



## CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program

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## CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program

The CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program combines graduate-level educational opportunities for social workers in-training with direct counseling and social services for children in need through a proven framework that is simple to develop, implement and administer.

Our program is a joint venture with the University of Texas at Austin's Steve Hicks School of Social Work Program, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) campuses, and CapCityKids (CCK), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization created to help children facing homelessness defy the odds and receive a quality education.

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DINORAH DE LA TORRE  
AISD PRINCIPAL

“Having the support of the social work interns on campus truly helped my most vulnerable students. I was able to see my students work through difficult emotions. As the principal of the campus, I am very thankful for the support offered to my community.”





## I. Program Origin

The CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program was initiated from a heartfelt desire to aid distressed youth encountering difficulties with learning and remaining focused, and whose needs outweigh the services that public schools can offer. For many young students facing hardships such as grief, abuse or other mental, social and health issues, the program is a panacea to providing valuable, requisite resources for distressed youth across 116 AISD campuses.

Joslyn Dobson



The program originated at a dinner for Central Texas Homeless School Liaisons in Austin, TX in 2009. Dinner guests were asked to discuss pressing issues they were seeing across education in Central Texas, and attendee Lupita Garcia, who was employed by AISD at the time, offered the idea of an internship program that would benefit both master's level social work students and children in need of resources and attention that were unavailable to public school students at that time.

Ms. Garcia emphasized that for the program to be effective, they would “**need to get these kids early,**” and that the meetings between social work student interns and distressed youths “**couldn't be a one-time situation**” for the program to be effective, as it takes time for children to feel comfortable discussing personal issues.

Joslyn Dobson, co-founder of CapCityKids, wanted to see the idea gain traction; and after meetings with the University of Texas and folks from AISD, the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program was born.

Tanya Voss, MSSW, Clinical Professor and Assistant Dean for Global Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin's Steve Hicks School of Social Work, who played a critical role in the development of the program, likened it to “**a three-legged stool**” supported by CapCityKids, which funds the program, the University of Texas at Austin, and AISD.



TANYA VOSS, MSSW

“I'm thrilled to have played a role from early on in creating connections between CapCityKids, AISD, and the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. Everyone's care and support for the kids really shows when you combine CapCityKids's commitment to the program, the educational opportunities AISD provides for our interns, and the skills our master's students contribute to those campuses.”



\$2,500

#### TUITION STIPENDS

\$2,500 in tuition stipends per student intern annually, in addition to potential work study funds, both of which offset the students' costs.



#### ONE SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR OVERSEES 8-10 INTERNS

- At the University of Texas at Austin, the majority of CapCityKids student interns (called "First Fielders") intern two days per week for the school year, for a total of 400 hours. The second batch that join the program in the Spring semester ("Final Fielders") intern full-time for 35 hours, for a total of 500 hours.

5,243  
HOURS



11 social work interns served 2,773 AISD students on 11 campuses during the 2023-2024 school year, totaling 5,243 hours of internship service.



## CAP CITY *kids*



### By the NUMBERS

900  
HOURS

Minimum of 900 hours in social work education of practice under a social worker to earn a Social Work master's degree.

11,000

**DIRECT SERVICE HOURS**  
provided to AISD students by social work interns from 2009-2024

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116  
CAMPUSES

in the Austin Independent School District (AISD)



73,000  
STUDENTS

AISD services just under 73,000 students in elementary, middle, and high schools



\$130,000

Yearly budget of \$130,000 to run the entire program

- The average budget from year-to-year has been \$130,000, which includes a half-time Math Specialist position.
- CapCityKids has increased their investment in 2023 to fund two half-time Specialist positions at two different elementary schools with the highest number of homeless youth. This position also pays for a full-time social worker to provide supervision to 8-10 social work interns.



## II. Program Overview

Designed to help a wide range of students from pre-K-to-21 years-of-age, the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program provides direct counseling and social services to children by placing University of Texas social work graduate students at several AISD campuses, which provides UT students the learning environment and the internship hours they need to earn course credit. The hours count toward the minimum 900 hours of field study practicum learning they need for graduation, while allowing them a rewarding social work field experience.

The program was originally organized and spearheaded by Kate Amerson, LCSW-S, who led the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program for a decade. Amerson witnessed significant growth since its inception in 2009 and her work has impacted the lives of countless distressed students and their families.



KATE AMERSON, LCSW-S

“Witnessing the social work interns in action was truly inspiring, educational and humbling. Their enthusiasm, passion, and creativity in providing support to students, families, and campus staff left me in awe. I wish I could have captured each story the interns shared in supervision, because they were each so breathtakingly powerful.

