



Trauma, Health & Hazards Center

Volume 4, Issue 2

July 2019

Special points of interest:

- New Child Maltreatment Prevention Program
- VHTC Arts Connection Grows
- Trauma Training Courses registration opens
- Welcome to the New Ph.D. Class

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VHTC Launches Resilient Families Group to Enhance Resilience and Prevent Child Maltreatment

By Maggie Talbot

According to the Center for Family Justice, a report of child abuse is made approximately every ten seconds in the United States. In 2017 alone, over 16,000 calls were made to the Child Abuse and Neglect hotline in the Pikes Peak region, the highest volume of calls to the hotline in the state of Colorado. A parent's exposure to trauma increases the risk of child maltreatment, with a vicious cycle of trauma and abuse lasting generations. That is why the Veteran's Health and Trauma Clinic (VHTC) recently launched an intervention for parents and their teens focused on increasing family resilience and preventing child maltreatment.

The VHTC is uniquely positioned to provide services for those who have experienced traumatic events and intervene so that the cycle of child maltreatment can be prevented before it has begun. The VHTC was awarded a one-year grant by the Colorado Springs Health Foundation in order to expand their services to teens and their families. As part of services expansion, the VHTC has developed a

group intervention for parents and their teens to prevent maltreatment and build resilience. The first Resilient Families group is currently being implemented at the VHTC.

In the eight-week intervention, parents and teens learn about trauma and its impact on families, identify family strengths, develop communication skills, enhance emotional exploration and expression, and build coping skills. Through the group, parents and teens participate in activities and discussions to build their relationships to create stronger, more secure families. As part of the Resilient Families group, parents and teens have access to web interventions, MyTraumaRecovery and Recovery4Teens, to learn skills and resolve issues related to trauma. The Resilient Families group is led by Amanda Jepson, LPC and Shannon Everett, LPC. Jepson and

Everett are clinicians who focus their therapeutic work on trauma treatment, and Everett specializes in working with children and adolescents.

The Resilient Families Group directly addresses the need of the Pikes Peak region to decrease child maltreatment. Through working with parents and their teens, the VHTC aims to teach skills to create healthier, more resilient families.

Another eight-week Resilient Families group will begin at the VHTC in Fall 2019. For more information about the group, please contact VHTC Director Kathryn Dosch at 719-255-8003.



Amanda Jepson, LPC and Shannon Everett, LPC are the clinicians leading the Resilient Families Group.

VHTC Continues to Foster Community Engagement Through Creative Expression

By Danielle Correll

As the saying goes, “see a need, fill a need,” precisely what Erin Fowler does with her work to bolster community engagement and connection through the arts. Erin, a Licensed Professional Counselor and the Strategic Alliances Liaison of the VHTC, worked alongside other community professionals to establish the Military Arts Connection (MAC).

The recently launched MAC website is an interactive tool connecting military service members, veterans, and their families with local arts experiences. Through the platform, the user can find a variety of classes, from poetry to agricultural arts. Over the next three years, \$175,000 has been committed to this project from the Colorado Springs Health Foundation and Arts in Society. Funding is used to pay the artist facilitator so that the military client may access a growing number of opportunities to attend local art sessions.

This work encourages engagement in artistic expression and creates connections within the community.

Erin is responsible for spearheading the Military Cultural Competency training for artist facilitators. She describes this training as “addressing the overarching idea of what it is to be a part of a culture in order to develop a deeper understanding of the population being served.” This thoughtful approach facilitates sustainable connections rooted in respect and understanding; connections that will continue to support the military’s goal of fostering resiliency and wellness of soldiers, past and present, for years to come!

Erin N. Fowler, LPC, Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic Strategic Alliances Liaison



UCCS Trauma Students Triumph

By Margaret “Mimi” Morison

UCCS trauma psychology graduate students and THHC researchers Skylyn Webb, Amanda Devane, and Alisa Bartel were recently recognized for their stellar achievements. Skylyn received the UCCS Outstanding Graduate Award for the Clinical Master’s program as a result of her exemplary performance. As a student researcher working with Dr. Charles Benight, she is interested in coping self-efficacy, physiological impacts of traumatic events, and holistic approaches to treatment.

Two of our advanced Clinical PhD students, Amanda Devane and Alisa Bartel, received the Mentored Fellowship Award. This highly competitive fellowship is awarded to doctoral students that have engaged in professional development beyond their coursework, such as research, teaching, and clinical work. Aided by this financial achievement, Amanda researches trauma coping self-efficacy and interventions for trauma survivors under the mentorship of Dr. Benight.

