

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

SPRING 2023

# PARTNERING *for* CHANGE

A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

## CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

**RUTGERS**  
School of Social Work



# C O N T E N T S

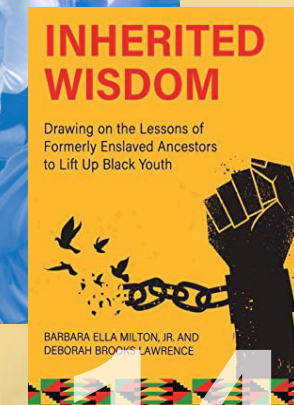


*“Don’t judge me by my success. Judge me by how many times I fell down  
and got back up again”*

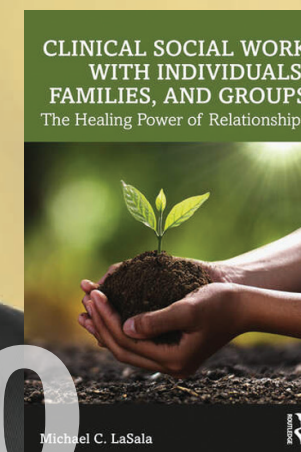
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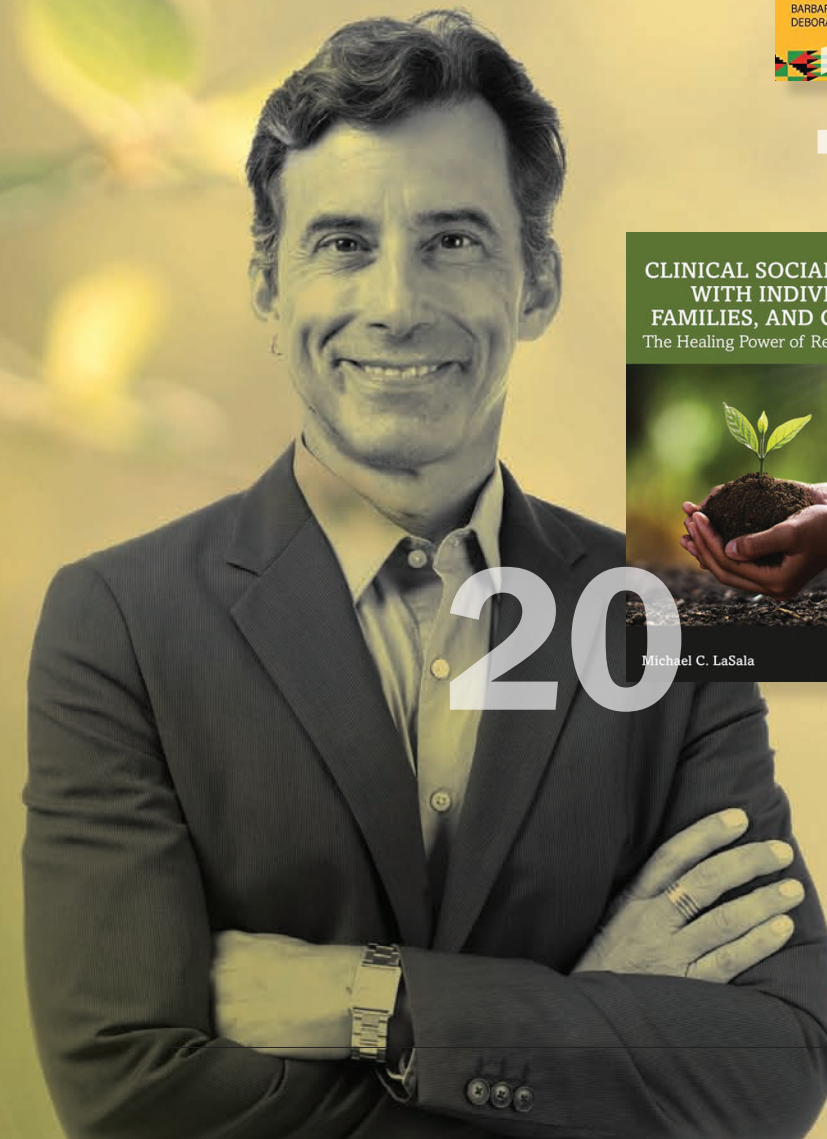
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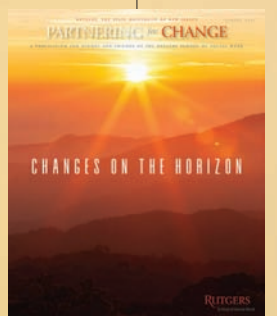
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As Dean Potter steps down from her role, Rutgers School of Social Work welcomes a new cohort of senior leaders.







SPRING 2023

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M E S S A G E F R O M T H E D E A N

Dear Friends,

I write to you for the last time in my role as Dean of Rutgers School of Social Work. After a decade in this position, this summer I will be stepping down, and a new Dean will arrive. I want to take this opportunity to thank the entire School of Social Work community—our students, alumni, faculty, staff, field instructors, and supporters. Truly it is this team that makes RUSSW such a thriving, exciting school of social work.

We have worked together to move our School forward to improve academic excellence, research eminence, and student success. The School remains one of the largest social work programs in the country; a highly diverse community, with over 2,200 students across our four degrees. Our rankings have improved steadily over the past years, with improvement each ranking year, rising most recently to 16th in the nation, and in the top 10 of large public research institutions with a reputation for excellence in social work education and social work research.

Our research and sponsored projects portfolio has also increased over the years, standing now at approximately \$60 million in multi-year contracts and grants. We are a major partner with the State of New Jersey in the area of human services, including substance abuse prevention and treatment, gambling studies, community-based prevention research, child welfare, children's mental health, and 0-3 early childhood initiatives, to name a few. Our federal awards have steadily increased as well over time, from less than \$7 million prior to 2018 to around \$13 million in 2022. Home to several vibrant centers and institutes along with several multi-faculty programs of research and emerging centers, Rutgers School of Social Work holds an important position in social work research and community engaged scholarship.

Three years ago we created and launched an exciting strategic plan, Toward a More Just Future, a plan that dovetails strongly with the New Brunswick Academic Master Plan. The work to enact this plan has proceeded extraordinarily well during the pandemic and has kept our school focused, excited, and energized as we engage the future.

I am so appreciative of the opportunity to serve Rutgers School of Social Work. I look forward to supporting the University in my faculty role and to continued partnership with our fantastic community. I hope you enjoy reading this edition of our magazine. Thank you for your dedication to the School of Social Work and the entire Rutgers community as well as the communities we partner with and serve.



*Cathryn C. Potter*

Cathryn C. Potter, M.S.W., Ph.D.  
DEAN AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR  
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



**Vivien Anthony**, Associate Professor and Scientific Director for Video Gaming and eSports at the Center for Gambling Studies, joined the board of directors for the International Gambling Counseling Certification Board (IGCCB) for a 3-year term. The IGCCB offers national and international certifications that assure competent professionals working in the field of clinical treatment of individuals with gambling and video gaming disorders.

**Elsa Candelario**, Professor of Professional Practice and Director of the Latina/o/x Initiatives for Service, Training, and Assessment Certificate Program, was appointed as a member of the board of directors of the New Jersey Mental Health Institute. She is also the PI on a \$64,000 Cigna Foundation grant and a \$200,000 Latino Action Network Foundation grant to ensure Latinx communities are better served through workforce development efforts that will increase the number of social workers prepared to work with them and who are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of individuals.

Associate Professor **Jacquelynn Duron** and her colleagues were awarded funding from the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) to support the Evaluation of the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program. In collaboration with the JJC, the research team will work closely with the Restorative and Transformative Justice (RTJ) Hubs and County Youth Services Commissions to evaluate the implementation and impact of the RTJ Hubs in four municipalities to prevent youth from entering the JJC and to support those released from JJC facilities.

Professor and Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion **Antoinette Farmer** received a \$1,195,617.50 grant with Dr. Corinne Warrenner from the National Institute of Justice for the project “Campus Climate and Sexual Violence Experiences of Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.” In addition, Dr. Farmer was invited to serve as a member of the board of editors for the ongoing updates of the Encyclopedia of Social Work and was appointed as a review editor on the Editorial Board of Educational Psychology (specialty section of *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Frontiers in Education*).

Assistant Professor **Caroline Harmon-Darrow** was appointed to the editorial board of *Prevention Science*, the journal of the Society for Prevention Research, as part of its early career reviewer fellowship mentoring.

Associate Professor **Joy Jeounghee Kim** and Postdoctoral Associate Skye Allmang’s paper, “Wage theft in the United States: Towards new research agendas,” won the Nevile-Plowman prize for the best article featured in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*. The paper analyzes labor market and economic inequality issues and inadequate employment policies and practices that harm many low-wage, minoritized, and immigrant workers in the United States. Dr. Kim was also invited to join the advisory group for the Essential Jobs, Essential Care Multi-State Initiative put forward by the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute and New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well to improve direct care workers’ job qualities.

