

Jean Quam:

I've been around long enough to see the field go back and forth between very quick to remove children from their home to working with families, to try to keep children in the home, to being concerned about violence in families and at what point do you move children out of the home and how do you do that in a way that can still make it possible for them to go back home at some point. I think those are some of the most complicated issues that social workers have to deal with and I don't know if it's going to get easier in any way but we can give social workers as much information as we can about the best ways to work particularly with children to make that a less traumatic experience for them.

Korina Barry:

Hi, my name is Korina Barry and welcome to our first episode of the new CASCW podcast. We felt it was important to interview Dean Jean Quam for this very first episode to really share more about the center, who we are, where we hope to go because she's a co founder and we're here because of her and Esther Wattenberg's original dreams and visions for the center. So I was able to sit down with Dean Quam to ask her a little bit more about what those early conversations were around why a title for a program was needed here in the twin cities, what were their early dreams and hopes for the center, and also to see what is Jean proud of and where does she hope to see the center go in the future. Well welcome to CASCW's very first podcast episode Dean Jean Quam. We are so happy that you could join us for this introductory episode to who we are as a center. Can you share a little bit about your current role at the university and tell me a little bit about your background?

Jean Quam:

Sure I'd be glad to. I have been at the University of Minnesota since 1980 so I realize and I'm still very surprised and I'm coming up on 40 years at the university. Very proud of all the work that I've done here, I started in the school of social work actually as an instructor and then went to an assistant professor and am now Dean of the college of education and human development where I've been for about 10 years and the school of social work is now part of the college of education and human development.

Korina Barry:

Yeah. Could you share a little bit about what drew you to social work?

Jean Quam:

Well, I grew up in Fargo, North Dakota which at that time was a small town, not very diverse. Probably the biggest diversity was if you were Norwegian, or Swedish, or Lutheran or Catholic, but I was very, I grew up in a family that was very interested in social issues. My mother was very active in a mental health association and introduced us to the fact I think early in our lives that some people didn't have as much as other people. I didn't know what career I wanted to go into when I was in high school. I was looking for a job to be able to get some money and I went to work at a nursing home that was two blocks away from my house not knowing at all what a nursing home was like or how difficult the work was.

Jean Quam:

I wound up staying there for four years working with older people, what we would call today frail older people and very confused older people. I loved working with older people. I figured out at that point that that was something I was interested in. And there was actually a new academic program starting at

Morehead State university at the time which was a bachelor's degree in social work and I went over and I heard about it and I thought that's something I'd be really interested in and so I did that.

Jean Quam:

When I graduated from Morehead State with a bachelor's degree in social work quite frankly I didn't know quite what I wanted to do. And there was a program at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, which anybody would love now, it was money from the National Institute of Mental Health to pay full rides for students to go to work on their master's degree in social work. And so, that's where I went next and then was a social worker in Iowa for a few years and then went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison and then came to Minnesota right out of my doctoral program.

Korina Barry:

Wow. What a journey. And in '91 you became the director of the school of social work here at the University of Minnesota what were some of your favorite moments that year?

Jean Quam:

Well, I was very flattered to be the director of the school of social work. I had been the director of graduate studies, the director of the undergraduate program. I had served on lots of search committees and I felt ready to be director of the school. But the story, the way that the story goes is that the search committee actually selected somebody else to be director of the school and they were trying to find a position for her spouse and so we were just assuming that all that was going to work out. Meanwhile my partner and I were in the middle of adopting a child from Peru and were waiting to hear when that was going to happen. So the day that I got the call that the woman that they had offered the position to was not coming and they were offering me to be a director of the school was the same day that we heard that we were traveling to Lima, Peru to adopt our first child.

Jean Quam:

So I always think of my first year in the school of social work that I was learning to be the director but I was also learning to be a parent and I've told many people that those two roles were not all that different. You learn how to reward people, you learn how to set limits and boundaries, you try to be as supportive as you can. And I think the two roles were very complimentary and even though I didn't have as much time as I would've liked with our new son who we adopted him when he was two days old that it was a great year for me combining those two roles.

