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The Psychological Services Center (PSC)

505 E. Green St., 3rd floor

Training

The Psychological Services Center (PSC) is the primary training site for doctoral students in the Clinical/Community division of the Psychology Department—and an integral part of the Clinical Science model, which emphasizes the scientific and empirical grounding of psychological interventions. As part of this model, advanced doctoral students provide psychological services under the close supervision of faculty members with expertise in their fields.

Innovative Services

The PSC has been recognized for its innovative efforts to deliver psychological services to traditionally underserved populations and currently has several community outreach programs funded by a \$113,000 Community Mental Health Board Grant, including:

- The **Family Advocacy Project** for low income African-American families and the Effective Black Parenting Program
- The Community Advocacy Project for domestic violence survivors
- The JDC (**Juvenile Detention Center**) Project

Cutting-Edge Treatment and Assessment

The PSC is also a Clinic (located at 505 E. Green St.) where community residents receive treatment for psychological disorders from specialized clinical teams. The clinical teams utilize state-of-the-art empirically validated interventions to work with severe disorders such as anxiety, phobia, post-traumatic stress, personality disorders, severe depression, and other serious mental health problems. In addition, the PSC serves as one of the leading providers of comprehensive neuropsychological assessments in Illinois, attracting clients from around the state.

To learn more, visit the PSC website (www.psc.uiuc.edu) or call 217-333-0041.



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Mentors help poor 'really achieve'

Submitted by The News-Gazette on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 2:00pm

CHAMPAIGN – Dian Hunter has buried a husband, nursed a young son through cancer and done her best to raise eight children on a modest income.

A strong woman with a megawatt smile, she has dreams of running her own child-care business some day. But as a high-school dropout, she wasn't sure where to start.

Until she met Benita Rollins-Gay, a mentor with a new University of Illinois project targeting lower-income black families.

Rollins-Gay helped Hunter set goals, find helpful community services and plan a better future for her family.

This month, Hunter achieved step one: a high school diploma. On May 24, she marched proudly across the stage with other Urbana High School graduates.

"I think I was more excited than they were," said Hunter, 31, sitting in her spare Burch Village apartment. "I really achieved, and it just made me so happy. It shows my kids to follow in my footsteps."

The mentoring project is completing its first year, and director Gladys Hunt is pleased with its progress. So far, it has served 35 families, 10 more than its goal, and now has a waiting list. It's getting more referrals from schools and social-service agencies. And the Champaign County Mental Health Board just renewed the project's grant for another year, increasing funding from \$50,000 to \$90,000. The goal next year is to serve 40 families – 10 in Rantoul and 30 in Champaign-Urbana.

"So many times, you hear about mentors for children, but many times, parents and other family members need help as well," said Hunt, coordinator of program development and community outreach at the UI Psychological Services Center. "The family is a unit. If one part is hurting, the whole family is hurting."

Community mentors sit down with the families, help them set goals and figure out a plan to reach them. Many parents want to further their educations, but others are interested in finding a new job, buying a home, communicating better with their child's teacher or improving their financial situation.

"It puts the family in the driver's seat. The family decides what they want to do, what they need help with," Hunt said.

Mentors, with help from student advocates, then show families how to tap into community resources, and

they keep in touch on a regular basis. The goal is to teach the families, many of whom are very poor, to become self-sufficient, Hunt said.

"Services in our community are so fragmented. The youth get it over here; the parents get it over there. This program is geared to tie it altogether," she said.

Families get involved in the mentoring program in a number of ways, including neighborhood groups, churches or schools. Many have taken Hunt's 10-week class on Effective Black Parenting, either on their own or through the child-welfare system.

"What we saw is that they were just getting a taste on how to improve relationships with children," Hunt said. "I always felt like they needed more – a follow-up. That's what this is."

The program has five community mentors, who started working with families last September. By design, they are not UI employees, but ministers or others with ties to the community.

"A lot of times, people don't trust the university, don't trust agencies," Hunt said. Mentors are "more like intermediaries. People know them."

Mentor Regina Crider, 31, minister at Crossroad of Life Community Church in Rantoul, has worked as a family advocate for other agencies but likes the flexibility of this program.

"I've always had a heart and a passion to help people," she said. "I try to get them to see that everything is a resource."

