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Social Work at an Area Learning Center

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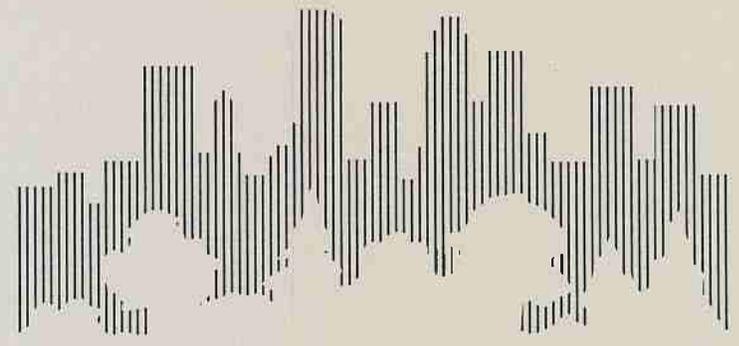
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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

**MSW
Thesis**

Brenda Hubers

Social Work at an Area Learning Center

1993

Thesis
Hubers

SOCIAL WORK AT AN AREA LEARNING CENTER

MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK THESIS
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SPRING 1993

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree.

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Social Work at an Area Learning Center

The student named above has passed her oral thesis presentation and made all required revision to my satisfaction on her thesis as required for the thesis component of the Masters of Social Work degree.

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(Signature of Thesis Advisor)

5/14/93

(Date)

*I thank God for the
strength and my family for the
encouragement and support in
making this possible.*

ABSTRACT OF THESIS
SOCIAL WORK AT AN AREA LEARNING CENTER

BRENDA HUBERS

SPRING 1993

This is a thesis for Augsburg College of Social Work. It presents a social work model and a research design for an Area Learning Center. The model emphasizes systems theory, Murrey Bowen's theory and task-centered social work. The task-centered social worker could provide at-risk students with community and school resource linkage.

At-risk students will benefit from support services provided by the Area Learning Center task-centered school social worker. The proposal includes, an independent and dependent variable, the conceptualization of at-risk, benefit, and task-centered social worker, and the characteristics of the study population, possible data analysis and protection of subjects. The proposal also includes a section on the limitations of the research design.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1983 the Minnesota Department of Education warned Educators that the public schools were sinking. It was stated that we are "A Nation At Risk." The nation then began to turn attention to ways that would improve public schools in order to regain a competitive advantage internationally (Pennekamp, 1991). In 1985 a task force helped put together the Governors (Rudy Perpech) comprehensive plan for "Access to Excellence." At the heart of this plan was public school choice, which would enable Minnesota families to select the public school they preferred. As a result Minnesota has provided students and their families with more education choices.

One of the Minnesota Choice Programs is what are now called the Area Learning Centers. In 1987 State legislators made planning money available to schools in Minnesota for Area Learning Centers. There were twenty grants of \$5,000 each, Willmar received one. Four grants of \$20,000 were given to St. Cloud, Mounds View, Caska-Carver Coop and North Branch. These were innovative and model sites, after which Willmar Area Learning Center was developed. The Willmar school opened in the fall of 1988 with twenty-eight students. The Middle Level, grades 7-9, was added this year (1992-1993).

The programs and supportive services of the Willmar Area Learning Center concentrate on academic and learning skills, trade and vocational skills, work experiences, and transition services. The 1992-93 student handbook of Willmar Area Learning Center says, "The educational philosophy.....expresses the same fundamental premises and values as those of independent School District graduation requirements." To earn a high school diploma, students must earn the following credits based on 10th through 12th grades:

- . 9 trimesters of Communication including 1 of speech, 2 of composition, and 3 of literature
- . 9 trimesters of Social Studies
- . 3 trimesters of Math
- . 3 trimesters of Science
- . 2 trimesters of Physical Education
- . 1 trimester of Health
- . 21 trimesters of electives

All Area Learning students are to complete at least one credit of transition to work, one credit of personal growth and development, and one credit of family studies (elective credits). The Area Learning Center is available to students who:

- 1.) are two grades below performance on a local achievement test, or

- 2.) are at least one year behind in grade level or course work toward graduation, or
- 3.) are pregnant or a parent, or
- 4.) are assessed as chemically dependent, or
- 5.) have been victims of physical or sexual abuse, or
- 6.) have experienced mental health problems, or
- 7.) have experienced homelessness any time within the past six months.

Students wishing to attend who do not meet the eligibility requirements listed above may attend if the high school they currently attend recommends Area Learning attendance (ALC Student Handbook, 1992-93).

The students are at-risk of not completing their high school diploma, becoming unemployed, living in poverty, becoming dependent on social welfare, being involved with crime, abuse, and having symptoms of depression. The Area Learning Center has approximately 130 students enrolled, but only a third of these students attend daily.

A generalist School Social Worker would make an excellent liaison between the school, the individual students and the community resources. The Social Worker could help the at-risk students identify their individual needs and link them and their families to available

resources in the school and the community. The ecological perspective provides social workers with a frame-work of person-in-environment. This frame-work helps the Social Workers achieve a balance of theories that directs practice toward the whole person. Holistic (whole person) refers to the individual's, biological, culture, psychological, spiritual, developmental, physical, intellectual and social needs. When working with students the social worker may pull from, or be directed toward, either the person or the environment, depending on the present need (O'Neil, 1984).

As the director of the Area Learning Center has said, "There are students who are falling through the cracks." This means that the students who could benefit from support services are not receiving them. The social worker who is writing this thesis is proposing that it would be beneficial to the students to provide a service that will help link them and their families to available resources in the school and in the community.

The writer of this thesis had the opportunity to practice social work, in the Upper Level of the Area Learning Center program, during her Masters of Social Work internship. The school hadn't experienced a social worker within the system prior to the internship. The devotion of 15-20 hours per a week has given the writer and the program new insights. The Augsburg College, Masters of Social Work,

family concentration has also given the writer insight to new methods and theories of social work practice. The remaining parts of this thesis will present a literature review, a model for Social Work practice at the Area Learning Center; experience as an Area Learning Center Social Worker; and a research proposal for the Area Learning Center.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature states that the range of problems at-risk students are confronted with are: tardiness, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse, disruptive behaviors in class, delinquent behavior, decrease levels of self-esteem, emotional dysfunction, learning problems, child abuse and neglect, health problems, fear of HIV positive, sexual orientation identity, suicide, adolescent pregnancy, racial discrimination, school phobia and inadequate food and clothing (Brodkin, 1991; Franklin, 1991; Kurtz, 1988; Lavoritano, 1992; Minnesota Department of Education, 1989 & 1992; Nunn, 1992; Stove, 1992; Uroff, 1991).

