



Bridges

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work
Winter 2022

**Answering the Call of
Geriatric Social Work**

Bridges

Bridges is the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work alumni magazine. We selected the name Bridges largely because of its symbolism. The term provides an important metaphor for both our profession and our school. Social work is a profession that has, as part of its mission, the goal of building and sustaining bridges among individuals, families, groups, neighborhoods, and communities, and we felt that the title Bridges captured this part of our professional mission. At the same time, the city of Pittsburgh has more than 450 bridges, and Allegheny County has almost 2,000, suggesting an uncompromising desire of the city's inhabitants to remain connected with one another. In keeping with this heritage, it is the school's goal to sustain and build bridges among those needing social work services; our students, alumni, faculty, and staff; the community; and corporate and governmental partners. We believe that the information in this magazine is an important way to achieve this goal.

BRIDGES MAGAZINE CREATIVE TEAM

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Dear alumni and friends,

It's hard to believe a year has passed since we last published an issue of Bridges. The world around us continues to be unpredictable and challenging. This past year has certainly been a time of hope and continued struggles. I hope that you, like all of us at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, have found ways to persevere; adapt; support each other; and find time to reflect, relax, and even enjoy as we make our way through.

Last year, Pitt Social Work lost a larger-than-life former leader with the passing of Larry E. Davis. The notes and remembrances from so many of you really highlighted how much of an impact he had not just on the school but also on the profession at a national level and on the lives and careers of so many people.

The school continues to advance and to center Dean Davis' focus on racial equity. We are building on the school's long history of anti-racism work by naming James Huguley our inaugural associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion; formalizing the school's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee; and meeting biweekly for collaborative discussion and learning in our Anti-Racist Learning Collaborative.

Along with Huguley, we have other newly promoted and hired faculty and staff whom we have been thrilled to welcome to our school as we continue to grow and thrive in these challenging times. One highlight is in our Bachelor of Arts in Social Work program, which is led by Toya Jones (MSW '07). See the Q&A with her on page 6.

Our cover story is one that is timely and focuses on a long-standing field of interest in social work and at Pitt. As America's aging population grows, so does the need for innovative, compassionate, and committed practitioners in geriatric social work. In this issue, you

can read about some of the work our alumni are doing in this area as well as the opportunities available to social work students.

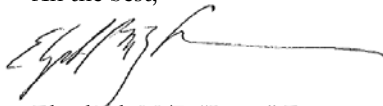
In recent years, we have really focused on the broad range of career options and opportunities that a degree in social work can support. So in this issue, we also shine a light on some alumni who have followed nontraditional pathways through their careers in order to illustrate the expansive options for our current students.

As always, please be sure to read about the talented and impressive recipients of this year's Distinguished Alumni Awards. It is always a pleasure to celebrate the hard work of our alumni and to recognize their accomplishments.

This is the year we also celebrate some wonderful milestones: 25 years for the Child Welfare Education and Research Programs and 20 years for the Center on Race and Social Problems. Please stay connected and join us for an assortment of activities over the coming months as we mark these anniversaries.

I am so excited about this reinvigorated version of Bridges. I hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed pulling it all together. It's a true privilege to be able to connect with our alumni and to highlight the incredible stories, journeys, and accomplishments of all of you in our alumni network! We want to stay in touch and up to date on what's happening in your lives, so please remember to follow us on social media, visit socialwork.pitt.edu, or join us (virtually, for now) for a speaker or other event.

All the best,



Elizabeth M.Z. "Betsy" Farmer
Dean, School of Social Work
University of Pittsburgh



Anti-racism Efforts

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work has a long legacy of fighting for racial and social justice. The events of 2020 saw conversations about equity, fairness, and what it means to be a person of color in this country come to the forefront. Pitt Social Work staff, faculty, and students felt the call to reflect on their school community and the role they could play in dismantling systemic racism.

To address these topics, the school brought together faculty, staff, and students to craft the Pitt School of Social Work Commitment to Anti-racism, a document that affirms the school's collective belief that the "legacy of slavery and racist policies undermine the espoused values of our country and create undeniable harm and disproportionate hardship for people of color." The commitment further asserts that the school's vision to "transform our world, our future, [and] ourselves" cannot be accomplished without centering anti-racism in all our work.

Pitt Social Work has committed itself to tackling issues of racism in the school and in the broader community through teaching, research, service, and education. The school also has established guiding principles that commit us to taking actions to become an "anti-racist, anti-oppressive, inclusive, and welcoming school." Those guiding principles are as follows:

1. **Anti-racism is central to all we do:** We will advance anti-racism in all business, education, and research operations, policies, and practices.
2. **Anti-racism starts with us:** We must acknowledge that our country's and the profession of social work's racist histories have enabled our society to practice de facto White supremacy while claiming the opposite.
3. **Anti-racism is a continual work in progress:** We commit to an ongoing process of individual and collective education, discussion, and action.
4. **Anti-racism is intersectional:** We will center racism in our attention to all forms of oppression.
5. **Anti-racism demands accountability:** We will develop rigorous tools to evaluate and assess our progress.

The Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity Committee, led by Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion James Huguley and Payroll and Personnel Coordinator Michael Jasek, is coordinating efforts to put this commitment into action. The committee is spearheading many critical activities to advance anti-racism, including creating curricular review guidelines to support the review of all courses at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level; hosting a biweekly anti-racism learning collaborative for faculty, staff, and students with a wide range of guest speakers; and leading the creation of an anti-racism action plan to ensure that proactive steps are taken to build a more inclusive school.

Right: Aliya Durham in her classroom

The action plan offers a blueprint "to do the work well in the world and to do right by our students," says Huguley. "We had to make sure our faculty and staff were acting in an anti-racist way. It's a balancing act of retaining what works but not stagnating in our actions." The action plan was approved by a vote by faculty and staff in spring 2021 after various levels of input and review.

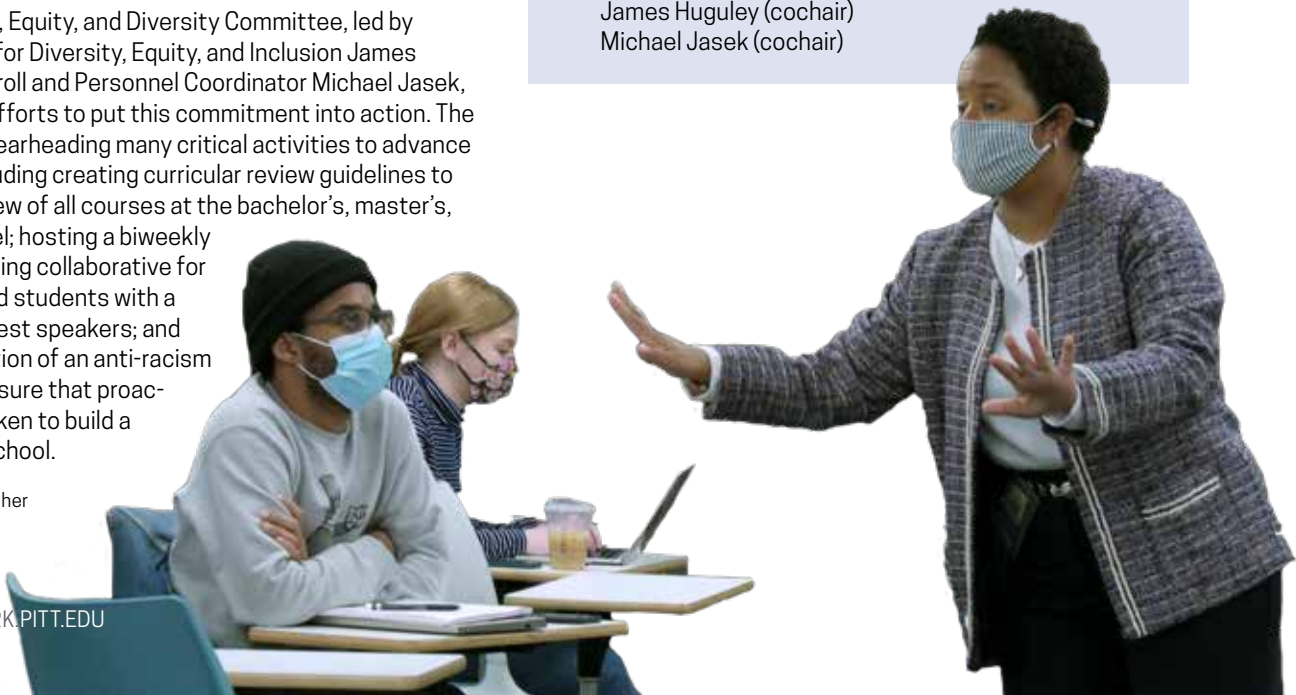
Inspired by the efforts at the schoolwide level, faculty, staff, and programs throughout the school have begun their own initiatives to embed anti-racism in their work. The Child Welfare Resource Center has convened an internal race equity working group, created educational opportunities on race for its staff in counties throughout the state, and made anti-racism discussion a standing agenda item at its monthly staff meetings. Director of Community Engagement Aliya Durham and University of Pittsburgh at Bradford MSW Program Coordinator Stephanie Eckstrom represented Pitt Social Work at a national training for Intergroup Dialogue to learn restorative practices and dialogue techniques; explore topics such as racism, power, and privilege in higher education; practice active listening in difficult conversations; and manage tense moments in interpersonal communication. Other faculty and staff have prioritized educating and challenging themselves to think differently about the role race plays in our work in order to become more anti-racist and inclusive in their daily lives.

This is just the start of the school's anti-racism work, with many actions and efforts still to begin. We invite all our community members—students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners—to join us in helping Pitt Social Work to become a model of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and inclusion for all.

