

Therapeutic Teddy Bears Open Up Dialogue with Children At Risk

All newsletter photos © 2009 Rich Ryan Photography.



There are some furry friends in residence at Washburn Center for Children's therapeutic preschool classroom. The **Family Focused** program recently implemented a new curriculum based on the work of **Lesley Koplow**, a nationally renowned expert on early childhood development and author of *Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools Can Heal*. Washburn co-sponsored a training during which Koplow shared her therapeutic use of stuffed animals as part of the framework for developing an emotionally responsive classroom.

Each child in the Family Focused preschool has a teddy bear and creates a home and unique identity for the bear using a shoebox and fabric. The child determines the name, age, and gender of the bear and shapes the personality, which typically reflects the characteristics of the child. The bears are stored on a shelf in the classroom and are allowed to accompany the children throughout their preschool day.

The bears are transitional objects for the children as they form relationships with the teachers and other children in the classroom and they provide comfort in times of stress and anxiety. Natalie Kendrick, Family Focused program supervisor, shared that **"Teddy bears in the classroom invite**

children to own their life experience and communicate about them at school. The bears also offer children a vehicle for working on unresolved developmental and emotional issues that may impede learning." A child might say "my bear is mad today" as a reflection of how she is feeling herself. Another child acted out how his bear's dad went to jail and how scared he felt about it. The children will get to take their bears home when they graduate from Washburn. The bears will become a symbol of their relationships here and remind them of friends and teachers.

Washburn's Family Focused program serves families with young children age birth to five, who are at-risk for abuse, neglect, or out-of-home placement due to high levels of household stress. In addition to the licensed therapeutic preschool, parenting education and support are provided through home visits and weekly parent groups to help adults who are struggling with their own challenges to parent in a more nurturing, developmentally supportive way.

Washburn Center for Children helps children with social, emotional and behavioral problems, and their families, lead successful lives.

Undergraduate Intern Studies the Teddy Bear Program's Progress

One person with a keen interest in the Teddy Bear Program is Washburn intern **Meg Soli**, who is working in the Family Focused program. Soli, a senior psychology major at Macalester College, is writing her senior honors thesis about the program. **"My goal is to assess the needs of the children and how the Teddy Bear program might affect their progress,"** Soli said.

In addition to an extensive literature review, Soli is doing case studies of four preschool-aged children who are new to Washburn. Like many of their peers, the children have experienced trauma or maltreatment that has affected their brain development and function. As a result they exhibit difficulties with attachment and behavioral and emotional self-regulation that make it difficult for them to thrive in a group setting.

Soli has been studying the Teddy Bear program since it began at Washburn this past fall. **"I like working with children and helping them as they go through the healing process and continue their journey of development,"** Soli added. "Every day someone learns something—such as how to control their body or express their emotions in a new way."

Meg's intern experience is an example of Washburn's commitment to community training. Over 50 students receive training and clinical supervision at Washburn each year at the post-doctoral, doctoral intern, graduate and undergraduate levels.

Washburn Center for Children's Core Programs

Outpatient: Mental health assessment and treatment for children and their families at Washburn's three locations in South Minneapolis, Brooklyn Park, and Minnetonka.

School-Based: Licensed mental health professionals are onsite at ten public schools in Minneapolis and Eden Prairie to provide prevention, early intervention, teacher consultation, assessment, and treatment services for students who are experiencing social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulty which is affecting their success in school.

Early Childhood Outreach: Consultation and training services for childcare and preschool providers to help them identify and work with behavioral issues or developmental concerns.

Family Focused: Intensive early intervention services to support healthy child development for families whose stress levels put their children at risk for abuse and neglect. Parenting education and support are provided through home visiting, weekly parent groups, and a licensed therapeutic preschool.

Day Treatment: An intensive half-day treatment program including group and family therapy, psychiatric care, and aftercare services for preschool and elementary school children with severe emotional and behavioral problems to help them transition back to their community school full-time.

Home Front: Intensive in-home therapy and skills development for families with children at risk of hospitalization or out-of-home placement due to severe emotional and behavioral problems.

Case Management: Helps families access and coordinate supportive services for children with severe emotional disturbance.



Frey Foundation Challenge Grant Multiplies Your Gift: \$ x 1.5 = > Impact

Thanks to a challenge grant from the Frey Foundation, your gift to Washburn Center for Children can have an even greater impact on helping children and their families.

The Frey Foundation will provide a 1:2 match for 2009 gifts from new donors and gifts from previous donors, provided that the gifts are at least a ten percent increase. The Frey Foundation grant is aimed at assisting Washburn in developing new donors and to encourage existing donors to give at an increased level as well as reactivating prior donors.

Please consider leveraging this grant. Your investment will help Washburn continue to provide quality assessment, treatment and support to children and their families. **Visit our website at www.washburn.org** to make a gift. If you have questions about this grant or your support of Washburn Center for Children, please contact **Linda Smith at 612.872.3309 or lsmith@washburn.org**.

**SAVE THE DATE:
July 6, 2009**

**2009 Washburn Center for Children Golf Tournament
Featuring Tim "Lumpy" Herron**



HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE

Thank you to everyone who helped to make the 2008 holiday gift drive a great success.

Gifts were provided for 150 families, including 375 children. We are grateful for the generosity of individual donors and the following groups:

Burnet Title
Cargill Salt Division
Coldwell Banker Burnet
General Casualty
Lissner Residence Hall,
Bethel University
PricewaterhouseCoopers
SUPERVALU

School Based Program: Early Intervention = Future Success

After spending nearly her entire life in foster care, eleven year old Joy was dealing with issues of anger, defiance, disrespect of peers and adults, poor academic engagement, delinquent behaviors in the community, daily referrals to the behavior room, and numerous suspensions. To help Joy gain skills to function more successfully she was referred to the Washburn therapist at her elementary school. Her treatment program included a weekly girls' social skills group and weekly individual therapy with the school based clinician. After just seven months of therapy, Joy's emotional and behavioral symptoms have decreased. She rarely goes to the behavior room during her school day. Her anger outbursts have nearly been eliminated, and if she has a tantrum, she is able to deescalate more quickly. Joy is more respectful to teachers and peers, has identified a few friends, and is emerging as a leader and industrious student in her fifth grade classroom.

Joy is one of the 225 children served through Washburn's school based program this past year. The program has expanded to serve ten schools in Minneapolis and Eden Prairie with a goal of providing timely access to mental health services to any child and family who needs help, regardless of household income or health insurance coverage. A licensed mental health professional is available onsite at each participating school to provide prevention, early intervention, teacher consultation, assessment, and treatment services for students. School based therapist Cheryl Cowan shared that being in the classroom gives clinicians valuable insight into the child's world. Since the services are provided at school, the child can be seen quickly at a place that is familiar and convenient. We are excited about the success of this program and look forward to its continued growth.



Washburn Center for Children has been helping children be more successful at home, in school and in the community for 125 years. Your thoughtful gift will help Washburn Center for Children continue to provide quality assessment, treatment and support to children and their families in the future. Visit our website at www.washburn.org to make a gift.