The educational choices, such as the Area Learning Center, empowers students to complete their high school education. It offers alternative education from the mainstream high school. However, a third of the enrolled students is not attending on a given day. Students who have been absent for fifteen school days are dropped from the program, with the option to return anytime. The students who drop from the program are at-risk of not earning a high school diploma. It would be interesting to research the reasons Willmar Area Learning Centers students drop out of school. The following national studies provide reasons for student drop out.

According to one national study, approximately one out of four adolescents entering high school as a freshman does not graduate. However, the rates vary greatly from school to school. The schools differ on the definition of "dropouts", and how the data was collected (Bickel, Bond, & LeMahieu, 1986).

A second national study, the High School and Beyond Study (HSBS) followed 30,000 high school sophomores through Graduation (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). They found higher rates of early school exit for students from low social economic classes, students in vocational programs, males (slightly), minority students except Asian-Americans, students in the West and South, and students in Urban as opposed to rural or suburban schools.

In addition, such students typically had lower school grades and test scores, more disciplinary problems, lower rates of homework completion, lower self-concepts, lower educational expectations, and more externalized sense of control. They were slightly more likely to be employed during their sophomore year and to work more hours per week at a job they found more enjoyable than school.

Students who leave school early cite a variety of reasons pertaining to themselves, their families, the school, and community. The most frequently reported reason

students leave school is poor academic performance. They also report nonacademic reasons such as: fighting, drug use, stealing, vandalism, difficulty getting along with school personal, desire to get married, and pregnancy.

Family reasons for leaving school are: emotional or psychological reasons, divorce of their parents, parents who do not support school achievement, low family income, including unemployment, welfare and unskilled work.

The study showed that the students dropped out of school because of the following school reasons: no alternative to disciplinary suspension, teachers who students feel do not care and lack fairness and effectiveness in their policies and practices.

The community reasons why students leave school are: racial, ethnic, gender and class biases in society. These biases contribute to the problem by degrading the quality of education attainable for some groups of people.

A recent (1992) study from Minnesota Department of Education states that, teenagers in Minnesota are participating in less risky (drug use, driving after drinking, vandalism, shoplifting, physical fights, suicide attempts, sexuality) behaviors since the last survey performed in 1989. This change is a reflection of the

prevention efforts of parents, the schools and the community. Teenagers who participated in less risky behaviors received more information from both their parents and the schools about the consequences of the risk behaviors. Those who participated in more risk taking behaviors were receiving information from only their friends. This survey and the above national study tell us, the connection of family, community and the school in prevention efforts is important.

The school social worker can serve as a home-school liaison to reach out and draw the parents into the problem solving process (Kurtz, 1988). The family and peers are the most influential system in a teenager's life and play a major role in problem resolutions. The Minnesota student survey shows that resolution of the student's problem is more effective when intervention occurs within two or more systems. For effective problem solving practitioners should utilize more than one system. An effective intervention for a student, for example, who is suffering from low self-esteem, if possible would utilize resources from the family, the school and the community. The worker can help the student and their family understand self-esteem and how to increase it; the teacher and school counselor can encourage and empower the student; and support such as outside therapists, social groups and friends could also be involved. Utilization of all the systems is crucial for the

adaptive balance between the students and their environments (Kurtz 1988, Larrivee 1991, Pennekamp 1992, Randolph, 1982,).

The education systems should examine their organization structure and programming and adopt this person-in-environment thinking into their planning. The studies of programming and development for education systems are full of ideas for creating an organization that facilitates learning (Larrivee, 1991, Scales, 1992, Staudt, 1991, Uroff 1991). One study which compared six sites of intervention strategies on at-risk students, found that most successful programs had student contracts, peer tutors and had incorporated major structural adaptations, such as the following.

Individual level strategies of the six sites were a combination of: support services, parent involvement, home visits, special workshops, mentoring, tutoring, student contracts and the flexibility of adjusting schedules. On a school level the strategies were: in house suspensions, co-op credit, small class size, principal involvement with the students, and a physical setting that was separate from the mainstream school. The community level strategies were work release job exploration, promised employment and cooperation with other agencies. The study showed that there was no pattern of success for community level strategies.

Unfortunately, what may have contributed to this is the lack of coordinated focus from a social worker who had no previous experience providing support services within the school milieu. The programs that were most successful had higher ranking of cost per participant in the program (Larrivee, 1991).

The education structure should include a position which can serve as a liaison for the connection of the student's, family's, the education system and community. A social worker can operate beyond the physical and normative boundaries of the school to bridge the gap between the three systems. This bridge is the essential link to helping high-risk pupils adjust and succeed in school.

Social Worker, Jerry L. Randolph (1982), said, school social workers in 1974, began to view their tasks in systemic terms. They emphasized leadership and policy making roles; and consultation with students and parents around their educational needs; and facilitation of school, community and student relations. Selective casework, work with target populations (minorities, pregnant students etc.) and liaison consultant and coordinator roles have been the current trends of school social work practice. The above findings, recommendations and trends in school social work are reflected in the following model.

A SOCIAL WORK MODEL FOR THE WILLMAR AREA LEARNING CENTER

This part of the thesis presents a model that the writer developed for the Willmar Area Learning Center. It is important for social workers to remember that practice is broad and social work training should consist of four practice levels: The first level of practice is helping individuals, groups or communities cope or solve their problems. The second level is to help individuals, groups or communities connect to resources. The third level is to change the structure of systems. The fourth level of practices is to change social welfare policies. Problem resolution shouldn't be singled to one level.

Problems are seen as systemic and circular

Blaming the individual students, parents, education system or community, won't resolve problems. Each of these systems are influenced through their interactions with one another. There are many parts of a system that makes a whole, which is greater than the sum of it's parts. One part of the system is only a portion of the problem. However, the motivated part of the system is often the person who is asked to change or seek therapy. When one part of the system changes other parts of the system, move along with it or fight it. The individual, family and environment may block (resistance) or facilitate

(motivation) resolution to the problem. When a system has a resistant member, other members can cause the resistant family member to change by their interaction with that person. According to system theory, Margaret Rodway (1986) said, "problems are not seen as the property of a particular individual, but as a description of their interactions" [with other people or systems] (p. 232).

Moving into the adolescence stage is a time of family transition. When adolescents are ready to become independent and find their autonomous self, the rest of the system is affected. At this time parents must be flexible and give their teen space, so they can develop their own identity. Although this is not as useful a concept in some cultural contexts. Families experience greater stress during family life transitions. If there is a toxic family issue (alcoholism, depression, overprotection etc.) in the family, the family's adjustment to the adolescent stage will be more difficult than the family who is not experiencing toxic issues. During this stage, the "normal" family has greater ability to gain insight to the needs of the individual parts of the system than does the family who is confronted with toxic issues. They're are not only dealing with the transition they are also dealing with or suppressing toxic family issues. (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980).