2020-21 Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity Committee

Kess Ballentine
Jaime Booth
Emma Bowe-Shulman
Rachel Gartner
Summer-Rae Hastings
James Huguley (cochair)
Michael Jasek (cochair)

Alyssa Lyle
Blair Mickels
Penny Miller
Riley A. Riley
Darren Whitfield



New Faculty

Two new tenure-stream assistant professors have joined the school: **Victor Figuereo** and **Nev Jones**.

Brooke Rawls is a new assistant professor and academic coordinator for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program.

New Postdoctoral Fellow

Thomas Buckley has joined the school as a postdoctoral fellow in gerontology.

New Staff

Carolyn Falk is the new academic administrator and the BASW and PhD program assistant.

Leah Mafrica has joined the school as the recruitment and admissions coordinator.

The Just Discipline Project added four new restorative practice coordinators:

Jamaal Gosa, Molly Means, Spencer Scott, and **Michele Snyder.**

New Positions and Promotions

James Huguley has been named the inaugural associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion and promoted to associate professor with tenure.

Elizabeth Mulvaney is the new chair of the direct practice specialization within the MSW program.

Elizabeth Osayande-Davis has been named director of operations for the Just Discipline Project.

Marlo Perry has been promoted to research associate professor.

Helen Petracchi has been named associate dean for academic affairs.

Tonya Slawinski is the new director of field education.

John Wallace is the new interim director of the Center on Race and Social Problems.



Figuereo



Rawls



Falk



Gosa



Scott



Huguley



Osayande-Davis



Petracchi



Wallace



Jones



Buckley



Mafrica



Means



Snyder



Mulvaney



Perry



Slawinski

Center Award

The **Center on Race and Social Problems** received the 2020 University Prize for Strategic, Inclusive, and Diverse Excellence from the University of Pittsburgh Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. The award is presented to the outstanding school, division, department, or office making a significant contribution to fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Faculty Awards

Associate Professor **Sara Goodkind** and **James Huguley**, associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion, won 2021 See the Best in Me Awards from Gwen's Girls and the Black Girls Equity Alliance.

Huguley received the 2021 Society for Social Work and Research Excellence in Research Award for his meta-analytic review on racial socialization that was published as a lead article in *Psychological Bulletin*.

An interdisciplinary team led by Huguley was one of three \$115,000 winners in the Pitt Innovation Challenge for its project, *Parenting While Black: Healing and Growing Together*, a program that provides Black parents with tools to promote positive racial socialization, mental health, and academic achievement in their adolescents. Other School of Social Work team members were Kyndra Cleveland, research associate at the Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP); PhD student Cecily Davis; and Rachelle Haynik, CRSP research coordinator.

BASW Program Director and Assistant Professor **Toya Jones** was named a 2021 Black Educator of the Year by the State of Black Learning conference.



Sara Goodkind



Toya Jones

Remembering Larry E. Davis

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work suffered a great loss when Larry E. Davis, PhD, dean of the school from 2001 to 2018 and founding director of its Center on Race and Social Problems, passed away on March 30, 2021.

Davis was born on May 11, 1946, in Michigan. He earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from Michigan State University and his master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan. Upon graduating, Davis joined the AmeriCorps VISTA anti-poverty service program and spent three years working in one of New York City's low-income neighborhoods before returning to Ann Arbor to earn his second master's degree in psychology. Following that, Davis became the first African American to earn a PhD from Michigan's dual-degree program in social work and psychology.

Davis began his career at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. He blazed trails during his time there, becoming the first African American to be awarded tenure at the university. He also was named the E. Desmond Lee Professor of Racial and Ethnic Diversity.

Davis became dean of Pitt Social Work in 2001. The following year, he created Pitt's Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP), the first such center to be created at any American school of social work. Scholars at CRSP conduct and disseminate applied social science research on race, color, and ethnicity and mentor emerging scholars on race-related social problems. Through its programming, the center regularly engages community leaders with current research relating to race.

Shaun Eack, the school's associate dean for research, says that Davis was "prophetic" in creating CRSP, as it was

one of the first places in the nation to put an emphasis on race and address issues such as racial injustice and education in social work. "His vision allowed him to [shed light on] the challenges this country has faced in the past and will continue to face with regard to race and racial injustice [and] about the need for social workers to be part of addressing that issue."

One of Davis' most cherished accomplishments was the center's hosting of the four-day Race in America conference in 2010. It drew more than 1,300 scholars, students, national experts, and leaders, including former NAACP chair and civil rights leader Julian Bond, to discuss the promotion of a more racially equitable society.

When Davis arrived at Pitt, he already was recognized as a leading scholar of race and social justice. He continued his record of publication and thought leadership during his time at Pitt. Among his extensive list of publications are five books that he wrote, cowrote, or edited, all aimed at fellow academics. He also authored books for a more general audience, including *Black and Single: Meeting and Choosing a Partner Who's Right for You and Why Are They Angry with Us?*, his most personal book, in which he discussed his family and personal experiences with racism in America.

Davis was the coeditor in chief of the "Encyclopedia of Social Work," 20th edition, and was the founder and chair of the editorial board of the journal *Race and Social Problems*. He also founded two national organizations: Black Administrators, Researchers and Scholars, Inc., and REAP, a consortium of race, ethnicity, and poverty centers.

Davis was the first person to receive both the Significant Lifetime Achievement in Social Work Education Award from the Council on Social Work Education and the Distinguished Career Achievement Award from the Society for Social Work and Research, major awards within the field of social work.

"Dean Davis was a larger-than-life figure who led this school and the field in ways that brought together his personal experiences with his keen





“Dean Davis was a larger-than-life figure who led this school and the field in ways that brought together his personal experiences with his keen ability to think deeply and profoundly.”

—Betsy Farmer

ability to think deeply and profoundly,” says current Pitt Social Work Dean Betsy Farmer. “His life and work had an incredible impact on so many people, and it is a true loss not only to his family, the University of Pittsburgh, and the School of Social Work but to all of the scholars and community leaders whom he has inspired with his work that was dedicated to challenging racism in our society. He was a mentor to many young academics over the years and has inspired the work of others throughout his career.”

Davis also was the founder and editor of Bridges magazine, which he took great pride in developing and overseeing with the help of his longtime executive assistant, Rosie Rinella.

Davis is survived by his wife, Kim Armstrong Davis, and by three adult sons—Keanu, Naeem, and Amani Davis—as well as an extended family of nephews, nieces, and cousins.

The VanKirk Career Center Is Here for You

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work’s VanKirk Career Center offers a wide array of services to help you achieve your career goals. The center offers individual consultations, workshops, and job fairs throughout the year. You also can find job opportunities from all areas of the field on the center’s website. In addition, the center provides support to alumni who are preparing to take the social work licensure exam.

Visit socialwork.pitt.edu/student-resources/career-services for more details about upcoming events and workshops.

New Programs and Courses from the Office of Professional and Continuing Education

In 2022, the Office of Professional and Continuing Education will be:

- launching three new asynchronous micro credential programs: Introductory and Intermediate Motivational Interviewing, LCSW Supervisory Institute, and Race and Trauma;
- adding new programs to our continuing education (CE) on-demand course offerings every month;
- offering monthly CE program highlights (and discounts!) through our email newsletter;
- kicking off LCSW/LSW Supervision Matching Program (made possible through grant funding from Staunton Farm Foundation) for social workers with traditionally marginalized backgrounds; and
- continuing to provide live, virtual, and asynchronous CE course options for licensed professionals to obtain their necessary CE hours in the way that is most convenient for them.

More information about all of these topics (and the sign-up form for email newsletter) can be found at socialwork.pitt.edu/professional-continuing-education.

Student News and Awards

Doctoral student **Ana T. Flores** was named one of the recipients of the 2021 Leadership and Service Award from Pitt’s Graduate and Professional Student Government.



Doctoral student **Dashawna Fussell-Ware** was selected for the doctoral Interdisciplinary Minority Fellowship Program (IMFP). The IMFP fellowship is awarded through a federal grant to the American Psychological Association from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Fussell-Ware also was selected by the Council on Social Work Education’s Council on Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity for its 2021 Doctoral Student Award for outstanding scholarship in the areas of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in social work education.



Doctoral candidate **Christina Huerta** was chosen to participate in the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research/Program for Research on Black Americans Virtual 2021 Summer Mentoring Workshop.



Doctoral student **Laurenia Mangum** received a grant from the Society of Family Planning to explore contraceptive use attitudes and health-seeking behaviors among Black mothers living with HIV in the United States.



MSW student **Tre Tipton**, a wide receiver on the Pitt football team, was named one of six recipients of the 2021 Wilma Rudolph Student-Athlete Achievement Award, which is annually presented by the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals. Tipton also won the prestigious Disney Spirit award, given every year to the most inspiring person in college football.



BASW Program Growing, Offering New Opportunities

Toya Jones (MSW '07), director of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) Program, has a lot to be excited about right now. The BASW Program is offering new opportunities to undergraduate social work majors. Jones also is celebrating an educational milestone of her own, having just earned a doctorate in education from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education in May 2021.

We asked Jones to tell us a little more about the BASW Program and her own life and work.

Q: What is new in the BASW Program? What are you most excited about right now?

A: We recently elected new BASW executive board leaders from the junior and senior classes. It's often a challenge to get a balanced representation of our upper-division BASW students, but this year we have diverse and engaged student leadership.

I am also excited about the University Honors College honors distinction and honors degree option for BASW students, which we just began this academic year. This allows students to be involved in some unique and beneficial opportunities that the honors college offers and to get full recognition for their exceptional academic efforts. The program also offers many opportunities to students to grow their research skills, including summer research placements with experienced faculty and our BASW honors courses.

Q: What are the key features of the BASW Program?

A: We are an upper-division program, so our students come to us as juniors in one of two ways: either as transfer students from local community colleges or internally from various schools and majors in the University.