Korina Barry:

Yeah. Wow. That's a big year.

Jean Quam:

We were in Ford Hall at the time too so one of the big issues was trying to figure out if there was going to be space for someplace else at the university and that continued for a few years.

Korina Barry:

And when did we move into Peter's?

Jean Quam:

Wasn't it around '99 or 2000? I love coming into Peter's Hall because I have never moved into a new home and when we moved into Peter's I got to pick the carpeting and the tile and the faucets in the bathrooms. So if anybody doesn't like any of those things they can complain but it was really fun to do in this building and we were so desperate for new space and more space and we were excited about this building because it offered the benches on the different floors and lots of open spaces and spaces for people to gather.

Korina Barry:

Absolutely. Well in the thinking of the growth and evolution of the school I mean we've been in the place of we're outgrowing this space and like ...

Jean Quam:

Now we're outgrowing this.

Korina Barry:

Turning closets into offices and trying to figure out how we can fit everyone so it's pretty cool to see, to see the school, the programs continue to grow in the way they have. So the same year that you became the director of the school and had other big life changes happening the school was setting goals around improving the quality of public services to children and families. Can you share a little bit about some of those early conversations and the ideas you had for accomplishing those goals?

Jean Quam:

I think if you look at the history of the school of social work and shortly after I became director we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the school, now we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the school. But I had documentation and articles about the 50th anniversary of the school and certainly the beginnings of the school and they all dealt, the main theme of the school of social work was public social services, creating workers who wanted to work in county social service agencies, wanted to primarily work in child welfare and working with children and families. But that this was really the focus, this is where the emphasis was and this is where our history was.

Korina Barry:

And at the time you and the late Esther Wattenberg co founded the Center for Advanced Studies and Child Welfare what were your goals, your dreams for the center at that time?

Jean Quam:

Well Esther and I, I think, were a good combination. Esther really had the child welfare background, intensively had the child welfare background. She had actually started here working on some programs with young parents, young mothers and young fathers. She worked on paternity issues. She was very committed to policy issues with children. She was a professor in the school of social work and till she was about age 96 or 97 she would never have wanted us to say what her age was but she was actively involved in the field for well over 60 years.

Jean Quam:

Her main goal was to really try to get master's level social workers more interested in child welfare and particularly child protection. So one of the things that we were seeing and we had developed a lot of

cooperative programs with both Hennepin County and Ramsey County. And when I first came into the school we required all students, all MSW students to have one year in a county social service agency. And one of the things that we would find is once students had been in a county social service agency many of them wanted to go back there but one of their last choices was child welfare or child protection and partly it was because they were really tough jobs and they weren't getting the kind of support that they needed.

Jean Quam:

So I think what as Esther and I talked about we wanted to see students who were excited about child welfare, who were excited about working at county social service agencies, who could move up into supervisory positions and really help to elevate that as a field of practice. And the other big consideration was we were looking at the population of the kids who were in child welfare services and they were very diverse and becoming more diverse every year and we did not see that in our population of social work students.

Jean Quam:

So, one of the things that we thought we could do as we talked with, I should say Esther was great about talking to social workers. She would go anywhere, anytime to talk to a social worker about what was needed. And one of the things that she heard was particularly for social workers who had bachelor's degrees or had been case aides who were people of color was that they had to keep working, that they couldn't afford to take off to come back to school. And they couldn't afford to come back even if it was a small scholarship it would have to be pretty significant so that they were able to leave their jobs.

Jean Quam:

So, as we started to look at what we could do best initially through the center was to try to get scholarships that were significant enough or large enough that somebody could actually either quit working or reduce their time working so that they could come back full time to school which really wasn't very possible for a lot of students at that point. So we were absolutely, well I will say what I brought to the table was that I understood budgets and I understood grants.

