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IU Kokomo professor studies needs of victim advocates

KOKOMO, Ind. — Kelly Brown leads efforts to train people who work with crime victims, while demonstrating to her students what they can do with a degree in criminal justice.

Brown, associate professor of criminal justice at Indiana University Kokomo, studies people who work in victim advocacy, to find out who they are, what attracts them to that work, what they do, how the stress of the job impacts them personally, and what can be done to help them handle that stress.

"We want to see if we can identify ways to make their jobs easier, so we can help them do this work at a more effective level," she said.

She involves students in her research, connecting them with law enforcement officials, victim's advocates, and people who have been victims of sexual assault, giving them an inside look at potential careers in criminal justice.

"They meet the people working in the trenches, and see first hand how criminal justice works in the real world," she said. "These people do amazing things. They help people who have been victims of horrific crimes cope with what happened to them. This allows students to see how we in the academic world can use our research and our knowledge to make the world a better place."

Participating in research with Brown prepared recent criminal justice graduate Michelle Lynch for the emotional toll her new job, as a case manager for the Indiana Department of Child Services, may take on her.

Before her first day, Lynch, from Upland, called a meeting with her husband, children, and some friends, to tell them how they could support her in her new career.

“I knew because of the opportunity to research with Dr. Brown that I was going to need a few shoulders to cry on at home,” she said. “I don’t think I would have been in tune with those needs without that experience. She is just awesome.”

Lynch and Brown presented their research at a criminology conference in Atlanta in November 2013, and having that on her resumé made her stand out from other candidates in her job search, Lynch said.

“When I had my interview with the Department of Child Services, that was one thing they wanted more information about,” she said. “I seriously believe this experience made me more marketable.”

Brown also works with the Indiana Coalition Against Sexual Assault to train agency leaders statewide to evaluate their programs for effectiveness. They must demonstrate having positive impact as a condition of receiving funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

“It’s one thing to raise awareness of sexual assault,” Brown said. “It’s another to change behavior. I give them tools to demonstrate their value to people outside their programs, to show they are making inroads in reducing incidents of sexual assault.”

She said many people think criminal justice majors all want to be police officers, but that is not the case.

“Most of them want to help in some way,” she said. “This is one way I can show them how to do that in the real world. This helps them understand how what they can do can make a difference in the world.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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