

Filling the gap to bring help to the abused child

Social workers are capable of helping abused children and their families from the witness stand and in lawyers' conference rooms as well as in counseling offices and private homes.

But the type of advocacy does not come naturally to those with little or no legal training, according to Lisa E. D'Aunno, adjunct assistant professor of law at the University of Michigan.

For four years, D'Aunno has been working to fill the gap in the background of Michigan social workers. D'Aunno and Clyde Owings, U-M associate professor of pediatrics and communicable diseases, conduct intensive two-day training sessions for nearly 400 social workers throughout the each year.

"Although Michigan's Department of Social Services recommends such training, it does not require it of the state's licensed social workers," D'Aunno said. "And they receive very little legal training in their graduate degree program."

"Yet, caseworkers often find themselves making decisions that affect the legal outcome of child abuse cases, usually without counsel. They need a road map of the juvenile court process in order to work knowledgeably on behalf of abused and neglected children."

The legal training is funded by the Michigan Department of Social Services and focuses on the legal aspects of child abuse and neglect, including the rights of children and their families and constitutional limitations placed on social workers.

"THE FIRST session leads protective services and foster-care workers through the legal steps involved in non-voluntary intervention in an abusive or neglectful family."

The second session focuses on the legal limitations of investigating suspected child abuse, on strategies for termination of parental rights and on caseworker liability.

Social workers' jobs become more complicated when they are undertaking non-voluntary intervention, according to D'Aunno. About 85 percent of the families will cooperate with protective services caseworkers, but the other 15 percent to 20 percent "say 'get off my porch,'" she said.

"Such families present a significant risk to their children," she said. "In such non-voluntary, high risk cases, social workers must decide if the child involved is in an emergency situation and, if so, obtain the proper authorization to enter the home."

D'Aunno cited the situation in which a teacher reporting a child's continuous absence from school as an example. A social worker must decide whether the child is in danger, needs non-voluntary intervention or, in extreme cases, police protection, she said.

The social worker would need to show reasonable cause that abuse or neglect was being committed and, except in emergency situations, would be required to obtain a court order or search warrant to enter the child's home, she added.

"PART OF my job is to sensitize social workers to these important details to help them use the juvenile system to help the child," D'Aunno said. "As it is, child welfare workers often feel the legal system is weighted against the state's interests in protecting children."

An important part of a caseworker's job is to see that children's rights are upheld, D'Aunno said. Complicating that responsibility is the apparent contradiction between two of these basic rights — children's right to remain with their parents and the right to protection from parental abuse.

"The children often appear caught between those two rights," D'Aunno said. "In general, the parents are the child's best protectors. The social worker must be able to prove that a child is in danger at home in order to recommend placement in a foster home as a final resort."

Social workers should use their knowledge to help the court protect the child and "to shape the case," D'Aunno said.

"As a strong advocate of the child's best interests, they have the responsibility to do more on the stand than answer 'yes' and 'no' questions," she said. "I suggest they present any information they consider important and make sure they provide factual proof that a particular parent isn't capable of caring for a child."

THAT APPROACH goes against the grain of many social workers who see themselves primarily as mediators between parents and children rather than as opposing parties.

"I advise them to take their place within the law, to stay on the heels of the lawyers and follow them into the judges' chambers rather than waiting out in the courthouse hallway," she said. "If a case is leading to a negotiated outcome, the social worker should know what's going on."

In addition to the legal aspects of child abuse intervention, the U-M training program presents techniques for investigating and verifying incidents of physical abuse. Owing shows social workers how to use their skills of observation and to collect information that could help them reconstruct injury scenes and how to distinguish normal, accidental childhood injuries from those resulting from abuse.

"Social workers should look very carefully at the total situation before quickly accepting glib explanations of an accident," D'Aunno said.



Dorothy O'Bara (left), promoter of the upcoming antique show, and Lois Scupholm of Scupholm Antiques fasten the sign announcing the show at the historic Botsford Inn.

Antiquers host Christmas show

The Botsford Inn Antique Show celebrates its 20th year as it stages its Christmas show and sale during the Thanksgiving weekend. The event will be open to the public from noon to 8 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 26 and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 27.

The historic inn is proud of the

fact that this is one of the oldest continuously-run shows in the state, with at least three shows a year over that 20-year history. The holiday show highlights 20 dealers, selling everything from antique jewelry to Victorian furniture. They represent a selected group of dealers who are known for their reasonable prices,

said Dorothy O'Bara, one of the show's promoters.

Admission is free and guests are invited to tour the inn and view its remarkable collection of antiques. Meals are available in the dining room from noon to 10:30 p.m. on Saturday and on Sunday a brunch is offered from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with

dinner until 8 p.m.

Two dealers who have been involved in every show over the last 20 years. They are Ruth Hellmann of Livonia, who will feature her jewelry and china, and Lois Scupholm of Redford Township who will have children's kindergarten table and chair sets.

Jingle bell run benefits arthritis foundation

Runners will tie the bells to their shoes at the start of the "Max & Erma's Jingle Bell Run for Arthritis" at 10 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 4.

The 5K fun run will start at Hunter Square Tally Hall at 14 Mile and Orchard Lake roads in Farmington Hills. Along with the 5K walk, there will be a one-mile walk, wheelchair division and holiday costume competition.

The best costume will win air fare and accommodations for two to Busch Gardens in Florida. Awards will be presented to the top runners in each division. The awards ceremony will be held at the finish line and a post race party chill buffet will be at Max & Erma's restaurant in Hunters Square.

"This is a fun run that is unique in several ways," said Marilyn Fessler,

Arthritis Foundation, metro Detroit branch spokesperson.

"The bells the runners will be wearing will sound like a herd of reindeer coming down the street. A special holiday costume contest will be featured during the race with runners encouraged to dress up in a holiday theme costume individually or in groups."

Young or old, fit or not, all will be able to gear up for an exciting day of fun and fitness. Registration starts today and is \$8 a person. The first 500 registered runners will receive "Max & Erma's Jingle Bell Run" long sleeved T-shirts.

Registration information may be obtained by calling the race/hotline/Arthritis Foundation at 350-3030. Ask for Marilyn Fessler or Barbara Waters. Entry forms are available

at all Max & Erma's restaurants, area health and fitness clubs and the Arthritis Foundation. All proceeds

from the race benefit the programs and research of the Arthritis Foundation, Michigan chapter.

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