Like Master of Social Work (MSW) students, BASW students must complete a field placement in a real-world practice setting, but our students are required to complete 600 hours of field education during their senior year, while MSW students complete 1,080 hours over two years.

Our program prepares students as generalist social workers, exposing them to all aspects of social work through a person-in-environment/multicultural lens. This includes learning about communities and organizations, individuals and families, research, policy, and group social work. BASW students receive a well-rounded education to encourage them to graduate and go directly into social work practice or continue into the MSW program.

One of the most appealing aspects of our BASW program is that if a BASW graduate enters the MSW program, they are eligible to complete their MSW in just one year as an advanced-standing student. I wish they had this opportunity when I was a student in Pitt's MSW program!

Q: What do BASW graduates go on to do?

A: Often, BASW students will continue their educational journey postgraduation [by earning] an MSW and enter the direct practice field to become a licensed therapist or director of a program or agency. They may also go into advocacy, policy, or nontraditional career spaces.

There are so many choices for a social worker to make that one cannot get bored with this career. Social workers are everywhere: in hospitals, the legal system, community agencies, schools—you name it!

Pennsylvania just began licensing BASW graduates, meaning that our students now have the option to get state-certified licensure after completing their undergraduate studies. That is great news because it will open up better-paying jobs and higher-level positions and will make our graduates more marketable across the board.

Q: Tell us about your journey to become BASW program director. What brought you here today?

A: My journey starts back when I was an MSW student at Pitt. I seized the opportunity to surpass my expectations in the MSW program and dreamed of teaching at Pitt someday.

That day came shortly after I spent a couple of years in the field, working with survivors of crime and facilitating training in the community, when I was hired as an adjunct professor by Dean Larry Davis (who I'd always admired even as a student). The dean promoted me shortly after that to full-time professor.

Another opportunity arose several years later, when Dean [Betsy] Farmer and the search team promoted me to BASW director. This all felt like a whirlwind of exciting opportunities in just five years. What a ride!

Q: You recently completed another step in your education journey by returning to school for your doctorate. Congratulations!

A: I knew I wanted to go back and get my doctorate. After my children were old enough to be more independent, I went back [to Pitt's School of Education]. My research focused on social work students experiencing trauma symptoms and the use of self-care tools in the PTSD Coach app. I didn't know that I would be doing all of this right smack in the middle of a pandemic!

This by far was the biggest challenge of my career. I was promoted to this new position as [program] director while writing my dissertation and juggling with my husband, trying to act like K-12 teachers while our children were at home last year. Geesh, what a challenging year! I finished in three years, including summers, and I now have my doctorate in education."

Q: What's your favorite thing about running the BASW program?

A: My favorite part of the BASW Program is the students! I love teaching, and I love talking with students.

They are intelligent [and] eager to learn and share their thoughts. BASW students have a passion for advocacy and grassroots activism. They make 'good trouble' and motivate others around them to do the same. They keep me fresh and on my toes.

Q: What do you do when you aren't at work?

A: I love hanging out with my two children, Naomi and CJ, and my husband, Cornell Jones. They are the best of my world. I also sing (shhhh, don't tell anyone). I've been singing since I was 3 years old, and music is truly my favorite way to take care of myself. I love going to concerts and enjoying live music. I also love to laugh, and my family and friends give me a lot of opportunities for laughter.



MSW Program Offers Unique Features at Two Regional Campuses

More than 10,000 alumni have graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. But did you know that nearly 5% of our alumni are graduates of one of Pitt's regional campuses? The School of Social Work offers a part-time Master of Social Work (MSW) degree program at two of Pitt's four regional campuses: the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford (UPB) and the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ).

Started in 2002 and 1998 respectively, UPB and UPJ's MSW programs have the same academic goals, standards, and requirements as the program at the Pittsburgh campus. The regional programs, however, are structured a little differently. Both UPB and UPJ's programs offer a direct practice specialization. UPB students also obtain a children, youth, and families certificate, while UPJ students receive a mental health certificate.

Each campus has an MSW program coordinator on site who provides academic advising, field liaison coverage, and community outreach. Stephanie Eckstrom became the UPB MSW program coordinator in 2002. Misha Zorich became the UPJ MSW program coordinator in 2020 after a long tenure on the Pittsburgh campus. Coordinators provide important on-the-ground support to students and help to connect the social work program to other campus activities and initiatives at each regional campus.

A final unique feature of the regional programs is their cohort-style admissions model, with a new group of students starting the program every two years. Our coordinators have found that the cohort model enhances students' academic experiences by providing a framework for support, community, and connection. Many students form personal and professional relationships with their cohort that last well beyond graduation.

What are some of the exciting programs or events that you are looking forward to at UPB and UPJ?

"I am very excited to welcome [the members of] Cohort 11 as they start their graduate school journey in August 2022. I hope that we will be able to get back into our annual professional development and network gatherings sponsored by the Pitt-Bradford MSW Alumni Network in collaboration with local entities," says Eckstrom.

"Our students are collaborating with community partners on events for the summer. For the fall, we are excited to welcome a new cohort of students and have an in-person meet-and-greet event with the MSW Pitt-Johnstown alumni. I'm also appreciative that the school's Office of Professional and Continuing Education will continue offering virtual training so all alumni can complete their CE hours from wherever they are located," says Zorich.

Pitt-Bradford and Pitt-Johnstown's MSW programs are accepting applications for the fall term through June 30. Please visit socialwork.pitt.edu/admissions for more details.



Eckstrom



Zorich

Answering the Call: Pitt Alums in Geriatric Social Work

By Sharon Blake



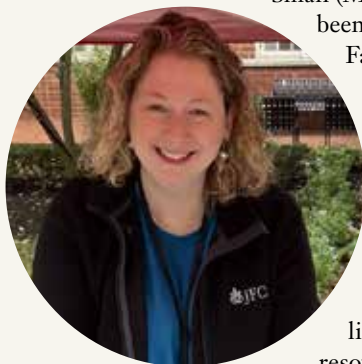
When 5-year-old **Stefanie Small**, dressed in a pink tutu, stepped onstage at a New York nursing home to perform a dance number for about 30 older adults, she looked out into the crowd, then suddenly ran offstage, terrified.

"I was petrified of older people," she says now. "All those eyes on me!"

Small's view of older adults had changed drastically by the time she got to college. In her senior year, she interned at an adult day care center that specialized in patients with dementia. Soon she was helping to lead the patients in exercises, serving them lunch, and just enjoying being around them.

"Dementia is really about being in the moment, because there is no past or future," says Small. "And being able to help people in the moment really was a remarkable transformation for me."

Her love of practicing directly with the aging population stayed with her. Now a successful geriatric social worker, Small (MSW '01) has



been at Jewish Family and Community Services in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood for the past 20 years. She helps to

link clients to the resources they need to keep living safely and independently in their own homes. For example, she assists a 73-year-old woman who has anxiety with paying her bills and making doctor's appointments and offers her general support. "She has no close family, so we are really it," she says.

Small and thousands of geriatric social workers like her are busy helping older adults to cope with a frightening pandemic and, when possible, ease back into society, ever mindful of the issues facing their clients and the potential problems they see coming down the pike. Right now, approximately 45 million Americans are 65 or older. By 2030, that number will reach 73 million. And by 2034, the U.S. Census Bureau projects the United States will—for the first time—be a nation with a larger number of older adults than children. All this comes at a time when geriatric social work is not attracting droves of new skilled workers.

Exemplary Training

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work has had a gerontology certificate program since the early 1980s. In 2005, the program received a grant to grow the certificate by establishing the two-year Hartford Partnership Program for Aging Education, a fellowship designed to provide students with a solid foundation for working with older adults based on deep community engagement. And it is expanding. Hartford fellows now include MSW and BASW students (for one year) and, among the MSW

Right now, approximately 45 million Americans are 65 or older. By 2030, that number will reach 73 million. And by 2034, the U.S. Census Bureau projects the United States will—for the first time—be a nation comprised of more older adults than children.

students, include those in both specialization tracks. Students seeking a joint degree (for example, a Master of Public Health or Master of Divinity) with social work also may apply. Unlike at other Hartford programs across the country, Pitt's MSW fellows are engaged with older adults for the entire two years of their degree program and have ongoing access to faculty and peers. During that time, they rotate assignments, working and learning in hospice settings, various residential facilities, or other environments serving older adults. They also complete a capstone project.

Rotation of placements is an important piece of students' training, says Clinical Assistant Professor **Elizabeth Mulvaney**, who ran the program for six years. When the students see older adults in more than one setting, they see the range of their capabilities and strengths as well as the challenges they face.

"The stereotype of an older adult is that they are dependent and sick," she says. "The reality is that most are not. Part of the purpose of rotation is to help our students see that."

Her colleague, **Rafael "Ray" Engel**, principal investigator of the Hartford Program, appreciates the leadership component of the capstone project, which allows fellows to take their work directly to the community. And there are many forms that a capstone project might take. It could be a resource guide about how important pets are to older adults or lessons for dementia patients on how to create art that reflects life memories. A student-created exhibition that included educational posters on hoarding was



Students in the Ageless Wisdom program sort "pills" while wearing glasses that simulate cataracts.

viewed by some 1,000 people coming through Wesley W. Posvar Hall one weekend. "The lessons learned by that event could help staff at community agencies carry out their own projects," says Engel.

The fellows also complete a program developed with Pitt's Aging Institute called Ageless Wisdom, which allows students to directly experience the physical impairments older people have. They move around with popcorn kernels in their shoes to simulate peripheral neuropathy, which interferes with walking and comfort. Wearing gloves that decrease sensation in the fingers, they manipulate items in their wallet, count cash, or open a snack. They wear glasses that simulate cataracts as they sort through fake pills, trying to distinguish the white ones from the yellow ones.

