

PARTNERING *for* CHANGE

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



BOLD IDEAS TAKE ROOT

AT THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

UPDATES FROM OUR INCLUSION, INTERSECTIONALITY, DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND
ADVANCEMENT (IIDEA) INITIATIVE & COMMITTEE

t h o u g h t s



“When we’re talking about diversity, it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.”

AVA DUVERNAY

C O N T E N T S



14



24



6



8



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The IIDEA Committee, comprised of faculty, students, and staff, is hitting its stride and meeting many of its goals as it approaches five years of advocacy and action.



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INTERIM DEAN AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
RICHARD L. EDWARDS

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EDITOR
LAURIE ZAZENSKI

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
SHERRIE NEGREA
MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY
NICOLE SWENARTON
LAURIE ZAZENSKI

PHOTOGRAPHY
PETE BYRON
ROY GROETHING
JOHN O'BOYLE
LAURIE ZAZENSKI

PUBLICATION DESIGN
ERIC MILLER + ASSOCIATES

PRINTING
GARRISON PRINTING COMPANY

We welcome your comments and
suggestions. Please email us with your
feedback or ideas to
lzazenski@ssw.rutgers.edu.



Dear Alumni and Friends,

I write to you with great excitement and enthusiasm that we are welcoming a new dean to Rutgers School of Social Work. Beginning on July 1, 2024, Dr. George Leibowitz will take the helm of the school in his new role as Dean. With an impressive background as an educator, interdisciplinary scholar, administrator, and social worker who is committed to helping individuals and elevating the common good, I am confident that Dr. Leibowitz will shepherd the school into its next stage as it works toward a more just future.

Our work moving in this direction, which we've named our Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement (IIDEA) initiative, is rooted in social justice. Since the initiative began and from the time our IIDEA committee was established nearly four years ago, we have made great progress in achieving our goals. In this edition of our magazine Dr. Antoinette Farmer, Professor, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, and IIDEA Committee Chair, and current and past members of our IIDEA committee give a glimpse into the work they have championed since Fall 2020.



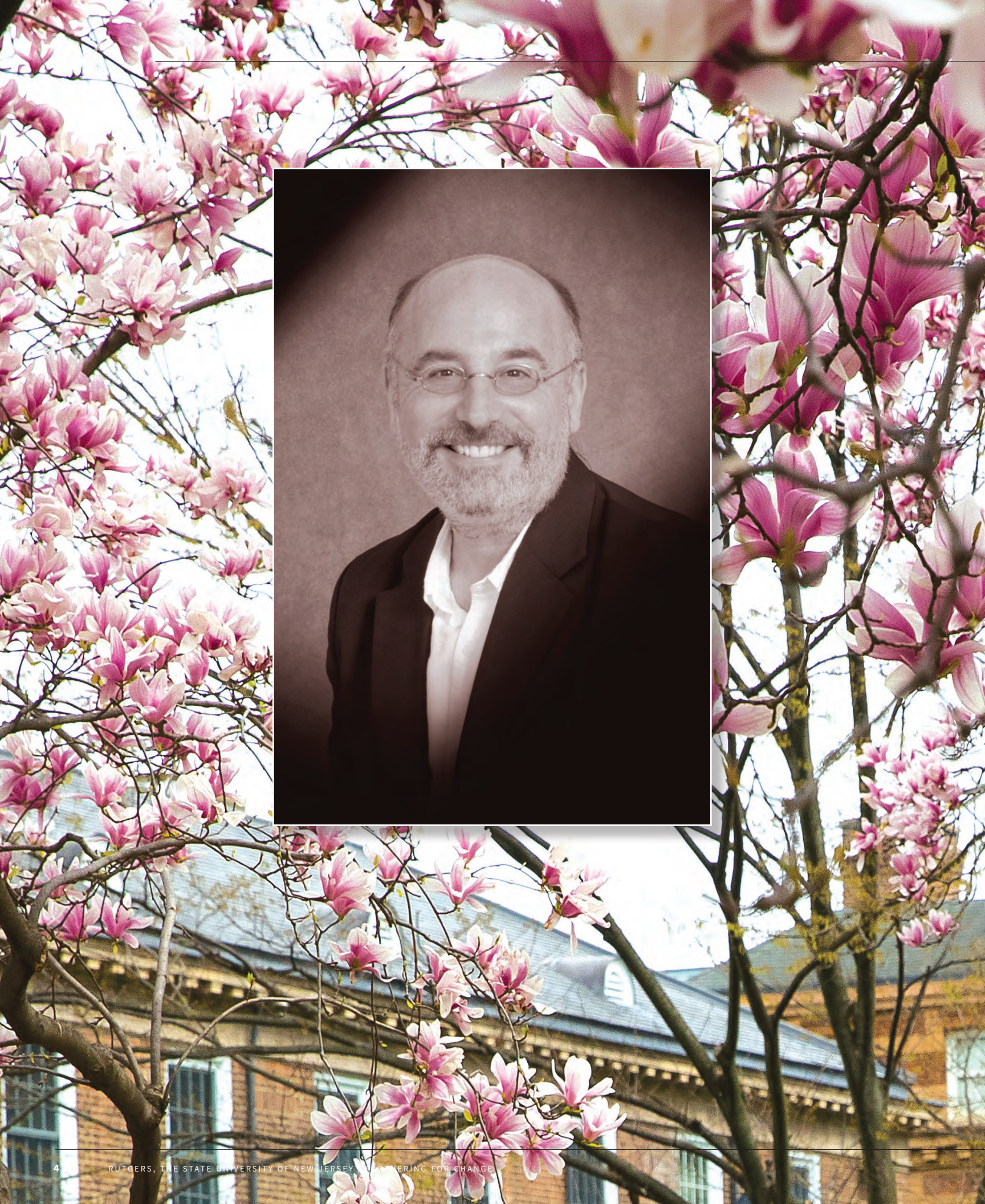
Also in this edition, you will read about faculty research and practice updates, meet student Gina Harvell, who is earning her MSW after overcoming many lifelong challenges, and get to know more about your fellow alumni. You'll also learn about the work of our Alumni Council and their commitment to fostering the success of future Rutgers School of Social Work graduates. Led by Dr. Tawanda Hubbard, President of the Alumni Council and Associate Professor of Professional Practice, the Council promotes excellence within the school and adds value through alumni relationships.

It has been my distinct privilege to serve Rutgers School of Social Work for the past year. I hope you enjoy reading this edition of our magazine. Thank you for your dedication to Rutgers School of Social Work and the communities we partner with and serve.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Edwards Ph.D.

INTERIM DEAN—SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
CHANCELLOR EMERITUS AND
DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY—NEW BRUNSWICK



ANNOUNCING GEORGE LEIBOWITZ as Incoming Dean of Rutgers School of Social Work

Modified from an announcement from Francine Conway, Ph.D., Chancellor and Distinguished Professor, Rutgers University--New Brunswick

Dr. George Leibowitz will assume the role of Dean of the Rutgers School of Social Work (SSW) on July 1, 2024. As an educator, interdisciplinary scholar, administrator, and social worker who is committed to helping individuals and elevating the common good, Dr. Leibowitz is an excellent match for the SSW—the nation’s 12th-ranked school of social work whose rankings have risen steadily for the past 15 years, and whose portfolio of research, sponsored projects, and federal awards has grown impressively over the past decade.

Dr. Leibowitz currently serves Stony Brook University as Professor in the School of Social Welfare, Director of the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare, and chair of the Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure Committee with cross-appointments as Professor in the School of Nursing and Professor of Psychiatry in the Renaissance School of Medicine. Previously he served as chair of the school’s Psychopathology and Psychopharmacology Sequence and is founding chair of its Forensic Social Work program and the Integrated Health: Physical, Psychological, and Social Well-Being specialization in the MSW Program. He also has a visiting appointment as Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India. Before joining Stony Brook in 2016 he served the University of Vermont, most recently as chair of its Department of Social Work and a faculty member in the School of Nursing and the Vermont Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Program. Dr. Leibowitz received his MSW and PhD at the University of Denver.

He is also a dedicated and highly regarded social work practitioner. His current service is at Montfort Therapeutic Residence in Port Jefferson, New York, where he provides program consultation and training, risk assessments, and clinical treatment with adolescents with sexually harmful behavior. His prior social work practice included consultation/training at the Vermont Department for Children and Family Services; at Stetson School residential treatment program in Barre, Massachusetts; as a clinical/research consultant at Northeastern Family Institute in Burlington, Vermont;

as well as a clinical supervisor at Progressive Therapy Systems in Denver, Colorado.

Dr. Leibowitz is an expert on opioid addiction and is an interdisciplinary researcher implementation scientist, consultant, trainer, and licensed clinician in adult and adolescent mental health and substance abuse assessment and treatment across the lifespan. His research focuses on the social determinants of health and health disparities, and he has worked with his colleagues at Stony Brook to bring cutting-edge artificial intelligence to solve real-world community issues and drive better health outcomes through informatics. He recently served as the Director of the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Network for the Long Island Network for Clinical and Translational Science module as part of Stony Brook’s Clinical and Translational Science Award, with the aim of enhancing trusting relationships between researchers, patients, and community members and reducing health inequalities by race and socioeconomic status. Recent research projects and federal grants include Stakeholder-Involved Modeling of Opioid Risk in the Emergency Department with Machine Learning Integrating Multimodal Data. Dr. Leibowitz has published two co-authored books and his research has been disseminated in journals such as *JAMA*, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *Journal of Primary Care and Community Health*, and *Child and Adolescent Social Work*. Additionally, he served as a cluster leader on a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute grant with the University of Vermont investigating the integration of evidence-supported behavioral health and primary care services. He was also awarded a \$1.8 million U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration grant, a collaboration between Stony Brook’s schools of social welfare and nursing, to deliver behavioral health screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment with underserved populations within Suffolk County, New York.

Dr. Leibowitz will succeed Chancellor Emeritus, University Professor, and Distinguished Professor Richard L. Edwards, who has served as the SSW’s Interim Dean since July 1, 2023, and who served as chair of the SSW Dean search committee that recruited Dr. Leibowitz. ■



In her early 30s, Gina Harvell regularly got high at Atlantic City's Brown Park, across from Atlantic Cape Community College. "I'd see young people coming and going and think, I want to go to school," the mother of three said.

More than two decades later, after a long road of addiction, imprisonment, cancer, homelessness, and loss, the 54-year-old earned her associate's degree from Atlantic Cape Community College and bachelor of science degree in social work, with a minor in drug and alcohol counseling, through Rutgers Statewide.

Harvell was honored during a ceremony recognizing her achievement as the recipient of the 2023 Lifelong Learner of the Year award.

"I wanted to prove I could do it, and I did," said Harvell, who maintained a 3.95 grade-point average. Building on her degree, Harvell is pursuing an MSW to help people overcome struggles as she did. Harvell is living proof it can be done.

