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## Connections 07/2019

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# Connections

A monthly newsletter from the  
College of Health and Human Services



## Agreement will lead KCC students to WMU BSW program

Officials from **Kellogg Community College** and Western Michigan University signed an articulation agreement that creates a pathway for KCC graduates with an associate degree to enter WMU's Bachelor of Social Work program.

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“We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.  
Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings,  
different hopes, different dreams.”

President Jimmy Carter

## Camp for blind and visually impaired athletes breaks down barriers

The sports education camp, hosted every summer by Western Michigan University in conjunction with the **Michigan Blind Athletic Association**, teaches visually impaired youth important skills and gives graduate students important work experience.



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## College hosts Kalamazoo Promise GEAR UP event

In July, GEAR UP students spent two days at the College of Health and Human Services to meet with faculty from the college to learn about health-related career opportunities.



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## MSW named top social work program for trauma care

WMU's Master of Social Work program has been listed by **mswcareers.com** as the top-ranking MSW program for trauma education.



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## In other WMU news for you:

- [Business class completes 3,700+ hours of service in one semester](#)
- [Football Broncos tackle tree clearing for Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [USWNT's equal pay fight echoes challenges of female sports pioneers](#)

## CHHS in social media:

Check out the newly redesigned graduate certificate in **Aging Studies** at the **WMU Center for Gerontology**. 9 credits you can take online in one year to specialize your education. Check it out!



From the **Center for Gerontology** [via Facebook](#)

## Agreement leads Kellogg Community College students to WMU BSW program



KCC and WMU officials at signing ceremony

On July 30, officials from WMU, the College of Health and Human Services and the School of Social Work met with representatives of Kellogg Community College to sign an articulation agreement. The new agreement provides a clearly articulated pathway for graduates of KCC's human services associate degree into WMU's Bachelor of Social Work program.

This agreement is an extension of a major transfer agreement which was [signed by the two institutions in May 2018](#). That agreement included a number of programs at KCC and WMU, including the B.S.N. program in the Bronson School of Nursing.

"This is part of an ongoing conversation about how these two institutions can deepen our relationship and best support our students," says **Dr. Ron Cisler**, dean of the College of Health and Human Services. "We can do more to help students in their quest to find meaningful careers in social work and other health care and human service fields."

Part of the conversation focused on ways to adjust academic advising at the two institutions to ensure a seamless transfer. Those conversations continue, as do other conversations about strengthening the relationship between Kellogg Community College and Western Michigan University.

## Camp for blind and visually impaired athletes breaks down barriers

Contact: Erin Flynn

July 3, 2019



Athletes crouch to play goalball.

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—A rubber ball thuds on the ground, followed by a metallic clanging that fills a silent gym. Young athletes crane their heads to follow the noise, before one scoops up the ball and hurls it across the court at the opposing team.

In a synchronized sprawl, three athletes dive toward the jingling noise as they try to defend their net, which stretches the width of the court. Teammates on the sideline wait in anticipation to hear if the ball slipped past their outstretched fingertips.

"Goal!" a referee yells.

Players on the sideline jump for joy. The player who threw the ball claps. None of them, however, saw any of the action on the court.



WMU student Osman Koroma, left, teaches a young athlete how to play goalball.

They're playing goalball; a sport created by visually impaired athletes. Every person on the court is blindfolded, relying on their ears to guide their movement.

The camp, sponsored by WMU and the [Michigan Blind Athletic Association](#), offers young athletes a chance to discover their athletic potential and learn how to adapt sports so that they can participate when they return to their own communities. It's one of the many events more than two dozen athletes tackled during the Michigan Sports Education Camp at Western Michigan University.

"Our philosophy is we take students with visual impairments from the sidelines to the goal line," says **Leann Ford**, a co-director of the camp.

## A PLACE TO GROW AND THRIVE

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**Dr. Paul Ponchillia**, emeritus professor of blind rehabilitation, and his late wife, Professor **Susan Ponchillia**, started the sports camp with colleagues in the University's internationally renowned [Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies](#) in 1988. Historically, children who were visually impaired or blind were educated in state residential schools. In 1975, however, the Education for the Handicapped Act was passed, requiring all public schools to provide students with disabilities equal access to education.

