

PARTNERING *for* CHANGE

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



RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK WELCOMES A NEW DEAN

The School of Social Work has a new dean, George S. Leibowitz. Who is committed to building on existing strengths, addressing pressing social challenges, and growing the School's programs so they're accessible to all.



C O N T E N T S



“Be courageous. Challenge orthodoxy. Stand up for what you believe in. When you are in your rocking chair talking to your grandchildren many years from now, be sure you have a good story to tell.”

AMAL CLOONEY



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We welcome your comments and
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Dear Rutgers School of Social Work
Community,

It is my distinct honor to serve you as dean
of Rutgers School of Social Work.

The School has had an impressive history
as a leader in social work education since
its founding in 1954, and I am energized
by the opportunity to build upon its many
accomplishments. Today, with its top-
ranked academic programs, research centers
and institutes, and continuing education
offerings, the School remains a powerhouse
of innovative pedagogy, research productivity,
and community-based teaching and practice
led by pioneering faculty and leaders in
the field. Deeply grounded in inclusion,
intersectionality, diversity, equity, and
advancement, our School presents a force for
good in New Jersey and the world at large.

I step into this role during what some are
calling an unprecedented time that has been
mired in conflict. But I believe complex
problems have always existed and will
continue to challenge us. It's up to us, from
nascent social workers to those who have
spent decades in the field, to curtail divisions
by acknowledging, assessing, and developing
appropriate actions to the issues we face. This
work is what I believe is at the heart of social
work. It is our job to collaborate and lead
humanity forward. Together, we can elevate
the common good through innovative and
restorative approaches that are deeply rooted
in equity. Some of the specific challenges I
plan to address during my tenure as dean are
bridging divides within and outside our



communities, making programs accessible
and equitable, and tackling barriers
to education through innovation and
technology, all while reminding our
community what brought them to social
work and why they're here.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my predecessors
and the outstanding faculty and staff whose
talents and commitment have elevated
our School to being named one of the top
in the nation. With our dynamic students
and alumni, the School of Social Work
community is a thriving group that I am
proud to serve.

I hope you will join me in this work moving
toward a more just future.

In Community,

George S. Leibowitz, Ph.D.
DEAN AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK CELEBRATES CLASS OF 2024 AT CONVOCATION CEREMONY

On Monday, May 13, Rutgers School of Social Work hosted a convocation ceremony to recognize its BASW, MSW, DSW, and Ph.D. graduates. Families and friends gathered at Jersey Mike's Arena in New Brunswick in support of their loved ones who have spent years of hard work completing their programs and tackling countless hours of class time, research, and practicum work. In total, 851 graduates earned a degree from the School of Social Work this year, including 705 MSW grads, 128 BASW grads, 12 DSW grads, and 6 Ph.D. grads.

Rutgers School of Social Work Interim Dean Richard L. Edwards welcomed guests to the ceremony, and Rutgers University–New Brunswick Chancellor Francine Conway shared congratulatory remarks with the Class of 2024. Dr. Susan L. Parish, President of Mercy University and a Rutgers School of Social Work alum, delivered the convocation address. Along with the conferral of the degrees, the School presented the following awards in recognition of the students' outstanding work:

MSW

- Outstanding MSW Student in the Clinical Specialization: Deborah Halpern and Ganaia Swinton
- Outstanding MSW Student in the MAP Specialization: Sarah Manship
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Online Program: Kamiya Modh
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Intensive Weekend Program: Thomas Kinloch
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Blended Program: Patrick Allred
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in Newark: Olivia Cole
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in Camden: Danielle Luczak
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in New Brunswick: Deborah Wang

BASW

- Outstanding Student in the Camden BASW Program: Prince Alvarado
- Outstanding Student in the New Brunswick BASW Program: Latonya Johnson
- Brian C. Wright Social Work Award: Jennifer Clarke



Ph.D.

- Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award: Catherine Buttner
- Dean's Honorable Mention for Dissertation of the Year Award: Alicia Mendez
- Excellence in Faculty Mentoring in the Ph.D. Program Award: Emmy Tiderington
- Ph.D. Professor of the Year: Lenna Nepomnyaschy

In addition, faculty and staff members were presented the following awards:

- Outstanding Professor in Clinical Specialization: Tawanda Hubbard
- Outstanding Professor in MAP Specialization: Karun Singh
- Outstanding Professor for Excellence in Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement (IIDEA) Teaching: Mary Beth Ali
- Outstanding Professor for Innovative and Creative Teaching: Vivien Anthony
- Most Supportive Professor: Rachel Schwartz
- Outstanding Lecturer: Frank Greenagel
- Outstanding Doctoral Student Teaching in the BASW or MSW Programs: Amy Geller
- Most Supportive Staff Member: Janice Svizeny

To round out the program, student speaker Tymeera A. Freeman, a member of the MSW Class of 2024, addressed the audience with words of encouragement and support. Freeman is a proud native of Newark, New Jersey, who plans to become a clinical social worker. She is committed to standing up for those who are marginalized and oppressed, aiming to empower and inspire others.

Interim Dean Edwards concluded the ceremony with words of encouragement for the Class of 2024. "Graduates, you have been prepared for a wonderful career in social work by an outstanding group of faculty and practicum instructors," he said. "We wish you great success and know your legendary class will change the world. We are so very proud of you!" ■

OFFICE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION HOSTS EIGHTH ANNUAL CHALLENGING RACISM CONFERENCE

Rutgers School of Social Work's Office of Continuing Education hosted its eighth annual Challenging Racial Disparities Conference, "A Call to Action," on Wednesday, June 5, bringing together more than 700 social workers and allied professionals for a powerful learning opportunity.

"The annual conference is held to help empower social workers to address the impact of racism in their practice in both small and large ways," said Douglas Behan, associate professor of professional practice and director of Continuing Education.

Interim Dean and Distinguished Professor Richard L. Edwards welcomed participants to the virtual event and offered initial remarks. "We're at a very critical period in our nation's history," he said. "It's a difficult time, and I think the topic of this conference is extremely important. I'm glad to see that so many social workers are participating in this conference today."

The keynote lecture was delivered by Dr. Joy DeGruy, a prominent researcher, professor, and author who has spent over 30 years studying and working in the field of social work with a focus on the impacts of racism, trauma, and slavery on African Americans. Dr. DeGruy is the author of the notable book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*.

Each year, the keynote lecture is offered in honor of social work professor Dr. William Neal Brown, the first Black professor at



Rutgers, who passed away in 2009. During his childhood, Dr. Brown knew his race placed him at a disadvantage. Even though he excelled in high school, he was denied the opportunity to be recognized as valedictorian solely because of the color of his skin. After high school, Dr. Brown graduated from Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), majoring in English and history. He was also a renowned debater, and in 1961, he substituted at the request of students for Rutgers School of Law professor C. Clyde Ferguson, in a debate with Malcolm X on the subject of integration. Dr. Brown served with the Tuskegee Army as a captain during World War II as a special services officer with the 618th Bomb Squadron. Dr. Brown's longtime partner, Suzanne Zimmer, supports the annual conference to acknowledge Brown's legacy and contributions to Rutgers.

Following the keynote was a panel discussion moderated by Natalie Bemby, EdD, MSW, LCSW. Panelists included Sylvia Chan-Malik, PhD, Nayeli Chavez-Dueñas, PhD, Joy DeGruy, MSW, PhD, and Mark Lamar, MSW, MBA, LCSW.

Attendees gained new skills and ideas to address issues of race in their practice with clients, organizations, communities, and within themselves. "This was my first time attending the conference and it was wonderful," said a participant. "I left feeling impacted and charged to reassess the work I've been called to do." ■

DR. SANDRA EDMONDS CREWE NAMED 2024-25 SOJOURNER TRUTH SOCIAL & RACIAL JUSTICE VISITING PROFESSOR

Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe, Professor and Dean Emerita at Howard University School of Social Work in Washington, D.C., was named the 2024-25 Rutgers School of Social Work Sojourner Truth Social & Racial Justice Visiting Professor.

Dean Crewe's research includes three substantive areas: (1) Black older adults, (2) leadership, and (3) community engagement with communities of color, all of which are central to the work at Rutgers School of Social Work and in contemporary social work research nationally. Dean Crewe has published nearly 30 peer-reviewed journal articles. She currently has funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



Her most recent book published by Oxford University Press is *Social Work, White Supremacy and Racial Justice: Reckoning with our History, Interrogating our Present, Past, and Future*. Dr. Crewe is a National Association of Social Work pioneer and recipient of the Next Avenue Influencer in Aging Award and Elizabeth Hurlock Beckman Trust Award.

Dr. Crewe said, "I am honored to serve as the Sojourner Truth Visiting Professor at Rutgers School of Social Work. The extraordinary legacy of Sojourner Truth is commensurate with the social justice values of our profession. I look forward to engaging with RUSSW faculty, staff, and students." ■

MPIs **Edward Alessi** (Professor and MSW Program Director at Rutgers School of Social Work) and Gabriel Robles (University of Southern California) received a \$275,000 grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities for their project, A Mixed-Methods Study of the Social Ecological and Integration Factors Associated with HIV Prevention Behaviors Among Latino/x Sexual Minority Migrant Men in the U.S.

ALESSI

Qiana L. Brown, Assistant Professor, is a co-I on a \$3,263,440 NIH/NIDA-funded R01 entitled, Modes of cannabis administration and polysubstance use among women before and during pregnancy. This 5-year grant (9/2023-7/2028) was awarded to Dr. Kelly Young-Wolff (PI, Kaiser Permanente). During the award period, Dr. Brown will serve as the PI of a \$161,080 subaward to Rutgers University.

To learn more about this project, visit the NIH's RePORTER and search for grant number R01DA058201.

BROWN

Professor of Professional Practice and Director of the Latina/o/x Initiatives for Service, Training, and Assessment (LISTA) Certificate Program **Elsa Candelario** (PI) received a \$260,000 award from the Latino Action Network Foundation to support the LISTA Certificate Program to recruit and train 12-18 bilingual MSW students by 2025. She also received an award from the University of Alabama School of Social Work for DSW students' contributions to social work education. The award recognized her development of the Puerto Rico study abroad course and the receipt of significant grants that provide twenty five \$10,000 scholarships to bilingual MSW students.