"Gina uses her trauma and her past to help others, letting them know that there is always hope, that recovery is possible," said Michelle Carlamere, a licensed clinical social worker who teaches the Rutgers social work integration seminar. "Her graduation in May

When Harvell began using again, she became homeless. By then, her older children were living on their own. Her youngest went to Covenant House, a nonprofit that shelters teenagers.

Her final arrest in 2007 landed her in state prison for a year, and then a halfway house for a second year. Harvell recalled a group counseling session at the halfway house, where she asked the therapist about her experience with drugs. The therapist had none, and Harvell had little interest in what she had to say.

"That's when a lightbulb went off. I thought, I want to be there for someone else going through this, as someone they can relate to so they won't shut down," she said. Harvell earned her high school equivalency degree while at the halfway house.

Once released, Harvell enrolled at Atlantic Cape Community College and flourished. After two semesters, though, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, which had claimed her mother, a sister and a cousin. Testing positive for a BRCA mutation, Harvell left school and underwent radical treatment. Her fiancé, Lawrence Blackledge, was the backbone of the support network that helped her get through the ordeal.

She returned to Atlantic Cape several years later to complete her associate's degree.

"Professors were telling me, 'you need to go for your bachelor's to really help people,'" she recalled. Harvell enrolled in Rutgers Statewide at the Atlantic Cape Campus, taking courses close to

INTENSIVE WEEKEND MSW STUDENT GINA HARVELL NAMED

After a long road of addiction, imprisonment, cancer, homelessness, and loss, Gina Harvell, a student in our Intensive Weekend MSW

is proof that hard work, focus, and perseverance pays off!"

Managed by Rutgers University's Division of Continuing Studies (DoCS), Rutgers Statewide is a program that allows students to earn Rutgers bachelor's degrees at one of six community colleges across the state. Offering nontraditional students accessibility and flexibility is at the heart of DoCS' mission.

Harvell proudly wore a red Rutgers social work sweatshirt as she held up the many Dean's List certificates she has earned. When the first one arrived in the mail, "I didn't know what a Dean's List was," she said.

She'd dropped out of high school in 11th grade when she became pregnant. Harvell took jobs at retail stores and fast-food restaurants while she and her daughter lived with Harvell's mother. She had two more children by her early 20s.

By her late 20s, Harvell was using cocaine and heroin. After her mother died of breast cancer, Harvell's drug use intensified, and her father took custody of her children. Harvell entered a cycle of shoplifting to buy drugs, and serving time behind bars.

Harvell stopped using drugs for stretches, getting custody of her children back when her father died of cancer in 2000. The day before he died, Harvell's father wrote a notarized letter describing how she had cared for him. He gave his blessing for the children to be returned to her, she said.

home and online.

She interned at Covenant House and at the hospice service that helped care for her father. "That was my way of giving back to them," she said. Harvell has worked part-time at the John Brooks Recovery Center in Pleasantville, New Jersey, for six years.

Years into her sobriety and on the path to her bachelor's degree, her stepmother surprised her with a birthday gift: a necklace that had belonged to her father before Harvell sold it at a pawn shop for drug money. The pendant had an image of Jesus on one side, Mary on the other. Her stepmother had purchased it back three years earlier.

"She kept it until she thought I was ready for it," Harvell said, wiping tears from her eyes. "Now, I don't go anywhere without it."

The Pleasantville resident has much to look forward to. Harvell and Blackledge plan to wed after she graduates. A grandmother of four, Harvell intends to work with either children or senior citizens — "they are my passion!" she said.

"Gina is a true lifelong learner, she has learned from every obstacle and triumph and moved forward," said Elizabeth Moore, associate program manager of Rutgers Statewide at Atlantic Cape Community College. ■



FIRST RUTGERS LIFELONG LEARNER OF THE YEAR

Program, was awarded Rutgers' first Lifelong Learner of the Year Award, which was created specifically for Harvell.

[Learn more about her remarkable journey in this story, which was originally posted by Rutgers Continuing Education.](#)



Intensive Weekend
Assistant Director
Amy Strickler &
Gina Harvell

BOUNCED FROM HOME TO HOME IN FOSTER CARE, STUDENT FINDS STABILITY AND SUCCESS AT RUTGERS

Alaska Strouss is one of about 30 students currently receiving support through Rutgers' Institute for Families

By **NICOLE SWENARTON**

When Alaska Strouss started at Rutgers, she had a hard time relating to classmates when they talked about their family life. From the time she was a baby living in Arkansas, she and her twin sister were part of the foster care system, bounced from home to home until they were adopted at age 12 and moved to Missouri. Life seemed as if it would get better.

But two years later, when her adoptive father died suddenly, her mother started neglecting the two girls, refusing at times to even feed them, Strouss said.

"She was extremely neglectful for a number of years," said Strouss, who was 17 at the time and living in Sicklerville, New Jersey, in a family home her mother inherited. "One day a Spanish teacher at school called the cops. My adoptive mother lost custody, so we ended up in the foster care system once again."

Today, living off-campus, Strouss found the connection she needed as a Fellow supported by the Institute for Families (IFF) at the Rutgers School of Social Work. The program supports students like Strouss who have spent time in the child welfare system by providing emotional, academic, and financial support.

"A lot of time, all I need is some advice," says Strouss, who is majoring in psychology in the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS).

"I never had guidance. When I hear other students saying they are going to call their mom, I think about how I never had anyone I could go to for support or comfort. Now I do."

There are about 30 students currently involved in the IFF Fellows program, which has been in existence since 2013 and has provided support to 111 undergraduates who have gone through the child welfare system. While nationally only about half of those in the foster care system finish high school and only 5 percent graduate from college, 71 percent of IFF Fellows at Rutgers have received undergraduate degrees and 18 percent have gone on and finished graduate school.

Adam Staats, manager for the IFF Fellows program, says coordinators in the two programs in New Brunswick and Camden, which are supported by gifts and donations to the Transitions for Youth Program, provide coaching and help students academically and with personal issues. The program also helps students leverage opportunities including access to grants and scholarships, food assistance, health services, emergency assistance funding, career development and other Rutgers services. Access to housing, for example, is critical for students who have no other options or support system to turn to. IFF also hosts community-building and recreational activities like barbecues, camping trips, talent shows, movie nights, cooking classes, and volunteer days.

"We have quite a few success stories, which is extremely



gratifying,” says Staats. “Watching our Fellows cross the finish line are some of the happiest moments of my life.”

These stories include Tahj Burnette, a first-generation college graduate, who was in foster care for seven years, going from home to home until he was reunited with his mother and one of his brothers when he was in the ninth grade. He was angry about his situation much of his young life. But he had an older sister who graduated from Kean University and thought if she did it, he could too.

“I didn’t want to grow up and have my children go through the same thing,” said Burnette.

After graduating from high school, Burnette earned an associate’s degree from Middlesex College before transferring to Rutgers where he completed an undergraduate degree in 2021. Burnette graduated with a 4.0 GPA and ranked number one out of 5,110 students from the School of Arts and Sciences. The following year, he earned his MSW, received the Dean’s Award of Excellence Scholarship, and became a licensed social worker in New Jersey.

Burnette, 28, now works as an Educational Opportunity Fund senior counselor for Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, helping dozens of students navigate school and life and encouraging them to look to the future. “I always felt imposter syndrome, that I wasn’t good enough,” said

Burnette. “But Adam wowed me. He told me that he believed in me, something that I had never heard before.”

The IFF program gave Burnette the support and stability he needed. “I came to Rutgers a couple of months after the pandemic hit and everyone was sent home. I had nowhere to go. They let me stay on campus, gave me social support and a food stipend so that I could buy food.”

Instead of feeling like victims, Strouss and Burnette said the IFF program gave them the second chance they needed. Besides her studies at Rutgers, Strouss works 30 hours a week at various part-time jobs, including modeling clothes for Knight and Day Apparel, which sells Rutgers-branded merchandise.

She is saving money to buy a car and wants to build a bank account for the future. The most important goal for Strouss is to “break the cycle of drug addiction and homelessness” she faced.

“I want to make sure that my future children and their children will have money,” said Strouss. “This program helped me and now it’s up to me to make sure I do my part.” ■

RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK MSW PROGRAM RANKED 12TH IN THE NATION



U.S. News & World Report, the global authority on academic program ratings, ranked Rutgers School of Social Work's MSW program as 12th out of 319 programs across the nation on its list of best graduate schools of social work. Rutgers School of Social Work's MSW program is now the #1 program in New Jersey, #2 among programs in the Big Ten, and #2 in the competitive New York market overall and #1 among public universities in the New York metro area. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks the 319 MSW programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, and this year Rutgers School of Social Work continues to improve its ranking among the best schools in the nation.

"This remarkable achievement reflects our outstanding faculty, staff, and students and the quality of education we provide," said Interim Dean Richard L. Edwards. "My congratulations go out to our entire School of Social Work community whose commitment to research, student learning, and advancing the core principles and values of social work have contributed to this national acknowledgement of excellence." ■

Help MAP Out a Student's Future

Rutgers School of Social Work's **Management & Policy (MAP) Connect Program** provides support for professional development in the area of human services management and leadership, strengthens the networks of MAP students and alumni, and facilitates working relationships that inspire professional growth. MAP Connect allows alumni to offer insights from their employment experiences and also provide constructive feedback, encouragement, and support about career options to students.

Interested in getting involved? Contact **Allison Zippay**, Professor & Director, Center for Leadership and Management, at zippay@ssw.rutgers.edu.



FACULTY VOICES IN THE NEWS



“While long wait times are an issue for anyone seeking medical care, they are extremely problematic for older adults with serious mental illness. These longer wait times exacerbate conditions and leave older adults feeling isolated and not cared for by the medical community. Additionally, delayed treatment can lead to increased levels of disability, substance use, homelessness, incarceration, and decreased quality of life. Caretakers then have the added responsibility and burden of attending to these long wait times, too, because a serious mental illness affects the entire family.”

Getting help to older adults with mental illness more quickly
Associate Professor Karen Zurlo in *NJ Spotlight News*



“States have passed all of this legalisation without really having any kind of framework in place for prevention, for education. Schools that have programmes to target drugs, cigarettes, vaping, they have no programmes to educate kids about problem gambling. Same thing with emergency rooms, family physicians, child welfare agencies, juvenile court system — no place screens for gambling at parity with substance-abuse disorders or has any kind of framework to triage people early for treatment.”

The Super Bowl and gambling are locked in a tight and dangerous embrace Associate Dean for Research, Distinguished Professor and Director, Center for Gambling Studies Lia Nower in *The Guardian*



“These findings demonstrate that when Black children felt connected to their school at age 9, they had fewer depressive symptoms and less aggressive behavior issues as adolescents. Simply put, when Black kids feel closely tied to their school, their mental health benefits.”

Black teens gain mental health boost from ‘connectedness’ at school Assistant Professor Adrian Gale in *U.S. News & World Report*



“Problems with pharmacy access can definitely affect health, especially when the pharmacies are in underserved areas — including both rural areas and underserved inner-city areas. Gaps in use can cause the development of resistant viruses, such as antiviral-resistant HIV viruses among those with HIV. Other medications of special concern include medications for opioid use disorder, since individuals may relapse to illicit drug use when their prescriptions are not filled in a timely way.”