While studies show students with visual impairments thrive when given the chance to interact with their sighted peers, Ponchillia says the law also created new challenges. Many schools did not have a staff of physical education, art and other elective instructors with the expertise to teach blind and visually impaired children.



Camp counselors run beside visually impaired athletes, holding tethers to guide them around the track.

"The kids ended up getting left out of things that were kind of outside the normal curriculum and being part of the whole group," says Ponchillia. "Sports and art are self-image builders, things that sort of make you fit. In those days there wasn't any way to do that because even the teachers didn't know how to do it. So, we started this camp in 1988."

Ponchillia says the camp received help from special education teachers at schools across the state. Students in WMU's Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies also got the opportunity to practice what they were learning.

"When we first put this together, most of us thought we were going to educate kids who get left out of sports and physical education so that they have the vocabulary to go back and talk to their friends about it—things like what a shot put is and how someone completes the high jump," Ponchillia says. "Every year we do a pre- and post-interview and test skills before and after camp, and I was totally shocked to find that every year these athletes jump farther, throw farther and, most importantly, their attitudes change."

"We ask them questions about whether they think they're a good athlete or if they're as good an athlete as other kids at their school, and that changes from the time they come until the time they leave."

## FINDING FRIENDS



Chaz Myshock, left, stands with a young athlete after playing hockey.

The camp also offers young athletes a chance to meet other kids facing similar challenges.

"When the students get to camp, it may be the first time in their lives that they realize that they are not alone," says **Bob Brauker**, camp co-director and also a former athlete at the camp himself. "The transformation is magical."

That sentiment is echoed by the athletes who come back to camp year after year and then go on to become volunteers.

"It's kind of like paying it forward," says **Chaz Myshock**, a counselor from Sterling Heights. "I enjoyed this camp for so many years, the least I can do is come back and be a counselor to help everyone out."



Myshock's enthusiasm for sports is undeniable. He grew up in a hockey family and has been skating since he was 4 years old.

"I had full eyesight until I was in fifth grade," says Myshock, who continued to compete in sports until high school. "It was just too much trying to keep up with the puck that I had to stop. Then I came to sports camp one year and they had blind hockey. Ever since then I go to every hockey session. I have fun with the kids and help them."

Fellow counselor **Kristen Hale**, who grew up in Warsaw, Indiana, shares Myshock's passion. Now 34 years old, she was just 10 the first time she stepped onto the WMU campus for Sports Education Camp.

"I had a total retina detachment at 9 years old," says Hale. "I no longer had depth perception because I didn't have vision in one eye. When I finally got a visual impairment teacher at my school, she was a recent graduate of Western's blindness and low vision studies program. She brought me and three other people from my county up to experience camp."

It gave Hale a chance to feel like part of a community; something she longed for since she lost her vision.

"We all have different levels of visual impairment or blindness, but it's the first time you're experiencing these things with other people who have the same challenges as you," Hale says. "Whether it's stairs or something else, it's just fun to be around people. You finally don't feel like the odd person here."

**Josh Harrington**, a teacher consultant for the visually impaired, also has deep roots with the camp. The Lawrence native started attending when he was 8 years old after being recommended by his uncle.

"He was involved with camp when he was a kid, and as I grew up, he wanted to make sure that I got some of the same opportunities that he did," Harrington says.



An athlete throws the shot put.

Harrington and his uncle both have retinitis pigmentosa, a progressive condition that takes away vision over time.

"Growing up in a small town ... I didn't really have any connections outside of family to visual impairment," Harrington says, "Coming to camp was my first experience with other people who were blind or visually impaired of my own age."

Over the years, Harrington emerged as a leader and developed a passion for helping his friends at camp. He eventually enrolled at WMU where he earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degrees in teaching children with visual impairments as well as orientation and mobility. Now an adult, Harrington is inspired by the athletes he works with at camp.

"To be able to come to a camp like this and learn all of these skills and how to adapt things that their physical education teacher is doing, and to be able to bring it back to their school to help those teachers do it is empowering."

## LASTING IMPACT

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The impacts of sports camp stretch far beyond the track or hockey rink.

