

Bridges to Excellence
Reflections
Successes & Challenges

Barbara Babb

**Baltimore Center for Families, Children and the Courts, University of
Baltimore School of Law**

Greatest Successes of Multidisciplinary Work:

The Center for Families, Children and the Courts has established Truancy Court Programs in five Baltimore City elementary and middle schools. On any given day in Baltimore, over 6000 of the city's 89,000 public school students are truant, meaning they have missed at least twenty days of school with unexcused absences. The program, which is non-punitive and therapeutic, relies on Baltimore City District and Circuit Court judges, who volunteer their time to participate in this in-school program. Other partners are the Mayor's Office and the Baltimore City Public School System. The TCP and its aim at identifying and addressing the root causes of truancy, requires parent/caregiver participation, recognizing that truancy is a family issue. Once the main cause of the truant behavior is identified, TCP personnel, including law students, work to link the child and family with whatever services are needed to remedy the situation. The sessions are generally ten weeks in length, and the program is now in its third session of operation. At its best functioning, the TCP is an excellent interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavor. Preliminary data analysis has revealed dramatic improvements in attendance for TCP "graduates."

Biggest Challenges of Multidisciplinary Work:

The Truancy Court Program described above also has proven to be a very frustrating experience, at times. One given in interdisciplinary or collaborative work is that, during the collaboration, one also inherits the "cultures" of the collaborators. In this TCP, this has involved working with inefficient and inept bureaucracies, dealing with longstanding turf battles, and negotiating power struggles. Commitments participating schools have made to the TCP have not occurred, due largely to inefficient resource issues within the schools. Great demands have been placed on the convenor (the Center) to monitor recordkeeping and student/parent contact. Personnel turnover within the schools has made consistency a difficulty.

Elizabeth Bartholet

Child Advocacy Program, Harvard Law School

Successes:

- Lots of enthusiasm for CAP on all levels:
 - Law Students: High student interest & seeming commitment to the issues
 - Community Partners: Lots of interest from partners who want to work and collaborate with us
 - *Through our Policy Workshop*: Wonderful list of Policy Workshop speakers from all fields & practice settings (e.g., lawyers, judges, policy-makers, researchers, social scientists, doctors, social entrepreneurs)

- *Through our Policy Workshop:* Many community activists attend Policy Workshop sessions (from a variety of backgrounds including lawyers; policy-makers; graduate students in education, public health, government; psychologists)
- *Through our Clinical Work:* High-level of interest and commitment from attorneys & policy-makers at a variety of types of NGOs & government agencies who are supervising our clinical students
- Other Schools & Departments at Harvard: Beginning good collaborations with:
 - +Harvard Graduate School of Education (both faculty & students)
 - Kennedy School of Government (limited this year but expect to build relationship in future years)

Challenges:

- Capacity Issues:
 - We have a very small staff and a full agenda; we're working to capacity already, but tempted by exciting opportunities that come our way and eager to expand in new directions.
 - We don't have the capacity to partner with and/or collaborate on as deep a level as would like with some partners and potential partners. (For instance, we are frequently approached by international graduate and post-graduate students who want to come to HLS to work with CAP, but we just don't have the capacity to create an appropriate program for visitors at this stage.)
 - Ideally, we would be more "proactive" in creating multi-disciplinary partnerships and reform proposals, but we already have such an ambitious agenda & such a small staff that sometimes we simply have to be "reactive" and to work within the confines of the activities our chosen partners are engaged in.
- Other
 - Although only in our first year, we were able to attract a large number of student cross-registrants (mainly students at the Graduate School of Education), who offer a valuable non-legal perspective to our work; in the future, we hope to attract an even broader range of perspectives in our classes.

