



Vol. 4, No. 1  
Fall 2000–Winter 2001



# ASPN

## *Adult Services Practice Notes*

### R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Produced under contract with the Adult Services Branch, Division of Social Services, NC Department of Health and Human Services

by

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*The aspen is perhaps the world's largest organism. Although some aspen forests cover acres and seem to be composed of individuals in all stages of life, they share a common root system.*

*ASPN: Adult Services Practice Notes is dedicated to providing information on excellent family-centered social work practice with adults and their families.*

In our last issue, several adult services supervisors participated in an ethics round table. Limits on space, however, meant that some of their good comments were not reported. One member of the panel recounted an incident that serves as the basis for this issue. When she was a line worker, she encountered a physician who wanted a competency hearing for one of her clients. She advocated for the client to attend the hearing, which is the client's right, but the physician prevented it. Apart from the ethical dilemma this produced for her, she felt as if her knowledge and experience had been dismissed—that she had been treated as a paraprofessional—and that this had had severe consequences for her client, whose rights had been trampled.

As the profession has developed, social workers have had to advocate for the value of their work in order to advocate more effectively for their clients. One route to respect has been through formal professional education—the establishment of accredited bachelor and master of social work (BSW; MSW) degree programs. However, many of the social workers in county departments of social services do not have this training, even though they have the same responsibility to clients as do holders of these degrees.

Over the past ten years, the Adult Services Branch has launched many initiatives to provide professional development to workers in the counties. (See the box on the last page.) These support the efforts of county departments of social services to develop the skills of workers. But what can you do yourself to earn respect for your expertise in a way that benefits your clients? To get some insight, we sought out two

people with a wealth of experience who are responsible for helping MSW students at UNC's School of Social Work develop as professionals.

**Margaret Burnley Spearmon, Ph.D.**, is the newly appointed director of field education at UNC's School of Social Work. Formerly the associate dean of professional degree programs (BASW/MSW) at the University of Washington and associate director of field education at Case Western, she had been intimately involved with the professional development of social workers. One of her main goals at UNC is to nurture partnerships with North Carolina's social services agencies.

From 1983 to 1989, **Joanne Caye, MSW**, was services supervisor in Chatham County, with responsibility for both adult and children's services. Since then she has been head of the Child Placement Services Branch at the NC Division of Social Services and, through the Family and Children's Resource Program at the Jordan Institute, she has developed and offered eight workshops for children's services personnel. She is currently faculty liaison with the NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative, working with field instructors for MSW students. Her experience in the county, at the Division, and preparing MSW students for practice gives her rare insight into professional development from many perspectives.

We interviewed them recently and asked them to comment on the case raised by the supervisor. We also asked them to give some general guidance on how to develop as a professional and earn the respect that will help you serve your clients best. Here's what they said.



When I consider the situation you presented, one thing that might have helped her is more confidence in the value of her work. I think workers have to have confidence in themselves, so self-awareness is really important. I believe that when we are not confident, we are even more apt to feel intimidated by another professional. Part of being self-confident is having good communication skills—that is, active listening, being able to allow people space to share what they have to share, and asking very specific questions. You need good written and verbal skills, but you need to be aware of the nonverbal messages you are conveying as well. It helps to understand the difference between intent and impact—what message you intend to deliver, but also the impact it may have. To understand the impact, you’ve got to ask questions of the receiver: “Help me to understand what you’re hearing from me.”

Another part of self-confidence is understanding your role and responsibility, so that you can share that information with other people. The students I work with are in a little different role, because they go into agencies as students, not as employees. They’re perceived by others as learners who don’t have extensive knowledge in this field, so there’s some freedom to stumble a little bit, unlike workers. Students definitely need to take time to understand the culture of the organization, ask questions, and create a space or place for inquiry. They need to reflect on their own behavior, to develop that self-awareness. New workers have many of the same challenges and need to do many of the same things to understand the organi-

zation and their role in it, but they often don’t get much time to adjust.

I used to train DSS workers in income maintenance. We used several modules. One was in communications skills and another was in interpersonal relationships—how do you send clear messages, how do you manage conflict, how do you de-escalate conflict? If you see that you’re having a lot of spirited conversations with a client or a colleague, you need to learn how to reduce the emotions. You learn that staying with behavior-specific terms, “I-messages,” and even controlling the tone of your voice can make it possible to work together more effectively.