In addition to the Mentored Fellowship Award, Alisa Bartel also recently received the Psychological Society of the Pikes Peak Region – Outstanding Trauma PhD

Graduate Award. As a PhD student working under Dr. Kristin Samuelson, her research interests include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, perceived cognitive and somatic problems, and adjunct therapies (e.g., nature). Each of these achievements are indicative of the dynamic qualities that promote passionate and experienced professionals. Congratulations to Skylyn, Amanda, and Alisa!



UCCS Psychology Student Awardees include Alisa Bartel (3rd from left) and Skylyn Webb (far right).

Does Marijuana Use Benefit or Harm Trauma Survivors? An Exploration into Motivation for Use and Self-Efficacy

By Julie Hurd

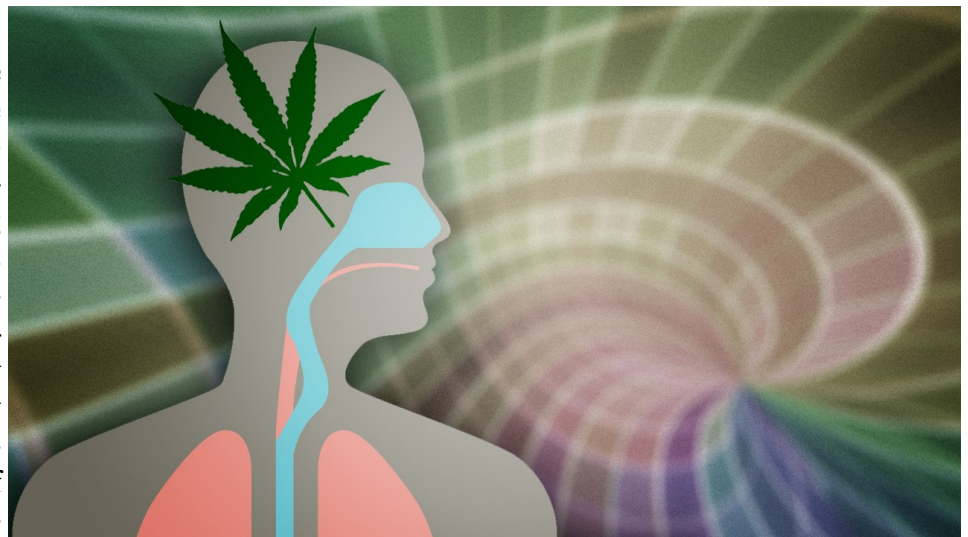
With the recent boom in marijuana use and accessibility, certain claims have surfaced regarding the benefits of marijuana for mental health. Marijuana has been suggested to benefit recovery for trauma survivors by decreasing posttraumatic stress symptoms, such as nightmares and flashbacks, and aiding in healthy functioning (Neumeister, Seidel, Ragen, & Pietrzak, 2015; Pietrzak et al., 2014). However, the majority of these claims come from studies where the potency and distribution of the marijuana products were controlled by the experimenters. Other studies have suggested that personal consumption of marijuana may be linked to dependence and increased symptoms for trauma survivors (Bonn-Miller, Boden, Vujanovic, & Drescher, 2013; Kevorkian et al., 2015). With these mixed results, it remains unclear as to whether personal consumption of marijuana provides benefits or harms for trauma survivors.

Unlike controlled experiments, legalized marijuana that is available to the public does not come with strict usage or dosage regulations. Because of this, marijuana consumption can vary from person to person. In order to clarify potential benefits or harms for trauma survivors, it is important for scientists to understand what influences variation in use and how that relates to dependence and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Differences in certain personal factors may be the answer as to why some trauma survivors benefit while others experience harmful effects.

Our current study addresses three personal factors that may contribute to different outcomes. The first factor is a trauma survivor's motivation for marijuana use. If decreasing distressing symptoms, such as flashbacks or memories, is a survivor's primary motivation for marijuana use, the substance may only provide temporary relief and may be used as a crutch. The second factor is a trauma survivor's coping self-efficacy, or the survivor's percep-

tion of how well they can cope with their symptoms (Benight & Bandura, 2004). If a survivor does not believe they have the ability to cope with their symptoms and is motivated to use marijuana because of their distress, this may exacerbate the risk for dependence and inability for symptom recovery. The third factor is a trauma survivor's self-efficacy to control their marijuana use. In addition to believing that they have the capability to cope with their symptoms, a survivor must also believe they can control their use in various contexts; such as marijuana use because it is readily available, marijuana use in social settings, and marijuana use for emotional relief.