**Michael LaSala**, Professor and Director of the DSW Program, was named one of the top 100 contributors to social work journal scholarship in a study published in *Research on Social Work Practice*.

**Lia Nower**, Professor and Director of the Center for Gambling Studies and Addiction Counselor Training Program, was awarded the Lifetime Research Award by the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), the leading research, policy, and prevention organization in the U.S. for individuals affected by problem gambling. It is the highest award in the gambling research field, and Dr. Nower is the eighth recipient of the award in the 50 years of the organization. The award is given to a person for “exceptional longstanding achievement in the field of research to assist problem gamblers and their families” and is “only bestowed in exceptional times and circumstances to individuals who exemplify at least twenty years of research on problem gambling.” Dr. Nower was also named senior editor of the journal *Addiction* and appointed to the Independent Monitory Committee at the Yale School of Medicine.

Assistant Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Racial Minority Health **Michael Park** was reappointed as an editorial review board member for *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* and newly appointed to the editorial review board for *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Dr. Park was also selected as a 2022 Health Disparities Research Institute Scholar at the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities.

**Chiara Sabina**, Associate Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Interpersonal Violence Research, was selected as a 2022 Fellow of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA), American Psychological Association Division 27 and was also named a 2023 American Psychological Association Fellow. Dr. Sabina was also awarded a \$999,882 grant from the National Institute of Justice, “Understanding Latina Experiences with Victimization, Intersectionality, and Discrimination (LAT-VIDA).”

**Cassandra Simmel**, Associate Professor and Incoming Director of the Ph.D. Program, was included as senior research advisor on the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, an award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Assistant Professor **Mark van der Maas** was awarded a seed grant of \$34,500 from the International Center for Responsible Gaming for “Online gambling and death by suicide: A quasi-experimental approach to gambling policy impacts.” The aim of the project is to use the restricted access database of the National Violent Death Reporting System to investigate changes in the rate and characteristics of deaths by suicide in states that have legalized online casino gambling compared against synthetic controls.

Assistant Professor **Abigail Williams-Butler** joined the editorial board of *Children and Youth Services Revue*.



# FACULTY VOICES IN THE NEWS



*“We know that children that actually touched debris were more impacted. I’ve learned this from my disaster work. A lot of people assume children are resilient, and ‘Oh, they’re going to bounce back, they’ll be fine.’ Unless we give them attention and speak with them, they don’t bounce back. They’re not as resilient as we think.”*

Repairing the invisible damage from Tropical Storm Ida  
Patricia Findley, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor of Social Work, and Special Assistant to the Dean for Interprofessional Health Initiatives in **NJ Spotlight News**



*“What do bodega workers need protection from? Convenience store workers, including bodega workers, experience high rates of workplace homicide. To put it into perspective, they are killed nearly at the rate that police are killed in the line of duty. Bodega workers are frequently victims of assault or witnesses of violence. Opening late and working alone makes them a perfect target for robbery.”*

The Beloved, But Vulnerable, Bodega Worker (op-ed)  
Assistant Teaching Professor, Assistant Director of Student Affairs and Newark Campus Coordinator Charles Chear in **Next City**



*“Microaggressions are the slights that people in marginalized groups experience. There are two types of microaggression: overt and covert. Overt, or microassault, is a direct attack and a racist comment, such as telling an immigrant to ‘go back to where you came from.’ Covert is an unintentional comment that really is an insult, such as ‘you speak so well for an immigrant.’ The underlying message is that ‘you don’t belong.’”*

‘So articulate for a Black person’:  
How microaggressions are more than just slights  
Assistant Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Intimate Partner Violence Prevention & Intervention Maxine Davis in **northjersey.com**



*“I had access to compassionate care, but there are many stories of people who have to call multiple clinics, repeat their story over, have to travel — all while every kick of their fetus is a reminder this baby is not going to survive.”*

Doctors seek to educate people on later abortions in post-Roe era  
Associate Professor of Professional Practice for Reproductive Justice & Associate Professor, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School Erica Goldblatt Hyatt in **New Jersey Monitor**

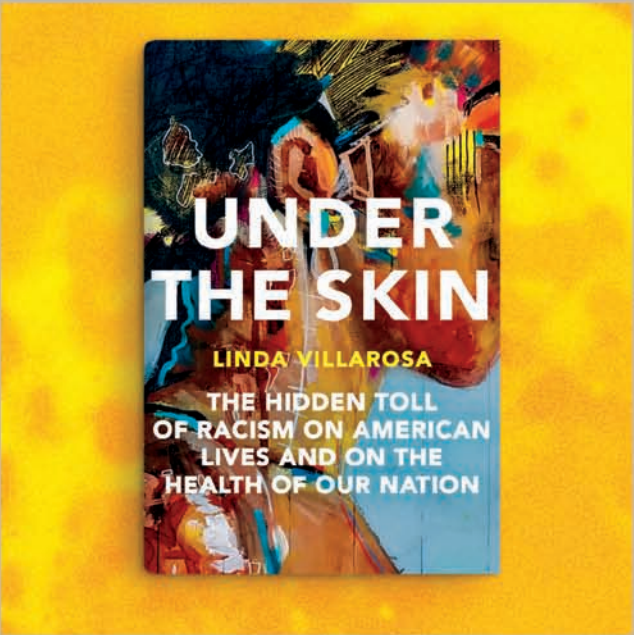


## SEVENTH ANNUAL CHALLENGING RACISM CONFERENCE

KEYNOTE LECTURER  
LINDA VILLAROSA

JUNE 7, 2023 | 9AM-12:30PM ET | VIRTUAL  
REGISTER FOR 3 SOCIAL & CULTURAL COMPETENCE CE HOURS  
**GO.RUTGERS.EDU/CHALLENGINGRACISM**

Designed with the practitioner in mind, this live webinar will provide social workers and allied professionals with a compelling learning opportunity on racial disparities. The William Neal Brown Memorial Lecture will be delivered by journalist Linda Villarosa, author of *Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation*, and contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, where she covers race, inequality, and public health.







*This year, Dean Cathryn Potter is stepping down from her post, after leading the School of Social Work through a decade of innovation, growth, and significant change. At the same time, the school welcomes two new senior leaders.*

# LEAD THE WAY

By **MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY**

**I**t was 2013, and Cathryn Potter had just arrived “on the banks of the old Raritan” as the School of Social Work’s newest dean. She was ready to hit the ground running and was impressed with the work that had already been done to make the school a leading institution. “I was coming from the University of Denver, where I was associate provost for research, so it was important to me to be with a program that had a strong emphasis on research,” she recalls. “But I was also drawn to Rutgers because of its highly ranked MSW program, and its commitment to training students to be strong clinical social workers and effective leaders in management, policy, and advocacy.”

In the decade since, Potter has built on the school’s existing reputation as one of the largest and most diverse in the country, to become a leader in teaching, community engagement, student experience, and research. The result has been a significant rise in the school’s *US News & World Report* ranking, from 26 to 16, over the course of Potter’s tenure as dean. “This is because of the dedication of our whole team,” she says. “I’ve been fortunate to be the dean of a great group.”

As the school prepares to transition to new leadership, here are just some of the advancements Dean Potter is most proud of.

## EXPANDING THE FACULTY

In the years before Potter’s arrival, the School of Social Work had nearly doubled the size of its MSW class without making many changes to the number of its faculty or staff. “One of the accomplishments I’m most proud of was our focus on faculty and staff hiring,” Potter says. This included a real push for high level researchers, seasoned teachers, and experienced practitioners as professional practice faculty. Most notably, 65 percent of these new hires

are BIPOC. “I’m incredibly proud of that, even though it’s not entirely my work,” Potter says. “We had strong senior faculty when I got here, but expanding our junior level faculty has been very exciting. This has allowed us to improve our student-to-faculty ratio and also continue to improve the quality and quantity of our research. Additionally, we have added top-notch staff to support our educational innovations and research advances.”

## THE FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

One of Potter’s most proud moments was unveiling the school’s new five-year strategic plan, called *Toward a More Just Future*. The process began in 2018, when she convened a committee to gather data from students, faculty, staff, community members, and competing institutions about what it means to envision a future for our country and world that’s grounded in justice. Out of that committee emerged six priority areas for the school to focus on in the coming years.

All was set to launch in 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began and rocked the higher education world practically overnight. “I’m proud to say that, even during a pandemic, we’re on track to implement all of our goals,” Potter says. “I’m proud of the engagement we had with so many members of our community during the development of this plan, and the plan itself is fantastic.”

## THE ONE SQUARE BLOCK INITIATIVE

Many alumni will recall the School of Social Work’s facilities as a scattering of small, dated buildings across from the Johnson & Johnson heliport, some rental space in downtown New Brunswick, and additional offices about a mile away in the public safety building on Commercial Avenue. This is not the case today.



During her tenure, Potter launched the One Square Block initiative, designed to concentrate the school’s footprint in downtown New Brunswick. Currently, it benefits from a significant amount of visible rental space all within one block on the corner of Albany Street and George Street, enabling face-to-face meetings in a matter of minutes—a feat that was impossible just a few years ago. Dedicated classrooms are still on the school’s wish list (classes are currently being taught in general university space) and will likely be a project for the next dean.