CVS, Walgreens and Rite Aid are closing stores across the U.S. Here’s how ‘pharmacy deserts’ can impact your health. Distinguished Research Professor Stephen Crystal in *Yahoo! Life*

COBB

Assistant Professor and Chancellor's Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Research on Black Americans **Ryon J. Cobb** received an Early Career Excellence in Research Award from the University of Michigan's Program for Research on Black Americans.

Assistant Professor **Laura Cuesta** is the lead author of the manuscript "How is child support regularity associated with custodial mothers' income packages and economic well-being? Evidence from the United States," which in a highly competitive call for papers was selected for possible inclusion in an issue of *RSF: The Russell Sage Journal of the Social Sciences* on "Three Decades Since Making Ends Meet: What We Know About How Single-Mother Families Survive Today." Dr. Cuesta also participated in a national convening of child support experts organized by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and

Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

CUESTA

V. DuWayne Battle (Assistant Dean of Bachelor's Programs; Teaching Professor; Director, BASW Program in New Brunswick; Campus Coordinator, Baccalaureate Child Welfare Education Program) and his co-authors were selected to be the recipients of the 11th Annual Florence W. Vigilante Award for Scholarly Excellence in recognition of the best article published in Volume 42 (2022) of the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. As announced in Volume 33(1), the award will be given annually in honor of the founding editor of the journal. The article, "Challenging Anti-Black Racism Across the Curriculum," merited this recognition based on its outstanding scholarship and creativity.

BATTLE

Kristen Gilmore Powell (Associate Research Professor and Associate Director, Center for Prevention Science; Director, Northeast & Caribbean Prevention Technology Transfer Center), Director

POWELL

and PI, along with **N. Andrew Peterson** (Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Prevention Science), Co-Director and Co-PI, were awarded a \$600,000 12-month supplement by SAMHSA to operate the Northeast and Caribbean Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) for its sixth year.

PETERSON

Assistant Research Professor **Cory Morton** serves as Investigator. Awarded a total of \$3,839,250 over six years, the team provides research, training, and technical assistance services to the substance use prevention workforce in New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, aimed to improve knowledge and skills in prevention science and evidence-based prevention practices. The Northeast and Caribbean PTTC strives to foster empowerment within the prevention community to employ effective strategies that can change the conditions that contribute to societal consequences of substance misuse and population-level behavioral health disparities.

MORTON

Associate Professor of Professional Practice **Tawanda Hubbard** was invited to participate in the multi-year Behavioral Health Integration Advisory Hub, a workgroup convened by the New Jersey Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services and the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The workgroup serves as a key part of a robust stakeholder process throughout the design and implementation of the multi-phased carve-in of select behavioral health services. In addition, Dr. Hubbard has been serving on the 988 Key Stakeholder Coalition since 2021, convened by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and the New Jersey Rural Health Council/Migrant Coalition since 2022, assembled by the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of Community Health

Services, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health for over a year.

HUBBARD

Assistant Professor **Ashley Jackson**, Associate Professor **Lenna Nepomnyaschy**, and Associate Professor **Emmy Tiderington** serve as co-leads for three different networks of the Social Work Grand Challenges (SWGCS). SWGCS are initiated by the

JACKSON

TIDERINGTON NEPOMNYASCHY

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. The Grand Challenges for Social Work is a groundbreaking initiative to champion social progress powered by science and a call to action to work together to tackle our nation’s toughest social problems. Dr. Jackson is co-lead for the Promote Smart Decarceration Grand Challenge, Dr. Tiderington is co-lead for the End Homelessness Grand Challenge, and Dr. Nepomnyaschy is co-lead for the Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality Grand Challenge and co-lead on the Asset-Building & Reparations working group within the Reducing Extreme Inequality Grand Challenge.

Assistant Professor **Woojin Jung** was named as a Faculty Affiliate to the Rutgers Urban and Civic Informatics (RUCI) Lab, which aims to research and build capacity in leveraging technology and data analytics to address grand challenges facing global communities. Dr. Jung, whose work converges at the nexus of global development, social welfare policy, and data science, brings to the lab her expertise in harnessing geospatial data analytics for the purpose of poverty alleviation in developing countries and communities. In collaboration,

Dr. Jung and the RUCI Lab hope to use emerging technologies in their research to support real-world change for social good in urban areas around the globe.

JUNG

Associate Professors **Joy Kim** and **Michael Joo** received grant funding (\$127,977)

KIM

from the Association of Social Work Boards to examine the effects of state social work regulatory rules on public safety and social workers’ earnings. The project uses multiple national data files including the Laws and Regulations database compiled by the Association of Social Work Boards, the National Practitioners Data Bank collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. The results of the data analyses are meant to inform

state licensing boards about the effects of regulatory rules on the public and licensed practitioners.

JOO

Cassandra Simmel (Associate Professor and Ph.D. Program Director) was named a 2024 Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Research Fellow. SSWR Fellows are members who have served with distinction to advance the mission of the Society—to advance, disseminate, and translate research that addresses issues of social work practice and policy and promotes a diverse, equitable, and just society.

SIMMEL

Associate Professor **Emmy Tiderington** (PI) and Co-I Eric Seymour from the Bloustein School received a \$199,889 grant from the National Alliance to

End Homelessness for their project “Investigating Predictors of Successful Exits from Permanent Supportive Housing.” The primary aim of the two-year grant is to identify characteristics of people who exit from permanent supportive housing (PSH) to permanent housing without embedded supports, to determine the factors that predict these “successful” exits, and to examine health care utilization outcomes of PSH movers up to three years post-move.

VICTOR

Assistant Professor **Grant Victor** (PI) and Ph.D. student Michael Enich (co-PI) received funding from Rutgers Center for State Health Policy Integrated Population Health Data Project (iPHD) for their project “Linked Administrative Data as Surveillance of Overdose Crisis and Drug-related Adverse Health Events in New Jersey.” Access made possible by

iPHD to emergency medical services and mortality data will allow this project to answer questions related to the proportion of New Jerseyans who experienced multiple non-fatal overdose events on different days; the proportion of those with non-fatal overdose events on multiple days who eventually died of an overdose or all-cause mortality; as well as understanding the factors that predict outcomes related to drug use-related morbidity and mortality. The findings of this study may provide a viable means of identifying where overdose response resources should be situated to mitigate the rate of fatal overdoses in New Jersey.



“I HOPE BY SERVING IN THIS POSITION THAT I AM CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT IN THE SCHOOL WHERE FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR VOICES ARE HEARD AND THEIR INPUT IS VALUED.”

– Professor Antoinette Y. Farmer, PhD



BOLD IDEAS TAKE ROOT AT THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

The IIDEA Committee, comprised of faculty, students, and staff, is hitting its stride and meeting many of its goals as it approaches five years of advocacy and action.

By **MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY**



In fall 2020, the School of Social Work (SSW) launched the IIDEA Committee to further inclusion, intersectionality, diversity, equity, and the advancement (IIDEA) of social justice at the school. In May 2021, faculty voted that the SSW would adopt Dr. Barbara Love's liberatory

consciousness framework to guide curriculum development as well as the work of students, faculty, and staff (see the sidebar on the following pages for more information).

Here is just a glimpse into how the committee is leveraging this framework to enhance the coursework, culture, and communication at the SSW.

Charge: Centralize and prioritize the work of the committee
Change: New administrative position

In order to be effective, the IIDEA Committee needed a chairperson to focus and direct its activities. Out of this need, Professor Antoinette Y. Farmer, Ph.D. was appointed as committee chair and the school's inaugural associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Farmer was drawn to this position, in part, because of its unique nature; as she points out, few schools of social work have a position dedicated solely to DEI. "I hope by serving in this position that I am creating an environment in the school

where faculty, staff, and students believe that their voices are heard and their input is valued," she says, "where students feel prepared to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds because they have become more knowledgeable about what has affected them as a result of policies, practices, and structural barriers; and where faculty, staff, and students are empowered to make real changes that will have lasting impact, as they strive to advance IIDEA."

Charge: Incorporate a guiding framework

Change: Added competency in liberatory consciousness

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the accrediting body for all social work baccalaureate and master's programs in the United States and its territories. Part of its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) is a competency-based approach to curriculum design. CSWE's nine competencies range from demonstrating ethical and professional behavior to advancing social, racial, economic, and environmental justice; engaging in policy analysis; intervening with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; and more. CSWE also allows social work programs to develop and implement their own competencies.

At the SSW, a liberatory consciousness competency has been added to the curriculum to formalize Dr. Love's framework as a school-wide touchstone, and students are now evaluated on their attainment of this competency in the following courses:



Emily Greenfield and Christine Morales

- *MSW courses Diversity & Oppression, Clinical Social Work II, and Program & Strategic Planning*
- *BASW course Diversity & Oppression*



This new competency is also integrated into every practicum placement and may eventually be integrated into every SSW course. In the meantime, all students are educated (though not necessarily evaluated) on the framework.

Charge: Develop ways to address oppression happening at the school

and beyond

Change: Anonymous email box

In an effort to identify and address any oppression or inequalities happening at the school, the IIDEA Committee launched an anonymous email inbox. Suggestions, questions, and criticisms received are shared with the committee and administrators, and stakeholders are engaged to find a solution.

In the first year of the committee's existence, student representatives identifying as transgender informed the committee that they and other transgender students were experiencing inappropriate treatment in the classroom and in their practicum placements. As a result, a few actions were taken.

First, SSW faculty and staff received a specialized training hosted by the Transgender Training Institute, which addressed current issues impacting the transgender community, inclusive practices for faculty and lecturers, and broader recommendations for creating an inclusive learning environment and community for trans, non-binary, and gender diverse students.

Second, SSW Professor Emily Greenfield and Assistant Professor of Teaching Christine Morales elevated the concerns reported to the IIDEA Committee to the New Brunswick Faculty Council, which then developed and passed the Resolution in Support of Students Identifying as Transgender, Nonbinary, and Other Gender Identities. This university-wide resolution emphasizes Rutgers' responsibility to uphold human rights and dignity. In this way, the IIDEA Committee not only made concrete change at the school, but also guided inclusivity

at the university level.

Their hope is that this new email box will encourage students to continue to come forward so additional work can be done.

Charge: Assess IIDEA initiatives at the school and communicate updates to the community
Change: Communication and transparency via reports and newsletters

The main way the IIDEA Committee showcases its work is with its annual report. Distributed widely in the school community and beyond, the report outlines the goals, initiatives, events, and impact of the IIDEA Committee each year. This year, it includes information about how the school's IIDEA strategic plan aligns with the university's newly implemented DEI strategic plan.

The committee also circulates an internal newsletter to faculty, staff, and students that outlines the goals and action steps of the committee, as well as updates, highlights, and events related to IIDEA.

Charge: Advance scholarship focused on the liberatory consciousness framework
Change: New writing group, virtual conference, research awards, and study

One of the criticisms of Dr. Love's framework is that it hasn't been widely studied or used to develop a curriculum. In response, Farmer convened a writing group that included tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty, as well as staff and students. This group meets every three months to discuss possible areas of research.

