

THE STILLMAN

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

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Social work adapts to trying times



FALL 2021



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The Stillman provides the latest news from The Ohio State University College of Social Work and highlights the ways in which our faculty, staff, alumni and students make a difference in our society.

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ABOVE: Marisa Sheldon, director of interdisciplinary engagement for the Age-Friendly Innovation Center, prepares for a community event. See page 6 for more on the newly designated center.

ON THE COVER: Tipoko Kabore sports a T-shirt from the college's new Student-Alumni Mentorship Experience. Kabore was a student participant in the program's first cohort. See story on page 25.

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TOM TALKS



“The friendships I have made with many of our alumni and friends will be among the gifts that I will cherish.”

DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

This past year may not have been the one we wanted, but it is the one we got. The COVID pandemic continues to claim lives and livelihoods and divide our country. To those of you who have lost a loved one, are challenged by economic insecurity or are struggling in other ways, we extend our deepest concern for your grief and pain. While we feel fatigue and frustration at the pace of progress, we also offer the expectation that this year will bring continued advancement as we tackle the challenges of COVID, racism and inequality, and economic uncertainty.

Despite these challenges, we find in our work, and in yours, optimism for our capacity to continue to create change. That might be as simple as the daily opportunity to extend kindness and compassion to another human being. It includes the efforts of social workers to keep families from being evicted, to expand innovative and needed programming into at-risk communities, and to advocate for policies that promote equity and a more just society.

To that end, this issue of *The Stillman* is an invitation to see how our students, alumni, faculty and staff have created change during the past 18 months. It's also an invitation to turn our gaze away from our fatigue and frustration and toward the possibilities our college community and our profession offer for change. You will learn how collaborative and engaged research is transforming communities, see how students are preparing themselves for advocacy and leadership, and learn about some innovative and inspiring alumni of our college. In these pages you will meet our newest faculty members and the most recent inductees to our Alumni Hall of Fame. There is much to be done in the world, and much of it is being done by College of Social Work students, faculty, staff and graduates.

I will conclude my service as dean on June 30, 2022, having been initially appointed as acting dean on November 1, 2008. The years spent in this role have been among the most rewarding of my life. As I consider this transition, I have a tremendous sense of gratitude for the opportunity to serve with an exceptional faculty and staff. Whatever good we did here, we did because of their creativity, hard work and commitment to excellence.

I've spent a lot of the past 13 years in awe of our students and their commitment to a more just society. If you take a minute to imagine all the lives that have and will be enhanced because of our graduates, you'll probably feel that same awe and respect. The potential for good grows with each graduating class.

Our students and our college have been the beneficiaries of tremendous generosity from more than 3,000 donors. Many are alumni, but others are also called to support the difference that our students and faculty make in the world. All share an affinity for the work that happens here. The friendships I have made with many of our alumni and friends will be among the gifts that I will cherish.

After a sabbatical I will rejoin our faculty here at the college, focusing on my addiction research and enjoying the chance to return to the classroom. There might be a bit more motorcycle riding in there, too. My gratitude for each of you is deep and heartfelt. My love for this college and its mission is enduring. Thank you for making my time as dean so memorable.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Gregoire".

Tom Gregoire, MSW, PhD
Dean



Support for students beyond graduation

STUDENT DEBT OFTEN forces college graduates to temporarily move home with their parents or work multiple jobs to afford repayment. The College of Social Work is helping graduates avoid these common problems by offering a scholarship that picks up where traditional funding leaves off.

The Public Impact Scholarship gives social work graduates the opportunity to work at agencies that serve society's most vulnerable. The scholarship aims to help with costs many new professionals face, such as licensure and continuing education fees. It supplements salary in partnership with the agency of employment, benefiting both the graduate and the agency.

Supplementing income benefits the agency by increasing the longevity of employees, allowing for more consistency with ongoing clients and supporting direct outreach efforts.

As Dean Tom Gregoire notes, when students choose the social work profession, earning a high income isn't typically at the top of their priority list. Instead, they often strive for a job where they can make society more caring, understanding and supportive.

"I don't want students to take a vow of poverty to do that," says Gregoire. "Increasing student scholarships has been a priority. Now, we're taking a broader view; the traditional scholarship starts with acceptance into the university or

"Increasing student scholarships has been a priority.... The Public Impact Scholarship solves real problems for real people."

TOM GREGOIRE

program and ends at graduation. But there are costs to enter a profession. License exams, CEUs — some students also need professional attire. The Public Impact Scholarship solves real problems for real people."

Many of the college's donors want to equip social work students with the resources to follow their innate calling as change agents and alleviate the worry of financial debt. Gregoire often asks potential donors what difference they want to make and how the college can help them achieve it. Gifts frequently come from people who tell him, "I can't do what students do, but I can make sure there are more of them to do it."

Cathy and Dave Levy are prime examples of loyal College of Social Work donors who understand that young professionals must graduate with the best resources and opportunities for a strong career start. For the Levys, it's the latter that inspired them to be the first to donate to the Public Impact Scholarship.

"We are at a pivotal time to rally and support our health and human services organizations, equipping them to reach those they serve in some of the highest need areas in our community, including homelessness, food insecurity, support for refugees and immigrants, domestic violence, child welfare and more," says Amy Bibler, director of strategic engagement and donor experience at the College of Social Work. "What I love about the Public Impact Scholarship is that it speaks to the heart of social work — we are always out in the community, collaborating, convening and partnering. The work is done outside the boundaries of campus." ■



Fran Ryan, a community advocate for Age-Friendly, attends a positive aging event.

“Answers to our communities’ most pressing challenges exist in the nexus between the knowledge from older residents, the experience experts, and the expertise of community service providers and scientists.”

HOLLY DABELKO-SCHOENY

COLLEGE ESTABLISHES AGE-FRIENDLY INNOVATION CENTER

In May of this year, the Age-Friendly Innovation Center (AFIC) became a reality for the College of Social Work, prioritizing the contributions of older residents in making communities more livable for people of all ages and abilities.

Built off the success of Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County, which came to the college three years ago through the leadership of Assistant Dean Lisa Durham, AFIC’s mission is “to innovate with older adults through research, education and engagement to ensure inclusion and build resiliency to make communities more age-friendly.”

The work starts by asking older adults what they want and need. “We don’t come in thinking we have all the solutions, rather believing that the answers to our communities’ most pressing challenges exist in the nexus between the knowledge from older residents, the experience experts, and the expertise of community service providers and scientists,” explains Holly Dabelko-Schoeny, associate professor and director of research for the center.

The center’s success lies in the ability to listen to, respect and respond to the needs and ideas of older adults that support Age-Friendly’s built, social and

service environments. As one member of the 50-plus resident council noted early in the work, “when you give input, you want to see change.” This sentiment grounds and guides the center, to ensure that community engagement is at the forefront of the work.

Reaching older adults takes collaborations with community partners, including those that provide services to that population. Engagement with immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQ+ community, low-income older adults and settlement houses and villages will continue to be a focus for the center.

“We look at a space before we hold a focus group there and ask ourselves a series of questions to make sure we are reducing barriers to participation. Is it accessible? Does it offer adequate parking? How’s the wayfinding? What’s the light and noise level? Do any of our participants need translation services, sign language or transportation coordination?” says AFIC’s director, Katie White.

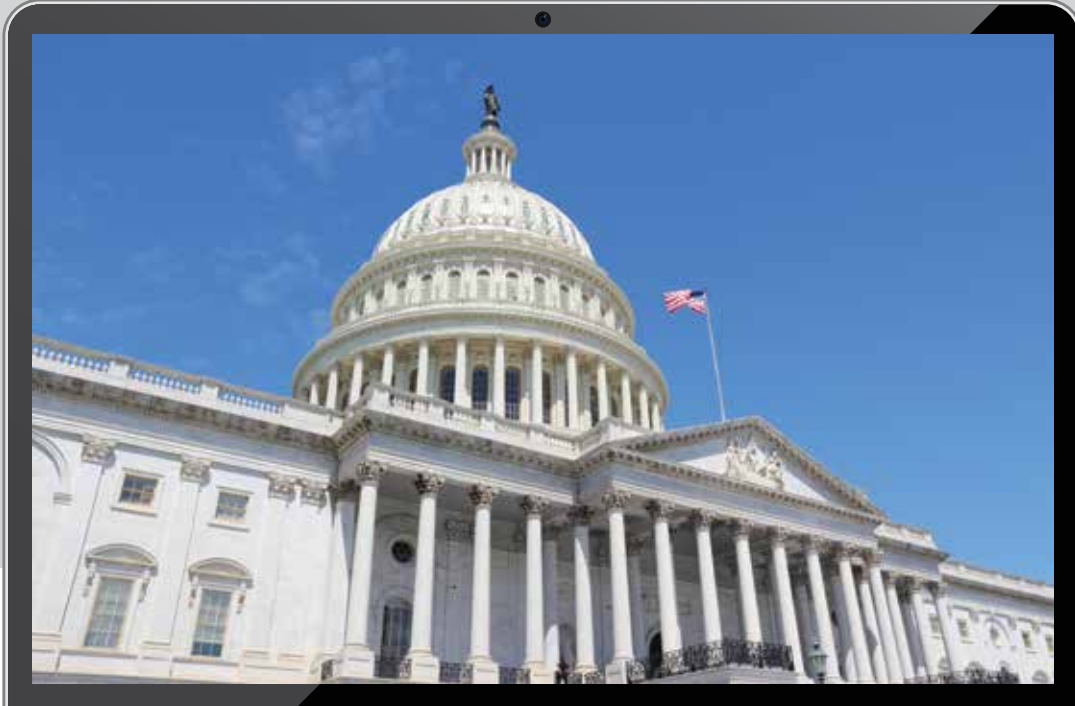
That intentionality continues with students, says Marisa Sheldon, director of interdisciplinary engagement. “We’ve had over 80 students from various disciplines, including city and regional planning,

social work, psychology and public policy, engaged with the work.

