

Presidents and Pioneers: A Celebration of APSAC's 35th Anniversary, Volume II

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This is the second volume of the *Advisor's* special issue celebrating APSAC's 35th anniversary. If you haven't read the first one, stop reading and go to the editorial of the first volume, which explains our vision for and process of creating the special issue. Because we ourselves are busy people and don't always follow directions, we're going to assume that some of you who haven't read the first issue are going to keep reading. So we'll bring you up to speed in the next paragraph. For those of you who have already read the first issue, you can skip the next paragraph as there isn't anything new here.

We have created a two-volume special issue that highlights the history and future of APSAC, specifically, and the field of child maltreatment, broadly. We enlisted practitioners and new scholars to interview APSAC's presidents and pioneers in an effort to preserve history, make connections between those who built APSAC and those who will help continue APSAC's growth into the future, and introduce new voices to the *Advisor* and APSAC. Now you can skip the next paragraph which is directed to those who have read the first issue.

So, what did you think of the first volume? Of course, we are biased, but it was pretty amazing, wasn't it? We were excited with how it turned out. If you're reading this and you didn't read the first issue (and didn't follow the directions that we gave at the end of the previous paragraph), you can skip to the next paragraph. We loved reading about the connections and themes echoed across the various articles. Authors' reflections often highlighted similar insights. Different pioneers and presidents shared

events and mentioned one another. A story emerged from the articles that continues in this second volume.

Okay. Now everyone should be up to speed. (Although, if you haven't read the first volume of the special issue, seriously, PLEASE consider going back and reading it.) We hope you aren't confused by our jumping around a bit at the beginning. If you are, our apologies. We're not going to give any directions to skip paragraphs for the rest of this editorial. So, please keep reading.

As we set out to write this editorial, we wanted to be engaging, and we knew that not everyone was on the same page. When thinking about how to introduce the second volume, we settled on the approach of conversationally writing for two different groups (i.e., those who have read the first volume and those who have yet to read it) and directing the groups to read different paragraphs. We suspected that this innovation was not going to be enjoyed by some; it was a little quirky and not the normal editorial. Nevertheless, we tried something new.

Novelty and risk taking are characteristics that should be very familiar to APSAC members. Similarly, APSAC members understand that people are coming from different places (i.e., disciplines, stages of career, lived experiences) and have different levels of knowledge and skills. Innovation and the need to engage a diverse group of people also are recognized by APSAC members. Within our editorial as well as our approach to the special issue, we sought to be innovative, to bring people together, to build on our history, to enhance our collective

Presidents and Pioneers



knowledge, and to celebrate our diversity. As we look to the future of APSAC, we know that there is a lot of work to be done and that a solid foundation has been built by our past presidents and pioneers. Much of this is explored in the articles in this volume. We are quite excited to introduce this volume; however, first we want to share our interview with the immediate past president of APSAC, Stacie LeBlanc.



**Immediate Past President:
Stacie LeBlanc**

Stacie LeBlanc, JD, MEd, brought more than 25 years of experience in child advocacy to her tenure as APSAC’s past president. She is also Co-founder

and Executive Director of the UP Institute, which provides upstream interventions and strategies that are aimed at reducing childhood adversity and promoting resilience in children and families. In 2017, Ms. LeBlanc was instrumental in launching

the Child Advocacy Studies Training (CAST) program as Adjunct Professor at Tulane. She is also Founding Director of the New Orleans Children’s Advocacy Center, which provided the backdrop for much of our conversation about lessons learned and future directions for APSAC. She also serves on state and national boards, including the National Review Board for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Executive Committee of the National Initiative to End Corporal Punishment, and the Louisiana Alliance of Children’s Advocacy Centers (as founder and first president). In addition to her impressive array of experiences, she has received numerous recognitions and awards for her advocacy efforts, that include successful legislative amendments.

