

International Center for Trauma Education & Care

Developed by the Andrews University School of Social Work

[Campus News](#) | Posted on October 28, 2019



An Andrews student interacts with a child on a trauma education trip to Ethiopia. (Photo by Jasmin Wilson)

By: Andrews University School of Social Work

The Andrews University School of Social Work is pleased to announce the development of a new International Center for Trauma Education & Care. Working in conjunction with several other departments on campus, the Center's purpose is to provide education and tools to support healing from trauma in organizations, churches and communities around the world. "We are excited to expand our social work outreach to support long-term emotional healing and help restore people to God's image," says Curt VanderWaal, chair of the School of Social Work. "It's clear that there is an immense need within the church for this type of ministry."

Additionally, a more immediate interdisciplinary response team, the Post-Disaster Mental Health Team, has also been created. "Post-disaster" is defined as at least 72 hours after disaster when there is some stabilization to up to one year after the crisis event. This team will provide emotional support by trained individuals, psychoeducation on trauma, and connections to further local resources.

Trauma is at epidemic levels in many parts of society and the world. Although many think of trauma only in the context of war and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, it can also be experienced through natural disasters, accidents, illness, divorce, forced immigration and violence of all kinds. When an individual endures something that he or she perceives as physically or emotionally threatening, the person often experiences overwhelming feelings of stress, fear and vulnerability which continue to plague them long after the end of the event. Individuals and even whole communities can be crippled by previous or ongoing traumatizing circumstances. Long-term effects of trauma can include mental and physical illness such as substance abuse, depression, strokes and heart disease. “The consequences of trauma are often devastating and long-lasting. Children are especially vulnerable to its life-altering effects and interventions are needed to help begin the healing process,” says Ingrid Weiss Slikkers, director of the newly-created Center.

The Center’s main goal is to help facilitate long-term healing from trauma. For the last few years, faculty, students and alumni from the School of Social Work have been traveling both domestically and abroad to educate communities about trauma resiliency and restoration. These groups have worked with local, state and international educators, ministers, students, refugees, orphans, and children and adults of all ages. In addition to providing trainings in churches and schools in the U.S. including to the Navajo Nation, faculty and students have made trauma education trips to Thailand, Puerto Rico, Ethiopia and Cambodia.

“These trips have been life-changing for me,” says Katelyn Campbell, an MSW/MDiv student who recently returned from a trip to both Ethiopia and Cambodia. “People are so grateful to receive practical tools for emotional healing—you can see these amazing changes right in front of you!”

Alina Baltazar, director of the MSW program, adds, “I feel like God has really been able to use us to help begin the emotional healing process for people who have been so traumatized by violence and disasters.”

With the formation of the Center this August, even more opportunities for education and healing are emerging including partnerships with other departments on campus. Local schools and churches have made requests for training, and students are becoming involved in hands-on educational experiences by assisting in the planning and delivery of these training sessions. “I’ve been amazed at how quickly people are able to use the trauma training tools to address really deep issues,” says Jasmin Wilson, a recent graduate who has participated in several of the international trips.

In addition to possible trips in the next few years, and continued local endeavors, the Center is working to develop trauma training certificates. These culturally-sensitive, research-based and spiritually-informed workshops will allow participants to receive the training needed to offer trauma healing activities in their own communities.

“We hope to begin offering workshops to church leaders or members who attend the General Conference session in Indianapolis next summer,” says Weiss Slikkers. “Having a GC Session so close really allows us to reach out to church leaders from around the world.”

Other upcoming projects include the creation of a full range of training videos which can be streamed online for personal, congregational or corporate development. Plans are also underway to conduct trauma-based research in order to better understand the needs of the church.

God has been blessing the efforts of the Center even before its official creation. Looking forward, it is clear He already has more blessings in store.