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Making a Difference

December 2008

www.mtschoolcounselor.org



Transformations & Transitions

Kristy Savaria
MSCA President

Recently, I was invited to my best friend's husband's 46th birthday party. His name is Charlie. I know some of you are now saying, great, she's going to share a personal story...but, bear with me, there will be a connection. Fortunately, Charlie's wife, my best friend, Jackie is very wise and intuitive. She knew that her very humble husband would be fine with a quiet dinner and a movie, but as social as he is, she knew that having a party gathered with good friends and food would be even better. It was a grand event with many of his best

friends in attendance and one theme stood out above it all—connections.

I am a bit of a wanderer in social events and found myself involved in at least two groups of about six throughout the evening. Both groups were equally divided with regard to gender, interesting personalities and communication skills. During both of those group conversations I witnessed complete strangers making connections through continued communication and completely unusual associations which were like revelations and celebrations to them as they were revealed. We were all

amazed at how many of us could find some type of connection with our shared stories and relations with others. These revelations, although not transformations, showed the degree of relationship needed to begin a dialogue and find common ground. Something that we as school counselors do every day in putting together pieces of our students' puzzles in attempts to problem solve, to support change, to facilitate growth, to make that difference.

Transitions alter, modify, vary, transform, revolutionize, amend, convert, adjust, switch, trade, swap, and make a difference to affect

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Dr. Gysbers to speak at Spring Institute

Dr. Norm Gysbers, one of the founding fathers of the School Counselor Program Model will be the Keynote Speaker at the 2009 MSCA Spring Institute. Dr. Gysbers has supported school counselors across the nation to be more equipped to handle the challenges school counselors face on a daily basis.

Dr. Gysbers has been recognized nationally by professional associations including the American School Counselor Association, National Career Development Association, American Educational Research Association, American Voca-

tional Association, Association of Computer-Based Systems for Career Information, American Counseling Association, and the American Vocational Association.

We are thrilled that Dr. Gysbers will be able to join us in April. The 2009 Spring Institute will have an emphasis on the implementation of a school counseling program model in addition to offering a plethora of information on a variety of topics in a "breakout" style format. We each have the opportunity to make a difference in our schools. Please join us!



Dr. Norm Gysbers is currently a Professor with Distinction at the University of Missouri.

Important Dates

- MSCA Conference—April 16-17, 2009 Bozeman, MT
- ASCA National Conference June 28-July 1, 2009 Dallas, TX

Transformation & Transitions (contd. from P. 1)

change- the act of or process of transforming somebody or something...Make a difference, that's right! That's what we as professional school counselors do in several forms on a daily basis, to support others in our areas of expertise with all ages of students and their families. We also do this with our fellow professionals in our school districts and sometimes outside of the district in collaborations and professional development opportunities in order to advocate for our number one client, the student. We cause something to develop in a different form than what it previously was- because someone asked us to; it may be the student, themselves, the parents, the staff, or another person who has a personal relationship with the identified person requiring the help. However, none of this can occur without

first a relationship being formed. The relationship is the basis for the transformation or transition to occur. It is the foundation and with the right tools, we can affect positive change and its occurrence. Charlie and Jackie's best friend, Debbie called it genuineness. She said with genuineness anything can happen. Her husband said it was being real and having that listening ear; he is a minister. I agreed with it all. As school counselors, we have so much power to shape positive influence for change- and with the right guidance and direction for our schools we can develop models that will facilitate that change. My tenure is almost over for this term and I anticipate great things continuing to happen. Will you be a part of that? Will you consider running for MSCA President Elect or another MSCA open board position? We cannot anticipate

who that will be because history has not revealed itself, but we do know that connections, transitions and transformations are being made on a daily basis in all areas of our lives.

Whether we agree or not, we can choose to be a part of history this next year with a new President and cabinet members working to do justice for our country's citizens in the best way they know how. What can you offer your state school counseling association? You have the experience and information to affect change and support the professionals who serve our state's students. Please consider completing a nomination form today and making another kind of connection that will truly and genuinely make a difference!