Jean Quam:

And so, Esther would have the ideas and then say, "How can we figure this out to get the most money for students?" And we'd sit and we'd look at all the requirements that the federal government had for title 4E at the time and we talked to other states and we had multiple meetings with the state about ways that we could do this. I think the state was eager to have 4E money come into the state to do this training and to have us do it for them but they didn't really know how to do it either. So we were inventing this as we went along but it was a very exciting time and that first grant that we received with 4E dollars through the state I think we supported 40 MSW students full time.

Korina Barry:

You also started the Forey Consortium and you want to say a little bit about what the consortium is, what it looked like at the time or what the goals behind the consortium were?

Jean Quam:

Well, because we were the first social work program to receive title 4E funds a lot of the other programs were asking us how could we help them to get title 4E money and I will say that there was some

controversy about that. Esther believed strongly that it was MSW students who should be doing the most work with these very, very difficult families and that was part of the motivation for wanting to get more people into MSW programs who were committed to child welfare. But the reality was and I had taught at Morehead State University for a year and saw that there were excellent people in the BSW programs there and many of them who are never going to go on to get a master's program or a master's degree or be able to do that work. And at best they might have one child welfare class before they went out and were doing the work that an MSW might be doing in Hennepin County but they were doing it in rural Clay County or someplace else in the state.

Jean Quam:

So, we started to work with the mainly state university programs that had strong BSW programs and started to build in as much as we could with child welfare into those programs so that they at least had a field placement in child welfare and at least one or two courses about child welfare. And then of course we began to see those could be feeder programs to the MSW program and we could continue to think about professional development that those BSW workers needed. But I will say that Consortium was a little controversial in should we be supporting BSW workers or should we in fact encourage everybody to go on and get a master's degree? But I think reality won out that in most of the areas around the state it was BSWs who were doing the work in child welfare

Korina Barry:

And so related to our out state communities and child welfare professionals working in those communities you played an important role in bringing distance technology and education to the school of social work back when you were the director how do you think this impacted child welfare training and education across the state?

Jean Quam:

Well, when I think about distance technology now it seems pretty crude but at the time it was very exciting and again because I had taught at Morehead State University we talked to some of those faculty about their students. We went and visited with the students. Many of them said that they wanted to get an MSW but they felt that they couldn't leave their families. They really couldn't afford to physically get up and move for two years to get a degree. So we started conversations about how could we do that. And the old way, the way old way was that you sent faculty to Fargo Morehead and we also had a program in Rochester that you sent faculty there and they taught onsite and then they came back so it was the faculty member moving back and forth. In some cases it was that you brought the students in and moved the students back and forth. But given winter in Minnesota that seemed pretty impractical for both groups.

Jean Quam:

So we used the distance technology, which was brand new at the time, to think about offering our classes here from the twin cities campus to Morehead and to Rochester. And the advantage I think of what that did we had a mixture of students in many of those classes. So we had urban students and rural students and they would talk about the unique differences of working with children and families in the classes. And I think it really expanded the view of how difficult that role could be given the number of resources that you had in a community. It raised issues about in small communities what if you saw your clients at the grocery store, or what if you were working with a family and they went to the same

church you did, or you were working with a tribe and you didn't know what your role was with respect to tribal customs and rules and regulations and how did you find that out.

Jean Quam:

And the other thing that was very exciting to me was we found that people were making connections so that somebody in, I remember we had somebody way up in Thief River Falls and she was trying to get a child into a foster care situation in the twin cities. And she called a couple of former colleagues, students of hers, fellow students of hers, and had made those connections. So, we created a really good strong network of social workers around the state as well.

Korina Barry:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think you all were so ahead of the game, so to speak, in coordinating that and connecting people and bridging and bringing like you said the urban perspective with more of the rural out state perspective. And we continue to see the need for more of that today and understanding the dynamics, the strengths, the needs and our rural communities and how we just do a better job of breaking down those silos and bridging between the work that's happening here in the cities.

Jean Quam:

And then sometimes there would be an interesting thing too where somebody who was in Fargo would feel like they were in an urban setting because they had a lot of social services, a lot of resources available to them, and somebody here who was maybe up north of the twin cities in an area where it was more rural would say, "Well wait a minute you're assuming I'm urban but I don't have as many resources as you have in Fargo Morehead." And we would start to talk about how you could share things.

