

# News

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## **UIS partners with Illinois DCFS to launch Child Protection Training Academy**

SPRINGFIELD – The University of Illinois Springfield Center for State Policy & Leadership has partnered with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to launch a Child Protection Training Academy.

The academy has already trained nearly 130 new DCFS investigators utilizing the Residential Simulation Lab and the mock courtroom on the UIS campus. The academy will soon expand to include new curricula for supervisors, multidisciplinary team members and a training partnership with the SIU School of Medicine.

“Investigators are faced with some of the most complex cases in child maltreatment with a constantly changing landscape,” said Susan Evans, the new director of the Child Protection Training Academy. “Training is critical and the investigators who have completed this new simulation training have overwhelmingly expressed a desire for additional hours in the simulation labs, practicing the skills they will need to be confident and competent in the field.”

Evans is a 24-year veteran of DCFS and spent 14 years in the field as a Child Protective Investigator and 10 years in the Office of Professional Development, training new staff and developing curricula.

The Child Protection Training Academy was created by the Illinois General Assembly on August 11, 2015 through Public Act 99-0348.

“This is an exciting step forward in the ability to train our employees, specifically in child protection investigations,” said Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Director George H. Sheldon. “Through this partnership with the University of

Illinois Springfield, we've made significant progress in reaching the goal of revising the Child Protection Foundation training. The lives of children depend on us, and resources like this training academy will help improve the overall quality of our investigations and better serve the most vulnerable.”

In addition to the partnership with DCFS, the academy has been awarded two new grants. The first grant was developed in partnership with the University of Missouri St. Louis and Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center. Awarded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) the 5-year, \$316,319 grant will support Project FORECAST (Foundations for Outreach through Experiential Child Advocacy Studies Training), which focuses on incorporating the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress Core Concepts within Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) curricula in universities across the United States.

The second grant was awarded by the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts. The Court Improvement Project funding will support a pilot project that brings together Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocates, DCFS Caseworkers and Assistant State's Attorneys to train together utilizing mock courtrooms in three locations, including UIS.

In addition to training professionals in the field, the Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program at UIS provides experiential learning for students in a number of academic programs. The CAST certificate is offered online and on-ground and is an interdepartmental curriculum for students in public administration, social work, psychology, legal studies, criminal justice and teacher education.

“The CAST program provides critical course content and experiential learning for students who are interested in careers where they will likely interact with at-risk children and families” said Betsy Goulet, UIS clinical assistant professor and CAST Coordinator.

For more information on the Child Protection Training Academy or the CAST Certificate Program, contact Betsy Goulet at 217/206-8523 or [bgoul2@uis.edu](mailto:bgoul2@uis.edu).

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