“These students get to identify their passion area with the Age-Friendly work. Alongside the exploration of their interests, they all leave with a deep understanding of the aging network.”

That understanding helps grow the next generation of leaders through Sheldon’s newly designed AFIC Scholars program. “Some students come to us already passionate about working with older adults, and we hope to inspire others to help form a growing group of local leaders across disciplines,” she says.

“Our work shifted quite a bit because of COVID, and I think it’s really unique that our community has invested in a program like Age-Friendly that can fill in some of the gaps in existing programming and be this intentional innovation incubator. That’s rare. So often funding lands just with direct service providers, as it should, but many communities don’t have the opportunity to invest in the assessment and forward thinking and planning. We’re fortunate that our county, city, area agency on aging and foundations have really seen the value of investing in this work,” says Sheldon. ■



In the halls of Congress, virtually

TELLING A PERSONAL story to congressional staff is not for the faint of heart. But for the students bold enough to turn their experiences as future social workers into legislative action, it can be a transformative experience.

“This year’s D.C. trip was one of the highlights of my senior year,” says BSSW student Caroline MacNeill. “Despite being virtual, the experiences I had working with my team, networking with alumni and presenting our bill to congressional staff was incredibly valuable for my self-growth, solidifying my career interests in advocacy and preparing me for my future career.”

Concerns over COVID-19 caused the cancellation of the 2020 D.C. Fly-In only weeks before students were scheduled to travel to the nation’s capital. As the pandemic stretched on, it became clear that if the college wanted to continue one of its signature advocacy training

programs, it would need to adapt. So it pivoted and built an online advocacy immersion, training students to identify and research legislation, strategize for their meetings and be effective advocates for social work issues.

“I will admit, there is no replacement for seeing the Capitol or walking into a congressional office” says Steve David, advocacy director and coordinator of the D.C. advocacy program. “But when it came down to our purpose of telling powerful social work stories, these students could not have made a bigger impact.”

The college selected 16 students for the 2021 digital cohort, providing four training sessions along with the university’s Office of Government Affairs. Students identified bills based on their passion areas, developed fact sheets, and participated in six legislative meetings to talk about criminal justice and alternative crisis response, addiction services, education policy and telehealth.

“This year’s D.C. trip was one of the highlights of my senior year.”

CAROLINE MACNEILL

This work not only brings critical conversations into congressional offices, it also builds the confidence of future social work leaders.

“The Fly-In was an empowering experience and the highlight of my school year,” says MSW student Micah Mitchell. “This trip solidified my passion for advocacy work and helped me to feel more confident as an agent of change.”

The college is planning to return to Capitol Hill in Spring 2022. Learn more at u.osu.edu/cswadvocacy/dc. ■



RESEARCH

Continued excellence marks the college's latest research efforts

HIGHLIGHTING SOME OF THE SOCIAL WORK FACULTY
AND STUDENTS WHO ARE MAKING AN IMPACT



Michelle Johnson-Motoyama



Dr. Lauren McInroy



Dr. Cecilia W. Mengo



Dr. Camille R. Quinn

Improving the lives of children, LGBTQ+ youth, women impacted by the trauma of intimate partner violence and justice-involved Black girls are highlights of the recent work of college researchers. With a focus on evaluating or bettering interventions, treatment, programs and policy, our researchers seek to strengthen the overall health and well-being of those who are often neglected in our society.

ADDRESSING GAPS IN CHILD WELFARE RESEARCH

By 2014, the majority of U.S. states had implemented differential response (DR), a child welfare policy that seeks to serve families through diversion from formal child protective services investigations, family engagement and service provision.

However, the effects of these programs on child welfare outcomes had yet to be evaluated nationally using causal methods. Associate Professor Michelle Johnson-Motoyama and her colleagues, including PhD candidates Rebecca Phillips and Oliver Beer, addressed this research gap by analyzing data drawn from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System from 2004 to 2017.

They found states with DR programs to have significantly fewer substantiated reports and children using foster care services when compared to states without, even after accounting for other factors.

A CHAMPION FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

Dr. Lauren McInroy investigates how internet-enabled information and communication technologies may foster improved outcomes and increase well-being for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexual and/or gender minority (LGBTQ+) adolescents and emerging adults.

McInroy's research demonstrates how internet-based activities can mediate

offline risk factors and compensate for limited offline identity-based exploration and socialization. Her recent work includes development, implementation and evaluation of resources and interventions for LGBTQ+ youth.

She is a leading member of INQYR, an international, multidisciplinary and multilingual research and training partnership, which seeks a deeper understanding of LGBTQ+ youth resilience inclusive of regional contexts in an increasingly digitized world through technology-engaged research.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Dr. Shannon Jarrott received a USDA grant for a five-year, \$1.28 million project on intergenerational mentoring.
- Dr. Bridget Freisthler received an award for a two-year project on alcohol use and harsh parenting during COVID-19.
- PhD student Erin Tebben's dissertation, "Interrogating Anti-Blackness in Early Childhood Expulsions," has been funded by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families.
- PhD candidate Kathryn Coxé received a fellowship for her work focused on traumatic brain injury screening in behavioral health care organizations.
- Dr. Nancy Mendoza received nearly \$200,000 in funding for a project focused on understanding COVID-19's effects on infant language development.
- Susan Yoon's research involving adolescent substance use was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse for more than \$900,000.

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

Dr. Cecilia W. Mengo's research contributes toward improving health and reducing disparities for women impacted by violence in the context of trauma, specifically among diverse populations of women survivors of intimate partner violence in the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa.

In the past seven years, Mengo has published several peer-reviewed articles focused on this area. Her work has appeared in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Violence and Victims*, *Journal of Family Violence* and *Journal of Violence Against Women*. The findings from these publications have created opportunities to strengthen formal and informal systems of care to increase service access and improve survivors' overall health and well-being.

ADDRESSING AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS AND JUSTICE

Dr. Camille R. Quinn has authored several publications on African American girls' correlates of health and mental health disparities associated with their justice involvement, with a focus on their rehabilitation and treatment. Quinn leads a project with Franklin County Juvenile Court and the city of Columbus to reduce stress and promote healing and crime desistance with African American girls and their parents and caregivers.

A recognized youth expert in Ohio, Quinn provided expert testimony for state legislative action, including the passage of SB 256 (January 2021) mandating parole eligibility review for youths sentenced to life without parole.

She was reappointed to the Governor's Council on Juvenile Justice Statewide Advisory Group and is an invited member of the Ohio Supreme Court Subcommittee for Juvenile Justice. ■

Improvising to ease counseling for cancer patients

SOCIAL WORKERS AT THE ARTHUR G. JAMES CANCER HOSPITAL AND RICHARD J. SOLOVE RESEARCH INSTITUTE ADAPT TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE TIMES

SOCIAL WORKERS AT the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute believe that when the pandemic struck, they were able to meet the challenge.

They adjusted strategies, reassured patients and caregivers, and learned new ways to reach out, according to Saquena Atkins (MSW '01), manager of psychosocial oncology and harm reduction at the hospital.

Atkins said one key was increasing the number of counseling sessions with patients because of COVID-19 isolation.

Previously, counseling took place face-to-face. Then, telehealth became necessary, with both video and phone calls used to reach patients and caregivers. Not surprisingly, the number of counseled patients and caregivers increased, as did

the size of the staff to meet the demand. Over the first 12 months of the pandemic, Atkins' division counseled about 1,030 patients and caregivers, compared with about 830 a year earlier.

There were other adjustments. Some elderly patients lack computers and internet services, but video contact and talking over the phone were effective.

"I know that we have our own personal concerns about COVID-19, but our professional response to the pandemic has been excellent," Atkins says.