The writer applied the transition concept to the student and family system, it could also be applied to the school and community. This example of changes in the family life cycle demonstrates that problems are circular; no one part of the system is the sole cause of the dysfunction. Micheal. P. Nichols and Richard C. Schwartz (1991), said, "circular causality is the idea that events are related through a series of repeating cycles, on going and circular". For problem resolution, the social workers role from a systemic perspective is to look at the whole and the sum of all its parts.

There are three ways in which problems develop: cybernetic, functional and structural. Cybernetic was coined by Gregory Bateson, he refers to systems as self correcting, through positive or negative feedback loops. If the symptom gets better, it's negative feedback; if the symptom gets worse, it's positive feedback. Positive feedback and negative feedback are the areas in which behavior disorders develop. To make a change in the feedback system, changing of the rules or behavior is necessary. A first order change is to change the behavior; the second order change is to change the rules goverening behavior. (Nichols and schwartz, 1991).

In terms of functionalism, problems result when people try to protect or control one another indirectly and serve a

function for the system. For example, a child is scapegoated, when their problems are used by parents to enable them to avoid their own problems. The conflict is detoured to the child rather than resolved between the parents.

According to structuralism, problems arise because there are problems with, structure, hierarchy, and boundaries within the system. Functional families modify their structure to accommodate the changed circumstances. Dysfunctional families increase the rigidity of structures that are no longer functional. The authority (staff members) of the school system or family system (parents) are responsible to accommodate to changes to meet the needs of their members.

Thus far, the writer has described problems as systematic and circular. This definition is nonvictimizing and creates an environment for change. Often times problems reach a peak during (individual life, family life, group life, organization life etc.) transitions. Problems serve a function in systems; a dysfunctional structure and cybernetic's (feedback loops) are also areas in which problems develop. The paper will describe further, a social work model for the Area Learning Center, which attempts to put this perspective into practice.

Student-in-environment

Social Workers are at the interface of the student-in-environment framework. At interface the worker and the client identify needs and plan for changes that will enhance the individual and their environments' adapting to one another. If the student/system gains insight to the problem change may occur. If the student/system changes their behavior insight to the problem may occur. Task-centered model would not insist on insight, but does change behavior. Task-centered social worker, William J. Reid (1986) said, "change is brought about mostly through problem-solving in the session culminating in external actions taken on by the client [student] or worker." The worker role is to help the student bring about changes the student wishes and is willing to work towards. It's the Social Workers responsibility to help the student put their capacity to work. In the student-in-environment framework, the change effort may pull from, or be directed toward, either the person or the environment. Please see the framework below for the model that is presented.

STUDENT	/	IN	/	ENVIRONMENT
---------	---	----	---	-------------

Murrey Bowen's	/	Task-Centered-	/	System Theory
Theory	/	Social Worker	/	

In the problem solving process, interpsychic (Bowen) and systemic (system) theories, along with the social workers role (task-centered), are presented in the student-in-environment framework (ecological). With this framework in mind the rest this section will continue to demonstrate how the above theories operate and how they can form a model that could be useful for the role of a school social worker at the Area Learning Center. The combination of the three theories gives social workers a solid foundation to build on.

"Environment"

Systems theory offers a tool for relating micro-macrosocial events and the interaction between individuals and their environment (Rodway, 1986). It provides a framework useful for social change, allowing for different types of intervention so students are not constrained with one approach. It allows practitioners to gain an overview of the complexity of problems and to collect massive amounts of data from different frames of references.

The first step in analyzing the problem is to determine the system type: intrapersonal; interpersonal; group; intergroup; organization; interorganization; or community. The system analysis involves six factors: input; throughput; output; feedback; boundaries; and environment (Rodway, 1986). The following demonstrates how these concepts are applied to human systems, both the interpersonal (student) and organization (Area Learning Center) human systems.

Input can range from individual input of food, water and sensory stimulation to organizational input of money and material. All human systems have a throughput function in which they process the input. These throughput functions range from individual throughput of thinking and feeling to organizational throughput of educating students. Then there are output functions. These vary from individual output of opening a book and talking to organizational output of graduating students. Next, there is the feedback loop, human systems receive feedback that can be used for self-regulation. This feedback varies from the credits or grade the student receives to the staff morale or the students attendance. The next concept is the boundary around the system. This varies from the physical space zone around an individual to the enrollment eligibility of Area Learning Center students. Finally, the concept of environment, which contains all aspects that are not included in the system.

Important environmental aspects range from the students' loved ones to the community's resources.

When analyzing the system, it's important to determine if the system is receiving the input it needs. There is a common concern among a few of the school personnels. Through conversation, they said, the school, County and Family Service communication and collaboration seem to be lacking. The lack of communication may stem from the county over load of cases. If the school is desiring the connection, they will have to make the initiative.

In terms of throughput, all systems must perform certain operations in order to survive. Minor parents are required to have a county social worker. Students who are developmental disabled have case managers. Lutheran Social Services, a private agencies of Intensive in-home treatment program, occasionally contact the school to coordinate service delivery. Contact with the county is necessary to pursue, if there is a need for a chemical abuse assessment, truancy reports, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, minor parents, developmental disability and mental illness, (vulnerable adult) and financial support. The worker should determine whether the activities are appropriate and adequately performed. In terms of output, it's important to question whether the behaviors of the

human system are appropriate for the particular situation or environment in which they exit.

The positive feedback loop maintains a system on its present behaviors. Negative feedback loop corrects and assists a system in making changes. For example, the school provided the students with video's in the dining room to prevent them from congesting the halls. This was negative feedback loop because their behavior changed. Most of the students preferred watching video's during lunch than stand in the hallway. All human systems need an appropriate balance of both feedbacks. On an individual level, for example, students need praise, to develop self-confidence, and consequences to help them establish appropriate limits of behavior. Social workers should understand the type of feedback the system requires and receives, along with the systems ability to integrate and utilize it. Simply asking the students stay out of the halls was not effective, positive feedback occurred. However, providing an alternative, such as the video was effective in changing the behavior.