So far, writing group members have explored how the liberatory consciousness framework can inform inclusive pedagogy, mentorship of the queer community, and even study abroad opportunities. Plus, a group of faculty members is currently evaluating the framework's implementation in the Clinical Social Work I course. In the fall, the IIDEA Committee plans to host a virtual conference, where members of the writing group can present their scholarship on the liberatory consciousness framework.

In conjunction with the school's Research Advisory Committee, the IIDEA Committee also created two research awards to support scholarship related to IIDEA: the Exemplary IIDEA Research Recognition Award (for faculty and staff) and the Emerging Scholar IIDEA Research Award (for students). The awardees are honored at the school's convocation ceremony and also receive a monetary award.

Liberatory Consciousness Framework 101

Dr. Barbara Love's liberatory consciousness framework consists of four elements, known colloquially as the Four As:

Awareness requires we recognize that we live in an oppressive society, and challenges us to understand how our behaviors, language, and thoughts may contribute to systems of oppression.

Action requires we develop explanations or theories about why oppression is happening, and begin to advance solutions that promote equity and justice.

Accountability/allyship requires we take action to promote equity and justice on an individual or organizational level.

Accountability/allyship requires collaboration with others to make substantive change.

"The liberatory consciousness framework is not a linear model," says Farmer. "For example, someone can be ready to take an action, but then receive new information on the topic, which puts them back in the awareness phase."

Committee Members in Action

The IIDEA Committee is designed to reflect the diversity of the School of Social Work community. Here, committee members discuss how they're bringing IIDEA concepts back to their roles as faculty members, staff, and students.



Tawanda Hubbard

Faculty Spotlight: Tawanda Hubbard, associate professor of professional practice

Tawanda Hubbard leverages her role on the IIDEA Committee to embody true inclusivity and intersectionality in her various roles as an educator.

In the classroom, Hubbard begins each course by developing a social working agreement, or a collaborative agreement she and her students make together about how they will be and speak with one another. This includes a definition of respectful communication, how students will behave when they are challenged or when differences emerge, how they will respond to microaggressions or offenses, and how to create an accountable and safe enough space for everyone to participate. "Each class is its own entity, and this agreement is not the same for every class,"

Hubbard says. “We discuss current events, social issues, mental health issues, how to provide services, and other heavy topics. This process of outlining the social working agreement allows us to lean into these sometimes difficult conversations in a prepared way.”

Hubbard also holds herself accountable to her students by incorporating herself into this agreement—a new element she’s introduced in the spring 2024 semester. “I have power in the instructor role,” she explains. “I want to know how the students want me to show up and respect that power, and how we can best collaborate together.”

Hubbard has also begun to integrate the liberatory consciousness framework into her coursework. “I encourage my students to use the Four As as a lens to inform their practice,” she says. “As social workers, we bring so much to the table when it comes to clinical practice, in that we help people manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and navigate relationships and environments. With that being said, it’s important to factor in social justice and advocacy.” Her students are trained on the Four As, and assignments connect back to these concepts across practice as well as clinical, policies, macro, and management courses.

In addition to her work with students, Hubbard trains professional social workers and allied counterparts in the community on social justice, implicit bias, and inclusive leadership. Here, too, she has started incorporating the liberatory consciousness framework. “There are many theories and practice models that we have adopted in our profession that, when you examine them closely, are very Eurocentric,” she says. “I challenge practitioners to expand their perspectives in how we think about the work, the people we work with, and the decisions we make.”

Graduate Student Spotlight: Zan Haggerty, LCSW, MSW, doctoral student and licensed clinical social worker

The IIDEA Committee includes a student representative from each of the school’s academic programs. Representing the doctorate of social work (DSW) program is Zan Haggerty, a clinician-scholar who is both a doctoral student and a Rutgers staff member at Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS). In CAPS, their focus is on serving communities with marginalized identities; in their research, they examine how oppressive systems impact these communities. As a result, they prioritize building on and moving beyond individual interventions to also focus on creating safe and inclusive systems, communities, and cultures.

Haggerty’s role on the IIDEA Committee is to serve as a liaison between the committee members and students in the DSW program. “It allows the faculty, staff, and others on the committee to maintain a close connection with student needs, and respond to those needs as much as possible,” Haggerty says. “My focus as a student representative is on the classroom experience, because that’s generally where we spend the most time and, in my opinion, where there is potential for the most harm.”



Zan Haggerty

Because Haggerty holds various roles on campus, they implement lessons learned on the IIDEA Committee quite regularly. As a lecturer, they explicitly teach the liberatory consciousness framework in courses like Clinical Social Work I, and they also incorporate IIDEA concepts into their teaching style.

At CAPS, Haggerty leads the Next Step Program and the Gender and Sexual Diversity team, and also occasionally works with MSW interns. Here, too, Haggerty implements liberatory consciousness framework lessons and takeaways, both when supervising clinicians and when working with clients. “I have a constant eye on how to liberate individuals and communities from forces of oppression and I’m constantly analyzing my position of power in the workplace,” they say. “I want to wield that power for better and not in service of oppression, so I’m constantly thinking of that in the classroom and with clinicians, colleagues, and clients.”

Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Julia Katz, senior, Bachelor of Arts in Social Work

Julia Katz knows firsthand how intimidating it can be to speak up in a room full of social work professionals, faculty members, and administrators. But she also knows she has an important role to fill on the IIDEA Committee: to represent her fellow undergraduate students and bring their input to the table. “As a student, I know how certain policies and efforts would affect us, and bringing that perspective to the committee is so important,” she says. “The liberatory consciousness framework is focused on action and practice, so it’s also quite empowering to bring issues to the committee on behalf of students and work together towards a holistic solution.”



Julia Katz

In fact, Katz says the liberatory consciousness framework has shifted her perspective on learning and practice in general. In the classroom, she finds herself analyzing the power dynamics that may exist between students and how those dynamics can cause some to share their opinions openly while others stay silent. In her practicum placement, it means acknowledging her own privilege when working with different populations and making adjustments so everyone is comfortable. “As a student, you learn about all kinds of different theories and frameworks, but what’s unique about the liberatory consciousness framework is that it’s applicable to everyday life because it’s grounded in the human experience,” she says. “I’ve worked with clients from age 8 to 80, and it applies to working with all of them.”

Katz’s practicum placement is at a nonprofit called Empower Somerset located in Somerville, New Jersey, which provides evidence-based prevention education focusing on topics such as substance abuse, mental health, sexual health, and more. Katz works directly with various groups served by the center—including veterans, students, and seniors—but she also participates in macro efforts like Narcan/naloxone distribution and the development of marketing materials to explain complex government policies to the general public. “What I’ve learned in the committee is how to hear other people’s perspectives, and that has served me well in practicum,” she says. “Everyone brings something different to the table and if we don’t listen and work as a diverse team, it’s impossible to make tangible change.”

Staff Spotlight: Thomas E. Benjamin, MCM, senior program coordinator, Center for Research on Ending Violence

Thomas Benjamin was elected to the IIDEA Committee in spring 2021 as the academic/educational programs/research staff representative, and was excited to join. “I thought the School of Social Work was the best place to set an example as an organizational workplace and academic culture that embodies inclusiveness, recognizes diversity, and looks for ways to advance fair and equitable treatment,” he says.

Benjamin works at the Center for Research on Ending Violence, where he administers a grant that funds client services for survivors as well as education, training, and outreach for students, staff, and faculty. Additionally, Benjamin’s role at the Center includes extensive reporting and evaluation of client data, as well as reporting findings to the university-wide Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance.

As the academic/educational programs/research staff representative, he speaks not only for those working in the Center for Research on Ending Violence, but also for a range of staff who work in various units throughout the school. For Benjamin, this means recognizing that there is a power hierarchy in higher education and acknowledging that the committee may not be immune to the

effects of that. “Often, when we think about equity, advancement, and inclusion, we think about gender, race, sexuality, religion, and ability; but there’s another aspect we must be mindful of when there’s a power dynamic,” he says. “Sometimes, faculty may get more acknowledgement or respect than a lecturer or staff member. I’m very mindful to ensure that every member of the community has a voice and adequate representation.”



Thomas E. Benjamin

Benjamin also incorporates lessons learned in the committee into his role at the Center for Research on Ending Violence. “We’re utilizing the liberatory consciousness framework to increase our awareness of the issues and concerns that are top of mind for various groups of people,” he says. As such, he works to hold the Center accountable and takes action as an ally for marginalized voices.

Plus, Benjamin utilizes more inclusive language and tactics in his reporting, so as to remain accurate and sensitive to how certain groups want to identify. “We know there are certain groups that are more prone to certain kinds of violence,” he says. “It’s important to remain sensitive to the fact that not only are these people survivors of violence, but also that certain groups experience violence in a way that’s marginalized and disregarded. I’m continuously challenging myself to report in a way that’s accurate as well as inclusive and sensitive to those societal issues.” ■

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. LAURIE L. MULVEY, SSW'89

Dr. Laurie L. Mulvey, who graduated from Rutgers School of Social Work with an MSW degree in 1989, considers her education at Rutgers to be the most valuable part of her entire educational experience. Now a clinical professor in sociology/criminology at The Pennsylvania State University, Dr. Mulvey developed and directs the university's World in Conversation Center, a university hub since 2002 for training students to become conflict facilitators. The mission of "conflict facilitators" is to deploy Mulvey's dialogue method to help small groups build solutions around contentious social problems.

Dr. Mulvey shares a glimpse into her life and the impact Rutgers had on her career.

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tell us a bit about your journey to the field of social work.

I was interested in a lot of things as an undergraduate, including communication, psychology, and law, but social work was the place where I could put all of these interests together and study something that gave me practical experience, as well as intellectual tools, to discern what was needed in any given context.

Why did you choose to study at Rutgers School of Social Work?

I had chosen to go to law school but then fortuitously met a recent graduate of Rutgers School of Social Work in 1986. I was so intrigued with his perspective and vision that I decided that I wanted to study where he studied. I applied immediately and started in Fall 1987.

How have you used your social work education since you graduated?

I use my social work education every single day. Although I went on to receive a doctorate (and studied research methods), what I do every day as a clinical professor is work with people in small groups. I have been facilitating groups, as well as studying and designing small-group interventions at Penn State ever since I graduated from Rutgers. I had amazing practicum learning supervisors that ignited me, and the hands-on learning was formative—and *transformative*.

As someone working in classrooms with undergraduate students ever since, I have built a vocation around "meeting students where they are" and *facilitating* their learning rather than *telling them* things.



This social work premise has defined my entire career and led to co-founding (with my husband and colleague, Sam Richards, another Rutgers graduate), World in Conversation, a Center for Public Diplomacy, where we train students to be "conflict facilitators." This is a grassroots initiative that teaches students here and internationally how to use conflict to solve social problems. For decades, graduates have been telling me how

profoundly this training has shaped their lives. That tells me that the seeds I carry from the Rutgers School of Social Work continue to be cast, planted, and harvested all around the world.

