Hello, Alumni!

- Would you like to be included in your next alumni newsletter? All updates on family, travels, photos, and upcoming workshops are encouraged and welcome!
- Remember ‘Alumni Friday’, that Autumn event that brings in panels of alumni to speak to their areas of passion? Please join us next Fall.
- Send updates to james.caringi@mso.umt.edu

$3.2 Million Grant Awarded to UM

The federal Administration for Children and Families recently announced that the National Native Children’s Trauma Center at The University of Montana and its partners have won a $3.2 million grant to apply cutting-edge research to the problems of child abuse and neglect in Indian Country. The work will benefit at least three reservations in Montana during the next three years.

Second year MSW Student Mollie Devlin speaks with Professor Caringi to discuss newly awarded grant.

So to start, could you tell us more about the grant? The grant is really about addressing the fact that trauma plays such a huge role in neglected and abused children in Indian country. The systems that deal with these children and families have little idea how to deal with the impact of trauma on kids lives. So what we’re trying to do is to create trauma informed systems. The grant is housed in the National Native Children’s Trauma Center and Rick van del pol is the Co-Principal Investigators on the grant.

So how do you see this grant being utilized and by whom? This builds upon five years of partnerships with native communities, we are partnering with tribal leaders and individuals from the communities that we’re working with, and much of the research portion of the grant will involve Community Based Participatory Research and Co-Researchers in the communities. This involves talking with child welfare workers themselves, schools, mental health centers, and the legal system which they may be involved with.

What does this grant mean to you professionally and personally? I’m just incredibly excited about this because it has the potential to have a huge impact on these kids’ lives, and personally brings together all of my areas of interest: Trauma, Secondary Trauma, and Child Abuse and Neglect. This builds upon all of the work I have done since my MSW program, where I read Bessel’s work in Boston. Through the work of the grant I’ve gotten to meet some of my trauma hero’s; I’ve met Bessel van der kolk (Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Center, Boston), Laurie Perelman, Robert Fairbank (Duke University). In many ways this sets the stage for the next five years of my career, I know what I am going to be doing a lot of and am really excited about that.

It sounds like this grant will help to keep you very busy for many years. Yes, and as with all of my grants, I always write in rolls for MSW students. We currently have two second year MSW students working on a project. These students have contributed greatly and have been able to participate in what they describe as life changing events, like sweat lodges and meeting with community leaders and elders.
“I will miss her and her incredible voice. She wasn’t afraid to stand up to anyone or speak her mind, no matter how controversial her opinion. I will forever be inspired by her courage.”

Fellow classmate, Liz Stoeckel

MSW Class of 2009 Loses an Alumni

Lisa Petersen was an excellent student. She was super fun to be around, passionate about her work, and a great, great person. All of us who had contact with her at the School of Social Work have fond memories of our interactions with her. She will be missed in so many ways. **We dedicate this issue of the MSW Alumni Newsletter to the memory of Lisa Peterson.**

Jim Caringi
MSW Program Director

Long-term Partnership Proposal To Address Social Issues

by Ryan Tolleson Knee

Suicide, alcoholism, child abuse, and domestic violence are problems that have plagued Montanans for decades. Programs and services have been developed to help combat the problems with varying degrees of success. Because the University of Montana’s School of Social Work is the state’s institution charged with providing qualified social workers for the state’s public and private social and human services providers, part of its future should involve how to better connect its intellectual resources to the state’s most pressing social problems. Action research and service learning courses have positively impacted local agencies and the clients it serves through increased student involvement in Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and area nursing homes. A concerted and well-orchestrated effort that better intertwines undergraduate and graduate policy, research, and practice courses to a specific social problem over a long time period has not occurred.

The University of Illinois–Champaign/Urbana’s public planning department reformulated its coursework and learning opportunities to increase student involvement in East St. Louis to work side by side with community residents to revitalize its economy, transform its transportation system, clean its streets and playgrounds, and empower community residents. With adequate funding, a similar long term commitment could be made by the School of Social Work to significantly lessen a statewide problem that has and continues to disrupt the lives of Montana’s citizens. Finally, by committing the School’s faculty, student, and intellectual resources, other academic disciplines around the state could emulate the school’s efforts and make similar long-term commitments to address social problems in partnership with other individual disciplines and areas of expertise to connect college campuses to community needs in unprecedented ways.
Alumni Updates: What’s New in Your World?

Becky Buell Rodrigues, class of 2009 is pictured above walking the El Camino de Santiago pilgrimage bridge in Spain for her honeymoon. She married her husband Ken in June 2009 and is planning a trip to Machu Picchu in 2012. She is working at Hospice of St. Peter’s in Helena.

Liz Stoeckel ’09 recently accepted a position at Community Medical Center as the Behavior Specialist for the Bridges outpatient brain injury rehab program. After a two-year stint raising money for Homeword, a nonprofit affordable housing agency, she’s thrilled to return to her former practicum site and put her education to use in a clinical setting.

Eran Fowler Pehan, class of 2007, has recently accepted the position of Executive Director at the Poverello Center, Inc. The Poverello Center provides emergency food and shelter to homeless men and women in Missoula, facilitates a homeless outreach team designed to work with unsheltered chronically homeless individuals, and operates two highly successful transitional housing programs; the Joseph Residence at Maclay Commons for homeless families and the Valor House for homeless veterans. Eran and her husband will also be welcoming another daughter in February.