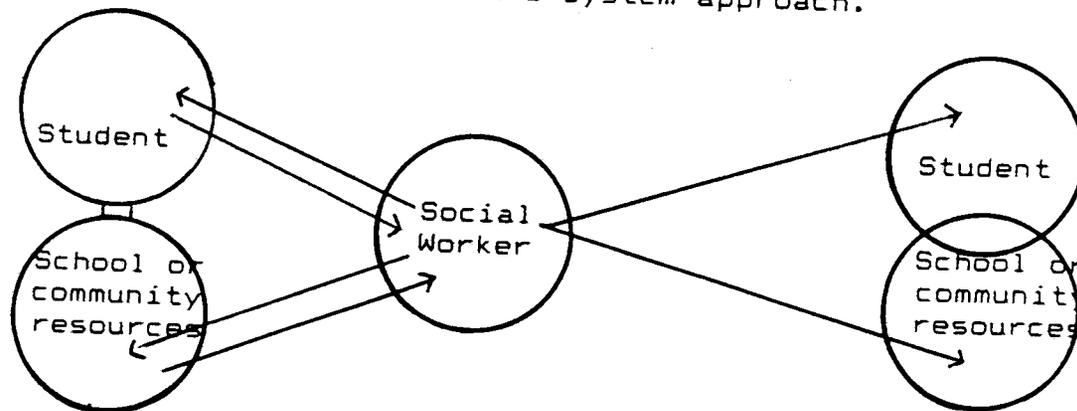
This leads to the next concept of boundary. A rigid boundary will prevent the necessary exchange between the system and its environment. A loose boundary may cause the system to lose its identity as a system. The worker should examine the environment in which the demands are placed on

the system. Workers need to understand the students, family and schools coping mechanism, and the demands and influences from the environment.

The enrollment criteria listed in the introduction, demonstrates an open system. The boundary of the system may be too loose. Many times, different teachers, have said, the school is a dumping ground. The mainstream junior and senior high school easily refer students to the Area Learning Center. Often times students who have been suspended (for reasons of bomb threats, drugs, weapons, etc.) from the mainstream school are placed at the Area Learning Center. The 16+ year old students are free to come and go as they choose in the upper level, as long as they haven't missed more than 15 consecutive days. The students in the lower level are to attend school regularly to avoid truancy. If the students in the upper level are absent fifteen consecutive school days, they will be dropped from the program. They can enroll again anytime. Systems that are too open, lose their identity, closed systems are too ridged.

The communication context and process are important, communication can occur along thinking, feeling, and behaving channels. According to Rodway (1986) system theory says, "the communicational feedback system is seen as crucial in explaining the circular change of events that

result from an ongoing exchange of information." Diagram I demonstrates how intervention and channels of communication operate in the system approach.



(Rodway, 1986)

Diagram I: Communication intervention process.

The communication intervention process works with any type of exchange between two systems or more. For example, a student who requested more information about volunteer work was introduced to the volunteer coordinator at the school. The coordinator helped the student achieve this goal. This exchange may not have happened without the social service support.

"Person"

The system approach shifts attention from the individual students to interactions with their environments. Bowen's theory is also systematic, but foci is on the individuals' differentiation and interaction with their families. The goal of Bowen's theory is to promote differentiation of family members from the "ego mass" or

"stuck-togetherness". Poorly differentiated parents raise poorly differentiated children; differentiated is a socialized emotional process that is passed on, through the generations. Intrapsychic differentiation is the ability to separate feeling from thinking. People who lack differentiation between feeling and thinking, have little autonomous identity and tend to be fused with others. They tend to have difficulty separating themselves from others. They are unable to develop their own opinions and values.

To become free from undifferentiation, the person must analyze their own role in their interaction. People are to take responsibility for their own actions, rather than blame others. Unfortunately, when there is conflict between two individuals, the undifferentiated person tends to pull someone else into the conflict. Bowen calls this behavior, triangulation. To stabilize the conflict in a two person relationship, a third person is pulled into it. A vulnerable child is usually the target of triangulation in families. For resolution, the student/family member is to collect information about a particular relationship, and behave differently in that relationship than the usual family patterns. The practitioner helps the student become free and autonomous, separating thinking from feeling, and reopening and changing the communication channels.

At the Area Learning Center, a triangle was formed between a mother-student-teacher conflict. The mother nor the daughter communicated with a particular teacher about their disagreement about the co-dependency statement on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) with a particular teacher. Instead, the mother-daughter, who were enmeshed, held onto the conflict, rather, than working out the differences. The writer helped the student take responsibly for her actions, rather than blame others. In this case the student choose to not confront the issue anymore. The family pattern was also carried over to another situation. The student tried triangulating the writer into the student-mother conflict. The writer worked with the student, helping her separate objectivity and emotions to resolve conflicts and make decisions. This eighteen year old student, wanted to live independently, but she was reluctant because her mother was against it. During therapy, this student was taught to make decisions on her own and to take responsibility for those decisions. Detriangulation occurred when the student when the student stopped blaming her mother and made her own decisions.

Holistic approach

During the students orientation to the Area learning Center, the school coordinator introduces the student to the social worker and informs them of the optional up coming

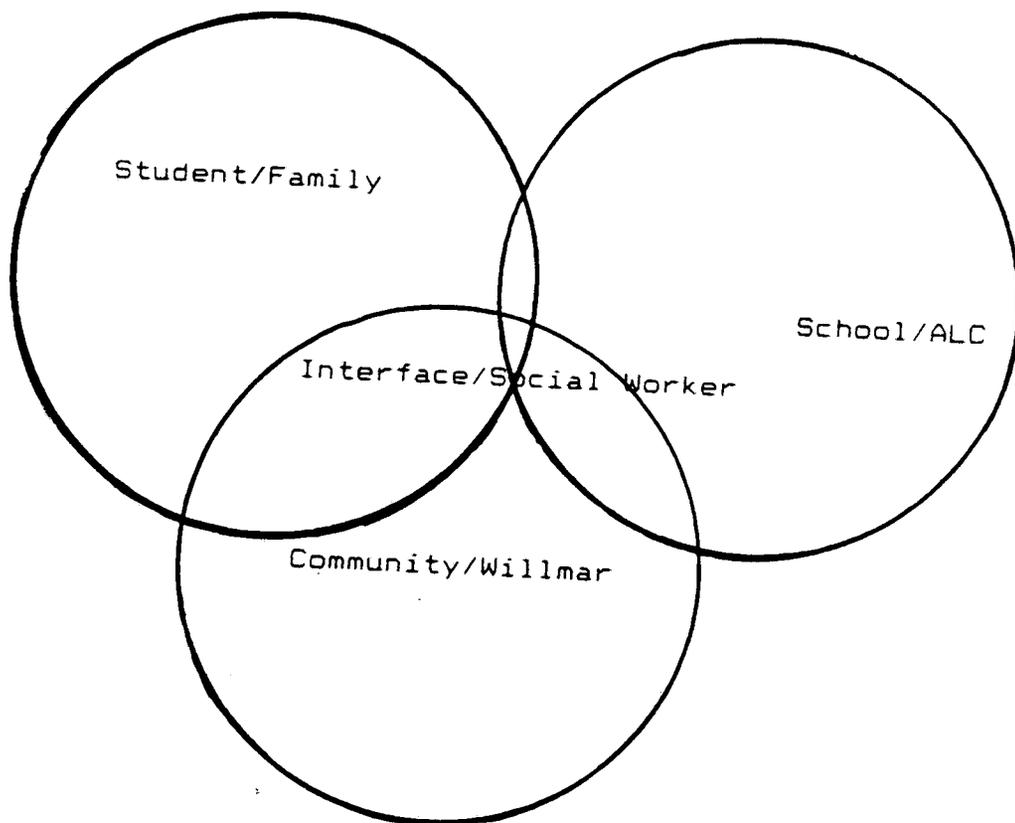
interview. After they have been enrolled for about a week they are interviewed. At the beginning of the interview the students are informed, the purpose of the visit is to help them identify goals for themselves and link them to school and community resources. Participation in the interview process is optional.

