



LOVELOCK



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Social Work Scholarship Recipient Check-In

Kareen Filippi is a BSW student at UNR through the 3+1 program and is a Grants Manager for the WIC program through the Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH) in Carson City.

Background and Career Beginnings

I was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and moved to the United States when I was three years old. I grew up in Carson City and graduated from Carson High School in 1996 (30 years ago!). After high school, I planned to become a nurse and enrolled at Western Nevada Community College (now WNC). At this time, I was also an assistant at a local doctor's office, and I quickly discovered, as much as I wanted to help others, I could not handle needles or blood. After my first year of community college, a series of life events led me on a different path.



Over the next twenty years, I got married, had two children, went through a divorce, obtained a full-time position at the state and eventually remarried. At work I noticed that I could attain better paying positions if I had a degree. That began the turning point for me; giving me the push I needed to go back to school and try again. During this time, I was only able to commit time and money to enrolling in one or two classes a semester. Over the course of four years, I finally was able to earn my associate's degree. Even after completing my associate's degree, I still felt uncertain about the exact path I should take.

As a full-time employee with the State of Nevada, the trajectory of my career path has been fiscal and budget related. I really felt that I missed my opportunity to get onto the path that would lead me toward directly helping others. However, in 2023, I was presented with the opportunity to obtain my BSW through the Social Work Scholarship program, through the Department that I work in. This opportunity was the catalyst that motivated me to continue my education and work towards my bachelor's degree. The scholarship removed most of the financial burden that had held me back for so long. Additionally, the flexibility of the 3-in-1 online program that was offered by UNR allowed me to balance school with my full-time job. Without that flexibility, this journey simply would not have been possible. Now, 9 years after I obtained my associates degree, I have reached my senior year, something that once felt unattainable.

The reason I have always wanted to help others is that in my childhood and throughout my life I have often needed the guidance, direction, and support of others to help me navigate challenges. Those experiences shaped who I am today and continue to motivate me to be that source of support for someone else. I am pursuing my BSW to provide the same support that helped me survive my own challenges. I want to prove that it is never too late to align your career with your calling.

Where do you work and what is your role

I currently work for the State of Nevada, Department of Human Services, Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. I am the grant manager for the program. *Continued to Page 2...*

What part of your job do you enjoy the most? Can you share a success story or an interaction with a client/program/etc that made an impact on you?

The part of my job that I enjoy the most is knowing that the work I do behind the scenes has a real and meaningful impact on the lives of others. Even though much of what I do may not always be visible, it directly supports Nevadans, and that gives my work a strong sense of purpose every day. What makes this especially meaningful to me is understanding that each number represents a person or a family who is relying on these services for support.

One experience that had a lasting impact on me was during the government shutdown that lasted more than 40 days. During that time, there was a great deal of uncertainty, especially since our program is 100% federally funded. Despite those challenges, we were able to sustain services for our participants and ensure that over 55,000 Nevadans continued to receive the support they depended on. Just as importantly, we were able to ensure our agency employees were paid during that period. That experience really highlighted the importance of teamwork and dedication to the people we serve. It showed me how critical our work is, not just for the participants, but also for the stability of our workforce.

What is a challenging area of your work?

One of the most challenging areas of my work is navigating periods of uncertainty, especially during events like a federal government shutdown, since our program is 100% federally funded. During these times, there is a great deal of concern not only for the continuity of services, but also for the families who rely on us every day.

How have you been able to apply in your work what you are learning in school?

In my BSW program, I've learned about active listening and empathetic communication. I've started applying these techniques in my current role when navigating difficult conversations. I try to look for the underlying needs that may need to be met. I have also been working on using interpersonal skills, such as reframing, to help me communicate fiscal needs in a way that is supportive and collaborative rather than from a bureaucratic lens, ensuring the focus stays on helping Nevada families.

What do you look forward to over the next year?

Over the next year, I am looking forward to beginning my practicum. This feels like an exciting step for me because I'll finally get to put what I've learned into practice in a real-world setting and build relationships with others in the field. I'm ready to gain hands-on experience working directly with individuals and families. I'm also looking forward to the graduation ceremony next spring, where I can finally get my bachelor's degree in social work!

Kareen's
Rapid Fire
Questions

Would you rather travel to the past or to the future?


TOUGH QUESTION...THE FUTURE
Favorite spring activity?

STARTING MY GARDEN
What was your first job?

PIZZA MAKER AT STRAW HAT PIZZA
What is something we'd be surprised to find in your office/desk?

A HALLOWEEN PICTURE THAT STAYS UP YEAR-ROUND
Restaurant or home-cooked meal?