In a decade of serving over 50 campuses and district programs, the CCK Social Work Internship program was always asked to return the next year — always. The services the social work interns provided were universally recognized by administrators, counselors, teachers and families as supportive of the students’ educational success. And that was a marker of success for me, something I’m extremely proud of; we helped students achieve educational goals.”

Today the program is run by Sarah McCafferty, LCSW-S, a full-time licensed clinical social worker with supervisory status. Ms. McCafferty has taught nine courses at University of Texas and uses her background in social work curriculum to understand what student interns need to be learning, and how it translates into the field for their practicum training. McCafferty notes that public schools are a particularly excellent setting, as they allow for a systems approach to well-coordinated care for children and their families.



**SARAH MCCAFFERTY, LCSW-S**

“I love school-based work. It really provides an opportunity for us to see all kids, as opposed to a therapy or clinical setting.”



**SUPERVISE 8-10  
INTERNS**

**6000  
HOURS**

**1-2-1 COUNSELING &  
STUDENT REFERRALS**

By pairing the needs of graduate students to gain hours of valuable field experience with CapCityKids' funding and resources, one social worker can be employed to supervise 8-10 social work interns, who then provide approximately 6,000 hours of one-on-one counseling and student referrals per year.

The interns effectively multiply social work services within AISD, as they increase the amount of long-term support services available to students and families. The interns provide more consistency in the students' lives in terms of allowing them to see the same person over multiple sessions that occur at regular intervals. In addition, CapCityKids staff can often match identified needs to existing community or government resources that may otherwise not be known or available to these children.

CapCityKids was founded by Amherst Holdings and is fully funded by the firm's partners and employees through general donations. They provide stipends for the program supervisor; as well as a \$2,500 in tuition stipends annually for each social work intern. As of January 2024, students are also eligible for up to \$3,500 in additional funds through work study – the program is unique in that work study is traditionally only available to on-campus jobs; but the school of social work has partnered with the financial aid office to make the funds available for the students' off-campus work in AISD.



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### III. Program Curriculum

University of Texas at Austin students are placed in the internship as “CapCityKids Scholars”; students don’t have the ability to request specific placements, but it is a very popular program, and one of the most sought after, according to university administrators.

The curriculum for the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program at the University of Texas at Austin offers two internship tracks:

- **FIRST FIELD:**

First field students are brand new to the program, and the internship is their first practicum. These students are concurrently earning their Master of Social Work degree, and the internship runs the length of an entire school year, part-time, for two days a week.

- **FINAL FIELD:**

The second track is offered for students who have already completed all their schooling and their first field. For students on this track, they are in their last semester of the program, only taking one course that aligns with the field. Occasionally, final fielders will co-facilitate groups with first fielders, giving them an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and partner with other students.

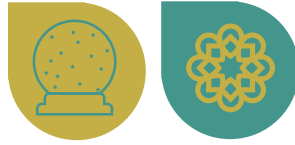
More rarely, there is a third type of intern for the final field through the Macro Social Work program. This student is not focused on clinical aspects of social work and instead centers their focus of study on program design, program evaluation and partnerships.

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SARAH MCCAFFERTY, LCSW-S

“We are known and highlighted as a placement that gives very solid support, strong supervision, a lot of training and orientation, and really try to make it feel like a community, or a home.”





Student interns work with children in distress who are recommended through direct referral to Ms. McCafferty via school counselors. Each campus within AISD runs a Child Study Team that meets weekly or bi-weekly to discuss which students are struggling, and what resources they have or need access to.

Upon admittance to the program, student interns serve 1-3 separate campuses, depending on the needs of the district and the internship track of the student intern (i.e., sending a student to an economically disadvantaged campus and pairing that experience with a middle school).

A student intern meets with a child weekly for one-on-one meetings, with sessions running 30 minutes long for younger elementary school children and 45 minutes to an hour for middle-to-high school students. McCafferty notes that **“play is the language of kids”** – and to support that, the program provides student interns with items and training.

As a cohort, student interns meet every other Friday and do group supervision or special training, which strengthens their experience in the program and relationships with fellow interns. Interns will also lead issue-based groups that are identified by the campus as a need, which attracts students together who are experiencing similar life traumas/issues (i.e., a Self-Esteem group).

## PLAY IS THE LANGUAGE OF KIDS

– AND TO SUPPORT THAT, THE PROGRAM PROVIDES STUDENT INTERNS WITH ITEMS AND TRAINING INCLUDING:

- Portable sand trays for therapy usage

- Wide range of tools for art therapy (i.e., glitter jars, which children make as a mindfulness exercise. Children place glitter in a jar filled with water, noting that as the glitter falls, it slowly settles down, just like your nervous system).