Ageless Wisdom has been offered to more than 600 students throughout the

continued



School of Social Work. MSW students also are trained to deliver these valuable lessons in the community after they graduate.

More Alumni Answering the Call

For **Jennifer Marasco-Kuhn** (MSW '10), her focus has been on people with memory impairment. As cochair of Dementia-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh (DFGP), the former Pitt Hartford fellow collaborates with a network of agencies to educate the public about dementia and to train caregivers. She hopes to tailor dementia training for specific businesses—in the arts sector, for example, or transportation providers. DFGP is working with faith-based organizations and the Pittsburgh Cultural District to make outings for people with dementia less confusing or jarring. A partner agency soon will be working with a local gym to introduce dementia-friendly practices to its employees.

“If we educate individuals on how to spot the signs and how to interact with people living with dementia, it will make the community more accepting, inclusive, and safe,” she says.

Social workers engaged with people living with dementia must be at the top of their game, says Marasco-Kuhn. “You might be helping them with dinner, and they suddenly change their mind or are in a different timeline. They are not stupid or inept. They are very aware

of what they believe is their world, and they will call you out if you try to force a detail in their life they believe is not true,” she says. She tries to meet them, emotionally, where they are. “We let them take the lead.”

Marasco-Kuhn also explains that the lived environment plays a role in how people with dementia cope. She has worked in communities with inclusive design features, such as a favorite grocery store or market or bus stops that don’t actually have bus service. This way, residents can still have freedom of movement without risk of harm.

Much farther south, **Chris Messersmith** (MSW '10) is applying what he learned as a Hartford fellow as operations manager of Suncoast PACE in Florida, a state with a high number of aging adults. Suncoast PACE is a state- and federally funded program that delivers services through an adult day center and primary care and therapy clinics. In his work, Messersmith engages with his older clients and their caregivers at his site in Clearwater, works with vendors, and helps to address issues of compliance to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for seniors.

Facing Down the Challenges

All three of these social workers face daily challenges in their work. Small feels that one of the biggest is trying to help people who don’t feel they need help.

“If we educate individuals on how to spot the signs, and how to interact with people living with dementia, it will make the community more accepting.”

—Jennifer Marasco-Kuhn

She clearly remembers the mantra of one of her Pitt professors: “You can’t want it more than the client.” Small says that she has heard that phrase in her head for decades and shares it with social work students and trainees.

“You have to learn that early on, because everything we do is client directed,” she says. “If they want to do something you would not choose, you have to learn to live with that.”

Small says that’s when family consultations can help, usually with adult children. Social workers tackle three questions with them: What does your parent need now? What will they need in a few years? What will they need in a crisis?

“At the very least, the family members leave knowing what to do in a crisis,” says Small. “Even if older adults don’t want to hear it, the families have to be prepared. Then we slowly work on the older adult.”

Family members often play the role of caregiver (or “care partner,” which some social workers note is a more appropriate term, because not all scenarios are a one-way flow of care and support). And while the public may assume that social workers suffer from burnout in their careers, Small says it is actually unpaid caregivers who burn out most quickly (see sidebar on page 12). “Especially in spousal caregiving, they are also dealing with strong feelings of loss in their situation—what could have been and what will not be,” she says.

Prior to the pandemic, Small's support group for caregivers, which usually attracted eight to 12 people, met once a month. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she says that stressors for caregivers intensified, and the group now meets virtually twice a month and has doubled in size.

Marasco-Kuhn sees a lot of burnout among those who provide dementia care. Working with families who are experiencing anticipatory grief is emotionally charged work. "They are losing their loved one while they are still alive," she says. "It is a lot of grief work. And if you don't have boundaries or are not practicing self-care, it can really wear on you."

She says that it is important not to forget members of the LGBTQ+ population who have impaired memories. Some of them may have special circumstances, and their caregivers need enhanced skills to provide support. Through DFGP, Marasco-Kuhn learned about an ongoing national study conducted by the University of Washington called Aging with Pride: Innovations in Dementia Empowerment and Action that explores this topic. DFGP plans to share information on this study locally with interested participants.

"This is something communities will experience more and more, whether it is in independent living or in a nursing home," says Marasco-Kuhn.

At Suncoast PACE in Florida, Messersmith says that his primary challenge is an uptick in the number of seniors needing help with substance abuse or overall mental health. And the funding is just not there. "We need increased investment in home- and community-based services here in Florida and across the nation," he says. "Health care companies and politicians are learning it is cheaper to care for people in their homes rather than in facilities. And most people want to remain in their homes, so it is a win-win."

Despite these challenges, these social workers feel that they benefit from engaging with older adults. They love the personal connection and the wise advice they receive from clients. They enjoy clients' stories about their

"It is such a big reward when a senior calls me and says what we did made their life easier. I can't put a price on it. It just makes me feel I can do even more."

—Joy Starzl

childhood adventures, their experiences in military service, their careers, how they met their spouse, or their world travels. They also learn skills they can apply to aging members of their own family. As Marasco-Kuhn says, "[My older clients] have provided me [with] life wisdom for my own journey."

Always a Social Worker

Joy Starzl (MSW '97) has always had a special spot in her heart for older adults. A longtime social worker at the former Lemington Home for the Aged, she eventually became executive director of nearby Lemington Community Services. With the 80-unit Eva P. Mitchell Residence for seniors right next door, Starzl began offering more services for that population.

"We put in a personal care home, a gift shop, podiatrist, hairdresser—putting that all together was exciting," says Starzl. When the Lemington Center closed in 2005, Starzl eventually set up shop in the basement of Cornerstone Baptist Church so that the meals, outreach, recreation, and referrals could continue.

Starzl retired in 2010 but is active on the Eva P. Mitchell Residence board and remains a strong advocate for seniors. She says that when the Lemington Center closed, the Port Authority of Allegheny County bus service was cut. Now she watches seniors trudging up a hill carrying bags to get the closest bus while she and others appeal to Port Authority to restore the original bus service.



"Our society just keeps putting Band-Aids on things, especially for older adults," says Starzl, although she is encouraged by recent news that the old Lemington Home will be redeveloped as 54 housing units for seniors with a first-floor health center. "Maybe the bus will return," she says.

Starzl speaks daily to people who live at the Mitchell Residence and connects them to services, be it a dinner companion or someone who can assist with small home repairs. "It is such a big reward when a senior calls me and says what we did made their life easier," she says. "I can't put a price on it. It just makes me feel I can do even more."

Starzl recognizes the struggles of seniors in her own life. Before the pandemic, she was a regular Sunday-night dinner guest at the home of a 90-year-old friend, with meals delivered by Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church. When the pandemic prevented those in-home visits, the church meals kept coming, and to Starzl's home as well. Even the brief encounter with the delivery person was a comfort. "I was overwhelmed," says Starzl, who became a widow in 2017. "I didn't realize how lonely I was."

Issues Looming on the Horizon

A laundry list of issues lies ahead for geriatric social workers and the millions of older adults they serve. As Starzl points out, transportation is a big one. While Port Authority offers free rides for seniors, not everyone lives close to a bus

continued

stop. Uber and Lyft are too expensive for many. Free senior transit through ACCESS is helpful, says Small, but you have to allow a lot of time for pick-up and drop-off. Volunteer transportation programs can be unreliable. Starzl and Mulvaney both suggest eventually introducing the older population to driverless cars.

Loneliness and isolation also are concerns. “Some older adults are so isolated that it scares me,” says Starzl, who has tapped on the door of an older adult’s home to check in on them only to spot them lying on the floor or unable to get to the door. Many seniors living at home have struggled to have enough social contact and support, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Housing challenges persist, with long waiting lists for the Housing Choice Voucher Program homes and senior high-rises. The pandemic also frightened some family members, who pulled their loved ones out of congregate living.

Engel feels it is time to rethink institutional care and reassess how it can be delivered safely. Are our current nursing homes and institutions really the model to use going forward? Small says that too many people think moving an 83-year-old widow from her familiar home into an assisted living center will solve all her problems.

“Now you’re paying \$6,000 a month for her to isolate in a room that she is not familiar with and where she doesn’t have her own things. So yes, now she is getting help, but now she is depressed,” says Small.

Messersmith says that the current system that serves older adults overall is the same one that has been in place for decades, dating back to a time when that population was much smaller. Starzl hopes to see more social workers employed in the policy arena, helping to shape a better geriatric care system for the future.

Today, Messersmith says, we need more funds and interest in preventative health care to reduce the stress on

the system. And he thinks Americans need to change their outlook: “We will most likely need some degree of cultural shift in how families view their personal responsibilities in caring for older family members.”

Marasco-Kuhn agrees. She notes that studies have shown that intergenerational living arrangements between older adults and college students can benefit both. She feels that college students, many of whom have lost their connection to their grandparents, have a lot to gain as well as to contribute from living near or with older adults.

The pandemic made very clear the problem of nursing home staffing shortages, and many think that trend will continue. Mulvaney says that the industry needs more geriatric social workers who must be well paid to do this very hard and important work. And they don’t just need bodies to fill positions but high-quality, compassionate professionals.

Engel admits that the geriatric path is not necessarily a popular one for social work students. “They don’t see it as a sexy field,” he says. “It’s not like mental health, where one works with broader populations across any age group.”

Affordability for the patient also is a concern, says Mulvaney, in an insurance system that she says is very “disease focused.” Insurance provides good coverage if a patient has an acute illness or is very low income. But those with long-term challenges and disabilities or who are middle income can struggle.

Technology continues to play a key role in assisting older adults, with innovations like a wristwatch that monitors movements and can detect a fall or phones that provide large print and can follow voice commands. Telehealth also has come a long way, though Small cautions that there are still seniors who do not have access to the internet. “Technology has been a boon, but it has not been an equal boon,” she says.

