

# The Progress Note

January 2026

## Alumni Spotlight



Amber Alberts is a proud alumna of Westmoreland County Community College (WCCC), where she earned two associate degrees in Small Business Management (2011) and Social Work (2021), before completing her bachelor's degree in social work at Millersville University in 2024. Community college was a perfect fit for Amber, providing flexibility, affordability, and strong academic support while allowing her to balance full-time work, life responsibilities, and continued education. She is especially grateful to the WCCC Social Work Department and its professors for their guidance, encouragement, and commitment to student success.

While pursuing her education, Amber lived overseas on the island of Saipan, where she became actively involved in disaster relief efforts following Typhoon Yutu and helped found **C.O.R.E. (Community Outreach Recovery Effort)**, a nonprofit focused on community recovery after natural disasters. After returning home in 2019, she worked as a Targeted Case Manager at WCSI and later led the CareerSTEPS out-of-school youth program through PA CareerLink®, supporting young adults ages 18–24.

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Amber has worked at **WIN-Spirations, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, for a year and a half, where she supports individuals with disabilities, behavioral health needs, and past or present SUD/ODD by addressing employment barriers and key social determinants of health. She also serves on WCCC's Social Work Advisory Board, mentoring students as they begin their careers. With eight years of experience in the field, Amber remains deeply committed to service, equity, and community impact.

### **Field Trips to BSW Programs:**

The tradition continues to take students to four year school to tour and talk with the social work program there. The trips have been so valuable to former students and have impacted their decision to transfer that it has proven to be an important event. This past fall, students traveled back to Seton Hill and also to Chatam University. The social work program recently signed a transfer agreement with Chatam! The students were excited to see the beautiful campus and so close to the city!

### **Field Trip to work site:**

This past fall the Westmoreland County Drug Court hosted the social work and paralegal students for an afternoon to learn how the system works and to watch the proceedings. Judge Mears was very gracious with providing education before and during the visit. All the court staff were inviting and engaging. Thanks goes out for this wonderful experience.



## Club News

### Club news:

In the fall of 2025 the Humanitarian/Social Work club embarked on their goals of making a difference. They advertised, encouraged and collected hats, scarves and gloves and bagged them with notes of encouragement along with members of the RISE program. They joined with Feeding the Spirit and distributed the bags in the city of Greensburg for the homeless. It is always great to have alumni join us every year for this fun event!



### **Advisory Board Appointments**

Welcome to our newest members of the Westmoreland County Community College Social Work Program Advisory Board:

Jean Slusser and James Galik (PFLAG Gbg)

Ashley Weyandt (AAA)

Amber Alberts (WIN)

We would like to thank all of our board members who attend meetings, provide input on what is happening in the social service domain and get the word out about the program!

## Student Recognition

The Pennsylvania Chapter of The National Association of Social Workers sponsors a poster session each year at the conference for students. This year, two of the students from the social work program were accepted to present. This is the first time in its history that any associate level student was accepted. Emily and Jo did a great job representing the school and showing their passion for social work.

Emily Miller - Kinesics Training Mandate: The Importance for Child Protective Workers

Jo Gongaware - Gender Affirming Care for Youth: An Accessibility Crisis

**KINESICS TRAINING MANDATE:**  
The Importance for Child Protective Case Workers

**What is Kinesics?**

- ◆ Kinesics is the study of the way in which certain body movements and gestures serve as a form of nonverbal communication.
- ◆ Nonverbal communication (kinesics) is significant in all interactions and for many is the most important aspect.
- ◆ It has been estimated that as much as 93% of interpersonal communications are nonverbal.

**Why Kinesics Training is Needed to Help Children**

- ◆ Children tend to express emotions nonverbally more often and earlier than they do verbally because they can't always put feelings into words so listening includes seeing their behavior as communication.
- ◆ Children who are unable or unwilling to verbalize (e.g. due to young age, physical impairment or active decision) communicate through body language and actions about how they feel and think.
- ◆ Nonverbal signals comprise a central communicative channel from early childhood and play an important role when children discuss traumatic events like kidnapping abuse.
- ◆ Although verbal emotional expressiveness increases with age, there was no age differences in nonverbal emotional expression.
- ◆ Children in the first year of their life are 18% of all victims, and more than a quarter (28%) of child maltreatment victims are no more than 2 years old.
- ◆ In 2021, an estimated 1,820 children died from abuse and neglect in the United States.

**Child Abuse**

Age Group	Percentage
0-2	18%
3-5	28%
6-11	28%
12-17	26%

**How Kinesics Training Can Protect A Caseworker**

- ◆ Child welfare workers spend a majority of their time visiting the homes of families and children they serve in order to assess needs and to monitor the well-being and safety of the children to help reduce the possibility of child maltreatment and improve child developmental outcomes.
- ◆ Examining body language can help give advanced warnings of fast-developing danger signals, giving sufficient time to activate a plan of self-defense soon enough to effectively protect yourself and those for whose safety you are responsible.
- ◆ A 2003 survey of social workers about violence on the job, found that 68% of the 1,128 workers who responded said they had experienced at least one violent incident in their careers to date.
- ◆ In 2011, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees reported the approximately 70% of child welfare workers in the United States have been victims of violence or threat of violence in the workplace.