CANDELARIO

Assistant Professor **Ashley Jackson** was chosen to serve as a research contributor to the City of St. Louis Reparations Commission to lend her expertise on historical police violence. Dr. Jackson also received the Rutgers University-New Brunswick Center for Historical Analysis Faculty Fellowship Award and was chosen to be a Future of Families and Child Well-Being Study Summer Data Workshop participant.

JACKSON

Associate Dean for Research, Distinguished Professor and Director, Center for Gambling Studies & Co-Director of the Addiction Counselor Training (ACT) Certificate Program **Lia Nower** (PI) received a total of \$5.1 million from the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement and New Jersey Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to evaluate betting patterns and impacts of Internet gaming and sports wagering on problem gambling in the State of New Jersey and to examine the effectiveness of responsible gambling measures on limiting harmful play.

NOWER

Assistant Professor & Chancellor's Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Racial Minority Health **Michael Park** (Co-I) and Yoonsun Choi (PI, University of Chicago) received a \$3 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to extend an existing longitudinal study of young Asian Americans that started in 2014 to track family processes and racial experiences from adolescence to late young adulthood to investigate their impact on Asian American young adult adjustment.

PARK

Associate Professor **Emmy Tiderington** was one of 57 homelessness researcher *amici curiae* on the amicus brief opposing the use of arrest and fines to address homelessness in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Grants Pass v. Johnson*. The court's decision will have wide-reaching consequences for communities and individuals across the nation. The brief called on the court to make an evidence-based decision when deciding what was arguably the most significant Supreme Court case in decades about the rights of unhoused people.

TIDERINGTON



“Rather than banning books, leave it up to parents and guardians to have critical conversations with children. School boards should not be making decisions to ban books, which, in essence, restricts information that parents can use to inform their conversations with their children. Books can be written at developmentally appropriate levels for children of various ages with language that can help them understand themselves and the world around them.”

'Parents' Rights' movements forget families have the right to read LGBTQ+ books

Professor & MSW Program Director Edward Alessi with co-authors Jacquelynn Duron and Gabriel Robles in *Advocate*



“Disparities across the spectrum of health conditions and ‘diseases of despair’ have been worsening in rural communities, a phenomenon sometimes called the rural mortality penalty. It is essential that leaders across governmental, health department, and academic sectors initiate and sustain equal partnerships with rural leaders as a means of building trust and helping better address the needs, concerns, and solutions of rural residents.”

Exploring geography-based health disparities in Michigan

Associate Professor Jamey Lister in *The Michigan Daily* on his 2020 study on opioid prescribing and overdoses, which showed urban counties in Michigan had consistently higher opioid-overdose death rates while rural counties had higher opioid prescription rates



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

Rutgers social work interns find a world of need in Central Jersey public libraries

Assistant Professor of Teaching and Associate Director of Practicum Learning Nancy Schley in *My Central Jersey*



“My reaction is: What did you think was going to happen? You just blanket the country with all this opportunity to gamble on sports. All of these advertisements, enticements, inducements. And we know from the research literature that athletes in particular have higher rates of gambling problems.”

Risking Everything to Lose Money

Associate Dean for Research, Distinguished Professor, Director of the Center for Gambling Studies, and Co-Director of the Addiction Counselor Training Certificate Program Lia Nower in *The Atlantic* in response to the recent bans and suspensions in professional sports from gambling



“For unhoused people with very high needs, housing first is the most effective approach for helping this particular population stay housed.”

One street at a time, one day at a time — the work to end homelessness

Associate Professor Emmy Tiderington in *NJ Spotlight News*



“Generally speaking, there are fewer women with gambling disorder compared with men. But when we talk about the reasons why people gamble, women are more likely to say that they gamble to help deal with negative emotional state. In both the US and Canada, women in military service or on police forces are exposed to sexual harassment and assault on the job. Understanding how being in that emotionally stressful environment potentially leads to gambling disorder for women is an area we need to pay more attention to.”

'Gambling addiction on steroids': fears of betting crisis at heart of US military

Assistant Professor Mark van der Maas in *The Guardian*



MOTHER-DAUGHTER GRADUATES SUPPORTED EACH OTHER THROUGH RUTGERS JOURNEY

By ROYA RAFEI, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN RUTGERS TODAY

They live together. They attend school together, and in May, mother-daughter Latonya Johnson and Laila Birchett graduated together from Rutgers School of Social Work.

“My family – my kids, my mom and dad – everyone is proud because it’s two generations going to college together,” said Johnson, 43. “I never thought in a million years, I’d be going to school with my daughter and graduating in the same college and major. It’s kind of surreal but it has brought us closer because we connected on a level that I never thought I’d connect with my kids.”

She and Birchett, 21, both transferred to Rutgers in September 2022 from Middlesex College and Montclair State University respectively.

At the time, Birchett was a psychology major with no clear vision of her career path. She just knew she wanted to enter a field that allowed her to help others, especially the homeless or the elderly. Johnson was already helping others as a certified alcohol and drug counselor, but she wanted to complete her education, a life-long goal that kept getting postponed.

“My first college course was in 1999,” said Johnson, a divorced mother of six, whose children range in age from 4 to 26. “From 1999 to now, I’ve attempted to go back six different times, but I was unsuccessful. I didn’t have the proper time management because I was a wife, a mother, and working full time.”

She realized the only way to finish her education was to go back to school full time. That meant giving up her full-time job for a part-time position. The decision was frightening because it meant scaling back her income while taking on additional student-loan debt.

She credits the Rutgers community with getting her through it – the programs for nontraditional, first-generation students; the mentoring; the sisterhood at Douglass Residential College but especially the available scholarships. Johnson said programs like the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) and Thrive SSS provided the extra support she needed. “If it weren’t for those scholarships, I probably wouldn’t be here right now,” Johnson said.

“College is my lifeline,” added Johnson, who has been working for the Crisis Services Division of the National Call Center at Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, answering New Jersey 988 calls since last July. “The same way it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to support a nontraditional student.”

Birchett has noticed all her mother’s hard work.

“Her journey has been truly inspiring,” Birchett said. “It’s encouraged me to work harder in college.”

Johnson knew that she’d eventually want to obtain her master’s degree in social work. She started looking at schools that offered an

accelerated program in social work where students can obtain their master’s degrees within a year of graduating. Johnson started going on college tours and Birchett came along. Johnson settled on Rutgers. In some ways, her decision was an easy one to make. The school, considered one of the best in the country, is close to her North Brunswick home, has a diverse population, and offers an Advanced Standing program, allowing her a fast track to her master’s degree.

On those school tours and in conversations with her mom, Birchett learned more about the field and realized that social work, rather than psychology, is more aligned with the career she envisioned for herself.

In their time at Rutgers, they took only one class together, and they rarely studied together because of their schedules. But they relied on one another. Birchett gave her mother tech support, helping her navigate the various computer programs that a college student now uses. Johnson helped her daughter better understand her schoolwork, providing her with the real-life experience and knowledge that a college student can use.

In another way, Johnson was like Birchett’s guidance counselor, encouraging her to pursue her master’s degree and telling her it was easier and quicker to do at 21 rather than later in life.

“Go for your master’s because I’m telling you from my experience, you can have more opportunities, you can evolve and make more money,” Johnson recalls telling her daughter. “I’m telling you what no one told me.”

Birchett listened to her mother’s advice. The duo plans to enter the master of social work program at Rutgers later this year.

“I feel she’s always been someone I can look up to because, like she said, when she was my age, her parents didn’t understand the college process. I think without her, I’d be truly lost.”

Birchett admits that it was a bit strange to go to the same school as her mother, who can connect with others more easily than she can. But it was Birchett who helped her mother find a community at Rutgers. When Birchett attended a program for transfer students, she learned about Douglass Residential College.

“When they told me about Douglass, I said, ‘Yes, this is what I’ve been looking for’ because I really wanted to find a sense of community. It was really welcoming.”

She encouraged her mom to join, and they both ended up with the same mentor, Madinah Elamin, senior director of diversity, equity and inclusion at Douglass. Elamin told Johnson about scholarships, helped her with class schedules and setting goals, and introduced her to the Bunting Program for nontraditional students.

“I made a 4.0 and I’m proud,” Johnson said. “I remember one time someone said to me, ‘Nobody cares about the GPA nowadays,’ and I said, ‘For me that means everything because you don’t know my story.’ It matters to me. There is so much behind that. I know how far I’ve come and what it will mean for my family.” ■

RICHARD L. EDWARDS RECEIVES NASW LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Chancellor Emeritus and Distinguished University Professor Richard L. Edwards, PhD, ACSW, has been a social worker since his graduation from Augustana College in 1965, and began his career as a social work trainee at Chicago State Hospital. He subsequently earned his master's degree in social work from the University of Chicago

School of Social Service Administration. After several years at the Illinois Department of Mental Health and at agencies serving children and families, he returned to Augustana where he taught and served as founding director of its undergraduate social work major. During that time, he was elected president of his local NASW chapter and in 1972, received the chapter's Social Worker of the Year Award for outstanding contributions. From 1974 to 1978, he worked at the NASW national office, directing the chapter services office and later the continuing education and professional development programs. In 1986, he earned his PhD in public administration and policy at the State University of New York at Albany, receiving the Distinguished Doctoral Dissertation Award.

Over the years, Dr. Edwards has devoted his life to educating generations of social workers. He has served as a faculty member, practicum learning director, associate dean and/or dean at several schools of social work. He served as associate dean and acting dean at the School of Social Work at the State University of New York at Albany, and as dean at Case Western Reserve University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he also served for nearly a year as interim provost. Later, at Rutgers University, Dr. Edwards served as dean of the School of Social Work and then served

as executive vice president for Academic Affairs, as Interim President, and then for five years as chancellor of Rutgers-New Brunswick. For the 2022-24 academic year, he was called upon to serve as interim dean of the Rutgers School of Social Work during its search for a new dean. Throughout his distinguished career, Dr. Edwards also served in a variety of nonprofit and public organizations as a consultant and has served on the boards of multiple nonprofit organizations.

Throughout his lifetime of achievement and commitment to social work values as a practitioner and educator, Dr. Edwards continued to be actively involved in NASW at the state chapter and regional levels and later at the national level. In 1987, he received the Social Worker of the Year Award from the NASW New York State Chapter. That same year, he was elected as a member-at-large to the NASW National Board of Directors, and later was elected treasurer. From 1989 to 1991, Dr. Edwards took the helm as NASW's president and provided governance oversight and leadership of the organization.