Program manager for the Center for Cancer Health Equity at The James, Bibiana Bishop (BSSW '05, MSW '06) said she and her colleagues faced adjustments. The usual person-to-person outreach to churches, mosques and other social gatherings in minority communities was suspended, but telehealth helped.

Bishop and her staff met every week instead of once a month to brainstorm. Not only did that help with outreach, it also kept staff members connected and supportive of one another. "They did a remarkable job in dealing with the situation we had," Bishop says.

Kayla Lamp (BSSW '16, MSW '17), an inpatient social worker at The James, said lessons have been learned, especially about the mental well-being of cancer patients. "That social workers are essential in the delivery of such care was clear," says Lamp. "We like to dig a little deeper." ■



Saquena Atkins, MSW '01



Bibiana Bishop, BSSW '05, MSW '06



Kayla Lamp, BSSW '16, MSW '17

"I know that we have our own personal concerns about COVID-19, but our professional response to the pandemic has been excellent."

SAQUENA ATKINS



DON'T SHARE THAT!

HAVING THE SKILLS TO ASSESS AND NAVIGATE THE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE IS AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

WHAT IS YOUR STRATEGY for determining what is true and false online? Have you ever thought about it?

College of Social Work advocacy director Steve David has been giving social workers and students the tools to confidently answer those questions, reaching more than 500 people with his workshops in the spring of 2021. He argues that having the skills to assess and navigate the information landscape is an ethical responsibility for social workers and essential for the future health of American democracy.

“Whether it is stories that vaccines magnetize people to spread 5G wireless signals or false claims about fraud in the 2020 election, falsehoods have become a significant part of our political discourse,” says David. “What we are seeking to do is give people some foundational skills for engaging with

information that lets them draw fact-based conclusions and prevents them from being manipulated.”

Thankfully, there are many resources available to people who want to sharpen their eye for misinformation. David distilled these down into four questions that people should ask before sharing content online: How do I feel? Who says? How do they know? What do others say?

“Paying attention to your emotional reaction can be a real shift in how people interact with social media,” David says. “Many of us are used to unconsciously scrolling on our phone, all the while being exposed to highly emotional content without really thinking about it. False stories are designed to play on your emotions, which can bypass our critical thinking. Hitting share or retweet is often an emotional response, rather than an informed one.”

Developing a skeptical eye for different sources and their quality and “reading laterally” across a variety of sources to get a bigger picture of the truth are critical skills that most people have never been taught in any structured way.

While digital communications may seem to be the realm of journalists and political scientists, social workers have unique ethical obligations in this area. The NASW Code of Ethics recognizes that competent practice “includes an understanding of the special communication challenges when using technology and the ability to implement strategies to address these challenges,” and that “social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.” This lays out a clear framework for social workers to be informed consumers — and disseminators — of media, with the proper tools to do so in an ethically sound manner. ■

WELCOME

THE COLLEGE WELCOMES FOUR NEW FACULTY MEMBERS



SAMANTHA M. BATES

Dr. Samantha M. Bates joins the College of Social Work faculty after working at Texas Christian University for the past three years. In some ways, it's like a homecoming for Bates, who graduated from Ohio State's PhD program in 2018. Bates is a licensed social worker with more than six years of experience working with socially vulnerable youth in schools, afterschool programs and sports. Her research focuses on equity-minded positive youth development and seeks to draw attention to patterns of inequity in youth outcomes. This includes exploring how to leverage sports as a context for social-emotional learning, identifying evidence-based and culturally responsive mental health interventions for youth, and examining how adults in youth-serving organizations become race-conscious and aware of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in education. She is a passionate educator who sees her classroom as a tool to spark social change, normalize vulnerability and cultivate belonging.



DONTE T. BOYD

Dr. Donte T. Boyd is an assistant professor in the College of Social Work. He also serves as a visiting faculty member at the Research Education Institute for Diverse Scholars at Yale University School of Public Health through the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS. Boyd's research addresses how socio-contextual factors impact young Black men who have sex with men (MSM) in their decision-making behaviors. He is particularly interested in examining how families and other important persons in the lives of these young Black men impact HIV prevention behavior and other health and mental health outcomes. Boyd's research also focuses on the impact of school context among Black male adolescents in shaping their sexual health behaviors. Before joining the faculty, Boyd received his PhD from UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. He also has worked extensively as a social worker in different capacities in AIDS service organizations. Boyd worked with HIV-positive individuals as a case manager in the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and as a public health representative before deciding to further his education.



JOYCE Y. LEE

Dr. Joyce Y. Lee joins the College of Social Work from the University of Michigan School of Social Work, where she completed a joint PhD in social work and developmental psychology. Lee identifies as a child welfare and family-strengthening scholar. Her research interests and expertise are in preventing child maltreatment, promoting the health and well-being of foster children and supporting positive parenting practices. Her current research focuses on preventing child abuse and neglect in families with low income or other adverse family contexts; promoting foster children's physical, mental and behavioral health and reducing disparities in such health outcomes; examining the role and impact of legal tools and mechanisms in reforming child welfare systems; and informing the development of culturally responsive approaches to serving child welfare systems involved with children and families. Lee draws on developmental and family theories as well as her extensive experiences working with children and families as a licensed clinical social worker in community-based settings.



SMITHA RAO

Dr. Smitha Rao comes to the College of Social Work with more than a decade of practice experience at the intersection of environment, development and social policy, spanning academic and not-for-profit sectors in India and, more recently, North America. She completed her PhD at Boston College School of Social Work. Her work and scholarship are informed by her cross-disciplinary background in social work and human geography. Rao has led post-disaster community-based reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. She has also worked on strategy and design for local and international environmental campaigns ranging from climate change policy to lobbying with industries to phase out toxins and promote sustainable agriculture practices. Her current research focus encompasses social vulnerability in the context of natural disasters and disaster preparedness to develop knowledge to inform policies centering on underserved communities. Her work also touches upon climate change implications for vulnerable communities, energy poverty and ecological justice.



Jeff Glitt, MSW student

PANDEMIC CREATES SERVICE OPTIONS FOR COLUMBUS FREE CLINIC

When the pandemic hit central Ohio, the world turned upside down. Many businesses, including some health care services, shut their doors. But the Columbus Free Clinic pivoted to telehealth with social workers lending support.

The Columbus Free Clinic is a student-run organization that provides free, quality health care and educational opportunities for professional and undergraduate volunteers, primarily from medicine, pharmacy, social work and law.

While the need is clear, the work is not without its challenges. Catherine Hechmer, interprofessional education and practice field coordinator for the College of Social Work, supervises students at the clinic. She says that finding the right technology to deliver services was the first of many challenges they encountered.

"The clinic has a pretty robust pharmacy, but when we were telehealth only, many patients didn't have access. When we transitioned back to in-person care, we had to figure out how to provide

their meds while minimizing traffic in the clinic itself," Hechmer says.

"Social workers were available on clinic nights as needed, and we followed up with patients' needs via telephone and email. The clinic reopened for in-person appointments in July 2020 with one social work student assigned to telehealth support working from home and the rest of us working in person. We intend to continue with the same amount of telehealth behavioral health going forward," Hechmer says. "As a team, the importance of communication became even clearer."

Jeff Glitt, an MSW student in the clinic, also saw the benefits of telehealth care. "Once COVID hit, the psychiatry clinic switched to 100 percent telehealth. We noticed an increase in adherence for the appointments, and no-show rates dropped significantly," Glitt says. "Telehealth services allowed clients to not worry about transportation and gave them the flexibility to be seen more regularly. The psychiatry team sent prescriptions to the clinic for free or to the client's

"Telehealth allowed clients to not worry about transportation and gave them the flexibility to be seen more regularly."

JEFF GLITT

pharmacy of choice, giving clients more options and eliminating the wait time.

"We saw firsthand how someone's physical health and mental health were connected, and we got the chance to truly understand what an integrated health care model looked like," Glitt says. "The clinic helped me understand what I was comfortable with and what I still needed more experience with when it came to my therapy styles, but it also allowed me an opportunity to step out of my skin and look at things from the client's perspective." ■

Pandemic 101 for social workers

ACCEPT CHANGE, THINK CREATIVELY AND REPEAT

Alison Pence-Ward was used to seeing her kids' faces as they tromped through the hallways of Reynoldsburg High School's Summit Campus. As a social worker in the district for the past two years, she knew reading their expressions and body language was a good barometer for who might need some extra attention that day.

Then the pandemic sent the students home, and her idea of what it meant to do her job had to change overnight.

And Pence-Ward wasn't alone. Social workers in hospitals, behavioral health clinics, private practice and more — every bit as essential as the doctors, nurses and grocery and warehouse workers — faced unprecedented hurdles in delivering care, maintaining connections and helping those most vulnerable.

"We never learned to be a virtual mental health provider," says Pence-Ward (MSW '19), who was a teacher for 10 years prior to becoming a social worker. "On top of that, our district didn't require students to turn on their cameras during virtual learning because of equity issues. So, I was talking to a blank screen and couldn't see their faces. That was definitely a challenge."