Despite these astounding accomplishments, Ms. LeBlanc was very down-to-earth during our conversation, which made the experience informative and quite enjoyable. This prompted me (Carlo) to ask how she manages to keep the steam going, stay motivated, and be able to maintain such a positive outlook given the difficulty in approaching

maltreatment prevention broadly, and the challenges of working in a state with different perspectives about abuse specifically. After a lighthearted response, she acknowledged the difficulties and challenges of working in the field of maltreatment prevention and child advocacy by saying, “It’s hard... it seems like every time you make a step forward, there’s a backlash...” She then stated that what keeps her going is seeing “the light at the end of the tunnel,” the results of preventive efforts such as reduction in juvenile incarceration rates, and the positive impact of upstream prevention efforts on communities. I would add that her use of humor and her affable personality are also impressive. As you will shortly see, a conversation about Ms. LeBlanc’s background and historical involvement with APSAC says a lot about how such a positive outlook has come about. More important, it was refreshing to hear her many self-reflections and the need to pivot along her professional journey, which propelled her to where she is now. Within the field of educational psychology, this process is referred to as *metacognitive monitoring*, during which individuals determine their progress toward a previously set goal, checking if the strategy or plan is working, detecting any potential challenges, and shifting as needed.

Professional Background

Ms. LeBlanc’s journey began as an undergraduate pre-med student gearing up for medical school. By her junior year, she had already taken many prerequisites, such as the MCAT, as well as courses in organic chemistry and microbiology. She had also begun an internship in a psychiatric facility to prepare herself for a specialization in child psychiatry. This internship experience was pivotal in her career choice, having seen the impact of psychiatric treatment non-compliance on abuse and neglect. She stated that it was “so compelling how many of these kids had been victims of crimes at the hands of their parents, and I truly left out of there, and decided I wanted to go to law school and become a prosecutor.” This was a defining moment for Ms. LeBlanc to switch from pre-med to law, where she began her chosen career path. For 10 years

post-law school, she was a successful prosecutor, having prosecuted parents at a 94% conviction rate. According to Ms. LeBlanc, “I loved it, but then I realized, I just didn’t have any children...who were happy about what I was able to do for them.” This was another moment of self-reflection for Ms. LeBlanc, realizing that she was “never going to prosecute her way” to solving this challenge. She realized that something else had to be done.

What Ms. LeBlanc noticed is that in her work as a prosecutor, so many professionals in the various disciplines involved with the cases worked in different silos. It was then that she subscribed to the idea of bringing in multiple disciplines to work in concert and pursued legislative changes in Louisiana to mandate Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) to engage in a multidisciplinary response. According to Ms. LeBlanc, multidisciplinary teams should be able to “understand everybody’s roles and their limitations” and prevent any misunderstandings between team members who come from varying disciplinary perspectives. This led her to APSAC, where she admired how the organization brought different disciplines together.

Early APSAC Involvement

Ms. LeBlanc recalled that her initial introduction to APSAC came from the time that she met Dr. Viola Vaughan-Eden. She and Dr. Vaughan-Eden had been paired up to present in San Diego, California, for a joint session. Ms. LeBlanc presented first a CAC case about prosecuting a mother and stepfather from a decades-old sexual abuse act given the availability of DNA evidence. She shared her reflections on the case with the audience, particularly about how she was “aggressively going after the mom” or telling the children that they would go to foster care. She soon realized that such an approach did not make sense and therefore began talking to experts across different disciplines and bringing research into practice by understanding the literature on the incongruencies in the emotional and behavioral responses of victims and alleged perpetrators. She discussed some of her missteps and how she

Presidents and Pioneers

approached the children during interrogations, reflecting on wanting to be instead part of the solution by reading even more empirical work that could better inform her practice at the CAC.

Dr. Vaughan-Eden came to present next and expressed that she was shocked to find out how much “this attorney” knew about the child welfare system. She then told the audience about Ms. LeBlanc, joking that she would not help Dr. Vaughan-Eden with her equipment as a rebuttal. It was during the conference social hour that Dr. Vaughan-Eden shared the value of Ms. LeBlanc’s presentation. Specifically, it is important to bring practitioners to the table so that research can be translated. Even though APSAC was heavily academic at that time, Dr. Vaughan-Eden recognized the importance of bringing in a partnership between research and practice. For nearly three years, she attempted to bring Ms. LeBlanc on as a board member of APSAC. She finally succeeded and since then, this dynamic duo has become good friends and worked together to publish multiple articles and open a company called UpStream Solutions. Ms. LeBlanc then shared that this is what the field needs—more opportunities for people across different disciplines and silos to work together.

Advice for APSAC Members

Recognizing that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to prevention and intervention efforts, Ms. LeBlanc reiterated the importance of working with different disciplines across research and practice settings and building authentic relationships. She outlined her experiences and how she came to learn the value of research and practice. If others have not attempted such a collaboration, it can be nerve wracking, but it is still an important step to take. She said that those in the field who are recognizing similar challenges across different points in their careers have to be brave enough talk with their colleagues. They should also ask peers how to improve and welcome constructive feedback to grow and develop professionally.