If I were in the position of the worker you described, I would provide the doctor with information around the client’s issues. I would share the law or policy with him, in writing. The other thing I would do is garner support. I would talk to my supervisor, tell her the dilemma that I’m facing, and ask her, “Would you support me in talking with the physician?” When you’re feeling disempowered, get support. It could be through the professional literature and other resources that support your position or through another individual that you feel could help.

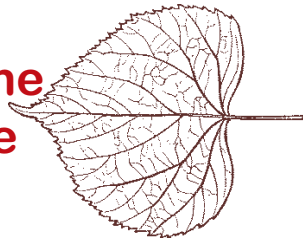
If you have to advocate for a family-centered approach with someone who isn’t used to working that way, you can present data or information that demonstrates why it’s important to work with families, and how that can influence the progress of the particular case situation. Use the experts in the professional literature to demonstrate why you take your position. Talk about what you’ve read and what research has been done on family-centered practice and why it’s a preferred approach that DSS supports strongly. Maybe you can cite examples from other situations and other cases where you felt that taking this approach had a very positive outcome.

Still, some people have their own approach to their work. They aren’t eclectic, and they won’t

*Continued on p. 7*



**Joanne  
Caye**



The social worker whose dilemma is mentioned in the introduction is feeling like her expertise has been completely discounted. Sometimes that seems to be connected to concern about who has more “letters.” Being on the short end of that process can be very frustrating. I think a lot of DSS folks who do not have an MSW have a sensitive spot when it comes to the word *professional*. Being seen as a professional can be attached to credentials, but it is also related to how you choose to present yourself in your world.

Credentials are a reality that will not go away. DSS directors want social workers with credentials, but depending on where one lives in the state, it’s hard to find them, sometimes because county commissioners will not pay for them, sometimes because the people with graduate degrees stay around the population centers. I think that social workers within the system who, for financial reasons or time constraints or family requirements or simply a lack of interest, do not have the graduate degree are going to have to accept that if you don’t have the credentials, some people will hold it against you.

A person gets some benefit from a title, but the benefit lasts only for a limited amount of time. People are going to look to see what you do and how you behave, as opposed to just what you say. If you don’t follow through, if you don’t know things someone in your position should know, it makes it far more difficult for people to see you as a professional.

I know a lot of people who do not have the credentials, yet who are hardly ever deterred from their goal because of their status. A lot of things

contribute to this, but one major one is an old-fashioned thing called comportment or demeanor. I know folks don’t like to hear it, but it has a lot to do with how you speak and how you dress. Does the way you dress or the way you speak send messages of disrespect? Do you demonstrate a lack of concern for rituals or practices of other people and other organizations? Pay attention. It doesn’t help you much if people are so distracted by what you have on that they don’t hear a word you say.

You also have to do the homework. That means you learn things like what the *DSM-IV* is all about, for instance. You develop some comfort with the language used by other professions. If you work a lot with people in medical settings around adult clients, you need to know about medications, the usual kinds of diagnoses—what things affect older adults. You don’t have to know everything, but if you take the initiative to learn, when you get to something you don’t know, you can say, “Help me understand what this is,” and nobody will think less of you for it. I’ve heard social workers say, “I could never understand those psychological reports. I just get somebody else to tell me what it means.” They hurt themselves when they do that.

Homework means that you are proactive. You plan ahead, think through possible solutions, and consider repercussions for the choice or choices being made. If I were working with a family trying to decide whether Grandmother needed to live in an adult care or nursing home, it would be my job to know how to interview Grandmother and her family to understand why they think this is the right solution, why it needs to happen now, what strengths are available in the family, and whether there are other possibilities. I would need to learn how the grandmother and the family would deal with this move psychologically. Meeting their needs depends on goal-oriented, skilled conversation. I would have found out what homes were closest to the family and which had vacancies. If Grandmother does need to go to a nursing home, the

*Continued on p. 4*

## More from Joanne Caye

physician who authorizes her admission may ask you for background information. If you haven't done a good assessment, you're not going to be able to provide the answers.

You really have to look at your own skills. If you're a new worker, it's hard to know the questions to ask or how to prepare, but here are some things that you can do. When you're new, shadow the person you think is most experienced in your unit—shadow somebody who does bang-up assessments and watch how they do them. Listen to the people who seem to be able to develop the best rapport with their clients. How do they explain things? Read. Read as much as you can. Find out what other professionals do.

