



SPOTLIGHT

DR. WILLIAM "BILL" PFOHL

OCTOBER 2020



DR. BILL PFOHL

He was recently informed of being the 2020 recipient of the prestigious APA Division 16: Jack Bardon Distinguished Services Award due to his hard work and dedication as an inspirational change agent in the field of school psychology. Over the years, his leadership has impacted the lives of many individuals and groups and has resulted in a long-lasting positive chain reaction of best practices flowing through local, state, national, and international levels of influence.

Over a 49-year career thus far, Dr. Pfohl has been a consultant, advocate, practitioner, trainer, and university professor in supporting the mental health needs of students across Kentucky and in promoting a best practice crisis response model in his leadership role with the National Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT).

Dr. Pfohl has also served as president of the Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools (KAPS), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the International School Psychology Association (ISPA).

In Kentucky, Dr. Pfohl began his teaching career at Western Kentucky University in 1979 as a professor in the school psychology department. When he arrived, there were only 14 school psychologists in the entire state.

- By serving on many committees advocating for the field of school psychology and obtaining and maintaining national accreditation for WKU's program from 1991 to the present, he has been a major contributor to the fact that there are now more than 400 actively practicing school psychologists in Kentucky!

- To better get to the know the Man, the Myth, the Legend, beyond his many professional awards and achievements, Bill Pfohl agreed to share more about his life on a personal level, as well as taking opportunity to do some reminiscing and providing words of encouragement and wisdom from his professional experiences across the years.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. PFOHL

Years of Experience

- Western Kentucky University – Professor Emeritus – Psychology – 36 yrs
- Chester (NJ) Public Schools – 1yr; Plainfield (NJ) Schools – 1 yr
- BOCES – Little Valley NY – 3 yrs; Cattaraugus County Guidance Center/Rehabilitation Center 2.5 yrs
- Total Years of Practice: 49

Most Meaningful Experience(s)

This one is difficult. My most meaningful experience was being part of NASP's National Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT). I was involved with 6 other fantastic and dedicated people. I led three crisis response teams to shootings. (Flint Michigan, Grundy Virginia, and Grass Valley California). Flint, at that time, involved the youngest child death by shooting (age 6) in the USA. Working with school and community representatives to re-establish a path forward was very satisfying. I have also helped respond to Critical Incidents in Kentucky and internationally. I still do crisis response training for European school psychologists.

Receiving NASP's Lifetime Achievement Award was another highlight. I was honored to be elected as NASP President – twice (1996-97 & 2005-06); and was elected as President of the International School Psychology Association (2009-2011). The Jack Bardon Distinguished Service Award from Division 16 (School Psychology) of APA is my most recent highlight.

Favorite Quote

"Every child needs at least one caring adult."

Hopes for the Future of School Psychology

My sincere hope is to move our practice into serving ALL children. We have made significant inroads, but we have a ways to go. I have observed school psychologists around the world, and they have much to teach us about serving all students. We still have too much assessment focus, which in many cases, does not provide the necessary services that a child needs. In serving all children we can address their mental health, educational, social emotional, and developmental needs. School psychologists need to be more vocal in who we are and what we do. This lack of self-promotion and "silent" leadership is rampant across the USA.

Now, we are present at more "decision making and stakeholder" tables. This is a great opportunity to make our profession visible in service to America's youth. We are too humble for our own good. Our profession is strong and School Psychologists are well trained. It will only get better. I hope we can have school psychologists in charge of directing our future path. Kentucky has had three NASP School Psychologists of the Year. We are doing something right and need to keep up the momentum.

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Future Goals

Since I retired from WKU in 2016, my goals had been to gracefully retire. However, I have “flunked” retirement according to my wife. I still do private practice, consult and provide direct services to the WKU Kelly Autism Program, continue to be involved in international school psychology including crisis training and consultation and accreditation (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, Germany) for training programs. My personal goal is to travel, photograph, and see the world. That had been going well until this pandemic. I am also learning photography in depth with classes and photo tours.

Unique Talent or Interests

I LOVE travel – 48 states and 45 countries. My family hosted 8 high school aged exchange students. We also have hosted Russian faculty, and Mexican and Chinese graduate student. We have learned much from them. I like doing crisis response.

I was a volunteer fireman and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in my previous life. It gets into your blood. I have been involved with the local Red Cross representing Disaster Mental Health. I guess crisis/disaster is what I do most.

Influential Person/People in My Life

Professionally – My career path started with a former undergraduate professor, Dr. Robert (Bob) Morgan, who strongly encouraged me into a school psychology path. He urged me to go to grad school and I went on to get my master’s degree in school/clinical psychology. Marcia Shaffer, an early leader in school psychology, then “dragged” me into school psychology leadership opportunities early in my career.

I was President of the School Psychologists of Upstate New York just 4 years out of grad school. Garry Walz, who was the head of the ERIC School Counseling and Guidance Services, He was an exceptional and caring leader.

Jim Ysseldyke showed his incredible future thinking and helped me with the NASP Blueprints II & III for Training and Practice.

Personally – My wife has given an incredible support and encouragement. She was always there in good (and not so good) times.

Closing Thoughts

I have enjoyed my professional career immensely. Thank you, Dr. Bob Morgan, Marcia Shaffer, Garry Walz, NEAT TEAM, and Jim Ysseldyke. Jim Batts who was supportive and a trusted friend – THANK YOU! I have had incredible opportunities to meet many exceptional school psychologists from across the world. Students in my WKU classes were top notch. I have told several students – take any opportunity that comes your way – say yes, and then figure out how to do it. You cannot do all that I have done without a supportive wife and family. I have met some of the neatest people who are working hard to help others and it is a real rush. It looks like full retirement must wait for a while. I am still having fun. School psychology has been a great profession and career for me. It has given me the opportunity to “make a difference.”