RESTAURANT



Spotlight on Play Therapy: A Conversation with Cathi Spooner, LCSW, RPT-S

Cathi Spooner is the Clinic Supervisor at Mesquite Behavioral Health Center and is the owner of Renewing Heart Play Therapy Training, a play therapy training and consulting business.



Can you share your background (growing up location, schooling, early career)?

My father was in the Navy most of my early years and we moved a lot when I was young, including living in Spain for a while. I enjoyed living in different parts of the country and overseas. My father retired and we eventually settled in Virginia near Washington, DC, so I lived most of my life in Northern Virginia until we moved to Nevada 10 years ago.

I received my undergraduate degree at James Madison University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education with a specialization in teaching children with emotional problems. I was a special education teacher for 5 years, predominately teaching elementary aged children in Fairfax County, VA, at a specialized school. That's where I was introduced to play therapy by the school social worker and school psychologist. The school psychologist and I co-facilitated a play therapy group with the kids in my classroom. I was instantly hooked when I saw the power of play therapy. That was the catalyst for getting my Master of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University with a specialization in Child and Family Welfare. Continued on Page 3...

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After graduation, I worked as an adolescent and family substance abuse clinician in a community mental health center for the first four years of my career. I later started my own private practice and went on to start a private group practice specializing in using play therapy with children, teens, and families. In 2016, my family and I moved to Nevada to start a new chapter in our lives on the west coast. I worked at two adolescent residential programs in Southern Utah prior to taking a job close to home as the Clinic Supervisor at Mesquite Behavioral Health Center (MBHC), which is a rural clinic under Southern Nevada Mental Health Services (SNAMHS).

Can you describe where you work currently and what your role is?

As the clinic supervisor at MBHC, I oversee the service delivery of mental health services to our clients in Mesquite. I have a small caseload working with children using play therapy since there are no trained play therapists in our community. In addition to my role with MBHC, I own a small play therapy training and consulting business, Renewing Heart Play Therapy Training. I teach child and adolescent therapists to use play therapy. I'm passionate about ensuring children get the specialized mental health treatment they need and making sure parents get the support they need to help their child heal. Play therapy is relatively new in Nevada. I hope to be part of helping increase access to play therapy for children and their families in Nevada, especially in rural Nevada.

Through Renewing Hearts Play Therapy Training, I provide virtual and in-person play therapy training. I also provide consultation and support online through my two membership programs designed to help child and adolescent therapists learn how to use play therapy within a supportive community.

What is Play Therapy and how does it help the child and their parents?

Play therapy is an expressive arts modality grounded in a theoretical model. Like many traditional talk therapy approaches, there are many play therapy theoretical models, some of which are evidenced-based models. Play therapy is defined by the Association for Play Therapy as a theoretical model that accesses the therapeutic powers of play within a strong therapeutic relationship with a trained play therapist. There are core competencies for providing play therapy that require specialized training and consultation.

The uniqueness of play therapy is that play therapists are trained to use play, which is the natural language of children, in a therapeutic way to help children overcome their mental health challenges. Developmentally, children need a treatment approach that takes into consideration how they learn, grow, and explore using play. Based on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, traditional talk therapy often expects children to engage like adults to heal which often results in premature termination and unsuccessful treatment outcomes. Continued on page 5...

RESOURCE CORNER

Free Mental Health Resources for GBC and WNC College Students

BetterMynd provides enrolled Great Basin Community College and Western Nevada College students, 18 and older, with up to 5 FREE telehealth counseling sessions with a licensed, insured counselor, and 1 wellbeing workshop each semester, to help support them through any challenges they may be facing.



<https://www.bettermynd.com/who-we-serve#public-institutions>



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PREP SERIES: CAREER PATHWAYS

For the next few months this newsletter will share tips and techniques for resumes, interviewing, and overall career planning.

Cover Letters

Even when a cover letter is not required by an employer, submitting one can help you stand out among other applicants. Employers often use cover letters to gain a more personal understanding of who you are beyond your resume. A cover letter allows you to explain why you are interested in the position and express your passion and enthusiasm—qualities a resume alone cannot show. It also demonstrates your writing skills and ability to clearly communicate ideas. Additionally, a strong cover letter can distinguish you from candidates with similar qualifications and provide an opportunity to address any gaps in your employment history.

Writing a Cover Letter, Where to Start

The first step in writing a cover letter is reviewing the job description carefully. The job description outlines the qualifications and skills the employer is seeking. While your resume should highlight most of your experience and qualifications, the cover letter allows you to emphasize specific aspects of your work history that are especially relevant. For example, if an employer is looking for a candidate with five years of managerial experience, the cover letter provides an opportunity to expand on that experience and explain how your skills meet the employer's needs.