Frank Cervone

Support Center for Child Advocates

More than 30 years ago my predecessors at the Support Center for Child Advocates posited the notion that children would be well-served by lawyers who worked actively and closely with social workers in the tasks of representation and advocacy. At the time – circa the mid-1970s – the practice of children's law was mostly limited to a few public defender offices and many private criminal defense, domestic relations and general practice lawyers, representing only a minority number of the children on the juvenile docket while merely *responding* to facts and motions and recommendations presented by the state's attorneys, probation officers and social workers. In Philadelphia, the Child Abuse Committee of the Young Lawyers Division of the

Philadelphia Bar Association hired Carol Schrier, who with both a law degree and social work degree, received referrals from Philadelphia General Hospital and met children with volunteer lawyers at the hospital and in their foster homes; the Committee would incorporate the Support Center for Child Advocates in 1977 and soon hire its first full-time social worker. In the same period, Peg O'Shea founded the Defender Association's Child Advocacy Unit in 1975 and hired social workers to perform field work for her in-court lawyers. In 1975, Bob Schwartz, Marsha Levick, and two others founded the Juvenile Law Center, and hired their first social worker in 1977.

Today, we teach that lawyering for children is a multi-disciplinary craft. Our agency's model of service involves teaming a volunteer lawyer with a staff social worker for every child,¹ and representing the child in various types of proceedings and interventions. In the best of these teams the lawyer who thinks like a social worker knows there is much to see but that the lawyer's eyes are weak or blind to many dimensions of the human experience; and the social worker who thinks like a lawyer, aware of legal standards, proof issues and procedural due process, but has not forgotten for a minute that she is a social worker, can offer the most useful perspective and most relevant support.

One hard part is reconciling the perspectives of disparate disciplines in the singular life of a child. The social worker sees a "truth", which she calls a "fact" or "what happened" or "what needs to be done"; she knows that an assessment is needed to fully understand the child's needs. The lawyer believes it is her duty to find and press a position or goal; but with a court hearing "next week", the lawyer needs to control WHEN the assessment will be done and know in advance WHAT it will say. All the while, the child is more complex and more demanding and more needy than all that.

Most people are exhausted by the work, and I can see why.

Sasha Coupet
Civitas Child Law Center, Loyola University Chicago School of Law

As a psychologist, I long believed that the primary locus of control for many of my most troubled clients was the law—the legislature, court system, advocates, and most importantly, the arbiter. I imagined that law making, advocacy and legal decision-making could be significantly enhanced with input from mental health professionals who could work across adversarial boundaries and develop therapeutic alliances with court-involved families. I imagined that legal decision-making might itself supplant what I perceived as a punitive system with a therapeutic framework oriented towards the best interest of the child, as that aim might be inherently embedded and entwined with that of the whole family. For a number of years, I participated as an outsider or observer, without the requisite background or knowledge to make sense of how the law continued to miss the bigger picture, even when making decisions purportedly in the best interest of the child.

¹ A small number of children have staff attorneys rather than staff social workers assigned to work in concert with the volunteer attorney.

I was motivated by my own ignorance in the face of these ‘mysteries’ of legal decision making to attend law school. While in law school and shortly after, I had many opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue, working primarily in a consulting or advisory role, where I felt quite comfortable drawing from both of my disciplinary backgrounds. I count these among my multidisciplinary success stories. I did not have a client to represent or a narrow legal position to advance and, most importantly, was typically engaged in dialogue with the already converted choir-- legal academicians, policymakers and advocacy groups working on issues related to child welfare. Outside of the courtroom—outside of any real case involving a real child and family with real problems—interdisciplinarity was welcomed, supported and encouraged. However, when I finally began child welfare practice and began representing children, parents and the state in child welfare proceedings, I found an entirely different climate and source of complexities with which I am still wrestling. It was disheartening to observe that within an advocacy realm—where arguably, this kind of dialogue was most needed—the opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue decreased dramatically. While I could seek to inform my own client representation by keeping in mind the psychological and sociological dimensions of the course of action I was advancing, I could not compel the other relevant parties to do so. Moreso, even I felt constrained by my ethical obligation to zealously advance my clients’ wishes when I believed that this position was likely to achieve more psychological harm than good. Often, the only opportunities to engage other parties in any kind of multidisciplinary dialogue was while standing before the bench, arguing the merits of a particular proposed course of action on behalf of my client. Even then, it is a stretch to say that any meaningful dialogue really took place. As much as I could use my advocacy role to inform the “system,” the system itself demanded that the parties assume prescribed roles, usually defined by their adversarial stance, and operate within the bounds of the applicable statute. In this context, multidisciplinary “collaboration”—if it can even be called such—occurred within an adversarial framework, with each side ‘cherry picking’ from the scientific and sociological literature only to the degree that this information would favor a particular legal outcome. Ultimately, it was my impression that the arbiter was left no wiser by the dueling expertise of the parties. I count these experiences as my greatest continuing multidisciplinary challenges and am eager to hear and learn from others who have successfully integrated a true multidisciplinary perspective into a legal advocacy arena.

