

Episode 218 - Dr. Charnetta Gadling-Cole and Dr. Cathy McElderry: The Development School Partnership: Interrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.inSocialWork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hello from Buffalo. Well we've said so long to our friend and cohost Charles Syms and now we'd like to say hello to Dr. Louanne Bakk. She's a clinical assistant professor here and she received her Ph.D. from Michigan State. Her research specializes in aging with emphasis on Medicare and Medicaid policy disparities in wider life and community based intervention and Program Services. We're thrilled that Louanne will be cohosting our podcast series and you'll meet her in our next inSocialWork episode. Our guests Drs. Charnetta Gadling-Cole and Cathy McElderry discuss the development School Partnership an intervention created to interrupt the school to prison pipeline originating in the relationship between Alabama A&M University and the pinnacle schools. Our presenters speak about how a A&MU has been able to bridge the gaps for students graduating from special therapeutic programs offered by pinnacle schools transitioning to the next step in their young adult lives offering wraparound services for students in need of comprehensive behavioral health services. Both the pinnacle schools and the A&MU professional development school project hope to create strong support systems for vulnerable students at risk of not completing their schooling. Our guests point out what role strictly black college like A&MU plays in this partnership but suggests that this model can and should be used by a variety of schools in a variety of settings urban and rural to create higher rates of graduation for vulnerable populations in both high school and college Charnetta Gadling-Cole Ph.D. is the assistant director for the Alabama A&M University's Center for Global Social Service Research. Cathy McElderry Ph.D. mph LCSW is associate professor and chair of the Department of Social Work at Southeast Missouri State University. Our guests were interviewed in May 2017 by our own Annahita Ball Ph.D. assistant professor here at the School of Social Work.

[00:02:53] This is Annahita and I am an assistant professor in the School of Social Work in University at Buffalo and I'm here With Dr. Cathy McElderry and Dr. Charnetta Gadling-Cole. We are talking about the Development School Partnership. And. The first question I have for you two is to tell me a little bit about that partnership and of course we'll go into more detail but you could give us an overview of what that is.

[00:03:19] This is Charnetta the Alabama A&M University and the Technical School Partnership is what developed into our what you would call now Development School Partnership. It was actually spearheaded by Ms Karen Lee who is the founder and CEO of the technical schools and they provide a variety of services for youth who have behavioural issues within the school system as well as they have a wilderness camp Ms. Lee is an anesthesiologist by trade that she develop an interest in working with youth with behavioral issues because her team begin to manifest some. Issues themselves. So with that she reached out to the administration at Alabama A&M University. And. Asked that. We identify services that could assist her students who are graduating to successfully matriculate to Alabama and in university. And from there the Center for Global Social Service research was actually Cathy and I. Cofounded at Alabama A&M university. We were asked to develop and implement a project plan. From there we did research and we identified models and we were successful in implementing. A project that would provide. Wraparound services for students after they graduated. That consisted of bio psychosocial assessment testing. As well as case plans and mentoring and tutorship. So that's just a broad overview of services. Are these wraparound services in college. Well there excepted to Alabama A&M University and that we have

an orientation during this summer. And from there the students come in and we have bio psychosocial testing done by some of the faculty member in the Department of Social Work and also psychology in counseling as well. And then we have a psychometry Dr. Daniel Upchurch who did the testing piece for us. And from there we had Professor Lidz Ford who works with one of our master's students who are in field placement and they. Developed a case plan for those individuals students. Okay.

[00:05:40] Great. This partnership seems to address the significant problem that we have a number of them from action that we have. So could you tell us a little bit about the school to prison pipeline.

[00:05:51] This is Cathy and basically the school to prison pipeline involves behaviors that once led to a student going to the principal office and most the student might get detention. Now what we're seeing is a very large number of students who are getting suspended and expelled from school for minor infractions. And if students aren't in school and parents are working and there's the lack of supervision. So we began to see a problem as these kids end up going from school. Into the criminal justice system. Now if a child gets into a fight at school it can lead to criminal charges. So it's put a lot of our youth on a trajectory that involves them interfacing with the criminal justice system. And a lot of this evolved out of the road tolerance policies. Many schools have gone through. Now that involves basically removing children from the school and vermin. And often these are kids who most need to be in school.

[00:07:11] Can you tell me a little bit on how to fill the prison pipeline relates to the developmental project and how that came to be?

[00:07:17] Yes. Never mention the pinnacle school basically deals with children who have behavioral problems so these might be children who have been sent to alternative school. Or children who have other types of behavior problems Oppositional Defiant Disorder or learning disabilities or any number of problems that could make management in the wrigglers school system problematic. So Karen in her wisdom created a school environment for those children that would provide them with the nurturing in the wraparound services that they needed to be successful. OK that's wonderful. But what happens after graduation. And that where Alabama and you know stepping in and that we will continue to provide those services in partnership with clinical school to try to change the outcome for students who would otherwise may not have any place to go after graduation to interrupt the school to prison pipeline by providing an alternative for many of the children who may not see themselves as ever earning a college degree or being successful in college. But creating an environment that could potentially lead to success.