Stephanie Cymbal, Class of 2011,
I am joyfully working as an outpatient oncology social worker at Kalispell Regional Medical Center and gaining hours towards licensure. In addition, I am part of a team that is developing a palliative care program for the Flathead community. My five chickens have been providing my family sustenance and my husband and two dogs are enjoying getting my undivided attention again!

Dylan Rincker (Class of 2009) is working as an In-Home Family Therapist at Western Montana Mental Health Center and living in the beautiful Nine Mile Valley (but never combines the two).

Kelsey O’Connell After May 2011 graduation, I took the job at the Montana Cancer Center at St. Patrick Hospital. It’s been both exciting and difficult. I am loving it. Matt and I moved in together and are having fun playing house. My dog Ebi had so much fun hiking and floating this summer that she tore her A.C.L. and had to have surgery. Keeping her inactive for at least six weeks has been a whole new challenge. Wish me luck! Hope everyone else is doing well. Miss you guys!

Just a quick update from Canada. I am still telecommuting to work at the University of Montana Rural Institute and am teaching two Social Work courses (one online and one in person) at the University of Victoria. A colleague in Helena, Montana and I are launching an eating disorders information and education website (http://www.healthy-reflections.org). We hope to “go live” on Halloween. Greetings to everyone in Montana and to UM MSW’ers across the country!

Alumni! We would really love to hear from you, please email us any change of email to Cyndi Stary at Cyndi.stari@mso.umt.edu
Professor Janet Finn Discusses Sabbatical Plans

For my sabbatical time I am completing work on a social history of childhood in Butte, 1900-1960 to be published in Fall, 2012 by the Montana Historical Society Press.

I am also co-editing two collected volumes. The prospectus for the first, Gender Oppression and Globalization: Challenges for Social Work, is currently under review by the Council on Social Work Education Committee on Publications. Twelve authors are contributing chapters addressing such issues as: the impact of globalization on the lives of sex workers in Mumbai, India; the place of performance poetry in healing from social and political trauma; and grassroots organizing for social and economic justice by immigrant women union workers in Las Vegas.

The proposal for the second, entitled Place, Power, and Possibility: Remaking Social Work with Children and Youth, has just been submitted for review by Columbia University Press. This book brings together an interdisciplinary and intergenerational groups of 20+ scholars, practitioners, and activists who are exploring the institutional and social spaces shaping young people's lives and the roles of helping professionals therein. Contributors examine the power relations in the care and control of children and youth and open up possibilities for innovative and transformative practice informed by young people themselves.

Both of these projects will be in various stages of development through the spring and summer. So, that's what's keeping me occupied these days.

-Janet

Professor Conley’s Sabbatical

Conley’s sabbatical is going well. After taking the summer almost completely off to spend with family and on traveling, he is back to work on publications, networking, and taking an inventory of all addiction related college courses in the state. He will continue to work to strengthen addiction education and practice opportunities for students throughout Montana.

First year versus second year MSW students join together for a post-kickball photo (Spring 2011).
Effective teaching requires ongoing learning, and sabbaticals allow for professional development, research, and scholarship to enrich teaching and add to the knowledge base of social work. During my spring 2011 sabbatical, I spent 3 months in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia with the purpose of understanding social work education in these nations, learning about the role of social work in developing areas, and being exposed to the experience of aging through agency visits and interactions with elders.

Prior to travel, I learned about each country’s history, contemporary social issues, and the social development indicators such as income, policy development, literacy rate, life expectancy, health status, and more. Learning about how social workers are involved in social development as a way of promoting social functioning and how social work education is structured to prepare practitioners helped me to engage with professionals, educators, clients, and everyday people.

In Bangladesh, one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world, walking among the poor and disadvantaged in both megacities and rural villages reached by boat and foot raised my awareness immensely. Presenting a poster and facilitating a panel at the conference of the International Consortium on Social Development, visiting social work schools, and interacting with elders in care facilities and in the community brought significant insight.

Seeing social work dealing with poverty, natural disasters, health promotion, and social policy development was instructive and inspiring.

In Malaysia, I was able to teach MSW students at the Universiti Sains Malaysia and train social workers to supervise practicum students. I visited agencies serving older adults, and interacted with numerous Muslim and ethnic Chinese elders about their lives. I traveled to villages of indigenous people struggling to maintain their unique cultural identity.

Cambodia has no formal social work education, but impressive social development efforts are underway to promote cultural recovery from the impacts of genocide during the Khmer Rouge Regime of the 1970’s, providing services to land mine victims, eradicate human trafficking, and reducing poverty. One highlight was time spent utilizing life review techniques with an 83 year old former prisoner of the Khmer Rouge (one of only 7 survivors of a political prison which sent 17,000 to the killing fields), bearing witness to atrocities and calling for justice.

In Vietnam, I met with faculty and students at Vietnam National University in Hanoi, visited agencies in urban areas and traveled to ethnically diverse rural areas where social development efforts are underway. An incredible cross cultural practice opportunity was afforded me as I met with veterans of the American/Vietnam War who were former enemies of the U.S. and was able to lead a therapeutic life review group, allowing participants to talk about their traumatic experiences in war and its after effects, desire for peace, forgiveness, intergenerational teaching about war, and making meaning of trauma.

Grateful for this deeply rich and impacting experience, I am incorporating my knowledge and deepened insights into my teaching and into professional presentations; remembering with gratitude each individual I met and each experience afforded me.

Cindy, Spring 2012