

KATIE BENSON, MSW, LISW

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SUMMARY

In August 2024, I transitioned to full-time private practice as a mitigation specialist and forensic social worker. This increased flexibility has allowed me to expand the scope of my work while continuing to advocate for individuals involved with the criminal court system. My work remains:

- Rooted in formal training/education - I am a licensed, masters-level social worker with a concentration in mental health and a specialization in management.
- Informed by experience with forensic social work, criminal justice advocacy, child protection, program management, clinical mental health, case management, research, grant writing and community organizing along with my extensive knowledge of family, criminal, and civil commitment court processes and procedures.
- Aimed at developing and fostering connections with clients, case managers, community providers, and legal professionals to encourage a creative, comprehensive, and empowering response to criminal court involvement.

CURRENT POSITION

Owner and Mitigation Specialist, MN Mitigation Services, LLC

November 2019-Present

MN Mitigation Services is a private criminal defense mitigation consulting practice that I co-own and operate. As a professional mitigation specialist, I serve as a liaison between attorneys, clients, and courts to help parties greater understand the psycho-social issues facing clients and integrate clinical information into disposition. Consultation is provided in federal courts by contracting with CJA panel attorneys and in state courts by contracting with private criminal defense attorneys. My expertise is utilized to impact disposition, treatment, and competency proceedings. Since transitioning to full-time private practice, I have partnered with the Federal Defender's Office to provide training for their in-house mitigation specialist in the Fall of 2024. I have also partnered with the Great North Innocence Project to assist with Reentry Planning and served on the Policy Team for the non-profit organization, Children of Incarcerated Caregivers.

PAST WORK EXPERIENCE

Dispositional Advisor, Office of the Public Defender, Second Judicial District

February 2017-August 2024

Dispositional advisors work as part of the legal defense team representing indigent clients facing criminal charges in state court. Through both written and oral advocacy, I worked to formulate alternative sentencing options and identify relevant mitigation factors for clients facing presumptive prison sentences. The forensic client population often includes individuals coping with a variety of social stressors including mental illness, chemical use, housing instability, and numerous other social stressors. My work with these individuals often involved a needs assessment, gathering of social history information, treatment planning, and care coordination. Additionally, I provided clinical consultation on competency cases and assisted attorneys with navigating the Rule 20 and civil commitment processes.

Accomplishments exceeding job expectations:

- Served as the dispositional advisor team lead: responsible for hiring, training, and mentoring new staff, assigning referrals, managing team communication with the office, and establishing best practices/materials to standardize the deliverables and expectations for the dispositional advisor team
- Established a Metro-wide, masters-level internship program for MSW students
- Represented our agency in communications with justice partners
- Developed and maintained relationships with community practitioners, legal and mental health experts, and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system

- Provided leadership on District-wide initiatives including the Ramsey County Warrant Resolution Day, Pretrial Release Services Oversight Committee, Ramsey County Community Corrections Transitional Age Group Charter, Ramsey County Diversion Program, and the Ramsey County Rule 20 Workgroup
- Developed and managed service contracts with community agencies to provide evaluations for in-custody clients
- Created and facilitated comprehensive training for attorneys, paralegals, investigators, dispositional advisors, and various community providers surrounding mental health treatment, competency, and civil commitment
- Served as the Union Steward for the support staff bargaining unit and gained knowledge of procedures including employee hiring, firing, grievances, and performance reviews

Social Worker, Stearns County Human Services, Child Protection (2015-2017)

Grant Writer, Missouri Institute of Mental Health (2015)

Practicum Student, Mental Health First Aid of Missouri (2014-2015)

Practicum Student, St. Louis Psychiatric Rehabilitation Center (2014)

Research Assistant, Washington University in St. Louis (2013)

Housing Outreach Worker, Off the Square Club, Madison, WI (2010-2013)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Holistic Defense: The Role of Social Work and the Importance of Effective Supervision: National Organization of Forensic Social Work Conference (2025)

Mitigation Specialist: Not Just for Sentencing: MoreLaw and Millios Law (2018)

Warrior Wellness: Trauma, Burnout, and Self Care: Office of the Public Defender, 2nd Judicial District (2018)

Sentencing Advocacy: MN Board of Public Defense, *Presenter and Faculty* (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Evaluation of Competence, Criminal Responsibility, and Civil Commitment: Regional Psychological Services & Office of the Public Defender, 2nd Judicial District (2019)

Self-Care & Resilience: MN Board of Public Defense, Trial School (2020)

Social Work in Public Defense - The Role of a Dispositional Advisor: Minnesota Social Service Association, Annual Training Conference (2021)

Self-Care & Resiliency: National Association for Public Defense, We the Defenders: Rise, Resist, Represent (2021)

Partnering with Public Defender's Office on Rule 20 Cases: Ramsey County Social Services (2022), Regions Hospital (2023)

LICENSURE AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

MN Board of Social Work

License Number 24353

Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

National Alliance of Sentencing Advocates and Mitigation Specialists

National Organization of Forensic Social Work

EDUCATION

Washington University in St. Louis, George Warren Brown School of Social Work

Master of Social Work, Mental Health Concentration, Management Specialization – May 2015

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Bachelor of Arts in Social Welfare – May 2013