

In the winter of 2010, Steven Behling, a member of the Section on Child Maltreatment, conducted an interview with Jeffrey Haugaard, Ph.D., the first President of the Section. The interview was conducted as part of a celebration of the Section's 15-year history. Below is a transcript of the interview.

STEVEN BEHLING: The first question I have is “who were the individuals within the initiative to start the Section on Child Maltreatment?”

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: I think that it was primarily Diane Willis and Barbara Bonner. They were both at the University of Oklahoma and had been actively involved in research, and a lot of training more than anything else, in the child maltreatment area. They were the ones working with the President of Division 37 at that point Denis Drotar, and they had come up with the idea for doing this.

STEVEN BEHLING: Why did they think the Section was needed?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Well, child maltreatment had become a newly developing field in many ways in the 1970's and maybe the early 1980's and it seemed as if society had decided that some things they knew were going on with kids in the past and maybe they weren't paying that much attention to that it was more problematic and we should start paying more attention to those things. There was more research being done, there were a number of books and training programs to inform therapists about how they should be treating children who had been involved in abusive situations. It was not clear that what they were doing was necessarily based on science. So I think that there was a concern that we start more of a concerted effort through the APA to develop a better scientific base and then a better way of bringing people to use that science in their treatment of children and families. I think it naturally went with Division 37. I think the women who organized this were very active in the Division so where they turned.

At that point there was no division focused on child or adolescent or pediatric issues. Everything clinical was done in that one big division [Division 12] and so they thought this was the time to get some things started. To try to get the scientific base organized and get people organized around trying to promote those things. There was a question at the time about whether it would be best to try to have a Division focused on child maltreatment and the thinking was that if that were to happen, everybody would say well “the child maltreatment stuff is over there” and that if child maltreatment issues were to be a focus of several different Divisions (like the Clinical division at that point, Independent Practice division) would promote a focus on child maltreatment *across the organization*. There was concern that if we just had *a* division, everybody would say “that's those folks, that's not us”.

STEVEN BEHLING: So even though the Section was located within Division 37, the thought was that the reach of the Section could extend beyond that one division into the others that were also focusing on this population?”

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: That's right. We would try to encourage other folks either through some kind of joint work together – or, I don't know what else – that we would try to encourage other folks to be concerned about that [child maltreatment] as well.

STEVEN BEHLING: It sounds like the Section was very needed then at the time, considering how things were being done in terms of practice. I'm going to read to you the mission of the Section as developed 15 years ago and I want you to think about whether the mission is still relevant 15 years later. [Steven reads mission] Do you feel like that mission is still relevant today?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Sure. Absolutely. ... since I'm not focused that much on this area anymore, I'm not sure where the research is these days. Whether we have continued to progress or whether we've continued to do the same thing year after year and really trying to fine-tune what we know about various types of maltreatment and the wide range of responses to children, and what might be associated with individual responses children and families might have. But my guess is that we haven't finished with that yet. Probably not. The other piece about training professionals I think remains important because there are new professionals coming into the profession all the time and they need to have more of a sense throughout their training about the importance of child maltreatment issues in people's lives. And it can't be just child clinicians because what we know is that almost all abused children grow up to be adults and some of them end up seeking therapy for various reasons. And people who are treating adults need to understand the long term consequences of maltreatment and how that can affect how people parent their own kids. And then helping to promote policies at the various county, state, and federal levels to address the issues, to help prevent child maltreatment and then to address the issues that occur when child maltreatment happens. I think all of that is still very relevant in our society these days.

STEVEN BEHLING: I would definitely agree. I'm working at a therapeutic preschool.... It still is influencing families.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Sure, Absolutely. And I guess the hope is that it is there less frequently than it was in the past now that we are more aware of it...but I'm not sure if that is even true.

STEVEN BEHLING: What were the critical issues in child maltreatment at the time you were president of the Section?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: So that was in 1985?