Please refer to the eco map (appendix B) it demonstrates all the possible systems in the students environment. The map is used to gather information about the whole person (psychological, social, physical, developmental and culture). The students and the worker, together complete the interview form, item by item, The form helps the students' identify areas of concern.

The function of the social worker is to help the at-risk students move forward with solutions to psychosocial concerns that they define and hope to solve. Some of the students are living independently or thinking about it; some have jobs and others are seeking employment; some are preparing for college or trade school; some have parent responsibility or are preparing for childbirth. The interview process helps the social worker identify and reach the students who are wanting support. The student and worker meet weekly or bimonthly until the goals are met, changed or withdrawn. The goals often involve linkage to specific school and community resources. Students often

identify relationship conflicts after the linkage goal is in process. Some students voice their interpersonal conflicts directly and openly during goal setting. Barriers of goal achievement, often result from conflict with either the intrapersonal and interpersonal system, the structure of the system, lack of resources, and or rules and policies of systems.

The student-in-environment framework gives social workers a practice foundation. Systems (environment) practice is wide open, interpsychic and systemic (Bowen) practice is more focused. The diagram below helps visualize the connection and collaboration of services (interpsychic and systemic) a school social worker at the Area Learning Center could provide .



SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AT THE AREA LEARNING CENTER

This part describes social work at the Area Learning Center, the task performed, the school programs and functions, the students' reactions to the support services provided by the writer and a common concern from the school staff.

The Area Learning Center has potential for many types of service delivery. The school serves at-risk students who for the most part have had toxic family issues. At the Area Learning Center, the writer found a very supportive group of school personnel. The director, asked the writer developed a community coordination service. As an new member, the researcher was challenged to learn the system and it's functioning while developing a plan. The plan was student focused, an advocate role, with emphasis on resource connection. The school psychologist served as the writers mentor. The staff were all involved in the process of developing a plan. A Social Worker from Cambridge Minnesota, was also consulted.

Cambridge schools have about the same number of students as the Willmar Area Learning Center. The students in Cambridge, are referred to the Community Coordinator by teachers, friends or agencies. And sometimes students seek assistance on their own. The Coordinator provides

counseling and linkage to community resources. She also provides transportation to community resources such as Family Services, Planned Parenthood, and housing and health care coverage. The director of the Cambridge Area Learning Center is responsible for the intake procedure. During the intake procedure the director introduces the students to the social worker and refers them to her as needs arise.

The students' home district is responsible for completing the Individual Education Plans and Psychological evaluations. At Willmar Area Learning Center, the Special Needs Teacher is responsible for completing the Individual Education Plans and the School Psychologist is responsible for psychological evaluations. Cambridge has a guidance counselor who provides career counseling and transition services for work, college or vocational school. All of the students go through this transition service. Willmar Area Learning Center, has a class called, Work Experience, which prepares students for work, vocational school or college. The community coordinator of Cambridge, Minnesota is basically doing the same types of tasks that the writer did during her internship. The director of the Willmar Area Learning said, Willmar is fortunate to have a school psychologist to complete the Individual Education Plans and psychological evaluations, rather than have to track down the students school district.

For the first time, this year, many Area Learning Centers from Minnesota, collaborated in efforts to prevent drug and chemical abuse, through Southwest and West Central Educational Cooperative Support Unit (ESCU). The support services from the surrounding Area Learning Centers were able to compare their experiences and begin to collaborate and coordinate among themselves.

The writer, as a social work intern student did the following types of tasks: Presentations (on the consequences of driving while under the influence of alcohol and sexual harassment), student interviews, goal setting, connection to school and community resources, provided transportation, did follow up on student absentees (through phone calls and letters), monitored a student while on in house suspension, and counseling.

The school provides the students with a variety of learning opportunities. The writer is interested in how the Multi-Cultural Gender Fair mandate is integrated into the curriculum. The English teacher, demonstrates this through the readings and videos she provides to the student for earning credits.

The Special Education teacher and Social teacher coordinates the volunteer service. Students can receive credits for volunteer work. This service is important

because volunteer work may lead students to employment and stop the family pattern of unemployment. The Special Education teacher and psychologist also facilitate a sexuality class. Planned Parenthood is invited to give a presentation on sexuality and family planning. The school Psychologist, does administration work, crisis intervention, psychological evaluation and presentations and group work. The Home Economic and Parenting teacher occasionally invites outside agencies, such as Legal Aid and Public Nursing Service. The Math and Science Teacher Coordinates field trips to the grocery store and coordinates the experiments of dissecting piglets. The Social teacher coordinates a mock court case around issues of drunk driving. The Staff Coordinator and the Director, communicates changes in rules and polices to the students. The coordinator also is responsible for staff supervision, student enrollment, drops and records.

The school received its second grant from the Private Industry Council (PIC-5), a summer school program to study water pollution. They will take, measure and record the results of water sample tests from many area lakes, streams and rivers in a study to be coordinated with project CURE (Clean Up our Rural Environment) from Montevideo, Minnesota. Student will learn about water pollution in the Hawk Creek Watershed and the Minnesota River on a trip to Granite Falls. They will write letters and reports about their

findings as well as research water issues and create other projects. This list is not inclusive, but gives ideas of the structure and functioning of the school. The Agency demonstrates efforts in coordinating student learning with community resources.

A majority of the students, of the Willmar Area Learning Center seem to come from broken homes. The students are living with either one of their parents, with extended family, independently, foster home, group home or at Willmar Regional Treatment Center. Many of the students seemed to be grieving the loss of family unity. A Majority of the students sometime in their lives have been involved with probation officers, therapist, and social workers for family and financial support. Special groups of students who could use support are: Hispanic, Biracial, parents, pregnant teens, criminals (robbery, theft, assaults, drug use) and those dealing with issues of loss, relationship conflicts, independent living and identity crisis.