Develop the comfort level or, if not comfort, the assertiveness to ask questions when people are planning too fast or give you the impression that they see you or your client as someone who is meaningless in the process. I can think of a number of times when doctors haven't clearly answered the client's questions, and it was up to me to say "I'm sorry, Dr. Jones, I don't think that Mrs. Smith understood what you were saying, and I'd like to ask you some questions to see if we can clarify the answer for Mrs. Smith." You have to be willing to do it and do it in a way that is polite but assertive.

If there are reasons why you can't do a particular thing, you need to be able to describe why not without saying, "It's just policy and I don't understand it anyway." Part of your expertise is that you understand a social services system that is often confusing and complex. You don't have to be able to do everything, but you should be able to explain your actions in a way that is at least understandable, if not agreeable.

Despite all your best efforts, someone may not show you the dignity and respect they should. It can be incredibly irritating when people don't see you in light of your knowledge or experience. A pri-

vate trainer, John Alderson, talks about the division of responsibility in training events as 40/40/20, and I think the same thing is true for professional interactions. Forty percent is yours: how you act, your demeanor, your homework, all that. Forty percent belongs to the people from the other agency: their perspective about you and how entrenched their opinions are (you don't need to operate in kind, you just need to understand their position). Twenty percent is chemistry. So that means you've got some control over sixty percent of the relationship. I have known people who have turned around a bad relationship with another agency, just because of the positive way they deal with things.

In one of the nearby counties there's a social worker I recommend to students looking for a great model of fine social work practice. She doesn't have an MSW. She is incredibly articulate. She reads constantly. She knows what's going on. She's done a lot of learning on her own about her clientele. She took the initiative in establishing parenting groups, and she decided that facilitating groups was something she wanted to do more. She went to the courthouse and made such a case for the usefulness of the groups that the courthouse now supports part of her work. She prepares, she does her homework, she explains what she does clearly, she carries out what she said she was going to do, and then she evaluates it once it's done.

In the social work class that I teach, one of the first things students have to do is videotape themselves explaining to families they've never seen before who they are and what they do. I can't tell you how much they stumble in the beginning. Being able to describe what you do clearly is part of your homework. When you work with other agencies, it is neither useful nor correct to assume those people know the mission of the DSS and your responsibilities specifically. It is also highly incorrect for DSS social workers to assume they know the mission of the other agency. One

*Continued on p. 7*



# 2000–2001 Ongoing Professional Training from CARES

*Sponsored by the Adult Services Branch, NC Division of Social Services*

## Geriatric Mental Health

Through presentation, case example, and skills practice, this four-day curriculum reviews normal aging, symptoms and treatments of severe and persistent mental illness in older people, methods for working with older clients and their families, legal issues, and resources.

## Effective Counseling in Adult Services

This two-day curriculum provides the opportunity to develop skills in counseling adult clients and their families. Participants have the opportunity to practice counseling techniques and skills such as empathic listening, effective questioning, redirection, and reminiscence.

## Effective Social Work Practice in Adult Services: A Core Curriculum

This six-day training for adult services social workers reviews the family assessment and change process for adult clients and their families. It emphasizes the role of family-centered practice, awareness of and sensitivity to issues of cultural diversity, and skilled counseling and interviewing abilities in excellent practice.

## Working with Clients with Serious Mental Illness: The DSS Perspective

This two-day curriculum, primarily for DSS social workers, reviews symptoms and treatment of the most common chronic mental illnesses that affect adult services clients and examines the DSS role in working with clients and their families. Mental health consumers and family members themselves offer insight into the challenges of living with severe and persistent mental illness.

## An Introduction to Aging: Knowledge and Skills for Working with Older Adults and Their Families

This two-day foundation course for health and human services professionals from diverse settings provides basic information and skills needed to work effectively with older people and their families. The training is divided into four modules: Aging Processes, Group and Individual Differences, Changes and Losses, and Practice Challenges.

## The Adult Services Supervisors' Curriculum

This six-module curriculum is designed to enhance knowledge and skills essential for the administrative, supportive,

and educational functions of an effective adult services manager. Each two-day module offers the opportunity to examine current professional concepts, practice their application, and share ideas and experiences among peers.

Module 1: "The Supervisor's Role in Supporting Excellent Adult Services Social Work Practice."

Module 2: "Planning and Budgeting."

