

# spotlight on our students

**MANN CHILD POLICY EXTERN** **Kelly Kanya** A senior majoring in psychology and minoring in childhood studies, anthropology, and sociology, Kelly Kanya plans on pursuing a career in the field of social work. Kelly became interested in pursuing a Mann Child Policy Externship after taking the Child Policy courses offered through the Schubert Center for Child Studies. The class sparked her interest in policy, and she wanted to explore policy work through a hands-on learning experience. Kelly applied and was selected to complete a Mann Child Policy Externship in the summer of 2009. She was placed at the Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau, a social service agency where she was able to see the role that policy plays in the field of social work and learn about important policy issues affecting youth.



Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau ("Bellefaire") is a social service agency that aims to provide local children, youth, and families with access to a variety of services to help promote family health and well being. Kelly's externship focused primarily on the issue of underage drinking. Through her research, she learned about the many negative societal impacts and the policy issues surrounding underage drinking. As part of her externship, Kelly had the chance to work directly with youth as well as with practitioners and policy makers. She was given the opportunity to work on policy initiatives and engage in advocacy efforts which helped to bridge her understanding of policy and real life consequences. Kelly began her externship by working with high school students and by teaching them about policy and advocacy regarding underage drinking. As the externship progressed, she became involved with Bellefaire's initiative to amend Ohio's Social Host Law. Her work at Bellefaire allowed her to understand how underage drinking affects youth as well as the larger society, and to understand the role that policy can play in addressing this issue.

#### **POLICY RESEARCH: UNDERAGE DRINKING**

Underage drinking is a rising concern in our nation. A recent survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration ("SAMHSA") found that nearly half of the nation's high school students report drinking in the last month; this number is more than double what it was in the late 1990's.<sup>i</sup> Underage drinking has many negative consequences for our nation's youth. Alcohol is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile accidents, and in 60% of all teen suicides, sexual assaults, and date rapes.<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, drinking during adolescence can come at high health costs to youth. The adolescent brain is rapidly developing; excessive alcohol consumption can disrupt this development, and may even result in permanent brain damage. Underage drinking also has negative consequences to the larger society. For example, it has a large fiscal impact on our nation that often goes unnoticed by the public. Over \$53 billion is spent annually on addressing and fixing the consequences of underage drinking, which includes \$6 billion in medical costs, \$19 billion in automobile accidents involving underage drinking and \$29 billion in violent crime involving underage drinking.<sup>iii</sup>

Current legislation recognizes the consequences of underage drinking and the need to restrict adolescents' access to alcohol. Nevertheless, 50% of high school students are finding ways to circumvent these laws. One of the most common ways young people get around the law is through adults buying or supplying adolescents with alcohol. Nearly 40% of adolescents who drink report receiving alcohol from parents or other adults.<sup>iv</sup> Only a very small proportion of these adults are being prosecuted for contributing to underage drinking. In order to address this issue, many states have adopted some form of

'social host liability' legislation. Social host liability holds adults accountable for providing or allowing underage drinking to occur while under their supervision (provided that the adult is not a legal guardian of the underage person). Ohio has adopted its own Social Host Law as part of the Ohio Revised Code.<sup>v</sup>

#### **BRIDGING RESEARCH AND POLICY: OHIO'S SOCIAL HOST LAW**

Kelly's externship at Bellefaire allowed her to work on addressing this important policy issue in many ways. In 2000, Bellefaire founded the Social Advocates for Youth program ("SAY"), a drug and alcohol prevention program that targets high school students in eight local Cleveland school districts. As an extern, Kelly worked with the SAY program to bring a policy focus to the curriculum of a summer leadership camp hosted annually by SAY. Kelly's role at the camp was to teach students about how policy works, and how it can be used to address the issue of underage drinking. She worked with students to come up with their own ideas about how policy could be used to reduce the amount of underage drinking in their communities, and then developed a public service announcement that they presented to the camp and SAY staff. At the end of the camp, the students wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers voicing their ideas and advocating for the need to improve policy addressing the issue of underage drinking. Through this experience Kelly was able to work directly with youth affected by this important issue, teach them about the importance of policy, and motivate them to become personally involved. Kelly

found this experience very rewarding as she saw her students start to understand how policy can be used to address issues that impact them directly and become excited about making a difference in their own community through policy change.