Dr. Edwards has been honored with prestigious recognitions such as the University of Chicago's Edith Abbott Distinguished Alumni Award, the University of North Carolina's Alumni Distinguished Professorship, a Fulbright Senior Scholar award, and the National Network for Social Work Management's Chauncey Alexander Lifetime Achievement Award. His contributions extend through 18 authored or co-authored books, including serving as editor-in-chief for the three-volume set of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work 19th Edition* and the related supplement, published by the NASW Press. Additionally, he has more than 30 peer-reviewed articles, 25 book chapters and conference proceedings, 34 manuals or brief articles, editorials, and book reviews, 13 editorial assignments for various professional journals, and more than 60 conference presentations. His dedication to professional and community service is reflected in his membership and leadership service in numerous organizations. His expansive list of academic service activities, teaching and research agendas, global faculty appointments, and dissertation committees has continued over the lifetime of his career. Notably, as the principal investigator, he has successfully secured grants and contracts totaling more than 46 million dollars.

For his unwavering dedication to a lifelong career that has profoundly influenced social work education, institutions, faculty, and generations of social workers, we applaud and honor Dr. Richard L. Edwards as the recipient of the NASW National Lifetime Achievement Award. ■



RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK WELCOMES DR. GEORGE S. LEIBOWITZ AS DEAN

The School of Social Work has a new dean who is committed to building on existing strengths, addressing pressing social challenges, and growing the School's programs so they're accessible to all.



George Leibowitz is an educator, interdisciplinary scholar, administrator, and social worker. And, on July 1, he became the Rutgers School of Social Work's newest dean.

Dean Leibowitz arrives at Rutgers from Stony Brook University, where he made a significant impact as a professor in the School of Social Welfare, director of the social welfare Ph.D. program, and chair of the Appointment,

Promotion, and Tenure Committee. He 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. A committed collaborator, his diverse expertise also spanned cross-appointments as a professor in both the nursing school and the medical school's psychiatry department. Prior to his role at Stony Brook, Dean Leibowitz was a faculty member at the University of Vermont, where he chaired the social work department and taught in the nursing school. He earned his MSW and Ph.D. from the University of Denver, bringing with him a wealth of experience and a broad perspective.

Dean Leibowitz is a leading expert on opioid addiction and an interdisciplinary researcher and licensed clinician specializing in adult and adolescent mental health, substance abuse assessment, and treatment across the lifespan. His research delves into the social determinants of health and health disparities. At Stony Brook, he employed cutting-edge artificial intelligence and informatics to tackle real-world community challenges and improve health outcomes. Dean Leibowitz has co-authored two books, and his research has been featured in prominent journals such as *JAMA*, the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, the *Journal of Primary Care and Community Health*, and *Child and Adolescent Social Work*.

"Dr. Leibowitz is an excellent match for the School of Social Work—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," said Francine Conway, Ph.D., Rutgers University–New Brunswick Chancellor and Distinguished Professor.

Learn more about Dean Leibowitz, his goals and priorities, and his excitement for the future of Rutgers School of Social Work.

What was it about Rutgers School of Social Work that attracted you to this position?

First is Rutgers' relationship to the state, as well as its extraordinary history from its inception as Queen's College through its establishment as a land grant institution. It's been incredibly compelling to learn this narrative and feel the depth of its impact come alive today.

Most importantly, I was drawn to the Rutgers community, particularly the warm culture of the University, and its extraordinary growth trajectory. Rutgers has such compelling reach and tangible statewide impact thanks to the location of its three geographical campuses that provide rich educational and professional opportunities for us to engage in practice within urban, suburban, and rural communities. As dean of the School of Social Work, I'm committed to working together to identify opportunities for even deeper community

engagement—which is an integral part of the Rutgers-New Brunswick Academic Master Plan—and making local impact in areas where the need is greatest.

Rutgers' reputation and rankings were also very impressive to me, with the School of Social Work ranking 12th out of 319 MSW programs nationally (and number one in New Jersey) by *U.S. News & World Report*. I saw this as an exceptional opportunity to build on an already strong school and program and develop enhanced partnerships.

I had a chance to meet with School leadership and was impressed by how they broke ground in inventive ways. These include areas like technology-driven approaches to research in data science, ending violence, and substance abuse treatment solutions, to name a few. Rutgers School of Social Work is an expansive and innovative school, with vast online programming and continuing education focused on meeting the needs of the social work community—all while actively working towards equity and inclusion, which is something many institutions only talk about. The diversity of the faculty, staff, student, and alumni communities reflects the rich diversity of New Jersey and speaks to this commitment. The School's exemplary students were icing on the cake.

I've been thinking for years about where I would land in my career, and stepping into this position is a big undertaking. I'm confident that Rutgers School of Social Work is where I was meant to be. Having come from Stony Brook, which is another flagship university, I felt prepared for leadership at an institution like Rutgers and arriving here felt like coming home.

What are your goals as dean?

My first goal is to build upon relationships throughout the state of New Jersey. Together, we will create opportunities for innovation and community engaged work, which is an important goal of our school's strategic plan, *Toward a More Just Future*. I've already discussed this plan with many faculty, staff, students, and alumni in the short time I've been here, and I'm deeply committed to advancing community engagement that provides services and ensures our research is attentive to community needs.

My second goal is to enhance our already strong programs by sharpening our focus on social justice. The School of Social Work is obviously an accredited, highly ranked school, and I believe inspiring our faculty, staff, and students to recommit to addressing pressing social issues will elevate our work. By employing new approaches that put inclusivity and belonging at the heart of what we do, we can expand upon the areas where we're already committed and enhance new partnerships to address injustices at all levels.

I share in Rutgers' commitment to data science and using technology in ethical and thoughtful ways to address pressing social issues, understanding that we need human-centric ways of addressing social problems. Building partnerships across schools and centers throughout the university will allow us to contribute robustly to interprofessional education and research with the attentiveness to social issues.

Thirdly, as we all recognize the divisions currently happening in our communities and on college campuses, I want to work together to build bridges across our differences and grow collaboratively. We as leaders and teachers need to reflect the lived experiences of our students. Who we are and who we develop into as a faculty and school should also reflect the communities we serve.



What will be your first priority and why?

Rutgers is a huge institution with many students and faculty, as well as robust and complex departments, centers, and institutes across many locations. It is important and I look forward to learning about the varied aspirations across our school and the communities we serve. I have been reading a lot about the history of Rutgers, where we've been, and where we're going—in particular, our own strategic plan for the school and what that means for the campus climate.

What are you most excited about in your new role and why?

I look forward to welcoming new faculty and staff who complement the strong team we already have and fostering new relationships across the university. Every university has its challenges, but my sense is that while we are in an era where many schools are withdrawing and isolating, Rutgers is progressing. Rutgers is also the kind of institution that is fully

engaged and encourages its deans and other leadership to be as well. We're front and center on tackling issues in a forward-thinking way, and that thrills me.

I'm also excited to be at a big school that excels in sports. I have two boys who are so entrenched in sports and are excited to join the community of a Big Ten school, become fans of the Scarlet Knights, and apply to become students here themselves one day.

What do you believe are the biggest challenges that lie ahead for social work education?

Despite the growing number of students who are interested in social work, there are barriers to earning a degree and thriving in the workplace. Some of the biggest challenges include accessing quality care and getting the training needed to hit the ground running in a competitive environment. Social work education must be innovative and accessible. We must align the structure of our programs to accommodate people living busy lives and raising families. Education also must be affordable, which is certainly a challenge. We are committed to supporting our students beyond their time at Rutgers, providing an engaged and growing alumni network with whom the RUSSW Alumni Council commits to providing professional support and engagement. As the field evolves, we will continue to evolve alongside it.

Another important challenge many of us are discussing is the divisiveness on college campuses and, indeed, in the world. How can we work within differences and address fragmentation and divides? How can we build a more cohesive, productive, and respectful culture? To that end, I've been working on issues surrounding restorative justice and improving civil discourse. It is important that we work toward collaboration to address issues of equity and justice. Our profession is on the front lines of this work.

What are your hopes for the future of the School of Social Work?

I hope Rutgers School of Social Work continues its evolution as a productive, community-engaged school with a commitment to academic excellence where everyone has a place. Where everyone who engages with us develops rich and impactful partnerships and has a rewarding experience. Where the academic environment is responsive to inclusivity and where we continue to develop an infrastructure that fosters equity. I hope our school becomes a trailblazer in bridging divides and is a place where people love to work together to achieve that goal. Our ability to do this as a school and as a university is based on our ability to work together and build connections and partnerships on campus and with agencies within diverse communities across New Jersey. These goals are achievable with the strong commitment and dedication of all our community members. Our faculty, staff, students, and alumni are terrific and I hope we can continue to build out this wonderful culture. ■



THANKING DR. KATHLEEN J. POTTICK FOR 43 YEARS OF SERVICE

After more than four decades of service to Rutgers University, Dr. Kathleen J. Pottick retired from her roles as tenured professor at Rutgers School of Social Work and core faculty at Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research. During her tenure at Rutgers, she served in a variety of administrative positions in the School of Social Work, including acting dean (2011-2013) and associate dean for faculty development (2009-2011).

The bulk of Dr. Pottick's research has focused on better understanding and developing strategies for removing the barriers to the provision of effective mental health services for children, adolescents, and disadvantaged populations. One line of research investigates racial and ethnic disparities in mental health service use for youths in the United States with serious emotional disorders. Another line targets clinicians' views on youths' emotional problems and the correlates of biased perceptions.

She is co-author of *The Parents' Perspective: Delinquency, Aggression and Mental Health* (with Paul Lerman), an analysis of adolescents receiving outpatient mental health services in Newark, New Jersey; and (with Miwa Yasui) of *Measures for Mental Health Practice with Diverse Racial and Ethnic Populations: From Perceptions of Distress to Treatment Experiences* (under contract). She has published

in the fields of social work, psychology, and psychiatry, with articles appearing in *Social Service Review*, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, and *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. Her article there, upon which her book is based, “Conceptualizing culturally-infused engagement and its measurement for ethnic minority and immigrant children and families,” won sole honorable mention for the 2018 award for Excellence in Research from the Society for Social Work and Research. Her research studies have been funded by federal government and foundation sources (e.g., National Institute of Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Annie E. Casey and Robin Hood Foundations).

