



INNOVATION

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

HELPING

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Member Spotlight

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



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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Ten students in cohort 1 completed the program in fall 2021; six students are in an apprenticeship position with FIC and assisting others in the cohort with job placement or pursuing a degree in social work.



Innovators of the FIC-MCC Parent Peer Support Social Work Scholarship Stipend Program: Dori DiPietro from MCC; Erin Teach and Karin Kline from FIC

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."

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

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 through was preparing me for this opportunity."

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.

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 (Saeturn et al., 2022).

Reference

Saeturn, E., Wu, Q., Krysik, J., Vasiliou, N., & Mabingani, D. (2022, January 12-16). Peer parent programs in child welfare: A systematic review [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work and Research 26th Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

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

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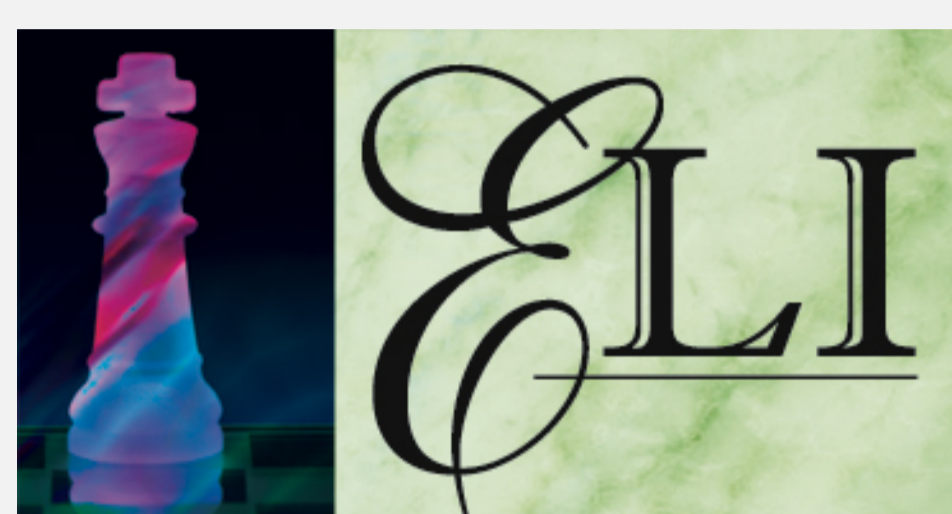
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