“Our goal was to centralize our footprint,” says Potter. “Short of having the resources to create a new building, the One Square Block initiative has accomplished our goal in a creative way.”

**NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC**

When Potter arrived at Rutgers in 2013, she never could have predicted that her time as dean would entail navigating a global pandemic. But this soon became the reality for about one-third of her tenure. “It was a terribly heavy lift for everyone involved,” she recalls, especially in the early days of March 2020, when the school transformed—over spring break—from being a mostly on-campus program to developing asynchronous, synchronous, face-to-face, and remote online class options for roughly 2,000 students. “Our team’s ability to pivot, be successful, get our students graduated, and take care of one another throughout the pandemic has been nothing short of amazing,” Potter adds. “Our students are also one of the most diverse bodies in the country, made up of highly engaged and tremendous leaders, and watching them navigate the pandemic has been inspiring.”

Despite its challenges, the pandemic accelerated the school’s interest and investment in technology. On one hand, it revealed what the future could hold for students interested in online or other alternative paths to a social work degree. On the other, it also prepared students for what practice might be like in a telehealth setting. “The way that a lot of social work practice is being done is changing,” adds Potter. “That flexibility and the ability to position ourselves for the future speaks well for our school.”

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Dean Potter plans to take a one-year administrative leave at the end of the 2023 academic year. But she’s not slowing down. “I plan to reconnect with some of my scholarly interests,” she says, which include organizational health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health. In the meantime, she looks back fondly on her successes as a team effort. “A dean gets to be a leader, but they’re not the person doing all the strategic thinking, all the work, or even any of the implementation in a lot of ways,” she says. “The success of a dean is the success of a team.”

**PATRICIA FINDLEY is the New Associate Dean for Academic Affairs**

If you ask Patricia Findley about her career path, she’ll tell you she’s a clinical social worker first and foremost. “That’s the most important thing,” she says, referring to her 15 years in practice

working with patients in rehabilitation hospitals, retirement homes, and nursing facilities. After earning her doctorate in public health, she transitioned into research, first at Northwestern University and then at Rutgers, where she worked with the Social Security Administration to determine how people receiving disability benefits could use those benefits to secure meaningful work, get off of the benefits, and earn higher wages. After a brief stint with the Veterans Administration’s War Related Illness and Injury Study Center, she returned to the School of Social Work as a faculty member. This year, she’s bringing her extensive experience in research, teaching, and administration to the position of Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the School of Social Work.

One of Findley’s goals for her new position is to leverage her interdisciplinary background to bring the school’s expertise to academic and clinical centers across Rutgers’ campuses. Her first target? Health care. “There are so many ways to bring the role of social work to health care environments across the university, including direct care, substance use disorder treatment, working with children, and more,” she says. “The School of Social Work is sometimes overlooked within health care at Rutgers, but that’s what I’ve been actively working towards for the last 10 years—bringing social work into the forefront of health care.” Beyond this, she also sees a role for the school to get involved in business management and leadership research, and advance advocacy across the university. “It’s about bringing the power of what we do as social workers to the university and state,” she says, “and sharing the resources so everyone can benefit.”

When it comes to the student experience, Findley plans to strengthen the school’s supports for those pursuing bachelor’s degrees as well as for those in the larger master’s degree program. This includes working to develop agreements with community colleges to recruit students into the bachelor’s program, and engaging with practicing social service workers who may be interested in the Intensive Weekend MSW Program. As the desire for online education grows, she also hopes to build a more robust online program for social work students at Rutgers. “I enjoy programming and thinking creatively about how to attract students and work with them to get their degrees,” she says. “This role gives me a lot of opportunities to do that, and I arrive at work in the morning energized for the day and excited for what we can accomplish.”


At the center of Findley’s new role is her dedication to students, both while they are at Rutgers and as they prepare to leave. Top of mind for her, currently, is the nationwide licensure exam bias, making it difficult for Black and other minority students as well as older students to pass the MSW exam. To that end, she’s currently hosting monthly meetings for all the MSW directors in the state about how to address this and other challenges social workers face, from telehealth to business advocacy. “My emails in the morning solidify my schedule for the day, because if there’s a student issue, everything else gets set aside,” she says. “I work with the students first.”

*“My emails in the morning solidify my schedule for the day, because if there’s a student issue, everything else gets set aside. I work with the students first.”*

**Patricia Findley,**  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor of Social Work, and Special Assistant to the Dean for Interprofessional Health Initiatives







*“The Rutgers MSW program is one of the best in the country, and I look forward to continuing its mission of preparing social work students to confront the most pressing social issues of our time.”*

**Edward Alessi,**  
Associate Professor and  
MSW Program Director

The School of Social Work is pleased to announce additional leadership changes effective July 1, 2023:

**Dr. DuWayne Battle,** Assistant Dean for Bachelor’s Programs, Director of the BA in Social Work Program in New Brunswick

**Dr. Natalie Bembry,** Director of the BA in Social Work Program in Camden

**Dr. Erica Goldblatt Hyatt,** Director of the DSW Program

**Dr. Judith McCoyd,** Associate Director for Doctoral Programs

**Dr. Lia Nower,** Associate Dean for Research

**Christine Morales,** Assistant Dean for Part-Time Lecturer Development

**Dr. Cassandra Simmel,** Director of the Ph.D. Program

#### **EDWARD ALESSI is the New MSW Program Director**

As the School of Social Work’s newest MSW Program Director, Edward Alessi plans to build on its already stellar reputation by infusing Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement (IIDEA)-related initiatives throughout the curriculum. “Americans have faced turbulent times over the last few years, and an MSW curriculum that is grounded in IIDEA-related initiatives makes certain that Rutgers prepares social workers for contemporary clinical and policy practice,” he says. “The result will be a cohort of leaders prepared to advocate for their clients, all in service of promoting racial, social, and economic justice and eliminating health disparities in New Jersey, the United States, and globally.”

Alessi, a School of Social Work faculty member since 2011, brings to his new role substantial research experience. Generally, his work centers on the topic of stress and trauma among sexual and gender minority (SGM) populations, as well as how clinical practice, policies, and programs can align more closely with the needs of this underserved population. Currently, his research focuses on how traumatic stress among SGM migrants intersects with the psychosocial and structural issues of their host countries to impact health and mental health outcomes. He takes this one step further to also examine what kinds of community-based interventions might serve to buffer some of these negative effects on the SGM migrant population. This research has taken him all over the world, and has been published in journals like *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, Psychotherapy, Psychotherapy Research*, and others.

Alessi’s extensive teaching experience will also benefit him as MSW Program Director. In June 2017, he was named a Rutgers Chancellor’s Scholar, an award created to support faculty excellence at the associate professor level, and in March 2021, he joined Rutgers Global Health as a core faculty member.

Alessi has taught a range of courses at the master’s and doctoral level at the School of Social Work, including Qualitative Research, Theory Development, Clinical Social Work, Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis, and Sexual and Gender Diversity in Social Work. He received the Outstanding Professor of the Year Award four years in a row (2013 to 2016) and earned the Rutgers University Presidential Fellowship for Teaching Excellence in 2017. A clinical social worker since 2001, he has a decade of full-time social work practice experience, primarily in outpatient mental health settings.

“The Rutgers MSW program is one of the best in the country,” Alessi says, “and I look forward to continuing its mission of preparing social work students to confront the most pressing social issues of our time.” ■

#### **Toward a More Just Future: A Crash Course**

The five-year strategic plan, which envisions the School of Social Work as a leader in justice, is one of Dean Potter’s lasting legacies. The six key pillars of the plan are:

- 1. Inclusion, intersectionality, diversity, equity, and advancement (IIDEA):** This aspect of the plan focuses on embracing IIDEA across everything the school does, from its community engagement and research portfolios to the demographics of its faculty, staff, and students. It also sets the stage for significant curriculum reform, and has already put the school in the position of being one of the earliest on the New Brunswick campus to get its diversity, equity, and inclusion plan underway.
- 2. A Curriculum for the Future of Social Work:** Here, the plan prioritizes preparing students for a range of careers in social work in the private and public sectors, with an emphasis on technology integration and leadership preparation.
- 3. Supporting the 21st Century Student:** From increasing scholarships to strengthening the school’s professional network, this part of the plan highlights the need for advanced support for students and alumni. During the pandemic, this aspect of the plan expanded to determining the “new normal” for today’s students and supporting them in new ways.
- 4. Research for a Just Future:** As a top 20 ranked program, the School of Social Work has the unique opportunity to set the tone for emerging research. The plan prioritizes identifying research priorities, building research centers, and enhancing support for current research.
- 5. Innovative Community Engagement:** The plan envisions the school as a dynamic partner for community organizations, and aims to increase faculty, staff, and student engagement in social and policy advocacy.
- 6. Organizational Foundations for Success:** This portion of the plan focuses on creating the best possible culture, climate, and structures for the school and its stakeholders—from branding and communications to infrastructure and fundraising.