The students' response to the interview that was mentioned earlier on page twenty-seven was positive. Most of the students were very open and desiring support in learning about the community and school resources, along with setting goals. Many of the students, requested help with relation difficulties. One student said, "I enjoyed coming to you [the writer], I don't have anyone else to talk

to about the these things" That statement is encouraging. Some females students said, they were more comfortable with a female counselor. Students appeared appreciative of the information and help they received. Many of the students requested information on education options, independent living, jobs, volunteer work, emancipation, housing, parenting, future planning and financial planning.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The last part of this thesis is a proposal for a research project. The writer of this paper was originally planning to carry out the research, but this was not possible due to time restraints and complications in passing the Institution Review Board (IRB) of Augsburg college. The following research design, which incorporates improvements and suggestions gathered in the planning process, may help others who are interested in researching the hypothesis; At-risk students will benefit from support services provided by the Area Learning Center task-centered school social worker. The following is an outline for quick reference to the research proposal:

Question

.At-risk students will benefit from support services provided by the Area Learning Center task-centered school social worker.

Services

.Provide community and school resource linkage services (prevention and intervention).

Theories

- .Holism (whole person)
- .Person-in-environment
- .Task Centered Social Worker
- .Murrey Bowen's Theory

Conceptualizations

- .At-risk
- .Benefit
- .Task-Centered Social Worker

Operationalization

- .At-risk (ALC students)
- .Benefit (needs assessment interviews [Student Profile form] and evaluation of services [student survey]).

Task-Centered Social Worker (interviews, needs assessment, student identifies problem/need, contract goals, meet with student until goals are met, changed or student withdrawals).

Choice of research

.Survey research (needs assessment interviews [student profile form] and evaluation of services [student survey]).

Population and sample

.Day time students in the upper level of the Willmar Area Learning Center.

.Population size would be approximately 25 students.

.The sample will be purposive sampling method in which the researcher uses their own judgment in the selection of sample members (judgmental sample).

Methods for the support services provided by the Area Learning Center Social Worker were presented in detail in the School Social Work Model. The model provides a social work theoretical framework for the researcher who conducts this research. Although, all theories have limitations, the combination of Bowens theory, task-centered social worker and systems theory provides a balance of micro and macro services delivery. The task-centered social work theory is the core social work role presented in the following proposal. The task-centered theory, as presented earlier, includes both micro (personal) and macro (environment) areas of social work.

Methods

Hypotheses

At-risk students will benefit from support services provided by the Area Learning Centers Task-center school social worker. This support service can meet the students identified needs by connecting them with services and resources that are available to them in the school and community. The following evaluative research design will explore whether the student support services have been beneficial.

Independent and dependent variables

The service provided by the researcher is the independent variable and the dependent variable is the benefit for the Area Learning Center students.

Conceptualization of at-risk, benefit and task-centered social worker.

For the conceptualization of at-risk the researcher included all the day time students who are eligible for Area Learning Centers enrollment. This includes students who are high school drop outs or those that are at risk of dropping out, one grade level below academic standards, parents or pregnant teens, homeless, been treated for chemical use, or referred by a service agency.

For the operationalizing of the variable benefit there will be a collection of information from the consumers of the service through consumer satisfaction survey (see appendix A for the survey). The survey will ask the students if they received Social Work services. Then it will ask if the support was very satisfying, somewhat satisfying, not very satisfying or not satisfying at all. After that the questionnaire will ask the student if they would recommend a friend to use the service. Then there will be two open-ended questions. The first open-ended question will read, what did you like about the service? The other one will read what did you dislike about the service? The last question will be a yes or no answer. It will ask the students if they would recommend that the Area Learning Center hire a person who could provide (community linkage) services that the writer provided. This survey should be pretested by colleagues and by a student, who pretested the very first "Student Profile" form which will be explained later in this section. Besides the evaluation survey, data will be collected from the student records. This data will demonstrate the students demographics, identified needs and resources from the school and the community that were utilized.

A map has been created to demonstrate all of the many parts that make up the environment of the students (see appendix B for the map). It gave direction for gathering

information from the available resources in the community that would be useful for the students. The community resources were gathered and organized into what is now called the "Student Profile" form (see appendix C for the form). The writer who designed this research proposal had continuously involved the Staff and students in the creation of the "Student Profile" form. This should be a continuous process because available resources change and individual needs differ. The "student profile" form is used during the initial interview with the students. Their participation in the interview is optional. At the first session, after the completion of the form, the student and the practitioner who conducts this research, constructs realistic goals towards accomplishing their needs or concerns. The number of sessions the student and the social worker meets depends on the individual student needs. If the student has several needs, student contact will be more often.

The researcher will ask the students to complete the evaluation survey during the last session of the task-centered social services. After the students have completed the survey, they will seal it in an envelope. The results will be viewed after the researcher has gathered data from approximately twenty-five students.

From the records of the "Student Profile" form data will be collected on the students demographics, stated needs

and resources that was utilized from the school and community. Both the evaluation survey and the records from the Willmar Area Learning Centers "Student Profile" forms will provide data for the evaluation of support services provided to the students.

Characteristics of the study population

The Area Learning Center is located in rural Minnesota. Students in the upper level program of the Area Learning Center are the population that will be studied. These students are of ages 15-21, who are freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. They are students who are at-risk of not achieving a high school diploma. Please refer to the definition of at-risk that was stated earlier in this paper. The respondents for this study have been selected from volunteers. The researcher had been entering the class room and asking for volunteers to complete the "student profile" form. Then the student and the practitioner who conducts the research start the first session. This is a convenient method for gathering the data. The population size of the day time students will be approximately twenty-five. The sample will be purposive sampling (judgement sample), which is a type of nonprobability sampling method. The researcher uses her/his own judgement in the selection of the sample members. For this study students are selected for various reasons: availability, new students, self referrals, and referral from others. The writer recommends these criteria

because these are the actual ways in which the practitioner is connected with the students at the Area Learning Center.

The Area Learning Center has students who are enrolled in the Independent study and the Junior High programs. These students will not be included in this study because there is an insufficient amount of time available. This is a disadvantage because the findings will only represent a portion (day time students) of the Area Learning Center students.

Possible data analysis

From the Area Learning Centers day time students' "Student Profile" form the researcher will be collecting demographics information, students identified needs and the resources from the school and community that are most likely to be utilized. The researcher could use pie charts and bar graphs to help the readers visualize these findings. The evaluation survey will provide the researcher feedback on the services that were provided to the students. The students will have the opportunity to provide their ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Hopefully this new information will facilitate in the future development of the tasks of a practitioner for the Area Learning Center.

Protection of subjects

The researcher has received verbal permission from the director of the Area Learning Center to collect information for this research project. To assure the agency and the students of confidentiality the researcher had developed a consent form. The consent forms will give the researcher permission to collect the data and it will protect the students privacy (appendix D).