Accessibility of legalized marijuana means that trauma survivors have the ability to self-medicate at their own discretion. It is extremely important to be able to understand why trauma survivors are motivated to use marijuana related to their symptoms. It is also important to know how a survivor perceives their coping skills and their ability to control their marijuana use, as this could contribute to increased or decreased risk for dependence and increased or decreased posttraumatic stress symptoms. Our hope for this study is to disseminate recommendations for marijuana use with trauma survivors based on these personal factors so that consumption can provide benefits and harms can be avoided.





Director's Corner

By Charles C. "Chip" Benight, PhD

I am very excited to share a new opportunity being offered by the UCCS Trauma, Health & Hazards Center and open to anyone interested in learning more about trauma. **Trauma Training Foundation I** and **Trauma Training II: Advanced Topics** are by offered through UCCS Online. These are non-credit courses and each course is 8 weeks long, about one hour per week time commitment. They are worth 1 CEU each and a certificate of completion provided at the end. Each class is designed to be independent of the other – you don't need one to be able to register for the other.

Trauma Training Foundation I: Next Class Starts August 26, 2019

Part one of a two-part Trauma Training for Professionals. This eight-week online course gives a basic foundation of trauma, including an introduction to stress reactions, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, biology, multiculturalism and diversity of trauma, developmental trauma, crisis interventions, and evidence-based treatments for adults and children. Students learn material through a combination of empirical journal articles, media presentations, and online discussions. This course will benefit anyone looking for a basic understanding of the symptoms and impact of trauma. Class contact hours: 10 Training Hours, 1 Continuing Education Unit. A Certificate of Completion is provided at the end of the course.

Dr. Benight is the Director of the UCCS Trauma, Health & Hazards Center, Chair Veteran Health & Trauma, and Professor of Psychology.

Trauma Training II: Advanced Topics; Next Class Starts October 28, 2019

Part two of a two-part Trauma Training for Professionals. This eight-week online course builds upon Trauma Training Foundation I. Students learn about current trends in research on trauma and PTSD, non-PTSD adverse reactions to stress, epigenetics, complex PTSD, intimate partner violence, disaster mental health, military and combat trauma, and the relationship between trauma and substance use. Students learn material through a combination of empirical journal articles, media presentations, and online discussions. This course will benefit anyone looking to further their knowledge on general trauma and trauma in special populations. Class contact hours: 10 Training Hours, 1 Continuing Education Unit. A Certificate of Completion will be provided at the end of the course.

Cost is \$250 plus a \$42 technology fee per course, total \$292. For registration information, visit:

<https://www.uccs.edu/thhc/training-and-education/trauma-programs/certificate-programs>

Welcoming the Incoming Ph.D. Students

By Lori Bryan, PhD

The UCCS Trauma Psychology PhD Program will welcome its fifth incoming class this Fall, 2019. Sarah McInerney, Rachael Peck, Tyler Powers, and Emmeline Taylor were selected from a pool of approximately 130 applicants.

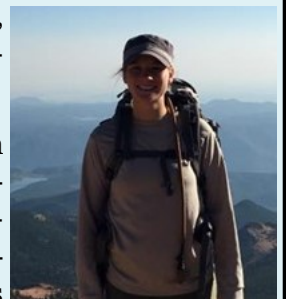
Sarah graduated from Marquette University in 2006. Upon graduating, she commissioned into the US Army serving on active duty for nine years and deploying twice in Operation Enduring Freedom. Sarah looks forward to applying her military experience for the benefit of service members and their families.



Rachael completed M.A. and B.A. degrees at James Madison University in Virginia. She spent eight years in the USAF as a behavioral scientist and instructor at USAFA and is transitioning into the Reserves this August. In her spare time she en-

joys trail running, painting, and hanging out with her husband, 8-month old son, and pups Franklin and Eleanor.

Tyler graduated in 2017 from the University of Central Florida, where she worked as a research assistant in the UCF RESTORES lab serving veterans



with PTSD. Tyler is pursuing her M.A. in clinical psychology with an emphasis on trauma at UCCS under the mentorship of Drs. Andrew Lac and Kristin Samuelson. Her research interests focus on the intersection between PTSD and substance use/addictive behaviors