

University of Maryland Baltimore Graduate School

# Announcement of Doctoral Dissertation Defense\*

**Candidate:** Rebecca L. Sander

**Date, Time, and Place:** Thursday, May 1, 2008 at 1 pm Social Work/Law building, Room 519

**Dissertation Title:** Setting the Table: A Mixed Method Study of the Preparation Process for Community Conferencing

**Dissertation Abstract\*\*:**

Over the past 30 years, alternate approaches to transforming conflict have been emerging. These conflict transformation strategies are loosely grouped under the rubric of “restorative practices.” The primary focus of restorative practice is to hear about the harm and determine how to “make it right,” rather than focusing on who is to blame and how to punish the offender (McCold & Wachtel, 2002; Zehr, 2002). These group processes are viewed as strengths-based, culturally-sensitive, and a vehicle for building community cohesion and strengthening both social support and social control (Braithwaite & Roche, 2001; Merkel-Holguin, 2004; Van Wormer, 2004b).

Community conferencing is a restorative practice that has considerable connections to social work values and community practice. The purpose of this mixed method, exploratory study was to increase our knowledge of the preparation process for this intervention. It focused on one side of the interaction – the actions, reactions, and meaning making of facilitators. The setting was an urban agency that had received over 1500 referrals in 8 years of operation. Interviews with six facilitators were conducted along with a secondary analysis of the administrative database.

The results present a picture of a nuanced, recursive, and iterative process that is influenced by facilitator characteristics, interactional skills, and analytical ability. The source of the referral appears to influence the amount of time spent in preparation with community referrals taking the longest amount of time. The source of referral also appears to influence the probability of a case going to conference with cases referred by the police and DJS being less likely to go to conference. This finding was the one area of dissonance when the qualitative and quantitative results were mixed. Finally, facilitator experience, as measured by the number of cases that a facilitator has handled, may predict the percentage of community, court, and school cases that go to conference.

**Dissertation Committee Chair:** Bruce DeForge, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Social Work

**Dissertation Committee Members:**

Caroline Burry, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Donna Harrington, Ph.D., Professor, School of Social Work

Megan Meyer, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Lauren Abramson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

*\*The Open Presentation is open to the university community and invitees of the candidate. Any member of the Graduate Faculty may observe the Final Examination. Only committee members may vote. For more information, see Procedures for Examination of the Doctoral Dissertation.*

*\*\*You must type your abstract on this form in the space provided.*

*Updated: February 24, 2006*