What are you currently doing for work?

I am the co-founder and director of Penn State's World in Conversation, which has become a global center for public diplomacy that is devoted to advancing the capacity of people to solve problems with their opponents. We train conflict facilitators to use dialogue as a tool to enable people on opposite sides of a border to build solutions together. Our clinical research, educational programming, and extensive global collaborations are all directed toward bringing conflict facilitation skills into the hands (and hearts) of people at home and around the world. Having completed more than 55,000 dialogue programs (and counting!), World in



DISCUSSING FACILITATION TECHNIQUES WITH MEMBERS OF TRUTH COMMISSION IN BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA, 2019

Conversation became one of the largest university dialogue centers in the world—all thanks to my education at Rutgers School of Social Work.

What advice would you give to students currently studying at Rutgers School of Social Work?

Know that your practicum placement and all the courses that support it are going to be a key factor in your education and know that what you are learning prepares you in profoundly practical ways for more vocational opportunities than you can imagine. I can say that the values of social work shape every decision I make as a director, a teacher, a colleague, and as a person. “Meeting people where they are” was not a widely used phrase when I was a student. Although it has become that in certain circles, most people

really don’t know *how* to meet people where they are. But I can say that this is the core of my work and everything I’ve been doing for the past three decades at Penn State. I’m grateful that I had the opportunity to learn it and practice it at Rutgers School of Social Work. As a student, you have that opportunity, so take advantage of it by pushing yourself to engage, to make mistakes, and to learn. That’s what you’re at Rutgers to do.

What are your hopes for the future of social work?

Social work is essential work. It deserves to be seen, valued, and remunerated at high levels. Full stop. ■



CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD



Do you know a fellow Rutgers School of Social Work alum who has made an indelible impact on their community? Have you made a lasting mark yourself?

Rutgers School of Social Work's Alumni Council seeks nominations for its Outstanding Alumni Award. Our alumni network is rich with dedicated social work leaders who work tirelessly to make a difference in their communities or organizations. Your nomination gives these outstanding individuals (or yourself) the opportunity to be recognized for their hard work and accomplishments.

SELECTION PROCESS

All nominations will be reviewed and selected by the Alumni Council. Nominations for the 2024 award are due by October 19, 2024. A decision will be made in November, and the award will be presented during the 2024 School of Social Work Annual Winter Alumni Reception.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Nominees must have matriculated at Rutgers University and earned either the BASW, MSW, PhD in Social Work, or DSW degrees.
- Nominees cannot currently be an employee of Rutgers University or a current member of the Alumni Council.
- Self-nominations are accepted and encouraged.
- Posthumous awards are not accepted. To recognize the accomplishments of a late School of Social Work alumnus,

please email their story to Laurie Zazenski, Director of Communications, at lzazenski@ssw.rutgers.edu.

- Must be able to attend the Fall SSW Annual Winter Alumni Reception (date to be announced).

NOMINATION PROCESS

Please send an email with the following information to the SSW Alumni Council at alumni@ssw.rutgers.edu:

NOMINATOR INFORMATION

- First and Last Name
- Email Address
- Relationship to the nominee

NOMINEE INFORMATION

- First and Last Name
- Email Address
- Occupation
- Description in approximately 500 words of the impact this individual had on Rutgers and the community.

Thank you for helping us to recognize your fellow alumni for all their important and noteworthy accomplishments to the field. ■



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 ident, Alumni Council

Alumni gather for Fellowship and Fun at Annual Winter Alumni Reception



ast November, nearly 100 School of Social Work alumni attended the Annual Winter Alumni Reception at the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick. Hosted by the Rutgers School of Social

Work Alumni Council, the event gives alumni an opportunity to reconnect and share in the celebration of their meaningful work.

"In our tradition, the Annual Winter Alumni Reception provided a wonderful opportunity for alumni, faculty, staff, and School leadership to come together and enjoy fellowship on campus," said Tawanda L. Hubbard, Associate Professor of Professional Practice and President of the School of Social Work's Alumni Council. "It was a great pleasure to see familiar faces I have not seen in some time and meet new alumni. I enjoyed learning about the magnificent work fellow alumni do in the communities they serve and connecting with alumni interested in giving back to the School."

Among the evening's speakers were Interim Dean Richard Edwards, Dr. Hubbard, Alumni Council Member Frank Greenagel, and Institute for Families (IFF) Managing Director Theresa

McCutcheon, who welcomed alumni back to campus and shared updates from the School. McCutcheon also highlighted the IFF Fellows Program, which supports full-time undergraduates who have had lived experience in the child welfare system and/or are at-risk for homelessness. Each year, the Alumni Council will shine a light on a program at the School, giving alumni a chance to learn more about the work being done in service of the social work profession.

"The Annual Winter Alumni Reception is a highlight event for the School of Social Work, as it brings together alumni, faculty, and staff to reconnect, reminisce, and, most importantly, reunite with the School," said Doris Pierce-Hardy, Associate Director of Development at the School of Social Work. "These types of events allow alumni the opportunity to learn about the impactful and transformative work of our faculty in the field of social work and reconnect with those who played a pivotal role in shaping their lives. We hope to see many more faces at future events."

"I am looking forward to the next winter's reception," said Dr. Hubbard. "I encourage you to come out, mingle, and connect with your fellow alumni and the school. I will see you there!" ■



MEET THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI COUNCIL

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or more than a decade, members of the School of Social Work's Alumni Council have served as ambassadors that interface between the School, the thousands of

alumni who earned a social work degree from Rutgers, and the broader social work community. The Alumni Council, which is comprised of alumni who serve in a volunteer capacity, supports future generations of social workers, enhances the professional portfolios of alumni, and keeps graduates connected with their classmates. Council members work collaboratively and actively engage with fellow alumni to promote the School's reputation and standard of excellence among internal and external stakeholders. The Council also provides recommendations based on trends in the field to School leadership.

Now in its 12th year, we invite you to learn about the most recent cohort of Alumni Council leaders and members and the work they're accomplishing.



**Tawanda L. Hubbard,
SSW'05, SSW'17,
Alumni Council
President**

Tawanda L. Hubbard, DSW, MSW, LCSW obtained her BS in business administration with a concentration in management from Bloomfield College and her MSW and DSW from Rutgers School of Social Work. Dr. Hubbard is an Associate Professor of Professional Practice on the faculty at Rutgers School of

Social Work and a Ph.D. candidate in Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University.

Dr. Hubbard has experience in child

welfare, mental and behavioral health, case management, advocacy, and clinical practice and supervision with a small private practice and consulting firm. She is trained in family therapy and EMDR and is certified in REBT and child sexual abuse therapy. She holds a postmasters in clinical practice with adolescents and social work and spirituality. Dr. Hubbard was honored in 2023 and 2022 with the Outstanding Clinical Specialization Professor Award from Rutgers School of Social Work and the National Teaching Leadership Award in Higher Education by JV Educational Consultants in 2021. She is a former president of the NASW-NJ Chapter, CSWE-MFP Doctoral Fellow alumna, and Family Process Institute New Writers Program Fellow alumna. Dr. Hubbard is currently serving as a member of the CSWE Minority Fellowship Doctoral Advisory Council, Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work Advisory Board, NJ 988 Crisis Line Stakeholder Coalition, NJ Rural Health Advisory Committee, NJ Behavioral Health Integration Advisory Hub, and an active member of the National Association of Black Social Workers and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Dr. Hubbard's scholarship and practice interests focus on the mental and relational health and well-being of Black women and families; young Black women aging out of foster care and transitioning successfully into adulthood; dismantling structural inequities in human service organizations; inclusive and humanizing pedagogy; and oppositionality and relational neglect in adolescence. She develops curriculum, publishes, and creates and delivers keynotes, webinars, and workshops connected to her scholarship and practice interests statewide, regionally, and nationally.

Why did you decide to join the Rutgers SSW Alumni Council?

My experience as a social work student at Rutgers School of Social Work provided a rich and solid foundation for me as a social worker. As an MSW and DSW student, I experienced a positive learning environment, felt supported, and engaged in diverse opportunities that helped launch and

elevate my social work career. As a student, I developed several positive and satisfying relationships with peers, professors, and alumni that helped shape my learning experiences and informed my journey of becoming the social worker I am today. The relationships I formed, positive learning experiences, support, and opportunities continue as a professional social worker. For these reasons, I decided to join the Alumni Council to continue the tradition of nurturing positive relationships between the School, alumni, and students and creating enriching and satisfying opportunities for alumni to stay connected to their most cherished alma mater.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

As a member and current president of the Alumni Council, I hope to fulfill its vision, work collaboratively with my fellow alumni to support the School in achieving its mission, support and strengthen alumni engagement with the School, and enhance student access and positive experiences with alumni. I would also like to ensure a strong infrastructure for the Alumni Council that will support the Council's work today and, in the future, and grow the Council.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

There is much to share with someone starting out as a new social worker. One thing that is essential and that you must hold dear is what being a social worker means to you. As you move throughout your career, you will take positions in organizations that will try to define who social workers are and what we do that do not align with what you know about social work. You need to hold dear how social workers define themselves. Audre Lorde says it best: "If you don't define yourself for yourself, you will be crushed into other people's fantasies of you and eaten alive." We are not a monolithic group, but we have core values that speak to who we are and guide what we do. I have heard peers and former students share their experiences about their work, not being social work,

feeling disconnected from the mission and our organizing value, social justice, in some of the positions they have held. This feeling of disconnection can creep in, and we have to be aware of it and intentionally prevent it. You have to figure out ways to hold dear what social work means to you, why you became a social worker, and stay connected to the profession's roots through your engagement with social work peers, associations, and our beloved alma mater.

Tiffany L. Mayers, DSW, MSW, LCSW, Alumni Council Vice President

Tiffany L. Mayers, DSW, MSW, LCSW obtained her BA in psychology with a minor in social work from Seton Hall University, her MSW from Rutgers School of Social Work, and her DSW from the University of Kentucky. Dr. Mayers is a Director at Rutgers Graduate

School of Education and is a lecturer at Rutgers School of Social Work teaching the master's-level courses Clinical Social Work and Social Policy.

Dr. Mayers has experience working in New Jersey state government in the areas of government records, policy, and urban redevelopment. She is also a part-time mental health clinician with expertise in child welfare, behavioral and mental health services, case management, and private clinical practice. She has been a member of the NASW-NJ since 2012 and is the outgoing board secretary. She also serves as a consultant with NAMI NJ's African American program, AACT-NOW, as the Central Regional Coordinator, and has been a member since 2008. In this role, she works within the African American community to bring awareness to mental health and eradicate stigma. Her passion stems from caring for a child with ADHD, and learning the importance of education, advocacy, and self-care.

Dr. Mayers has research interests and scholarship contributions that include a focus on bridging the gap between the Black community and the field of mental health

in hopes of strengthening families and increasing the utilization of mental health services. She also focuses on eradicating mental health stigma, advocating for stigma-free communities, and works in consultation with programs that provide mental health services in non-traditional safe settings that foster community and contribute to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health.