Happy Holidays and God Bless!

“The relationship is the basis for the transformation or transition to occur.”

Join us at the 2009 MSCA Spring Institute

“So far, So Good, Now What?”

Your MSCA Spring Conference will offer many sectionals related to our area of expertise. This year we hope to wow you with best practices to support you in your district !

April 16-17, 2009

Holiday Inn Bozeman

Bozeman, Montana

Call 1-800-366-5101 to reserve your room now.

Conference registration forms will be available soon online.



Academic Skills + Personal/Social Skills = Student Success

By Elaine Schoyen, Middle School V.P.

As middle-school counselors, we have long realized the importance of addressing and providing our students with those personal/social skills that are developmentally appropriate. Truly, we all realize that the more a student is able to demonstrate social and emotional proficiency coupled with academic success, we will see the makings of a wholeness...a completeness moving towards that self-actualization we so wish for all of our students. We all know first hand what does not happen for our students when they are missing those collaborative problem-solving skills resulting in social conflict day after day.

Recently, I accompanied a group of students from my school that was fortunate to attend MBI Youth Days 2008 here in Great Falls. Mac Bledsoe, founder of the program "Parenting with Dignity" spoke to us about the importance of teaching decision-making skills on multiple levels to our students and/or our children. He cited the example of what happens when you tell someone, "Don't kick the elephant!" He was absolutely correct when he stated that each and every adult in the room immediately pictured themselves attempting to "kick an elephant". At that point, I thought about a recent bit of research that I had read regarding a study by Karen Bierman, Ph.D., distinguished professor of Psychology at Penn State University.

Dr. Bierman led a study involving about 350 4 year olds, who were enrolled in 44 Pennsylvania Head Start classrooms. Half of the students received the traditional Head Start curriculum, which emphasized academic readiness. The other half of the classrooms added an enrichment program called REDI Head Start, which provided opportunities to learn problem-solving skills through the use of puppets and interactive stories. One example of a story was about a turtle named Twiggle, who got really angry when someone knocked over his blocks. Then, a very old and wise turtle told Twiggle to go inside his shell, take a deep breath to calm down, say what bothered him and how it made him feel. Twiggle replied, "It really made me mad that you knocked my blocks over." Then the teachers modeled and taught the children to cross their arms and be like Twiggle the turtle when a problem happened, rather than the teachers using that familiar vague advice of "use your words".

The scientists from National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), who provided much of the funding for this study, made it clear that no longer should anyone need to debate whether we should teach academic readiness at the expense of providing social and emotional development. When the test results of the two

groups were compared, not surprisingly the REDI group scored higher on several tests of emotional and social development. Actually, by *yeElar's* end, the REDI group that received the enriched curriculum also scored higher on academic readiness.

Specific data concluded:

- 70% of kids in the enriched classes showed little or no disruptive behavior, compared to 56% in the regular classes.
- 12% of the enriched students still struggled to focus attention on academic tasks, compared to 21% in regular classes, and
- 20% in enriched classes exceeded a national vocabulary norm compared with 15% in regular classes. Moreover, parents of children in the REDI group reported fewer instances of impulsivity, aggression and attention problems than did parents of children in the traditional program.

In conclusion, I just want to encourage you to continue providing your students with opportunities to acquire and demonstrate those social and emotional skills that will help pave the way to greater success in life. For many of our students this will involve creative teaching and often re-

teaching of lessons that are usually mastered at a much younger age. Just like I frequently remind my students and their parents that they can acquire academic skills now or they can do it later...it is so much easier to do it now. Well, the same holds true for those social/emotional skills. They can either do it now or do it later. Once again, life will be smoother, more successful, and more self-gratifying if they do it now.



Consider running for a position on the MSCA Board in April, 2009—Serves Oct. 2009-2011.

Open positions are : President-Elect, Middle School Vice President, K-12 Vice President

Treasurer & Secretary will be open by appointment by President. **Go online for more information.**

Survival Tips for the Holidays

By Linda Konesky, K-12 V.P.