Pence-Ward's Tier-3 students, who are the most at risk socially and emotionally, benefit most from relationships and in-person support. She worried they would shut down along with the school and fail to reach out to her as they grappled with their mental health and social isolation.

Megan Lee (MSW '16), a social worker in Columbus City Schools, shared Pence-Ward's worries about how students and their families would adjust, especially the younger students. During the strict lockdowns, Lee says, a common refrain was "we're just trying to survive."

"These words echoed in my head the entire school year," she says. "It became difficult for parents to be able to support their children's education at home when



Alison Pence-Ward, MSW '19

they were worried about being able to meet their family's basic needs."

GETTING CREATIVE

Pence-Ward and Lee also experienced feelings of inadequacy in being forced to serve from afar. How could they do their jobs properly without the personal connections and in-person interactions?

Like many social workers in this new reality, they had to quickly become comfortable with technology they had zero exposure to prior to the pandemic.

Pence-Ward and a couple of her colleagues created "Reyn Wellness," an Instagram video series focused on coping with all the changes. Students, families and teachers began following it, and other schools and teachers in the Reynoldsburg district shared the videos.

"I had never used Instagram before, but I forced myself to learn," Pence-Ward says.



Megan Lee, MSW '16

At a co-worker's suggestion, Lee began using Google Voice when her Zoom connections with students became infrequent and inconsistent. She could call and text families without using her personal cell phone, and she found families were often easier to connect with through text.

And she discovered a new role: IT troubleshooter. As Chromebooks sent home with students became damaged or failed, she found parents didn't want to tell the school and face an unaffordable replacement fee. Lee was the go-between with the district's IT department so computers could be repaired rather than replaced.

"This is not something I anticipated," Lee says, "but it was certainly necessary, and it fit right into my role of helping address barriers for families."

WORK WHERE YOU'RE NEEDED

James Alexander (MSW '11), program director for the Southeast Healthcare Rapid Response Emergency Addiction Crisis Team (RREACT), didn't have the option of having his outreach coordinators and engagement specialists work from home. When you're trying to help substance abuse patients who just survived an overdose find treatment, a phone call won't always cut it.

Pre-pandemic, RREACT had access to emergency rooms, so Alexander says communication was critical during the evolving situation. He listened to his front-line team members about how best

to engage with clients because each ER set its own protocols. He ensured that his team had personal protective equipment for ER visits and kept them apprised of the latest COVID-19 developments.

Alexander's work was urgent, with a 50 percent increase in overdose deaths in Franklin County. Rising opioid use was tied to the pandemic-induced prevalence of social anxiety, isolation, depression and hopelessness as well as the social upheaval around racial justice, Alexander says.

"This left an already vulnerable population even more vulnerable."

Desperate circumstances forced innovative thinking. RREACT began offering pop-up Naloxone sites throughout Franklin County. The medication can be administered in the form of a life-saving injection or a nasal spray for someone who has overdosed and doesn't have immediate access to care. The organization also increased its exposure in the community by starting Bridges to Recovery, which offers patients Suboxone or Vivitrol in a health care setting to lessen craving and withdrawal symptoms.

"We wanted to reduce the overdose deaths and increase the chances for patients to enter some form of addiction treatment," Alexander says. "There is no one person, agency or institution that can accomplish this work alone. We all need to continue to work together if we truly desire to make an impact in reducing overdose encounters and deaths."

"We wanted to reduce the overdose deaths and increase the chances for patients to enter some form of addiction treatment. There is no one person, agency or institution that can accomplish this work alone."

JAMES ALEXANDER

FORWARD-THINKING

Eva Shinka (BSSW '98, MSW '99), who works in private practice at The Center for Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy in Columbus, had a bit of a jump-start on the pandemic. Her group began experimenting with telehealth sessions as part of a pilot project in January 2020.

When the pandemic arrived in Ohio two months later, Shinka, who became certified through the Telebehavioral Health Institute, was able to continue working completely from home between March and May. Even when she went back to the office in June 2020, she maintained the hybrid therapy, and it now accounts for half her sessions.

Continued, next page



James Alexander, MSW '11



Eva Shinka, BSSW '98, MSW '99

Incorporating telehealth has proven a boon for her practice and patients. Some prefer not having to deal with the anxiety of going to an office, and they can stay at work for a session by going to a conference room or their car. Shinka likes the flexibility of being able to switch a session from in person to video at a moment's notice, and she can establish the required first face-to-face visit via video. She attracted patients who wouldn't normally contact her because they are up to two hours away, and she can continue working with her college student clientele as they return to their Ohio campuses.

"It takes a little longer to get to know your patient when you do telehealth, and not everyone is appropriate for it," says Shinka, who has about 35 appointments a week. "But our patients see it works, and it's going to be here to stay."

Myles Stickle (MSW '96), director of mental health and recovery services at Equitas Health, is also incorporating telehealth where it never existed. The clinical and administrative operations he oversees in eight locations throughout Ohio were 100 percent in person prior to the pandemic. That became 95 percent virtual after the lockdown for services that include counseling and psychiatric medication for an LGBTQ+ core constituency.

The flip, which required input from every Equitas department to make happen in a short time, created an unexpected positive: it removed the perceived stigma of using Equitas. Some rural and non-LGBTQ+ clients have an underlying fear of being "outed," Stickle says, just for coming to one of Equitas' exurban locations in places like Lima, Mansfield, Portsmouth or Youngstown.

"It takes a little longer to get to know your patient when you do telehealth, and not everyone is appropriate for it. But our patients see it works, and it's going to be here to stay."

EVA SHINKA



Myles Stickle, MSW '96

"It's sort of guilty by association," Stickle says. "And even before the pandemic, many rural Ohioans had to travel quite a distance to even get to us. Telehealth removed many of these barriers to care for those who had access to technology."

Some other positive outcomes:

- Equitas started with one virtual support group at the start of the pandemic and ended up with six to seven people who "wanted a space to dial in to for support and connection," Stickle says.
- For those who couldn't telehealth, Equitas piloted a team of central Ohio therapists who would meet clients one on one in their home (masked, of course), on their porch or in a park or other space to keep those most vulnerable connected to treatment.

"Life has been hard for so many, especially those in our community who are substance affected, have a process addiction (sex, food, gambling, etc.) or are isolated due to mental illness. Intersect all that with being in the LGBTQ+ community," Stickle says. "Having to quickly respond to and expand our service model has been really important to me. Without adding buildings, we have been able to expand our reach."

FORCED ADOPTION

Another area that seemed to benefit from the pandemic was the college's continuing education program. The pre-pandemic classes hosted 50 people in person and upward of 200 people if they



Chelsea Mossbarger, BSSW '12

were for an agency-specific training, such as for the Franklin County Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board.

But the forced switch to live webinars during the pandemic drew upward of 300 people from across 10 states, and registration was capped at 500 attendees so as not to overwhelm the technology.

There were significant benefits, says Sara Friedman, director of continuing education:

- Out-of-work social workers could keep their licenses up-to-date by taking advantage of the free courses.
- More people could attend because they were working from home.
- The program offered more training — about 30–40 hours a week, up from its usual nine to 12 hours.
- High-quality presenters from inside and outside Ohio could be added. Atlanta's Brittany Works, LMSW-CTP, spoke on racial and health equity issues, and Cleveland State's Dr. Josephine Ridley shared the latest research on health inequities and suicide prevention.

The webinars, which are taped and available anytime, will be a continuing education staple going forward, Friedman says. The one drawback is attendees don't have time to share personal and professional experiences like they do in person.

"But you can get perspectives from other areas of the country, and that just enriches the training you're trying to provide," Friedman says.



Dysha Cole, BSSW '18, MSW '19

“Working through the pandemic definitely allowed me to become a better advocate for my patients and families.”

DYSHA COLE

TURNING FEARFUL TO FEARLESS

Finding the positives early in the pandemic was like searching for the elusive four-leaf clover in a sea of green grass — hard to come by, especially for social workers in a hospital setting.

At ground zero for people with COVID-19, hospitals were incubators for the fears and unknowns, the stresses and the strains. Chelsea Mossbarger (BSSW '12) connects with almost every patient who comes through the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center ER, and she took the brunt of an emotional tsunami.

She watched patients who had families desperate to see them die alone because hospital protocols didn't allow any visitors.

“That was a hard pill to swallow,” she says. “Part of my role here is to advocate for patients’ and families’ rights, and the pandemic changed that in a big way. Research shows patients do better when they have visitors, and for over three

months we had zero visitors. Even now, almost a year and a half later, we only allow two per patient a day.”

Providing social services to COVID-19 patients meant talking to them on a hospital phone outside their room. Giving families updates meant standing outside the ER with the doctors. Arranging transportation for patients became “a disaster,” Mossbarger says, because cab companies closed at night and other potential drivers were worried about picking up anyone from a hospital.