Dr. Mayers is passionate about mental health overall and delivers workshops and other speaking engagements to put a friendly face to mental health. She is also involved in other organizations serving urban and minority communities such as the Family Support Organization of Union County and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., specifically serving Middlesex and Somerset Counties.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

I joined the Alumni Council because I wanted to stay connected to the School of Social Work after graduating with my MSW. I knew that joining the Council would allow me to network with other professionals while having a seat at the table to speak for non-traditional social work graduates. Also, my colleagues, including our current President Dr. Tawanda L. Hubbard, spoke highly of the Council.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

I hope to help expand membership of the Alumni Council. I also want to bring social workers together in a much needed, relaxing, and social way. As social workers, we work hard and wear many hats, but it is also important for our own self-care that we unwind and just connect socially.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

My advice to new social workers is to carve out your niche in the field! Be certain of the areas of social work that you do not want to work in and focus your efforts in the areas that fulfill your passion. Sometimes our work as social workers goes unrecognized and undervalued, but when you are working in your purpose, the journey will always feel worth it!

Joshua Collins, RC'06, SSW'18, Alumni Council Secretary

Joshua Collins, LCSW, LCADC, CCS is a proud Rutgers graduate working as an EMDR certified clinical social worker. He is passionate about learning and helping the people he serves. His origin story was deeply shaped by his own lived experience of intergenerational addiction, experiencing the shame of stigma, and being a caretaker for his grandma for the rest of her life following the death of his mother. Following a decade of being a barista at Starbucks and delving into meditation at silent retreats, he was able to get past his fear and return to school. Currently, he is employed as a clinical coordinator and therapist at an addiction and mental health treatment center. He recently became a father. He has a love of comics, animation, fandom, and spending time outdoors.



Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

As someone who went back to school as an older student, I had a lot of gratitude for just being there. I had gotten a lot of satisfaction from being involved as a student and a great love of Rutgers. For me, that extended to wanting to be a part of the Alumni Council.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

During my term, I hope to be a part of the process to enhance the value of being a Rutgers alum. I feel inspired by the leadership on this council to work hard towards our mission.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

Get clear on who you are, or find at least enough clarity to not lose yourself.

Dawn Apgar, SSW'93, GSNB'02, Alumni Council Member

Dawn Apgar, Ph.D., LSW, ACSW, is currently an Associate Professor at Seton Hall University. Dr. Apgar joined the faculty at Seton Hall University in 2016 after serving as Deputy Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, the largest department in New Jersey state government with more than one-third



of the state workforce (15,000 employees/contracted staff) and an annual budget of more than \$18.7 billion. Prior to becoming Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Apgar was an Assistant Professor at Marywood University and the Director of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Institute at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. She has extensive direct practice, policy, and

management experience in the social work field.

Dr. Apgar also writes and does research on social work licensure and has served as chairperson of the New Jersey Board of Social Work Examiners. Many of her publications are used by states across the country to assist social workers with passing the licensure examinations.

She is a past President of the New Jersey Chapter of NASW and has been on its National Board of Directors. In 2014, the Chapter presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

I earned both my MSW and PhD at Rutgers University. The faculty and my classmates had a profound impact on my development as a social worker. I joined the Alumni Council to “pay it forward” by creating opportunities for current students. Additionally, social work is about relationships. I want to help Rutgers alumni benefit from the large professional network that comprises fellow graduates.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the council?

I am a “doer,” so I want alumni to feel better connected to the School and each other as a result of structured and unstructured networking events. I also want to recruit new alumni leaders onto the Alumni Council. I have been helped by others in my social work career. I want to use my position on the Alumni Council to help students and alumni grow professionally and realize their social work goals.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

Enjoying your professional journey is important. I have learned from every job

that I have had since graduation. Sometimes the most growth has come from adverse situations. Social work is a relatively small professional community, so always treat coworkers and others with respect. Your professional reputation is your most valuable asset, so never burn bridges!

Erin Capone, MSW, Alumni Council Member

Erin Capone, MSW considers herself to be a human conjunction, someone whose purpose in life is to connect others with the people, places, and things they care about most. This is what drew her to philanthropy and to her current role as assistant dean of development for NYU Silver School of Social Work. Erin leverages over 16 years of fundraising experience to increase philanthropic revenue, engage stakeholders, and advance the School’s



priorities. Erin also serves as a lecturer with Rutgers School of Social Work, teaching Fundraising & Marketing in the MSW program. Erin began her career as a children’s social worker after graduating with an MSW from NYU and a BA in social work from Rutgers School of Social Work.

She previously served as director of development for Rutgers School of Social Work and The Andrew Goodman Foundation, and executive director of Overcoming Obstacles. She speaks nationally on the topic of social and emotional learning with youth, with past media appearances on NBC, FOX, and the Solutions Webcast hosted by Clemson University. She is passionate about the intersection of social justice and philanthropy and the important role social workers play within it, which is the focus of her research in the DSW program.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

Rutgers School of Social Work has played such a pivotal role in my life: it is where I was first introduced to social work, it is where I spent seven years of my career, and it is where I am earning my third social work degree. It is a true honor to be able to serve the School as a member of the council so

that I can give back to others what was invested in me. Prior to joining, I also had the pleasure of seeing firsthand how dedicated, talented, and innovative the members are, and I knew it would be a good opportunity for my own growth to learn from them.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

The main thread of my career has been connecting people with the institutions that they care about so they can create impact together. As a Council member, I hope to help create those pathways for our alumni to meaningfully engage with the School. I also hope to help our School community widen its sights on what social workers can accomplish and the places and spaces where they can make a difference. Our field is at a critical juncture that will require us to fully step into our unique training to effect change in between and among systems, and not solely as clinicians.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

During my time at Rutgers, I would have never imagined the trajectory my career would take. Looking back, I can see that a big factor in my success has been staying open to the possibilities. So, my first piece of advice is to stay flexible and open-minded about the types of positions you pursue. My career has also required the ability to educate others on who social workers are and our unique value. So, my other piece of advice is to be firm in your social work identity and help the world learn how best to partner with you.

Frank Greenagel, MPAP, LCSW, LCADC, ICADC, CASAC, ACSW, CJC, CCS, Alumni Council Member

Frank Greenagel, MPAP, LCSW, LCADC, ICADC, CASAC, ACSW, CJC, CCS, is a clinical social worker who specializes in addiction and recovery treatment, PTSD, grief, and finding direction. He is licensed in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. He is the Director of Clinical Supervision at Prevention Links and oversees the first New Jersey recovery high school. He also established and runs the internship program at Prevention Links. Frank is a lecturer at Rutgers School of Social Work. He drives up to Albany, NY, a few times a month in order to serve as the Head Therapist for the New York State Troopers Employee Assistance Program. Frank served the New Jersey Governor’s Council



on Alcohol & Drug Abuse from 2011 to 2022 and was the Chairman of the New Jersey Heroin & Other Opiates Task Force. He served on the Board of Directors for Hazelden-Betty Ford from 2014 to 2017 and on the NASW-NJ board from 2018 to 2020. In 2018, the President of the New Jersey State Senate, Stephen Sweeney,

appointed Frank to the New Jersey Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council. Frank is an Army veteran who wrote a play about the military that made some people in the Department of Defense very upset with him. His use of profanity, love of sports, occasional frustration with humanity and background as a borderline juvenile delinquent usually make him a hit with almost every crowd.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

I was the keynote speaker at a New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies conference about nine or ten years ago, and people from the School of Social Work and Rutgers Foundation were there and asked me to join.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

Great question. I am a lifelong educator. I started substitute teaching when I was 22. I taught English in Tokyo when I was 26. I taught high school English in Elizabeth, New Jersey after that. I began teaching at the Center of Alcohol Studies in 2007, Essex County College in 2008, and Rutgers School of Social Work in 2011. I am still teaching. I love the classroom, but it is micro level work (maybe it is mezzo). I look at the Alumni Council as something that can impact, change, improve, and advance students' social work education. I've been training and supervising other social workers since 2010. I oversee an intern program that takes 25-30 students a year from over a dozen different universities. There are major problems in the practicums that most schools offer. Anyone in a social work leadership position that knows me knows that I have been talking about the problems and offering up solutions for well over a decade. Finally, I want to advance the profession. I want social workers to be highly regarded and well compensated. So much of what I do is an attempt to advance our entire profession.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

Don't pick a job, pick a supervisor. Find someone that loves teaching and supervising and will help you develop to be the best social worker you can be. You should also consider working a full time job and a part time job after graduation. There are financial reasons for this, but that is not why I suggest it. By working two very different social work jobs, you double your network, you double your learning, and you increase your ability to help others and stand out compared to your peers. This should be discussed with your family and loved ones, so that they don't feel slighted. Also, it is something that should be done early in the career and only for a few years.



Daveen L. Mann, MSW, Alumni Council Member

Daveen L. Mann, MSW is a true social worker at heart for her family, friends, church, and community. She accepted her divine purpose

and began her career with the Division of Child Protection and Permanency over 25 years ago. She is an experienced leader and an exceptional role model to her staff and peers. Daveen is passionate about encouraging others to thrive holistically — mind, body, and spirit. Currently, Daveen is also a practicum instructor for the Baccalaureate Child Welfare Education Program, an active member of the Communication Workers of America Local 1037 Union serving on the Executive Board as Vice President of Primary Level and Shop Steward, as well as a domestic violence response advocate after completing her training through the Domestic Violence Intervention Certificate program in 2023. Most importantly, Daveen loves to travel, spend time with her family, and help others through volunteerism. Daveen serves on the Women's Council and in the R.E.A.C.H. ministry at the Abundant Life Family Worship Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She also volunteers by serving at local food banks or with Girlz vs. World, a non-profit agency that focuses on community partnerships, empowerment, and self-determination through activities, education,

mentoring, and hosting youth and family events.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

As an alum of the first public child welfare intensive weekend program (now currently known as the Intensive Weekend MSW program) cohort, I was encouraged by Dr. Ericka Deglau to consider joining the Alumni Council so that there would be representation for the Intensive Weekend MSW program. I connected with the Alumni Council and accepted the invitation to become more engaged in the School of Social Work community, which afforded me opportunities to maintain a connection with former colleagues, professors, and my alma mater and be an ambassador for the Intensive Weekend program.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

I want to bring more exposure to the Intensive Weekend program and the School as a whole and forge more connections during my term on the Council. The School is a large community with so many facets. It's my hope that alumni attending a School activity or event will lead them to get involved and support the School.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

My advice would be to be open to possibilities and extend grace to oneself. There are so many different opportunities in social work. However, self-care and self-preservation are key to being successful in this field. So, be gracious to yourself as you are to others.

Issata Oluwadare, RC'05, SSW'09, Alumni Council Member

Issata Oluwadare, MSW is a dynamic leader with 10 years of leadership experience in higher education. She is also a content creator, bestselling author, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, certified life coach, minister, and consultant for women in leadership and business. She has a passion for mobilizing historically marginalized communities through speaking engage-



ments, leadership workshops, professional development opportunities, and conferences. As a wife and mother of two, Issata writes about infant loss and special needs parenting, supporting local organizations through her family's organization, Manny's Village. She uses her family's journey to encourage others to hope through a children's book, *Mighty Manny*, which debuted at number #1 and made the bestsellers list on Amazon. The book has been featured on Yahoo, Blacknews.com, Fox, and CBS.