“Whatever works for you, take the time to do it”

It seems like everyone I speak to lately has the same question, “Where has the time gone?” The school year has flown by with all kinds of demands regardless of whatever your level of school counseling might be. Scheduling in elementary classroom counseling time; the fall round of testing including, but not limited to, LEP, PLAN, P-SAT, ASVAB, ACT and SAT; collecting AIMS data; making sure all the seniors are on track for graduation; helping to implement a bullying program and dealing with the day to day ups and downs of our students are just a few of the demands at the K-12 level. Of course, don’t forget the “extra duties as assigned” such as ticket taking, being a class advisor, working concessions and chaperoning homecoming activities. On top of all of this, now the holiday season is approaching!

Don’t get me wrong, I love what I do, but this time of year does get a little crazy with everything going on in our lives. I thought it might be nice to offer some survival tips to help preserve sanity through the holidays. Counselors, as you know, usually forget to take care of themselves and are sometimes stressed out already before the holidays even get here!

In an effort to provide some sound advice, I did some surfing on the Internet. There were hundreds of thousands of sites providing information on how to survive the holidays. There are tips for everyone including parents who have college kids coming home, college kids who are coming home to stay with parents, animals who have difficulty with all of the excitement, ADHD kids (and adults), people who have various health problems and on and on.

UpliftProgram.com had the following emotional survival tips that I thought might be helpful:

1. Ask yourself who you really want to spend Christmas with. Imagine that the Guilt-Free Fairy could wave her wand and no one would feel hurt or angry at your decision. Where would you feel truly accepted and at ease? Where would you laugh and be playful? Where would you feel that your own values were recognized and reinforced? Where could you count on people to meet your needs? Wherever that is --is where you should be.

2. In terms of Christmas shopping, ask yourself whether you are buying each gift because the process gives you pleasure or out of obligation, and be realistic about your finan-

cial situation.

3. Use your time off to be in nature. A walk in the woods, or cross-country skiing if the snow is deep, will help tone your body and your neural chemistry. Especially in the presence of someone you love, it can connect you to that which is most true about yourself and the world.

4. Spirituality is a natural antidepressant, but only if it feels intrinsic to you and brings you closer to others. Evaluate your religious rituals in these terms, and, if they meet these criteria, seek solace and joy there.

5. If you feel in danger of being isolated or bored during the holidays, join a group that has activities during this time. Being with supportive people who share your values and interests is vital to combating depression--now and during the rest of the year.

6. Remember that, while good food and drink can be a part of Christmas cheer, when taken in excess they are also depressants. If you feel in danger of overdoing it, try to spend time with those who don’t. “

Whatever works for you, take the time to do it! Enjoy your time off so you can approach the New Year with energy and enthusiasm. Happy Holidays!!



What Will You Do for Shy Kids?

By Marjie Braun Knudsen

They're quiet, don't get into trouble, and can become invisible if you let them. They don't want to participate in activities, go to school, or even birthday parties.

This was my daughter. Life was more of a challenge for her. The everyday tasks of interacting with peers, and talking in class were overwhelming and sometimes painful. Changes in routine or new situations were especially difficult.

There were several times over the years that she had begged me to home school her. I knew if I went down that route, it would be the point of no return for her to feel independent. For her, home schooling would have been giving up. It would have been easy to let her slide by through life as the invisible child... the most difficult thing in the world was to not let her.

When, by fifth grade, things did not get better, I realized that if I wanted my daughter to have a chance at life, I needed to get her some help. Also, as a parent, I needed to learn how I could help her through those difficult moments. This was the turning point for my daughter, to decide to get help, instead of just letting time slide by.

I took her to see a psychologist. It was Jenne R. Henderson, Ph.D. who helped my daughter finally

start understanding about the anxiety she was experiencing. She helped her to not feel quite so 'frozen' in fear about experiences and issues that would come up in her life. My daughter learned that it takes her more time than others to get used to new things, that it's just a part of who she is, and now that she knows that about herself she can plan for it, so she can be successful at anything she might encounter.

