

### **Training partnership improves youth and family services in Superior community**

Northwood Children's Services in northern Wisconsin is a national leader in training social services providers and educators who work with youth in need of special services. By teaming up with UW-Superior's Center for Continuing Education/Extension, they've provided university level training for 68 persons, resulting in a more qualified and competent workforce that is more responsive to the special needs of youth in the social services system. The Youth and Family Services Certificate program gives professionals comprehensive knowledge and skills to use when working with children and their families. Participants have been able to use the information in their jobs, some have made changes in policy or decision-making, and many have received increased responsibilities or promotions as a result of their training.

#### **Situation:**

Professionals who work with youth and their families in social services, other agencies, and school settings are continually challenged to update their knowledge and skills to more effectively meet the needs of their clients. However, there is a lack of comprehensive training for both professionals and paraprofessionals. Also, undergraduate and graduate students need practical training to help them compete in the job market.

#### **Response:**

UW-Superior Center for Continuing Education/Extension (CCE/E) formed a partnership with Northwood Children's Services (NCS) to provide a Youth and Family Services Certificate program. NCS is recognized as a national leader in staff training curriculum. This partnership transformed NCS's existing curriculum into a comprehensive training program for professionals, paraprofessionals, and undergraduate and graduate students. NCS provided expertise in program content and instruction. CCE/E provided leadership in developing, managing and structuring the program. Once established, an academic credit option was submitted and approved for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) by the Minnesota Board of Social Work.

The program has run continuously since its inception in 1999. It consists of four sessions, each comprised of seven, two-hour workshops on child and adolescent development, applied child and adolescent abnormal development, applied behavior management and intervention for adolescents and children, and intervention strategies for families. Some participants enroll for the entire certificate program, others for one or more of the individual sessions. At the completion of all four sessions, participants receive the Youth and Family Services Certificate. One graduate credit in Counseling or one undergraduate credit in Psychology may be awarded for each session. Since January 1999, 68 participants have enrolled and 34 have completed their certificates. Eight individuals have elected to take the program for academic credit, completing additional coursework.

#### **Impacts:**

Participants evaluated program content and methods after each two hour session and again after all seven workshops were completed. Six to twelve months after completion of the entire

certificate program, 22 of the 34 participants were mailed a survey to assess how the program influenced their practice and profession. Respondents rated five statements on a 5-point scale from “Completely Agree” to “Completely Disagree”. Of the 12 persons (56%) who responded:

- 50% completely agreed or agreed the knowledge gained in the program improved their professional competency and/or standing. The program:  
“...provided me with tools to use in workplace”  
“...broadened my knowledge in several areas”  
“...assisted me in moving up two job titles”
- 58% completely agreed or agreed the knowledge gained in the program enriched them personally. The program:  
“...taught me ways to de-escalate in a more efficient manner”  
“...helped me to understand myself”
- 58% completely agreed or agreed the program helped them increase productivity.  
“I will now be able to advance in my current employment.”  
“Improved my skills when dealing with the kids I work with”  
“...my team has commented on my improved skills”
- 33% completely agreed or agreed that as a result of this program they implemented changes in their economic decision-making, and /or policy development.  
“I try to offer more critical feedback to co-worker when needed.”  
“[I implemented] new strategies for managing behaviors...”
- 50% completely agreed or agreed that completion of the certificate program resulted in personal and/or professional gains.  
“[It] assisted me in moving up two job titles.”  
“[I received an] increased salary”

The Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) and life skills segment were listed as the most valuable aspects of the program. “[I am] better able to understand the psychological disorders of my clients,” said one participant. Another added, “[It was the best behavior program I have seen.”

Others cited insights gained and integrated into their professional practice. These included having a more active role in promoting youth’s assests. One person said, “I have retrained all of my children’s Personal Care Assistants and rewritten the support plan in a more positive way.” A second said, “There was a young man I was dealing with outside of work, and after this program I had much greater insight into his problems.”

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