STEPs’ mission is to provide participatory, utilization-focused evaluation for organizations serving children, youth, and families in poverty.
What a joy and privilege to be at UNO, housed in the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, and partnering with nonprofit organizations to alleviate poverty. We cherish the opportunity to provide program evaluation to organizations by informing their decision-making, documenting their impact, and telling their story.

Our participatory approach is grounded in communication and collaboration with our community partners. We explore with them their information needs and offer support and tools of our trade like logic models, theories of change, mixed methods research approaches, and systems mapping. We are out in the community often: meeting with program staff, interviewing children and parents, surveying stakeholders, observing services, and presenting to boards. Our utilization-focused approach spurs us to initiate projects and conversations that promote evaluative thinking in organizations.

We are fortunate to have an amazing team of faculty, graduate students, and alumni who dedicate their skills and knowledge to program evaluation and community engagement.

We look forward to another great year of program evaluation and community engagement!

Jeanette Harder, PhD, Project Director
Pam Ashley, M.Ed., Program Evaluator
**STEPS’ Team Members (2014-2015)**

Other contributors: Dean John Bartle, Adam Thurley, Kym Caddell, Amy West, Jaimie O’Gara.

New Faculty Affiliates: Jodi McQuillen, Christopher Goodman.

Jeanette Harder, PhD
Professor, Grace Abbott School of Social Work
Project Director

Pam Ashley, M.Ed.
Program Evaluator

Jon Stanton, B.A.
Bookkeeper/Office Manager

Emily Nguyen, MSW-MPA
Program Evaluator

Pam Ashley, M.Ed.
Program Evaluator

Jon Stanton, B.A.
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Christian Bratiotis, PhD & Jieru Bai, PhD
Grace Abbott School of Social Work
Faculty Affiliates

GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Jessica VanVuren
MSW student

Andrea Bradley
MSW/MPH student

Samantha Weiss
MSW-MPA student

Jennifer Sedivy
MSW student

Amy Wattier
MSW student
EDUCATION
Avenue Scholars Foundation
Children's Scholarship Fund of Omaha
GOALS Center
Phoenix Academy
SummerWorks

CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE
“Better Together” with Heartland Family Service
Financial Success Program (United Way)
“Nebraska Adoption Project” with Nebraska Families Collaborative
Nebraska CASA Association
Nebraska Children’s Home Society

FUNDING AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS
Omaha Community Foundation
Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare
“The evaluators did **exactly** what we asked. We then discovered how **we wanted** to change what we evaluated. We look forward to working with the evaluators in this realm.” ~Phoenix Academy

“The STEPs team did a wonderful job engaging a new agency into a program evaluation process. The STEPs team is very engaging and easy to work with. They often went above and beyond and were able to explain complex topics to the agency staff who had less knowledge in the area of program evaluation. They made the program evaluation process easy and comfortable.” ~GOALS Center

“It has been great working with STEPs over the last year. The staff are knowledgeable about program evaluation and are helpful in addressing our program's needs and timeline. STEPs' program is a critical/essential component to our work and driving the ROI information for investors and partnerships.” ~SummerWorks

“There is an effective working relationship. I do not hesitate to contact them with ideas, suggestions, concerns, etc. I have seen that they do listen to us through the results of their work.” ~Nebraska CASA Association
Accomplishments

In 2014-2015, STEPs completed more reports and made more presentations to our community partners and in the community than even we can count!

Evaluating two federal grants: (U.S., Administration of Children, Youth and Families):
- “Better Together” with Heartland Family Service
- “Nebraska Adoption Project” with Nebraska Families Collaborative

Completed a program evaluation needs assessment for smaller nonprofits in north and south Omaha—now following up with information and training sessions.

Judges’ Perceptions of the Nebraska CASA Program

Amy C. West - Jamie L. O’Gara - Jeanette Harder

Abstract: This article discusses judges’ perceptions of court appointed special advocates (CASA) programs in the rural state of Nebraska, as reported in two online surveys. The goal of CASA is “to train and support volunteers in advocating for safe and permanent homes for abused and neglected children” (CASA for Children 2013). One survey investigated the opinions of judges providing in Nebraska counties that did not yet have a local CASA program, another was administered to judges in counties that did have a CASA program. A total of 96 judges completed a survey. Data from both surveys were analyzed separately and then compared to provide information regarding judges’ satisfaction with local programs and general perceptions of the Nebraska CASA Association. Results offer vital information for program growth and contain a hopeful tone for the Nebraska CASA programs seeking similar information to guide program growth in other states.

Keywords: Judges - Advocacy - Volunteers - Child welfare - Foster children - Rural

Introduction: Children are among the most vulnerable members of society, particularly children who have been removed from their primary caregivers as a result of abuse and/or neglect. According to a report of the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, 676,810 children were reported to be victims of child abuse and neglect in federal fiscal year 2014.

Presentations:
- American Evaluation Association
- UNO Research & Creative Activity Fair
- CASA conferences (national and state)
- EN4MRB (regional program evaluation)
- Nebraska Legislature’s Planning Committee
We measure success through the accomplishment of our mission. We seek to provide organizations with the evidence to improve services to their clients and to tell the story to their stakeholders and funders.

We are pleased to contribute to UNO’s strategic goal of being community engaged. We value the involvement of our Faculty Affiliates, Graduate Research Assistants (graduate students), and other staff.

**STEPs’ Expenditures (2014-2015)**

- Subject Compensation: $1,746
- Technology/Supplies: $7,018
- Travel and Conferences: $9,970
- Benefits: $13,265
- F&A/Indirect: $35,215
- Staff Wages: $43,839
- Faculty Support: $55,291
- Student Wages: $57,239