She was named as a fellow to the honorary society of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare in 2019 for outstanding contributions to social work and social welfare. Most recently, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Foundation named Dr. Pottick a Social Work Pioneer. NASW Pioneers are social workers who have explored new territories and built outposts for human services on many frontiers.

In her 43 years at Rutgers, Dr. Pottick estimates she taught 3,000 graduate students. She also held appointments as invited visiting scholar at the University of California-San Francisco’s department of psychiatry, the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (now the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy and Practice), the University at Albany School of Social Work, the University of South Florida’s Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, and the University of Michigan School of Social Work. She was also Katherine E. McBride Visiting Associate Professor at Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.

“I am pleased to offer my congratulations to Professor Kathleen Pottick for her wonderful career,” said Richard L. Edwards, Ph.D., Chancellor Emeritus and Distinguished University Professor. “Kathy’s contributions to the School and the University have been tremendous. Upon joining the faculty, she steadily moved up the ranks from Assistant Professor to Professor, and her impact on the careers of thousands of students over those years was significant. She also served our School for two years as acting dean and previously also served as associate dean for faculty development. She has been recognized throughout social work education nationally for her research contributions in the area of health and social work. For me, personally, it was a great pleasure and honor to work with Kathy during my years at Rutgers. As she enters this new phase of her life, she will be missed by me, as well as by our faculty colleagues and our students. I wish her the very best in her retirement.”

Alum Yamalis Diaz, Ph.D., a clinical child psychologist and clinical associate professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at New York University, considers Dr. Pottick her mentor. “I’m honestly not sure what she saw in me as a young student,” said

Dr. Diaz. “Truthfully, I didn’t see anything myself yet. I struggled with deep-seated imposter syndrome and was unsure how I had gotten that far and feared that I would fail. Dr. Pottick never let me. And with each passing opportunity she gave me, with each mentorship discussion, with each gently tough nudge, she managed to convince me I could do something bigger than I ever thought possible. And once she had nudged me onto that path, she wouldn’t let me leave it. I recall a lunch meeting with her where I tearfully explained I couldn’t leave home for graduate school because my family needed me close following the loss of my mom. Dr. Pottick listened quietly and simply said, ‘You’re going,’ reminding me that I could be of more service to my family if I pursued my academic goals. And so I went.”

Lynn A. Warner, Ph.D., a professor at University of Albany’s School of Social Welfare and longtime colleague of Dr. Pottick, said, “Given her generosity to others it is easy to lose sight of what an accomplished academic record she has. Most of her published work has focused on mental health services for children and adolescents. To that work she brought several unique features: insights and theoretical orientations of a social psychologist; nimble ability of a seasoned methodologist (for example she has utilized an array of methods from secondary data analysis to primary data collection via vignette studies); creative and artistic vision of a ceramicist; and the heart and soul of a social worker. She seamlessly negotiates between cultivating individual relationships and identifying levers for change at the organizational and policy levels. Throughout her professional career she operationalized the person in environment framework as well as the social workers’ code of ethics, which means that when pressed to figure out a complicated problem, she would step back and focus on the client.”

Dr. Pottick said, “I have felt honored to serve Rutgers and its School of Social Work, together with students, faculty, staff, and members of the wider practice and research community. I look forward to seeing the University and School progress even further in the years ahead as they develop and teach new knowledge for innovative solutions to complex social and practice problems.” ■

If you would like to honor Dr. Pottick’s service to Rutgers School of Social Work, please visit socialwork.rutgers.edu/giving and make a gift to the Students Supporting Students fund, which was created collaboratively by Dr. Pottick and a group of students in 2012. It was designed as a participation-based campaign, aimed at building a community and culture of philanthropy among faculty and staff, alumni, and students to provide scholarships for current MSW students.



above from left to right:
Christopher Molloy, PhD is Chancellor Emeritus of Rutgers University-New Brunswick Campus and former dean of the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy.

Suzanne Siverio Kreie, LCSW is the CEO of Coordinated Family Care, a private non-profit care management organization funded by the NJ Department of Children and Families.

opposite right:
Nicole Swenarton is assistant director of marketing and communications at the Rutgers’ Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research and Jonathan Thompson is associate director of the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research, Office of Computing.



GROWING FUTURE LEADERS: MAP CONNECT PROGRAM SUPPORTS EMERGING SOCIAL WORK MANAGERS & LEADERS THROUGH CAREER BUILDING

Deputy Chief of AmeriCorps. Development Manager at Habitat for Humanity. VP of Operations at Pyramid Health. These are some of the leadership roles that MAP alums bring to the MAP Connect program.

F

or the last decade, Rutgers School of Social Work's Center for Leadership & Management (CLM) has worked to build the capacity of nonprofit leaders and organizations. One of its most recent initiatives is the Management & Policy (MAP) Connect Program, which links current MAP students with experienced MAP alumni who are in leadership roles.

The program supports professional development, strengthens MAP student and alumni networks, and facilitates working relationships that inspire professional growth.

Since its creation, MAP Connect has evolved into a vital bridge between current students and experienced alumni. Dr. Allison Zippay, professor and director of the CLM, is energized by the program's success, feeling a sense of pride and excitement for its continued impact. "The enthusiasm and engagement of our alumni are so impressive. MAP alums are an extraordinary resource with a wealth of experience and connections. They are a powerful network. What a gift to be able to share this with our students," she said. Current MAP students are paired with a MAP alum and meet over the course of two semesters for career information and development.

One of the most rewarding aspects was seeing how the connections forged through the program often extended far beyond the initial six-month period. Take MAP alum Thirjeet Matharu, an individual giving specialist at NJ PBS, and her student match, "RW," for instance. Their relationship has blossomed into an ongoing professional connection, with RW reaching out for guidance as she navigated the job market post-graduation. This was exactly the kind of lasting impact Dr. Zippay had hoped for when the program was first conceived.

"Each year I have been paired with students who 'magically' align—

the program has a great vetting system," said Matharu, who has been involved in the MAP Connect program since its inception. "Joining this program was my way of giving back to the university that gave me a lifelong mentor like Dr. Karun Singh and an MSW program that taught me many invaluable lessons."

The program's strength lay in its ability to match students with alumni who could offer relevant insights and experiences. BC's story was a perfect example—an immigrant student paired with Matharu, who had walked a similar path.

"My very first student, BC, and I formed an instant connection," said Matharu. "She was an immigrant to this country and was not aware of career opportunities as a social worker. It was a story I related to all too well as an immigrant and the only one in my family to pursue a career in social work."

BC wanted to obtain a job at the end of the program, and Matharu helped guide her on that journey. "I worked to identify which tools BC would find helpful in her search," Matharu said. "For one of our sessions, I developed a one-pager with the various job titles and websites that she could explore after graduating. I took that a step further and listed the job titles in hierarchical order so that she was aware of her (potential) career path. In that same session, we dissected the job descriptions together and discussed the interview process. After graduating, she obtained a job! I was happy to play a very small role in assisting her in her MAP journey."

Alumni in the CLM MAP Connect Program have proven to be invaluable resources for students, offering insights that go far beyond what can be learned in the classroom. One alum, Janis Ikeda, reflected on her experience, saying, "It's been amazing to learn from the students as professionals, while also providing whatever guidance I can to help them along their journey. We've covered everything from job search



strategies to grant writing to navigating internal promotions. I've been able to share perspectives from my years of experience in hiring and supervision, giving students a glimpse into the other side of the job search process that can feel so opaque and daunting when you're just starting out."

The program's emphasis on partnership and mutual learning, rather than the traditional mentorship model, has fostered rich connections. Melissa Allen described how her experience as a mentor reconnected her to the School of Social Work.

"After being out of touch for a while, I moved into leadership roles within my agency," said Allen. "This meant having fewer peers and more responsibilities, which was both a privilege and a challenge. I realized that I needed to find a new circle of support. My 'unofficial' mentor, Mark Lamar, connected me with Dr. Zippay, and I learned about MAP Connect. I wanted to get involved so other students who, like me, didn't follow the 'typical' path of an MSW student, had the support they need."

Allen reflects positively on the relationship she built with her connection. "She was always organized and prepared during our time together. I quickly recognized she was skilled at leading from the top; something that is lacking in many members of my staff. I hope that I was able to contribute to her growth by identifying some of her strengths. Having an outsider's perspective can be valuable in this way."

After earning a psychology degree, alum Christine James, MSW, Ph.D., LCSW worked as a trainer for staff in direct care for individuals

with disabilities. Wanting to focus on leadership and policy in the disability and community health field, she pursued an MSW while working full time and advancing in supervisory positions. She eventually held high-level positions in nonprofit and government roles with her passion for social justice and system-level perspective guiding her career choices.

"I provided support to my student partner by first getting to know them and exploring their interests and career goals," said James, now director of the community health worker collective at Jefferson Health. "We then collaborated on ways that I could be helpful, such as reviewing potential job postings, discussing salary negotiation and ways to position résumé experience, providing suggestions for how to ask and answer questions in an interview process about salary, answering questions about MAP roles in various settings and budgeting in nonprofit settings, offering tips on attending networking events, and even suggesting what to wear to a professional conference! I purchased a student membership for my MAP Connect student to NASW-NJ and we had both in-person and virtual meetings so they could get more comfortable with professional interactions in the 'real' world outside of the classroom." ■

If you would like to learn more about MAP Connect or get involved, please contact Dr. Allison Zippay at zippay@ssw.rutgers.edu.

RUTGERS ALUM RICHARD STAGLIANO

Completes 40th Year as School of Social Work Lecturer

Lecturers are valuable members of the School of Social Work's teaching workforce. Many are active practitioners within their local communities who incorporate their rich and wide-spanning experiences into the classroom, providing students with real examples connected to course content. Lecturers offer practice

-informed education, often making theories and lessons come alive. When asked, most lecturers state that they wanted to become educators to help shape future social workers. Lecturers, such as Richard Stagliano, LCSW, LMFT, demonstrate their commitment to the advancement of the profession through their teaching.