She also learned that being prepared ahead of time could help alleviate her anxiety, and also that exposure to those situations, although uncomfortable, would help. It was the start of the long process of her growing and learning about the way she is, and what she needs to do to help herself through her feelings.

When my daughter was younger, I purchased many books about social anxiety and shy children, although I could never find a school-age book that would help her to understand someone else going through the same feelings. I wanted a story-based book on the issue that would be engaging and entertaining, something that would be memorable. I could not find that book. When mentioning this to Dr. Henderson,

years later, she suggested we write one.

The message of being prepared ahead of time echoed throughout the years of the learning process about social anxiety. The book *BRAVE: Be Ready and Victory's Easy, A Story About Social Anxiety*, was written to include that message in the format of an entertaining chapter book. The title and message of the book uses a memorable acronym, BRAVE, which stands for 'be ready and victory's easy' because with social anxiety it helps to not only be ready but also to be brave.

It worked for my daughter. She ended up taking advanced courses in high school, was a cheerleader, and had a part in the high school musical. She is now enrolled at a large university, and I look back over the years at all the turning points and think... what if I didn't keep trying? She has told me over and over that she is glad that I never gave up.

My husband and I are constantly amazed at how far she has come. It was so important throughout the years for us to never give up, and take it a step at a time. We see that so clearly now, even though it was so difficult at the time.

It would have been so easy to let her stay invisible.

"my daughter learned...that it's part of who she is.."

Marjie Braun Knudsen is a writer living in Portland, OR. She is the mother of four children, two who have suffered from social anxiety. She retains all rights to this article and welcomes comments at mbknudsen@msn.com

BRAVE: Be Ready and Victory's Easy, A Story About Social Anxiety by Marjie Braun Knudsen & Jenne R. Henderson, Ph.D. is available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Powell's Books and www.summertimepress.com



Reasons For Living

By Barb Holden, Past President

“By expanding on the reasons for living, you often find a piece of hope....”

This time of the year is always filled with emotions. For many it is a great and happy time. For others, this is a time of heartache. More often than it should ever be, this includes our students. As counselors, the compassion and care we feel for our students is often stretched to the limit at this time of the year as we hear their stories and search for ways to support them.

The most serious of these situations are those students that are suicidal, students that are finding few “reasons for living.”

Professional school counselors are often in the situation of responding to and evaluating potentially suicidal students. It is critical that you have a clear protocol for working with and evaluating those students that come to you as potentially suicidal.

I would recommend that

you adopt or create a very specific plan for referral and response in regard to suicide. For example, in my school, every hint of suicidal ideation, plan, or intent is assessed. The staff knows to refer those to our counseling department and we have a district protocol to follow. Most specifically, we always assess and we always notify parents.

The concept of exploring Reasons for Living and Reasons for Dying is part of the ASIST Training (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). (www.livingworks.com). Training for this is being done nationally and Voices of Hope in Great Falls (406 268-1330) would have information on current trainers in Montana for the two day training..

The portion of the plan referred to in the title talks about the importance of listening to the reasons why someone might wish to

die but then also listening to the reasons why they might wish to live. This conversation is different than simply a focus on the level of lethality, (which should also be done.) It allows the opportunity to verbalize what has been in their heart and then to reflect on ambivalence regarding actually dying. By expanding on the reasons for living, you often find a piece of hope coming into the student’s heart and into their voice. You also will find the relationship between you and that person is strengthened. Then even if hospitalization follows, there is a connection there when the student returns to school.

No work we ever do is more important than potentially saving a student’s life. Check out this program on the web site. Be sure you have a clear plan of action and do your part to ease the pain in someone’s heart.

Acknowledge the Difficult; Especially During the Holiday

By Vicki Smith, High School V.P.

Wow, for those of you who did not get to hear Karen O. Johnson, MEd, speak on grief at the MEA-MFT Conference in Missoula in October...you really missed a special presentation. Karen came to us from Utah and has spent more than 37 years in education. She wears many hats but specializes in grief counseling and is the founder of “Everyday Grief” which offers Grief and Loss seminars and consulting.

