



Melissa has been practicing in the field of mental health and substance abuse for the past 10 years. She received her undergraduate education at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln and completed her graduate work at Arizona State University. She has experience in State and local governmental organizations, hospitals, community mental health, corrections, and private practice.

Growing up and currently ranching with her family on their ranch in Central Nebraska, Melissa has an understanding of the unique challenges and strengths of rural life. She combines her urban knowledge and experience with her rural roots to provide quality, professional, individualized services.

Sandhills Sense

Real Help for Real People!

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The Good Life

“As social workers, we must join forces to help the rural families in crisis. Poverty, single parent homes, poor educational systems, lack of resources and less than desirable quality of life plague rural communities and those individuals and families unable to escape the life they were born in to.” Yes, that statement got my gander up, just as it did yours! During my graduate work I was sitting in a required cultural diversity class, listening to a “rural expert” describe rural communities. The destitute and deficit perspective was the only thing in her lesson plan. My tongue bled until class was over. After I spoke to this professor about my concerns related to her “expertise” I encouraged her to educate about the strengths of rural communities as well as the opportunities. “I am so appreciative of your

interest in this topic”, she replied, “and I believe in presenting all the facts, but in this case, there does not appear to be any research findings that support rural communities as a positive developmental environment.”

search of rural communities. Although I respected her ability to succeed in academia, I am quite certain she was not an expert on rural communities. I was on a mission! Not only did I personally replace her



Needless to say, I was appalled by her views, but even more so by the fact that she referred to herself as a “rural expert”. I discovered that she was a native of New York City, and at that time working with the reservations around the Phoenix area and receiving federal grant money to fund her re-

title as “rural expert” with “Professor Puss Between the Ears”, but I also researched and published on the strengths of rural communities, in relation to how they affect children who are raised in agricultural producing families. Try these facts on for size! (Continued next page)

The Good Life (continued)



- Approximately 80% of rural families are composed of married couples and the majority report high satisfaction levels with their marital relationships. Two parent homes place rural kids at lower risk for poverty.
- Rural kids feel a greater sense of belonging and have more positive feelings toward their parents and sibling than urban children.
- Rural parents and children spend more time together, participate in more family-centered activities, have more interaction with extended family members, and are more involved in their communities than urban counterparts.
- The majority of child care does take place in the home in rural communities, rather than day care centers. The involve-

ment of grandparents in child care is higher in rural communities. This involvement promotes development of moral character, a strong work ethic, coping mechanisms and practical skills in rural children.

- Although rural kids begin earning money at a younger age, they place minimal emphasis on money and consumerism and are less materialistic than their urban counterparts.
- Hard work, self-reliance, a sense of responsibility, commitment to family, and social trust are common values expressed by rural kids.
- Rural kids have higher levels of peer acceptance in middle childhood than urban children.
- Stability and cohesiveness are hallmarks of rural life

The combination of family, values and personal integrity provided in rural areas makes children raised in these areas less susceptible to substance abuse and other risk factors as they mature to adulthood.

Rural kids have better abstract abilities and social skills when compared to their urban counterparts.

It is the good life, and those of us fortunate enough (not forced) to live here know this fact all too well. Rural communities do face challenges and

lack some resources, but are able to often overcome these obstacles by working together. So here's to "Professor Puss Between the Ears", not only do we raise high quality beef, but we have high quality kids too! And by the way, there is a good body of research on the strengths of rural communities.

Would you like to feature Sandhills Sense in your publication?

Melissa is dedicated to improving rural lives through education and involvement in rural communities. Her articles discuss common problems with a common sense approach.

Sandhills Sense is currently featured in rural publications in Nebraska. If you would like to include "Sandhills Sense" in your publication, please contact Melissa at

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