- Books

- Puppets

- Sports equipment (soccer balls, frisbees, etc.)

- Eco therapy

- Play and rhythm modalities (that ground the nervous system)

- Older students generally prefer to color mandalas, use fidgets, beading, or make friendship bracelets in groups.

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## PROGRAM ORGANIZATION DYNAMICS

Sarah McCafferty is the Administrative Supervisor for Social Work Support Services, and she oversees a social work intern specialist.

Student interns meet weekly with their direct supervisor for a minimum of an hour, and bi-weekly for group supervision with all interns, alongside both Ms. McCafferty and the social work intern specialist. Sessions with students are typically held on a weekly basis, but can vary in frequency based on needs (i.e., on occasion, interns may meet individually with a student and also observe them in group; sometimes sessions are twice a week, or every other week for a period of time).

Both Ms. McCafferty and the social work intern specialist are AISD employees, but 100% of the social work intern specialist's position is funded by CapCityKids, as well as a portion of Ms. McCafferty's position.

Their Direct Supervisor observes the student interns and determines the following:

- How well are they acclimated to their environment?
- How well are they connecting to the students?
- How well are they engaging on campus and with the parents/students?



## COMMON ISSUES AMONG DISTRESSED YOUTHS INCLUDE:

- Changing families (i.e., divorce)
- Tough transitions
- Self-esteem
- Impacts of COVID-19
- Coping skills
- Impact of poverty
- Housing instability
- Immigration trauma
- SI/NSSI: Suicidal Ideation; Nonsuicidal Self-Injury
- Academic issues
- Social Media
- Helicopter parenting (i.e., perfectionism, fears of failure)
- Drugs and alcohol, vaping
- LGBTQIA+
- School avoidance
- ELL (English Language Learners)



#### IV. Student Intern Spotlight: CAROLINE CRAWFORD

Ms. Crawford was delighted to be part of the third intern cohort for the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program in 2011. While a graduate student at the University of Texas for Clinical Social Work, Ms. Crawford was placed with CapCityKids, where she worked as a student intern with elementary and middle school children.

Caroline Crawford



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“My experience in the program is evidence for the belief I have that people want to be seen and heard. We aren’t going to fix everything in a day. But what are the ripples we’re making?”

During her time in the program, CapCityKids comped tickets for the intern cohort to attend a costly Social Work Conference in Texas. At the conference, Joslyn Dobson of CapCityKids asked the interns **“how can we continue to learn about your experiences working with this program this year.?”** – and Ms. Crawford replied, **“you can buy us dinner!”**

Ever since, the CapCityKids School of Social Work Internship Program has held an annual dinner for its interns, which has become a treasured tradition where students share stories, what they’ve learned, and how the program has impacted their lives.

Through the internship, Ms. Crawford gained valuable insight into the roles that negotiation and conflict resolution played in social work, and she learned about some of the lesser-known opportunities in the field that helped shape her eventual career path. The program helped her **“reframe social work,”** and she identified a niche in business that examines how the aspects of leadership, management, communication, and other critical skills impact systems.

Today, she is the founder of Caroline Crawford Consulting, where she serves clients through one-on-one coaching, professional development, corporate retreats, and team building workshops, notably working with local organizations like Young Women’s Alliance, Women Communicators of Austin and worldwide companies like Salesforce and Tableau.

Leaning into her longtime passion for helping girls, Ms. Crawford previously worked as the Chief Program Officer at The Girls Empowerment Network, where she led a team of 14 women and grew program operations to reach an additional 300+ girls in the Houston area. She has also worked as a Professional Coach and a Camp Director.

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“Social work is about acknowledging the intersection of systems in our lives, how those systems affect us, how we feel empowered or educated through those systems, and how to connect those systems to other resources.”



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## V. Student Intern Spotlight: JULIA GIBSON

There have been a number of powerful relationships and stories of incredible resilience from this past semester of interning through CapCityKids. I think one of my greatest successes came from my work with a student at Austin High School who was experiencing frequent dysregulation, family conflict, and housing instability. Halfway through my work with [this student], her mother [indicated] that she wished to relinquish parental rights. [The morning before doing this], her mother had [the student] pack up her belongings and return her key; and she told her that she needed to find somewhere else to live. [The student] showed up to school with three different bags that had been hurriedly packed and without a phone, important documents, and other basic necessities. I was able to coordinate with my supervisor at CapCityKids, who provided guidance on what services [could help the student] and how to navigate the various agencies and systems that would inevitably become a part of [her] life. We linked [her] with Project HELP to ensure school stability and vital resources; and LifeWorks Youth Diversion Program to help secure a safe and stable living environment. We advocated for [the student] at a CPS family team meeting and created a relationship with [her] current guardian to try to ensure her safety, housing stability, and overall well-being. Over the course of the semester, I was able to see a positive change in [the student], as she moved from a living situation marked by instability and unpredictability to a new and more stable home life. In spite of the very painful circumstances surrounding her housing change, [she] began to find meaning in the loss of her former home and relationship and reflect on the ways that she wanted her life and relationships to look.



