

— GRADUATE TESTIMONY —

Summer 2021 CABH Master's Graduate

Katelind Halldorsson Melendez

Katelind graduated in Summer 2021 from the **Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health (CABH) Master's Degree Program at USF** and completed her field experience with the **Children's Mental Health Network (CMHN)**. Her research interests lie in the intersection of children's mental health and juvenile justice, as the literature provides evidence that many youth involved in the justice system have underlying behavioral health problems. Through her field experience at the CMHN, she dove deeper into this topic through connecting with CMHN readers. As a part of her field experience project titled, *Understanding the Relationship between Youth Mental Health and Juvenile Justice*, she conducted qualitative interviews with children's mental health and juvenile justice stakeholders in Florida and Massachusetts. The interviews were conducted to gain a greater understanding of stakeholder perspectives regarding the gaps in the systems for this population of youth and ultimately summarize these gaps and propose corresponding recommendations. Through transcribing and coding stakeholder interviews, common themes surrounding gaps in services and service needs emerged. The common themes related to systemic gaps according to youth mental health and juvenile justice stakeholders included: family support and involvement, childhood trauma, cross-systems navigation and collaboration, racial disparities, and access to services.



While enrolled in the program, Katelind also worked full-time as the Assistant Program Director at the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Technical Assistance Center (CJMHA TAC) at USF, where she delivers training and technical assistance related to best practices in criminal justice, juvenile justice, and behavioral health to Florida Department of Children and Families Criminal Justice Reinvestment grantees across the State of Florida. Following graduation, Katelind will continue working at the CJMHA TAC and applying the knowledge and insight she gathered from the CABH program, as well as her field experience with CMHN to her work promoting best practices in the field.

The CABH program was the perfect fit for me because I was able to complete my degree while still working full-time. Despite being an online program, I built relationships with my professors and they were always available to assist when I needed. I also built relationships among child and adolescent behavioral health providers in the community through my field experience program. I hope to maintain the professional relationships with the CABH faculty and community stakeholders as my current work aligns with CABH research and practice.

<https://www.usf.edu/cabh>