

Lipscomb Students Complete Critical Research for CAL, Inc.

Contributed by Chris Pepple

During the Fall 2006 semester, seven senior social work students at Lipscomb University completed critical research for Choral Arts Link (CAL, Inc.) as part of their Applied Social Work Research class project. Their work proved to be significant in allowing the nonprofit agency to move forward with grant applications that will provide opportunities for growth for its programs. {mosgoogle right}

CAL, Inc., works to provide singing and choral performance opportunities for children and youth through programs that encourage not only strengthening vocal skills, but also scholarship, leadership, and teamwork abilities. The MET Singers Honor Choir is the signature program of CAL, Inc. This choir consists of middle Tennessee students in grades 4-12. Under the direction of founder Margaret Campbelle-Holman and an all-volunteer staff, this choir performs regularly with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra and in other community performances.

As she prepared to incorporate her choral program and seek nonprofit status in 2004, Campbelle-Holman studied at the Center for Nonprofit Management. "I learned from these sessions that my group needed to think strategically, plan effectively, and implement ideas steadily. Then we must review, evaluate, and reseed to grow. To gain funds through grants, we needed to build in accountability and provide research proving we could fulfill our mission. We needed program evaluations. Cost for the research and evaluations, however, so soon in our development was only a future-think budget item in our strategic plan."

In 2006, Campbelle-Holman shared her hopes for research that would give her information needed for grant applications. She confided in Donnetta Hawkins, CAL, Inc. board member and assistant professor of social work at Lipscomb. Hawkins and Hazel Arthur, associate professor and chair of the Department of Social Work and Sociology at Lipscomb University, knew Lipscomb students could help.

Lipscomb University social work majors must complete the Applied Social Work Research class in their senior year to fulfill their graduation requirements. The students work together as a group on an approved project to apply research methods and strategies to settings similar to ones they will serve through a career in the social sciences. Arthur knew that providing critical research for a community organization would benefit everyone involved. The seven students who worked to assist CAL, Inc. were Rosa Santiago, Natalie Ivey, Meaghan Lokey, Sarah Kate Tiner, and Rachel Forehand of Nashville, TN; Kim Mack of Louisville, KY, and Lindsey Bumpus of Centerburg, OH.

"The research project that we did for CAL, Inc. was one of the most rewarding projects I have ever been a part of," said Kim Mack. "The class pulled together as a team and worked so hard. We were able to give the CAL, Inc. board some great information which will, in turn, help them receive grant money and recognition. There are many at-risk youth on the streets, and this program gives those kids something to be a part of."

The Lipscomb students conducted in-depth research concerning families participating in the MET Singers program, the reasons for their participation, the benefits they feel they receive, and their evaluation of the program. The students surveyed the parents and choir members. They reviewed the program's goals and assessed the program to see if it was meeting those goals through questionnaires the students constructed. The students had the questionnaires translated into Spanish to give all families access to the evaluation process.

"This project really opened our eyes to the struggles in inner city Nashville and to the important role that music programs can play in youth development," stated Lindsey Bumpus. "We were so happy to do such a large scale project that benefited CAL, Inc. and the MET Singers. This project not only taught us so much about research, but it gave the volunteers, parents, and singers information that will benefit this positive program. It is so rewarding to be a small part of something so much bigger."

The Lipscomb social work students exhibited the level of excellence the social work department has come to be known for. "The research in their final presentation and documentation was vast and in-depth," stated Campbelle-Holman. "The administration of surveys during a rehearsal was done in a most supportive, yet professional manner. Lipscomb students were gracious in assisting parents and students as very few had previously participated in this type of data gathering event."

"This project has given CAL, Inc. invaluable documentation and evaluative statements for next steps in grant proposals, as well as content for our year-end summary. By looking within our city's boundaries and offering an educational service model of this type, you have 'paid forward' through a long-term investment fostering healthy services for children and youth that CAL, Inc. serves. I am indebted to the social work department's willingness to reinvest its human resources and academic energies in our local community."

Between the number of supervised service hours put in by seniors and the number of required volunteer hours by freshmen, Lipscomb social work students serve the community quite extensively. Social work students complete a total of 508 hours during their senior year (60 in the fall and 448 in spring). Last year, the department had 10 seniors for a total of 5,080 hours minimum of service. Introduction to Social Work students complete a 25-hour placement. In 2005-06, there were 36 students (including fall and spring) who served a total of 900 hours.

The social work research class implements many of the initiatives of the Serving and Learning Together (SALT) Project developed from Lipscomb's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which focuses on service-learning experiences for traditional undergraduate students. A service-learning graduation requirement will begin with the incoming freshman class in Fall 2008. The intent of service-learning experiences is to provide opportunities for students to focus on and understand the fulfillment of specific academic goals in the context of service. The seniors in the fall social work research

class proved how invaluable this experience can be for the students and for the agency they worked with.

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