

HEALING *moments*

Psychology, counseling and family science reaches out to the hurting in Nashville and the world



Counseling students Chuck Hargett and Leila Ashkazari traveled to Kenya to counsel children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

On a hot spring day in Kenya, more than 100 people were gathered underneath a small tent to hear from their guest speakers. The audience was black, African and HIV positive. The speakers were white, American and in much better health.

At first, the 15 counseling graduate students on the global learning experience to Kisumu, Kenya, were daunted by the differences and tried to overcome them with research on living with the AIDS virus in Africa.

"But then we realized this wasn't about educating them. Others have done that. This was about sharing hope and experience with them in an authentic way, because that's what counselors do," said Chuck Hargett, a clinical mental health counseling student from Vicksburg, Miss.

So Hargett decided to share about his own life after receiving a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis.

"I shared my experience of living with something in my body that I have no control over. When I started talking about my own personal experience, that is when I saw the faces in the crowd light up and I saw the people begin to really lean in.

"The way they led the session was unique, because they realized the important thing wasn't to give the participants information, but to connect with them," said Douglas Ribeiro, assistant professor of psychology who leads the Multicultural Issues and Integration of Psychology and Christianity classes. "That familiar message coming from someone they would never expect—white Americans, made for a very moving and intimate moment to say we are not that different. The same God who helps you, helps us."

That is just one of the many healing, nurturing moments that Lipscomb's graduate counseling students experience every day in the program. On any given day of the school year, while hundreds of Lipscomb students are studying in classrooms, counseling students can be found working with those suffering from addiction, ministering to marriages in crisis, playing with emotionally at-risk children, comforting the grieving or counseling desperate college students.

Nashville's rehab centers, mental health clinics and hospitals are filled each year with Lipscomb students working to fulfill their required practicum hours in counseling or marriage and family therapy. It is that need for real-world, personal experience for each and every student that has fueled much of the growth in the Department of Psychology, Counseling and Family Science over the last seven years.



Children at the Ring Road Orphan Day School play with Lipscomb counseling students in Kenya.

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Each clinical mental health counseling graduate student must collect 750 hours of internship and face-to-face counseling hours, while marriage and family therapy graduate students must earn 500 hours. In a city with several academic counseling programs, internship spots in nearby health care facilities have become increasingly scarce, said Shanna Ray, chair of the department since August.

But, just like those enterprising students in Kenya, this department knows how to overcome a challenge, Ray said.

"We have always had a very entrepreneurial faculty," she said. "We are a group who has been up for new challenges. And we are in an environment where that is being encouraged."

The department decided to create its own internship opportunities on campus. In 2013, it began the operation of the University Counseling Center. The center served 479 clients in the 2013-14 school year, more than double the number of people served the school year before.

This year the department established a second



Lipscomb Family Therapy Center

on-campus center, the Lipscomb Family Therapy Center, offering marriage and family therapy to the university and Lipscomb Academy community, and expects to begin offering services to the community at-large in 2015.

The on-campus centers are just one outward manifestation of the rapid growth the department has experienced since 2007, when it established its first graduate program in clinical mental health

counseling. That program was accredited this past summer, due in large part to the leadership of Jake Morris, who served as chair of the department from 2009 to July 2014.

In 2007, Lipscomb's Department of Psychology (as it was then known) was a relatively small department with 77 undergraduate psychology majors bound for other universities to earn their masters' degrees after graduation.

Today, more than 130 graduate students now walk its halls, which are lined with offices for 10 new full-time faculty and four new staff members. Undergraduate psychology majors reached a high of 106 in spring 2013. Plus a recent reorganization means the newly re-named Department of Psychology, Counseling and Family Science offers not only graduate and undergraduate programs in psychology, but also a bachelor's degree in family science.

"The family science program brings a strong focus on prevention to the overall department," said John Conger, director of the program. "Psychology, counseling and family science all deal with prevention at some level. However, family science is focused more on relational health, with knowledge gleaned from research on families."

The family science program added a well-known new faculty member in 2014. Holly Allen, professor of family science, brings 25 years' experience in educational psychology, intergenerational Christian formation, along with children's and family studies. She was director of the Child and Family Studies Program and professor of Christian ministries at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Ark.

The department also hosts special seminars allowing their students, other local students and the community to delve deeper into specific areas of psychological counseling.

Gerald Corey, one of the leading experts on group psychotherapy and author of 16 psychology textbooks, held a weeklong seminar on group

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therapy in spring 2013. Robert E. Wubbolding, director of the Center for Reality Therapy with 30 years' experience in counseling, came to campus in fall 2013. In the spring of 2015, the department will host Garry Landreth, founder of the Center for Play Therapy at the University of North Texas and internationally known for his writings promoting the development of child-centered play therapy.

Landreth's visit is part of the opening activities for a planned play therapy center, slated to open Feb. 1. The department currently offers a specialization in play therapy and the new Lipscomb Family Therapy Center includes a play therapy lab where marriage and family therapy and counseling students will practice their skills with clients.

"Children naturally play as a way to work through troubling issues they need to work through, so play therapy provides a framework to facilitate that process," said Denis Thomas, assistant professor of counseling and psychology and the coordinator of the department's play therapy programs.

"Traditional play therapy is most effectively used with children under age 10, but we believe that play therapy is applicable across the lifespan, so we use a lot of expressive arts with adolescents and adults as well."

Future plans could include becoming an approved play therapy center through the Association for Play Therapy, which would be a first in the state of Tennessee, Thomas said.

Both the play therapy focus and the department's offerings in global awareness go above and beyond what most other counseling programs in the nation offer, said Ray. Last year, students taking the Multicultural Issues course and the Integration of Psychology and Christianity courses were required to travel to Kenya or Ghana to receive course credit.

"All mental health practitioners need to be self-aware of their own cultures and the lens through which they see the world in order to relate to clients and the lens through which they see the world," Ray said.

"The direction of our society is to become more diverse," Riberiro said. "We need to address those changes in a practical way, not just theoretically. Global travel provides a different lens to achieve that."



◀ The department plans to open a play therapy center where students will practice their skills in play therapy and expressive arts activities.