

## FROM THE EDITOR

### **Broadening Vistas in Child and Youth Work: The Harvard Program in Risk and Prevention**

Several occurrences converge to make timely the presentation of the work of the Harvard Risk and Prevention program to the child and youth work field and to other human service related disciplines and professions: rapid social change, boundary shifting in human service professions, interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education, and the movement to locate social services in schools so that members of a community may obtain what they need in one setting.

Predicted for the future are economic uncertainty, political unrest, multicultural populations, environmental concerns and overall rapid social change. These circumstances will pose challenges to young people, their families and the various institutions of society that support them in development and daily living. As educators, child and youth workers, and members of human service professions, it will devolve upon us all to find the most effective and efficient interventions and ways to equip children and youth to adapt to and function productively in this complex world of the future.

In traditional human services, professional boundaries are loosening and increasingly overlapping as practitioners recognize that with limited resources they may be able to accomplish more for their clients if they collaborate around common goals and aspects of their practice. In this way they preserve the unique contributions of their field while sharing commonality with others. Similarly in higher education, new perspectives on the nature of knowledge, along with the realities of financial cutbacks, are encouraging interdisciplinary curricula and delivery structures that build upon common features of structurally separated disciplines.

In the community we have the advent of the "full service" school, in which the school is the focal point and locus not only for education, but also for other human services delivered not only to children and youth, but their families as well. Thus, increasingly in schools, teachers and other educators will need to be sensitive to the problems and pressures their students are facing out of school, and to how their lives out of school affect their academic work. Conversely, child and youth workers and members of other human service professions, will find a need for their knowledge and skills within school settings. For them, it will be crucial that they understand the significance of school in the lives of children and youth and that they work collaboratively with school personnel and students' families to promote their common goal of healthy development and growth towards a productive adulthood.

All of the above situations relate to the burgeoning advancement as a profession of child and youth care work, with its focus on promoting positive development in children, youth and families and to the significant

implications of the Harvard Risk and Prevention Program for this effort. Looking at the goal of the Risk and Prevention Program and its graduates alongside of child and youth work, we see compelling commonalities: a developmental conceptual base, a focus on relationships, the encouragement of social growth, the development and utilization of interpersonal and activity-based interventions, and the emphasis on working in the life space of the child, whether it be a family, a school, a residential or group program, or a neighborhood.

When visiting one of the schools where Professor Michael Nakkula supervises his students and does pair therapy (an intervention to be described in the journal), I saw him conduct a “stair case” counseling session with a youth who was having difficulty. The language might be different from what the child and youth care field would call a “life space interview,” but the intent and the process were the same. This simply confirmed my conviction that both the commonalities with, and distinctions between, the Risk and Prevention program and the programs and activities of child and youth care work can be empowering to both as we work towards our mutual goals.

The collection begins with a conceptual overview to the Risk and Prevention Program by Michael Nakkula, Catherine Ayoub, Gil Noam, and Robert Selman. It has often been stated that the field of child and youth care needs a strongly articulated conceptual base. We will find the concepts of child and youth development, of risk and resilience factors that either impede or promote it, and of prevention strategies, highly germane and a seminal contribution. In our growing tradition of presenting innovative curricula (the description of the Direct Care Practice Concentration in the Sociology Department of the State University of New York at New Paltz was featured in our Volume 10), we also find in this piece a description of the Risk and Prevention curriculum that is directly derived from its conceptual base.

In a description of the RALLY program, an in-school program in which “prevention practitioners” work directly with children and youth in the classroom and out, Gil Noam and his collaborators articulate for us the role of a milieu-based worker whose functions are akin to that of child and youth workers in other settings. The concept and rationale for the “prevention practitioner” are a valuable model for the burgeoning effort to define and implement the role of the child and youth workers.

No matter in what setting we work — schools, after school and community programs, early childhood programs, residential and group care — it is important today that we understand how our multicultural clients’ motivation to learn is affected by both internal and external factors. Similarly, as we move more towards a family-centered model, it is crucial that we know how motivation and learning are affected by family values that may differ across cultural groups. The research of Janine Bempechat and her colleagues in this area has cross-setting implications and crucial insights

that can contribute to our awareness and more sensitive practices.

In the section "Developmental Youth Work in Action: Research and Practice," the pieces reflect the integral intertwining of program design and implementation, and of research conducted within these programs to shed light on those processes that lead to positive development for children and youth.

Thomas Shaw, in the first piece, shows us how learning much more about the world of youth, as they see it, gives us greater credibility with them and hence enhances the impact of our work. Andy Schneider-Muñoz in a related piece reports, as part of a larger study, of a youth in residential treatment. His ethnographic findings of how she utilized multiple caregivers in her social growth has major significance for the child and youth care field in which our work focuses on relationship formation with previously traumatized children and youth. William Penuel, in a similar vein to the two prior pieces, describes how important the language is in which transactions with youth are framed and suggests "empowering youth worker language as congruent with the purposes of youth empowerment programming."

In "Telling All One's Heart: Research as an Intervention in Children's Lives" which focuses on the relationships children formed in an after-school art program, Professor Annie Rogers and her colleagues show how a close relationship between a program and research can be helpful in enabling the program to best address the children's needs and interests.

The section "Constructive Interventions for Social Growth" contains, first of all, two articles describing one of the seminal methods for helping children develop healthy social perspectives and relationships and with major relevance for child and youth work across age groups, category groups, and settings. This is pair therapy, a model pioneered by Professor Robert Selman and colleagues. The diversity of applications of pair therapy is reflected in the work of Catherine Ayoub and collaborators, who have developed it for working with very young children; and Michael Karcher, who utilized it to promote intergroup understanding of older youth through its ability to encourage the ability to take the perspective of others.

Then, showing how numerous concepts and intervention methods can actually be applied in designing and implementing a program, we have Marc Camras' description of the Youth Attaining Volunteer Excellence program (Youth A.V.E.) he conducted in Worcester, Massachusetts. All of us are concerned with "theory into practice" and this paper offers an excellent example of how theoretically and empirically derived approaches are actually implemented in settings serving children and youth.

I hope that these papers will lead to connection and further collaboration between the Risk and Prevention faculty and students and the Child and Youth Work field. Together we can work to address the compelling developmental needs of children, youth and families in the years to come.

- Karen VanderVen July 1996