



THE STONELEIGH FELLOWS PROGRAM

A large, abstract graphic composed of numerous overlapping, concentric circles in a light blue-grey color, creating a complex, web-like pattern that fills the central portion of the page.

OUR
MEET
FELLOWS

LISA M. JONES, PhD



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Lisa Jones considers herself a “pretty traditional” person. “I have always worked with the system. I have always wanted to do the right thing,” she says. However, it does not take long to notice that there is something special about Lisa that is hardly traditional. The twinkle in her eye, her seemingly effortless optimism and the passion she has for her work suggests that she is always a step or two ahead of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and thank Bernardine H. Watson, the author of this article, who tells an inspiring story about Lisa M. Jones. Ms. Watson interviewed Dr. Jones and wrote this profile based on their conversations. This is the eleventh in our series of “Meet the Fellows” profiles. The series is intended to provide readers with stories that describe our fellows’ motivation, goals and the philosophies that drive their work.

Ms. Watson is a social policy consultant living in Washington, D.C. She writes for and provides strategic advice to foundations, think tanks and nonprofits.

Jones grew up in what she describes as a very middle class household. Her father was an officer in the Air Force and the family moved around a lot. “I grew up all over,” she says, “Louisiana, California and Ramstein, Germany for three years before we moved to Yorktown, Virginia, where I went to high school. I think the experience of moving around so much contributed to my desire to understand different cultures and communities and appreciate how other people live. It is something that has stayed with me.” Jones’ mother is a clinical psychologist who practices family therapy. “My mother has been very influential in my education and career direction,” she says. Jones admits to following in her mother’s foot steps when she pursued the same degree. She began her graduate school education in psychology at the University of Rhode Island, intending to work with individuals and families. “My pre-doctoral clinical work focused on children and families in community mental health settings. I loved working with people individually, helping them deal with issues like abuse and victimization within the family system,” she says. However, as Jones went through school, she realized that her true interest was in solving problems on a larger scale. “I found that my heart was in the bigger picture. I still wanted to address these issues, but from a broader perspective. This realization caused me to shift toward research and academia and away from practice.”

Since receiving her PhD in 1999, Jones has been a professor on the research faculty at the Crimes Against Children Research Center (CCRC) at the University of New Hampshire. Over the past 13 years, Jones’ work has focused primarily on child victimization. “I have always been very drawn to help those who suffer from injustice or harm, or who are vulnerable and need help. I have conducted research in many different areas of victimization,” she says, “including children who have witnessed domestic violence, parents whose children are in protective services, the role of Child Protective Services in improving parenting, abuse prevention and more recently, peer victimization such as bullying. David Finkelhor, Director of CCRC says, “Lisa is a brilliant,



creative researcher who has made major contributions in developing and disseminating evidence-based practice.” Jones seems genuinely surprised to hear Finkelhor’s comments about her. “Oh my gosh!” she says. “He is very kind. I hope I can live up to that.” While Jones may never call *herself* “brilliant”, she is hardly shy about her accomplishments, skills and interests. “I love research,” she says. “I value research. I know that some people find research dry and boring. I think that is unfortunate. I am interested in getting agencies, schools and communities to use research data *more*—as a way to make sure they are on track with their goals. One of the things I am good at is translating the learning that happens in academia to what people are trying to do in communities. This is something I have tried to do throughout my career and it is a connection that needs to be made more often.”

In her Stoneleigh fellowship project, *Using Web-Based Technology to Increase the Dissemination of Evidence-Based Bullying Prevention Initiatives for Vulnerable Youth*, Jones will have an opportunity to bring all of her knowledge, skills and experiences to bear. Her interest in peer violence and bullying grows directly from her research on child victimization generally. “All of these victimizations are related to each other,” she says. “Once you have experienced any type of victimization, you are at risk for others.” With her fellowship, Jones will explore ways to improve bullying prevention and safe school strategies, particularly in urban schools that serve vulnerable youth, where she says few programs have shown strong effects.