FORGING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH NARRATIVE:

# A CONVERSATION WITH ALUMNA DR. BARBARA ELLA MILTON JR.

Dr. Milton Jr. received her MSW from Rutgers School of Social Work in 2001 and is the author of *Inherited Wisdom: Drawing on the Lessons of Formerly Enslaved Ancestors to Lift Up Black Youth* (Cognella Academic Press, 2022) and *Heeding the Caregiver Call: The Story of Barbara Ella Milton Sr. and Alzheimer's Disease* (2nd Edition coming Fall 2023, Cognella Academic Press). She spoke with Vivian Todini about her background in social work and how her education and experience in storytelling shaped her career — and her life.

By **VIVIAN TODINI**

W

## What drew you to use storytelling as a way to transform communities?

When you are a clinician working with youth from high-risk environments, you learn quickly about the power of stories, many of which contain so much drama and trauma. Yet, the trauma—and hence the story—of Black and Brown youth is so deeply misunderstood and miscast. As a result, the stories of Black children are not grounded in compassion and

love. Rather, they are mired in harmful tropes that perpetuate the vicious cycle of racism that led to their trauma. These narratives form dangerous cultural norms that devalue and dehumanize Black lives.

I realized that my social work skills could help Black youth transform their inner stories and my advocacy skills could help transform the outer stories that are told about youth of color. So many youth with whom I worked felt hopeless and had no sense of future orientation, which always made me sad. My listening, validation, and connection with them became their lifeline; it helped them rewrite their stories. Through our work together, their stories had new beginnings and new endings. So many of them, with whom I am still in touch, are now parents. They transmit love, hope, confidence, and achievement to their children, thus helping to mitigate the clamor of damaging narratives. By helping individuals and communities shed destructive messages that bear down on their well-being, we help today's youth manage the outside myths that continue to threaten their emotional and physical health.

## How do you use storytelling to shift the cultural narrative?

To begin to change the external narrative, we have to change external systems. While working as a clinician in a ninth grade school-based trauma reduction program, a fight broke out in the hallway between two students. Although order was quickly restored, I will never forget

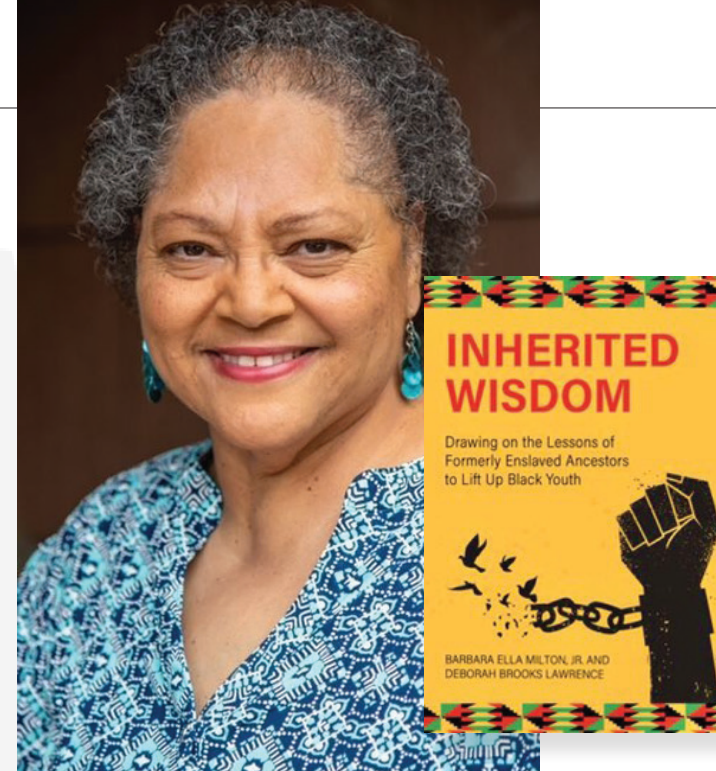
how the school was suddenly enveloped in the whirl of helicopters and an onslaught of media stirring up an unfounded story that there was a “riot.”

That experience, once again, demonstrated the presumptive myths about the children of inner-city schools, unjustly mischaracterizing them as wild, unruly, and scary. I wanted to do something to change that perception. I contacted the editor of the local newspaper and registered a complaint. I said rather bluntly that it seems his paper runs only negative stories about Black and Brown youth, which I found shameful and against the public good. I implored the editor to find someone who knows the value of youth of color and who would tell positive stories. I suggested that if they didn't have someone on staff, I would do it. Long story short, I was hired to write a weekly column called “Our Pride and Joy” where I told stories about the resilience and beauty of Black and Brown youth.

When my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2015, we went searching for the stories of Black and queer women like her who were experiencing the disease. Yet, we found none. At that moment, my mother asked me to write her story to help other Black and queer women know that we get this illness too. By telling my mother's story, I heard over and over again how the book helped families of color to feel less isolated; they were relieved to better understand the challenges and the resolutions in a way that were never reflected in the general press. By sharing the narratives of Black and Brown families, we not only support families of color, but also shift the dialogue and disrupt the negative stereotypes that undergird systemic racism.

## How do you use the power of past stories to move us toward a better future?

My mother was a strong Black woman, as was her mother and her mother's mother. They were survivors and resilient. When contemplating a topic for my doctoral dissertation, I wondered what



were the roots of Black resilience? The question led me to the Library of Congress and the collection of slave narratives called “Born in Bondage,” a trove of more than 2,000 stories of men and women born in bondage who were teenagers around the time of emancipation in 1865. I wanted to examine how these teens survived that cruel and decimating bondage. By combing through their stories, I learned that the keys to their survival and resilience spanned a range of behavioral, psychological, and attitudinal strategies that carried them out of bondage into lives of freedom.

I qualified those experiences as markers of historical resilience and made use of those strategies in my work with their progeny in my clinical practice. This approach of going back into history to fetch knowledge and sustenance is called *Sankofa*. That research and application of the findings is contained in my latest book, *Inherited Wisdom: Drawing on the Lessons of Formerly Enslaved Ancestors to Lift Up Black Youth*.

## How did being a practicing LCSW therapist inform your choice to become an author?

In July 2012 I was diagnosed with bladder cancer, which now, 10 years later, has led to end-stage renal failure and a life fighting the good fight against stage 4 cancer and dialysis. This medical reality forced me to leave direct practice. The transition was difficult, as I loved working with clients and helping new LSWs work towards their clinical licenses. It was during this transition that I found my way to writing, as I knew the sum of my 40 years of social work experience could be helpful to others. Now, I do advocacy in a new way through the power of the pen. My lived experiences and worldview, when expressed in essays, newspaper columns, and through my books, have helped transform the lives of Black people. Tragically, Black youth are still victimized by state-sanctioned violence and at the hands of the resurgence of white supremacy. Black youth need allies, social workers, other mental health

workers, and educators to have compassion and knowledge about ways to help them navigate the hostilities of the world that are directed at them. That's why I wrote *Inherited Wisdom*. The book provides tools on how to safeguard their precious lives.

## What were the experiences at Rutgers that informed the direction of your career?

I admired my professors at Rutgers and had excellent and versatile fieldwork experiences that kept me excited throughout my MSW program. In my first year I was placed at a child welfare agency; the second year, an outpatient child and adolescent treatment program. Through these experiences, I learned so much about clinical disorders and psychopharmacology. The MSW seminars, where we processed field placements, were intellectually stimulating and very helpful in enriching my fieldwork experiences. I am still in touch with classmates from my MSW classes. Kudos to the professors who emphasized group work, which allowed me to forge deep connections to my peers. I advanced my research and writing skills throughout the program, which serves me well today. Throughout the MSW program, I had a great advisor who guided and supported me and for that I am grateful.

## What role can social workers play in forging social change?

The Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of social work. The nation woke up more to the realities of systemic racism, disparities, and the economic exploitation of Black and Brown people. Social work chapters took up the mantle of the moment and movement to work even harder on social, racial, and economic justice issues. This recommitment to our core values, life learning, and allyship from the NASW has made me proud to be in the profession. I have a part in facilitating social change in my personal interactions. I do this through my quest for professional development and in using my talents, time, and treasure, including storytelling, in service of social change. I know from my own lived experience that an encounter with just one person who saw me for who I was, who treated me with respect, who had a genuine interest in getting to know me, who listened to me, who did not judge me, who showed compassion for me and who validated the value of my life as a Black lesbian, helped me to survive the trauma of my upbringing and to forge a life of purpose and success. Onward! The world needs us. ■





Rutgers School of Social Work faculty, staff, and students meet with community partners as part of the Age-Friendly North Jersey alliance — a network that they have helped to initiate and support since 2015 in partnership with private philanthropy, nonprofit, local government, and grassroots community leaders.

## RUTGERS SSW LAUNCHES NEW HUB FOR AGING COLLABORATION



ast fall, Rutgers School of Social Work launched the Hub for Aging Collaboration (“the Hub”), the School’s newest nexus for research, education, and engagement. Led by Professor Emily Greenfield, the Hub amplifies synergies across

a growing network of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community partners committed to aging-focused activities consistent with social work values. The Hub will build upon the School of Social Work’s nationally and internationally recognized leadership in aging, especially in the areas of age- and dementia-friendly communities, supportive service programs, other community-based social innovations, and gero-curricular infusion.

