

Margaret Stevenson, Section Membership Chair, interviewed Bette Bottoms in August 2011. Bette was the Section President 2001-2002.

Who were the individuals leading the initiative to start a Section on child maltreatment? Why did they think the Section was needed and give me your own thoughts on why the Section was needed?

Georgi Achilles, Sandra Barrueco, and I recently summarized the founding of the Section in a chapter about the history of Division 37. We noted that the Section arose from discussions in the 1990s amidst a climate of nationwide distress over escalating rates of child abuse. Diane Willis directed the APA's Coordinating Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect to pioneer three working groups focused on child abuse issues: prevention and treatment, the legal system, and education and training. The conclusion was that APA needed an organization with the goal of championing child abuse issues exclusively. Willis took the idea to the Division 37 executive committee and President Jan Culbertson, and in 1994, the Section on Child Maltreatment was established. As Chair of the new Section, Willis wrote its original bylaws and led a Coordinating Committee of devoted child advocates including Barbara Boat, Barbara Bonner, Jan Culbertson, Dennis Drotar, Jeff Haugaard, Karen Saywitz, and Cynthia Schellenbach. The first President, Jeffrey Haugaard, further developed the bylaws and appointed an Advisory Board of 20 widely known researchers, clinicians, and advocates in child maltreatment. Subsequent Section Presidents were Gail S. Goodman, me, Tom Lyon, Sharon Portwood, Anthony Mannarino, Cindy Miller-Perrin, and our current president, Mary Haskett. Of course, even this list omits many other psychologists whose work helped lay the foundation for the study of child maltreatment and therefore for the Section on Child Maltreatment – apologies to all of them.

Do you feel this mission (below) is still relevant 15 years later?

SECTION MISSION: The purpose of the Section shall be to promote the general objectives of the American Psychological Association and the Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services to support and encourage the development of the scientific study of child maltreatment and of sound professional practice relevant to child maltreatment, to provide up-to-date information about maltreatment, to encourage networking across divisions and sections in the area of child maltreatment, and to advance scientific inquiry, training, and professional practice in the area of child maltreatment as a means of promoting the well being, health, and mental health of children, youth, and families.

Yes, of course the mission is still relevant, and sadly enough, there will probably be no reason to revisit this mission statement any time soon. The Section is still the only dedicated home within APA to professionals who are primarily concerned with child maltreatment issues, and it is home to child maltreatment-related advocacy and public policy work within APA. Through the dissemination of information in publications and trainings, congressional briefings, and amicus briefs, Section members have heightened the national awareness of child maltreatment and the needs of victims in public, professional, and political domains. The Section should continue

to support quality research on these issues and to share this information, translating it into policy that serves the needs of maltreated children.

What are the current challenges related to child maltreatment that the Section should be addressing at this time?

I hope the Section continues to focus on obtaining the necessary resources (money and people) to conduct congressional hearings regularly, identify legal cases ripe for the application of psychological knowledge via amicus briefs, develop more educational curricula on topics related to child maltreatment, and develop and use advocacy training materials. I'll also comment on a challenge that the Section faced while I was President, and one that I believe it still faces: taking a stand against physical child discipline. My one great disappointment was that I walked out of the presidency having not been able to lead APA to pass a strong statement against physical punishment of children.

How has your own career developed and changed since you were President of the Section?

My career has changed a great deal in some ways, but not so much in others. I am still at the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of the most diverse and social-action-focused universities in the country, where I have been since I got my doctorate in 1992. I am still active in research, most recently being led by my wonderful graduate students to study issues relating to public perceptions of sexual offender registration laws applied to juvenile offenders. But I'm only a 25% time professor these days, with 38% of my time being spent as Dean of the Honors College (as is former Section President Jeff Haugaard at SUNY-Albany, coincidentally) and 37% of my time spent as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. (Yes, this does add up to more than 100% in practice.) I am a career researcher, a career child advocate, but I am also a career administrator, because I am impatient when faced with a problem. I want to solve it and move on, and I want to work with smart, interesting others while doing it. That's why I was a president of the Section on Child Maltreatment, and why I was a president of Division 37. These roles taught me extremely valuable leadership skills as well as the confidence to pursue other major academic leadership positions. And these roles gave me friends for life. So the Section really was my personal stepping stone to where I am today, in a job – jobs, that is – that I absolutely love.