Kelly also had the opportunity to work with practitioners and policy makers in an effort to amend Ohio's Social Host Law. Bellefaire is a member of the Coalition to Amend Ohio's Social Host Law ("CAOSHL"). CAOSHL was founded in 2008 with the goal of amending Ohio's current Social Host Law so that adults would be held to more strict standards under social host liability. Ohio's current Social Host Law states that "no adult shall know-

ingly allow any underage person to remain in or on the premises while consuming beer or intoxicating liquor..."<sup>1</sup> The amendment that the CAOSHL is advocating for would change the wording from "knowingly" to "known or should have known." This amendment would hold adults accountable in more situations involving underage drinking, and would also make it more difficult for adults to avoid legal prosecution under the claim that they did not know underage drinking was occurring.

As part of her externship, Kelly worked with the CAOSHL to raise awareness and gain support from local community leaders for this amendment. Kelly met with local mayors to inform them of the

magnitude of the issue of underage drinking, to describe the role of the coalition, and to seek their support for the proposed amendment to the Social Host Law. Through this process Kelly learned a great deal about the role of advocacy and the link between research and policy. In her work with the CAOSHL and meetings with the mayors she learned how to talk to policy makers about societal issues, and to present issues in ways that are important and relevant to the communities they represent. The externship experience enabled Kelly to see advocacy in action and witness how it contributes to policy change.

**BELLEFAIRE JCB** is a non-profit organization committed to providing exceptional care and advocacy to enhance the emotional, physical and intellectual well being of children, young adults, and families in the Jewish and general communities. **SOCIAL ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH** is a school-based alcohol and drug prevention and early intervention program operated by Bellefaire JCB and dedicated to creating a coalition of community representatives to strengthen families, youth and their communities.

Nancy Schaumburg, LISW-S, SAY Coalition Coordinator for Bellefaire, had this to say about working with our Mann Child Policy Extern: "It was wonderful having Kelly Kenya as an extern from the Schubert Center this summer. She contributed many ideas on underage drinking policy issues while planning the SAY Summer Leadership Institute for high school students. She was then able to implement her ideas with the students with great success. In addition, Kelly helped with the SAY program's efforts on working to amend the social host laws in Ohio. This was SAY's first year with a Schubert extern and we valued Kelly's presence as she helped lead us in new directions when it comes to policy issues. We therefore hope to continue our relationship with the Schubert Center to collaborate on these issues that promote and support healthy lifestyles for youth."

**Kelly's experience** as a Mann Child Policy Extern allowed her to take what she had learned in the classroom and use it in a setting closely related to her future career goals. She was able to use her skills in research, advocacy, and teaching to make a difference on a policy issue that greatly affects our youth and society as a whole. Kelly reflected on her experience: "I really enjoyed getting to work with a service-providing agency. It allowed me to see how policy affects the field of social work and how I can become involved with policy in my future career. I can now see that policy can be woven into all professions. Understanding how policy operates within your own field can open up many doors for implementing change."

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (November 2008). National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Underage Alcohol Use. (<http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/productDetails.aspx?ProductID=17959>)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2007). Results from the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. (<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k6NSDUH/2k6Results.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Ohio Revised Code section 4301.69 (B) (2008)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

**THE SCHUBERT CENTER FOR CHILD STUDIES** in the College of Arts and Sciences at Case Western Reserve University strives to bridge research, practice and policy and to promote educational initiatives across disciplines. Our focus is on children and childhood from infancy through adolescence and in local, national, international and global contexts.

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