Last spring, Stagliano completed his 40th year as a lecturer at Rutgers School of Social Work, teaching several courses while also serving as CEO of the Center For Family Services. During his tenure, which continues this fall, Stagliano has facilitated undergraduate and graduate courses through in-person, online, hybrid, and weekend formats. He has instructed introductory, policy, clinical, and practice classes.

"Richard aspires to increase students' knowledge, critical thinking, and practice skills," said Christine Morales, assistant dean for lecturer support and associate professor of teaching. "His teaching goals include creating a safe classroom space to share and build relationships. Over the years, he has received strong and positive student feedback in course evaluations. He is a role model for lecturers just beginning in their careers."

Stagliano has also received numerous awards over his career. In recent years, he was awarded with the Outstanding Service Award from the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers for outstanding service to the local community. In 2018, he was recognized as one of *South Jersey*

Biz Magazine's Executives of the Year. In 2022, he was named as one of the "Men of the Year" by *South Jersey Magazine*. In 2023, he received the Humanitarian Award from the Community Planning and Advocacy Council.

To honor this major milestone, we spoke with Stagliano about his work at Rutgers and beyond.

Tell us about your journey to the field of social work.

I grew up in the 1960s and became very socially conscious and concerned about social justice issues. Initially, I was interested in psychology and human behavior and received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Rutgers. Later earning my MSW, I began my career as a licensed marriage and family therapist and a licensed clinical social worker with Family Counseling Service. A decade later, I was appointed executive director and, after facilitating the merger of three local nonprofits, I was named president and CEO of the new organization called Center For Family Services in 1999.

When did you get started as a lecturer at Rutgers School of Social Work?

I began teaching in 1984 and have taught every semester but two for the past 40 years. I also served on the Rutgers Camden Social Work Advisory Board early in my tenure. More recently, I've worked closely with the School's Office of Practicum Learning to ensure the Center For Family Services has a robust training program for future social workers.

Why have you continued to teach?

I believe in the profession of social work and know the importance of training social work professionals. I really enjoy



working with students. I love the interaction and growth that I see in them. Being in the classroom also keeps me up to date with practice and policy issues.

Tell us about your work with the Center for Family Services.

I've been with the Center for Family Services for 43 years, specifically working as CEO for more than three decades. In that time, I've grown our staff from 15 to 1,500, our budget from \$300,000 to over \$100 million, our programming from three to over 100, and our one location to more than 90 statewide. We're an army of helpers, and I'm very proud of the high-quality work we accomplish together. Because of our size, expertise, and reach, we have the ability to influence social policy in New Jersey, so the work our team does is really critical to real-life outcomes in the state.

How do you balance your professional duties, including teaching?

It's not really a job but my life's passion. It's very rewarding. I'm also fortunate to have a good team of staff to rely on while

I also have the opportunity to mentor and coach others. I've also undergone so much professional growth over the years with support from other executives that paved the way before me. While I do work hard, I also focus on my family and take good care of myself. It's critical to maintain a healthy balance.

How has your teaching experience impacted you?

I have been fortunate enough to stay connected with many of my former students who have gone on to become successful professional social workers. In fact, several have even been hired by our organization, CFS. From time to time, I invite these accomplished individuals back to my classroom to share their experiences and insights with my current students. I make it known that I am always available for guidance and support to my former students whenever they may need it. Recently, a former student who now holds a prestigious social work policy position reached out to me, hoping to shine a light on the valuable services we provide in Camden. I frequently run into former students during my travels across the state, and it brings me great joy to see how far they have come in their careers. ■

ADDRESSING SOCIAL WORK'S "GRAND CHALLENGES"

Participating in the AASWSW's Grand Challenges for Social Work strengthens the already outstanding research at Rutgers School of Social Work and elevates the visibility of its faculty.

By MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY

Social workers, regardless of their own personal circumstances, often find themselves on the front lines of America's most pressing challenges, whether through direct service to clients and communities or through research and teaching. These challenges are systemic, complex, and diverse, spanning healthcare, housing, poverty, racism, justice, safety, and more. To streamline research and action in addressing these issues, the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare (AASWSW) launched the Grand Challenges for Social Work.

The 14 Grand Challenges outline a far-reaching social agenda centralized around three major themes: individual and family well-being (closing the health gap, combating domestic violence, ensuring healthy development for youth, and advancing long and productive lives), a stronger social fabric (confronting homelessness, social isolation, gun violence, the impact of technology, and climate change), and a just society (focused on eliminating racism, smart decarceration, building financial literacy, addressing economic inequality, and equal opportunity).

At the School of Social Work, faculty, staff, and students are deeply invested in these issues via their research and community engagement, and several faculty members are already contributing to the Grand Challenges initiative as co-leaders, subcommittee chairs, and participants. This involvement not only highlights the school's outstanding research, teaching, and expertise, but also enables collaboration with a nationwide network of colleagues who share a strong commitment to these important efforts.

Meaningful Networking for Stronger Research

Associate Professor Karen Zurlo, a member of the Build Financial Capability and Assets for All working group, describes being a part of the Grand Challenges as invaluable for expanding her network. "It's a great opportunity to understand what others are working on, build stronger connections, and advance our research agendas together," she says. Through her involvement, Zurlo has connected with researchers who work in similar areas but from

different perspectives. For example, while her research focuses primarily on older adults, she has met colleagues who study younger families and explore solutions like child savings accounts for enhancing financial security.

"I've not only connected with scholars who share my interests, but I've also expanded my network to include government agencies focused on policy," Zurlo adds. One particularly valuable collaboration has been with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which shares her goal of improving financial knowledge and literacy among adults in the U.S., and organizes the datasets that scholars like Zurlo use to conduct analysis and advance their research.

Assistant Professor Ashley Jackson, who has spent over a decade working on issues related to the criminal legal system, has found that joining the Grand Challenges' Promote Smart Decarceration working group has helped her expand her network. Over time, she's discovered significant value for her own research as well. "I was eager to contribute to discussions about the role social workers can play in addressing the most pressing criminal legal issues," she says, "but participating in the Grand Challenges has also helped me approach my research more thoughtfully, ensuring it's not only relevant to an academic audience but also useful to policymakers and community partners."

Indeed, there is growing recognition that social work research must have a measurable and sustainable impact, and this is a core principle of the Grand Challenges program. In line with this commitment, the Grand Challenges recently released policy recommendations designed to drive progress across various challenges. These recommendations are valuable tools for engaging with stakeholders and advocating for effective policies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Engaging the Next Generation

The benefits of participating in the Grand Challenges extend far beyond research, with members actively applying cutting-edge insights gained from their cohorts to their teaching at the School of Social Work.

Assistant Professor Caroline Harmon-Darrow, co-chair of the policing subcommittee within the Promote Smart Decarceration group, notes that her involvement in the Grand Challenges has



Lenna Nepomnyaschy



Karen A. Zurlo



Ashley Jackson



Caroline Harmon-Darrow

significantly shaped her pedagogy. "It has broadened my ability to teach social work students about community-based solutions to violence and crises that don't rely heavily on the police," she explains. "Specifically, I was invited to teach a section of the advanced Policy, Politics, and Racial Justice course on anti-carceral social work. My teaching in that course was deeply informed by my work with the Grand Challenges and the leadership and direction they provide in that area."

Similarly, Zurlo drew on her experience with the Grand Challenges to create an MSW course titled Financial Capabilities for Individuals, Families, and Communities. This course focuses on enhancing financial stability and security for low-income populations. As a generalist elective, it takes a comprehensive approach to exploring social programs, direct practice interventions, financial services, and policies that can help individuals, families, and communities build assets.

Beyond classroom teaching, involvement in the Grand Challenges provides valuable opportunities for faculty members to mentor junior colleagues, such as doctoral students who share similar research interests but may not know where to turn or with whom to collaborate. "It's still a small network, but many of us faculty members in the School of Social Work have taken on the role of mentoring these junior colleagues," Zurlo adds.

In fact, one of the main reasons why Jackson joined the Grand Challenges was to lead student engagement efforts and raise the visibility of the Promote Smart Decarceration Grand Challenge among students interested in researching criminal legal issues. Her student engagement work included leading monthly meetings on various topics to foster community and professional development, and amplifying not only these students' ideas but also the voices, opinions, and research of the faculty participants. "Participating in this Grand Challenge allows me an opportunity to shape the discourse on how social workers can critically engage with social justice frameworks and approaches in their work with communities impacted by the criminal legal system," Jackson says.

Looking ahead, working groups are focused on recruiting more students to join them. In fact, Professor Lenna Nepomnyaschy, who is co-lead of the Reducing Extreme Economic Inequality group, recently welcomed a doctoral student as co-lead. "The goal

is for students to learn more about the Grand Challenges, join us, and attend our meetings," Nepomnyaschy says. "We want to create opportunities for students and emerging, pre-tenure faculty to present their work."

Zurlo also hopes to see more School of Social Work faculty get involved. "For us to succeed in research, we need large networks," she says. "This is one avenue to build a strong network of individuals who share your same interests."

Faculty interested in joining a Grand Challenges working group need only reach out to one of the leaders to express their interest.

Uplifting the School's Expertise

While individual researchers involved in the Grand Challenges benefit from expanded networks of like-minded colleagues, the School of Social Work also contributes significant value to the program. The School boasts a diverse faculty passionate about addressing various social issues, and this intellectual curiosity drives relevant research and enriches the Grand Challenges working groups. "I believe the research conducted at the school is highly responsive to national trends in social work and the most pressing questions our field faces," says Harmon-Darrow, adding that the school's core priorities, goals, and even its strategic plan align well with the Promote Smart Decarceration challenge and other Grand Challenges.

One of the most impactful contributions from the School of Social Work is the integration of Dr. Barbara Love's liberatory consciousness framework, a guiding principle at the School, into the Grand Challenges. "Our network has recognized in recent years that decarceration alone is not enough to achieve our initial goals, which include reducing incarceration, addressing disparities, and maximizing safety and well-being," Jackson explains. "As a result, the group is seeking to uplift and engage in research, policy, and practice rooted in transformative justice and liberatory consciousness. These kinds of approaches are directly inspired by the School of Social Work's implementation of liberatory consciousness in its curriculum and the larger community." ■

We appreciate

our alumni and friends who made gifts between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

Your contributions create opportunities for our dynamic and determined students and faculty that otherwise would not be possible.