The cover letter is also an opportunity to explain why you want to work for the company. Employers want to hire individuals who share their values, are passionate about the work, and are likely to remain with the organization long term. Showing genuine interest in the company helps demonstrate your commitment and enthusiasm for the role.

Tips

- Try to identify the actual person that you will be sending your resume to. If you can't, then address the cover letter to "Dear Hiring Manager" or "To Whom it May Concern".
- Share why you want to work at that company or why you want the job. Employers are interested to know why you applied.
- Focus on what you bring to the company (experience, skills, passion, etc.).
- Take the time to personalize the cover letter. Don't download a cover letter template and just change the name of the company. It will be obvious if you are using a generic template.
- Remember to have someone read your cover letter for spelling and grammar.

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Involving parents in the treatment process is critical for successful treatment outcomes since children live within the context of families and parents are the most important resource for their children. It's important for parents to get the support they need to know how to effectively support their children. During these meetings with parents, play therapists teach parents how to help their children through difficult emotions and struggles while also getting important feedback from parents that ensure treatment is on the right track.

As a Supervisor for both Clinical Social Work Interns and Registered Play Therapists, what made you decide to become a supervisor, and what do you find most rewarding about mentoring clinicians in their professional development?

I became a supervisor because I love teaching, which was the reason I went into the education field early in my career. I'm a self-professed psychotherapy nerd, and supervising others allows me to share my knowledge to help them grow. I enjoy showing child and adolescent therapists how to look deep into the issues to find the root cause and then help them develop a plan using play therapy, so their young clients can heal. Being able to support and mentor the next generation of play therapists to develop core competencies in play therapy is rewarding. To be honest, I learn as much from them as they learn from me. I love getting a little nerdy to explore the latest research and trends with other passionate play therapists and sharing ideas. My consultation programs are community based so we get the benefit of all the amazing wisdom and knowledge of the professionals in the community in addition to my 30+ years of experience in the child and adolescent mental health field.



What are the benefits to working for both a state agency (SNAMHS) and running a private practice?

There are pros and cons to working for a state agency versus running a private practice. When my children were young, running a private practice allowed me to have a lot of flexibility and control over how I practiced. The downside is insurance billing is a challenging revenue stream and requires A LOT of work. The other downside of private practice is that if you don't meet with clients for counseling sessions then you don't get paid, and there are no benefits, like insurance and paid leave.

I loved the creative control that I had in private practice, and I find that I have an opportunity to be part of something bigger serving underserved populations in rural communities with resources available to me working for SNAMHS. Since MBHC is in a rural community, we serve children, adolescents, adults, and seniors. We have a lot of support to serve our clients, such as case management, medication management, rehabilitative mental health, counseling services, and a Drop-in Center. I can ensure play therapy is available for children and families in our rural community. As a state agency, we can also offer a sliding fee scale for eligible clients to reduce barriers to accessibility. The state benefits are great, and the working hours are excellent. I have really supportive supervisors and staff that I can go to for help anytime I need it.

Can you share a success story or a story that was impactful to you?

From a supervisory standpoint, I've recently had the honor of inviting some of my former supervisees to teach current members of my play therapy community. It's awesome to see them grow as a play therapist and feel confident using play therapy. We keep in touch and share ideas. It's exciting to see the people that I've mentored go on to specialize in play therapy and make a difference in their communities. I've worked with so many awesome professionals. They remind me that our profession is in good hands. My next goal is to collaborate with former members of my programs to share their expertise in some upcoming play therapy trainings.

Are there areas of training that have become invaluable in your work?

Early in my play therapy career, getting consultation was a game-changer to help me take the information I was learning in play therapy trainings and apply it in real time with a variety of clients. I found that being part of a play therapy community helped me continue to develop my skills and get support when I needed it, so I didn't feel like I had to do it alone. Now I focus on taking ongoing play therapy training and reading current trends and research to stay up to date in the field. I also seek consultation with neuroscientists and other experts to ensure my trainings and programs are aligned with the current research and information.

What advice would you give to students interested in pursuing work as a social worker who works with young children and families?

If you're interested in working with children and families, then I highly recommend getting training in play therapy. Play therapy is more than simply pulling out games and art supplies to help children "talk" about their problems. It's about learning how to apply a theoretical approach through each stage of the treatment process and making sense of what's happening so you can use strategies that meet the unique treatment needs of children.

If you would like to connect with Cathi you can reach her through her contact information on her website,

www.rhplaytherapytraining.com.