

Biography of Diane J. Willis, Ph.D.

Diane J. Willis grew up in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and attended Northeastern State University (NSU) there. She was always interested in biology, and considered applying to medical school. She was undecided about career directions after obtaining her B.A. degree in biology from NSU, and she decided to enter Medical Technology training at St. John's Hospital. She worked in this field for a brief time, but wanted to explore other career opportunities.

Diane had been very active in the Baptist Church youth activities while growing up, and she had a dream of attending Seminary. She applied to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and was accepted in 1962. She took various religious education courses and made lifelong friendships with fellow seminary students that she has maintained to this day. Although she did not complete a degree in religious education, the experience of working with theologian Dr. Wayne Oates and others helped her decide on a career path and field of study—psychology.

She was accepted in the psychology graduate program at George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, and completed her Master's of Arts degree there in 1964. Although she could have continued her doctoral training there, she wanted to return to her native Oklahoma and be nearer her family. She applied to the University of Oklahoma, and was accepted in their doctoral program in psychology. She moved to Norman, and lived in a house on West Brooks Street purchased by her "Papaw" Bynum (Herbert Bynum). She eventually bought this home from him, and lived there until 1993, when she moved to her current home in northwest Norman near Tecumseh Road.

Diane graduated from the University of Oklahoma with her Ph.D. in psychology in 1970, and completed her internship in clinical child and pediatric psychology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) from 1969-1971. While engaged in her studies, she worked part-time as a staff psychologist at the John W. Keys Speech and Hearing Center in Oklahoma City (the OUHSC Department of Communication Disorders) and at the Child Study Center, where she would devote much of her career to developing programs for children with developmental disabilities and advocating for services for child victims of abuse and neglect.

In 1971, Diane was given her first faculty appointment at OUHSC as Assistant Professor of Medical Psychology in the Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, as well as Chief Clinical Psychologist in the Department of Communication Disorders. In 1975, she moved to the Child Study Center, where she assumed the role of Chief of Psychological Services and Associate Director of the Child Study Center. Over the next 25 years, she was a pioneer in developing new programs for children with developmental disabilities in the Oklahoma City area and around the state. She developed one of the first programs for diagnosing and teaching children with Specific Learning Disabilities in the state, and was active in developing special education services for children with hearing impairment and speech/language problems. She was a strong advocate for development of special education programs for children with all types of disabilities, and was awarded a Distinguished Contribution Award by the Oklahoma Association for Children with Learning Disabilities. She later was awarded the Distinguished Psychologist Award from the Oklahoma Psychological Association for her pioneering work and advocacy in psychology.

In the early 70's, she worked with many children who were hospitalized at Oklahoma Children's Hospital due to injuries suffered from abuse and neglect. She became concerned that there was no systematic way to train medical personnel to detect signs of abuse and neglect, and train them on ways to protect these children from further harm. She and a fellow physician were instrumental in starting the first Child Protection Committee at OU Children's Hospital, where pediatricians, radiologists, social workers, and psychologists met regularly to review cases of suspected abuse/neglect and assure that children received Protective Services from the Oklahoma Dept. of Human Services. OU Children's Hospital is now one of the leading hospitals in the state for careful assessment of potential abuse and neglect injuries in children and referral of

children to protective services. All medical students and residents who train in the Department of Pediatrics now obtain state-of-the-art training in the area of abuse/neglect, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Diane and other professionals.

Not satisfied with just detecting abuse and neglect and treating the child victims, Diane also wanted to develop a treatment program for parents who were committing the abuse. Her strong advocacy led to co-founding the Parents' Assistance Center (PAC) in Oklahoma City, which is still in existence today. Through Diane's advocacy with the Child Protection Committee and Parents' Assistance Center, literally thousands of abusive parents and abused children have received services in the State of Oklahoma. Always one to put her advocacy in action, Diane spent countless hours serving on the Board of PAC, serving on the Governor's Committee on Children and Youth, serving as Chair of the Legislative Committee on the Region VII Child Abuse Prevention Task Force, making countless speeches to various local and regional organizations concerned with prevention of maltreatment, and providing direct treatment to the children and their families.

At the Child Study Center, Diane coordinated the child abuse program and all psychological services in general; supervised assessment and treatment of children and families; and made court appearances on behalf of her patients who were abused or neglected. She established or co-established several new clinical programs at the center, including the Infant Clinic (for infants with disabilities and their families), the Neuropsychology Program, Genetic Assessment Clinic, the Psychoeducational Clinic (diagnostic nursery), child abuse and neglect services, and the Behavior Disorders Clinic.

In her faculty role, Diane was Director of Clinical Child Psychology Training at Child Study Center as part of the OUHSC APA-accredited psychology internship; served on the committee to establish Developmental Pediatric Training to first year Pediatric Residents and teach in this program; and taught medical students on rotation through the Department of Pediatrics. Scores of medical students, residents, and psychology students who benefitted from her tutelage over 30+ years are now in positions of leadership around the country. Her style of teaching, whether with students or with younger colleagues, involves both challenging as well as "opening doors" to allow others to grow and develop to their potential. She is a superb catalyst and mentor who has a talent for drawing out the best in her students. In recognition of Diane's lifelong, significant contributions as a mentor to psychologists, the American Psychological Association Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services established the "Diane J. Willis Early Career Award" in 2008. The award is being funded by contributions from Diane's colleagues in psychology, former students, and those whom she has mentored as early career psychologists over many years. The award will recognize the accomplishments of early career psychologists, and will live on as a legacy to Diane's teaching, mentoring and advocacy in the field.