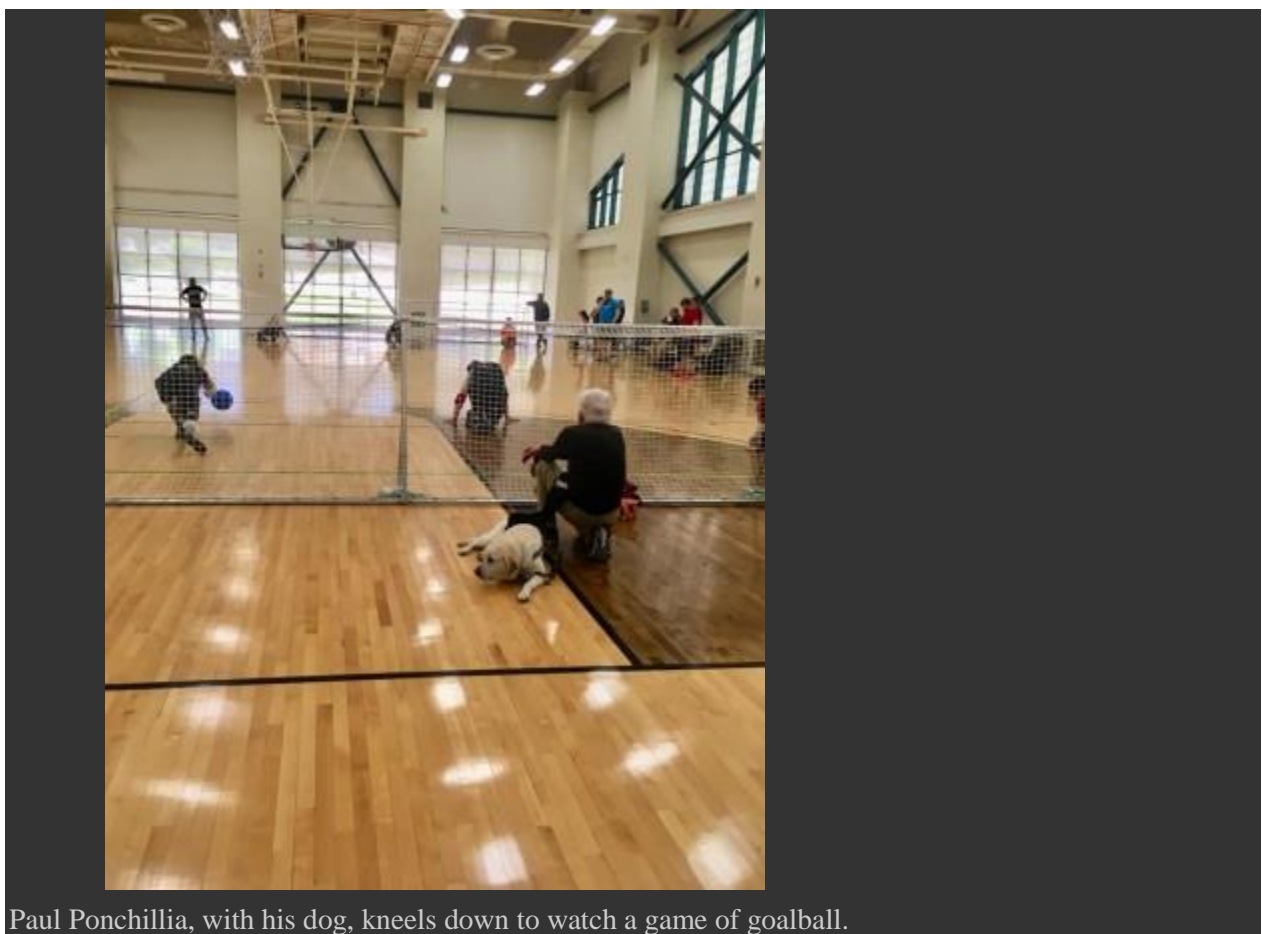
"You not only learn sports here, you learn independence," says Hale. "We stay in dorms here on a college campus, so learning how to be without your parents and navigate campus was a really good thing. It helped me feel really comfortable that when it was time to go off to college, I would be ready."

"As a parent you have to learn to let go," says **Tina Sabel**, who travels from Wisconsin to bring her daughter to camp. "The hardest thing is to make them do things for themselves, and they learn all of that here, which is a huge thing."