HER INTEREST IN PEER VIOLENCE AND BULLYING GROWS DIRECTLY FROM HER RESEARCH ON CHILD VICTIMIZATION GENERALLY. “ALL OF THESE VICTIMIZATIONS ARE RELATED TO EACH OTHER,” SHE SAYS. “ONCE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED ANY TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION, YOU ARE AT RISK FOR OTHERS.”

Extensive research on the effects of bullying has also influenced the direction of Jones' work. "Over the past two-to-three decades, some of the best researchers in the field have documented the extensive negative physical and emotional effects of bullying and peer victimization," she says. For example, research has identified connections between bullying and a number of other social problems youth face including, behavioral issues, drug and alcohol use, delinquency, academic problems and absenteeism, mental and physical health issues, and suicide. There is also evidence that *all* youth involved in bullying—the victims, the victimizers and even those who stand by and watch these incidents happen—can suffer these negative consequences. Recent studies report that the number of children and youth involved in bullying is significant. It is estimated that about 20 percent of children are victims of bullying in school, where most reported bullying happens; 13 percent are directly engaged in bullying others and 60 percent of children report witnessing an incident of bullying in school at least once a day. Further, Jones says, "The best social science in this area shows that the effects of bullying on a child can last well on into adulthood."

It was Jones' research into the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs that led to her decision to carry out her fellowship project in an urban environment. "A lot of peer victimization and bullying prevention programs are pretty effective when done in suburban schools where things are going pretty well otherwise," Jones says. "But they are not very effective for children who live in communities where they are exposed to excessive violence. The research is pretty powerful that if you are exposed to extensive family, school and community violence, you are much more negatively affected than children who are not. It is called poly-victimization. Youth who live in poly-victim communities also report more bullying behavior

and more victimization. These youth are often practicing what they see at home and in their communities. This is a really important population to work with if we want to reduce this kind of behavior."

Jones is also interested in testing how technology can be used to help make programs that are effective in other environments, more available and accessible to schools that serve vulnerable youth. She has chosen to carry out her project in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) where 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and where district officials have struggled to address high profile bullying cases.

While bullying has been a problem for schools and communities for decades, Jones is starting her work in this area as the pressure to *do something* about it is intensifying. "I think some of the reason bullying is getting so much attention now is because of new technology," Jones says. "It used to be that a lot of bullying would happen and no one ever saw it. Now we have YouTube videos and other social media showing this kind of aggression. As adults, we are waking up and seeing things that we were never able to see before."

In response to the bullying data and pressure from the public, state legislatures and school systems across the country have adopted efforts to address the problem. Forty-nine states have passed school anti-bullying legislation and many schools have put policies and programs in place aimed at stemming bullying behavior. However, Jones says, these legislative initiatives are often unfunded mandates that many schools cannot afford to implement effectively. Schools attempting to "*do something*", often adopt low cost, "quick fix" approaches, such as one-shot assembly style programs, which research says are ineffective. Still, Jones understands the pressure and frustration many schools feel. "Schools, especially those in struggling communities, are taking on a lot right now," she says. "Staff feel like they are being pushed to solve every issue. I think that is a problem. Bullying prevention cannot fall entirely on the schools. "It is really a two-way street. Schools have to accept that bullying prevention needs to be a priority if they want to succeed at maintaining safe environments and educating children. On the other hand, researchers have to come up with innovative anti-bullying strategies that will work for schools."



“BULLYING IS A COMPLICATED CULTURAL ISSUE—IT IS NOT JUST KIDS BEING KIDS. KIDS’ BEHAVIOR IS BEING INFLUENCED BY SCHOOL, THEIR PEER GROUP, THEIR FAMILIES AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.”