We hope you find lasting pride in Rutgers School of Social Work.

Please note that names are listed as they were entered at the time of the gift. Questions or changes can be directed to Meera M. Ananth at meera.ananth@rutgersfoundation.org.

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Mr. Saul Zeichner & Mrs. Janice L. Zeichner
 Dr. Allison L. Zippay
 Mrs. Lisa Zittis & Mr. Nicos A. Zittis

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 2024.

Mr. Dominic N. Acque, SSW'95
 Ms. Susan M. Amy, SSW'90
 Mr. Emory Aycock, SSW'71
 Mrs. Gloria L. Barsky, SSW'86
 Mr. Theodore Blunt, SSW'68
 Ms. Marguerite Lipton Bronster, SSW'08
 Mrs. Anita G. Cohn, SSW'58
 Margaret Davis Jelly, LCSW, SSW'92
 Mr. Lamar F. Dourte, LCSW, SSW'05
 Ms. Sandra Dunleavy, SSW'95
 Mrs. Ruth E. Gandek, SSW'83
 Ms. Susan Maria Giordano, SSW'85
 Ms. Stacy M. Hill, SSW'19
 Mrs. Ellen W. Hasley, SSW'81
 Ms. Susan P. Iaccarino, SSW'84
 Ms. Doris M. Johnson, SSW'91
 Mr. Christopher T. Jones, SSW'76
 Mr. H. David Lawrence, SSW'72
 Mrs. Janice G. Lenehan, SSW'90
 Naomi G. Loeb, MSW, SSW'73
 Mr. Benedict J. Martorana, SSW'60
 Ms. Norah R. McCormack, SSW'87
 Barbara Milton, II, Ph.D., LCSW, SSW'01
 Mr. Arthur Cyril Monczka, SSW'70
 Ms. Mary M. Muise, SSW'80
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 Mrs. Susan S. Reeder, SSW'68
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 Mrs. Roberta K. Sutker, SSW'80
 Mr. Alan M. Syslo, SSW'96
 Ms. Eleanor E. Tyler, SSW'85
 Ms. Eugenia E. Vollmann, SSW'88
 Ms. Diane L. Zanoni, SSW'92

REMEMBERING PROFESSOR EMERITUS DR. PAUL LERMAN

Professor Emeritus Dr. Paul Lerman, who served Rutgers School of Social Work from 1969-1994, passed away on August 13, 2023. He is survived by his wife, Carla, children, Nina and Josh, nephews, and grandchildren. Paul began his tenure at Rutgers in 1969 and achieved the status of Distinguished Professor of Social Work and Sociology in 1982. He also directed the School of Social Work's Ph.D. program from 1971-1982 and 1991-1992.

Paul met his future wife, Carla, in 1954 while working together at the settlement house Chicago Commons. Carla saw in him a "diamond in the rough," as he used to say, and he attributed all his good fortune to her influence. Within their first few years together, she earned her master's degree in city planning. Later, they married and moved east, where Paul pursued his doctorate at Columbia.

Together, Paul and Carla created the family he never had. His mother died not long after his birth in 1926, and his father worked day and night shifts. Paul spent his early years in an institutional setting and his elementary school years with a foster family, later returning to the care of his father and new stepmother when he was 10. As a teen, he found support from his stepsister and from intentional family and used his journeys to craft his own life philosophies.

Paul launched his academic career at Columbia but was lured to Rutgers soon after, teaching a new generation and focusing his work, perhaps not surprisingly, on youth at risk. Carla, who says she's lost her best friend, playmate, travel mate, and steadfast lover, remembers him as "a wonderful father, husband, uncle, and friend. He treated everyone with respect, listened to people, and engaged with what he heard – all with humor. He brought this thoughtfulness, sense of play, and respect to his career in social work and social policy."

His children, nephews, and grandkids remember this combined thoughtfulness, curiosity, and attention to process – not forgetting the fun – throughout the lives of family and friends he gathered, whether leading games at children's parties, talking through military draft options with a young neighbor turning 18, enhancing assignments for a bored 6th grader (adding survey design and basic crosstabs!), or gathering everyone for a celebratory toast. He delighted in being a grandfather, and his adoring grandchildren cherished his charm, humor, flirting with waitresses, intellectual rigor, and love. He is deeply missed.

"I remember meeting Dr. Lerman at the new student orientation for Rutgers School of Social Work's Ph.D. program," says Dawn Apgar, Ph.D., LSW, ACSW, Associate Professor/BSW Program Director at Seton Hall University and member of the Rutgers School of Social Work Alumni Council. "I was so impressed with the scope of his

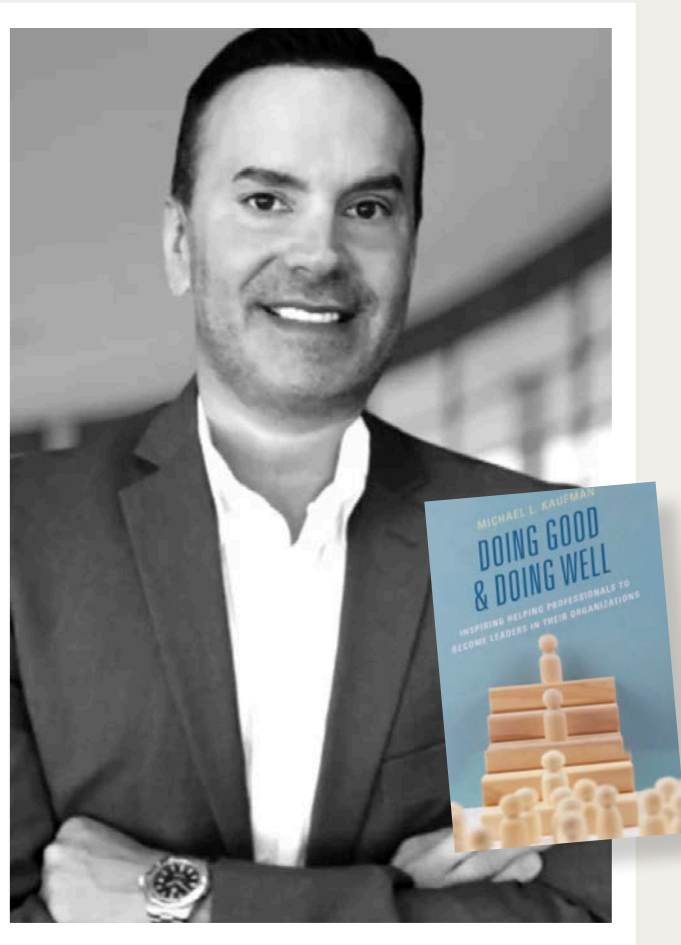
research interests and his impact on the areas of child mental health, developmental disabilities, and delinquency. His policy class in the doctoral program was known for its rigor. The only grade for the course was a final paper. I spent the entire semester researching homelessness and included a secondary data analysis, which impressed him. I was so proud when he praised my work in his feedback."

"We went on to work together for nearly 20 years," Dr. Apgar continues. "First, when I was a research assistant on his projects and then together at Rutgers and NJIT as co-directors of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Institute. No one has had more of an impact on my professional career. Paul (it took me a decade to call him by his first name out of respect for his intellect and scholarly work) taught me knowledge and skills that I still use in the classroom with current social work students. He could look at data and know whether bivariate or multivariate relationships were significant as he could perform most analyses in his head. I can't think of a single instance in which SPSS proved him incorrect! Paul's impact on social work education and research lives on through students, like me, that he taught and mentored."

Professor Allison Zippay, Ph.D., who previously directed the School's Ph.D. program, explains, "Dr. Lerman was an extraordinary mentor to Ph.D. students. As a director of the Ph.D. program, he guided the development of the research curriculum and rigorous studies in theory and conceptual foundations. He championed research that made a difference and articulated a commitment to an evidence base that would thoughtfully and empirically guide policy and practice. He was an inspiration."

Longtime colleague and coauthor Kathleen J. Pottick, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at Rutgers School of Social Work, says, "Paul's death is a great loss to me personally and to the field of social work. His pioneering research and scholarship analyzed critical social welfare policies on deinstitutionalization, delinquency and juvenile justice, disabilities, and mental health. Long before the idea of listening to clients' voices took hold, Paul and I worked together on an ambitious NIMH study of the help-seeking efforts of urban parents for their children in Newark, New Jersey: 226 parents in hour-long interviews in 13 social agencies, with a companion survey of 126 clinicians treating their children. As co-investigators of a novel family and community study, we faced many challenges in acceptance and access. Paul's grace, perseverance, and strong belief in the scientific merit of the project was infectious, and those characteristics contributed to the project's success."

To make a gift in memory of Dr. Lerman to support the School of Social Work's Ph.D. dissertation fund, please visit go.rutgers.edu/sswphdfund. ■



By **CINDY NIXON**

SOCIAL WORKERS AREN'T JUST NATURAL HELPERS — THEY'RE NATURAL LEADERS TOO

A Proud Rutgers School of Social Work Alum Shares His Journey from Dishwasher in Brower Commons to CEO of Three Service Organizations

The third turning point was when Mike happened to chance upon a want ad for a school director-in-training at a private day school for children with special needs in Baltimore. When he got the job with the company that later became known as Specialized Education Services, Inc. (SESI), it changed everything—it launched an ever-advancing career he never could have dreamed of. “There are just moments when people are in the right place at the right time,” Mike says. “Getting hired by SESI was my moment.” Promoted from principal to regional director to COO from 1998 to 2004, Mike eventually served in the top executive position at the company for 10 years before deciding to leave after a corporate merger.

When Mike talks about his latest accomplishment, the publication of his book *Doing Good & Doing Well: Inspiring Helping Professionals to Become Leaders in Their Organizations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), it’s not the release of the book he wants to discuss—it’s the message of the book for all of his many colleagues out there working in the helping professions, particularly social work.

That message is, quite simply: Helpers are innately gifted leaders more than capable of rising to the top of their fields. They don’t have to either do good in the world or do well in their careers. They can do both, they can have both. They can contribute to the social causes that matter most to them and also lead service-based companies and businesses to organizational and financial success. In Mike’s words, social workers are allowed to make a good living on their way to making the world a better place.