[00:08:51] Does the services that you offer at the university or at least the wraparound? Are they offered all four years? Follow the student all the way through the four year matriculation? Grade? What sparked your interest in kind of developing the transitional program for at risk youth?

[00:09:11] This is Charnetta Actually my interest was sparked whenever we were brought forth to identify and develop a plan. However Cathy had done extensive research with the presence of pipeline piece that she had the foundation information that we use to theoretically implement the project. Once we learned more about what Karen Lee and her service they were providing at the pinnacle school and we identified various models that are really in place and some of them were similar to what called Sober goals. We decided to modify to fit the needs of our students at Alabama A&M and university and those coming in. That's how. The interest was initially sparked but from there it became an interest throughout campus as well as students who are not only matriculating in but some that may be there now who are on probation or parole actually expanded our services to not the album anyone can clinical school model but a student support retention service. They it across campus.

[00:10:19] For people who aren't familiar. What is the sober school model?

[00:10:22] Well usually for individuals who have some type of substance abuse issues that they collaborate with a university and they are able to attend alcohol Anonymous meetings or those type services that they need and at the same time matriculate through. However our model was different because we were collaborating with and Cathy stated somewhat of an alternative schools provide services through the school system itself in various counties as well as a wilderness camp. So we are able to get students who are coming from any variety of her programs the Wheaton's model initially focused primarily on the collaboration with the technical schools. That's why we said no model needed to be a little different and a student is coming in. The good thing is they were already receiving services a lot of them are already in counseling. So although we were able to assess based on our own bio psychosocial assessments we are also able to gain information from the staff at the Technical School who had been previously working with the student.

[00:11:38] I just want to add to what she never said with the sober school model it sort of focuses on one problem and as social workers we know that rarely do we see clients or individuals with just one problem usually there's a cluster of problems so the model that we met with the broad scope to look at a multitude of problems and not just one but. Anything that the student might experience that could somehow interfere with their potential for success academically.

[00:12:18] So that's actually leading into our next question what can social workers offer to meet the challenges of at risk students that are seeking a college education.

[00:12:28] I think most of all is to be aware of some of the challenges that youth who are at risk face particularly students who are ethnic minority students. We're also seeing in the area of suspension and expulsion more males who are suspended than females. We're also seeing children who have disabilities. And as social workers. We work with the most vulnerable populations. And this was truly a vulnerable population. No school social workers. Individuals who were working with families. We need to be aware of the challenges that some of these children face just walking into a school every day. And how do we begin to help them to see themselves as successful when we may be dealing with a system that's telling them every day that you're not welcome and you won't make it. I think being aware. And knowing that there are resources out there like Alabama you know in a development School Partnership.

[00:13:45] I was thinking about some of the students that are part of the project or that were even in the pinnacle school they are already in the system as you say some of them are already have cases with Department of Social Services or human resources depending on the state. And we know that a lot of the social workers after they graduate they end up working in that environment and ask social workers we work with a variety of individuals you know psychology's teachers. So we need to be aware and we need to make sure we have the appropriate skill set. To successfully work with the students. So that's one thing that we try to do as well. We've developed a number of certificate training programs for individuals who work with DSS or DJJ so they'll know how to successfully work with students who are manifesting behavioral issues because you know sometimes it goes beyond just behavioral. Sometimes it's environmental factors. There may be issues at home that we may be able to refer out. We try to provide I guess you say a holistic model. To address all of the identified needs which is why we do the psychosocial so we can get the family history and if needed you know talk to family members identify other services that they may be in. Well.

[00:15:14] That's great. That sounds truly like it's based on a social work model and interdisciplinary model too. So I'm. Curious also then do you see a specific role that historically black colleges play in interventions and projects similar to this one.

[00:15:30] This is Charnetta but a lot of times we see first generation those students and we may see those with any university where they may be education gap. So we're able to when they come in the door identified by those deficits so we can provide services for them to be successful. And that's across the board. That's what I think we can offer and the retention rate is. Important as well because yes a student can be accepted into the university. But. Are they able to successfully graduate and obtain a job in the discipline and with a variety of policies that are coming forth with the financial aid. You have to make sure you know you graduate a certain number of students and they go into their discipline. This is an area that you're going to find that many universities are struggling with to make sure that they retain students all four years. So as Cathy stated the fact that the model follows the students throughout it's similar to the case plans that we do in other areas. So once they meet this specific goal another area may develop and we were able to identify goals and objectives and tasks to assist those students in that area as well.

[00:16:49] Sounds like this is actually a pretty big program with a lot of moving parts. How do you think the target population has benefited.

[00:16:59] Well I think what we have learned because as you said there are a lot of moving parts and it takes a lot of systems to be successfully in place. That's why we have collaborated with other entities that are already at the university. We have the old network that there we have freshmen Academy at Alabama A&M university that already provided some of this support. But it was for so many students. So what we have done is asked them to identify students who they think will benefit from our services. And yes we still have students that will come in through the technical schools and now even other alternative schools because they've contacted us the tinsel city even some of the students who may benefit from a wraparound service. So I think it's you know. We're getting through some glitches as you do with any project it starts but because of the various moving parts we have found that collaboration is best and identifying resources that are already in place. And then from there just strategizing and we knew that we needed to have one person designated to work in this role. And that's been Professor Liz Ford. She had previously worked in the freshmen Academy so she was aware of all of the services that were there. So we were you know we're still working through glitches but I think it's coming along pretty successful at this point.