Jean Quam:

And I think the whole idea of when we would have supervision and we would talk about students being in field placements and they would be able to talk about, we would do role plays and discussions via distance education, via television so they could see each other. One of my favorite stories is when we did the graduation, the first graduation of the students who had come through Morehead they wanted to come down to the twin cities and be part of the graduation and two of them came with cutouts of a TV and held it around their head to say, "This is probably what you think of me that you've only seen my head for the last two years," which wasn't quite true but it was the way that they got to know each other.

Korina Barry:

I love that. I love that story thank you for sharing that. So, when you think about CASCW's title 4E child welfare fellowship program, it's outreach through publications and events, the policy work, research and evaluation, what do you think the center's impact has been in Minnesota and even beyond nationally?

Jean Quam:

Well, one of the things that I'm most proud of is that CASCW and we never envisioned that it would be called CASCW but I like the fact that there's a word now rather than CASCW is that it has a strong national reputation. The website is tremendous, the resources that are on there are outstanding and I think that's what we had always hoped that, Esther wanted to see the information that we were

learning it through research or in the field that it could get out to people. She was always very frustrated that new knowledge didn't get out fast enough, that people weren't sharing information.

Jean Quam:

And I think one of the best things that we've been able to do is have that information available, the curricula that's available to the state universities which is one of the things that the undergraduate programs always ask us for, "Can you help us with curricula? Can you help us with videos or training materials?" I think the county's ask us for that. The influence that CASCW has on state policy has been very profound. I think CASCW is seen as a leader, as a go to place if you want to understand what are the current issues in child welfare. I think legislators clearly recognize the value of CASCW. And Tracy Law Liberty's leadership has been tremendous, she is really recognized at the legislature as the voice of child welfare and I am very pleased to see that.

Korina Barry:

So as we think about how CASCW has continued to grow and evolve and we have brought on Minn-LInK Minnesota Linking for Kids which is our unique data sharing project what do you think about Minn-LInK and the impact that Minn-LInK is having on the broader community?

Jean Quam:

We're in an era of big data that we're moving and sometimes very quickly to thinking that we can solve most of our issues by just understanding data and looking at data and I think data can inform our practices in very exciting ways and in some ways very efficient ways. We can start down a wrong path and then data tells us which path we should be going. Minn-LInK has been really amazing in that it's had the multiple sources of information that can be pulled together. I would love to see more doctoral students and more research being done with that data. I think you're doing a good job of making it accessible and it's a great wealth of information that should be used more.

Korina Barry:

So as you know CASCW in partnership with the department of human services is currently tackling the development of a new statewide Child Welfare Training Academy. The academy will enhance training and professional development opportunities across the state. What do you think about this new endeavor for the center?

Jean Quam:

It's exactly where CASCW you should be right now and I am very pleased that the legislature realized that. We did have a much smaller training program going on where we did some training around the state a few years ago through CASCW. And I was on the governor's task force three years ago now and Representative Cretia who was on the subcommittee with me recognized the value of having staff development and staff training all around the state. We again debated in that subcommittee, I wanted to see them put in a requirement that there had to be an MSW supervisor in every county. And I was told by most of the county people who came and talked to us that in some counties that was just never going to be possible. They all said to a person and described just unbelievable family situations that were very, very difficult.

Jean Quam:

And so, we talked about how could you have workers who had the knowledge that they would need to make these very difficult decisions about whether or not kids should remain with their own families. I can't imagine a more difficult decision to ask a social worker to have to make. So how could we give a social worker the very best skills and help to keep them current with laws and all the resources that would be available to them? So to have a training academy where we could do that and have the best research and the best training available is very exciting to me here. And I think it's the next logical step when I think of how we get the information out as quickly as we can to social workers all around the state and probably eventually all around the region.