Issata believes in role modeling imperfect, authentic leadership. As the founder of The EZ Breezy Life, she supports a network of women spanning 50+ countries. She is also the host of "The EZ Breezy Life with Issata O.," a Goodpods Top 100 podcast in Christianity and spirituality, dedicated to highlighting the experiences of everyday women striving for healthy, well-balanced lives and relationships.

As the Principal of Issata O. Inc., Issata provides consulting and coaching to support nonprofit leaders and business owners through speaking engagements, one-on-one coaching, and brand consultation. Since its inception in 2019, Issata O. Inc. has engaged in over 40 invited presentations focused on leadership, business basics, and women's issues. They have hosted over 50 women's empowerment and development events, engaging over 4,500 participants worldwide through their Small Business Saturday series and reaching women in over 80 institutions of higher education. She has supported high-powered clients in launching their business ideas, books, and brands.

Issata is pursuing her Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, holds a certificate in Women's Leadership from Yale School of Management, and a certificate in Leading Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from Northwestern University. When she is not working, Issata enjoys a quiet and peaceful life with her partner, two children, and a large extended family.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

I joined the Alumni Council because my time at Rutgers School of Social Work had a transformative effect on me, both personally and professionally. Even after nearly 15 years, the gratitude I hold for the education and experiences I received there is immense. It shaped me into the professional I am today, broadened my perspective on the world, and, in many ways, helped me grow as a partner and mother. Giving back to a profession and, specifically, a school

that has enriched my life so deeply feels like a tremendous honor and privilege.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

My aim during my term is to be a positive influence, especially for those just stepping into the field or pondering how to leverage their social work degree to become a force for good in their communities and the broader world. When I was a student at Rutgers, we embraced a mantra: "Jersey Roots, Global Reach." My ambition is to inspire and enable my fellow alumni to embody this principle fully, to make a difference both locally and globally.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

To those newly navigating the field of social work, my advice is simple: trust your instincts. Our career paths will present a myriad of opportunities—some will be golden, while others might veer us off our intended course. Keep your core purpose in sharp focus; it will act as your compass, guiding you towards opportunities that not only allow you to uplift others but also live a life that's in harmony with your values. Remember, it's entirely possible to make a significant impact and find joy in your work.



Kyle Smiddie, NLAW'11, SSW'11, Alumni Council Member

Kyle Smiddie has been an attorney in the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice since 2011. He holds

a JD and MSW from Rutgers University. In his work, he enforces the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). One focus of this work has been on the use of solitary confinement in jails and prisons, especially as it relates to prisoners with men-

tal illness. Another focus has been ensuring that persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are getting the services they need in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. He currently leads two Consent Decrees—one with the Hampton Roads Regional Jail in Portsmouth, Virginia, and one with the Commonwealth of Virginia, focusing on persons with developmental disabilities. He is also the lead attorney enforcing an MOU regarding the Massachusetts Department of Corrections' use of suicide watch. Before joining the Civil Rights Division, he worked on issues regarding prisoner re-entry, affordable housing, adequate education, and foster children. He was raised on a 40-acre farm in rural Ohio.

Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

I joined the Alumni Council first because I'd never served on a board before and I was simply honored that I was asked and felt that I owed it to the School that had given me so much and wanted to see if I could help. I also really liked the idea of being able to learn from other successful accomplished alumni.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the Council?

My goals are hopefully not too grand. I'd like to think we could grow the alumni donation pool, but also I hope to inspire at least a handful of students and/or alumni when talking about the great work graduates are doing in the field.

As a leader in the field of social work, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in their career?

Keep a timeline of what you're doing and look back at it because over the course of your career you'll learn lessons by reviewing your past that you can use in your present to direct your future. And never be afraid to ask someone you admire out for coffee; they will likely be flattered if they're a good person, and then use that coffee time wisely to chart your next path. ■

CLASSNOTES

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.

For the past five years, **Kevin Lee SSW'17** has served on the development team at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), a nonprofit civil rights law firm in Manhattan. He was recently promoted to Manager for Corporate Giving and Executive Administrator. In this role, Kevin manages the firm's corporate giving program, as well as logistics for NYLPI's annual gala and golf outing. He is grateful for Rutgers SSW's Management & Policy program for its expansive vision for what social workers can achieve. Besides his professional work, Kevin recently became an épée fencer and has been fencing competitively since 2022. In his free time, he trains and competes in local events.

Dr. Barbara Ella Milton, Jr., SSW'01, a scholar, author, and life-long advocate for justice, passed away on October 9, 2023. Widely recognized as a national expert and social change agent advocating for at-risk youth and families of color, Dr. Milton earned her BSW from Seton Hill University, a MSW from Rutgers School of Social Work, and a doctorate from Hunter College at the City University of New York. Dr. Milton's doctoral work centered on researching archival narratives of formerly enslaved individuals recorded during the 1930s. Through her investigation, Dr. Milton identified the factors of strength, fortitude, resilience, and community found in the narratives to develop a blueprint for the healing and survival of young people of color in contemporary society. Her research led to her most recent book *Inherited Wisdom: Drawing on the Lessons of Formerly Enslaved Ancestors to Lift Up Black Youth*, which she co-authored with Dr. Deborah Brooks Lawrence (Cognella Press, 2023).

In 2021, Dr. Milton published *Heeding the Caregiver Call: The Story of Barbara Ella Milton, Sr. and Alzheimer's Disease*. The second edition, which was published by Cognella Press, is being used as an academic textbook in social work and nursing programs across the country. In this memoir, Dr. Milton shares her journey of love, loss, and healing and brings to light the too often ignored experiences of people of color with dementia. The book also provides a road map for dealing with the emotional and financial implications of caregiving. Just

prior to her passing, Dr. Milton was at work documenting her experience with bladder cancer, which she hoped to share with individuals and families navigating the health care system during a life-threatening illness.

Dr. Milton was a contributor to the "Confessions of a Welfare Mom" series and co-authored the book *The Great Pause: Blessings and Wisdom from COVID-19*. She produced and hosted "The Dr. Milton Social Work Show" on Comcast Public Access and YouTube to educate the community about social welfare issues and the social work profession. She also provided supervision to social work students at the master's and doctoral levels.

Throughout her life, Dr. Milton was steadfast in her fight for justice for families of color and all disenfranchised people. As the founding columnist for "Our Joy and Pride" for the *Jersey Journal*, Dr. Milton shared the accomplishments of young people of color, as a means of giving voice to the positive light in communities consistently marginalized and misrepresented by the press. She also served as the former Director of the Citizen Action office in New Brunswick, New Jersey, managing campaigns to promote health care, tax reform, environmental justice, anti-apartheid work, and the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. She was an active member of the National Association of Social Workers, including serving as co-chair of the National Association of Social Workers, New Jersey Chapter, Hudson County Unit.

A recipient of many honors, Dr. Milton most recently received the 2023 Seton Hall University Distinguished Alumni Leadership Award, one of the highest honors given to a graduate. Setonians have been named distinguished alumni for their leadership in education, business, science and technology, the arts, volunteerism, and philanthropy. Dr. Milton is survived by her wife, Kay, stepchildren Tania and Ian, and grandsons Henry and Finnegan.

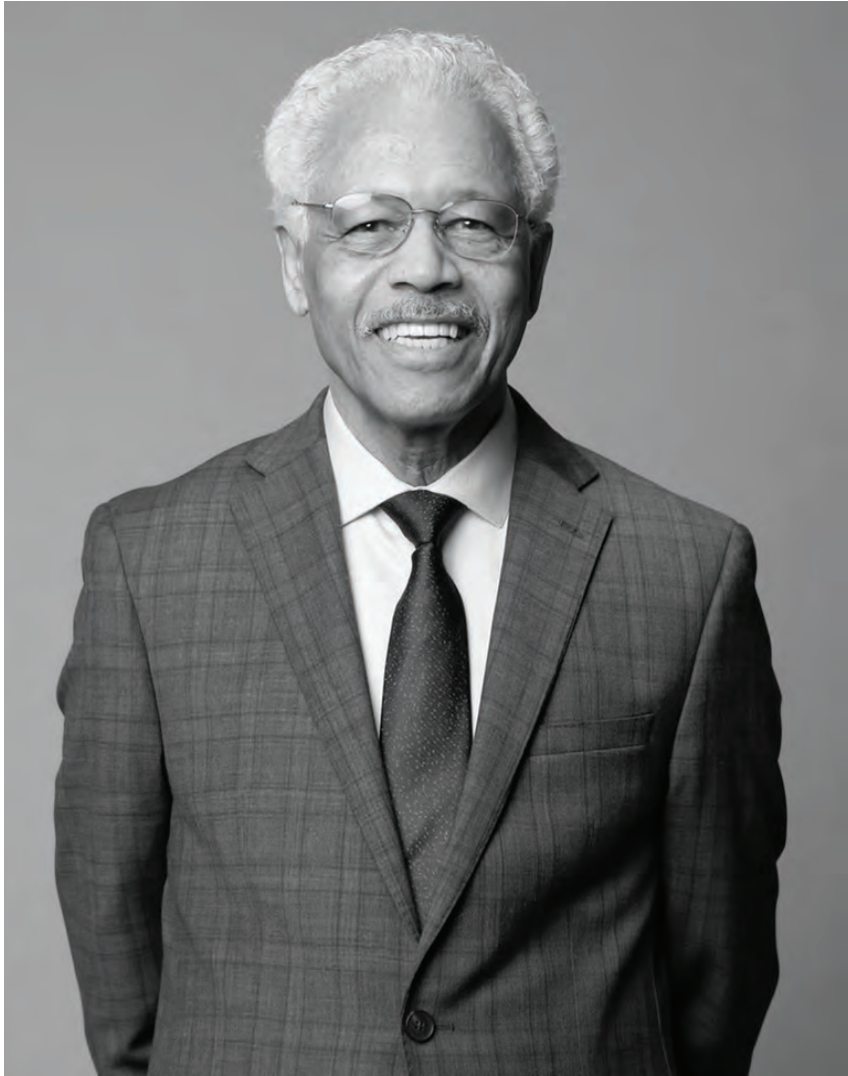
Mark Ostrowski SSW'87 retired after a successful career in human resources, serving as general manager of career transition firms in New Jersey and Maryland, director of HR and learning and organizational development in health care organizations, and running a successful

business called Major Choice LLC, which helps students and young adults navigate career choices. He served as a public speaker on the national level and now does a significant amount of volunteer work in the Baltimore area. He also enjoys time with his wife and family, including nine grandchildren, and traveling. He was in the inaugural class in the first-of-its-kind, part-time Rutgers School of Social Work MSW program while working full time with a family.