[00:18:34] From a national perspective what's it like to say that one of the major social determinants of health and well-being is education. And if we can put students who are at risk of not getting an education on a trajectory of higher education versus the criminal justice system I think it benefits us as a nation. The long term consequences of young African American males not going and education affects family life it affects. Their health it affects any number of other areas. So. Our goal is to create a model that can be replicated in other areas so that we somehow began to change our focus from how do we help young people who have been identified as exhibiting some type of problem behavior. Turn that around and to fix that. And the long term benefits of that. Are. Enormous. And that's what we would ultimately like to see come out of this project. So what do you think has been the greatest impact of the project. Thus far. I believe that having students who probably never thought they would get to college now enrolled in a four year institution. Is a huge impact. And each year that students are able to matriculate through this program I think will be huge. And. That. To me is the greatest satisfaction that there are. Any number of students who are now enrolled in higher education who may not have otherwise had that opportunity had it not been for the Developmental School Partnership.

[00:20:45] Now I want to add on. Yes definitely. Them being able to be admitted into university but then. Also having those services in place to assist with their success. That's important. You know for us as well. So I think to follow the fact that OK you're here but not only have you been admitted but now you have services you have support you have individuals that care about your success. So I

think that what. I'm really interested in the. Partnership project because this is definitely needed and it spans the high school. And the college level because we seem to be doing the two different thing separately in the different system and I'm just wondering what's next for all of you. In this. In the program but also in the research that you've been doing.

[00:21:36] What we're trying to do now is actually identify funding opportunities because it's a lot of you know services and funds available. For this type of model because it is out of the box and it is a collaboration interdisciplinary. So we've been looking at various requests for proposals and applications and trying to get sponsors just to assist with being able to hire more individuals who can specifically focused on this area of service for our students. So that's been primarily and then of course is you know we've also been presenting the research we presented at CSWE last year and then we've also presented for the national professional development schools. They have an annual conference to the University of South Carolina. So we've been able to present the model and it's been well received and we've even had other states to reach out in interest in replication of the model itself. And what I think is important to note is that. With any model it can be modified to fit the population of focus. What we need is a b c use for them. Primarily why institute some time resources. You know financial resources. That's the focus. Our primary focus right now is just to be able to identify those resources to help fill the financial gaps that. Exist.

[00:23:07] That's great. And. Like I said I'm interested in this because as you mentioned a particularly vulnerable population. And I think. You know the component of having an HBCU involvement is really critical as well. So I really appreciate you explaining the details of the context along with the program. Is there anything else.

[00:23:26] You want to say that is not a model exclusive to HPCU even though that's where the word originated. And certainly it fit well with the population that we've reached out to in Alabama. I am now in Missouri. The university that I'm affiliated with. Now we're also looking at something similar. And one of the counties here in Missouri and we're sort of expanded in and out to look at a trauma informed model that embraces not just the school system but also the community. There's lots of potential here. It's not just HBC U but the university. Affiliated with. Now actually is not HBCU were reaching out to a rural population that certainly aren't some of the fine types of issues.

[00:24:27] I'm curious then how do you think the size of the university could impact this type of program like I'm not sure what size University is that you're at in Missouri now. But just thinking like I'm a University of Buffalo and the large school is trying to think of ways that we can do similar program.

[00:24:44] Well I think many of the problems that are in urban areas are very similar to rule areas and a school of the University of Buffalo would probably have far more resources than what I have here. At my university and probably it sure as a university. So just getting involved with the community that you're in I think it's critical and that's one of the things that's very important with the university that I'm affiliated with that we are here for the community we're part of the community and so we try to reach out and engage the community in various activities. We use the teacher scholar models so that involve you know our research be focused on what are the community and historically black colleges. That's been their focus as well meeting the needs of the community. But certainly any university is a proponent of civic engagement. You know we have a responsibility to not just do research for research but to have major social problems. And right now this is a major social problem. These suspension expulsion of students the school to prison pipeline male students being underrepresented universities. You know however you choose to look at. There. Is. A. Problem that's facing our nation and it's not specific to just one area.

[00:26:26] Yeah I agree and I really appreciate that additional information about it too. Is there

anything else that either of you would like to add. Just want to thank everyone who's been involved with the project. Through the Center for Global Social Service research and we appreciate the opportunity to talk more about them model and the services and the needs of the community and this is what social work is about. So just thank you for the opportunity.

[00:26:55] You've been listening to Dr. Charnetta Gadling-Cole and Cathy McElderry discuss development School Partnership in social work.

[00:27:12] Hi I'm Nancy Smyth Professor and Dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history or online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our website at www.SocialWork.buffalo.edu. And while you're there check out our technology and social work research center you'll find that under the Community Resources menu.