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UAB Community Counseling Clinic provides affordable mental health care to Jefferson County

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From left: Clinic director Sean Hall, Ph.D., clinical student, Richard Krebs, faculty supervisor, Shannon McCarthy, Ph.D. clinical student Morgan Sieck, faculty supervisor, Larry Tyson, Ph.D., and clinical student Gina Helms

More than 1,000 people seeking low-cost mental health services have been served by the [University of Alabama at Birmingham](http://www.uab.edu/home/) (<http://www.uab.edu/home/>) [Community Counseling Clinic](https://www.uab.edu/education/counselingclinic/) (<https://www.uab.edu/education/counselingclinic/>) since its creation in 2011.

The goal of the clinic, run by faculty and students in the [UAB School of Education](http://www.uab.edu/education/home/) (<http://www.uab.edu/education/home/>) [Counselor Education Program](https://www.uab.edu/education/home/hs/counselor-education) (<https://www.uab.edu/education/home/hs/counselor-education>), is to increase access to outpatient mental health counseling services in Jefferson County while also providing an innovative educational experience for UAB graduate counseling students.

“In our area, access to counseling can be hard to come by if you do not have insurance,” said Sean

Hall, Ph.D., clinic director and assistant professor in the [UAB School of Education Department of Human Studies](https://www.uab.edu/education/home/departments/hs) (<https://www.uab.edu/education/home/departments/hs>). “There are places in the community that accept patients without insurance for a sliding or reduced fee; however, availability of those services can be limited. We are working to fill the gaps so clients can get the services they need.”

The clinic offers individual, group, family, and couple and marital counseling services and accepts clients starting at age 8, to adults and seniors. Clients are accepted through referrals from hospitals and other providers, social service directories such as [2-1-1 Connects Alabama](http://www.211connectsalabama.org/) (<http://www.211connectsalabama.org/>), and self-referrals. Fees are determined by income and family size and range from \$5 per individual session to no more than \$30 per session. Individuals go through an initial screening via telephone in order to determine if the clinic’s outpatient services are the best fit for them or if they should be referred to a different provider.

Well-trained graduate students, supervised by experienced faculty members, conduct all counseling sessions. The program is unique because most university programs that operate similar clinics do so in a doctoral program setting. Students in the UAB Counselor Education program are able to take part in this high-level training at the master’s level.

“Our faculty are incredibly engaged and enthusiastic,” Hall said. “We devote a lot of time to making sure clients have a positive experience when they are working with us as well as making sure that students are well prepared to make an impact on the community when they leave.”

To provide students with a rich training experience and best serve clients, several technologies are utilized to enable supervisors to send messages digitally while observing each session from a control room. Students can also send a one-touch message to supervisors, such as “please advise,” without derailing the session.

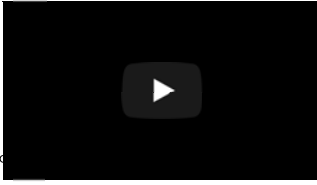
Since the clinic is also a teaching center, all counseling sessions are recorded so that program faculty can review and assess client progress, monitor the need for medical services, and evaluate clinical interventions.

“The process is similar to a football coach’s reviewing game tapes with players,” Hall said. “The



Clinical student Gina Helms conducts a counseling session with an adult

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counselors and their supervisors break down small segments of each session in order to help students understand the dynamics that occur between the counselor and client and pick up subtle interpretations or things that clients are saying that help provide insight into what they are struggling with.”

Weekly meetings are also conducted with students and supervisors to discuss treatment goals, progress toward those goals, barriers to progress, interventions they are using and how they are working, and how to make improvements.

Students in the UAB Counselor Education Program go on to work in a variety of mental health service professions, such as private practices, small group therapy and counseling clinics, psychiatric hospitals, community treatment centers, and residential treatment centers.

The clinic staff provide counseling services for a range of mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, stress,

relationship conflicts, grieving and loss, recent recovery from substance abuse, self-esteem issues, adjustment problems, job loss, parent and child conflicts, school and/or studying problems, and time management problems.

To learn more about the UAB Community Counseling Clinic and services, visit the clinic website (<https://www.uab.edu/education/counselingclinic/>).