Nonetheless, this once timid ballerina who has grown up to become a confident social worker relishes getting up in the morning and heading to work to serve this population. She says that early on, when she told her friends she was going into geriatrics, a common response was, “Oh, that’s so depressing.” But nothing could be further from the truth.

“It is amazing what you can gain from them and do for them,” she says. “There is so much positivity on the horizon. I think it far outweighs any problems that may crop up.”

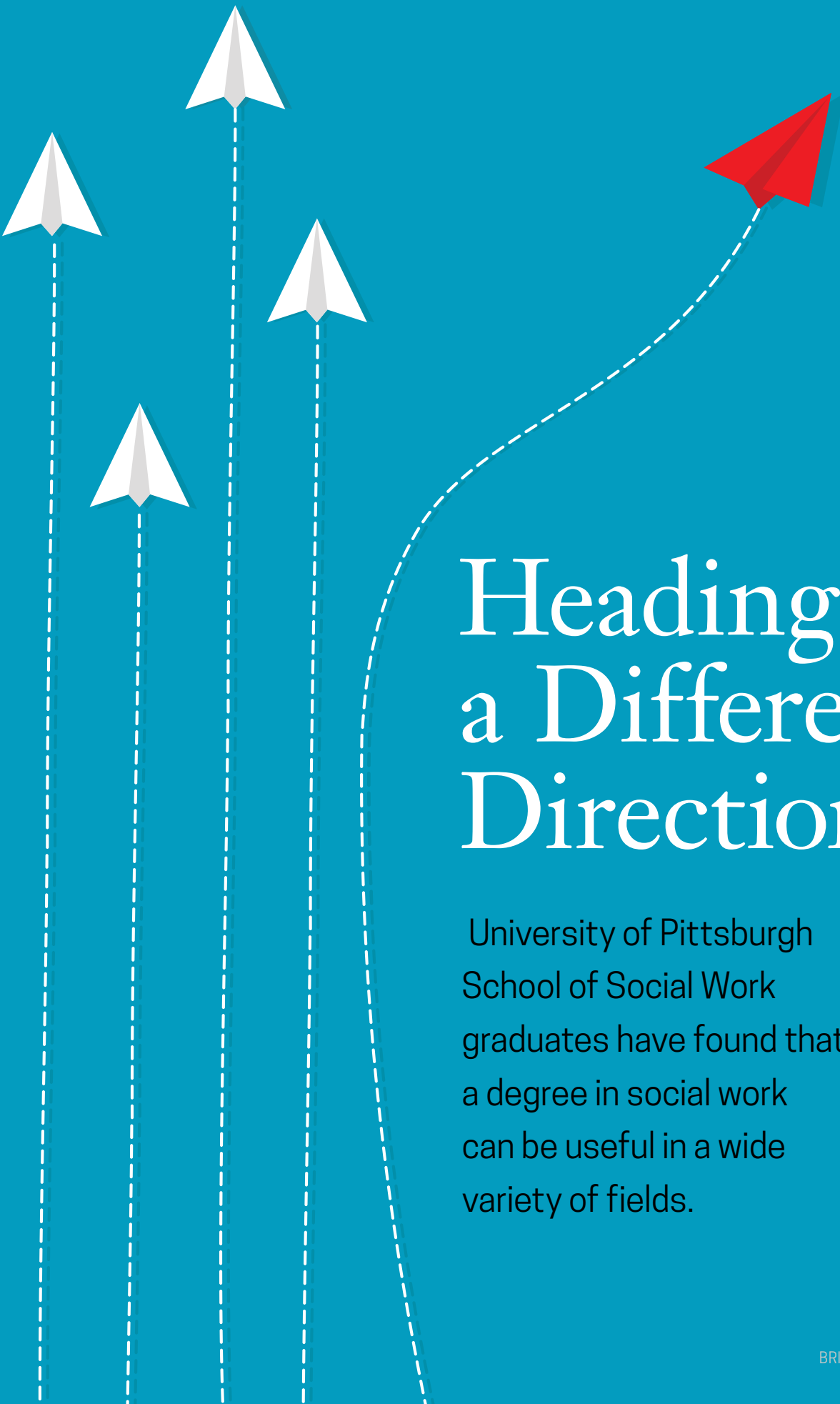
Tips for Caregivers

Take time for yourself. This is not a selfish act. The caregiver is an important person in the older adult’s life and is not replaceable.

Ask for help. Sometimes people hide their situation but there is nothing to be embarrassed about. Asking for help can ease the burden. And it can be useful to friends and family members if you give them something specific to do. Have a running list of small tasks.

Accept the help. Caregivers are used to being in charge, but they must learn to accept help from others. Sometimes, they refuse to accept assistance and then find themselves in their own health crisis.

Talk to the doctors. Share your concerns and make sure the doctor is taking them seriously. If the doctor is dismissive, find a new one.



Heading in a Different Direction

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work
graduates have found that
a degree in social work
can be useful in a wide
variety of fields.

“We all know that social workers have been viewed as caseworkers and therapists or community organizers for decades—we have been put in a box,” she says. “But we also know that [the Pitt MSW program] gives us the tools to become powerhouses.”

—Samantha Buffoni



For many decades after the start of formal social work education and training, a degree in social work was seen as having two trajectories: going to work as a social worker or pursuing advanced degrees as a precursor to entering the world of academia. In recent years, however, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work graduates have found that a degree in social work can be useful in a wide variety of fields and that their career options are no longer so narrowly focused. Some alumni have gone on to earn advanced degrees in other fields and used their social work skills and perspective to guide their careers in those fields. Others have found that their social work degree alone has been sufficient to succeed in a field that is seemingly unrelated to social work. Despite their many differences, though, these alumni agree that no one should be surprised to see someone with a social work degree in any field today.

I-Yu “Ann” Chen (MSW ’70) is now retired but had a long career as a computer scientist at a number of technology companies around the world, including Intel Corporation. While

her degree was not necessarily directly applicable to her day-to-day work, she found it to be immensely useful when it came to tackling problems and working with others as she created and led teams in software research and development.

“People skills, group work skills, and problem-solving techniques from my social work training helped me build stronger engineering development teams and foster interpersonal relationships among team member engineers,” she says. While many people she worked with were surprised to learn she had a social work degree, she notes that they often came to see it as one of her strengths, and she credits it for her success as a manager.

In her role as the assistant operations manager for the medical marijuana dispensary goodblend, **Samantha Buffoni** (MSW ’19) uses skills in advocacy, leadership, and critical reading of empirical research that she learned in her degree program daily. Still, she finds that others almost always are shocked to learn of her educational background.

“We all know that social workers have been viewed as caseworkers and therapists or community organizers for decades—we have been put in a box,” she says. “But we also know that [the Pitt MSW program] gives us the tools to become powerhouses.”

Buffoni is proud to be putting her skills to good use in advocating for an industry that she says has helped more than half a million patients and

caregivers since medical marijuana became legal in Pennsylvania in 2016. “Advocacy has been a huge part of my role in this industry,” she says, “from educating patients to advancing employee-related concerns among our workforce to promoting knowledge of the scientific evidence supporting this plant.”

The interpersonal skills that are so integral to social work practice are similarly quite useful in other fields. **Robyn Lawler** (MSW ’10), who is the assistant director of Hillel at Pennsylvania State University, notes that she uses those skills and others she acquired in her master’s program daily in her interactions with fellow staff members, with students, and with others across the university community. Hillel is a nonprofit campus organization that works with college students on more than 500 campuses worldwide, and the Penn State Hillel works with an estimated 4,000 Jewish students at the school. As assistant director, Lawler oversees student life programming and works to encourage Jewish leadership across the campus in addition to maintaining partnerships and collaborating with other campus organizations.

“Much of my role requires me to listen actively to students, staff, and stakeholders and apply pastoral care when dealing with difficult circumstances,” she says, adding that her Pitt Social Work education “also prepared me for grant writing, referring, and practicing

effective conflict management.”

Lawler says that while some people have been surprised to find a social worker at Hillel, she has found a social work degree to be highly desirable in her line of work and has even inspired several student interns to pursue a graduate degree in social work.

A degree in social work can be a natural fit with a degree or career in a related field; indeed, the Pitt Social Work MSW program has grown over the years to formally include several dual-degree programs.

Jessica Cohen (BASW '17) found that much of the “big picture” focus of her course work meshed well with that of public health. As a program manager at the Association of Material & Child Health Programs, a professional public health membership organization, Cohen leans into her training as she analyzes and advocates for public health policies.

“My social work education infused health equity and social justice principles into my thinking,” she says, and both areas “remain strong pillars of my current public health work.”

Gretchen Benner (MSW '11) came to Pitt Social Work with an undergraduate degree in music from Duquesne University and combined her two degrees in a career as a music therapist. In 2013, she founded Piedmont Music Therapy, an organization that provides musical instruction and music therapy and now has four therapists on staff. Like social workers, music therapists can be found in settings such as schools, hospitals, and clinics, though Benner has found that people are more familiar with the role of a social worker.

“My degree in social work helped my counseling skills and taught me about models of service delivery,” she says. “It helped me learn about community systems and obstacles that individuals and groups overcome with resiliency and perseverance.”

Beatrice Lors-Rousseau (MSW '13) earned a master's degree in public health from Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health concurrently with her social work degree, and she finds that her educational background in both informs her work as a grant maker for a private philanthropic organization and helps to reassure some

of the nonprofit leaders she works with.

“The leadership at many grantee organizations often have at least one social worker, particularly for those providing direct services, so grantees are often pleased to know that there is a social worker who truly understands their work and serves as an advocate for them in the grants decision-making process,” she says.

Prior to her current role, Lors-Rousseau was a licensed public health social worker for various nonprofit and governmental organizations, work that she says makes her current job easy “in terms of helping others understand how this career in philanthropy aligns with the tenets and values of social work.”

