Jen Barile, Program Director of the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC), was once an intern herself and invites current students to join their team. “One of the reasons I chose the practicum was that it gave me the ability to do direct care work with individuals and families and I was also able to learn about “macro” level, systems change social work (such as legislative advocacy).” We also encourage you to checkout intern Dale Nickelson’s recent Missoulian Interview.

What is the mission of the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC)? Is it a religious organization?

“To empower congregations and community organizations to work together, leveraging strengths to address community challenges.”

“Although our name is the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative, we are not a religious organization. We do work with faith communities in Missoula in order to help them mobilize to address community needs. Many times, we are working with faith communities, social service agencies, and people who have been personally affected by homelessness. It is a collaboration! If religion and faith is something important in your life, you can certainly incorporate that into your internship with us. If that is not something that is a focus for you, that is okay too!”

How do these collaborations work?

“MIC sometimes helps convene groups to work together, but not under the auspices of MIC. For example, a few years ago, the Department of Corrections approached MIC to see how they could involve the faith communities in working to reduce barriers for people returning from prison. (Many people with records struggle to find housing and employment.) With the help of
MIC, a coalition was formed called Partners for Reintegration (PFR). PFR is a coalition, supported by the City of Missoula, local agencies, faith congregations, service providers and community volunteers, including previously incarcerated individuals, working in partnership with the Department of Corrections to help returning citizens reintegrate from incarceration back into the Missoula community.

What is your role in this organization? What are some of the programs you work with?

“As program director, I manage two programs that address homelessness in the Missoula community. One program, the Homeless Advocate Network, provides volunteer advocates for people trying to get off the streets and into housing. Our Advocates meet weekly with program participants to help them set goals and connect them to housing and employment resources. I manage and supervise the Advocates, organizing monthly trainings for the Advocates, schedule orientations for new / incoming Advocates, and manage the program’s waiting list. I answer phone calls about the program, refer people to community resources, and decide if they are appropriate for this program. I also manage a steering committee, made up of “Advocate Leaders;” many of whom have direct, personal experience with homelessness, addiction or incarceration. I also supervise five practicum students and meet with them weekly.”

“The second program I manage is Family Promise of Missoula. Family Promise is a program where local congregations house and feed families that are struggling with homelessness. The families rotate to a different congregation each week. During the day, program participants can use the Family Promise Day Center in order to look for employment and housing. A typical day at Family Promise includes checking in with families, communicating with the "host" congregation, answering phone calls, putting families on our waiting list, and providing case management. I also provide training and guidance for our Family Promise volunteers.”

How does having UM student interns help fulfill the mission of MIC?

“How many hours are interns expected to work?

“Most of the interns we have come from the MSW program and are doing their practicum placement with MIC. MSW practicum students work 15 hours per week at MIC. Other interns work less. We are very flexible on how our interns obtain hours, as most of the work that our interns do is on their own time. There are no office hours, although interns are free to arrange this is they’d like. MIC interns work very independently.”

What is the work environment like for a student intern? What about training and supervision?

“This depends slightly on what the intern is doing at MIC. Many of our interns are Advocates and work weekly with people experiencing homelessness. This can sometimes be stressful for interns, as many times there are simply no housing options for homeless individuals and families. But we
work hard to provide a supportive environment for our interns. Each intern receives weekly supervision from me. In addition, we also offer group supervision twice a month, where Advocates can get together and talk about challenges that might come up for them. Most of our interns need to be comfortable working on their own or with another advocate. We like to stress that this is a “teaching-learning” environment, where interns have a lot to teach us as an organization; not just the other way around.”

Does your company provide other experiences for students, i.e., professional development trainings, research, civic engagement, or global experiences?

“Yes! Some of our interns recently went to Helena to testify in front of the Law & Justice Interim Committee in Helena. They spoke about the importance of housing options for people who have been incarcerated. Our Advocates not only provide direct assistance to people experiencing homelessness, but they are able to get involved with policy advocacy and community organizing to get at the root causes of homelessness. In May, we are providing a three-day Leadership Intensive course that will teach our interns and Advocates about mobilizing to create lasting change. We will discuss policy advocacy, community organizing, and general leadership skills. Many of our Advocates also do research on best practices around homelessness. For example, we have an Employment Team that is researching evidence-based practices that will help increase access to employment for the people we serve.”

Did you do an internship as a student? How did your own experiences as student shape your career?

“Yes! I, myself, was a practicum student with MIC from 2013-2014 while I was in the MSW program at UM. One of the reasons I chose the practicum was that it gave me the ability to do direct care work with individuals and families and I was also able to learn about “macro” level, systems change social work (such as legislative advocacy).”

Do you have any advice for students seeking internships or other experiences in Social Work?

“I would encourage students to seek out internships that give them a wide range of experiences, even if they already think they know what they’d like to focus on. A broader experience will make for a better social work practitioner.”

When and how do you advertise for interns? Are they paid opportunities?

“We advertise at the social work practicum fair at UM, as well as give presentations in classrooms at the University. For example, some of our Advocates recently gave presentations about doing a practicum with MIC in some of the BSW (Bachelor of Social Work) and LAC (Licensed Addiction Counselor) classes. We have approximately 5-7 interns at a time. We offer a limited amount of small stipends ($150/month) for interns that want to be Advocate Leaders.”
Are you only looking for Social Work students?

“We usually obtain interns from the social work department at UM (BSW, MSW…). We also take LAC students but we are open to taking students from other disciplines if they feel that an internship with MIC might be a good fit for them. There are no special qualifications, although interns wanting to be Advocates must complete an Advocate Volunteer Application. Because we work with folks that are in vulnerable situations, our Advocates must pass a criminal background check. If they have a criminal history or an addiction history, they do need to provide additional information that shows they are ready to take on the role of being an Advocate.”

Where can students get more information?

“Students can learn more about MIC at our website: http://www.micmt.org. They can also give me a call to chat further: (406) 529-4671. (This is the number for the Family Promise Day Center, where my office is located.)”