To build trust, Crider tries to meet with her families at least once a week and talks to them on the phone in between.

"These are people who've had things embedded in them, ingrained in them for years and years. They're afraid of failing and afraid of trusting people," she said. "It's about building relationships and a rapport with people. You just don't become friends overnight."

Crider's own brief experience as a single mother several years ago helps, as many of her clients are single moms – including nursing student Elizabeth Williams, 24, who has a 2-year-old son.

"She is like a role model to me, because she has come so far," Williams said. "She basically has been in the same predicament I'm in, and she's come out so successful and able to use her experience to help other people like me, who are young and don't see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Williams was referred to the mentoring program by a friend. She had been struggling to make ends meet after returning to school full time this spring at Parkland College. She had trouble finding a job that fit into her academic schedule, and she had exhausted her savings.

She met with Crider over spring break. Soon after, she found a job with flexible hours at the Anabel Huling Early Learning Center in Rantoul, which her son, Ryan, also attends. She's taking a certified nurse aide class this summer so she can get a health-care job this fall. She hopes to graduate from Parkland's nursing program next spring and perhaps go on for her bachelor's.

Crider also helped Williams work up her nerve to press Ryan's father for consistent child support.

"She tried to get me to realize that I did need to stick to my guns and stand firm on things like child support, things that I was very passive about," Williams said. "I didn't want to have a confrontation and argue all the time. I didn't really like that I needed his help, but it is his responsibility."

In general, Williams appreciates having Crider as a neutral sounding board, someone she can call day or night who will share her own experiences and tell her "you're doing the right thing, you've got a good head on your shoulders, you're not crazy."

Similarly, Hunter has become close friends with Rollins-Gay, whom she met last October. They talk nearly every day. They attend school meetings together. And their families spent Thanksgiving and Christmas together.

"We're more like big sister, little sister," Rollins-Gay said.

Still, Hunter is fiercely independent. Once Rollins-Gay pointed her to a particular service, she would follow up on her own.

"She didn't want me to do it for her," Rollins-Gay said.

Born in Buffalo, N.Y., Hunter was raised in Peoria and later moved to Chicago. She had dropped out of high school after 10th grade so her mother wouldn't have to care for her two children.

Four years ago, her oldest son, now 7, was diagnosed with ear cancer. The family moved to Champaign to be closer to St. Jude's Hospital in Peoria, where he underwent radiation and chemotherapy. He is now in remission.

"He'd say, 'Mommy, don't worry about me, I'm gonna be all right.' I thought I was gonna lose him, but I stuck through it," recalled Hunter, who was pregnant with her 3-year-old son at the time.

Her current husband, cab driver Chris Watson, took care of the other children while she stayed in Peoria.

"I don't know what I would have done without him," she said.

Hunter had taken the Effective Black Parenting class but felt she needed more help, so she signed up for the mentoring program.

Rollins-Gay took her to the Social Security office and helped Hunter figure out where to look for a part-time job. She would drop by to take Hunter's children to Hessel Park. She directed Hunter to agencies that provide free food and clothing, and student advocates arranged for Big Sisters for her three older girls.

"She helped me get the motivation, believe me," Hunter said. "I am a quiet person, but she helps me to open up more."

She had enrolled in the high school completion program through Urbana Adult Education several times before, but didn't have anyone "to push me to go through it, so I kept quitting," she said. "This time, I proved to myself that I could do it."

Hunter wants the feeling to rub off on her children. She and her oldest daughter, Markeisha, 14, have signed a contract: If she finishes college before Markeisha graduates from high school, Markeisha will "have to buy me something big," and vice versa.

She's brushing up on her reading and math skills this summer through the EvenStart program, which provides child-care for preschool children while parents attend classes. She plans to attend Parkland College in the fall and is interested in starting a day-care business.

"I just love kids, but I don't want to have any more," she said, laughing.

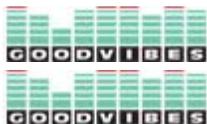
Because each family's goals vary, success is hard to define. For one of Crider's clients who had been unemployed for more than a year, just filling out five job applications was a big step.

"That's progress, compared to where she was when we first started working with her," Crider said. "If you can get a person to just change a little bit, then you are successful. The goals sometimes may be small, but they're still big deals for some of these people. ... Change doesn't come overnight."

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