Law and social work are less-common bedfellows, but **Jeffrey Fromknecht** (MSW '07) is making the combination work. He is CEO of Side Project Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization that serves as an incubator and developer of grassroots projects that seek to promote social justice and social change. He also serves as managing attorney of Lawyers for Nonprofits, an offshoot of Side Project that specializes in helping small and start-up nonprofits. He notes that Side Project focuses on community organizing and uses a strategy he first learned in a course with Tracey Soska, now an emeritus faculty member at Pitt Social Work.

Fromknecht says that many people are surprised to hear that he's a lawyer with a social work degree, but “I often hear that they wish more lawyers had a social work background.”

These Pitt Social Work alumni show that it's possible to achieve success in many fields with a social work degree and that a course of study does not have to be limiting when it comes to pursuing a career.

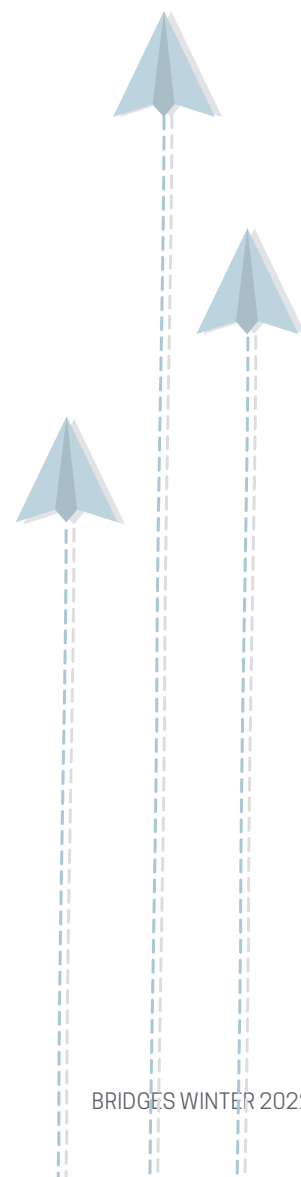
“It's easy to wonder if you chose the right major,” says Cohen, “but there is so much you can do with social work, and you don't need to know exactly how you want to apply your degree while you're doing your course work.”

Lors-Rousseau concurs: “Don't be afraid to rewrite the narrative of what social workers can do; we are multifaceted.”



“Don't be afraid to rewrite the narrative of what social workers can do; we are multifaceted.”

—Beatrice Lors-Rousseau





A Year of Celebration

2022 is shaping up to be a year of celebrations and special events at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.

The Child Welfare Education and Research Programs will celebrate 25 years of statewide impact through education, advocacy, research, training, and technical assistance. Their key initiatives—the Child Welfare Resource Center, Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program, Child Welfare Education for Leadership program, and Child Welfare Workforce Excellence Fellows Program for MSW students—provide child welfare educational and practice leadership to agencies in every county and 16 public universities in Pennsylvania.

The programs will commemorate their anniversary with a public celebration and lecture from a renowned leader in the field in late spring 2022.

The Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) is commemorating 20 years since its founding by Dean Emeritus Larry Davis with a year of activities and events. CRSP supports scholarship, teaching, and community

engagement related to race and racial equity, engaging faculty, students, and community partners from around the region. CRSP hosts public lectures, runs a graduate fellowship program, and provides competitive seed funding for scholars throughout the University who are conducting research on race. It also promotes interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among race researchers from all fields.

CRSP hosted disability rights advocate Haben Girma, the first deafblind woman to graduate from Harvard Law School, for a virtual talk on disability and race on February 2, 2022. This event marked the inaugural Florence Gibbs Momeyer Lecture at CRSP and served as the kickoff celebration for CRSP's 20th anniversary year.

Visit socialwork.pitt.edu/events for all CRSP and child welfare anniversary activities.

Grants

Dean **Betsy Farmer** received funding from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for her project, Needs Assessment for Allegheny County Jail Inmate Welfare Fund.



Assistant Professor **Rachel Gartner**, with doctoral students Adrian Ballard and Emil Smith, received a Pitt Seed grant for her project, Translating TGQN Campus Climate Findings into Practice.



Associate Dean and Associate Professor **James Huguley**, along with colleagues from the Schools of Social Work, Education, and Medicine and The Pittsburgh Study in the Pitt Department of Pediatrics, has been awarded a \$3 million grant from the Institute of Education Sciences for the Just Discipline Project. Huguley also received a grant from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit for training and evaluation programs at the Just Discipline Project.



Assistant Professor **Travis Labrum** received a 2021 Steven H. Sandell Grant, administered by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, to study the perspectives of adults with mental illness who have their social security benefits managed by a family member. Labrum also will conduct in-depth interviews with the family members acting as the beneficiaries' representative payee.



Assistant Professor **Deborah Moon** received a University of Pittsburgh Year of Engagement grant in support of the Congregations as Healers Uniting to Restore Community Health (CHURCH) Project. The CHURCH Project engages Black church musicians to incorporate musical components into a mental health intervention that can be implemented in Black churches.



Associate Professor **Mary Ohmer** received a one-year grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and

Health Disparities. Ohmer, along with colleagues at Pitt and UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and community partners, is working to create a community-level strategy to reduce youth violence in Pittsburgh neighborhoods.



Research Associate Professor **Mary Elizabeth Rauktis** received a 2021 Pitt Momentum Funds Seeding Grant. She is leading the project Supporting the Education of Youth in Foster Care during the Pandemic: Foster Parent and Agency Perspectives in collaboration with her Pitt Social Work colleagues Huguley and **Fengyan Tang** and other Pitt partners in the School of Education and University Library System.



Professor **Daniel Rosen**, along with coinvestigators **Rafael Engel** and Huguley, received a \$1.9 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration to provide specialized behavioral health workforce training to Pitt Social Work MSW students.

Publications



Associate Professor **Jaime Booth's** Homewood Youth-Powered & Engaged Media project is now producing and publishing podcasts that are available on Spotify.



Assistant Professor **Victor Figueroa** authored the chapter "The Role of the Health Care System on the Incorporation of Latinxs into American Society" for the book *The Edinburgh Companion to the Politics of American Health*.



Associate Professor **Sara Goodkind** is one of three editors in chief of the journal *Affilia: Feminist Inquiry in Social Work*.



Assistant Professor **Nev Jones** was named column editor of *Psychiatric Services*, a peer-reviewed medical journal, and a lead editor for the *Community Mental Health Journal*. Jones also was appointed to The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on Psychoses as well as to serve as a member of the commission editorial group and participatory research chair.



Associate Professors **Jeffrey Shook** and **Rafael Engel**, along with doctoral student Christina Huerta, Daisia Williams (MSW '20), and colleagues from the Pitt School of Education, released a new report as part of the Pittsburgh Wage Study. "Motivations, Barriers, and Strategies: Perceptions of Human Service Organizations to Proposals to Raise the Minimum Wage" used in-depth interviews with 25 leaders of human service organizations of varying budget sizes in the Pittsburgh area to understand their perceptions of proposals to raise the minimum wage and their capacity to do so.

Shook and Engel, along with Associate Professor Sara Goodkind, research team consultant Sandra Wexler, and Kess Ballentine (MSW '17, PhD '21), edited a special issue of *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* titled *Moving Beyond Poverty: Effects of*

Low-wage Work on Individual, Social, and Family Well-being.



Clinical Assistant Professor and Academic Coordinator of the Child Welfare Education for Leadership Program **Alicia Johnson** contributed the chapter "Adverse Childhood Experiences: How Incidents from the Past Affect a Student's Classroom Behavior Today" to the book *Strategies and Methods for Implementing Trauma-informed Pedagogy*.

Associate Professor **Mary Ohmer** and three colleagues were named members of the editorial team for the *Journal of Community Practice* by the Association for Community Organization and Social Action.

Research Associate Professor **Mary Elizabeth Rauktis** has been appointed children's book editor for the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, published by Taylor & Francis.



Clinical Assistant Professor **Liz Winter** is the lead author of the book chapter "Team-based Learning Brings Academic Rigor, Collaboration, and Community to Online Learning," which appears in *Resilient Pedagogy: Practical Teaching Strategies to Overcome Distance, Disruption, and Distraction*.

Letter from the Alumni Advisory Board

Dear University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work friends and family,

Since graduating from Pitt Social Work, we've found ways to continue to be involved with our peers and fellow alumni through the school's Alumni Advisory Board (AAB). AAB allows alumni like us to be lifelong learners at Pitt as well as to serve as a bridge between the School of Social Work and the broader social work community. In addition to enabling alumni to continue to learn and practice social work values, AAB also connects alumni to current students, faculty, and staff at the school.

AAB plays a role in organizing events for networking and volunteering as well as recognizing alumni excellence. During the past several terms, the board has worked creatively and thoughtfully to create engagement experiences on a virtual platform with great success. Last year, AAB organized five Alumni Speaker Series events spotlighting alumni who demonstrate excellence in the field. We anticipate a continuation of this successful programming in the future.

In 2022, we hope to begin to transition to in-person events again with opportunities for our subcommittees to meet and mingle.

Our three subcommittees are the heart of our organizing efforts. The Engagement Subcommittee's primary focus is to ensure that current Pitt Social Work students are aware of and connected to the board and the school's alumni. The Programming Subcommittee plays a significant role in supporting the school's events, such as networking and volunteering opportunities, that alumni can participate in. The Membership Subcommittee focuses on both recruiting and maintaining alumni members for the board. AAB has implemented improvements to the subcommittee format to provide enriching, positive experiences for all members. We strongly believe that these improvements will maximize the value, time, and expertise of the alumni involved.

If you are a graduate of or current student at Pitt Social Work, we would love to answer any questions you may have about AAB membership. Please connect with us at sswalums@pitt.edu.