Bernardine Dohrn
Children and Family Justice Center, Bluhm Legal Clinic
Northwestern University School of Law

The Children and Family Justice Center set out to be multidisciplinary and collaborative in several senses. First, the Center includes law and social work students on clinical cases, bringing to bear medical, psychological, educational, developmental, and psychiatric collaborators as appropriate. Second, the CFJC represents “the whole child” in the sense that the attorneys worked in child welfare, delinquency, crime, education, domestic violence, and immigration/asylum law and approached the representation of each child with multiple domains as potential intersecting areas of legal need. Third, the Center sought partnerships with community organizations where

our child clients live. For example, for six years we operated a community law clinic in a settlement house in West Town, where CFJC attorneys, law and social work students conducted intake, taught at the local high school, and represented clients in the neighborhood. In this sense, our partners and teachers were the youth, parents, family, neighborhood residents, and community organizations where the clients live and to which they return. Fourth, the Center engaged in clinical legal work that was not traditionally "clinical", i.e., court-based litigation. Center attorneys developed a city-wide street law program, organized community-based restorative justice programs for youth in six Chicago neighborhoods, and collaborated to build peer juries in Chicago high schools. Fifth, for some five years CFJC attorneys represented both children and parents (and foster parents) in child welfare proceedings (in different cases). Finally, the Center served as a catalyst and participant in national initiatives to address particular issues in children's rights. For example, as part of the Juvenile Death Penalty Initiative, the CFJC worked over six years to abolish the execution of juvenile offenders in the U.S., developing strategies involving legislation, clemency, coalition-building, brain research, international support and law, trial support for local attorneys, media work, and appellate law. For example, the CFJC worked with experts in legal ethics to undertake two national working conferences to address ethical issues in the legal representation of children and to forge recommendations regarding the role of the child's attorney and the role of the child's family.

How to reflect on this work, victories and defeats, over fifteen years?

The challenges include funding and fundraising, concerns of a university and law school about non-traditional forms of lawyering and advocacy, and juggling the multiple loyalties to clients, students, university institution, and community --- all amidst the worsening material conditions for so many of our child clients.

Deborah Forman
Center for Children's Rights, Whittier Law School
Successes/Challenges

The heart of the Whittier Law School Center for Children's Rights is its Fellowship Program. The Center accepts up to 20 students per year as Fellows. They follow a specialized curriculum designed to train them in all aspects of child advocacy. Those who complete the program earn a certificate upon graduation. The program offers substantive courses, hands-on training through work in one of our on campus Clinics, through externships and through summer placements supported by stipends, and exposure to the multidisciplinary aspects of child advocacy through monthly colloquia and attendance at conferences. In addition, the Center seeks to serve as a resource for the community through publications such as the *Whittier Journal of Child and Family Advocacy*, by hosting the National Juvenile Law Moot Court competition and by organizing an annual symposium. Students are involved in all aspects of these endeavors as well.

The greatest successes of the program include the following:

1. The program gives the Fellows broad exposure to the need for child advocates, and

the issues facing them, in a wide variety of areas, including abuse and neglect, family law, delinquency and special education through course work and field placements.

2. The program fosters cohesiveness among the students based on a shared purpose and commitment to child advocacy.
3. Graduates of the program are working in each of the areas listed above.
4. The program offers multi-faceted educational opportunities, integrating extracurricular activities, such as the *Journal*, with relevant courses.

The greatest challenges of the program include the following:

1. The program lacks a structured forum for multidisciplinary learning, exchange and collaboration.
2. The program would benefit from expanding the faculty involved in the Center through additional hiring.