Limitations

This study will only represent a portion of the Area Learning Center students, as specified earlier in this paper. It would be ideal if the researcher could interview all the students and interesting to compare the Junior high, Independent study and the Day time students. Nevertheless, the researcher hopes to achieve an understanding of the presenting needs of the students and resources that are likely to be utilized most often, besides whether or not the students have identified the service as beneficial. The benefit of this service would be greater to the students if the writer who designed the research, had more than the fifteen hours a week internship time to provide the service.

Other barriers of this study are the threats to internal validity. Allen Rubin and Earl Babbie in *Research methods for social work* point out that history and

maturation or passage of time are threats to internal validity.

History refers to "the fact that the extraneous events coincide in time with the manipulation of the independent variable" (Rubin & Babbie, 1989). The independent variable in this research proposal is the social work services. Its possible that some extraneous improvement, (an improvement independent of the services) in the Area Learning Center environment, was introduced prior to the evaluation of services.

Maturation or passage of time is also a threat to internal validity. The students are continually growing and changing. The students' changes effects the results of the research. The researcher couldn't conclude that the social services was beneficial when in fact the functioning level or mood of the students could have changed the results.

Practice bias should also be considered in this research process. The writer believes the Area Learning Center would benefit from the services. The writers attitude could be projected onto the students who respond to the evaluation of services. The researcher could try to prove the service had no benefits; restating the hypothesis may help prevent some practice bias.

There is a balance of quantitative and qualitative methods in this study. "Quantitative methods are more concerned with maximizing the objectivity and testing the validity of what we think we are observing" (Rubin and Babbie, 1989). The researcher will be obtaining quantitative data from the "student profile" form. The form will give the researcher a record of the types of needs the students have. The researcher has discovered many of the students' interest, concerns and problem areas which were mentioned earlier in this thesis. The open-ended questions from the student survey will give qualitative data. Qualitative methods are more concerned with the subjective view. The open-ended questions will "tap into the deeper meaning of the student's experience" (Rubin & Babbie, 1989).

Criticism

At Augsburg college the Master of Social Work student are required to take a Thesis Seminar class. In the class the students provide feedback to their colleagues about their research project. One person suggested, the researcher have the Area Learning Center student's complete two satisfaction surveys; one after the interview process and one during the last session. It was also stated that the survey should have more details included on it, a five point scale and a question, asking if the goal(s) were achieved. It was also suggested that the researcher's name

be left off the survey. The study would be of greater value if the respondents could document other sources which facilitated the students goal achievement. The whole issue of satisfaction and reliability and validity of satisfaction surveys could also be examined. The researcher agrees with all of the ideas the Thesis Seminar class provided. The researcher doesn't intend to use this proposal at the present time. However, the ideas are documented for future use.

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Brenda has been working with students during her training at the Area Learning Center. Her job is to provide support and link students to resources in the community. Your input is very important for the evaluation of this service. This survey is anonymous, so please do not place your name on the survey. However you do not have to participate in this survey. Your decision whether or not to participate will not effect your grade or relationship with Brenda or the staff of the Area Learning Center. Thank you so much for your cooperation.

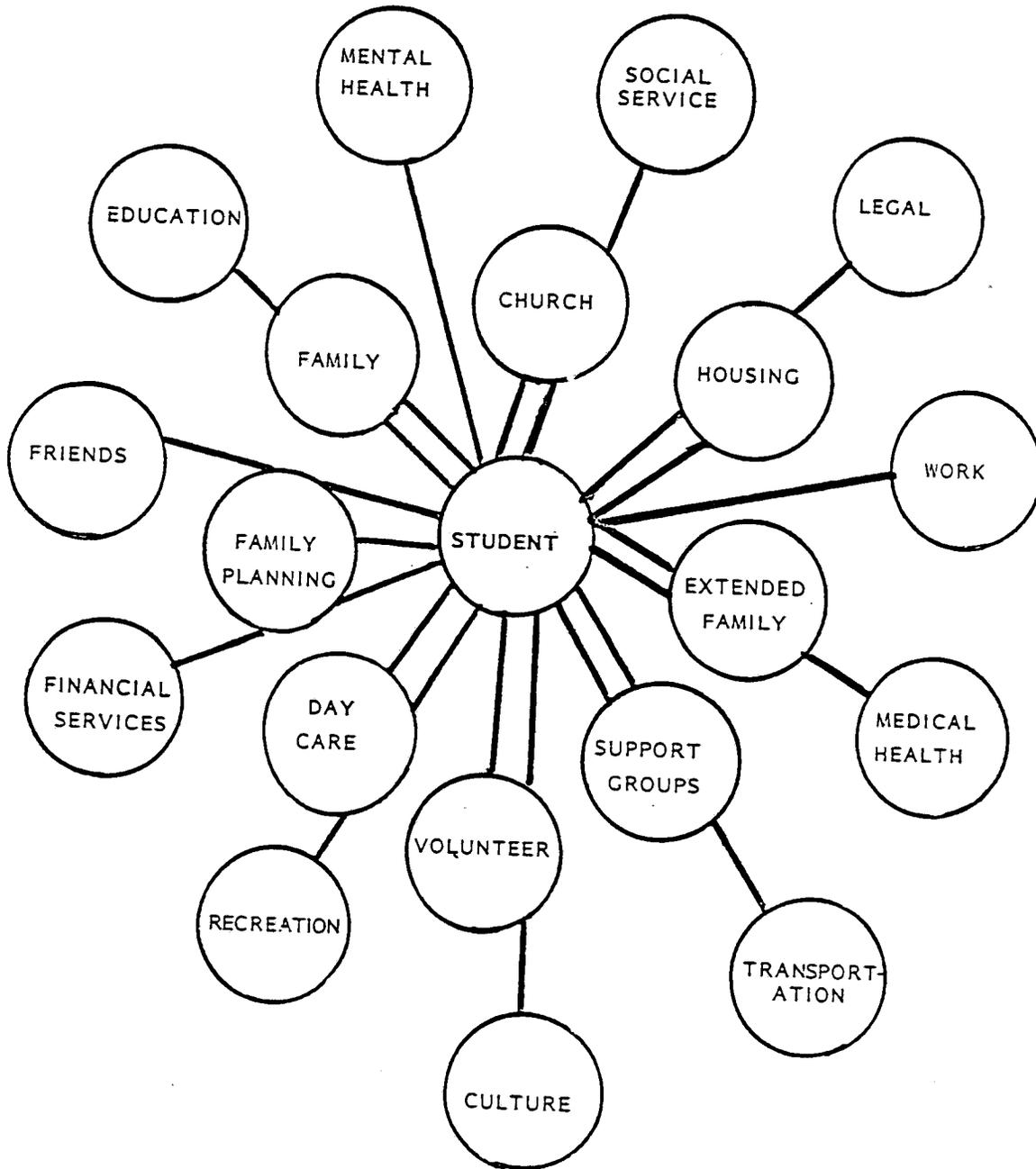
1. DID YOU RECEIVE SERVICES FROM BRENDA? YES OR NO
IF YOU ANSWERED YES, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING
QUESTIONS...IF NO, SKIP # 2, 4 & 5.
2. WAS THE STUDENTS SUPPORT SERVICES (PLEASE CHECK ONE):
____ VERY SATISFYING
____ SOME WHAT SATISFYING
____ NOT VERY SATISFYING
____ NOT SATISFYING AT ALL
3. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS SERVICE FOR YOUR FRIEND TO
USE? YES OR NO
4. WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THE SERVICE? _____