We hope you will reach out, and as always, hail to Pitt!



Jessica Murray (MSW '14)
Chair, Alumni Advisory Board



Talia (Landerman) Nevitt (MSW '19)
Vice Chair, Alumni Advisory Board

The Alumni Advisory Board allows alumni like us to be lifelong learners at Pitt as well as to serve as a bridge between the School of Social Work and the broader social work community.

Help Us to Unlock Additional Funds on Pitt Day of Giving

February 22, 2022, marks the sixth annual Pitt Day of Giving,

the University's most important fundraising day of the year. During this 24-hour online event, alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of Pitt come together to celebrate the University's founding in February 1787 by making a gift to the area or areas that mean the most to them.

This year, the School of Social Work Board of Visitors has issued a special challenge. Every 50 donors to Pitt Social Work on Pitt Day of Giving will unlock \$5,000 in challenge funds from the Board of Visitors, up to \$25,000 for 250 donors! Those additional funds will provide critical support for social work students.

On this year's Pitt Day of Giving, your gift to the school and our students will go twice as far. Donate, encourage former classmates to make a gift, and share the news with others in your networks. Visit pittdayofgiving.com to learn more and make your gift!

2021 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

Since the late 1970s, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work has annually recognized a select group of alumni with its highest honor: the Distinguished Alumni Award. These individuals have achieved the highest standards of professional integrity and personal conduct, have advanced knowledge of the social work profession, and have supported public and social policies that champion equal rights for all.

The school honored the 2021 Distinguished Alumni Award recipients on October 19, 2021. This year's virtual celebration kicked off with greetings and well wishes from 10 past recipients from the 1980s through 2020. Dean Betsy Farmer then announced the 2021 honorees, who joined a panel discussion to share more about their individual career journeys, their thoughts on future opportunities for the field of social work, and the importance of self-care as we navigate uncertain times. Following the discussion, attendees mixed and mingled in the virtual networking lounges.

Thank you and congratulations to the winners!



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON (MSW '07)

BSW Program Director and Assistant Professor of Social Work, Penn State Greater Allegheny



Christopher Robinson is an advocate, educator, and licensed social worker. Before joining the faculty of Penn State Greater Allegheny, Robinson spent 11 years at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), where he led the Associate of Science program in social work at the CCAC South Campus.

Robinson also serves as manager of cultural competency for the UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion, where he collaborates on and develops strategic diversity initiatives that focus on culturally competent patient

care, eliminating health disparities, enhancing language access services, and reducing community trauma.

A native of Kalamazoo, Michigan, Robinson holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Jackson State University and a doctorate in education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in addition to his Pitt Social Work degree. He is cofounder of the Western Pennsylvania Council of HBCU Alumni and the greater Pittsburgh alumni chapter of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc. Robinson was a 2020 recipient of the NISOD Jackson State University Excellence in Teaching Award and a 2021 New Pittsburgh Courier Men of Excellence honoree.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

KATHI R. ELLIOTT (MSW '08)

CEO, Gwen's Girls



Kathi R. Elliott earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Chatham University in August 2014 and completed dual master's degrees in social work and nursing at the University of Pittsburgh in 2008. She has close to 30 years of experience in social service and community and individual mental health treatment. Advocacy and giving back to others in need is a value that was instilled in her by

her mother, the founder of Gwen's Girls, the late Commander Gwen Elliott.

Kathi Elliott has served as CEO of Gwen's Girls since 2015. A visionary leader, she has been instrumental in establishing the Black Girls Equity Alliance, an interdisciplinary collaborative that is addressing systemic inequalities that exist within the juvenile justice, health and wellness, child welfare, and education systems locally and nationally. Elliott currently serves on the boards of Chatham University and ACLU Pennsylvania.

REGIONAL IMPACT AWARD



COREY LAKINS (BASW '03, MSW '04)

Founder and CEO, AIMED Human Services

Corey Lakins serves as founder and CEO of AIMED Human Services; founder and CEO of Sensible Home Healthcare, LLC; and founder and CEO of Kingdom Business Service. Lakins' passion for navigating the complex care system for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and mental health disorders has been her charge for more than 30 years. Her mission

to ensure that the individuals she serves receive inclusive and person-centered care and that their desires, interests, and values are taken into consideration is evident in the everyday lives of

those she has helped. Lakins established Sensible Home Healthcare to make life more manageable for the elderly and disabled who choose to retain their independence and stay in their homes. To help ensure its success, Lakins oversees the operational and financial plans to guarantee that Sensible Home Healthcare operates effectively and efficiently.

Kingdom Business Service specializes in transforming the client's signature story into a business idea. Lakins masterfully coaches her clients in the art of step-by-step online digital platform and content creation. The 5-Figure Global Course coaches and trains clients to acquire the mindset to scale their businesses.

OUTSTANDING FIELD INSTRUCTOR AWARD



JESSICA SOUPLY (MSW '14)

Supervisor, Therapeutic Preschool, Family Resources

Jessica Souply, a licensed social worker and strengths-based family worker, is the supervisor at Family Resources' Therapeutic Preschool, which serves children ages 3-5 who have experienced trauma and have behavioral needs, mental health diagnoses, autism spectrum disorders, and other special differences that benefit from specialized

intervention. Prior to her current position, Souply was the program's social-emotional learning coach and worked for Family Resources' in-home services program.

Souply's professional interests include the intersection of social work and education, trauma-informed care, and anti-racism in early childhood education.

RISING STAR AWARD



ANETTE NANCE (MSW '20)

Director of Partnerships for Family Support, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development

Anette Nance is a dynamic professional who is a servant-minded leader. She is an Operation Enduring Freedom veteran and served eight years honorably in the U.S. Marine Corps. In addition to her Pitt Social Work degree, she holds a bachelor's degree in psychology, which provides a theoretical foundation for her

work as a social service practitioner. She has done advocacy work for veterans locally, regionally, and nationally. For this work, she was one of 10 student veterans nominated for 2020 Student Veteran of the Year by Student Veterans of America, headquartered in Washington, D.C.

As a master's-level social worker, Nance is involved with a variety of nonprofits within the Pittsburgh area. Recently, she was appointed to Governor Tom Wolf's Commission on African American Affairs because of the work she's done in the Western Pennsylvania region. She currently works for the University of Pittsburgh in the Office of Child Development as the director of partnerships for family support. The work she does for Pitt provides a macro social work lens that aids in program development, implementation, and an array of other services for more than 25 family support centers in Allegheny County in conjunction with the county's Department of Human Services.

Do you know a Pitt Social Work alum who is making an impact on the field at a local, regional, national, or international level? Nominate them for a Distinguished Alumni Award! Descriptions of the award categories and nomination form are located at socialwork.pitt.edu/alumni/distinguished-alumni.

News and Notes

1960s



CHARLES L. GREENE (MSW '67) was elected chair of the Alpha Phi Alpha Foundation. The foundation was created by the Eta Tau Lambda Chapter

of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., to provide financial assistance to nonprofit organizations that serve and support the underrepresented community in the greater Akron, Ohio, area.

1970s

AL CONDELUCI (MSW '75) is part of the Doo Wop Doctors, two longtime friends who played in a band together in their youth and have reunited in retirement to raise funds for various nonprofits in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

1980s

RAM CNAAN (PhD '80) received a University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice 2021 Excellence in Teaching Award.



1990s

Senior Services of Alexandria recognized **KATE GARVEY** (MSW '91) for her leadership in developing an effective response to the COVID-19 crisis as director of Alexandria, Virginia's Department of Community & Human Services.

JENNIFER KOGET (MSW '97) was named the national director of social work, the national Fisher House and Family Hospitality program, and intimate partner violence assistance program for the



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for organizational awareness. In this role, Koget has the unique opportunity to lead the clinical practice of more than 17,000 social workers across the Veterans Health Administration.

2000s

SALY J. FAYEZ (MSW '00), director of the Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department Victim Services Division, was named an Unsung Heroes honoree. The Unsung Heroes are Virginians who have dedicated themselves to serving victims and fighting for their rights.

THOMAS HEARN

(MSW '08) published his memoir of life on both sides of social services, "More than a Child Welfare Kid!"



After more than 20 years of service,

SANDRA SUE HOGUE

(MSW '02) retired from the McKean County (Pennsylvania) Department of Human Services.

JOHANNES JOHN-LANGBA

(PhD '04) was appointed regional vice president for Africa of the World Federation for Mental Health. He currently serves as associate professor and academic leader of research in the School of Applied Human Sciences and director of the College of Humanities' Doctoral Academy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.



PAUL LIM (MSW '03) was named vice president of mission integration at West Virginia University Health System's Wheeling Hospital.

MICHAEL A. LINDSEY (PhD '02) was selected as a 2021 fellow of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. Lindsey also was appointed to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Community Preventive Services Task Force.

TIRELO MODIE-MOROKA (PhD '03) coauthored an article in The African Journal of Social Work about teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Modie-Moroka is an associate professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana.

CHARLES L. SMALL (BASW '06, MSW '07) was named Iowa State University's interim vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

2010s

KESS BALLENTINE (MSW '17, PhD '21) and **GABRIELLA JONES-CASEY** (MSW '13), along with Pitt Social Work Associate Professors Sara Goodkind and Jeffrey Shook, wrote "Evolving Education: The Power of Organizing—Micro Meets Macro" for Social Work Today magazine.

ERIKA BROSIG (MSW '13) was featured in Lifetime's "Aly Raisman: Darkness to Light," a three-hour documentary special that reveals the tumultuous journey to healing from the perspective of sexual assault survivors.

OSCAR CARICEO (MSW '14) coauthored the article "Predictive Analytics and Big Data" in the Encyclopedia of Social Work with two colleagues from Columbia University and the University of Southern California.