Leslie Harris
Oregon Child Advocacy Project, University of Oregon School of Law

Since the Oregon project is so new, I don't have very much to report about experiences through it. Instead, I'm also including some thoughts about efforts to do interdisciplinary work in other parts of my professional life, hoping they're relevant.

I've always been quite interested in doing interdisciplinary work, especially collaborating with social scientists to do empirical work, but I've had very little luck. One barrier is the usual problem that academics need to impress people in their own disciplines before they expand into multidisciplinary work, and often people in other disciplines don't see much value in thinking about how their research affects or is affected by legal issues. A second barrier that particularly affects lawyers who want to work with those in other disciplines is that so many other disciplines are so driven by the need to secure grants. Very often when I've talked with people about doing joint research it's apparent to me that they don't see a legal component as enhancing their chances to get grants. And I don't have much to bring to the table in the way of new grant possibilities.

Given these issues, I, like most others in this field, have become an avid consumer of research from other disciplines and use it in all of my work. The availability of online resources has made this much easier than it used to be, and now my biggest concerns are making sure that I understand the significance of what I find and that I can evaluate the reliability of sources.

I will mention one modest success that I have recently had doing empirical work. For a study of parental responsibility and curfew laws, I surveyed state law enforcement officers and prosecutors. Since I don't know how to do sophisticated statistical analyses, I paid someone to do this work and was very satisfied.

I hope that the Oregon project will be called upon to work on cases and legislation where multidisciplinary work will be valuable. I am expecting that we will be working on cases where we will use information about children's attachment needs (caregivers, siblings, etc.) to advocate for certain outcomes, and to this end my students fellows have been compiling research on these topics so that it's ready to go when our opportunity comes along. It would be great if the project had a chance to work directly with experts to disseminate this information, as some of the other projects around the country have done, but I can't tell at this early stage whether we'll be able to do that.

David Katner
Juvenile Litigation Clinic, Tulane Law School

The greatest successes of my practice include watching student lawyers handle litigation in juvenile court proceedings in behalf of child clients. The biggest challenges are too numerous to list, but they include the lack of mental health resources and professionals working with children in delinquency and dependency proceedings. The state of Louisiana, not unlike many other jurisdictions, divides children into dependency and delinquency tracks. I'd like to see this system combine all cases and to use all available resources for children in either track, delinquency or dependency. The lack of adequate resources available for forensic evaluations and appropriate treatment for all children entering state systems is a major challenge.

Alan Lerner
Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research
University of Pennsylvania

Our underlying successes include:

- We have been able to secure core underlying funding which has enabled us to not focus our primary efforts on fundraising; choices of work are not driven by development issues.
- We receive significant support from one of the three "partner" schools within the university.
- We have remained a functioning multidisciplinary center for over six years.
- We have attracted a significant donor.
- We are becoming known in the local, state and national communities.
- We are viewed as a resource, with perceived value in our multidisciplinary approach as well as our expertise.
- Graduate students who have been placed with us have benefited from their interdisciplinary education and have gone on to do or potentially do noteworthy work in the child welfare arena.
- We have achieved significant multidisciplinary education of the professional community through "Breakfast Meeting" seminars and a national child welfare conference.
- We have had an impact on a number of critical cases.
- We have fostered relationships with key individuals in multiple disciplines and settings.

- Our Child Advocacy Clinic provides interdisciplinary training to social work, law and medical students and offers the opportunity for student representation of children in dependency proceedings.
- We have been able to proactively address emerging child welfare issues from a uniquely interdisciplinary perspective.
- Our co-principals, each from a different discipline and background, collaborate weekly in a solution-focused approach.
- We have staying power.

Our challenges thus far include:

- Rapid turnover in the administration of child welfare agencies has resulted in the need to re-establish relationships, delivering a work product to someone other than the person who originally contracted for the work, and a changed focus of agency needs.
- Working with change-averse institutions.
- Getting people from different disciplines to think outside the envelope.
- The need to learn the language and concepts of disciplines other than our own in order to work collaboratively rather than engage in parallel play.
- The tendency of some disciplines to be hierarchical.
- Having sufficient time to do the work.
- Others don't always recognize the value of the multidisciplinary perspective.