When working with practitioners in the field, we need to be able to shift away from just performance evaluations related to instrumental criteria such as time sheets, box-checking, invoices, and so on. Instead, we need to work together on developing relational skills, recognizing their value as critical when working in the field of maltreatment prevention. She said that, akin to her lessons from working with legislators, one should learn how to lobby and to advocate while not being insulting at the same time. Additionally, if you find yourself working with people who are actually doing harm, find a way to communicate directly—“be an upstander . . . speak out, and if not, go up and do what you’ve got to do.” She related that just like with her efforts to push for no hit zones against corporal punishment, you have to be brave enough to talk about the topic directly and not discuss euphemisms on punishment. You need to be direct about the developmental consequences of not doing so.

Vision for APSAC’s Future

Ms. LeBlanc stated that she would love to see APSAC grow in membership and to have more interdisciplinary representation that includes the faith leadership and education sectors. She believes that inclusion of faith leadership would be instrumental in Southern communities to bring prevention to these families. She also wants to see more diversity in leadership on the Board of APSAC and to have the Board represent the membership and the people that it serves. On this note, she expressed excitement about the role of APSAC’s Commission for Racial Justice in Child Maltreatment in calling out white supremacy and its impact on the field of child welfare. Ms. LeBlanc also wishes to see more disciplines recognize each other’s strengths and recognize the strength of the community members that we serve. In line with such recognition, she envisions a special day called “Champ’s Day,” when frontline workers in the field of maltreatment prevention and intervention would be recognized for the outstanding work they are doing. Given the high levels of stress and burnout in the field, such an

appreciation could help ensure that we recognize the contributions frontline practitioners undergo on a daily basis.

Reflections

We were fortunate enough to have two of us interview Ms. LeBlanc: Carlo Panlilio and Amanda Ferrara. I (Amanda), as an early career researcher, was particularly inspired by our conversation. At the time we interviewed Ms. LeBlanc, I was preparing to defend my dissertation. At that time, the experiences and thoughts Ms. LeBlanc shared with us left me with three big takeaways.

The first is that not all paths look the same, and there are many different roads that lead to the same destination. At the time, I was anxiously figuring out my next career move, worried about whether I was making the “right choice.” However, as you can probably tell from hearing Ms. LeBlanc’s career path, I was reminded that there is no one “right choice” when you remain passionate about pursuing work that positively impacts children and families. She described how her interests in maintaining and promoting the safety of children led from one experience to another, and it was difficult to not think that she had ended up exactly where she was meant to be. I’m not usually one that says something was fated or meant to be—I think life is made up of many more choices than that—but it did seem like she had ended up where the universe needed her most. And I think that maybe that is a takeaway we should all be reminded of by Ms. LeBlanc; while there is no one “right choice,” and we are often inundated with what seem high-stake decisions, when we remain passionate about a goal such as promoting the safety and wellness of others, we will not be disappointed. In fact, we may find that it does indeed feel like where we end up was meant to be.

My second takeaway from our conversation with Ms. LeBlanc is to continue to be a lifelong learner and be inspired for future endeavors by our past experiences. As a self-regulated learning scholar, I found it easy to see how Ms. LeBlanc has used

Presidents and Pioneers

reflection and metacognitive monitoring (i.e., the tracking of one's performance throughout a task) to propel her career. Specifically, she talked about the value of peer review and feedback, then changing your current practice upon learning of ground-breaking science. Soliciting peer review and feedback takes a great deal of humility and grace; further, incorporating others' suggestions requires introspection and a constant updating of your own practices. Similarly, changing your current practices when confronted with emerging research that contradicts what you have been doing requires not only the capacity for continued change and growth but also the constant seeking out of new knowledge. These are hallmarks of excellent self-regulated learners. We all would do well to follow in Ms. LeBlanc's footsteps in this regard.

