This year has been one filled with many changes, both exciting and sad, for CCF. We welcomed two new faculty who do work relating to children and families. You can read about the valuable work being done by Dr. Megan Paceley and Dr. Nancy Kepple on pages 1 and 3. Dr. Paceley’s work focuses on well-being of sexual and gender minority youth, and Dr. Kepple’s work focuses on parental substance use. We also lost a beloved colleague, Dr. Toni Johnson, whose work focused on social, racial and economic justice for youth and their families. On page 2, you can read more about Dr. Johnson’s work and about the new Toni Johnson Office of Race and Social Justice that has been created in her honor. CCF also piloted a new CEU presentation series this year, “CEUs and Coffee” to promote community connections and disseminate our research findings. This series, described on page 4, has been a success and leads the way for future opportunities and events. As our Center continues to grow and change, I am excited to see what new areas and partnerships we explore and how we can continue to have a positive impact on children and families.

—Amy Mendenhall, Director of CCF

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Megan Paceley

Megan Paceley is a new Assistant Professor with the KU School of Social Welfare and the Center for Children and Families. Her research addresses the need to better understand the impact of communities on the well-being of sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth; youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. Dr. Paceley also studies the development, sustainability, and evaluation of SGM community organizations. She aims to utilize research to contribute toward creating inclusive communities, decreasing marginalization, and reducing negative outcomes among SGM youth.

A recent study conducted by Dr. Paceley examined how SGM youth in small communities seek and access community support. She utilized multiple methods including surveys (n=338), interviews (n=34), observations, and public data in one Midwestern state. Her findings revealed a model of community support among non-urban SGM youth. Participants described needing support to reduce isolation, gain social acceptance, access emotional support, and develop their SGM identities. Although their communities were small and sometimes lacked resources, most youth found support through SGM and ally peers and adults, SGM organizations or groups, and other supportive businesses such as libraries or game stores. Youth, however, indicated that there were sometimes barriers to accessing these supports, such as a lack of accessibility to SGM resources, stigma surrounding SGM identities, and fear of being outed when utilizing public supports. When they were able to access them, they described having a greater sense of belonging and community, acceptance, integration of their SGM identity, and a sense of safety and security. The findings from this study have important implications for social workers in small towns and rural areas. Youth participants described the need for mental health providers to be well-trained in working with SGM youth so as to avoid stigmatizing them. Additionally, community-level events to reduce marginalization and promote acceptance and tolerance were described as important and necessary to their well-being. Even in the smallest towns where a public event or SGM organization may not be feasible, the inclusion of visible signs of support (such as rainbow stickers or ally signs) went a long way to making youth feel supported.

Dr. Paceley’s upcoming research focuses on the association between communities (size, community climate, and access to resources) and the health and well-being of SGM youth. She is excited about her move to Kansas and looks forward to continuing this research in the small towns and rural communities across the state.

If you are interested in connecting with Dr. Paceley, please email mpaceley@ku.edu.
School of Social Welfare Honors Dr. Toni Johnson

The KU School of Social Welfare recently lost a beloved member of the school community, Dr. Toni Johnson, an associate professor, who died on January 7th. Dr. Johnson began her career at KU in 2005. She received her master’s and doctorate in social work from the University of Texas-Austin and a bachelor’s degree in sociology and psychology from Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. She also had worked as a therapist, trainer and program coordinator for disadvantaged individuals and families.

Dr. Johnson committed her life to social, racial, and economic justice for youth and their families. As a practitioner, researcher, and professor, Dr. Johnson aspired to be a social change agent to increase the inclusion and equity of all people, with a particular focus on African American families. As her research focused on families and economic justice, she was involved in both the Center for Children & Families and the Center for Assets, Education, and Inclusion within the School of Social Welfare.

Examples of her work include:


Dr. Johnson was also dedicated to supporting students in and out of the classroom, including her role as the Director for the Multicultural Scholars Program. She received the Gene A. and Gretchen Budig Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2012.

In honor of our beloved colleague, friend and professor, The University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare (KUSSW) has created The Toni Johnson Office of Race and Social Justice. The Office represents the School’s commitment to forward Dr. Johnson’s life work by promoting student activism and engaged scholarship in the areas of race and social justice. It is utilizing three task forces to accomplish its goals for the year: Student Support Task Force for Diversity and Inclusion, a Task Force on Identifying Student Mental Health Resources, and a Task Force on Research. For additional information, please contact the Office at orsj@ku.edu.

Toni Johnson Office of Race and Social Justice Spring Events

On January 29, 2016, ORSJ sponsored a talk given by Dr. Larry Davis, Dean at the University of Pittsburgh and author of the book, Why Are They Angry With Us. Dr. Davis is a leading scholar on race issues in America. Over 165 people attended and the talk can be watched at http://socwel.ku.edu/larrydavis.