Sarah Ramsey

Family Law and Social Policy Center, Syracuse University College of Law

I. Successes

One of the greatest successes of our multidisciplinary work is our Family Advocacy Program (FAP). FAP is a joint undertaking between the Family Law & Social Policy Center (FLSPC) and the Children's Rights and Family Law Clinic (CRC) at Syracuse University College of Law and the Department of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University (UPAC). The goal of the project is to improve children's health in the community by providing comprehensive advocacy for low-income children and their families. Doctors and medical students from UPAC screen child patients for legal issues that impact the child's health. Doctors make direct referrals of those cases to FAP. Lawyers and law students from the CRC work on as many referred cases as possible. Those cases which CRC is unable to take are referred to the FLSPC for placement with a pro bono attorney. The collaboration of several disciplines (pediatricians, medical students, nurses, professors, lawyers, law students and social workers) is required to make FAP work. It has been successful thus far because of the commitment and insight of the individuals who came together to make the program work.

Several courses offered through our Center curriculum are also great examples of successful multidisciplinary work. For example, the Advanced Family Issues course taught by our Center Director offers law students the opportunity to interact with forensic psychology residents in a number of classroom projects.

Additionally, the Bioethics and the Law course is jointly taught by one of our Center faculty and a medical professor. Half of the students registered for the course are law

students and the other half are medical students. This course provides many opportunities for the two professions to dialogue about ethical conflicts and strategies to implement when those conflicts occur.

Family Issues Network (FIN)

FIN consists of a group of professors and directors from several disciplines including law, child development, social work, communications and psychology. FIN meetings are held each semester to give members an opportunity to exchange information about teaching, courses, research and program development.

II. Challenges

Some challenges of multidisciplinary work include scheduling conflicts, ethical conflicts, and differences in desired goals.

Suzanne Tomkins

Baldy Center, University at Buffalo School of Law

My multidisciplinary work is in the area of family violence – primarily violence against women. I am the director of a clinic that provides students with experience assisting with civil and criminal proceedings on behalf of battered women. The clinic also serves as a resource providing research, trainings, community organizing, and policy development and evaluation studies in the surrounding rural and urban communities. I have engaged in similar work in Ukraine and Russia. I also chair the workgroup, Families and Children, for the Baldy Center on Law and Social Policy. The Center provides funding and institutional support for multidisciplinary research and forums.

Over the past 14 years, I have worked closely with representatives from a wide variety of academic areas and professions. These include, but are not limited to, the following: social work, law enforcement, government, mental health, child welfare, mediation, psychology, sociology, and psychiatry. Within the legal field, I work with attorneys in private practice, from the public sector, public interest, and the courts. These include defense attorneys, matrimonial attorneys, legal service attorneys, court clerks, prosecutors, law guardians, court clerks, and judges.

In general, the greatest successes occur when a topic or forum identified as meaningful to a wide audience results in a cross pollination of perspectives and ideas. An example is a forum we hosted at the Law School a few years ago on adolescents and the law. Attorneys, social workers, advocates, psychologists and many others whose work focuses on issues related to adolescents engaged in very meaningful discussions throughout the day. Important linkages were made between individuals, several research collaborations were formed and it was an opportunity to bring the resources of the university to the community.

Research projects, including evaluations of specialized courts, succeed with a multidisciplinary team to inform the process. We conducted a yearlong process evaluation of a domestic violence court that included all of the stakeholders in the design and implementation. It resulted in a far more informed study and streamlined the process considerably.

A multidisciplinary team enhances trainings. Receiving information from different fields makes the experience more relevant to the participants. Similarly, policy development is better informed and more likely to succeed when all the systems are represented. For example, our most successful law enforcement trainings include advocates, prosecutors, and other service providers.

The most significant challenges involve overcoming the barriers between disciplines. I find it particularly challenging regarding family violence because the defining dynamics are labeled differently in every field. Matrimonial attorneys may refer to “high conflict relationships” while mental health or substance abuse may speak of “co-dependence.”
Those in the area of child welfare may not recognize the co-morbidity of child abuse and spouse abuse.