STEVEN BEHLING: 1995

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: 1995. Oh my lord, I really am older than I thought! What were the critical issues that we were dealing with at that point? I think interestingly enough, there still a number of definitional issues that people were struggling with. Folks who started the research effort in the 60's and 70's had kind of said "this is what child maltreatment is", or the studies they had done had focused people's definition of what child maltreatment is. And I think we were still struggling a bit with that. Child maltreatment as it was defined then and probably still is now go across a wide range of behaviors. There are advantages to conceptualizing it that way in that all of these behaviors can be harmful to kids. There are disadvantages in that most of the kids experience more mild or moderate forms of abuse and a few experience more serious forms...the worry is that you are thinking that everybody is in this moderate range and you miss the kids who are experiencing much more severe forms and probably need more

intervention and you may be intervening inappropriately in a case of kids who have experienced what we might consider much more mild forms of maltreatment. And so I think we were still struggling with that. And the physical maltreatment...is it ok to spank young children? I'm not sure that we have ever resolved that, for example. I think we were still dealing with a lot of that. I know that I was on a panel, through one of the institutes of NIH, where they were trying to discuss whether or not we should keep the same definitions or whether we should be aiming for different definitions. One of the ideas we were talking about then was that maybe rather than dividing maltreatment as we had been doing into emotional, psychological, and physical and sexual, maybe it should be divided into mild, moderate, and severe and include all of those (sexual, physical, and emotional abuse) into each of those three categories. I'm not sure if that ever went anywhere but it was an interesting discussion because how you define things affects how you do your research and then how you conceptualize individual cases. So I think that we were struggling with that some. I think that within the APA organization we were struggling – and my sense is we're still struggling – to have children's issues become a more important part of what the organization focused on.

STEVEN BEHLING: Those are really critical issues that you just mentioned.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Yeah, ... I think there was a significant amount of treatment going on at the time, both preventive treatment and treatment for kids who had been abused, and there was concern about whether it was being done appropriately. As I noted before, there wasn't ...because the field was *suddenly* there...I mean that was the kind of interesting about it. Suddenly everybody became aware of all these abused kids and we needed to do something with them. And of course you know the science takes awhile to get going and so there were a number of prevention and treatment programs and concerns about their effectiveness... concerns about whether or not they might be causing more trouble than doing nothing. I think we've been more careful about developing those programs and modifying those programs as the scientific base is developed. But I think that was another significant concern at the time.

STEVEN BEHLING: Wow. Sounds like we've made some progress over the last 15 years but there's still more work to do.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Yeah, of course. You know?

STEVEN BEHLING: Like most things. So, I've asked about the critical issues. How did the Section address some of those issues? Please describe the early activities and success of the Section.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Well, we suddenly started from nowhere and we had gotten some funding from the Division. The Division was going to give us \$5,000 a year for each of the first three years of our existence, or something like that, to get us started in that regard. My things were...we need to get some members. I'm probably better at the organizational hum drum stuff than the "grand plan" stuff. So we need to get the word out to people and try to attract some members. And it's a constant issue. I was on the Board of not only the Section but also of the Division for a long time and it's a constant issue and people are still, I'm sure, concerned about that. The whole issue of deciding the dues that people would have...trying to organize some kind of a newsletter or publication was an important thing to do early on

so that the people who are members felt they were getting something out of the organization. That was always an important piece. Asking people to be on the executive committee or board. Trying to find people to fill those roles, with the assumption that some of them would continue on past the time that I was the President. When we started the Section, the President's term was for one year – I had started as the President Elect so the plan was that I would be there for the President Elect year and the President year and then elect someone else right away. Then, the decision was that the President ought to be there for two years, which kind of extended my tenure by a year and it meant that we didn't have to suddenly start looking for a president as soon as I became the President. So that was probably a good move. And then trying to get people involved. My basic belief is that in many organizations like this you get a small group of people who are involved. Who did I ask to get to be officers? Well, I asked people who I knew! But I thought it was important to get other people involved, and so sending out messages to the members saying "if you would like to be involved, let me know. Or if you have ideas about what we should be doing and you would like to be involved in that, let me know". And I think we had several initiatives during those first couple of years started by people I never would have met if they hadn't contacted me and said "I think that we could be doing this" or "I'm available for whatever, let me know". Cindy Perrin was one of those, who I think was the President maybe in the last year or two? And some other people whose names are slipping from my mind right now who helped with some of our early projects that may or may not still be going. What I wanted to do was let the Section provide opportunities for people who would like to get more involved in doing something on a national level to be able to do that. So in many ways I let that process drive what it was the Section was doing. I didn't come in so much with an agenda that I thought the Section *ought* to be doing. My piece was more "let's get the organization started. Let's figure out how you send out emails to people. Let's figure out how we're going to do a newsletter. How are we going to send that out?" And that's the kind of stuff my brain can wrap itself around. And then letting people suggest projects. We had something that was designed for undergraduates, I believe, that specified what graduate programs had training in child maltreatment. That was the idea of some folks out at Wyoming. That's an example of one of those projects that I would never have thought of but they thought it was an important thing to do and so we did it.