There also was the constant fear of contracting the virus and taking it home to family. Mossbarger, who lives with her sister, wiped everything down with bacterial wipes, including the bottoms of her shoes, which she left on her doormat. All her clothes went immediately into the washing machine.

Dysha Cole (BSSW '18, MSW '19) carried those same fears, with a husband furloughed at home watching their young son. Cole is a clinical medical social worker at Nationwide Children's Hospital and works in two clinics, one of which never stopped seeing patients in person.

She called the uncertainty “scary,” as patients in her Teen and Pregnant program were testing positive for COVID-19 regularly. In addition, the world erupted around the George Floyd murder. As a social worker, though, she continued to provide comfort and reassurance to others as self-care took a back seat.

“I tried to decompress as much as possible, but as a Black woman I was very conscious of the racial unrest both locally and nationally and how I was directly affected,” Cole says.

Yet for all the learning curves and changes brought on by the pandemic, Cole says she wouldn't change a thing. “Working through the pandemic definitely allowed me to become a better advocate for my patients and families,” she says.

Lee, in her work for Columbus City Schools, is focusing on the positives as well.

“I feel that we all probably learned something about ourselves during the pandemic, and the pandemic further proved to me that there is always room for growth and new ideas on how to approach a situation. So, my goal is to keep this mindset and use it as a way to guide my practice after the pandemic and throughout my career.” ■

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

IN A WORLD THAT GETS more digitized every day, the College of Social Work is revolutionizing virtual training for the future at no cost to the professional world.

With a partnership between Sara Friedman, director of continuing education at the College of Social Work, and Cindy Clouser, managing director of the college's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery, 41,451 trainee registrations spanning 465 hours had been provided online by September of this year.

“Cindy was the principal investigator on the grant and responsible for putting all the pieces together,” says Friedman. “Along with the continuing education office, we worked with the College of Nursing, Pharmacy, as well as Student Wellness. It was a great opportunity to work with other human service providers and demonstrate to others its importance when serving clients.”

This breakthrough in digital training for social workers was possible after the team secured funding through the Behavioral Workforce Grant, which falls under Ohio's State Opioid Response umbrella.

With the challenge of a pandemic gripping the world, the team needed to provide participants with real-time access to professional trainings without them having to leave their home.

“It is an incredible opportunity to create a network of social workers and other health care providers in learning and support. Although we are very excited about the number of people we have been able to reach, we realize that there are still people that struggle with computer access. It is something we will continue to think about,” says Friedman.

The challenge of providing equal access to all remains an ever-changing hurdle for future trainings, but even so, the team has found a way to impact the professional lives of thousands — and appreciation has been overflowing since the trainings were initiated. Participants from around the country have been thrilled by the offerings.

For Friedman, the emphasis on collaboration through these trainings is invaluable in the fight against the opioid crisis, and for the future of social work.

“Collaborating with other professionals is key. It is vital to look at a larger picture of every area that contributes to this crisis: physically, emotionally, mentally and environmentally. There is still so much stigma associated with addiction and opioid addiction, especially. Continuing to offer education comprehensively is essential.”





HER MISSION:

HELP KIDS BUILD A KINDER WORLD

AS THE MOTHER of two young children with a third on the way, Brandy Jemczura (MSW '11) has consistently sought opportunities to help her kids see and understand the needs in their community. What better way to help them learn, early in life, what it means to help others and build a stronger community?

The problem: she couldn't find such a program in central Ohio. The solution: she and a few like-minded parents started one.

That was five years ago. Today, Jemczura is founder and executive director of Seeds of Caring, a nonprofit that engaged more than 9,100 child participants in service, social action and community-building efforts in 2020. Projects included cards for and visits with about 800 senior citizens, 1,400 holiday baking kits for food pantries, 400 personal care bags for LGBTQ+ youths and 24,700 sack lunches to feed the hungry, according to its annual report.

Jemczura had no idea her creation would grow so quickly and attract so

many parents and children. "I think parents see that we want to nurture kind, compassionate children who contribute to their community," she says.

Jemczura, 39, was young when she learned about volunteerism from her mother, who gave an endless amount of time to community projects. As a parent, Jemczura wanted to have volunteerism meet children at their level, so she designed Seeds of Caring.

Her master's degree from the College of Social Work helped, as did her experience as a middle school teacher and a licensed social worker.

Amid the success, board member Justin Parisi credits Jemczura with the heavy lifting. "If you start with leadership, Brandy is the most engaged among any of the executives I've ever met in the nonprofit sector," says Parisi, a financial adviser with Manning & Napier of Dublin who has a 6-year-old in the program.

Parent Aimee Merino, who has children ages 6 and 10 in the program, is

"Parents see that we want to nurture kind, compassionate children who contribute to their community."

BRANDY JEMCZURA

just as enthusiastic as Parisi: "We love Seeds of Caring. It teaches our children about empathy and caring for others."

Jemczura sees much work ahead. She wants every area child to have the opportunity to participate, and has received inquiries from individuals in other cities requesting a Seeds of Caring chapter.

"I know our vision of a kinder, more connected world led by our youngest generation is possible," she says. ■



Sam Yarnell, BSW '20



Siema Eljack

The year they made contact

TWO MSW STUDENTS CONNECTED WITH THE SICK AND ULTIMATELY THEMSELVES DURING THE PANDEMIC

During the pandemic, Sam Yarnell and Siema Eljack called people day after day to deliver bad news, yet they couldn't have been more inspired.

The different paths that they followed to a social work education brought them to the same conclusion: helping people, even under the most difficult circumstances, is always an affirming moment for their chosen career.

Both on track to complete a Master's in Social Work in 2022, they each took part-

“Being a contact tracer taught me the reason I came to social work: there are people who are more privileged than others, and the ones who aren't are the ones who really struggle.”

SIEMA ELJACK

time jobs in August 2020 as pandemic contact tracers with Ohio State's College of Public Health (COPH). Almost every call was to tell someone they had been exposed to a person with COVID-19 or they had tested positive, and they would have to either quarantine or isolate.

“They were scared, angry, fearful, and because of my social work training, I knew how to talk to them to help them figure things out,” Yarnell (BSW '20) says.

“Ninety percent of the people were really cooperative and understanding,” says Eljack. “But being a contact tracer taught me the reason I came to social work: there are people who are more privileged than others, and the ones who aren't are the ones who really struggle.”

Eljack, a native of Sudan, became a dentist in that country to have a more comfortable life, but she was never fond of the profession. When she moved to the U.S. in 1998, she earned her dentistry degree at Tufts University in Boston. She later moved to New York to become an oral pathologist. Later, her then-husband took a job in Saudi Arabia, and it was there she reignited her passion for mental health, observing the women in such a patriarchal society.

Eljack returned to the U.S. in 2017 so her son Mustafa could attend Ohio State for his undergraduate degree. Oral pathology jobs were scarce in Columbus, so she became an interpreter for a refugee resettlement agency. “It clicked,” she says. “This is what I want to do.”

Yarnell felt an inextricable pull toward, and sympathy for, people struggling with substance misuse, and she decided to follow that passion.

For Yarnell, contact tracing came at the right time. The pandemic forced her to quarantine because of an immunocompromised system that included severe asthma, so a job where she could use her phone from home was perfect. The irony of telling others to follow suit wasn't lost on her.

“We would press people on the phone: ‘I want you to be truthful with us because we just want to contain this as much as possible,’” says Yarnell, who worked until mid-May and was one of nearly 100 student COPH contact tracers. “I genuinely think we did that. It could have been so much worse.”

Eljack certainly never considered herself a hero, but for the same reasons she left financial security to become a social worker, she says taking on that role paid dividends. Her children watched her work at home, asking questions and staying engaged with the ever-shifting health regulations. Eljack also signed up for an AstraZeneca vaccine trial seeking more non-white participants.

“I'm a risk-taker in general,” she says. “It feels good, and I'm grateful I had that chance to be involved in both endeavors.”

Eljack says some people told her they couldn't afford to lose time away from their jobs. She assumes they went to work sick or infectious. It was just another signal that she needs to be in social work, when lack of equity and privilege means people have to choose between their health and their need for an income.

“There's a need for more people that care about providing equitable conditions for everyone,” says Eljack, who earned her master's from Ohio State's John Glenn College of Public Affairs earlier this year. She is interning with the Ohio Women's Alliance and working with Muslim Family Services. “There are so many things I can do to help people that I couldn't do as a dentist. I honestly think I can reach that equity.” ■

TELL US ABOUT YOUR SERVICE!

When COVID-19 shut life down, many social workers faced a dilemma: how to serve communities when they need them most. In a March survey sent out by the Alumni Society, alumni shared how they engage in service beyond their professional role. During Social Work Month alone, volunteers logged nearly 300 volunteer hours addressing everything from domestic violence and housing to suicide prevention and community outreach efforts.