Establishing independence could be life-changing for these kids. According to the American Foundation for the Blind, the employment rate for people with visual impairments is only about 35%.

"It's really obvious when you look at the volunteers at camp," says Scott Ford, a camp director. "Bob (Brauker) is a former athlete. He's now a camp director and a lawyer. The manager and operator running goal ball this week are former athletes who've gone on to work at the United Nations and as a project manager for General Motors. Our athletes go on to excel and be leaders, not just in the blindness community."

## PIONEERING PROGRAM



Paul Ponchillia, with his dog, kneels down to watch a game of goalball.

"I worked at the Veterans Affairs office in Birmingham, Alabama; it's a huge clinic with dozens of professionals working there," says Brauker. "Hanging right in the center of the building is a picture of Paul and Sue Ponchillia. They're just so highly respected around the country in the field, and it comes directly from this University. The support we get is pretty awesome."

WMU's Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies is the oldest and largest of its kind in the United States. Research completed by faculty and students is lauded around the world—including a book focused on the skills taught at camp.

"A lot of the research for the book we wrote, *Physical Education and Sports for People with Visual Impairments and Deafblindness*, was done through the sports camps," Ponchillia says.

"BLVS faculty and students assist with promoting, writing grants, doing research, soliciting volunteers and so on," says Brauker. "In turn, we provide a great opportunity for BLVS faculty and student to do research and gain experience in the field."

Every year the camp brings several practicum students on board from WMU's Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies. **Lexi Theis** is wrapping up her second year at camp.

Theis is working on a master's degree in teaching children with visual impairments. "Camp allows me to use strategies I've learned in the classroom in real-life situations," she says.

Theis, who grew up in St. Charles, Missouri, says she first became interested in the blindness and low vision studies field while earning her undergraduate degree in elementary education at another university.

"I was placed in a first-grade classroom with three students who were blind," Theis says. "This was my first experience ever working with anyone with a vision impairment. I was so inspired by their love of life that I knew I wanted to see what this field had to offer."

After researching graduate programs, Theis says she chose WMU because it "had a reputation for being the best." The opportunity to work with athletes at camp is an added bonus.

"They're all so ready and willing to learn, so when they master a skill, it's the most awesome feeling!" says Theis. "These athletes come in feeling timid, like they do not belong and cannot do what their peers who are sighted can. They leave feeling confident."

And directors are confident the camp will continue touching lives for years to come.

"It is truly inspiring watching a kid who has never competed before race to the finish line while his buddies cheer him on," says Brauker.

# College hosts Kalamazoo Promise GEAR Up event

In July, Michigan's GEAR UP students spent two days at the College of Health and Human Services to meet with faculty from the college to learn about health-related career opportunities.

Students met with **Paula Andrasi** to learn about the [Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness](#) minor and graduate certificate. **Laura DeThorne** and **Kathryn Hillenbrand** from the [Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences](#) spoke about the bachelor's degree in speech-pathology and audiology and the American Sign Language minor.

**Susan Houtrouw** from the [Bronson School of Nursing](#) introduced students to the [Simulation Lab](#), which approximates beds and workstations at local hospitals and clinics. **Cassie Watts** demonstrated the [Anatomage Table](#) and discussed other student services like peer mentoring that are available in the college.

Events like this introduce students to health care and human services careers and show how the College of Health and Human Services at Western Michigan University can help students find a path forward in these growing fields.

Michigan's [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs \(GEAR UP\)](#) program partners with Michigan's 15 public higher education institutions and the Michigan Department of Treasury and Partnership For Learning to target and provide services to 38 public secondary school districts and 77 school buildings throughout Michigan. The goal is to improve the entry into post-secondary education of students from the targeted areas.



Dean Cisler and GEAR UP students

# Top 5 MSW Programs for Working with Traumatized Populations



Top 5 MSW Programs for Working with Traumatized Populations

From interpersonal violence to natural disasters, traumatic experiences are wide ranging. Trauma can impact any member of society and even be passed down through generations. While trauma is universal, some groups of people are more vulnerable to trauma's effects than others. Traumatic experiences can have a serious impact on a person's mental health, social functioning, and overall well-being, significantly interfering with her or his ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. Thus, social workers need advanced knowledge and training in the rapidly evolving field of trauma and trauma care in order to work with diverse groups of people who have experienced diverse forms of trauma, including interpersonal violence, natural disasters, identity-based violence, terrorism, combat trauma, and vicarious trauma. The following is a list of recommended programs that provide advanced level training in the field of trauma.