STEVEN BEHLING: It sounds like you were well suited for the task of putting the Section together and establishing it. All those things you mentioned are instrumental in starting something, but I don't know that everyone excels at those details.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Yeah, a little more mundane.

STEVEN BEHLING: Two more questions. How has the field changed? What are the current challenges related to child maltreatment that the Section should be addressing at this time?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: That I really don't know because I just have not been keeping up. My jobs in universities have changed over the years and so I'm not real sure what the current issues are.

STEVEN BEHLING: Well that is perfect because the next question gives you a chance to talk about what you have been doing. How has your career developed and changed since you were President?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Oh, in the last 15 years. Well what was I then? I was an Assistant Professor at Cornell University and involved in some child maltreatment work in my research. At that time my research was focused more on special-needs adoption kids and the adoption of older kids, many of whom, or most of whom, have been maltreated. So, my interest kind of moved in that direction. I had some small projects going with that and was doing my “professor bit” at Cornell and that seemed to be going fairly well. It just became more difficult to do the kinds of research I wanted to do in the small community of Ithaca, and the special needs adoption world changed fairly dramatically then. It used to be that you could never adopt kids who had been your foster children, and now the large percent of special-needs adoptions are done where somebody has been a foster child in the family and the parents later decide to adopt that child. And I was looking at family formation issues and it worked when you couldn’t adopt your own foster kids because suddenly there were these new kids in these new families and that was what I was interested in; when that changed I got out of that area.

Based on my interest in undergraduate education, I focused more on that. I started doing some research on stalking and other forms of dating violence, which was easier for me to do because I was surrounded by students (and not surrounded by so many adopted kids). I did that for a number of years and then became more steadily interested in the undergraduate education piece and found out that there were these things called “honors colleges” at various institutions, although none of the institutions I had attended or worked at had such a thing and I didn’t know they existed. Suddenly I found out that they existed and became interested in that and eventually got the job as the founding director of the honors college at SUNY Albany. And so I moved up here 5 years ago to start the honors college and have been working at that ever since.

STEVEN BEHLING: Sounds like an interesting path, and natural based on what was going on at the time.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Well, the nice thing about being a professor is that, once you get over that “tenure hump”, you really do have a fair amount of freedom to say “what’s important to me?” Right? The university is a big place and to say what’s important to me and how can I pursue that, so that’s kind of what I’ve done.

STEVEN BEHLING: That’s a good reminder to those that are currently on that tenure track. It’s coming...you get to choose soon!

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Yes, you only have to drive yourself crazy for 5 years and then it’s over.

STEVEN BEHLING: And we’ve already done that once in grad school so we can do it again.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Right.

STEVEN BEHLING: Is there anything else you think would be important for the Section to know in terms of its early years?

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: I do think there was a lot of work. The folks whose idea it was to do this – and it really was Barbara Bonner and Diane Willis – The field, the Section, APA owes a lot to them. It was kind of their brainchild and they pushed to have it happen. And then there were a number of people who got

involved in the Section very early on – some of them, like Cindy [Perrin-Miller], stayed involved *forever*. And the work that people did then – those little meetings we had back then – were very important to getting the Section started and to keeping it going. There are a number of people who got us off to a good start and I'm glad to see that we're still going.

STEVEN BEHLING: Thank you for talking to me this morning. I really appreciate it.

JEFFREY HAUGAARD: Thank you.