The Hub’s overarching goal is to advance excellence in collaborative research, teaching, and engagement to improve social contexts for healthy and equitable aging. It builds the School’s programmatic strengths in aging, including multiple grant-funded research projects and the MSW Aging and Health Certificate program.

As an example, last fall, a team of faculty, staff, and students worked in partnership with private philanthropy and a statewide nonprofit to host the inaugural New Jersey Age-Friendly Virtual Fair. This first-of-its kind event was conceptualized from their multi-year, engaged program of research with local, county, and state age-friendly efforts in New Jersey. The fair was designed to showcase work being done to make the state a better place to age well across sectors and at different systems levels. It was attended by over 260 service providers, government officials, community



leaders, retirees, educators, students, and more.

The Hub is poised to continue to work strategically across disciplines and sectors to make systems, environments, and social institutions more responsive to increasingly long and disparate lives.

The Hub is supported, in part, through a grant from The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, a long-time partner of the SSW’s work on aging. Core faculty members include Drs. Emily Greenfield, Lauren Snedeker, Ayse Akincigil, Patricia Findley, Karen Zurlo, and Ryon Cobb, with additional thanks to Althea Pestine-Stevens (Research Project Coordinator) and Natalie Pope (Graduate Assistant).

Visit [socialwork.rutgers.edu/aging](https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/aging) to learn more, and email [agingcollab@ssw.rutgers.edu](mailto:agingcollab@ssw.rutgers.edu) to be added to the Hub’s mailing list. ■





## NEW PROJECT USES PUBLIC ART TO SHOWCASE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK'S MISSION & VISION

In Fall 2020, Rutgers School of Social Work set forth an ambitious strategic plan, *Toward a More Just Future*, to guide its work over the next five years. The plan envisions a future for our country and our world that is grounded in justice. To that end, the School commits to leading for justice through a focus on innovation, excellence, collaboration, and community. Deeply grounded in inclusion, intersectionality, diversity, equity and advancement, the plan focuses on core elements of our mission as a leading school of social work.

To share our mission and vision with campus and community members, the School of Social Work commissioned a public art project in collaboration with Mason Gross School of the Arts. The project began last summer when a group of School of Social Work community members, which consisted of faculty and staff at all levels, convened to discuss a vision and plan for the project. Group members included Catie Buttner, Jacquelyn Duron, Sharon Fortin, Kathleen Gilbert, Kerry Hennessey, Arlene Hunter, Mark W. Lamar, Nicole Oceanak, Lauren Snedeker, and Laurie Zazenski.

Once the group was established, the School worked to find a student artist to execute the project using their own creative lens. Ria Monga, a senior at Mason Gross School of the Arts, was chosen from a pool of candidates to design the project.

"I believe that art is not just a reflection of our community, but a tool to shape it," said Monga, who is earning a BA in visual arts and minor in human resource management. "For me, the process

of creating the artwork has been an exploration of emotions and pursuit of truth. Cultivating the designs required an understanding and drive to learn more, all in the service of shedding light on important issues and inspiring positive change."

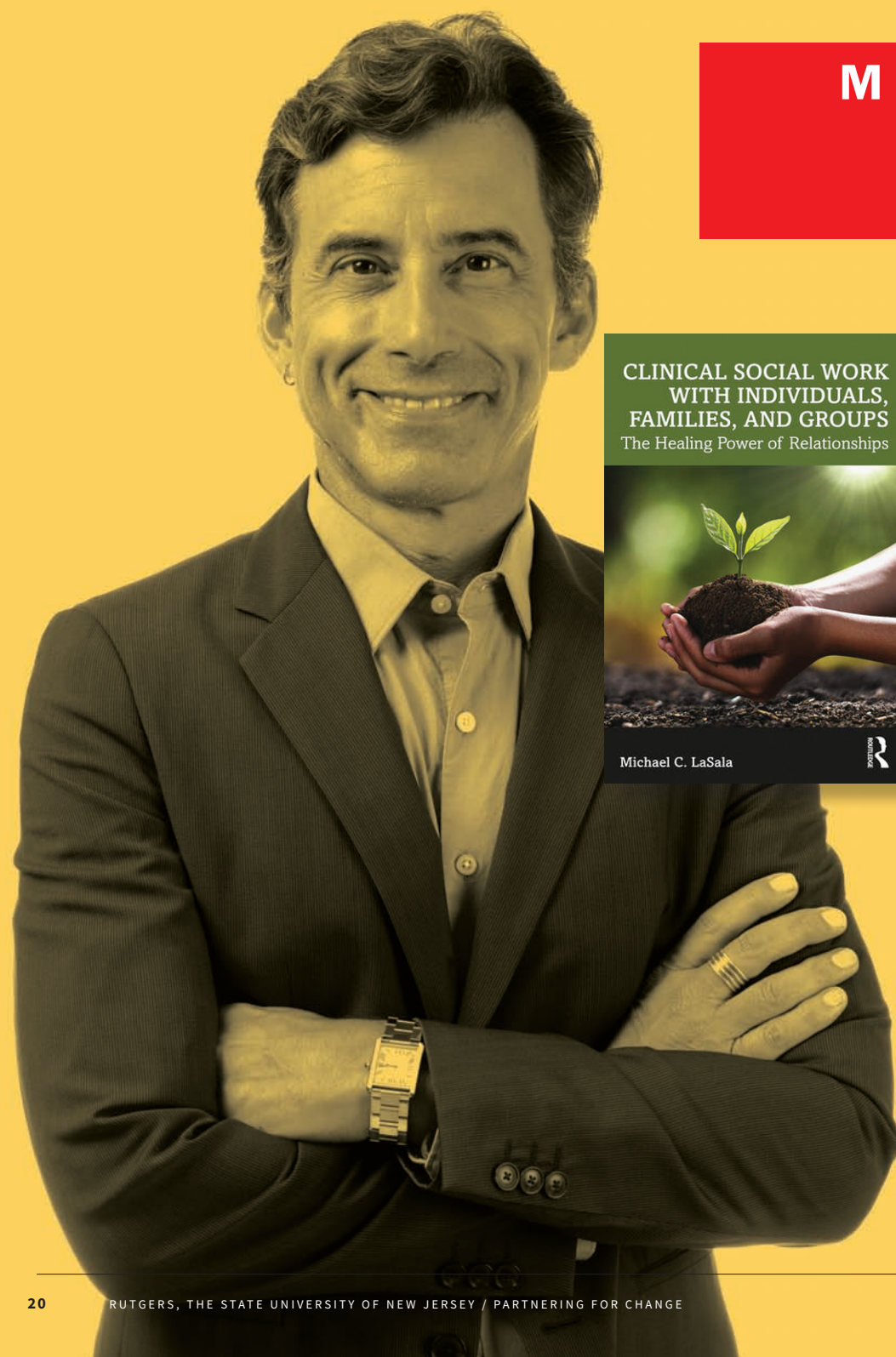
To maximize exposure, the art project was installed on the first-floor windows of the School of Social Work building in New Brunswick, which sits at the intersection of George and Albany Streets. A hub of buzzing activity, the corner symbolizes the literal and figurative intersections of campus and community. "The designs aim to visually embody the mission and goals of the School of Social Work, inspiring action towards a more just and equitable society," said Monga.

Stepping inside the School of Social Work building's first floor welcomes visitors to our student affairs and field education teams—administrators and professionals whose mission is to support the success of our students. "I'm hoping that people seeing the artwork—from the street and from within—receive impressions of community, family, inclusion, diverseness, welcoming, and social justice," said Mark W. Lamar, Associate Professor of Professional Practice and Executive Director of Field Education.

"The Student Affairs staff and faculty are excited about the powerful images and designs displayed on the windows of our offices," said Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Arlene Hunter. "We hope the bright colors and beautiful designs will be enjoyed by all who pass by and also inspire a sense of community and support to students as well as the greater New Brunswick public. The artwork reminds all of us of the School of Social Work values—community, diversity, and social justice." ■



## NEW BOOK RELEASE: CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND GROUPS



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Michael C. LaSala, Ph.D., LCSW, Professor and Director of the Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) Program, authored a new book, *Clinical Social Work with Individuals, Families, and Groups: The Healing Power of Relationships*.

While largely useful as a textbook, this volume speaks broadly to those seeking to harness their own healing and engagement skills to support and heal others. The book provides practitioners with tested methods for intervention, rooted in research, social justice, field application, and Dr. LaSala's 40 years of practice. Using engaging case examples, the book offers reflective questioning, guidance on how to use various techniques, and important discussions on supporting clients during the time of COVID.

The book is chock full of practical tips. For example, "If, in an attempt to be empathic, you misread a client's feelings and they trust you enough to correct you, this is a good sign. The attempt to be empathic *in and of itself* can be therapeutic because it demonstrates the clinician's desire to understand. The client will appreciate this, which can in fact, facilitate healing" (p. 62).