Comment [L1]:

Karen Worthington **Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic, Emory University**

About Us

The Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic is a program of Emory Law School dedicated to ensuring safety, well-being and permanency for abused and court-involved children in Georgia. These outcomes are best achieved when systems only intervene in families when absolutely necessary, treat children and families fairly, provide the services and protections they are charged to provide, and are accountable to the public and the children they serve.

Our Mission

The mission of the clinic is to promote and protect the well-being of neglected, abused and court-involved children in the state of Georgia, to inspire excellence among the adults responsible for protecting and nurturing these children, and to prepare child advocacy professionals.

Our Mission Requires that We:

- Act as a catalyst for improvements in the juvenile court and child protection systems in Georgia;
- Advocate a long-range systematic approach to public policy designed for the benefit of the children affected;
- Provide research-based information about best practices and whether policies and laws affecting children have their intended effect;
- Promote the practice of children's law as a specialized area requiring specialized knowledge and skills.

Our Work

1) We train the next generation of child advocacy professionals in an interdisciplinary setting.

- The program operates as a student clinic in which law and other graduate students conduct research; write articles, policy papers, and other informational materials; analyze and draft legislation and policy directives; and participate in reform initiatives.

- Clinic faculty teach courses at the law school and classes throughout Emory University.
 - The Emory Summer Child Advocacy Program brings students from across the country to engage in child advocacy work throughout Georgia.
 - Faculty, staff and students provide a limited amount of legal representation for child clients who are involved with multiple child-serving systems.
- 2) We serve the community by striving to improve the way Georgia cares for abused and court-involved children and raising awareness about these children.
- Clinic faculty, staff and students teach at local, state, and national conferences for lawyers, foster parents, judges, social workers, probation officers, community volunteers and others.
 - The Clinic monitors press coverage of children's issues and serves as a resource to the press and public.
 - The Clinic participates in the legislative process, distributes a wide range of publications, testifies at public forums, and advises Georgia's executive, legislative and judicial branches and non-profit organizations on the effects that proposed legislation, policies, or regulations will have on children.
 - The Clinic collaborates with national and local organizations in support of important issues affecting children.
- 3) We use and promote technology to improve the way child-serving systems function and to raise awareness about child abuse, foster care, adoption, and juvenile justice.
- A main facet of the clinic's research-based approach is operating as a statewide resource through its web site, ChildWelfare.net.
 - Clinic publications and data analysis are made available through our web site.
 - The Clinic encourages public and private organizations to use technology that will lead to better outcomes for children.
- 4) We use research and data analysis to promote accountability in systems that serve children.
- The Clinic, in partnership with other organizations, analyzes data and provides feedback to courts and child-serving agencies about compliance with policy and statutory requirements.
 - The Clinic promotes individual and system compliance with procedural and substantive safeguards that help ensure decisions about children are informed, accurate and appropriate.
 - Clinic faculty, staff and students actively participate in local, state and national work groups, commissions, reform efforts, and other endeavors to ensure that federal and state laws reflect best practices for children.
 - The Clinic uses research, publishing, advocacy, education, litigation and other tools to advance the rights and well-being of court-involved and abused children.

Our History

The Barton Clinic was established in March 2000 to address the need in Georgia for an organization dedicated to effecting systemic policy and process changes for the benefit of the children in Georgia's child welfare system. Since then the Clinic's work has expanded to also include children in the juvenile justice system. The clinic helps Georgia serve neglected, abused and court-involved children by providing multi-disciplinary, child-focused

research, training, and support for practitioners and policymakers charged with protecting Georgia's children. Located at Emory Law School, the clinic collaborates with Emory's School of Public Health, School of Medicine and the Center for Violence Studies, as well as other Georgia colleges and universities.

The origins of the Barton Clinic are in the School of Law's Child Advocacy Project, which began in 1992 and provides summer internships in the field. The summer internship program still exists and is now called the Emory Summer Child Advocacy Program. The establishment of the year-round program with a full-time director was made possible by a generous grant from the Barton Fund. The Clinic's activities and priorities are informed by an Advisory Committee to ensure that a broader spectrum of professions and organizations contribute to and are knowledgeable about the work of the Clinic.