

## Oakland University alumni counseling at-risk children, teens at Crossroads for Youth

Before Amanda Tomarin, Chris Harris, Marc Porter, Edward Stotts Jr., Justin Fittonneville and Chris Veihl became mentors to at-risk children and teens at the Crossroads for Youth treatment agency in Oxford, Mich., Oakland University's **Department of Counseling** helped them find their calling.

"The tools and the techniques that are taught at Oakland University really lend themselves to a very professional therapist once they come through our doors," said Porter, a 2010 graduate of Oakland University and the executive director of **Crossroads for Youth**. "It's very comforting to me to know that the youth that we serve will have very professional, ethical people providing those therapeutic services."

"In fact, I think a great deal of the OU counseling program. I know if I see Oakland University on a resume, I feel confident that, because they've graduated from there, we're going to have a good person coming through our doors."

Originally founded as Camp Oakland in 1951, the purpose of Crossroads for Youth is to provide a positive environment for at-risk children and teens – ages 7 to 17 -- where education, positive thinking, respect for others, a strong work-ethic and discipline are promoted to encourage their growth.

"Our mission statement here at Crossroads is 'Every Child Deserves a Chance,'" said Veihl, clinical director at Crossroads and a 1996 graduate of Oakland University. "That's really what it comes down to. We're their chance. The team that we have created and the environment we have here at Crossroads is their chance for a better life."

Every child or teen who participates in a Crossroads for Youth program receives a personalized treatment plan, which includes individual, group and family therapy sessions, along with specialized therapy programs.

"These kids have been abused and neglected by the adults who were charged with caring for them, so you've really got to earn their respect," said Stotts, a 2015 graduate of Oakland University and member of the Crossroads Advisory Board. "They've gone through things that we even imagine, so they don't trust us right off the bat because of who we are. But they're a pretty good judge of character. They know if you mean it, and if you're genuine, they'll connect with you. If you're not, they'll burn through you like they've done with other adults who were prepared to help them."

According to Chris Harris, a clinical therapist at Crossroads and a 2015 graduate of Oakland University, establishing a positive relationship with an at-risk youth often requires a great deal of patience, humility, and empathy.

"One of the things we're taught in the counseling program at OU is that you may not be able to identify with what they've gone through; but you can ask them to help you understand it," Harris said. "That really helps to create a connection."

Harris, Tomarin, Porter, Stotts, Veihl and Fittonneville all credit Oakland University's counseling program with providing them with the foundation necessary to establish positive relationships with the children and teens they mentor at Crossroads.

"One thing I would say about OU is that not only does the master's program do a great job in terms of training, techniques, theories, etc., the one thing I found to be the most valuable was the way they stretched me and made me grow internally," said Fittonneville, a 2014 graduate of Oakland University and a clinical therapist at Crossroads. "Holding the mirror back up to yourself makes you grow as a person and it's something that I also use with all the kids I work with."

Located on 320 acres, Crossroads for Youth provides non-secure residential and day treatment programs for at-risk youth, including:

- Residential Neglect and Abuse Programs: Combining Choice Theory, Collaborative Problem Solving, and Trauma Informed Care, these programs are offered to boys and girls ages 7-17 who are referred by the Department of Health and Human Services. Treatment services include individual, group, and family therapy sessions.



*Oakland University's counseling program helped Chris Veihl, Marc Porter, Edward Stotts Jr., Chris Harris, Amanda Tomarin and Justin Fittonneville find their calling as mentors to at-risk children and teens at the Crossroads for Youth treatment agency in Oxford, Mich.*

- **Day Treatment:** This program is designed for boys and girls ages 11-17 who face challenges in the home, school, and/or community. A six-day a week program includes a strong therapeutic component, academics, and community service opportunities.
- **Re-entry Program:** This program assists youth and their families with the transition period following residential or day-treatment and focuses on successfully reintegrating participants into their homes and communities.

"This is such a unique place, which is why I love it so much," said Tomarin, a clinical therapist at Crossroads and a 2015 graduate of Oakland University. "I'm not sitting in an office meeting with these kids. I'm in their house where they live, I'm at their school, and I'm transporting them to different places. For me, it's all about building relationships. It's about the moments that aren't so clinical, like when you're singing to the radio together on the way to court just because you feel like it. Typically, they don't have those types of relationships, so it's critical to form those bonds with them."

According to **Lisa Hawley**, Ph.D., associate professor and chair of OU's Department of Counseling, being able to form positive bonds is an important skill for a counselor.

"The counseling profession helps people to become self-aware, growth oriented and effective in mastering the challenges of life," she said. "Counselors, as skilled, perceptive and broadly educated professionals, assist clients in identifying areas for improvement and in carrying out changes that improve mental health and promote well-being."

To learn more about Oakland University's counseling program, visit [www.oakland.edu/counseling](http://www.oakland.edu/counseling).

For more information about Crossroads for Youth, visit [www.crossroadsforyouth.org](http://www.crossroadsforyouth.org).