Relevant for conversations and therapeutic skill development in the context of social work values, this critical clinical textbook comes at just the right time. Offering indispensable guidance for beginning as well as advanced practitioners, *Clinical Social Work with Individuals, Families, and Groups* emphasizes the importance of building relationships with your clients as well as yourself to heal across all contexts. ■

CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK  
WITH INDIVIDUALS,  
FAMILIES, AND GROUPS  
The Healing Power of Relationships



Michael C. LaSala

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## MAT ACT, SUPPORTED BY RUTGERS FACULTY, SIGNED INTO LAW

By NICOLE SWENARTON

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Last December, President Biden signed the bipartisan Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment (MAT) Act. The measure makes buprenorphine—a U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved

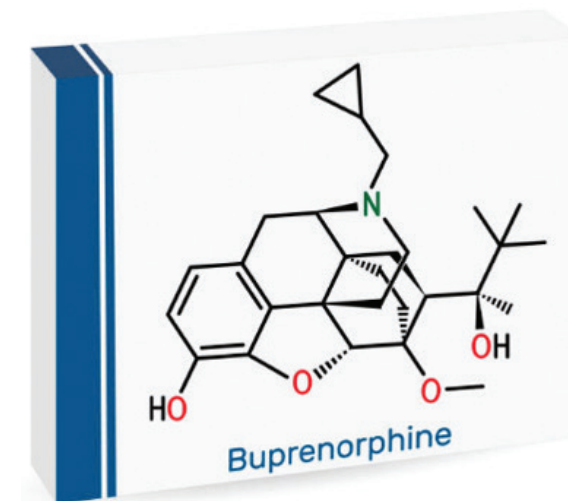
medication for opioid use disorder (OUD)—more readily accessible to people seeking treatment.

Significantly, the law will remove the requirement that a health care practitioner apply for a separate waiver through the Drug Enforcement Administration to dispense buprenorphine for opioid disorder treatment.

The passage was supported by the collective work of hundreds of people, including Rutgers School of Social Work's Distinguished Research Professor Dr. Stephen Crystal and Ph.D. candidate Peter Treitler along with Rutgers Institute for Health's Dr. Amesika Nyaku, IFH Associate Member and Assistant Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. Together, they participated in multiple Congressional briefings sharing their research and clinical expertise to highlight the need for the MAT Act.

"The enactment of the MAT Act is a vital step toward reducing the unacceptable toll of opioid overdoses in the US. In combination with other policy actions to engage and retain patients with opioid disorder in treatment with medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), and to make buprenorphine accessible at every point of contact where these patients encounter the health care system, the MAT Act will help expand the provider system for MOUD," said Dr. Crystal.

The MAT Act was the most broadly supported overdose prevention bill this Congressional session and



won more co-sponsors than 99% of bills in the House of Representatives. The large push for the MAT Act resulted in its inclusion in President Biden's State of the Union address and endorsements from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

According to End Substance Use Disorder, "the MAT Act will help integrate substance use treatment into the healthcare system and will equip states and local governments with a key tool to address the unique treatment needs of their communities."

"By eliminating the need for special government registration for MOUD providers, it can help encourage primary care clinicians to incorporate MOUD into their management of their patients with OUD, reducing the stigma that has led to false perceptions that MOUD is a uniquely challenging treatment to manage in a uniquely challenging patient population whose treatment should be limited to a small, super-specialized system of providers separated from the mainstream health care settings that care for these patients' other needs," said Dr. Crystal. ■



## PASSING THE TORCH:

# THE LISA ALVAREZ OBERLE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTS THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

**L**isa Alvarez Oberle SSW'93 was the consummate social worker—a dedicated clinician who went above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis to ensure the best outcome for those in her care. In addition to juggling all of her professional duties as a social worker for the Visiting Nurse Association, she also expertly managed her family responsibilities, which were her true passion.

Life was not always easy balancing work—which included a daily commute between East Brunswick, New Jersey and Staten Island, New York—family duties, and her own self-care, but Lisa made it all appear effortless. “She was always running from work to home with her paperwork in hand, never missing my basketball and softball games,” explains Lisa’s daughter, Paige. “She would be doing two million things at once, but it was never too much for her. She loved it.”

Lisa’s friends and family, including her husband and son, both named Gerard, felt nothing but constant support, warmth, and love from Lisa. “Every night at dinner, my mom would ask us to share the highs and lows of our day. As a child, I thought it was quite corny and annoying, but now I know she was asking the question to encourage us to talk about our lives and feelings,” Paige remembers. Lisa also made it a priority to be a good daughter to her own parents and her in-laws who lived nearby. She was always there for anyone who needed her at any time—no questions asked.

In 2006, when Paige was just 12 years old, tragedy struck the Oberle family. Lisa passed away suddenly at just 39 years old. A life that had manifested so much good in such a short time, and had the potential for so much more, was gone far too soon. Lisa was the heart of her circles and had touched each life she encountered in a profound way.

When Lisa died, her community gathered in support of the Oberle family and let them know how much she meant. “Heaven now has the best social worker,” wrote one of Lisa’s friends in a letter to the family. The child of one of Lisa’s clients similarly described Lisa in a letter saying, “Lisa was more than a social worker to my mother, but a confidant who always gave her best advice. Although she was officially my mother’s social worker, she was unofficially mine as well. She was an ear who listened to my problems and gave me the best advice as well.”

“It was something that impacted my whole life,” Paige says about her mother’s untimely death. “My mom was incredible. She was my best friend,” she recalls. Somehow, life continued on without Lisa. But Paige and her family were left to mark so many important milestones like birthdays and graduations without their most ardent supporter. Although she wasn’t there physically, Lisa continued to have an influence on Paige. When it came time to decide on a career path, Paige knew she had to pursue a caring profession. “I saw how much my mom gave her life to others and how fulfilled it made her, so for me it was a no brainer—there was nothing else I wanted to do other than being a nurse practitioner,” she says.

Paige decided to enroll in Seton Hall University where she earned degrees in nursing. It’s also where she met Jason, her partner of eight years and soon-to-be husband. Although Jason never had the opportunity to meet Lisa, he sees how she lives on through Paige. “I’ve gotten to know a lot about Lisa by hearing stories from Paige and from Lisa’s best friend, Chrissy. But the biggest source of getting to know Lisa has been seeing a lot of qualities Paige describes about her mother or people describe about her mother in Paige,” Jason explains.

In fact, a year and a half ago, Chrissy, whom Paige calls a “second mom,” got the devastating news that she was in liver failure. Paige decided to donate part of her liver to Chrissy, which saved her life. Paige

remained in the hospital for over a week post-operatively, and it took nearly six months for her to recover from her life-changing gift. “It’s exactly what I gather her mom would have done, so I truly get to see Lisa through Paige,” says Jason. “Now we joke that we’re blood related,” Paige says of Chrissy with a laugh. “What’s even more special is we can now say there’s a part of my mom in her, too, which is just wild. It’s yet another way my mom’s legacy is living on.”

Paige and Jason got married in 2023. “As I get older and I have these milestones in front of me, my mom continues to impact me more and more,” Paige explains. The couple knew they wanted to incorporate Lisa into the wedding in some way but took some time to figure out how to best honor her tremendous legacy.

Initially, the couple considered making a donation to a charity but felt it wouldn’t do justice to Lisa. Instead, Jason came up with the idea to create a scholarship in Lisa’s name. “When we were thinking about ways to honor my mom, we realized many of her family members and friends were still looking for a way to remember her and keep her memory alive,” Paige says. “I’m excited to share this opportunity with all of them. It’s not just about us but about all the lives she touched. Jason and I can’t say we’re doing it on our own.”

The couple has already raised more than \$50,000 for an endowment to support future generations of social workers at Rutgers. “When I think about my mom,” Paige says, “I remember her as the most incredible mother. But bigger than that, I think of her as a social worker. I know how much she impacted her clients, and she was a social worker for her family, friends, and everyone around her. Rutgers was a big part of her journey, so Jason and I agreed that we wanted the scholarship to benefit a social work student who could carry on her work.”

Creating the scholarship has also been cathartic for Paige. “Developing the scholarship has brought me a lot of comfort on this journey because I’m missing my mom. As much as it’s the most amazing time planning a wedding and getting married, I’m also missing her more than ever. It’s been the perfect way to bring her into the celebration and has become a happy light for my family and me,” Paige says.

Paige and Jason view the scholarship as a way of passing the torch from one social worker to another. “My mom’s not here, but we can support a social work student who’s going to continue doing the work she did. What gives me comfort during this time, too, is doing something to keep her memory alive and keep the stories about her going.” Paige and Jason hope to help students who embody Lisa’s values and hold similar qualities—thoughtful, compassionate, and dedicated to changing the world one person at a time.

