

[Child
Welfare
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UNH Joins State to Educate Child Welfare Workers

By *Sharon Keeler*
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DURHAM, N.H. -- The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services and the University of New Hampshire have joined together to offer social work students an opportunity to focus their education and future employment in the area of child welfare.

The partnership, which involves the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and UNH's Department of Social Work, provides up to five undergraduate B.S.W and three graduate M.S.W students with full in-state tuition benefits and stipend, and resources to attend training workshops and conferences. In exchange, each student agrees to work for DCYF immediately upon graduation -- one year for each year they receive the grant.

"Although New Hampshire has a commendable record of social and financial support to families, social problems related to child welfare have increased substantially both nationally and in New Hampshire over the past 10 years," says Jerry Finn, UNH professor of social work and director of the project. "The Child Welfare Training Project aims to help the state meet the demand for skilled workers who understand the complex needs of children and their families. Its purpose is to develop, expand and improve the training of people currently employed -- and those seeking future employment -- with DCYF.

Another focus of the project, he says, is to graduate students who have the ability and desire to move into positions of leadership within child protective services.

In addition to direct student aid, the Child Welfare Training Project provides program support to the university. A research component will allow Finn and state officials to evaluate the program's success. They will look at how long students work for the state, whether they are quality workers, and whether they develop expertise and move into positions of leadership. Funds are also provided for the development of a Child Welfare website that focuses on the needs of protective service workers.

"Working in child welfare is a difficult, stressful and demanding job, so it's hard to recruit new staff and retain employees," says Virginia Lamberton, DCYF assistant director and project coordinator. "This educational partnership with UNH is unique, in that it allows us to help educate and train students who will be our future employees. And, having students working in our offices helps renew the enthusiasm of current staff, who get to be teachers and mentors."

Lamberton says the Child Welfare Training Project with UNH has a two-year commitment from the state. Renewal depends upon governor and council approval.

Students receiving grants for the inaugural year of the project include undergraduates Anna Hopf and Molly Thomson of Newmarket, Allison Jordan of Manchester, Patricia Lindquist of Portsmouth and Angie Sargeant of Durham. Also receiving project support is graduate student Joanne Tarantino of Dover.

"I applied for the program because I thought it would be a great opportunity to begin working in child protective services," says Tarantino, who previously worked at the Portsmouth YMCA. "I feel that we can always go deeper to help families who are struggling. What I want to do is look beneath individual problems and find out how society is failing some children and families," she says. "From there, I think we can begin to make social change. I believe that some of the children we work with in child protective services are future doctors, lawyers, educators, social workers and politicians. They have to be given the opportunity to live up to their potential."

For more information about the Child Welfare Training Program, contact UNH Professor Jerry Finn at 603-862-3826 or by email at jerry.finn@unh.edu. Visit the program website at <http://www.unh.edu/social-work/ChildWel/IndexCW.htm>.

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