

Spring 2009



# Currents

A Publication of Winona State University



## Children's Advocates

Student Amber Olson and Professor Carole Madland make an impact through WSU's Child Advocacy Studies curriculum

# Setting the Stage for

*Child Advocacy Studies program prepares a future generation to end abuse*

By Margaret Cox



Angie Scott, a WSU faculty member and forensic interviewer with the National Child Protection Training Center, leads a Global Advocacy Studies class

**A**s one of the most progressive model undergraduate curricula in the country, the Child Advocacy Studies program at Winona State University is uniquely positioned to change the social fabric of communities everywhere.

The brainchild of former prosecutor, child abuse expert, and director of the National Child Protection Center Victor Vieth '84,

the Child Advocacy Studies Training (CAST) program is a series of courses specifically designed to train undergraduates across multiple disciplines in the identification and prevention of child abuse. The goal of the CAST program is to educate future frontline professionals—students who will one day be teachers, law enforcement officers, and healthcare professionals—to identify child abuse, intervene

when necessary, and create effective preventative programs to stop the cycle of child abuse.

## **The Curriculum Takes Shape**

Developing a one-of-a-kind curriculum from scratch is no small feat, but is entirely possible when supported by passionate instructors.

In 2003, two faculty members at Winona State joined Vieth in

# Social Change

developing a curriculum to address child advocacy issues: Jacqueline Hatlevig, professor of Nursing, and Carole Madland, professor of Social Work. Along with several other faculty members and an attorney, this group spent about a year learning each other's disciplines and creating a curriculum designed to facilitate critical thinking in students in a variety of majors, spanning from early childhood education to criminal justice.

"At first, we tried to pack all of our ideas into one course," recalled Hatlevig, "but we realized we needed more time to cover all the material." Madland agreed. "It was a real challenge to pitch it as a multi-disciplinary format," she added. "Many educators are purists, so not many courses are conducted across disciplines."

From the early stages, the group felt strongly that the need for child advocacy education was great among a

whole host of child protection professions, including social workers, doctors, nurses, counselors, police officers, theologians, lawyers, and teachers. Their vision was to train students across disciplines in the same way, so that the end result would be professionals who could more effectively collaborate in their efforts to identify and prevent child abuse.

The group forged ahead, conducting an extensive review of recent evidence-based literature—including more than 550 articles and 50 training programs—and used this information as a basis for three comprehensive courses. In 2004, drafts of the three courses were compiled and ready for presentation to focus groups consisting of professionals from Minnesota law enforcement, social services, public health departments, healthcare systems, technical colleges, and other experts in the field. The response and support was positive, and feedback from the focus groups was incorporated into the curriculum as it neared its launch date.

**The students  
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to helping  
others**

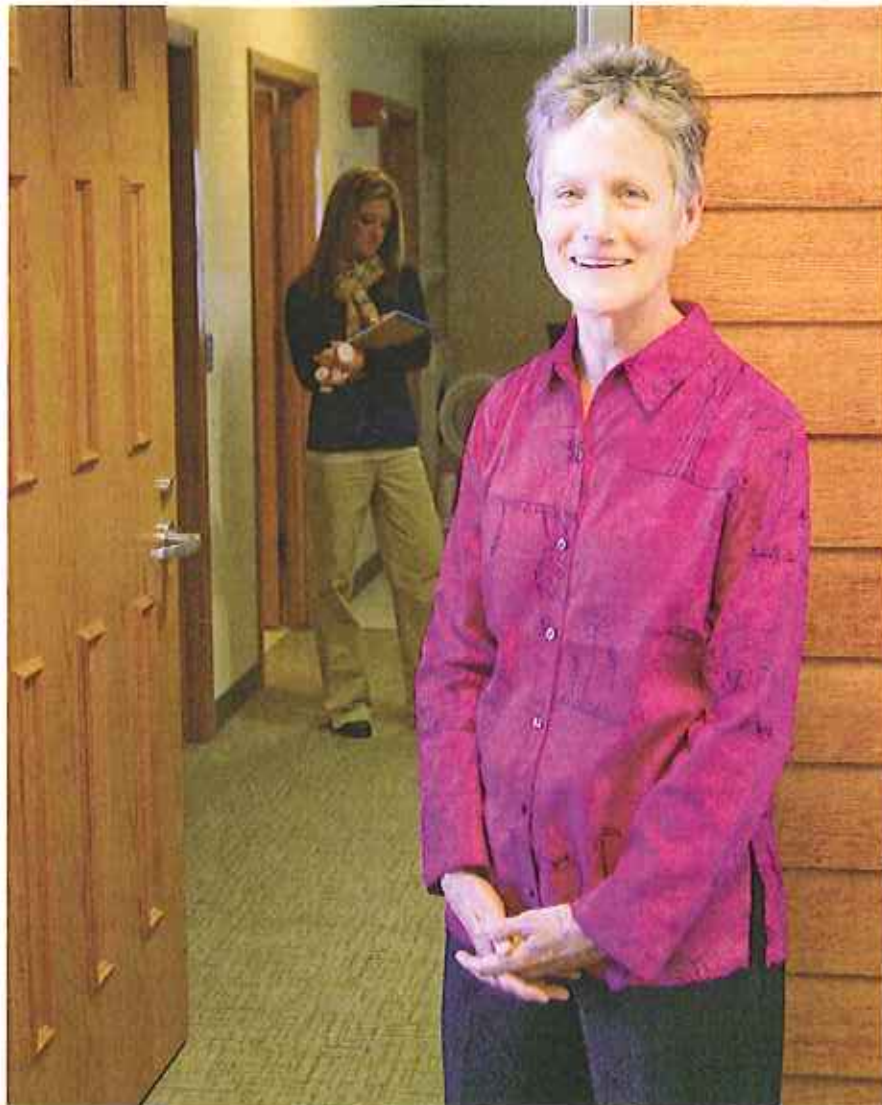
## CAST Becomes A Reality

The first course was designed to provide an overview of child advocacy issues, including the history of child maltreatment, its causes, responses to child maltreatment and legal perspectives. The subsequent two courses focus on the professional and system responses to incidents of child maltreatment, and responding to survivors of child abuse.