According to Jones, one problem in identifying effective anti-bullying strategies is that people have been looking for easy answers. She insists that there *are* none. “Bullying is a complicated cultural issue—it is not just kids being kids. Kids’ behavior is being influenced by school, their peer group, their families and society as a whole. It is a problem that requires a multi-layered response, much more than a single assembly program. Research says that anti-bullying programs should be multi-session, interactive, structured and skill-based.” Further, Jones ascribes to the thinking of a growing number of researchers and practitioners who believe that children must first acquire social-emotional skills (SEL) as a foundation for bullying prevention. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social-emotional learning is the process of acquiring and applying the skills to manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and capably handle challenging situations. CASEL says that these are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices, all key elements in preventing bullying. Studies also show that students who gain social-emotional competence help create physically and emotionally safe schools and can increase their scores

on standardized achievement tests. “There are so many indications by top experts that this is the way to go,” says Jones. “I think the whole field of bullying prevention will eventually move in this direction.”

To carry out her work in Philadelphia, Jones will partner with the Committee for Children (CFC), a nonprofit organization in Seattle, Washington, and the SDP to pilot a model that uses the emerging approach of social-emotional skills training followed by bullying prevention instruction. She believes that this approach can work well for urban districts like Philadelphia that are already dealing with so many difficult problems. “This approach allows districts to start with the basics,” she says. “They can focus on SEL in elementary schools and then build a more comprehensive program, by adding on bullying prevention and positive climate initiatives as appropriate.” The model Jones will pilot is based on CFC’s well known, evidence-based *Second Step* program, which targets children in grades K-8 and focuses on the social-emotional skills important for bullying prevention. Recently, *Second Step* was revised to make it the kind of approach Jones is interested in testing. CFC added a bullying prevention component to the program and put the teacher training on-line. Jones says the use of technology makes the program particularly innovative and attractive, especially to cash-strapped districts trying to keep costs down. “On-line training means that districts will not have to commit administrative staff to go around to each school and train teachers; and schools will not have to bring in trainers every time there is staff turnover,” she says. “Also, the on-line technology allows training materials and other resources to be adjusted and updated more cost-effectively.”



Jones hopes to pilot the new model in one or two elementary schools in Philadelphia. "I am looking for schools where the principal and teachers are very interested in improving the climate in their building and excited about being involved in this project," she says. "This has to be an organizational learning process." Jones sees this pilot as a way to gain a thorough understanding of SDP's struggles with the bullying issue and determine whether or not the Second Step program can work there. "In this initial pilot I will be evaluating program implementation and the teachers' experiences with the on-line training component," she says. "I will work closely with teachers and administrators at the pilot schools to make sure they benefit from what I am learning as the pilot unfolds."

Jones is looking forward to getting the pilot underway. "I have been on a very academic track," she says. "I want to get away from that and work on a project that allows me to deal more directly with communities, schools and kids." This spring she and SDP officials will travel to Chicago to meet with the CASEL team and learn more from schools where the Second Step program has been successfully implemented. She hopes that the Philadelphia group will be impressed enough with what they see to give her the go-ahead to move forward. If the pilot is successful, Jones wants to include more schools in an SDP-wide initiative that looks more closely at the effectiveness of this approach for the city.

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Jones knows she was a very lucky child. "I grew up in a household with a lot of love and affection," she says. "I was never bullied. I never bullied anyone or saw anyone bullied. But I am very affected by the stories that I hear. And honestly, I worry about my own children. I want to make sure they don't experience some of these things." Leaning forward in her chair she continues earnestly, "Ever since I began to learn about the effects of abuse, I have thought about what we would be able to accomplish as a society if we could raise a generation of children without violence, or even if we could reduce the violence a little bit. Childhood victimization has such a big affect on everything else we do. If kids could be treated well, and grow up with an understanding that they are loved and valued, what an amazing shift that would be in our world. That is what I am working towards. Some people say I am overly optimistic, but I believe it is possible to make a difference in even the worst problems."

Stoneleigh Foundation is a Philadelphia-based foundation established to help improve the well-being of children and youth. Focused on work that promotes change in our country's youth-serving systems, we meet our mission through fellowship awards that support outstanding individuals whose work unites research, policy and practice.

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