Sarah Swensen SSW'12 '13 is a Nashville-based mental health therapist turned singer/songwriter who released the country single "Rise," an anthem of resiliency and strength. She hopes the song will encourage anyone who has faced trauma or difficult times in their lives to find resilience and learn how to cope so the past does not define who they are. The song is now available on all streaming platforms.

Susan Van Vleet SSW'76, a life member of the NAACP, received the 2023 Small Business Award from the NAACP of Ventura County California for her business, Susan Van Vleet Consultants Inc®. The award is given to businesses that work for economic growth for all, educational equality, and political and social justice.

Reverend Nicholas Young SSW'21, a graduate of the Rutgers School of Social Work M.Div/MSW dual degree program in partnership with Princeton Theological Seminary, is a psychotherapist who works against the stigma associated with mental health care. He authored the book, *Kerry the Caring Koala: Where Feelings Find a Friend: A Child's Guide to Therapy*, that teaches children what therapy is and how it can help them manage feelings and relationships. It has interactive pages and a resource for parents. Rev. Young was inspired to write the book to introduce the concept of therapy to people while they are young. His goal is to teach elementary-aged children how therapy can help them manage emotions, peer conflicts, academic challenges, grief, and family dynamics. When the book was first released on Amazon, it was ranked #1 in its category. ■



THE HONORABLE THEODORE "TED" BLUNT

REMEMBERING
THEODORE "TED" BLUNT SSW'68



If ever someone epitomized the scripture, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21), it is Ted Blunt. The Honorable Theodore “Ted” Blunt, aged 80, passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his loving family, during the late evening hours of January 11, 2024.

Born in Philadelphia on March 22, 1943, the son of the late Helen and John Blunt, Ted was one of four children. He grew up in the James Weldon Johnson public housing projects, understanding the value of hard work and persistence. An explorer and a curious kid beyond measure, he walked all over Philadelphia — from the zoo and museums to Fairmount Park and diverse neighborhoods. But one place that shaped his love of travel and people was the library. Ted loved reading and being transported around the world, which he would later do.

The first in his family to graduate from high school and college, Ted attended Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia, where he met and married the love of his life, Alice LaTrelle Jackson. After graduation, he made his way to Winston-Salem Teachers College, now known as Winston-Salem State University, in North Carolina, where he received a bachelor of science degree in education. Without the assurance of a scholarship, he boarded a train with a footlocker and a shoebox lunch — a chicken sandwich, a piece of pound cake, a jar of water, and no money. This is where the hard work and persistence came in: from aspiration to reality, Ted made the team as a starting point guard in his freshman year. Under the tutelage of the legendary coach and mentor, Clarence “Big House” Gaines, he would suit up on the WSSU basketball team, where he earned a full scholarship. He not only repaid the scholarship in full and more, but paid it forward through contributions and service — including as the chair of the board of trustees. Ted helped lead a college basketball dynasty alongside legends like Cleo Hill and Earl “The Pearl” Monroe. His iconic jersey #12 now hangs proudly in the C.E. Gaines Center.

While basketball continued to be an important part of his life — as an NAIA All-American, an inductee in multiple basketball halls of fame, or as a recruit for the Harlem Globetrotters — he never forgot where he came from and that each of us can “Do Something” to make the world a better place. Because of his passion for education and justice, Ted earned a master’s degree in social work from Rutgers University. Always helping young people — whether through mentorship or education — Ted began his career as a juvenile gang worker for the Crime Prevention Association and later, a group therapist at Temple University in Philadelphia. In 1969, he moved the Blunt family to Wilmington to serve as a program director at the Peoples Settlement Association.

From Peoples Settlement, he would continue his commitment to our communities through positions at Head Start, the Wilmington Housing Authority,

as president of the Haynes Park Civic Association, president of the Wilmington Optimist Little League, and by creating a youth basketball tournament with friends like Major Hairston and Maurice Prichett. Through it all, Ted continued his career in education, where he served as an administrator focused on elementary education, special education, ESL programs, and parental engagement for over three decades in Wilmington, New Castle County, and the Red Clay Consolidated School Districts; and an evening instructor at the University of Delaware and Delaware Technical and Community College.

But Ted knew that more needed to be done, and he had to once again suit up and step onto the court — the court of politics. Ted’s philosophy was simple — work hard and make a positive impact — and it was that philosophy that led him to pursue public office. In 1984, he was elected to represent the first councilmanic district on the Wilmington City Council, and in 2000, became president of the council. In total, he would serve the people of Wilmington for nearly 25 years in these roles.

Of his accomplishments, he was immensely proud of the scholarship fund he created that became city-wide under his leadership and the students who would go on to do great things; he extended the hours of operation for local community centers; and he secured critical funding for Wilmington elementary schools that were under-resourced. Ted was also instrumental in revitalizing the City of Wilmington’s Riverfront. He would say, “Some have sight. They open their eyes and see what is. And some have vision, they close their eyes and see the future.” Ted saw what was and made it better.

For all of Ted’s professional accomplishments, many throughout Delaware knew him first and foremost as a friend, mentor, confidante, and trusted advisor. Put simply, everybody knew Ted Blunt — and Ted Blunt knew everybody. Ted was an institution in Wilmington and Delaware politics for decades, and even long after his time in public office, his opinion and input were sought by leaders from Delaware to the White House.

In addition to his late parents, John and Helen Blunt, Ted was preceded in death by his sister, Jean D. Richards.

Ted is survived by his wife of 62 years, Alice; brother, John Blunt (Donna) of Pennsylvania; sister, Catherine Blunt of Pennsylvania; three daughters, the Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester of Wilmington, Delaware, Thea Blunt Fowler (Mark) of Atlanta, Georgia, and Marla Blunt-Carter (Richard) of Wilmington, Delaware; six grandchildren, Alex (Ebony), Alyssa, Miles, Jordan, and Hannah, one great-granddaughter, Lennox, and a loving extended family.

All in all, Ted taught us to smile brightly, laugh freely, and love fully!

In lieu of flowers, please contribute online or by check to the Ted Blunt Memorial Fund, which will provide scholarships in his name. Checks should be made payable to: Delaware Community Foundation with “Blunt Memorial” in the memo line. The mailing address is PO Box 1636, Wilmington, DE 19899. ■

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.

- Mrs. Gloria L. Barsky, SSW’86
- Mrs. Joan Silver Blau, SSW’78
- Mr. Theodore Blunt, SSW’68
- Ms. Maureen J. Clancy, SSW’98
- Mrs. Anita G. Cohn, SSW’58
- Mr. Maurice Cotton, SSW’18
- Mrs. Frances A. Dolan, SSW’91
- Mr. Lamar F. Dourte, LCSW, SSW’76
- Ms. Judi Fiederer, SSW’95
- Ms. Judith G. Fredericks, SSW’81
- Mrs. Ruth E. Gandek, SSW’83
- Ms. Susan Maria Giordano, SSW’85
- Mr. Raymond Harvier, SSW’04
- Dr. N. Hilary Hays, SSW’74
- Mr. W. Wallace Hill II, SSW’58
- Mrs. Ellen W. Hosley, SSW’81
- Ms. Susan P. Iaccarino, SSW’84
- Margaret Davis Jelly, LCSW, SSW’92
- Mr. Christopher T. Jones, SSW’16
- Mr. H. David Lawrence, SSW’72
- Barbara Milton, II, Ph.D., LCSW, SSW’01
- Mr. Arthur Cyril Monczka, SSW’70
- Mr. Alan M. Syslo, SSW’96
- Mrs. Cornelia Boyden Thum, SSW’73
- Ms. Eugenia E. Vollmann, SSW’88
- Ms. Diane L. Zonani, SSW’92

SOCIAL WORK INTERNS FIND A WORLD OF NEED IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

By **SHERRIE NEGREA**

Originally published in *Rutgers Today*

W

hen Sofia Lorraine Mico learned that she would be assigned to the Edison Public Library for her senior internship, she didn't understand why a library would need a student majoring in social work.

Yet within a few weeks, the Rutgers senior found herself helping a woman who walked into the library looking for a homeless shelter. A deaf man living in a hotel asked where he could find an apartment that accepted federal housing vouchers. And a woman who is not a native English speaker couldn't fill out an application for benefits.

Her opinion about whether social workers should work in libraries began to change. "We provide certain resources that sometimes our librarians can't because you have to really do a deep dive into what that person really needs," she says. "And the librarians may not have the time."

With public libraries shifting into community centers that offer social service resources, Rutgers launched a program this year to place social work interns in libraries across central New Jersey. The program followed a trend among municipal libraries in the state to bring social workers on staff to work with patrons requesting social services.

"The role of libraries has changed pretty significantly over the last 20 years," says Jen Nelson, the New Jersey State Librarian. Checking out books, she adds, "is not the purpose of libraries anymore. Libraries are really about connecting and improving communities, and working with individuals to do that."

After a planning committee set up by the New Jersey State Library recommended that Rutgers develop the internship program, eight libraries in Somerset and Middlesex counties requested a senior majoring in social work or a graduate student earning a master of social work degree. The New Jersey State Library allocated about \$150,000 for the program, which covers the interns' stipends, Nelson says.

The interns are not only learning how to interact with people with a wide range of needs, but they are also helping libraries address social service needs in their communities, says Nancy Schley, associate director of practicum learning for the Rutgers

School of Social Work.

"When students enter into a setting, they are eager to learn and they are eager to participate," Schley says. "So it helps to invigorate the library staff in terms of what's possible."

After finding that many patrons were asking about housing, alumna Agny Valle, who completed her master's degree in social work this spring, created a bilingual workshop on affordable housing at the New Brunswick Free Public Library that offered information on tenant's rights. She has also drawn on her own experience as a child of Mexican immigrants to help Spanish-speaking patrons, including a woman who needed assistance filling out applications for a job, an apartment, and Medicaid.

"It was very rewarding to be able to speak in Spanish and let her know that I understand where she's coming from, especially because my family members have had similar experiences," she says.

The interns have discovered that many patrons who need services are often reluctant to approach them for help. The libraries, however, have promoted the program by posting flyers about the interns in their lobbies and placed signs at the interns' desks.

One group of people that can be difficult to work with are the homeless, Mico says. "When the temperatures are dropping, a lot of unhoused people are in

the library," she says. "But the thing is, as much as I want to, I can't help them unless they want my help."

Rutgers senior Ashley McDowell found a way to start conversations with patrons at the Manville Public Library by creating sets of resource cards with QR codes that link to community resources, such as rehabilitation centers or support groups. She says she has designed "a card for any kind of problem that anyone might face."

For McDowell, working in the Manville library has changed her plans for a career in social work. She initially thought she would specialize in the field of substance abuse, but she says the internship opened her up to other career paths.

"After being at the library, I realize there are so many other things that I could be doing with my social work degree other than substance abuse," she says. "You can use a degree in social work for so many different things, and that's what I've learned working at the library." ■



Ashley McDowell

e n d p a g e



“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
120 Albany Street, Tower One, Suite 200
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Visit us on the web: socialwork.rutgers.edu

Email us at: lzazenski@ssw.rutgers.edu

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