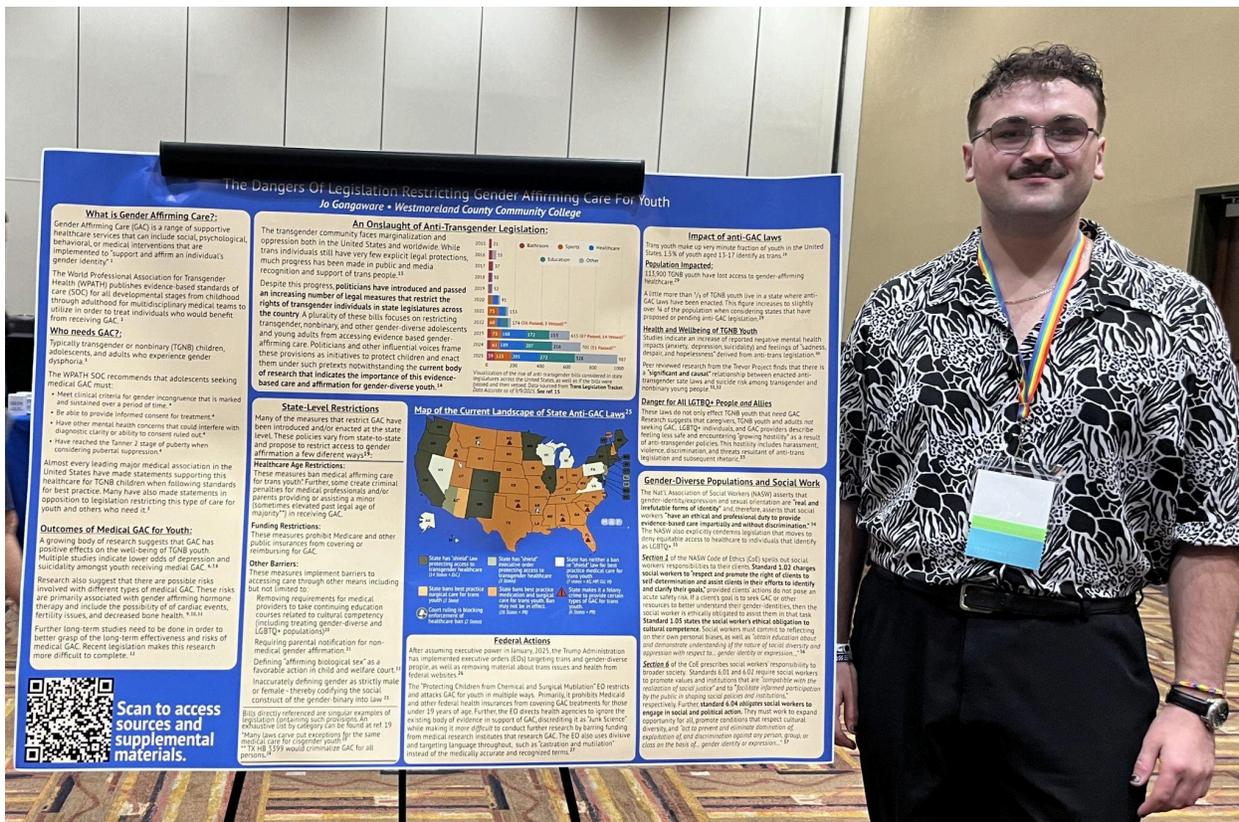
**Case Workers Use of Kinesics Training While Interviewing Children**

- ◆ The findings underline the value of nonverbal emotional expression during forensic interviews because the current data shows that it is possible to see negative emotions early and address them more effectively.
- ◆ Relying on nonverbal expressions of emotion can assist interviewers in engaging and formulating as early as possible and can guide interview responses before children say anything about their emotions.
- ◆ When children expressed more nonverbal emotions, they were more responsive during the interview phases and more informative about the abuse.
- ◆ Since attention to nonverbal displays of emotion appears to be strategically important, forensic interviewers should be trained to incorporate this strategy into their everyday work.

**If Kinesics Training is Mandated**

- ◆ Caseworkers may be able to figure out what the child can't or will not disclose and help them make a more informative assessment of all persons involved.
- ◆ Ensuring child welfare worker safety is a complex concern even though they must do their job for the safety of the children including home visits putting their own lives in danger.
- ◆ Having the kinesics training is one more tool caseworkers can utilize to protect themselves and the child/children.

By: Emily Miller



## Upcoming Events Please join us!

**Social Justice Week April 13-16**  
**The Social Work program is joining with Business, Legal Studies and Criminal Justice for a Social Justice week. Events are open to the public and college community.**  
**Monday April 13th - Identity Theft/Scams**  
**Two sessions - 9:30 and 11:00**  
**Tuesday April 14th-Pardon/Expungement DayPardon**  
**Starting appointments at 1:00pm**  
**Wednesday April 15th- Demonstration by Drug Dogs**  
**9-12 in SAC Lobby**

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Thursday April 16- Pa Healthcare Law Project

11:00am presentation of Medicare and Medicaid changes (CEU's Available)