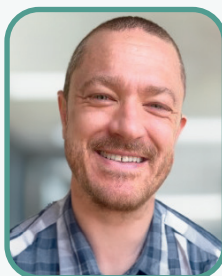
## VI. Professor Spotlight: PATRICK LLOYD, LMSW, Clinical Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin



### PATRICK LLOYD, LMSW

“I served with CCK as an intern and received excellent, compassionate supervision. In more recent years, as UTSHS faculty member, I have observed that same thoughtful, consistent supervision being offered to my students placed with CCK.

The quality of supervision across years and multiple staff members is uncommon. When I place a student intern with CCK, I know that they will have a rich learning experience with considerable structure and support.”



### VIA PATRICK LLOYD, LMSW, CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

“We met a young elementary school boy who recently immigrated from Central America to Austin. This school was primarily a Spanish-speaking school, but the young boy was non-verbal, so he was having trouble communicating, and was falling behind in school. A UT CCK intern was assigned to work with him.

After not being able to get through to the child, she reached out to his father. She learned that they were from a part of Central America that spoke an indigenous language. The father knew very little Spanish, but he was able to explain this to the UT intern. The CCK intern was the first person at the school who had taken the time to dig deep enough to figure out how to help this child.

The intern took it upon herself to look up the language and learn some basics. At their next meeting, she was able to greet the little boy in his own language. The child was amazed and so happy, he started talking non-stop to the intern. The intern and the school have been able to bridge the language barrier for this child and he is now thriving in school.

As you can see, most importantly, our programs strive to improve access to basic elements of day-to-day life that children in underserved communities need the most. Through our relationships with homeless school liaisons, we try to address unique situations like this as they arise.”





## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT/REPLICATION

### KEY AREAS TO CONSIDER FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM KATE AMERSON, LCSW-S

- **Understand the role of the intern.** Interns are an enhancement to mental health support; they are not a replacement for staff. It is crucial to understand their capacity and limitations, and to remember that they are still learning. Supervisors should check in with their interns in a private space so that they're able to discuss confidential information as well as process the emotional impact this work has on them.
- **Work directly with student counselors** to ensure they understand their role as the on-site support staff when hosting an intern at their campus. When setting up the program, it can be effective to first meet with the counselor to explain what hosting an intern would require of them. If they want to proceed, you can then connect with the administrator or principal for their final approval.
- **Build relationships with agencies** that want to come into the schools and provide services. Many agencies are waiting on the sidelines; agencies don't know how to navigate the system, but with a counselor and an intern, it is a lot easier to create new partnerships. Whoever is heading the internship program should not just focus on interns or schools; they need to be linked out in the community with agencies, programs and ideally, they are networking, or they're a leader in the community, or linked with forums where they can bring the interns along to gain experience.



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-DEBRA AUSTRUM,  
AISD SCHOOL COUNSELOR

“Having a social work intern on our campus was a tremendous blessing, adding an additional layer of care and support in a year where many students desperately needed it.”



## CHEAT SHEET:

### REPLICATING THE CAPCITYKIDS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK INTERNSHIP PROGRAM REQUIRES:

- **Funding of \$130,000 from any variety of individuals, and/or interested parties**

In our framework, CapCityKids funds the entire internship program, which includes the employment of Sarah McCafferty, LCSW-S, and provides stipends for students and the resources necessary for operation.

- **Two school district employees to run the program**

Sarah McCafferty LCSW-S and the social work intern specialist, who are both employed by AISD, work together to manage the program, interns, and all its moving parts. The social work intern specialist's employment is 100% funded by CapCityKids, as well as a portion of Ms. McCafferty's position.

- **Seasoned university administrator to oversee program operations**

Tanya Voss, MSSW, Clinical Professor and Assistant Dean for Global Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin's Steve Hicks School of Social Work, manages the program's partnership with the university, including working on programmatic pieces, student relations, and program alignment with AISD and CapCityKids.

- **Create a Program Development Toolkit**

As the program gets underway, it can be helpful to have ready-made templates to assist with onboarding and supporting the interns at their various schools. Recommended templates include: consent forms, referral processes, documentation, training; and orientations and evaluations, both for supervisors and for the interns.

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