“I want my fellow social workers to understand that choosing a career in the social services doesn’t have to mean limited wages, visibility, or influence. If you want to—and let it be noted that not every helper wants to, some are completely happy doing fieldwork their whole careers, touching so many individual lives along the way—you can ascend to top-tier positions of leadership that allow you a wider reach and a deeper impact on the populations to whom you’re devoted.”

Mike’s book focuses on the particular aptitudes and abilities helping professionals intrinsically possess that make them natural-born leaders. These include knowing how to de-escalate crises (like correction officers do); handling triage situations (like nurses and

EMTs do); mastering communication skills (like speech-language pathologists do); breaking down barriers to comprehension (like ASL interpreters and tutors do); and formulating medium- and long-range plans (like teachers do with their curriculums).

Furthermore, helpers regularly practice active listening (like counselors and therapists); they’re adept at making informed, rational decisions amid high tension (like humanitarian aid workers); they possess a seemingly unlimited well of patience (like autism behavior techs and day care workers); and they’re able to relate to and resonate with people from all walks of life (like agency caseworkers, home health aides, and rehab specialists).

Helping professionals have incredible grit and resilience; they’re highly emotionally intelligent with a built-in servant leader’s mindset; and, in Mike’s firm opinion, you won’t find a more passionate lot: passionate about their mission, about their role in society, about their unflagging respect for the students, clients, and patients they serve with decency and dignity.

All of these proficiencies—some inherent, some acquired and refined by both formal education and on-the-job training—are essential to skilled leadership and, in Mike’s view, matter more to the vitality and vibrancy of an organization than a framed MBA diploma on the wall. That’s the message Mike is dedicated to these days, broadcasting it as far and wide as he can to champion helping professionals as organizational leaders.

He doesn’t just believe all this; he walks his talks. Throughout his various tenures, he has hired a retired police officer to supervise the behavior program in one of his schools. He hired an athletic coach and watched him blossom as an education division head. He hired a church volunteer to manage one of his offices, and she’s now the managing director of an online therapeutic platform.

“I’m a huge advocate of learning on the job,” Mike explains, “and keeping that learning going throughout the lifespan. If you honor every role you’re in and give it your all—no matter your missteps or misjudgments—you’ll take away more than you gave.”

For example, “As the CEO of SESI, I learned more than I can say. I learned how critical a professional mentor can be. I learned that I needed to find a balance between my heart and my head if I was going to effectively manage teams and produce results. I learned humility when a board came in and demanded accountability for all my actions; and most especially, I learned that the people are the soul of any company—they’re what keeps it alive and growing, so you need to show up and stand up for your people more than anything.”

Next came his stint launching a nationwide teletherapy provider. “When I was the CEO of TalkPath Live, I learned how to do things a social worker doesn’t normally do: set up payroll and a 401k plan, secure health insurance, implement a functional web platform, and hire people outside my own areas of expertise. It was all very new and very challenging, and I learned that’s when we evolve the most: when we add new skills to our portfolio, even when they don’t particularly appeal to our sensibilities.”

“And now that I’m the CEO of my own special education management and consulting company,” Mike continues, referring to Premier Education Partners, or PEP, “I’m experiencing all that it means to be an entrepreneur and business owner—from negotiating building leases to being my own admin to keeping the toilet paper stocked.”

But if you ask Mike his greatest teacher, he’ll tell you Rutgers. “Most people bleed red,” he shares. “I bleed scarlet. The impact Rutgers has had on me—on the man I’ve become and the career choices I’ve made—has been immeasurable. I credit this institution for giving me a solid foundation and an exceptional education; from

there, I built a vocation that feels like an avocation. I built a life.”

Deeply loyal to the school that first employed him as dishwasher at his College Avenue dining hall and then granted him the opportunities to serve as resident assistant, resident director, on-call crisis interventionist for the Rutgers College Counseling Center, president of his doctoral program, and longtime lecturer, Mike is now deeply committed to sharing the lessons of his life’s work with the Rutgers School of Social Work community.

“When I was teaching here (which I very much hope to do again, by the way!), I noticed my students were particularly interested in the leadership arm of what we were discussing in class, more so than my in-the-field social work experience. They wanted to know if they, too, could climb to the top of a company, if they could lead teams and make policy that would transform systems and engender meaningful societal change.” How could they do that? How could they adhere to their calling and stay true to their values while also being able to buy a house and drive a nice car?

“That’s what inspired my book. That’s what led me to write it. It all grew out of my students’ questions and their interest in the track to leadership.”

Now that the book is done, his three daughters are all off to college or beyond, and his business is running smoothly with his partners, Mike has been reflecting on what he’d like to do next (a mentoring initiative tops his list) and the legacy he’d like to leave the helping fields that have gifted him with an immensely fulfilling career.

“Here’s what I’d like to say to the social workers Rutgers School of Social Work has created and is creating, just like it created me: You are compassionate, warm, and accessible. You approach your work and treat all people with fairness and justice. You stand up for what’s right, and you prioritize the good of the many over self-interest. That is what this country needs in leaders today more than ever—that is what this world is lacking. You have the tools and the talents. You know how to devise equitable solutions. You’re a natural at boosting strengths and mitigating deficits. You don’t just make a difference, you are the difference.”

Gazing out the window contemplatively—thinking back on a lonely childhood, a path paved with both trials and triumphs, and a work ethic characterized by a whole lot of drive and determination—this career helping professional offers his final words to others who may want to follow in his footsteps: “If people take nothing else from my book or from my story, take this: You are the future. You can shape that future just by being who you were meant to be and following your natural helping instincts, heeding your ingrained helper’s mentality. You aren’t just enough, you’re more than enough. You aren’t just good-hearted, you’re the heart of humanity. Go make the future better. I’ll be right there behind you cheering you on, believing in you like others believed in me. Go make the future better—for all of us.” ■

Michael L. Kaufman, MSW, PhD, earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Rutgers and is ABD for his doctorate at Rutgers School of Social Work. He earned his PhD in clinical psychology in 1999 from the International University for Graduate Studies while working in the field in various counseling positions in northern New Jersey. To all of his professional endeavors in his 30-year career, he always brings his unique blend of “heart of a social worker” and “head of a business executive,” and he lives by the Churchill motto “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.” Doing Good & Doing Well is available wherever books are sold.

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.



Jay Baturin, SSW'83 enjoyed a 36-year career as a senior school social worker at Archway Programs in Atco, New Jersey. He resides in Sicklerville, New Jersey, but travels back and forth to his home in Coconut Creek, Florida. He loves spending time with his children and seven grandchildren.

Emily Berger, SSW'07 is a firm director at Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, the nation's largest family defense legal nonprofit. After graduating with her MSW and JD, she committed herself to public interest, specifically working with former foster youth and parents working to reunify with their children. Having her social work degree has provided invaluable assistance to her in working with underserved populations. If anyone is interested in discussing a career in family defense, she'd be happy to hear from you! Email bergere@ladlinc.org to get in contact.



Lana Church, SSW'11 was elected as secretary of the board of directors for the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)-New Jersey, chapter in June 2024. Lana is the director of social work practicum education and a teaching instructor at Rutgers University, Baccalaureate Child Welfare Education Program campus coordinator, and founding faculty co-advisor for the Phi Alpha honor society, training students in social work competencies and coaching agency social workers in student supervision. Her professional experience includes medical and psychiatric social work as well as casework with homeless youth and survivors of domestic violence. A certified clinical supervisor, certified school social worker, certified gerontologist, and advocate for victims of domestic violence, Lana serves as the nominations committee member for the Association of the Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors. Lana previously served on the NASW-NJ board of directors as the regional representative, executive board member, conference planning committee member, and 2023 delegate assembly member. She

plans to continue to advocate for New Jersey members as the board of directors' secretary during fiscal year 2024-2026 and can be reached at rchurch@rutgers.edu.



Andrew Davis, SSW'06, who graduated with an MSW after originally taking nonmatriculating courses, remembers his time at Rutgers as thoroughly enjoyable. He fondly remembers lecturer

Jacqueline Phillips' psychopathology class and being challenged in Associate Professor of Professional Practice and Director of Continuing Education Douglas Behan's integrative seminar course. He was given learning tools that he still applies in his job today, keeping his situational awareness, bias, and countertransference in check. He remembers the spicy debates occurring in Teaching Professor & Assistant Dean of Bachelor's Programs DuWayne Battle's diversity and oppression class when he was still a doctoral student and the cool collaborations with his mostly female classmates, working on projects together and learning about each other's styles. Andrew would also like to give a shoutout to Professor Moreno and her HBSE II class. He remembers offering to be the guinea pig in Advance Direct Practice II, videotaping one of his sessions with a client (after receiving his consent) and allowing his interventions to be critiqued. Every one of Andrew's classes, even the ones he didn't like, gave him kernels to chew on 20 years later. After working in his first practicum choice following graduation, Andrew spent a few years as a counselor in Trenton State Psychiatric Facility and then a few years providing direct practice. Then, he got a job in the Department of Veteran Affairs working for the Veterans Health Administration in hospitals, first in New Jersey and now in New Mexico, where he has been for the last six years. He is now the outpatient social work program coordinator for the Raymond G. Murphy VA Hospital in Albuquerque. He supervises 15 social workers, with all their different personalities and educational backgrounds, and knows

he received the best education to prepare him for what he does today. He is happily married to his wife, May, and is child-free. They love to visit other countries and learn their histories and customs. Andrew still loves to write, as some of his classmates may remember, and he is working on his first novel.

Mary P. Duguid, LCSW (SSW'81) is approaching 45 years as the co-founder and clinical director of Main St. Counseling Center, an award-winning West Orange nonprofit that provides a wide range of mental health services to Essex County's economically disadvantaged. Main St. Counseling has 36 professionals and support staff and serves more than 520 individuals, couples, and families weekly.



Love M. Gaillard, SSW'05, who graduated from Rutgers School of Social Work with a dual MSW/MPP degree, has served as a child study team social worker with the Newark Board of Education for 18 years. During this time, she honed her

facilitation skills and currently has an LLC, Love M. Gaillard, MSW Consulting. She provides adult Social Emotional Learning (SEL) workshops across the state of New Jersey and online. Her workshops also cover other subjects, including special education, transition, and etiquette.



