to provide much needed advocacy for new statewide policies to better serve this population.

In addition to the Kinship Care Resource Center, CAC provides outreach to professionals and community members throughout the State of Michigan in several other ways. First, faculty and students placed in the clinic provide legal advice to professionals and laypersons throughout the state. Through the clinic's toll-free number, calls are received covering the full spectrum of issues addressed by laws intended to protect children's health and safety. Some of these calls are referred to students who do legal research; however, faculty answer most of questions that students receive. While clinic faculty do not represent the adults seeking advice, basic legal information is provided and callers are often referred to other agencies that can better address a caller's specific needs. Advice and referrals are provided free of charge.

CAC also has formally collaborated with Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan (VAMM), an agency affiliated with the Student Advocacy Center in Washtenaw County. Through this partnership, law and social work students were trained to advocate for K-12 students facing school suspension or expulsions. Students sought to contribute to VAMM's overarching mission to end the "school to prison pipeline." In addition to advocating for individual students, CAC students conducted outreach activities to inform parents and schools of these services.

Program faculty and students also speak to various community groups, including grandparents' groups, men's parenting groups, employer-facilitated groups, and other organizations regarding the many issues that families often encounter in the family court system. Such presentations are made to both laypersons and professional. For over ten years, CAC has partnered with Michigan's statewide Court Improvement Program, developing and presenting many trainings for child welfare professionals, including the development of a series of videos depicting best practices in a series of child welfare hearings. CAC is currently working with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to update and distribute CAC's series of mandated reporter pamphlets. Over fifty thousand copies of these pamphlets (specifically designed for teachers, law enforcement, medical professionals, social workers, and other mandated reporters as defined by Michigan law) have been already distributed throughout the State of Michigan.

Through these various community-based endeavors, CAC is able to affect the outreach mission of MSU. This provides both law students and social work students with a wide

variety of opportunities for interdisciplinary child welfare field experience. Students gain the interdisciplinary perspective in these endeavors by working hand-in-hand with students and professionals based both in social work and law, and through joint legal and social work supervision by CAC faculty and the practitioners involved in these many and varied projects.

### **Program Feedback**

In addition to the data presented above, CAC regularly collects data from our community partners and from our student graduates to measure the program's effectiveness at achieving the goals set forth in CAC's logic model. One primary research question focuses on whether program alumni believe that an interprofessional approach to child welfare education is, in fact, beneficial to students. Related considerations include whether interprofessional education in general, and the completion of the CAC program specifically, provides any benefit to students in terms of the jobs they obtain, the salaries they earn, their effectiveness as professionals, and their longevity in the field of child welfare. Preliminary alumni survey data suggests that alumni do believe that participating in CAC better prepared them for practice in the field, and "set them apart" when applying for child welfare-related positions. Of the 28 alumni surveys that were completed, 86% (24) responded that they would refer clients to CAC, 96% (27) reported they would encourage other students to enroll in CAC, and 86% (24) responded that they would encourage the courts to work with CAC.

Further, over 90% of respondents reported that their expectations were met, exceeded, or greatly exceeded regarding client interactions, legal experience, supervision, child welfare experience, and team building opportunities. 100% of respondents reported they understood and valued the different roles that lawyers and social workers play in the family court system. Finally, 85% of alumni who responded to the survey felt competent that they could conduct a home visit and custody investigation after completing the CAC program.

As CAC continues to evolve, additional specific research questions will arise as faculty and students embark on new projects. However, the fundamental questions regarding the benefits of CAC's interprofessional approach and the benefits of CAC's commitment to blending classroom and practical education experiences will determine the long-term viability of CAC as it is currently structured. Given the current structure of the program, CAC provides an opportunity to test a variety of hypotheses regarding the nature and effectiveness of interprofessional child welfare education and practice.

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