Module 3: "Developing a Supportive Community Environment."

Module 4: "Directing Daily Social Work Activities."

Module 5: "Teaching and Motivation."

Module 6: "Managing Program Performance." (Not offered in FY 2000–2001.)

## Applications in Family-Centered Practice with Adults: The Next Steps

This full-day workshop uses case scenarios, discussion, and group exercises to explore real-life applications of the Family-Centered Principles and the corresponding Administrative Principles.

## About Registration

Contact Delores Darby at (919) 962-0650 for information about registering for these events. Send a completed registration form with your check made out to UNC School of Social Work to her at

CARES

Jordan Institute for Families

School of Social Work, CB# 3550

University of North Carolina

Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550

If your agency is paying your fee, you may fax the registration form accompanied by a copy of your agency's authorization of payment to (919) 962-3653. We will make full refunds for cancellation before the deadlines for registration listed on the form. No refund can be made for cancellations after the deadline, but you may send a substitute. If you register using an agency authorization, do not attend, and do not cancel or send a substitute, you or your agency will be billed for the fee. Please call Ms. Darby at (919) 962-0650 to register a substitute.

If you need the aids or services provided under the **Americans with Disabilities Act** to enable you to attend these events, please contact Ms. Darby at least one month before the event.

# Ongoing Professional Training from CARES, Spring 2001

## Registration Form

Please send one registration form per participant. Each participant may register for more than one event using this form. Be sure to mark the dates for which you wish to register. The last day to cancel registration for any event and receive a refund of the fee is the registration deadline date for that event (shown in parentheses). If your agency is paying the registration fee, you may fax this form with a copy of the agency authorization of payment to Delores Darby at (919) 962-3653. Otherwise, please mail this form to her with your check made out to **UNC School of Social Work** or a copy of your agency authorization. Cash payments cannot be accepted. The address is: Center for Aging Research and Educational Services, Jordan Institute for Families, School of Social Work, CB#3550, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550.

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Work Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\*Home Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ \*\*SSN \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

*\*we ask for your home phone in case the training session must be postponed on account of inclement weather*

*\*\*used for internal record-keeping and required for those programs that issue CEUs*

#### Education:

##### Highest Degree

- HS  
 Associate  
 Bachelor  
 Masters  
 Doctorate

##### Highest Social Work Degree

- BSW  
 MSW  
 PhD/DSW

#### Work Type:

- Direct Client Service  
 Line Supervisor  
 Staff Development  
 Program Manager  
 Program/Admin. Support  
 Director

#### Employment Type:

- Federal  
 State  
 County DSS  
 County Non-DSS  
 Public Univ/College Faculty  
 Private Univ/College Faculty  
 Private Agency  
 Volunteer

#### Applications in Family Centered Practice with Adults:

##### Next Steps (\$20)

- Feb. 21, 2001, Albemarle (Feb. 7)  
 Mar. 9, 2001, Raleigh (Feb. 23)

##### Effective Counseling in Adult Services (\$35)

- Feb. 12–13, 2001, Charlotte (Jan. 29)  
 Feb. 26–27, 2001, Hickory (Feb. 12)  
 Mar. 13–14, 2001, Winston-Salem (Feb. 27)  
 April 23–24, 2001, Wilson (Apr. 9)

##### Effective Social Work Practice in Adult Services:

##### A Core Curriculum (\$50)

- Feb. 27–Mar. 1 and Mar. 27–29, 2001, Wilson (Feb. 13)  
 May 1–3 and 15–17, 2001, Raleigh (Apr. 17)

##### Geriatric Mental Health (\$50)

- Mar. 6–7 and 20–21, 2001, (Feb. 22)

##### An Introduction to Aging (\$40)

- Feb. 5–6, 2001, Winston-Salem (Jan. 22)  
 May 7–8, 2001, Wilmington (Apr. 23)

#### Working with Clients Who Have Serious Mental Illness:

##### The DSS Perspective (\$35)

- Apr. 2–3, 2001, Wilson (Mar. 19)

##### Effective Supervision and Management in Adult Services (\$25 per module)

- Module 1, Jan. 22–23, 2001, Raleigh (Jan. 8)  
 Module 2, Apr. 5–6, 2001, Charlotte (Mar. 22)  
 Module 3, May 10–11, 2001, Chapel Hill (Apr. 25)  
 Module 5, Feb. 8–9, 2001, Burlington (Jan. 25)  
 I have a Supervisor's Curriculum notebook already.