These courses include two-hour labs each week to provide students with hands-on experience in forensic interviewing, interviews with families,



CAST students, including Amber Olson (right), train in the mock house located in Maxwell Hall



Potential employers actively seek CAST students according to Carole Madland (above)

and mock trials. Students participate in role-playing to learn the specific protocol of interviewing potential victims and perpetrators. They are also introduced to diversity issues so that they are aware of cultural practices that are sometimes mistaken for cases of maltreatment. Related topics such as domestic violence and chemical dependency are also explored.

Students who successfully complete all three courses are eligible for certification, and are

prepared to pursue a minor in Child Advocacy with the completion of required courses and electives.

### Overwhelming Response

From the first course offering in the spring of 2005, the student response to the CAST program was tremendous.

The majority of the students in the first course were from Nursing and Social Work, but word quickly spread about the important topics

being presented and the practical learning experiences taking place in the classroom. Soon, students from Criminal Justice, Education, and other disciplines were lining up to take the courses.

"Currently, we are teaching four sections, and we have 80 more students on the waiting list. In the fall of 2009, we'll be teaching five sections to meet the needs and interest of the students," said Hatlevig.

The passionate instructors, not all of whom are faculty, fuel the program's success. A number of community members, such as area social workers and law enforcement officials, also contribute to the classes. They present information on the techniques they use in their everyday work life to help identify and prevent child abuse.

Winona State has demonstrated its commitment to the CAST program in many ways, notably with the dedication of a state-of-the-art facility located in Maxwell Hall. The building includes mock courtrooms, interview rooms, and a simulated residence nicknamed the "Garbage House" by students and staff.

"The Garbage House was designed to give students a very realistic view of the sights, sounds and smells that they might encounter in the field," explained Hatlevig.

The fully furnished residence includes props such as dirty diapers, open prescription bottles, and cigarette lighters. Each room has a camera to record the students and the techniques that they use, as they practice interacting with the "family" (actors or role-playing faculty) and taking careful notes on what they observe in the home. After the

walk-through, students review the tapes with instructors and peers to understand what they did well, and how they can improve.

Outside the classrooms, students have also organized their own CAST clubs to support area children.

The groups raise money to purchase items for clients of local social workers, including school supplies and scholarships for summer camps. "The students are zealous and committed to helping others," said Madland.

According to Amber Olson, a student who is currently pursuing the CAST minor, Winona State has provided a unique opportunity that, until recently, was not available anywhere else. "I am fortunate to be a part of the pioneering aspects of this minor," she said. "I am sincerely excited to utilize the knowledge I am learning for the future generations of children."

### Measuring Success

The ultimate measure of success for the CAST program will be the impact it has on communities who hire CAST graduates.

"We have several employers who actively seek out students from the CAST program," said Madland. "They are impressed with the level of training our students receive."

Students who earn certification in the CAST program are equipped to identify, investigate, and respond to the early stages of abuse. They are also able to dramatically improve primary and secondary prevention

**"It's about having an impact, not only in southeastern Minnesota but throughout the United States."**

initiatives. CAST faculty members and National Child Protection Training Center staff regularly hear amazing stories of success from former students.

"Prevention is the largest part of our plan to end child abuse," said Vieth. "Child abuse feeds into virtually every other social ill in our country. If we could reduce child abuse, it would have profound impact in our communities, everywhere in the country."

"Winona State has said that it's not just about turning out folks who will go into successful careers. It's about having an impact, not only in southeastern Minnesota but throughout the United States," said Vieth. "Literally, this is preparing a generation of leaders dedicated to improving our world."

*Margaret Cox is a freelance writer living in West Salem, Wis.*

## Ending Child Abuse Within Three Generations

An estimated one million children are confirmed as victims of child abuse and neglect in the United States each year. Child abuse stems from a number of factors, including a lack of reporting and investigation, inadequate training of child protection professionals, and scarce financial resources for preventative programs. The National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) was established in 2003 to address these issues and to significantly reduce, if not end, child abuse within three generations.

The NCPTC has designed a scalable, model curriculum for Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) to prepare future professionals on how to identify, investigate, and prevent child maltreatment. The CAST program has been implemented at Winona State. Montclair State University in New Jersey has used CAST as a model for its "Finding Words" forensic interviewing program.

The goal is to establish the CAST curricula at 100 colleges and universities over the next five years. This summer, representatives from 20 colleges and universities will come to Winona to learn about the program and how to implement it at their own campuses.

In addition to CAST, NCPTC sponsors educational programs for frontline professionals and agencies that include training, technical assistance, and publications. To date, NCPTC has trained over 40,000 professionals from all 50 states and 17 different countries. That number will grow with the recent announcement that NorthWest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville, Ark., will join the NCPTC as a regional partner to end child abuse.

You can learn more about the National Child Protection Training Center at [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org). Click on the "Publications" tab at the site to read Vieth plan to eliminate child abuse, "Unto the Third Generation."

### How You Can Get Involved

These programs are gaining momentum, but there is still much to be done. You can make a difference by supporting Winona State's Light The Way campaign which includes a \$2.5 million initiative in support of the NCPTC. To learn more, visit [www.winona.edu/lighttheway](http://www.winona.edu/lighttheway).