Dr. Phil Feldman, SSW'96 has more than 30 years of professional experience as a clinical director, psychotherapist, and supervisor. He is currently the clinical director at Journey to Wellness substance abuse program where he trains staff on treatment strategies, therapy models, and group topics for outpatient treatment. He has taught numerous clinical topics as a lecturer at Rutgers School of Social Work since 1995. He also completed his Ph.D. in social work at Rutgers in 1996. As a professional speaker, he has presented more than 350 clinical seminars at medical centers, agencies, and online. Dr. Feldman completed extensive research on shame and help seeking and has presented many seminars on this topic. In addition, he has expertise in cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, family therapy, and personality disorders. Dr. Feldman is also the author of three clinical manuals, *The Psychotherapy Manual*, *Co-occurring Disorders Manual*, and *Shame Affect*, which are all available on Amazon.

Caroline Grossmann, SSW'71 served as a social worker for her entire career and earned a Ph.D. in social work from NYU in 2001. She recently moved to Willow Valley Communities, a continuing care retirement community in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Although she retired three years ago, she maintains her license and volunteers within her community and at her church.

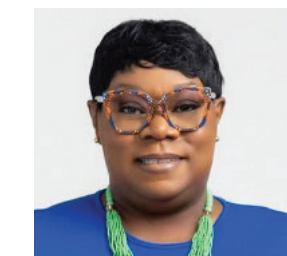
Rev. Karen E. Herrick, PhD, LCSW, LMSW, CADC, ACMHP (SSW'84) has shared her clinical expertise for over 30 years in her private practice on dysfunctional and addictive homes, disassociation, grief and loss from a Jungian psychological perspective. Since 1995, her interfaith ministry has been actively involved in spiritual psychology, specifically in naming spiritual experiences and working with chronic grief. She is a lecturer on the Internet with CEYOU.org providing webinars in Jungian psychology, spirituality, and mental health, etc. Her books, *You're Not Finished Yet; Grandma, What is a Soul?*, and

Psychology of the Soul and the Paranormal are available through Amazon.com. Her websites are kareneherrick.com and grandmawhatisasoul.com.

Angela High-Hailey, SSW'96, SSW'03 recently received her doctorate in human services from Capella University. She has been employed with the New Jersey Department of Child Protection and Permanency for 26 years.

Dr. Ammi Hussein, SAS'10, SSW'11 currently serves as president elect of the National Association of Social Workers-New Jersey chapter and sits on its board of directors. She was also elected vice chair of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, where she serves on the teaching section of the executive committee. Additionally, Dr. Hussein named a fellow for the Culture of Health Leadership Institute for Racial Healing, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sponsored program, as well as a civic science research fellow at Boston University College of Communication.

Bobby Ilam SSW'23 is a child protection specialist (ACS). Bobby believes giving back to society was what he was taught at the School of Social Work and that social work is a valuable field to be engaged with.



Allison K. James-Frison, SSW'18 was voted in as vice president of the Newark Board of Education.

Marion Levy Bergman, SSW'77 semi-retired in July after 43 years of clinical and concrete service provision. Marion will now be conducting virtual therapy part time via two major online providers, continue providing clinical supervision group for LSWs, and obtain clinical treatment hours towards International Gambling Counselor designation, after completing the School of Social

Work's Gambling Addiction Treatment certification course.

Dr. Judith Kirshenbaum Felton Logue, SSW'66, SSW'83, is a grateful and proud graduate of Rutgers School of Social Work. The education she received (an MSW and Ph.D.) led not only to a fulfilling career that she still enjoys, but also an in-depth understanding and knowledge about clinical work, research, teaching, and social and community services. Her teachers were terrific: inspiring, smart and wise, and required critical thinking at the highest level. She had no idea at the time what a gift Rutgers School of Social Work would be for her and her future because she was a typical stressed young person juggling work, family, finances, school, psychoanalytic training, health, friends, and trying to stay afloat to get through the day! At the age of almost 82, with not enough time left on the planet, it gives her great pleasure to thank everyone who contributed to her life in uncountable ways, many of whom are long gone but not forgotten. If she were to list their names that go back to her first year at the George Street ceramic building in 1964, there may not be many left who would remember them. She hopes you will join her in a cheer for the social workers who go back to the 1950s and carried her and her classmates on their shoulders!

Rasheedah Morrisson, SSW'12 has been working at Garden State CDC as a social worker for the last 10 years and Proud Moments providing ABA therapy for five years. She has two children. Her daughter is graduating with a degree in biology and a minor in public health and her son just completed his first year at Delaware State. Rasheedah is continuing to work and support the people in her community where she lives. She received an award from Jersey City Joy Temple for the services she provided. She would like to thank Rutgers School of Social Work for helping her pave the way.





Krista Nash, SSW'15 graduated from Rutgers Camden as an adult learner and single mother who was working full time. She chose to study social work as an attempt to understand a family member's struggle with addiction and mental health issues. Her education at Rutgers laid the foundation to later graduate from the University of Pennsylvania with an MSW. Immediately after graduating from Penn, she began working for a reentry program in the Philadelphia prison system and later became a director for a nonprofit residential parole program in New Jersey. Krista now knows it takes a certain kind of person to be a social worker: a compassionate one. One that strives to seek out research and best practices to best serve their clients' needs. She currently works as a commissioner with the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission developing policies with a social work lens.

Christina Pierre-Noel, MSW, LCSW, SSW'17 opened her very own counseling center, Journey to Self Wellness Center, in Montclair, New Jersey. Journey to Self Wellness Center offers an array of psychotherapeutic services for children, young adults, and seniors. Find her on Psychology Today!

Carla Powers SSW'15, who earned the Outstanding MSW Student in the Clinical Specialization Award at her graduation, was recently named Social Worker of the Year at Jersey Shore University Medical Center (JSUMC), part of the Hackensack Meridian Healthcare system. Also a recipient of the School of Social Work's Aging & Health Certificate, Carla has held a unique role at JSUMC for the past year and a half, helping build the geriatrics program with a small interdisciplinary team. Her team is consulted to support frailer older adults who are inpatient and provide supportive care services after their discharge. She also manages and hosts a monthly hospital Geri Talk series, where providers from all disciplines are invited to share their expertise and experience working with older adults.

Denise Rue, SSW' 12 is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Somerville, New Jersey. After working for seven years at a county mental health agency in Perth Amboy, where her work focused on adults with complex trauma, especially adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, Denise moved to Treasure Beach, Jamaica. For three years, she worked as the lead therapist and retreat leader at a legal psilocybin retreat, which provided treatment for individuals with a wide variety of mental health conditions, as well as for healthy

adults. During this time, Denise had the privilege of overseeing over 1,500 psilocybin sessions, and as many group integration sessions. Returning home to the States in 2023, Denise founded the New Jersey Psychedelic Therapy Association (NJPTA), a volunteer organization focused on educating individuals about the healing potential of psychedelic medicines and advocating for sensible and nonstigmatizing drug laws. NJPTA has taught several continuing education courses on psychedelic-assisted therapy at Rutgers in the School of Social Work and the Graduate School of Applied Psychology. NJPTA is part of an advocacy effort to pass S2283, "The Psilocybin Behavioral Health Access and Services Act." This bill would establish regulated psilocybin service centers where adults can receive supervised psilocybin services with the referral of a medical provider. Denise is hopeful that this treatment will soon become available to New Jersey residents struggling with conditions such as treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, and end-of-life issues.

Dr. Arthur Strock, SSW'77 is pleased to share that he is enjoying retirement and that his guidebook for understanding dreams, *Live By Your Dreams: Heartfelt Stories About Dreams and What They Tell Us*, has been so well received by the social work community. If you are interested in some delightful stories about dreamers with commentaries on how their dreams can be applied to your own or your clients' dreams, you may download it for free at arthurstrock.com. Dr. Strock welcomes phone calls if you wish to talk about dreams or have questions. When he is not dreaming, Dr. Strock continues to enjoy his hobby of building kayaks and canoes that he and his partner use on the waters of New Jersey, including Mt. Lake, just down the hill from where they live.

Dena Taylor, SSW'69 is retired from careers in social work and education. Her latest book is an anthology of writings by women over 80, titled *When a Woman Tells the Truth*. Other books are *Exclamation Points: Collected Poems; Tell Me the Number before Infinity; Red Flower: Rethinking Menstruation*; and several anthologies on women's issues. See denataylorbooks.com.



Cristina Vargas (née Melgarejo), SSW'19 obtained her LSW shortly after graduation. During the COVID pandemic, she worked for Fresenius Medical Care of North America as a renal social worker at FKC Harrison dialysis clinic. In 2020, she took the clinical exam and did not pass. However, she utilized a different study approach based on her previous testing experience and took the exam again in June 2021. That time around she passed! From November 2021 through February 2024, she completed her clinical hours at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center's Outpatient Behavioral Health Clinic. Today, she is proud to say that, after five long years of hard work and Covid-related setbacks, she is finally a licensed clinical social worker! She currently works for RWJ Barnabas Health - Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center as an oncology social worker at the Cancer Services Patient and Family Department. Specifically, she works for the Survivorship Program, under the guidance of Louise Ligresti, MD, Chief of Cancer Survivorship. Along with the oncology team, Cristina provides psychosocial support to patients and families, helping them readjust to life after treatment. She feels proud to work for Cooperman Barnabas' Cancer Center. Along with the treatment team, she feels honored to be part of patients and families' journeys, and she takes pride in holding a safe space for them. Cristina is amazed to see their unwavering resilience and newfound hopes. Through empathetic listening, strengths-based interventions, and kindness, together they work toward achieving post-traumatic growth. She is also excited about the future for her patients and the community, as next year the cancer center will be relocating to a state-of-the-art new facility, which will be named the Melchiorre Cancer Center at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center after the profoundly generous \$30 million donation from longtime supporters, Andrea and Anthony Melchiorre. Cristina is beyond grateful to be part of this amazing health care community and continue her connection with Rutgers University through Rutgers Cancer Institute, which in partnership with RWJBarnabas Health and Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center, makes New Jersey's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center bringing a world class team of researchers and specialists and providing access to the latest treatments and clinical trials.

Ace Wilson, SSW'19 is a LSW currently employed at an LGBTQ-focused private practice in New Jersey and is always looking for other queer therapists to form professional connections. Let's raise each other up! Ace can be reached at writewilsoninc@gmail.com and is searchable on LinkedIn. ■



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