“I VOLUNTEER WITH CRISIS TEXT LINE BECAUSE I KNOW THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO COULD USE SUPPORT AND QUICK CONNECTION TO HELP AND RESOURCES. PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE AND FREE SERVICES MAKES MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST.”

TASHA CHILDS, MSW '19 Columbia, South Carolina

“MY DAUGHTER AND I STARTED VOLUNTEERING IN OCTOBER. WE KNOW THAT SOCIAL WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL, AND IN HONOR OF SOCIAL WORK MONTH IN MARCH, SOPHIA AND I MADE INSPIRATIONAL NOTES AND TREATS THAT I GAVE OUT TO THE STAFF AT MY OFFICE.”

EVA SHINKA, BSSW '98, MSW '99 Granville, Ohio



“I VOLUNTEER FOR FEEDING TAMPA BAY AT MY CHURCH TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY.”

KIMBERLY CLARK, MSW '93 Tampa, Florida

2021 SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI

HALL OF FAME



DISTINGUISHED CAREER AWARDS

1 RAMONA DENBY-BRINSON

PHD '95

Dr. Ramona Denby-Brinson is the former associate dean for academic affairs in Ohio State's College of Social Work and the current dean of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work. Denby-Brinson has been practicing as a licensed social worker serving children and families since 1995.

Denby-Brinson is a nationally recognized expert in culturally adapted child welfare services and has received more than \$34 million in federal, state and foundation funding to support her research. She has published extensively about kinship care, as well as the mental health and well-being of African American foster children. Denby-Brinson has also served in various state and national leadership roles, including with the Society for Social Work and Research and the Council on Social Work Education, two of the most prestigious social work research and educational organizations.

Denby-Brinson has received numerous accolades for her scholarship and impact on the field. The Ohio State Community Engaged Champion Award for 2021 is one of two recent honors. The award recognizes university leaders who have made outstanding contributions to communities in Ohio, the U.S. and around the world. She was also designated as a Champion for Children by the Child Welfare League of America. In 2014, Denby-Brinson received the Harry Reid Silver State Research Award for her highly respected work that is responsive to the needs of local and national communities.

2 RITIKA SHARMA KURUP

MSW '03

Ritika Sharma Kurup is the senior director of learning and activation at StriveTogether. In this role, she established the organization's data and learning division, which facilitates data-driven learning to support better, more equitable outcomes for every child across the national network of 70 communities.

During her two-decade career in the U.S. and India, Kurup has led several community efforts serving children and families. Before joining StriveTogether, Kurup was director of early learning for Learn to Earn Dayton, where she led learning initiatives and the launch of the community's education race equity agenda. She also established Dayton's first out-of-school system, which served more than 1,000 students, and led Montgomery County's Grade-Level Reading Campaign, which was recognized as an All-America City Award winner in 2017.

Previously, Kurup facilitated the establishment of a crisis helpline for homeless children in New Delhi, India, served as the executive director of Miami County's CASA/GAL program and established Edison State College's grants office. In 2016, Kurup was named a Children and Family Fellow by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. She has master's degrees in social work from both the University of Delhi and The Ohio State University and a master's in public policy from Ohio State.

3 TRACI LEWIS

BSSW '85

Traci Lewis has been director of Ohio State's Office of Diversity and Inclusion's ACCESS (A Comprehensive College Experience for Single-Parent Students) Collaborative Program since 2006. Lewis' accomplishments include receiving the U.S. Department of Education's CCAMPIS grant allowing for collaboration with nationally

accredited centers to provide child care. She brokered a collaboration with Community Properties of Ohio to provide affordable housing for parenting students and a program to prepare high school parents for college by pairing them with ACCESS students as mentors. In partnership with Ohio State's Department of Athletics, Lewis helped create a program to support parenting athletes.

A leader in the support of parenting students, Lewis coordinates the National Student Parent Support Symposium. She's a member of the Institute for Women's Policy Research's Student Parent Success Initiatives group and the National Advisory Group and Postsecondary Working Group of Ascend, the Aspen Institute's educational think tank. A highly engaged member of the National Association of Black Social Workers, Lewis has served on the executive board as a National Steering Committee representative and co-chaired several national committees. She also co-chairs the Parenting and Pregnant Students Support Committee on campus.

4 PATRICIA LYONS

MSW '88

Dr. Patricia Lyons is the director of the Social Determinants of Health Innovation Center at Molina Healthcare, where she is responsible for expanding member engagement and support, using social determinants of health data to inform program development and best practices to address barriers to health care created by social factors. She also owns Lyons Counseling & Consultation Services.

In 2018, Lyons contracted with the city of Columbus' Commission on Black Girls, convening critical stakeholders legislated to study and assess the quality of life for Black girls ages 11–22. Lyons formalized the strategy to incorporate research, community input, subject matter experts and Black girls' telling of HerStory to produce a report on the quality of life indicators of Black girls in the city.

Lyons completed her PhD in public health from the School of Health Sciences at Walden University. She also holds a Master of Social Work from Ohio State, and a Bachelor of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling from Wilberforce University. She is president of the Columbus chapter of the National Association of Black Social Workers.

RECENT CAREER AWARD

5 ERIN HARRIS

BSSW '12, MSW '13

Erin Harris is the manager for Ohio State's Nisonger Center Aspirations program and serves as the social work faculty for LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities), an interdisciplinary graduate training program. She has established an administrative structure through the efforts of parent volunteers and integrated technology to update and expand Aspirations' curriculum and offerings, extending programming to serve more than 300 youth with autism and their families.

Prior to this role, Harris was a behavioral health outpatient therapist at the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Harris also developed and teaches a service-learning course at Ohio State to provide in vivo opportunities for neurotypical and neurodiverse students to learn about disability, inclusion and the importance of independence and interdependence.

Harris gives back to the profession and the Ohio State community by supervising field interns each year. Alongside her team of interns, Harris launched the Aspirations Self Advocacy initiative, an eight-week program for educating and empowering self-advocates, and established weekly support groups. ■

Was the pandemic kind to veterans' mental health?

SOCIAL WORKERS AT THE VA SAY IT'S A MIXED BAG



Matt McLaughlin, MSW '15



Jada Likely, MSW '20

“Our role is to provide a sense of calmness and provide services that foster a safe and secure environment as they transition to their recommended level of care.”

JADA LIKELY

For many, COVID-19 added fuel to existing risk factors for mental health issues, including anxiety about the health dangers, depression due to isolation from friends and family, increased substance or alcohol use linked to more idle time, prolonged stress related to unemployment and the need to cope with the illness itself.

For veterans experiencing suicidal thoughts, the pandemic seemed to have all the makings of a crisis within a crisis.

Fortunately, the veterans in Matt McLaughlin's care in the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder program at the Dayton, Ohio, VA Medical Center never experienced an uptick in suicidality.

“When vets are enrolled in VA care and engage in suicidal behavior, a report is made,” says McLaughlin (MSW '15). “There was no change in the number of reports since the pandemic's onset, and that's a good sign.

“The VA does a very effective job at suicide prevention when we have vets in our care,” McLaughlin says. “But the majority of vets are not engaging, and we need to do a better job of partnering with communities to prevent suicide.”

This has been McLaughlin's focus since June, after he was named community

engagement and partnership coordinator for Community Based Interventions for Suicide Prevention. His role is to develop interventions specific to each community to eliminate or reduce suicide.

McLaughlin is in the initiative's first cohort in Ohio, starting in Warren County. The pandemic hampered his ability to conduct outreach until this summer.

“Pandemic or not, mental health still needs to be addressed, and we can't ignore it,” he says.

Jada Likely (MSW '20), acting Community Living Center social work admissions coordinator and respite care coordinator at the Dayton VA, seconds that notion. The pandemic was especially detrimental to her patients in acute care, even more so when loved ones weren't allowed to visit.

“That brought emotions of sadness and moods that were either angry or sad,” she says. “The pandemic did not have a positive impact on veterans' mental health.”

In her role, Likely mainly conversed with veterans via telephone. On the rare occasions when she needed a signature for a means test or advance directive or to obtain a release of information, she dressed in full personal protective equipment.

Her department leaders have regularly held debriefings to discuss challenges

and brainstorm solutions to working with patients during COVID-19, which she says has been beneficial. That said, some issues continue to have no solutions, such as finding enough qualified home health care nurses for veterans after they are discharged from the medical center.

“Veterans have been forced to take a decrease in the amount of hours and days they receive services for bathing, dressing, wound changes, etc.,” Likely says. “This causes stress on both the veterans and their caregivers and loved ones.”

Getting veterans into nursing homes is always a challenge, but veterans who don't want a COVID-19 vaccine can be especially hard to place because many facilities prefer vaccinated residents.

“It puts veterans in a position of feeling forced to take the vaccine,” Likely says.