What a powerful, compas-

sionate professional. I’m not sure what struck me the most but I learned several practical applications for working with young people (any person really) who has experienced a loss.

Karen shared her “grief bags” with us which hold little treasures that attract and calm young people who might otherwise stay withdrawn. But what really struck me, was when she told us how important it is to acknowledge a person’s loss....even after some time

has gone by. That the pain, the longing and the loneliness, does not go away. Although it’s different for everyone, they’re thinking about those they’ve lost.

Growing up with Native American parents who both attended boarding schools, our process was to “not talk” about it. This insight from Karen has made a huge difference for me.

We’ve had several students who’ve lost family members this year and

Karen’s inspiration has made me realize my responsibility to check on them—especially now, during the holidays—whether or not 8 or 9 months have passed.

I encourage you to seek out those students who’ve lost someone and just let them know it’s okay with wherever they’re at in their grieving.

Please check out Karen’s website: www.everydaygrief.com.

MSCA Board Elections—Leadership Opportunities

By Carrie Stefanatz, President Elect

Greetings Montana School Counselors! I hope this newsletter finds you well rested after the holiday break, and that you are getting excited for the MSCA Spring Conference! We have some exciting and enriching activities planned.

MSCA is pleased to announce the following upcoming vacancies: MSCA President Elect, Secretary and Treasurer, Middle School Level Vice President, and K-12 Level Vice President. We invite all MSCA members to apply or nominate someone that would be qualified for the position. We need your help!

The President Elect who is

selected should be prepared as this role will require a six-year commitment: two years as President Elect, two years as President, and two years as Past President.

The Level Vice Presidents who are selected should be prepared as their roles will each require a two-year commitment.

The Secretary and Treasurer serve a two year commitment. These positions are appointed by the MSCA President. Interested persons need to contact Kristy Savaria or me (there are no specific applications for these positions).

Please go to the MSCA

website to view the complete positions descriptions and download full nomination applications for the President Elect, K-12 and Middle Level Vice President. All members are encouraged to consider these positions and apply by March 30, 2008, to:

Carrie Stefanatz

MSCA President-Elect

St. Ignatius High School

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St. Ignatius, MT 59865

[cstefanatz@](mailto:cstefanatz@stignatiusschools.org)

stignatiusschools.org



Working with the Bullied Child

By Steve Breakstone & Michael Dreiblatt, Balance Educational Services

Research has revealed common characteristics and profiles among students who are repeatedly bullied. One group is referred to as passive (a.k.a. submissive) victims; another as provocative victims. Clarifying the behaviors of a student who is repeatedly bullied can lead to strategies that reduce victimization.

Passive victims signal, through attitude and behaviors, that they are insecure and will not respond strongly if bullied. They are often:

- * Physically weaker than others their age
- * Afraid of being hurt, have poor physical coordination and don't do well in sports
- * Have poor social skills and have difficulty making friends
- * Are cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy

* Are anxious, insecure, and cry or become upset easily

* Have poor self-esteem

* Have difficulty standing up for or defending themselves, physically and verbally

Provocative victims express behaviors that often irritate others and incite negative reactions. They often:

* Have poor social skills -- appear to instigate the bullying

* Are hyperactive, restless, and have difficulty concentrating

* Are clumsy, immature, and exhibit irritating habits

* Do not develop strong friendships

* Are hot-tempered and attempt to fight back, ineffectively and sometimes entertainingly, when

victimized

* Pick on smaller kids

If the bullied child has traits familiar to either list, altering their behavior may help reduce further bullying and develop self-esteem, resiliency and empowerment - qualities that will limit further victimization.

For instance, teach passive victims to respond assertively to bullies with details that include specific language and how to express confident body language, eye contact, and tone of voice. These students will also need to practice social skills and learn activities appreciated by peers.