Throughout 2021, **JOHNNIE GEATHERS** (MSW '13) shared his reflections on working in the field of social work on several podcasts, including "The Martyr Show."

JAMES "JAM" HAMMOND (MSW '19) was named executive director of the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations. The commission, established by city ordinance in 1955, investigates complaints of alleged discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations within the city.

SHANON WILLIAMS HUGHES (BASW '10) was profiled as part of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's series on African American trailblazers in the city.

ROBYN MARKOWITZ LAWLER (MSW '10) was appointed to serve a one-year term on the State College (Pennsylvania) Community Oversight Board, which was created to increase transparency within the State College Police Department.

DANIEL JACOBSON LÓPEZ (PhD '19) was appointed chair of diversity and inclusion for the University of Pittsburgh Postdoctoral Association. López also was selected as a Career Education and

Enhancement for Health Care Research Diversity scholar at the Institute for Clinical Research Education in the Clinical and Translational Science Institute at Pitt.

JOSEPH MAHONEY (MSW '10) was named executive director of the Ellen O'Brien Gaiser Center. The Gaiser Center is a nonprofit that is licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. It offers both inpatient and outpatient addiction rehabilitation services and has been serving the community since 1971.

IVONNE SMITH-TAPIA (MSW '16) was named the new director of refugee and immigrant services at Jewish Family and Community Services in Pittsburgh.



CAMERON "CAMI" TEACOCK (MSW '14) started VolunTOTS of Pittsburgh in early 2021. Each month, the group organizes

activities to help young kids learn the joys of volunteering.

2020s

CARRIE FINKELSTEIN (MSW '20) was named manager of strategic projects at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Government Relations.

KATE GASCOINE (MSW '20) was selected as one of the 2020-21 Network for Social Work Management (NSWM) Policy fellows. The Policy Fellows Program was instituted by NSWM to encourage social workers in management positions to be at the forefront of policy in their communities and organizations.

MORGAN OVERTON (MSW '20) is now serving as president of the Young Democrats of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania.

Do you have news to share with the Pitt Social Work community? Send your updates to sswalums@pitt.edu.

In Memoriam

1950s Gloria D. Gugliotta (MSW '58)
Stephen J. Harris (MSW '56)
Theodore A. Lewis Jr. (MSW '52)

1960s Russell Adzima Jr. (MSW '67)
Brenda M. Bias (MSW '66)
Virginia A. Fargione (MSW '69)
Gary J. Fossett (MSW '69)
Richard L. Kerchner (MSW '61)
Dong S. Kim (MSW '69)
Norma R. Lehman (MSW '61)
Richard P. Ridenour (MSW '66)
Neil R. Snyder (MSW '66, PhD '75)
Robert J. Weis (MSW '64)

1970s Judith H. Adams (MSW '71)
Nancy K. Beck (BA '72, MSW '74, PhD '96)
Marilyn N. Cagna (BS '75)
Catherine E. Fahey (MSW '70)
Annette M. Green (MSW '73)
George A. Kinder (MSW '78)
Carol B. McNany (BASW '79, MSW '81)
Kay K. Mercogliano (MSW '72)
Elaine S. Portner (MSW '73)
Mary S. Rehm (BASW '79, MSW '80)
Sadie E. Strick (BASW '75)
Marguerite R. Supler (MSW '75)
Bobbie G. Turner (MSW '71, PhD '86)

1980s Shulamit I. Bastacky (MSW '84)
Glendalee B. Button (BASW '81, MSW '93)
Rebecca M. Hairston (BASW '82, MSW '83)
Edwin L. Hutcheson (MSW '84)
David McFadden (MSW '89)
Mary A. McFeely (BASW '89, MSW '92)
Joan Murray (MSW '86)
Darlene J. Stocker (MSW '88)

1990s Polly Z. Zerfoss-Horning (BASW '90)

2000s Charles S. Marcinko Jr. (MSW '02)

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“Repulsing the Monkey”: A Play about Pittsburgh and Neighborhood Change

By Mary Ohmer (MSW '86, PhD '04)

“Repulsing the Monkey” focuses on Jablonski’s Bar on Pittsburgh’s South Side Slopes, inherited by siblings who are in a quandary about how to dispose of their neighborhood property and are faced with out-of-town offers threatening to change the nature of their parents’ bar and the surrounding area. It is a timely tale of Pittsburgh and neighborhoods in transition and was written by **Michael Eichler** (MSW '86). A reading of the play was sponsored by my Community Organizing class and Alumni Relations at the School of Social Work in 2015. The play recently made its off-Broadway debut at the historic White Horse Tavern, which has been in operation since 1641 in the heart of New York’s Financial District, and I was fortunate to represent Pitt Social Work at the debut.

Eichler and I had a chance to catch up in New York to talk about the play. More than 500 people auditioned for the play’s six acting roles. Eichler also hired a team of professionals, including producer Ali Kennedy Scott and director Daniel Leeman Smith. The play’s off-Broadway debut will lead to an opportunity for the play to be taken on and produced in other locations.

I loved the play and thought that it authentically represented Pittsburgh and how residents struggle to deal with the issues of neighborhood change and gentrification. Pictures of Pittsburgh were all over the bar. The main characters, Danny and Janey, not only sounded like real Pittsburghers (Eichler hired a voice and dialect coach) but also genuinely felt like them. Theater



Left to right: Director Daniel Leeman Smith, Mary Ohmer, Producer Ali Kennedy Scott

reviewer Jon Sobel said, “‘Repulsing the Monkey’ is a funny and captivating ride down the spiraling destiny of gritty neighborhoods that are ‘found’—and then ruined, for most of us—by moneyed invaders from richer parts of town or distant wealthy burghs.”

So listen up, Pittsburghers: Let’s bring this play back to Pittsburgh in a venue on the South Side! If you are interested, please feel free to contact me at mlo51@pitt.edu.

Professor’s Lesson Helped Change National Policy

By Sue Hoechstetter (MSW '76)

It’s amazing what one can achieve as a social worker in Washington, D.C.

As a government relations person (yes, a lobbyist) I’ve been able to obtain policy that has helped thousands of low-income, non-English-speaking workers to feed their families by successfully urging Congress to require translations for food stamp applicants.

I have helped to gain recognition (i.e., the ability to be reimbursed) for social work. As the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye said in the March 14, 1997 Congressional Record: “When Sue first began representing the interests of social workers before the U.S. Congress, very few federal statutes directly acknowledged the significant role of professional social workers in providing health, mental health, and counseling services. Now, however, through Sue’s able leadership all federal insurance programs that

authorize the provision of mental health care services, including ... recognize the ability of clinical social workers to independently diagnose and treat mental illness.”

More recently, I’ve taught nonprofits throughout the country how to be stronger advocates for the causes they represent by developing and teaching an innovative advocacy curriculum.

This is not to congratulate myself, as I didn’t do any of it alone. My colleagues at the National Association of Farmworkers Organizations, the National Association of Social Workers, and Alliance for Justice collaborated with me and supported me in the work. But I played an important role.

Pitt’s School of Social Work also played an important role. One meaningful lesson I learned there came from a class exercise. The professor, whose name

I cannot remember, asked us what we would do in a situation where there has been a shipwreck and the 12 surviving passengers are in the only lifeboat, a boat that holds only 11 people without sinking. How would we decide who would be kicked out of the boat and left to die? My classmates and I tried to figure out a fair system, but the professor startled us by saying that all of our ideas were wrong. We didn’t have to accept his premise that someone had to die; we needed to come up with another solution. Perhaps it would be people taking turns holding onto the lifeboat in the water.

That lesson of thinking outside the box has always stayed with me and helped me to become successful. Working on social policy in Washington provides me with many opportunities to think creatively, and I like to think that my professor would be proud of me for putting his wisdom into action.

Why I Give:

FLORIAN PORTIS LICSW, LICSW-C
(BASW '00, MSW '01)

Founder and Executive Director, Therapeutic Links Behavioral Health Services

Please tell us more about your journey from the University of Pittsburgh School Social Work to your current work in the field.

After graduating with my Master of Social Work, I continued to work for the Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth and Families for a year, before moving back home to Maryland, where I secured a social worker position with the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency. Over the course of 12 years, I've held roles as a social worker for the District of Columbia Public Schools (providing evidence-based counseling to students) and as a clinical manager and clinical director for two outpatient mental health clinics. These positions allowed me to leverage my training in a macro-level practice, management and clinical skill set.

I am now the founder and executive director of Therapeutic Links Behavioral Health Services, a private practice with two locations in the Washington, D.C., metro area. I lead a team of 15 licensed therapists and three administrative staff members.

Thinking back on your time at Pitt Social Work, what are some of your fondest memories?

The most meaningful memory I have was being awarded a paid field placement through the partnership between Pitt and the Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth and Families. The application process was pretty intense and competitive. I truly enjoyed working closely with Edward Sites and Patricia Wright. I'm also honored to have attended the school under the leadership of Pitt's longest-serving dean and only African American dean [at the time of my attendance], David E. Epperson.

What motivates you to give back to Pitt Social Work?

I believe that philanthropy is about service, and it just made sense to give back to my alma mater that serves and provides education based on what their students need to make an impact on society as a whole. I was a recipient of various grants, scholarships, and opportunities at Pitt that allowed me to benefit from an authentic learning experience. It's important to me that students have access to the same quality of education that I received from Pitt. There has been a paradigm shift in the way we address mental health and social issues, and I believe that Pitt is equipped to prepare students for the challenges ahead.

Do you support a specific fund or program at the school? What other causes or organizations do you support?

At the school, I support the Center on Race and Social Problems and the School of Social Work Scholarship Fund.

I support fundraising efforts for various national and local organizations that promote health and disease prevention and address health disparities. I'm also an avid contributor to initiatives that provide sustainable relief to homeless and low-income children, families, and veterans.





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