On April 21, ORSJ sponsored a presentation by another leading social justice scholar. Dr. Georgiann Davis, Assistant Professor of Sociology at University of Las Vegas. Dr. Davis’ research is social justice oriented and at the intersection of sociology of diagnosis and gender theories. She has published papers on intersex traits as well as medical specialization, and her findings have appeared in numerous outlets ranging from the American Journal of Bioethics to Ms. Magazine. The event was held at 4:00pm on April 21 in the Kansas Union.
A concerning number of children are exposed to parental substance misuse and its associated harms. Of these, child maltreatment is particularly disquieting given its connection to toxic stress and long-term negative consequences for biological, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning. More needs to be understood about the complex and varied behaviors observed with parental substance use, how these behaviors affect their functioning, and how social environments protect or exacerbate children from parents’ substance-related impairments. Understanding the interplay among these elements can help social workers and systems better identify and address the range of service needs among substance-using parents.

In a study using the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW I), Dr. Nancy Jo Keppele explored (a) how a range of substance use behaviors (defined by amount and presence of substance-related problems) were associated with child maltreatment frequency and (b) how social support may interact with parent substance use behaviors to alter these observed relationships. She observed risk in chronicity of child maltreatment behaviors is likely conditional on the extent of the current substance use behaviors. For example, parents reporting heavy drinking and/or illicit drug use were associated with a higher annual incidence of child maltreatment compared to parents reporting no alcohol or drug use, but a lower annual incidence of child maltreatment compared to parents meeting criteria for substance use disorder (SUD).

The study also observed that parents who had reduced their use and/or substance-related problems after a recent history of SUD (within the last 4 years) were associated with lower frequency of child maltreatment than parents currently meeting criteria for SUD. In fact, they had an annual incidence of child maltreatment on par with parents reporting light to moderate drinking. This finding suggests treatment of SUD is an important target of maltreatment prevention services.

Dr. Keppele also observed these relationships vary by type of maltreatment. Frequency of acts of omission (such as neglect) are primarily associated with parent current SUD while frequency of acts of commission (such as physical abuse and emotional abuse) increase in frequency as substance use increases in amount and/or substance-related problems. These results suggest different pathways may be influencing how substance use is associated with abuse and neglect behaviors.

For neglect frequency, Dr. Keppele found a unique interaction between parent substance use behaviors and social companionship (defined by the number of people available for recreational activities). High levels of social companionship may be protective for neglectful behaviors among parents reporting heavy drinking and/or illicit drug use. For parents with SUD, Dr. Keppele observed the opposite effect: high levels of social companionship were observed to be risky for chronic neglect. These findings suggest relationships focused around social companionship (in contrast to provision of resources) may not always be beneficial among substance-using parents; however, further research is needed to understand how these types of relationships may influence parenting behaviors.

The findings from Dr. Keppele’s study emphasize that substance-using families likely require more tailored interventions to address the range of parenting needs that likely exist along a continuum of substance use. For example, services such as Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment [SBIRT] may be helpful for parents with heavy drinking and/or illicit drug use to potentially reduce the higher likelihood of involvement in the child welfare system. In addition, collaborative models between child welfare and AOD treatment systems can help develop innovative and nuanced approaches for differential substance-use treatment among families currently in child welfare settings. For more information, email Nancy Jo Keppele (njkepple@ku.edu).
Bullying and its Implications for Social Work Practice

On January 29th, the Center for Children & Families hosted the second presentation in the series of CEUs and Coffee events at the University of Kansas Lawrence Campus. The series was designed to promote connections in the social work community and disseminate research and evaluation findings which can be applied to work with at-risk children and families.

Dr. Anne Williford was the presenter for this second event. Dr. Williford is an Associate Professor at the University of Kansas. Dr. Williford received her doctorate in Social Work from the University of Denver. Her research interests include understanding characteristics associated with bullying and peer victimization among children and adolescents, and identifying strategies to prevent such behaviors in school settings. Her dissertation research focused on identifying correlates of physical and relational aggression and victimization among girls in middle school. Dr. Williford received her MSSW from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000 and worked as a clinical and community level social worker with diverse populations, including children and adults with developmental disabilities, adults with mental illness and chemical dependency, and children and youth participating in primary prevention programs. Her teaching interests include community and organizational practice, advanced advocacy practice, social work practice with aggressive and anti-social youth, and research methods.

Her presentation, Bullying and Its Implications for Social Work Practice, focused on bullying as a detrimental social problem facing children and adolescent worldwide. Dr. Williford reviewed the definition of bullying including its forms and functions. She summarized the potential consequences of bullying, and proposed assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies that practitioners can use to offset the negative developmental outcomes that often result for the youth involved. The event was well-attended, with more than 20 participants registered from a variety of local agencies and organizations.

On May 20, 2016, Sharah Davis will present the third and final event, Parent Support and Training (PST), at the University of Kansas Edwards Campus. PST services are offered to caregivers who have children with special needs. The goal of PST services is to help families successfully navigate the various health care systems and services required to help their children.

To register and obtain additional information about the courses and presenters, visit http://bit.ly/CCFCnC. Registration questions can be directed to Amy Mendenhall, 785-864-4792 or amendenhall@ku.edu.