\_\_\_\_ Number of Events for Which You Are Registering

Total amount of fees \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### Payment Options:

- Check Enclosed  
 Agency Authorization of Payment (check pending)

*Please note: Registration forms must be accompanied by a check or an authorization to be accepted.*

## More from Margaret Burnley Spearmon

take in other ways of doing things. I can bring an expert, and I can bring case examples, and they still may say, no, they want to do it their way. How do we tolerate that and still work with that individual? That's conflict, so how do you manage it? That's why I think that helping workers understand how to manage conflict is important—not to withdraw from it, but to work with it. Conflict is inevitable anytime you get people together. How do you reach a compromise? How do you accommodate? How do you not terminate the relationship? How do you use good communications skills to identify what the issues are? How do you look at ways to resolve those issues?

I think I would say much the same thing about working on interdisciplinary teams, whether they're formal or the kind of informal teams that develop when people at different agencies work together. To develop effective working relationships, you must identify and understand common goals and create a level of trust among members. You must understand the roles and responsibilities of the various members of the team. How do they relate to the particular family? What roles and responsibilities do the other agencies have with that family? It's being prepared.

### Did you know . . . ?

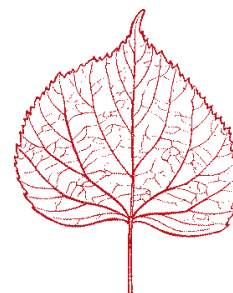
In 1998, there were about 604,000 jobs for social workers in the US, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which also concludes that “a bachelor's degree is the minimum requirement for many entry-level jobs, but a master's degree in social work (MSW) . . . or a related field is becoming the norm for many positions.” The BLS goes on to predict that the field will grow “much faster than average”—that is, more than 36 percent—between now and 2008, owing largely to the increase in size of the older population and to the needs of baby boomers (a very large segment of the population) as they make difficult mid-life transitions. For more information, consult the BLS website: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos060.htm>

## More from Joanne Caye

source of conflict is that people make assumptions about those things and then get mad when the other agency does something unexpected, all because the missions of the agencies are different.

Another essential thing, of course, is respect for other people, no matter who they are—even if they're objectionable people who behave in ways that are unkind. This is true regardless of whether they're wearing a white coat and stethoscope or living in a tobacco barn.

As a social worker you are not the be-all and end-all. We need other agencies, because they have expertise that we don't. I'm always grateful for these other folks, because we can put together a brain trust and see what we can come up with. I also think social workers are in prime positions to pull together all those other perspectives. Social workers have the luxury and the skill of looking at the big picture. We can bring diplomacy to the equation and do our best to advocate for our clients and ourselves. When we are blocked from doing so, as was the social worker described in the introduction, we reexamine our steps to check for mistakes on our part, fix what can be fixed, check to determine if another route is possible or if policy might support our position, and persevere. We will not always be able to accomplish all we would wish. Educate where possible. Keep your own personal support network healthy and well fed! In difficult times, they will help keep you going. Take care of yourself.



## DSS Initiatives to Promote Professional Development in Adult Services

In 1992, the Adult Services Branch published *A Model for Excellence in Adult Services Supervision and Social Work Practice*, which was revised and then published in 1995 as *The Field of Adult Services* by NASW Press (the publishing house affiliated with the National Association of Social Workers, the principal professional organization in the field). It is one of the few books in the NASW catalog specifically devoted to general social work practice with adults.

In 1993–94, the Branch sponsored a project to develop record-keeping tools for adult services that mirror and support the practices outlined in *A Model for Excellence*. More recently still, the Branch gathered a task force to develop and promote the Principles for Family-Centered Practice in Adult Services (read them on line at <http://ssw.unc.edu/cares/fcprinc.htm#sw>). Personnel from the Branch offer regular training (see their calendar for the year on line at <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/afs/afstraining.pdf>), and since 1989, they have contracted with CARES to develop and deliver curricula (see the schedule of events for spring 2001 on page 6).

Mark your calendar for the  
**Sixth Annual  
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**Visit the CARES web site at <http://ssw.unc.edu/cares/cares.htm>  
for information on workshops and ASPN on line.**

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Twelve hundred copies printed at a cost of \$1,381.64 or \$1.15 per copy.



**Next time:  
Working with Older Adults  
with Developmental  
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