Paige and Jason are aware that the endowment goal will only be possible through the support of family, friends, and all those who wish to see Lisa’s legacy live on for generations to come. “We’re only able to even think about doing this because we know the impact Lisa has had on her friends and family—we are confident her ever-lasting impact will motivate people to donate,” says Jason. Paige adds, “we’ve spoken with some family and close friends already and everyone is extremely excited to be a part of creating this endowment and honoring my mom.”

“We are calling on all of Lisa’s family, friends, former (and forever) clients, or anyone who has been touched by a social worker and wants to be a part of fostering the next generation of social workers to donate, regardless of the amount,” Paige and Jason explain. Donating to The Lisa Alvarez Oberle Memorial Scholarship will not only directly impact the life of a future social worker but also all the lives that student may touch for years to come. A gift will have exponential dividends and reverberate Lisa’s message of positivity and kindness in the world.

To make a gift, please visit [socialwork.rutgers.edu/giving](https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/giving). ■



# SUPPORTING TOMORROW’S CHANGEMAKERS

*After a decades-long career in social work, Gail Scagnelli Maurer MSW’85 PhD’98 is giving back to her alma mater with a scholarship in her name. Funded through a bequest intention, which will amount to \$100,000 or more, the scholarship will benefit MSW students interested in focusing their careers on health and aging.*

By **MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY**

It’s easy for Gail Scagnelli Maurer to remember when she first decided to become a social worker. As a teenager, one of her friends had a troubled home life and felt very misunderstood and rejected. He stole a car, skipped school, and was on his way to New York City as a runaway. Maurer was right behind him. “I didn’t know why at the time, but I felt compelled to help him any way I could,” she recalls. “I thought the best thing to do was to also run away from home and help him in his trouble and unhappiness.” She was packing her bags to leave when her mother found her and delivered a clear message: *If you want to help others, this is not the time or place to do so, she said firmly. Go to school and learn to do it right by becoming a social worker!* “That was all it took for me,” Maurer says. “The seed was planted.”

Fast forward a few years. Maurer earned an undergraduate degree in sociology and was working for the Virginia Department of Corrections as a probation and parole officer. “I liked the diversity and flexibility of the work and helping others,” she says. “I had an office full of artwork and things that some of my clients made for me to express their gratitude. It was a fulfilling experience, but I had reached a point where I wanted more for my career.”

She returned to her native New Jersey to earn her MSW from Rutgers University’s School of Social Work. She also took advantage of a special program offered at the time to become a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator (LNHA), a move that would ultimately land her a job as one of the only social workers with the United States Air Force’s Medical Services Corps (MSC). “Generally, the Air Force does not accept social workers as MSCs, as they typically only accept candidates with business and public administration degrees,” Maurer says. “In my case, I was the only social worker who was accepted because the Air Force recognized the LNHA as comparable to other administrative degrees.” It was the beginning of a 20-year

military career, which culminated in her retirement as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2006.

This path wouldn’t have been possible, she says, without the support offered by the School of Social Work. “I put myself through school—there was no one there to help me out financially,” she says, but she found support through the school’s work-study program, a Pell Grant, and various internship opportunities. “I doubled up on courses so that I could complete all of the requirements in less than two years,” she says. “Time was money.”

As part of the Air Force’s MSC, Maurer held a number of roles in military health care at home and abroad, both as an active duty and reserve officer. During this time, she decided to return to Rutgers for her doctoral degree in social work. “Again, financing such an endeavor seemed out of my reach for a number of reasons,” she recalls. “But once again, Rutgers came to the rescue.” She was offered a research assistantship at the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research (then called the Institute for Aging and Research), a Rutgers scholarship, and a Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation grant.

Her research, which focused on women with HIV/AIDS, gave Maurer even more clinical experience. She won the Dean’s Dissertation Award for this pioneering work, which focused on women who faced dying as well as the challenge of planning for their children’s futures. “I was deeply moved by this experience,” she says. “I learned a lot about my life and myself in the process.” Soon after, she started working in hospice around the country, while also serving in the Air Force reserves as a health care administrator, before finally landing at the Veterans Administration where she oversaw direct practice programs for veterans.

**Shifting Focus**

Though she achieved many of her goals, Maurer says there was still something pulling on her heartstrings: somehow combining her passion for clinical social work with her love of art. “I thought the



combination could help others realize their strengths more effectively, and also be a fun and relaxing outlet,” she says.

So after attending Prescott College in Arizona to become an expressive art therapist, she opened a solo clinical practice for older adults on Medicare, focused on using expressive art therapeutically. “Many clinicians don’t like to deal with accepting Medicare because it doesn’t pay well and there is a lot of red tape involved,” Maurer says. “That is unfortunate, because there is a great need for mental health care in the later years.” In the spirt of true social work, Medicare is the only insurance Maurer accepts at her Arkansas practice.

**Supporting the Next Generation of Social Workers**

If you ask Maurer, she’ll tell you she’s reached a moment in her life where she’s reflecting back on her career and also considering the future of social work. So it’s no surprise she quickly realized she wants to give back and pay it forward. It was important for her to do so at Rutgers for a few reasons. First, it’s an institution that made a significant difference in her life and journey as a social worker, and one that helped her meet and overcome financial hardships along the way. But it also stands out to her as an institution with a diverse community, helpful and encouraging faculty, and meaningful work and research opportunities—the kind of school that’s essential in shaping the next generation of social workers and providing access to the same opportunities she had as a student.

“The opportunities afforded to me by Rutgers made a major difference and enabled me to have a strong career life in helping others,” she says. “Without that, I’m not sure how my life would have turned out.” ■

## Take it **From Her**

For Maurer, being a social worker has been a lifelong calling. One driving force at the core of it all has been the values and ethics associated with the profession—something she hopes will guide the next generation as their north star, even when the road is difficult. “Social workers are people who can work through obstacles to make a difference and, if you are going to be a social worker who makes a difference, you are going to have to learn how to be a cause fighter and create change,” she says. “A social worker never stops questioning what others say is right. They are advocates for both themselves and others, and they care deeply about making the world a better place.” Here are her words of wisdom for today’s students.

**DON’T BE AFRAID OF AN OPPORTUNITY.** Twists and turns are all part of growth, and taking a chance on something out of the ordinary can be an important step in achieving your overall goal.

**CAREERS AREN’T LINEAR.** “It will not always be a clear shot from point A to point B,” she says. “Sometimes you need to take a break and do something else, and resume what you’ve been doing at a later time.” This could take the form of a new job or even focusing on another area of life.

**REMEMBER YOUR “WHY.”** Sometimes, dealing with difficult organizations, policies, politics, and personalities can become frustrating. “Never forget why you chose social work as your career,” she says. “Social work is a calling and sometimes you’ve got to fight for what’s right.”

**IT’S OK TO MOVE ON.** What seems like a setback now can later reveal itself to be a stepping stone...or even a launch pad.

**SOCIAL WORK IS A CAREER WITH MANY OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES.** “It doesn’t place you into one little corner of the world for the rest of your life,” Maurer says. “There is always something else you can do and explore. It is one of the most flexible, diverse, and interesting careers around. Don’t let yourself get bored. Think outside the box!”



Thank you to all of our alumni who have sent us their news and updates. We encourage you to keep us posted with any good news about your job, your life, or your family.

Email your news to [lzazenski@ssw.rutgers.edu](mailto:lzazenski@ssw.rutgers.edu).

**Rena Beyer (Brandeis) RNB’11 SSW’13** has been working in her private practice, Fostering Greatness, located in Cherry Hill, New Jersey offering ketamine-assisted Psychotherapy. She recently expanded her practice to offer services in Wilmington, Delaware, as well as virtually throughout both New Jersey and Delaware. Rena has completed training in MDMA-assisted and psilocybin-assisted therapies and became certified as a Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Provider. Rena offers both traditional therapy services and ketamine-assisted therapy services within her practice helping people struggling with depression, anxiety, and/or trauma. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her husband and 3-year-old son, reading Colleen Hoover or Jodi Picoult books, and binge-watching Netflix or Apple TV shows.



After teaching for 38 years at University of Texas at Dallas, **Dr. Susan P Chizeck DC’69 GSNB’83** will retire this summer. She developed an internship program and taught a variety of courses on campus, including Introduction to Social Work, various sociology courses, and Writing and Critical Thinking. Dr. Chizeck also edited a journal of experiential education and served on various academic and civic boards. In her final semester, she is teaching an internship course she developed on the social side of medical training for student EMTs. Having started out in pre-med and moving into social work, she has come full circle. Dr. Chizeck is married to a mathematician and has one son, who is a biostatistician. She is happy to hear from classmates!



**Florence A. Francis MSW’96, DSW’16** is wrapping up almost six years of clinical service in Pakistan, covering the country as the only LCSW assigned there on behalf of the U.S. State Department serving civilian and military staff at U.S. Embassy Islamabad, U.S. Consulate Karachi, U.S. Consulate Lahore, and U.S. Consulate Peshawar. Florence has found it to be a very meaningful and satisfying opportunity to support the people doing the hard work of diplomacy in that part of the world. Her posting will conclude in June, and she will return stateside to reinvigorate her private practice, Dr. Florence A. Francis, LCSW, LLC, with particular interest to provide counseling, supervision, and mentoring to young LCSWs starting out in the profession. Florence says, “The career of licensed clinical social worker has been everything I could have ever hoped for it to be, and then some.” Facing challenges along the way from early years working in child protective services to community mental health to correctional mental health care, veterans’ services, and much more has allowed her to develop treatment and self-care skills and given her tremendous fulfillment. She feels Rutgers prepared her well!