Provocative victims also need to learn age appropriate skills. They will need help from a caring adult to become aware

of behaviors that generate negative reactions from others. They may also need help with emotional management techniques.

Social skills training should be incorporated into behavior plans, classroom lessons, and IEPs (Individualized Education Plans).

Although some behaviors do perpetuate bullying, no one ever deserves to be bullied!

For more information and other bully prevention strategies, contact Balance Educational Services (A leader in Bully Prevention) Toll Free: 1-866-768-4803 © 2008

www.BalanceEducationalServices.com

Awards, awards.....

By Linda Konesky, K-12 V.P.

Hollywood has Oscars, television has Emmys, Broadway has Tonys, and MSCA has Counselor of the Year Awards!

Counselor and Administrator of the Year Awards for 2008 were presented at the Annual Spring Conference in Bozeman last April.

Elementary Counselor of the Year was presented to Dr. Renee' Schoening, from Deer Lodge Elementary School. Her nominator stated "Renee' has developed and implemented many innovative and proactive prevention programs, and believes that prevention is a key component of her job."

Barb Holden, East Middle School, Great Falls, received the **Middle**

School Counselor of the Year award. "Barb has consistently worked to establish ASCA standards in Great Falls since the 90's when we began to articulate comprehensive K-12 counseling programs."

Browning High School counselor Dona Bremner was honored as **High School Counselor of the Year**. "Dona has served the students of Browning Public Schools for 30 years. A special attention to and skill with at-risk students is a hallmark of Dona's counseling style."

Sue Sailer, Chester-Joplin-Inverness Public School, received the **K-12 Counselor of the Year** award. "Mrs. Sailer is an individual that students,

staff and community look to for insight. She is the heart and soul of compassion, yet balances for students the impact to make responsible decisions and see the big picture for their life now and in the future."

Christine Wortman-Engren, Director of Applied Curriculum, Great Falls, was honored as **Administrator of the Year**. "Christine has contributed enormously to the development of the Great Falls Public Schools counselor curriculum. It is no easy task to facilitate a large diverse group of counselors, culminating in the articulation of a high quality, research based program."

Congratulations to all!



Montana School Counselor Association 2009 Awards



It's time once again to acknowledge school counselors and administrators for their outstanding efforts in working with Montana's youth. If you have a colleague who you feel deserves this honor, now is your chance! Nominations are being accepted for the following areas:

- Elementary Counselor of the Year
- High School Counselor of the Year
- Administrator of the Year
- Middle School Counselor of the Year
- K-12 Counselor of the Year

Nomination forms can be downloaded at the MSCA website www.mtschoolcounselor.org and are due March 9, 2009.

Mailed forms to: Linda Konesky, Centerville School, 693 Stockett Road, Sand Coulee, MT 59480, or.....

E mail: lindak@centerville.k12.mt.us **FAX:** 406-736-5210 **Phone:** 736-5167 if you have any questions.

Awards will be presented at our annual spring conference in Bozeman during the luncheon on April 16, 2009.

MSCA 2008-09 Board Members



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Do you know any members who relocated? Please take a moment to let us know their new address:
lsimpson@geraldine.k12.mt.us

The MSCA Newsletter, "Making a Difference" is published three times annually as a service to our members. Two issues are sent to members electronically and one issue is mailed. Board members, except for Treasurer and Secretary, submit articles of interest related to their level of representation. We welcome articles of interest from members or other educational professionals who would like to share information. We encourage submissions be written in a friendly, informative, and practical style rather than technical or academic. Articles must be original and references are to be used when appropriate rather than footnotes. Articles must meet the mission of MSCA. No compensation is given for submitted articles. All articles are available on the MSCA website: www.mtschoolcounselor.org.

Advertisements may be submitted according to guidelines found on the website. (Full P. 1X=\$150, 1/2 P. 1X=\$125, 1/4 P. 1X=\$75, 1/2 Column 1X=\$50; see additional options). We reserve the right to edit copy or reject advertisements that do not meet the mission of MSCA. If you have questions please contact the Editor, Vicki Smith.

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