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ABOUT **EVENTS AWARDS PROJECTS** INNOVATION COMMUNITY

MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE: FROM CRISIS AND ADVERSITY TO HOPE, HEALING, AND

HELPING

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INNOVATION

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Member Spotlight

Tags: Inclusion, Learning Environments, Partnerships, Workforce Preparation, Teaching and Learning



MCC Social Work programs are piloting an education, training, and career pathway for parents with opioid/substance use disorder (OUD/SUD) and lived experience having a child involved with the Department of Child Safety (DCS). The social work stipend program was created as part of a four-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. The program seeks

collaborating to offer the Parent Peer Support Social Work Scholarship Stipend Program,

an innovative program bolstering support for families overcoming past adversity and

crisis while building careers in the profession of social work. Specifically, FIC and the

Mesa Community College (MCC) and the Family Involvement Center (FIC) are

to empower and develop parents with a history of OUD/SUD and child dependency involvement in peer support careers so they may then help other parents dealing with similar circumstances.

Program Benefits

The program provides participants with a year of free college tuition, live online social work courses at MCC, a computer to access classes, and a monthly stipend to cover the cost of Internet service and other living expenses. In addition to completing 24 credit hours toward a social work degree in the first year, participants fulfill 150 hours of experiential service learning through an internship with FIC. During the internship, FIC offers insights into relating to and working with individuals facing behavioral health- and substance abuse-related obstacles. Through taking social work courses at MCC, receiving experiential training at FIC, and participating in group discussions, participants learn how to effectively support and mentor their OUD/SUD peers.

After completing the first year, participants are eligible to apply for a paid position in an FIC apprenticeship program, receiving additional education, guidance, and job placement assistance. FIC has partnered with the Arizona Apprenticeship Office, Arizona Department of Economic Security, as a U.S. Department of Labor registered apprenticeship program in Peer Support.

Each participant receives additional support from both FIC and MCC. At FIC, participants have an assigned Parent Ally from the Parents for Parents Program, access to a Social Work Student Intern, and assistance from the Opioid-Impacted Family Support Program Director and Coordinator. At MCC, Dori DiPietro, Social Work Program Director, acts as the primary contact for the program and individually supports students in the cohorts.

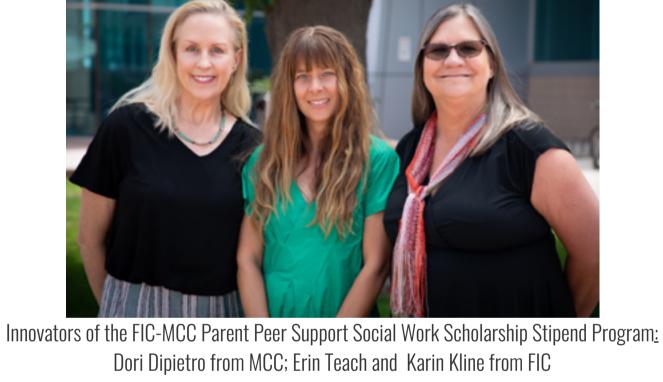
Participants

Cohort 1 began in fall 2020 and cohort 2 began in fall 2021. Just under 100 applications were received for each cohort. The applications were vetted for program criteria, and over 60 applicants met required conditions and were interviewed for participation in the first two cohorts. Fifteen students were accepted into the first cohort and 16 into the second; the grant supports up to 60 students over four years. Some of the participants have criminal histories and some experienced incarceration and having their parental rights terminated as a result. The strength and resilience they now have is truly remarkable and their desire to share their experiences with others going through the same things will go a long way to providing hope that recovery is possible.

Many participants in cohort 1 have disclosed the personal and professional growth they have gained from the program. Each one of them is on a journey of self-discovery and coming to terms with their past. Many are now able to view these experiences with substance use disorder and the child welfare system as strengths—an opportunity to help others who are facing comparable challenges. Most, if not all, have accepted responsibility for their involvement with DCS and recognize now that being involved with the department has not only changed their lives, but, for many, saved their lives. At least half of the students in cohort 1 are planning to continue their education in social work.

position with FIC and assisting others in the cohort with job placement or pursuing a degree in social work. Thirteen students in cohort 2 are succeeding in their studies and progressing on schedule toward becoming peer supporters.

Ten students in cohort 1 completed the program in fall 2021; six students are in an apprenticeship



Changing Lives for the Better

According to DiPietro, "This grant is a wonderful opportunity to change so many lives for the better and will have a ripple effect of goodness in our community." She continued,

much to offer other parents as a Parent Peer Support Specialist and, of course, we hope they will continue their education here at MCC to join us in the profession of social work. When asked to reflect on benefits of the program, one participant stated,

Parents who have overcome significant adversity and challenges in their own lives have so

My future is bright! As I learn more, I find my perspective shifting. I am becoming more and

more empathetic and less judgmental. I am cultivating a culture for my professional and personal life. . . . I'm creating a life for myself and my family. Another participant said, "I've learned that your story is your superpower. Everything I have gone

lives and serve others. Karin Kline, FIC's Director of Child-Welfare Initiatives, has worked in child welfare in Arizona for over 30 years. "This program has the real possibility of changing the child welfare system for the better by supporting parents who are often feeling judged and ashamed find hope that change is possible," she said. Kline has seen first-hand through her experience managing the Parents for

quickly, indicating a great desire for those who met the criteria wanting to change aspects of their

through was preparing me for this opportunity." Both the inaugural and second cohort filled

Parents Program the change that takes place when someone who has experience with navigating the child welfare system helps another parent going through the same process. The hope and relief provided to the parent receiving the service can be seen immediately. Programs like this are spreading across the country and there is a growing body of evidence that they result in children spending less time in foster care and an increase in reunifications (Saeteurn et al., 2022). Every community across the United States is affected by addiction and mental health issues that contribute to child abuse and neglect. Tapping into the strengths of parents who have

learned lessons along the journey to sobriety, stability, and a healthy family are invaluable to those

Saeteurn, E., Wu, Q., Krysik, J., Vasiliou, N., & Mabingani, D. (2022, January 12-16). Peer parent

Reference

still struggling.

programs in child welfare: A systematic review [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work and Research 26th Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States. https://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2022/webprogram/Paper45579.html

class.

Lead image: Dori Dipietro, MCC Social Work Program Director, with her spring 2022 social work

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those of the League for Innovation in the Community College.

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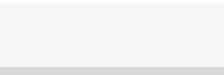
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