Protecting Vulnerable Children: The Title IV-E Education for Public Child Welfare Program

By Terry Cardillino, in an interview with Jennifer Wright, LCSW-C, Social Work Department Director of Field Education

The three primary goals of public child welfare are the safety, permanence and well-being of children. The Title IV-E Education for Public Child Welfare Program is designed specifically to meet these goals by recruiting and training competent social workers to enter the field of public child welfare.

Federal Title IV-E child welfare funds support an educational partnership between the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the Maryland Department of Human Resources. Within this partnership, Title IV-E specialized training is offered at Salisbury University, the University of Maryland Baltimore County and Morgan State University. The challenging program at Salisbury University is open to Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) students.

SU has played a major role in bringing the Title IV-E education program to all areas throughout the State of Maryland, especially to the rural areas, by starting four satellite locations. Technology is used to provide distance education in addition to on-site instruction beyond the main campus. Approximately one third of SU program field students are training at satellite locations in Hagerstown, Elkton and the Higher Education Center at Chesapeake College in Wye Mills. The fourth site will open fall 2013 in California, MD, in Saint Mary’s County.

This continued outreach into the rural areas will have a significant positive impact. Throughout Maryland, local Departments of Social Services need highly qualified and well-trained social workers to protect vulnerable children. Public child welfare is the largest service area within these county departments, and Title IV-E education is focused on this need.

“Prior to Salisbury University offering the Master of Social Work, the Eastern Shore did not have enough supervisors in public child welfare,” said Jennifer Wright, LCSW-C, SU’s director of field education for the Social Work Department. “The advanced training and field experience required were not easily accessible there, and candidates were required to travel to the Western Shore. The satellite locations fulfill a great need for the delivery of public child welfare services.”

The Title IV-E program is unique in several ways. Students receive a financial stipend of between $8,000 and $9,500 per school year to help pay for tuition and fees. Upon graduation, they are guaranteed a job with the Maryland Department of Human Resources. This is a contractual agreement to work in public child welfare. For every academic year of participation in the program, there is an employment obligation of 12 months. Students who withdraw from the program or choose not to fulfill the employment obligation must repay their stipend.

The program is very competitive, and the number of stipends is limited to available funding. Training includes field placement in a local Department of Social Services. Students attend six child welfare seminars per year in addition to the required field seminars that all M.S.W. candidates attend, and a specialized Child Welfare elective is required. Title IV-E students also are provided competency test training and take the competency exam as part of their IV-E training at SU, giving them the advantage of entering their job with that higher skill level.

“Title IV-E is an excellent stepping stone into the public child welfare arena and career advancement,” Wright commented. “To be a supervisor at a local Department of Social Services in the state child welfare system, one must have two years post-M.S.W. experience and pass an advanced licensing exam along with the competency test.”

Title IV-E social workers serve to protect children by performing many functions. They work with Child Protective Services on abuse and neglect investigations. They provide in-home services to children and their parents by helping them solve difficulties such as navigating the school system, linking parents to addiction and mental health services, and helping parents advocate for their children and become better role models. These workers also provide out-of-home services by recruiting and training foster parents, monitoring children placed in foster care or homes for adoption, and reporting to the court system.

The field of public child welfare is certainly challenging, but the work can be extremely rewarding. “Research on the Title IV-E program has shown that graduates are more satisfied with their job, as they have had the proper training and know what to expect, and because of this job retention is higher,” Wright explained. The result is a win-win situation for both the graduates and the children and families they serve.
STAND4YOU: Raising Awareness and Promoting Treatment

By Kathleen Scott, Ph.D., Counseling Center Director & Anisa Diab, NCC, LGPC, STAND4YOU Program Coordinator

Thanks to a three-year, $302,883 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SU’s Counseling Center and a cross-discipline team of faculty and staff have developed STAND4YOU. This suicide-prevention program’s goals include using awareness campaigns, discussion groups, e-trainings and outreach consultations to foster early detection of mental health issues and change student behavior by increasing their openness to seeking help.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in college-age students, and an increased number of students are coming to campus with more complex and severe problems than in the past.

SU students are not immune to mental health problems. Of concern are students whose behavior is disruptive or alarming, students who stop going to class or completing their homework because they are too depressed to get out of bed or lack motivation, students whose thought processes are distorted or obsessive, and students who have had to take time off from school due to family tragedies and circumstances that demand their attention and alter their mood and priorities, among other problems. The need for adequate mental health services has never been so clear.

The good news is that treatment can help improve mood and functioning, and that counseling helps students remain in school and perform better. SU’s Counseling Center launched the STAND4YOU suicide prevention and mental health promotion program in January 2013, and there are a number of program components being implemented to help our students.

One component is Kognito at-Risk, an online interactive simulation training that uses avatars and realistic scenarios to teach participants how to recognize problems in students, intervene effectively with those students and make referrals to appropriate resources. The training has been shown to be effective in its goals and is listed as a best practice with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

To date, 52 faculty, 156 staff and 463 students have completed the training, including almost all Student Affairs Office staff and student leaders such as resident assistants, orientation leaders, SGA board members, supplemental instruction leaders, peer educators and student mentors, among others. For the majority of faculty and staff who completed the training, this was their first time receiving any kind of suicide prevention training. For students, 92 percent (N=313) indicated that they would recommend the training to a friend/peer. Anecdotally, those who completed the training reported that they enjoyed the interactive nature of the training, felt that the scenarios were relevant and applicable to their professional and personal life, and thought that the information and training were useful.

First-year and transfer students are being asked to complete the training prior to their arrival on campus in the fall. To complete the training, faculty and staff can go to www.kognitocampus.com/faculty and students can go to www.kognitocampus.com/student and use Enrollment Key: Salisbury51.

Another component of the program is Let’s Talk, a drop-in consultation service for students in satellite locations around campus modeled after a program developed at Cornell University. Let’s Talk allows students to receive feedback about multiple topics of concern, ask questions about counseling and engage in less formal contact with Counseling Center staff to assist with reducing the stigma to seeking counseling. If appropriate, Let’s Talk counselors recommend that students participate in counseling; otherwise, the consultation itself is the assistance provided. No appointments are needed and services are free.

The STAND4YOU program also sponsored awareness events such as the program kick-off in February and “Step it Up!” held in May, as well as student trainings related to suicide prevention and mental health promotion. Awareness events slated for the fall include World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10 and Depression Awareness Month in October. There also will be an “Out of the Darkness Walk” for suicide awareness and prevention taking place on September 28 on the boardwalk in Ocean City. These events provide an opportunity to engage and educate students about suicide and mental health issues.

STAND4YOU has built partnerships both on and off campus and is working to further expand these collaborative efforts. A STAND4YOU student team also has been created, and any student or organization is welcome to join. The purpose of these teams is to identify needs and plan events and programs that will effectively reach students and contribute to a campus that is proactive in addressing the mental health issues of students.

If you would like to become involved with STAND4YOU or have questions, visit: www.salisbury.edu/counseling/STAND4YOU