My final takeaway is to collaborate with those who are available to you and excited to work alongside you—you never know who will turn out to be the most fruitful collaborators...just like the guest editors of this special issue! Specifically, Ms. LeBlanc shared how she has collaborated with Catholic bishops to promote child safety in the face of the Catholic church's child abuse scandals. She shared that she didn't anticipate this being one of her career paths, but to me, it seemed like one of the most fruitful and needed relationships that she discussed in our conversation. By keeping herself open to non-traditional collaborations, she was able to create a genuine, unexpected relationship benefitting Catholic children and families. Similar to remembering that there is no one "right path," there is no one right collaborator. Following Ms. LeBlanc's example, we can all remember that sometimes the most fruitful collaborations come in disguise.





Introduction to the Special Issue

Themes within Ms. LeBlanc’s interview align with many of articles in this volume of the special issue. Pioneers and presidents frequently discuss the choices that they made in their career, often that were based in wanting to make an impact and influenced by meeting people committed to addressing child maltreatment. The relationships among passionate people from multiple disciplines are mentioned in all of the articles. Many of the authors also discuss how pioneers and presidents bridged the worlds of research, policy, and practice and observe how this is something that the future leaders of APSAC need to continue.

Most introductions to a special issue are to introduce each article and make connections across them. We decided not to do this because we want each APSAC member to read the articles and see the special connections that resonate with them. After all, everyone’s journey and pathway through learning might be different! As editors, we quickly realized that it was nearly impossible to summarize so many themes and connections. Also, these articles are deeply personal, and it would be an injustice to summarize them in just a few sentences. Let us just say, therefore, that we hope you will delight in all of this special issue written about Dave Corwin, Viola Vaughan-Eden, John Myers, Randell Alexander, Diane DePanfilis, Joyce Thomas, Linda Williams, Sandra Alexander, Frank Vandervolt, and Barbara Bonner.

There is much to learn from the pioneers and presidents as well as the authors. We are excited to recognize the authors, who undoubtedly will build on the work of those who have founded and led APSAC: Nina Agrawal, Ellen M Chiocca, Megha Sardana, Naomi Rothenberg, Stacey L. Shipe, Carmella Miller, Kate Theimer, Bonnie Marsh, Maria Schweer-Collins, Charles Alvarado, Emily Bosk, Lili Falcon, Courtney A. Waid, and Leah Bartley. We imagine that 40 years from now, many of these authors will be interviewed for APSAC’s 75th anniversary special issue. We know that there are many people who are not included here yet who have contributed and will contribute in the future to APSAC and the field of child maltreatment. We indeed look forward to reading about their work over the years.

About the Editors of the Special Issue:

Carlo Panlilio, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education, and a faculty member with the Child Maltreatment Solutions Network at the Pennsylvania State University. He received his PhD in Human Development from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a specialization in Developmental Science and a Certificate in Education Measurement, Statistics, and Evaluation. He was a former Doris Duke Fellow for the Promotion of Child Well-being. His program of research focuses on the dynamic interplay between maltreatment, context, and development and how these processes influence individual differences in learning across the lifespan. His research is guided by an interdisciplinary approach to examine the multisystemic influences of early adversity on self-regulatory processes that explain variability in the academic outcomes of children with a history of maltreatment. He has published several journal articles and chapters and was editor of *Trauma-Informed Schools: Integrating Child Maltreatment Prevention, Detection, and Intervention*. He previously worked as a licensed clinical marriage and family therapist in private practice, community agencies, treatment foster care, and a residential treatment facility for adolescents.

Amanda M. Ferrara, PhD, is Multi-Modal Research Project Manager at the Survey Research Center at The Pennsylvania State University. She earned her PhD in educational psychology from The Pennsylvania State University, with a minor in applied statistics. Her program of research focuses on unpacking the effects of traumatic experiences and childhood maltreatment on individual and family well-being, self-regulation, and learning. Specifically, her prior work has focused on the effects of symptoms of trauma on students' self-regulated learning and metacognitive monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to decrease child maltreatment.

Lisa Schelbe, PhD, MSW, is Associate Professor at Florida State University College of Social Work and a Faculty Affiliate at the Florida Institute for Child Welfare. She serves as a Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. Her research focuses on young people transitioning out of foster care and services to assist with their transition out of care and into adulthood. She is a qualitative methodologist with experience working on interdisciplinary teams. She has published over 30 referred journal articles and co-authored two books: *The Handbook on Child Welfare Practice* (Springer, 2021) and *Intergenerational Transmission of Child Maltreatment* (Springer, 2017). Dr. Schelbe received her doctorate in social work from University of Pittsburgh, where she was a Doris Duke Fellow for the Promotion of Child Well-being.