5. WHAT DID YOU DISLIKE ABOUT THE SERVICE? _____

6. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT AREA LEARNING CENTER HIRE A
PERSON WHO COULD PROVIDE (COMMUNITY LINKAGE) SERVICES
THAT BRENDA PROVIDED? YES OR NO

Thank you.

STUDENT PROFILE



STUDENT PROFILE

STUDENT

Name _____ M F Date of Birth _____
Social Security Number _____ Age _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Phone (Home) _____ Phone (Work) _____
Do you live independently _____
With parents _____ Race _____
In foster home _____ Religion _____
In group home _____
Homeless _____
Other _____
What is your primary language ? _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN/SPOUSE

Parent or guardian name _____ Employment _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Phone (Home) _____ Phone (Work) _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT

Name _____ (Relationship) _____
Address _____ Phone _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

FAMILY

Are you married _____ Single _____ Divorced _____
Do you have children? yes or no If so, do the children live with you? yes or no
Are you expecting? yes or no

Children:

Name _____ Age _____
Name _____ Age _____
Name _____ Age _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Do you have a drivers license? yes or no
Do you have a car? yes or no

EDUCATION

Have you been tested for Special Education in High School? Yes or No _____

Name of school you last attended _____ Date _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Grade in school _____

Plans after earning a high school diploma:

Attend technical college _____

Attend community college _____

Military service _____

Work _____

Other _____

How did you hear about the Area Learning Center? _____

Why do you want to attend? _____

HEALTH

Are you under the care of a doctor? Yes or No _____

Are you experiencing any health problems? Yes or No _____

Reason _____

Doctor's Name _____ Address _____

City _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Have you been recommended or evaluated for chemical abuse? Yes or No _____

Have you been in treatment for mental health? Yes or No _____

Was it inpatient _____ or outpatient _____

Name of treatment facility _____

Dates of treatment: From _____ to _____

WORK

Have you been in a work experience program? Yes or No _____

Indicate career or vocational interest _____

Are you employed? Yes or No, Work hours per week _____

Place of employment _____ Phone _____

Supervisor _____

Duties _____

LEGAL

Do you have a probation officer? Yes or No _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

ACTIVITIES/LEISURE

FINANCIAL SERVICES/SOCIAL SERVICES

Do you have a social worker? Yes or No

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____

COMMUNITY SERVICES	Received in Past	Currently Receiving	Would Like More Info
CHILD CARE			
ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education and literacy based)			
Child Care Resources and Referral			
STRIDE			
La Leche League			
Parent to Parent			
Licensed Day Care Providers			
Child Support Alimony			
Other			
COUNSELING			
Peer helper			
Chemical dependency			
Counseling			
Spiritual			
Other			
EDUCATION			
Vo-Tech			
College			
Post-Secondary Enrollment Option			
Preschool Programs			
Community Education			
G.E.D. Programs			
Student Financial Aid			
Other			
EMPLOYMENT			
J.O.B.S.			
Career Assessment			
D.R.S.			
Employment			
Other			
ETHNIC/CULTURE			
Minnesota Migrant Council			
Affirmative Action			
Discrimination			
Hispanic Center			
Other			
FAMILY PLANNING			
Crisis Pregnancy Center			
Planned Parenthood			
Teenage Parents			
Pregnancy classes			
Other			
FINANCIAL			
Income taxes			
General Assistance			
Social Security			

	Received in Past	Currently Receiving	Would Like More Info
FINANCIAL (CONT)			
Supplement Security Income			
AFDC			
Emergency Assistance			
Banking Account			
Budget			
Financial Planning			
Other			
FOOD/NUTRITION			
EFNEP			
WIC			
Surplus Commodities			
Food Stamps			
Food Shelf			
Fare Share			
Other			
GROUPS			
Support group			
SEARCH (Self)			
Teen Parent group			
Alcoholics Anonymous			
Alanon			
Alateen			
Youth for Christ			
Church			
Social activities			
Narcotics Anonymous			
AIDS			
Parents Anonymous			
Other			
HEALTH SERVICES			
Sick Child Care Services			
Medical Assistance			
Children's Health Plan			
Immunization Clinics			
Health Learning Center			
Other			
HOUSING			
HRA			
Women's Shelter House			
Apartments			
Subsidized Housing			
Weatherization			
Home Repairs/Loans			
Housing			
Rental Assistance			
Energy Assistance			
Other			
INFORMATION			
Peer Relations			
Drug/Drug Free			
Abuse			
Violence			
Eating disorder			
Grief and Loss			
Pregnancy			
Depression			
Stress			

INFORMATION (CONT)	Received in Past	Currently Receiving	Would Like More Info
Independent Living _____			
Sexuality _____			
AIDS _____			
Sexually transmitted diseases _____			
Suicide _____			
Self-Esteem _____			
Divorce/Separation _____			
Parenting _____			
Sexual Assault Services _____			
Rape _____			
Recreation _____			
Driving License _____			
Sleeping Disorder _____			
Parent Relations _____			
Volunteer Services _____			
Legal Aid _____			
Clothing _____			
Other _____			

CONCERNS/NOTES:

GOALS:

Signature _____ Date _____

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that I am doing for my Masters of Thesis at Augsburg College. You were selected for this study because you are enrolled in the Willmar Area Learning Center program. I am interested in learning more about how a School Social Worker could be used at the Area Learning Center. Your signature on this paper will give me permission to collect information from your student profile form and the evaluation survey.

The information that you disclose is voluntary (you do not have to participate) and is kept confidential (no one, but Brenda Hubers will see the information). Your decision whether or not to participate will not effect your grade, relationship or status with the Willmar Area Learning Center, Augsburg College or myself.

I, _____, on this
date _____ understand that the information that I
personally disclosed is kept confidential (no one other than
Brenda Hubers will see the information). This form gives
Brenda Hubers permission to collect information to use for
the research study.