## 1. [Western Michigan University School of Social Work](#)

Western Michigan University offers a trauma specialization called Trauma Across the Life Span, which focuses on many different types of trauma and is available to MSW students who select a concentration in Interpersonal Practice. The trauma specialization includes a number of trauma-focused course options, such as "Core Concepts of Child Trauma" and "Integrating Mindfulness with Treatment for Trauma." To complement the trauma specialization, Western Michigan University has also designed a curriculum in Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, one of the leading trauma treatment modalities, focusing on social work practice with children who have experienced trauma. Students in the trauma specialization are also assisted in securing field placements with a trauma focus.

## 2. [Simmons College School of Social Work](#)

The Simmons College Social Work program provides a clinically-focused curriculum with several curricular pathways within it, including a Trauma and Interpersonal Violence specialization option. This clinical specialization focuses on "evidence-based practice approaches to trauma-informed care, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and child-adolescent trauma." The specialization aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of how trauma affects various aspects of human functioning and relationships across the life course. The specialization also provides students with the opportunity to gain advanced skills in effective trauma treatment approaches and common

behavioral and mental health effects of trauma, like substance abuse and stress. Advanced clinical courses with a trauma focus are offered as part of the specialization, including “Child and Adolescent Trauma,” and “Advanced Group Work with Diverse, Vulnerable, and Resilient Populations.”

### 3. Boston University School of Social Work

Boston University School of Social Work offers MSW students the opportunity to specialize in Trauma and Violence, with a focus on both systemic and interpersonal forms of trauma and violence. Students in this specialization gain advanced training and knowledge in trauma-informed practice from the micro to the macro level, as well as the skills needed to “apply this knowledge to prevention, intervention, and policy-making to mitigate the impact of violence and trauma on individuals, families, communities and societies.” Course offerings for the Trauma and Violence specialization include “Clinical Practice with Adult Trauma” and “Clinical Practice with Childhood Trauma.” An advanced field placement focused on Trauma and Violence is also required as part of the specialization.

### 4. University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Social Work

Offering a face-to-face or online option, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville offers a Trauma Treatment Graduate Certificate program to student enrolled in the Master of Science in Social Work program. The certificate program aims to equip students with trauma expertise that can be applied at the micro to macro level, from intervention implementing, to trauma-informed program design and policy development. Thus, students in either the Evidence Based Interpersonal Practice (micro) or the Organizational Leadership (macro) concentration can enroll in the certificate program. In addition to learning foundational-level knowledge of trauma, students in the certificate program dive into such topics as the neurobiology of trauma, the impacts of trauma, and the “larger social, cultural, and political forces at work which shape both exposure to and recovery from traumatic experiences.” The school provides many trauma-focused elective course options, as well as online webinars and field placements with a trauma focus.

### 5. Tulane University School of Social Work

The Tulane University School of Social Work is home to the Tulane Traumatology Institute, founded by renowned trauma scholar Dr. Charles Figley. The Traumatology Institute is made up of an interdisciplinary team of scholars who work together to “promote research, innovation, and interventions that help the traumatized thrive despite their challenges.” The Tulane Traumatology Institute uses participatory action research methodologies and provides research assistantship opportunities for MSW students. In addition, Tulane offers several trauma-focused courses, a dual-degree in Disaster Resilience Leadership Studies, and a graduate certificate program in Disaster Mental Health and Trauma Studies.

Runner-Up: Widener University School of Human Service Professions, Master of Social Work

Offering [online](#), on-campus, and hybrid options of study, the Widener University School of Social Work “follows a trauma-informed clinical model that promotes a social justice lens.” Thus, knowledge of trauma and trauma care is integrated across the entire MSW curriculum. A specialization in Clinical Social Work and trauma-focused elective course options offer students the opportunity to gain advanced knowledge and skills in the field of trauma care. The MSW program at Widener “prepares its students to understand trauma as a root cause and the effect it can have on a client and community.”

By [Jenn Miller Scarnato, LMSW, MA](#) | [Industry Articles & Topics](#)