“In a lot of ways, the pandemic has been its own lesson, forcing social workers to be creative and flexible while being a change agent and advocate during a trying time.”

Despite the adjustments, Likely says some things never change in her field.

“No matter what, our role is to provide a sense of calmness and provide services that foster a safe and secure environment as they transition to their recommended level of care.” ■

The Student-Alumni Mentorship Experience

A NEW PROGRAM BUILDS IMPACTFUL RELATIONSHIPS BY MATCHING ALUMNI WITH STUDENTS

Launched in autumn 2020, the Student-Alumni Mentorship Experience (SAME) matches current students with alumni who serve as professional mentors for them. The program, founded by College of Social Work students and student employees with the help of the Office of Career Services, prepares students for a successful future and leaves a lasting impact on the Ohio State and social work communities.

Overall, 65 students were matched with 65 mentors. Applicants requested matches based on professional and academic interests, geographic location, or other characteristics such as race and gender identity. One MSW student and an alumna were matched because of their shared geographic location, Colorado. Another pair developed a relationship based on their shared professional interest in aging, resulting in a field placement for the student. Other connections were made based on shared cultural interests, such as being members of Mwanafunzi, the social work student association for students of color.

The alums reveled in sharing their experiences with students pursuing social work degrees and helping them understand what a career in social work looks like. The students valued being connected to alumni and building supportive relationships. One student participant, Tipoko Kabore (pictured on this magazine's front cover), says: "The best part of the mentorship program was developing my social work leadership skills, building my confidence in decision making, and creating a strong professional and academic network." Alumnus and mentor Joseph Borgo says: "I had the privilege to be paired with an impressive young woman who was an absolute delight to interact with and to explore issues of practice, professional development and social work values that were of mutual interest."



One of the program's student founders, Meredith Whitaker, wearing SAME's promotional T-shirt.

Reviewing important skills relating to resumes, job search, testing, licensure, self-care and employment were a major part of the experience. Monthly guided discussion topics and resources also helped spark stimulating conversation when needed. At the end of the academic year, students and alumni earned a certificate of completion, received a T-shirt and attended a virtual celebration event with other participants. The college is excited to continue the program for the 2021 academic year. Visit tinyurl.com/CSW-SAME for additional information. ■

"The best part was developing my social work leadership skills, building my confidence in decision making and creating a strong professional and academic network."

TIPOKO KABORE

ALUMNI

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Are you an alum making a difference in your community? Reach out to cswalumni@osu.edu to be featured in our next edition of *alumni across the country!*



CHELSIE GIAMBRONE
MSW '07

📍 San Diego, CA

Current position:

Clinical program manager at UC San Diego Health Eating Disorders Center for Treatment and Research and owner of Center for CBT and Mindfulness (private practice)

Current social work issue in your city:
Migrant youth at the border.

What have you or your city been doing in response to the two pandemics?
Increasing access to mental health care by expanding services and treatment formats.

What do you miss about Ohio State?
Fall on campus, Buckeye football and learning from all of the amazing CSW faculty!



DEMONDRE PEAK
MSW '21

📍 Houston, TX

Current position:

Community engagement manager

Current social work issue in your city:
Abortion laws.

What have you or your city been doing in response to the two pandemics?

The city of Houston has started to pay community members to take the vaccine. Plenty of businesses in the Houston metropolitan area are still mandating masks and social distancing.

What do you miss about Ohio State?
I miss the communal feeling at Ohio State and the College of Social Work. On campus there is always this feeling of being a part of something larger than just yourself. It's illuminating most times!



ACROSS THE COUNTRY



TARKINGTON J. NEWMAN

PHD '19

 **Portsmouth, NH**

Current position:

Assistant professor at the University of New Hampshire

Current social work issue in your city:

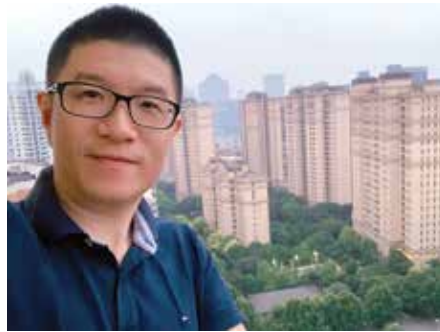
Systemic racism and COVID-19 are being discussed at many levels. In my faculty role, we have devoted time and resources to discuss, teach and practice anti-racism.

What have you or your city been doing in response to the two pandemics?

I collaborated with researchers and collegiate athletics stakeholders to examine the impact of the dual pandemics on the mental health of college student-athletes. COVID-19 had a positive and significant relationship with psychological distress. Nearly all BIPOC student-athletes reported experiencing systemic racism; however, the level of systemic racism did not predict psychological distress. In a related study, we examined the impacts of racism awareness and social justice attitudes on anti-racism behaviors and social justice advocacy. Findings suggest that awareness of racism and attitudes about social justice significantly predict anti-racism behaviors and social justice advocacy.

What do you miss about Ohio State?

The College of Social Work has THE best people, so I would say that I miss the people and the community of support. I also miss the food in Columbus — there's all the fresh seafood you could ever want in New England, but Columbus has an amazing variety of foods.



SCOTT SHEN

MSW '11

 **Shanghai, China**

Current position:

Counselor, Community Center Shanghai

Current social work issue in your city:

Parents and kids in Shanghai have faced growing pressure for years, and mental health issues in this population have become more evident than ever. Peer pressure, dominant focus on academics in mainstream culture, limited child care support, increasing living cost, insufficient educational resources, the pandemic and many other factors have made a significant impact on this trend.

What have you or your city been doing in response to the two pandemics?

Pandemic-related measures are highly coordinated, unified, quick and centralized here, given that our political and cultural environment is very different. It is messy and hectic like it is in other countries, but we get heads around the situation as quickly as possible. Lockdown measures are mostly kept and respected, health workers and volunteers work around the clock, field hospitals are built and gear production picks up at an amazing speed, and helpful information is spread far more quickly than rumors eventually.

What do you miss about Ohio State?

TOO MANY TO BE LISTED! It's where I learned and grew into a professional and a better person, where I was supported as an international student but also as a part of a community, and where I got to connect with so many brilliant people — friends to this day. I really miss Ohio State and my time there, although it usually cost me extra time to follow the jokes made in class. :)



LESLIE CARSON

MSW '11

 **Washington, DC**

Current position:

Highway safety specialist, Impaired Driving Division of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Current social work issue in your city:

Despite having a larger population than several states and paying more in taxes than many others, D.C. residents lack voting representation in Congress.

What have you or your city been doing in response to the two pandemics?

Before my current position, I worked as a Public Health Fellow at the NHTSA Office of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), where I served on the COVID-19 Federal Healthcare Resilience Task Force Prehospital Team. This team helped EMS and 911 systems prepare for and respond to the pandemic. It was a great opportunity to work with other federal agencies and make a national impact!

What do you miss about Ohio State?

Berry Café at Thompson Library! I spent a lot of money on coffee there.



“I wanted to see where my donation was going and what’s happening. At Ohio State I did that.”

ROBERT MASON

Huddles, hiring and healing with humor

ROBERT MASON GIVES BACK

It was 1958. Robert Mason was playing football at Euclid High School in Euclid, Ohio. He and his teammates were invited to teach flag football to junior high students, and it was in that moment that the social work seed was planted.

Through this experience, Mason learned that a local university (now Cleveland State) was offering a program where individuals could become YMCA professionals if they signed up to study social sciences. He took advantage of this opportunity at Ohio State, working for the Columbus YMCA and receiving a scholarship, and set out to work 20 hours a week while pursuing his degree full time.

After obtaining his BSSW in 1962, Mason worked for the YMCA in Wilmington, Delaware, where he facilitated youth development programming for high school students.

While completing graduate studies at Temple University, Mason embarked on a successful career in human resources, executive searches and business consulting. Despite not working directly in the field of social work, Mason credits much of his success to his incorporation of social work values, especially in human resources, recruiting and selection of senior executives. Mason and Associates, an executive search firm, was established in 1986. He retired in 2017.

Most recently, Mason has become passionate about giving back to students in the social services profession. His generosity led him to create an endowment in Ohio State’s College of Social Work and scholarship funds at the Medical University of South Carolina’s College of Nursing. He also gives an annual scholarship to female minority students who want to study STEM subjects at Euclid High School and St. John’s High School.

“I wanted to see where my donation was going and what’s happening. At Ohio State I did that, and I had the privilege of talking to scholarship recipients and learning their interests and backgrounds,” Mason says.

Beyond his scholarship support, Mason also hopes to leave behind some useful career advice for students: “You just can’t be afraid of opportunities because there are limitations. Life is full of experiences and challenges, and they aren’t all good. Sometimes you fall down, but you’ll get back up.”