**Dr. Nina Rovinelli Heller SSW’78** served as dean at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work since 2015. Dr. Rovinelli will step down as dean and return to the faculty in July 2023.

**Jeremy Lees SSW’16** LCSW, MSW, M.Div received his clinical license in 2020 and is now engaged in private practice psychotherapy. He is currently working on completing his certification in EMDR therapy.

**Madeline Martinez SSW’10** has been a social worker with Journey Hospice for the last seven years, where she also mentors social work interns. She is currently working on her LCSW with a fellow Rutgers alum, Dr. Julia Hankerson, LCSW, Class of 1986. Madeline is proud to report that her daughter Jelena Byrd (6) just won the State Championship Title in gymnastics for New Jersey for her age group. Not only did she win first place but also tied the record for the highest score of 38.05, along with tying the highest score in Vault 9.45 and Beam at 9.75! Madeline hopes one day she can be on the Rutgers Gymnastics team! Madeline’s daughter Jizelle (10) recently was asked to compete in gymnastics too!

**Dr. Barbara Ella Milton, Jr. SSW’01** has been fighting the good fight against bladder cancer since 2012, which resulted in losing her two kidneys and bladder in the fall of 2021. She is successfully adjusting to a life on dialysis and the new diagnosis of metastatic bladder cancer as the cancer is now in her right lung. Fortunately, she began an oral chemotherapy pill in December 2022 that is shrinking the tumors in her lung. Dr. Milton counts this as a miracle. She has entered into a contract with Greenheart Living Press to write her bladder cancer memoir: *Fighting the Good Fight: My Lived Experience with Bladder Cancer and Dialysis*. It is set to be published December 2023. Cognella Academic Press is publishing the 2nd Edition of *Heeding the Caregiver Call: The Story of Barbara Ella Milton, Sr. and Alzheimer’s Disease* in the Summer of 2023. Dr. Milton continues to be an advocate and social change agent through her podcast, “Listen Up with Dr. Barbara Jr.” and other social media platforms. For more information about her journey and work, visit [drbarbaraemiltonjrllcsw.com](http://drbarbaraemiltonjrllcsw.com).



**Mary Swigonski SSW’87**, a social worker and social work educator, published her debut novel, *Letters from Eleanor Roosevelt*. It tells the story of fictional character Joan Zatańczy’s determination to graduate from Barnard College, the obstacles she encounters, and the secrets she uncovers along the way. She ultimately earns her MSW and takes a job working for the UN Women’s Commission. The novel is a celebration of the strength of women and of the power of Mrs. Roosevelt’s letters in bolstering the strength and resilience of Joan’s character.



**Jonah Taylor SSW’22** exhibited his artwork on the Rutgers—Camden campus late last summer. The artwork, which was completed while Jonah earned his MSW, largely drew on what he learned in his courses and field placements. His art practice helped him process what

he was learning in school and in the field, and it also served as an important part of his self-care. The name of the art show was “The Nature of Play,” which explored the therapeutic nature of imaginative play as a clinical social work intervention for grief, loss, bereavement, and trauma. Since graduating from Rutgers, Jonah has been working at a private psychotherapy group. He continues to explore play both clinically and within his own art practice, each reinforcing the other.

**Susan Van Vleet SSW’76** led a two-part seminar, Women in Business: A Conversation with Future Female Business Leaders, at California Lutheran University. She discussed the current business environment for women and overcoming the imposter syndrome that many business leaders face. Through her consultancy firm, Susan will be investing more in female student leaders so they can be prepared for careers in business when they graduate.

## RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK MOURNS THE DEATH OF DR. LEONARD BROWN



Dr. Leonard Brown, a long-time faculty member at Rutgers School of Social Work, passed away on April 21, 2023 at the Stonebridge at Montgomery retirement center. He was 95 years old.

Dr. Brown was a professor for over 30 years at the School, retiring in 1991. He was a resident of Kendall Park, NJ where he and his wife, Marilyn, resided for 31 years. She passed away in 1989. In her memory,

he created the Marilyn Brown Memorial Fund, which from 1990-2000 funded service learning projects of middle and high school students in South Brunswick.

After serving a stint in the United States Army during World War II, Dr. Brown entered Syracuse University, completing a degree in 1951. To help fund his tuition costs, he sold men’s ties to his fellow undergraduates under the label “Leonard Ties of Syracuse University.” He completed a Master’s degree in 1953 from Western Reserve University and a Doctorate in Social Work from Columbia University in New York City in 1971.

His professional career began in Cleveland, Ohio and included a stint in Nashville, TN before settling at Rutgers School of Social Work in 1960. His area of expertise was group work and during his tenure he

wrote an authoritative textbook on the subject.

Dr. Brown was a member of Anshe Emeth Synagogue in New Brunswick, NJ for over 40 years, where he taught and served in many leadership capacities.

In addition to being a lifelong tennis enthusiast (playing into his early 80s), Dr. Brown was an avid collage artist, poet, memoirist and a formidable Charades player.

He is survived by his four sons, Mark, Michael, Sam, and Stuart, their respective family members, ten grandchildren, four great grandchildren and his romantic partner of 18 years, Anne Hurwitt.

Dr. Brown will be interned beside his wife of 33 years in Mount Hebron Cemetery, Flushing, NY. In lieu of flowers, the family asks you to consider a contribution to the Spiritual Care fund in memory of Len at his home, Stonebridge at Montgomery. Please send donations payable to Springpoint Foundation: 4814 Outlook Drive, Suite 201 Wall Twp, NJ 07753 or online at <https://springpointsl.org/foundation/donate/>





IN MEMORIAM

We extend our deepest sympathy to the loved ones of the deceased alumni and friends listed below whose passing has been shared with the School between February through June 2023.

- Mr. Peter J. Alderuccio, SSW 2010
- Mr. Victor M. Alicea, SSW 1974
- Ms. Sharon R. Baker, UCN 2009, SSW 2010
- Mr. Thomas A. Beach, SSW 1982
- Mr. Richard Allen Blume, CCAS 1973, SSW 1975
- Mr. Paul J. Boggia, SSW 1999
- Mr. Dennis Buttinger, SSW 1966
- Ms. Susan M. Chan, SSW 2008
- Mrs. Lillian S. Cohen, DC 1969, SSW 1979
- Dr. James M. Conneran, RC 1971, SSW 1977
- Mr. Robert Lane Covey, SSW 1971
- Ms. Anne Maureen Daughtrey, SSW 1986
- Ms. Ilia E. Dejesus, SSW 2022
- Ms. Dorothy N. Donaldson, SSW 1970
- Ms. Patricia E. Duffy, SSW 1993
- Mr. Thomas Giglio, SSW 1994
- Mrs. Helen Gottlieb, SSW 1967
- Mr. Shimon S. Gottschalk, SSW 1965
- Ms. Mary E. Hoble, LC 1982, SSW 1984
- Ms. Laura Kass Hochman, SSW 1977
- Ms. Barbara J. Jackson, SSW 1982
- Ms. Catherine E. Jackson, SSW 1986
- Mr. Daniel J. Laccitelli, SSW 1984
- Ms. Cynthia Lazarow, SSW 1981
- Ms. Christine Leili, SSW 1987
- Ms. Faith C. Liguori, SSW 1985
- Mr. Ralph F. Lollar, CCAS 1977, SSW 1985
- Ms. Catherine D. Manning, SSW 1972
- Mr. James D. Miller, Sr., SSW 1967
- Mrs. Mary Casey O’Connor, DC 1976, SSW 1979
- Ms. Sandra Lee Owens, SSW 1976
- Ms. Carol A. Poindexter-Sullivan, UCN 1980, SSW 1989
- Mr. John Joseph Reeves, RC 1964, SSW 1977
- Ms. Jane F. Reusche, SSW 1978
- Ms. Micki G. Riddick, SSW 1963
- Ms. Patricia G. Robinson, SSW 1980
- Mr. Paul R. Rowe, SSW 1972
- Mr. Joseph R. Seawright, SSW 1972
- Mrs. Selma Patt Shure, DC 1944, SSW 1967
- Ms. Ann E. Stafford, SSW 1978
- Ms. Beverly Casper Thaler, SSW 1984
- Ms. Barbara R. Tichy, LC 1984, SSW 1987
- Ms. Jill L. Verga, SSW 1996
- Mr. Rayvon L. Wilson, UCN 1998, SSW 2012
- Mrs. Ernestine Winfrey, UCNB 1991, SSW 1995
- Ms. Tara N. Wolozyn, SSW 1996

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OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY CHUCK KENNEDY

*“For me, becoming isn’t about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn’t end.”*

MICHELLE OBAMA





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