Korina Barry:

Absolutely. It's a big deal. Everyone's excited. Everyone's wondering, "What's going on with that academy?" So when you think about CASCW what are you most proud of?

Jean Quam:

When I went to Esther Wattenberg's funeral and when I went to the policy forum where we honored Esther one of the things that deeply moved me was as I looked around the room all of the students who I knew had come through CASCW and that they were successful social workers now but many of them were leaders in the field. And that's always what we had hoped for that they would become supervisors, and they would become administrators in the system, and they would become policy directors and policy analysts and they would be helping to shape the field, they would be the leaders in the field and many of the leaders at the department of human services. And that's who I saw in the room.

Jean Quam:

I think I'm most proud of that about the impact and that one of the things when we started was a social worker would probably take a job in child welfare because they wanted the benefits that went with being in a county social service agency but the last place they would want to be as in child protection. And what we hoped to see was that students who were graduating would say, "First place I want to be in child protection because I can make a difference. And I can represent the families that I want to represent or I can represent a culture that we haven't considered before with some of our families." And I see that now and that's exactly what we wanted to see happen.

Jean Quam:

I think the other thing that I'm really proud about and Esther led the way on this one too was having county social workers talk to school social workers, county social workers talk to police. We tried to make the point that we're all in this together, we all have to get on the same page. We all have little pieces of information and when we all come together and again in the best interest of working with kids and their families we can do better when we share information we don't all try to do it on our own.

Korina Barry:

I really appreciate that reflection and going back even to the forum and the policy forum and honoring Esther because as someone who's fortunate to work at the center and navigate many different spaces and the work that we do that forum hearing many of the reflections of yourself and others and the impact that Esther had on the lives of others but also the center you really could see how all of this has come full circle. And how the values, the skills, the education that you all helped instill in people and the impact that they are making and have been making in their communities and it really is beautiful to see



so thank you. In the fall of 2020 you will be returning to your position as a full professor in the school of social work are you hoping to partner with the center on any projects when you're back?

Jean Quam:

It's still a little scary to me to think about taking a, I'm going to take a short sabbatical. I'm excited about coming back to the school of social work, this is really still feels like my home and I would be very interested in doing some projects with the center. I've become a grandparent since I was here last and I have seen the role that grandparents play in taking care of kids and I think that's increasing as more parents are working and childcare is becoming very expensive. So, I'm interested in the role that family and kinship plays in taking care of kids and that might be something that I'd want to take a look at or looking more at the, I'm very interested in history and some of the archival materials in child welfare.

Korina Barry:

Where would you like to see CASCW go in the future?

Jean Quam:

Well, I think every time I think that CASCW is doing just about all it can do, either Tracy or the staff or somebody comes up with a new idea and there's several that I have thrown at Tracy thinking she may or may not want to have CASCW pursue that but she goes at it with great excitement and interest. So, child welfare will always be a field that's evolving and changing and we've seen dramatic changes over the years. I think that I see CASCW continuing to be very strong advocates for children and particularly for well educated social workers and well trained social workers and how they will work with families and children. I think that the role of CASCW especially with using technology through things like blogs and podcasts and excellent websites and webinars and things like that will be a significant presence nationally and probably even internationally.

Korina Barry:

And so, one other important note which I know just how much we enjoy a healthy cooking competition at CASCW I'm sure you've probably participated maybe in some ways in the past but we'd love when you return to the school to have you as a guest judge or even to submit whatever the competition is, a food, an item in our next competition so.

Jean Quam:

One of my very favorite things to do would be to be a judge in a food contest I would love that so thank you for the invitation.

Korina Barry:

All right we're signing you up, noted. Well, Dean Quam thank you so much for taking the time to sit and talk with me today a little bit about the history of CASCW, your role in all of that, sharing Esther's stories, what brought you to social work and how things have grown and evolved in all of your experience in your tenure here at the university and with the school and continuing to support CASCW. It really is an honor to have you here to inaugurate our first episode of our brand new podcast series so thank you.

Jean Quam:

Thank you. I've really enjoyed it.

Korina Barry:

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