Currently, Mason is traveling and spending time with family. He also brings joy to numerous hospitals where he provides therapeutic humor to patients as “Dr. Geezer,” part of the Bumper “T” Caring Clowns program. Dr. Geezer currently works at the Medical University of South Carolina, Roper St. Francis Healthcare and the Ralph A. Johnson VA Medical Center. ■



“I like to get to know the women outside of the research. I make it my business to really get to know people personally and intimately.”

JACQUELYN MESHELEMIAH

When the work chooses you

DR. JACQUELYN MESHELEMIAH'S IMPACT

Let me get this straight — the government will pay me to help people?”

When she learned that, Dr. Jacquelyn Meshelemiah knew that social work was for her. She was 17 and interning in the social services department at the VA Medical Center at Wade Park in Cleveland, Ohio.

Since then, Meshelemiah has earned her BSSW, MSW and PhD from The Ohio State University. Currently an associate professor in the College of Social Work, Meshelemiah also serves as the associate vice provost for diversity and inclusion. Her research focuses on human trafficking and human rights.

Working with some of the most vulnerable women in society, Meshelemiah is careful about how she engages. “I like to get to know the women outside of the research. I make it my business to really get to know people personally and intimately.”

She’s also keenly aware of how the profession has evolved since she began.

“I’m seeing more people of color and men being drawn to the profession. I’m also starting to see the profession go back to its roots about community-based approaches to social justice.”

Because of this shift, Meshelemiah has her own thoughts on what will make social work students truly successful.

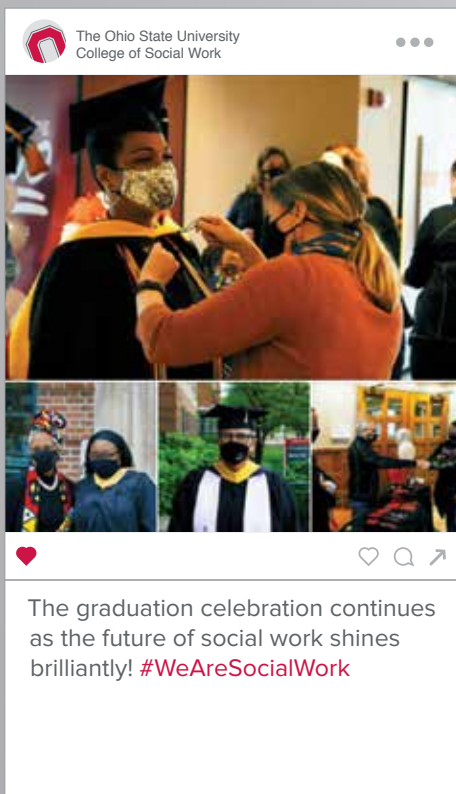
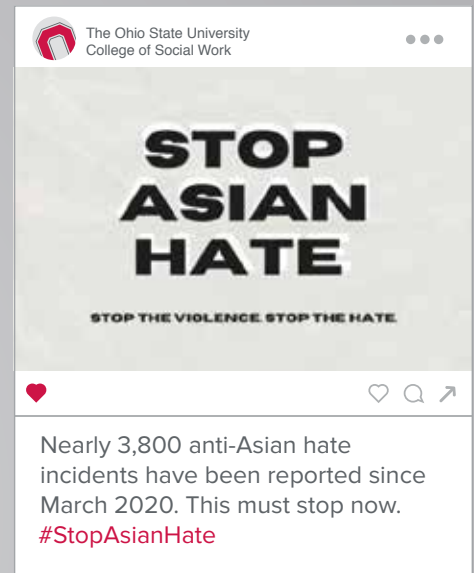
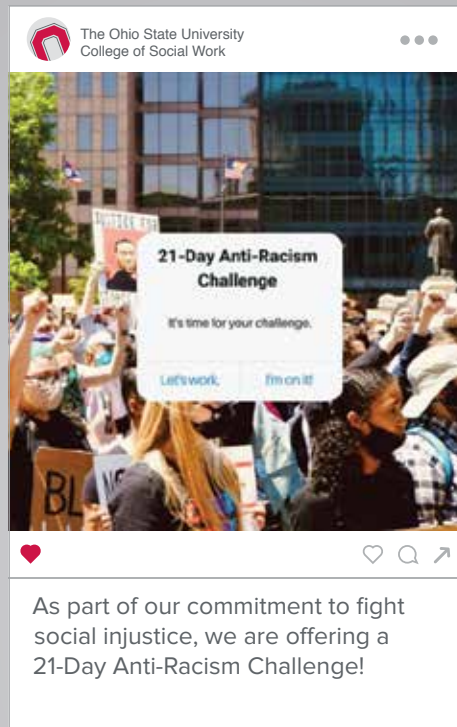
“Our students need to really rest on the code of ethics as a profession. I can’t emphasize enough the importance of JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) as not just words on paper but as a calling.”

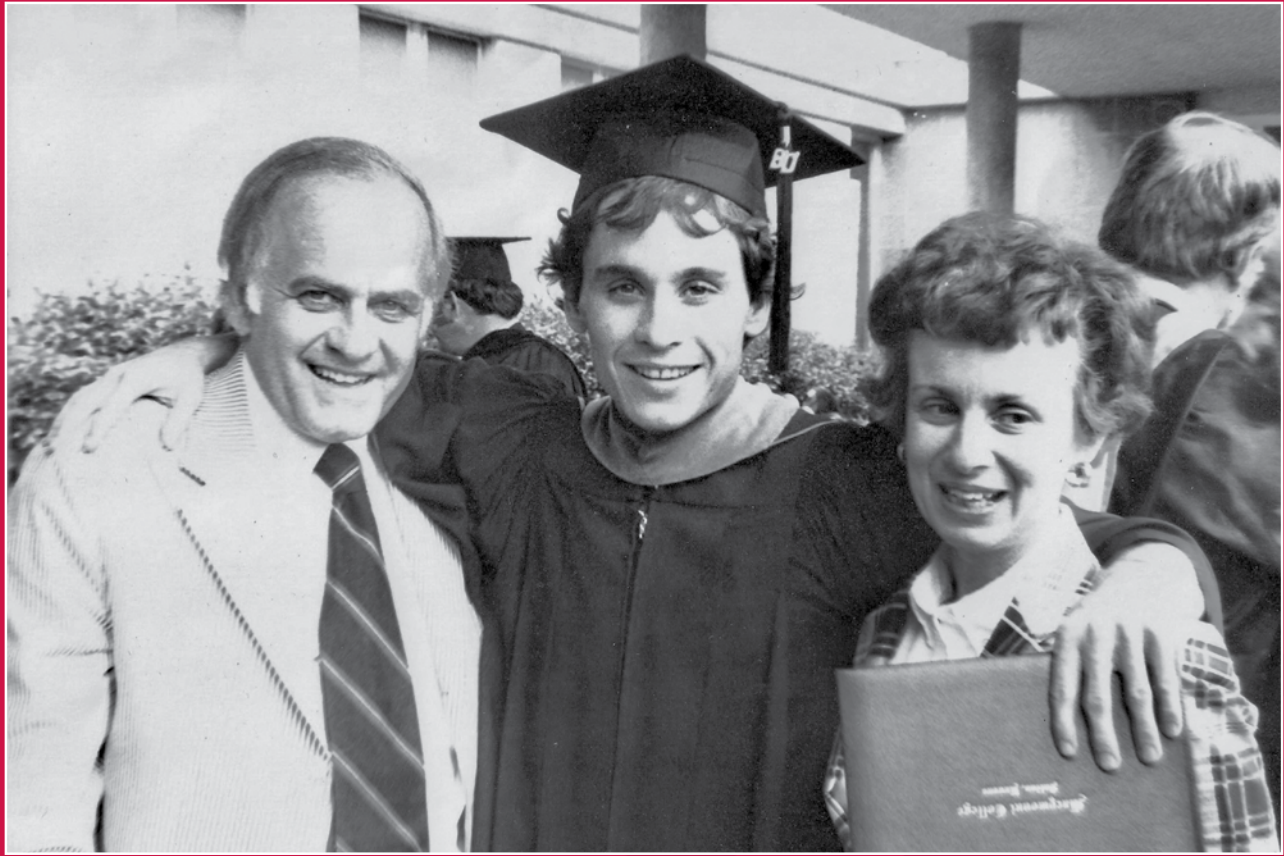
As a three-time alum, professor and donor, Meshelemiah is passionate about the college and giving back.

“The disparate treatment of Black people economically in this country is clear. This includes many of our students. These students want to come into social work, so it’s only right that we help them get these degrees,” she says.

“My advice to students is that you don’t have to do it alone. Working with allies and advocates is how we make changes. There are people, especially when you join the NASW, NABSW, who can help you and act as resources as well.” ■

SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT





Tom celebrates his undergraduate degree from Marymount College of Kansas alongside his parents, A. T. "Greg" and Charlotte Gregoire, in May of 1980.

Introducing the A. T. "Greg" and Charlotte Gregoire Fund in Addiction and Recovery Scholarship!

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