At the national level, Diane's work in psychology came to the attention of other professionals in the American Psychological Association early in her career. In the 1970's Diane was on the ground floor in the development of two major specialties in psychology—Pediatric Psychology and Clinical Child Psychology. She helped found these organizations, served on their boards, published scientific articles that provided a foundation for the field, and helped establish scholarly journals in each of the fields. She was the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* in 1973 and the second editor of the *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* in 1976. Both these journals are now leading scientific periodicals in their respective fields 30+ years later. Diane's own scholarship and research have helped to shape these and other specialty areas in the field of psychology. She has published over 75 scholarly articles, chapters, and books in the field, and has presented literally hundreds of scholarly talks and workshops to train others. She is still sought out as a senior scientist and clinician to speak and offer discussion on professional topics at the APA national convention each year.

Diane's national reputation was earned early in her career, so that by the 1980's she was being sought out for positions of leadership in the American Psychological Association (APA). Her leadership within APA continues to this day. Her leadership abilities were apparent when she sat

around a table with professionals expressing very different opinions, and managed to find common ground that could bring these professionals together to work toward a common solution to problems. She is respected by each of these parties for her ability to find compromise and move the group toward consensus. A small selection of her leadership positions include:

- *Serving on the American Psychological Association (APA) Council of Representatives, Policy and Planning Board, Board of Professional Affairs, and Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs.*
- *Serving as President of the Society of Clinical Child Psychology; Society of Pediatric Psychology; Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services; Division of Clinical Psychology; and Division of Psychotherapy.*
- *Serving as Chair of the APA Coordinating Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect*
- *Appointed to the United States Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, via the US Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1989-1993. During her tenure, she worked with the National Strategy Workgroup and Research Committee to publish papers on the prevention of child abuse and neglect nationally. She was often called upon to testify before the U.S. Congress on issues related to prevention of child abuse and neglect, and she testified before the Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences on research needs in the area of child abuse and neglect.*

Throughout her career, Diane has been proud of being a voting member of the Kiowa Tribe, and has been an advocate for better mental health services for American Indian children and families. As always, she devoted time and energy to helping American Indian families locally, as well as working at a national level to bring attention to their needs. She established the first Psychology Clinic at the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indian Health Service Clinics in El Reno and Concho, Oklahoma and at Clinton Indian Hospital in Clinton, Oklahoma. She continues to provide services to these clinics to this day. Psychology interns and postdoctoral fellows from OUHSC sign up to accompany her to these clinics each month; thus, Diane is helping to mentor the next generation of psychologists who will know how to serve American Indian families. She also was active in consulting, teaching, and providing clinical services to American Indian children and families from the Chickasaw Tribe (at Ada Indian Hospital, Human Services Branch) and Carter Seminary (Boarding School for ages 6 years through High School). She was named Indian Woman of the Year by the Oklahoma Federation of Indian Women in 2000. She has written and taught extensively at a national level, helped to encourage better research on mental health services to American Indians, and has testified before the US Congress on several occasions about the Mental Health needs of American Indians.

In recognition of her advocacy on behalf of children and families in her community, Diane was honored in 1985 by the Oklahoma Chapter of Women in Communication with its Byliner Award for Distinguished Contributions in the field of medicine. At a national level, her advocacy contributions were honored in 1993 by the APA Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services with its Nicholas Hobbs Award for Distinguished Child Advocacy. In 1992, the American Psychological Association presented Diane with the first “Karl F. Heiser Presidential Award for Advocacy.”

Toward the end of her faculty career at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Diane began consulting with American Indian Head Start Programs, working with *Three Feathers Associates* in Norman, Oklahoma (1986-1996) and also with the OU American Indian Institute Head Start Quality Improvement Center (HSQIC) from 1999-2003. She also consulted with the *Zero to Three* organization in Washington, DC, as an Infant Mental Health Consultant to the Eastern Band Cherokee Tribe from 2003-04.

In 1999, Diane retired from the full-time faculty of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and was given the prestigious title of “Professor Emeritus” of Pediatrics and Medical Psychology by the Department of Pediatrics. This title was given in recognition of 30+ years of significant contributions to the mission of the department in the areas of program development, teaching, research, publication, and clinical service.

Diane may be one of the busiest retirees in the State of Oklahoma! She continues to teach courses through the OU Native American Studies Program, the OU Advanced Programs (which offers graduate courses to American military personnel stationed around the world), and provides various seminars and lectures to the psychology training program at OUHSC. She continues to teach and serve on professional committees and boards nationally within the American Psychological Association, and has recently served as President of the American Orthopsychiatric Association. Never one to let grass grow under her feet, she actively keeps up with her large extended family and her national family of friends and associates—always the one to pick up the phone and stay in touch. She is very devoted to her 9 cats, is an avid fan of OU football, and enjoys her hobbies of gardening, genealogy, collecting American Indian art, and traveling nationally and internationally.