



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

Fall 2023



SOCIAL IMPACT AND INNOVATION



Fall has brought **new excitements, endeavors, and supports** for which we are thankful

Hello Friends of the School of Social Work,

Fall of 2023 was especially busy at the School. We were very excited to welcome all our new students and to begin to learn how we can support their success in their programs and beyond. It is always inspiring to see our new classes and imagine all the wonderful ways they will grow, teach, and make a difference. Social justice is key to their interest in the social work profession and is expressed in a new video about the School (see link on page 3).

A highlight of the fall was our Alumni Homecoming Event. You came from near and far to see each other, meet new friends, get your photo with Sparty, and learn about the future directions of the School. It was great to see so many of you (see photos on pages 3 and 8). We are so grateful for your insights, ideas, and passions. We are planning to have another alumni gathering in March to celebrate Social Work Month. We will send a “save the date” early in 2024. If there are other ways you’d like to connect to the School, please reach out and let us know!

Our alumni, students, faculty, and staff continue to inspire us and make us proud. In this newsletter you will learn about the range of their amazing work. The School is working with four other Michigan schools of social work to bring the Title IV-E program back to grow the child welfare workforce. This federally funded program provides stipends to students who want to work in the field and make a commitment to public child welfare. Our program will start in January, and we are excited to be part of the movement to improve child welfare services in Michigan.

With Thanksgiving coming up, I am thinking of all that I am thankful for. The School of Social Work, our wonderful staff, faculty, students, and alumni, and all the work we are privileged to do. I am thankful for your support of the School, whether that is your input, your time, or your financial support. All of us are important contributors to the success of the School.

Go Green!

Anne K. Hughes, PhD, MSW, FGSA
Director
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
Michigan State University

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

MSU School of Social Work Alumni Homecoming Event Recap: A Spirited Reunion Celebrating Connections Old and New

On a crisp, sunny afternoon on September 22, 2023, the MSU School of Social Work hosted its much-anticipated Alumni Homecoming Event. The gathering, marked by laughter, nostalgia, a sense of shared purpose—and Sparty. It turned out to be a remarkable success, reuniting alumni from various years in a celebration of their collective journey and achievements.

The event concluded with a forward-looking address by School Director **Dr. Anne Hughes**, outlining future

initiatives and the School's ongoing commitment to fostering a supportive and engaged alumni network.

Attendees left with a renewed sense of pride and connection to their alma mater and a reinvigorated drive to continue making a difference in their communities.

The MSU School of Social Work Alumni Homecoming Event of 2023 was not just a reunion; it was a reaffirmation of the bonds formed during the years at MSU and a testimony to the lasting impact of a career dedicated to social change and community betterment. We eagerly await next year's gathering, hopeful for more stories of triumph and resilience in the field of social work.



See page 8
for more fun
alumni photos!



<https://youtu.be/lkcFupvF1zc?feature=shared>

Monica Eaton stands as a testament to the power of heartfelt mentorship and the profound impact it can have on the future change-makers of the world.

Monaca Eaton receives the *2023 MSU Outstanding Advising Administrator Award*

The School of Social Work congratulates **Monaca Eaton**, its director of the BASW Program, for receiving the *2023 Outstanding Advising Administrator Award*. The *Outstanding Advising Administrator Award* recognizes the accomplishments of an individual who serves as an administrator or director of an academic unit. It recognizes individuals who may provide direct academic advising services to students but whose primary responsibility is as an administrator or director of an academic advising program for three years or more in that role.



Monaca Eaton

“I felt very humbled,” said Eaton, as she reflected on her achievement. “It’s a privilege to bear witness to the students’ journey and support them.” This sentiment echoes through her advising philosophy as well—a blend of empathy, understanding, and unwavering support, especially for those just starting their academic journeys.

As a first-generation college student, Eaton resonates deeply with the uncertainties that many students must navigate. “I’ve always remembered what it is to not know,” she says. “And so, we must assume students don’t know. Assume that they’re excited to enter into this partnership with us to get through their degree. Assume that they have the best intentions, that they’re using their time and their resources to be here. That it’s our job to come alongside them and help get them to their goal.”

Bearing witness to students discovering their potential is what Eaton lives for. “There’s nothing more joyful than seeing people find themselves and their voice and get excited about the gifts they have as an individual,” said Eaton. This joy she receives, from witnessing interpersonal transformations in students, is rooted in her belief in the transformative power of education and mentorship in social work. “In social work, it’s so rad, because everyone’s going out to change the world.”

“I cannot think of a more deserving colleague for this award,” said **Dr. Anne Hughes**, director of the School of Social Work. “Student success is at the center of Monaca’s work.”

“Monaca embodies compassion, dedication, wisdom, and support,” said **Jamie Griggs**, a BASW advisor for the School of Social Work. This is evident in Eaton’s solution-oriented and strengths-based philosophy—always striving to not only meet the needs of her students but to empower them toward achieving their goals.

“As a supervisor, Monaca has always made me feel seen and valued,” said

Emily Langhart, another BASW advisor. “She was able to draw out strengths in me that she recognized and taught me how to use those to serve students, the program, and the University.”

Eaton’s method is not just about guiding students through their academic journey—it’s about recognizing and celebrating their unique qualities. “When you tell a student the thing you see in them, like, ‘Hey, I see this in you, and this is why you are so amazing,’ you literally watch someone’s entire body language change,” she explains. Eaton’s approach fosters a nurturing environment where students feel valued, seen, and capable. “We see you, we value you, and you belong here,” she asserts. “We want to make sure you know that.”

As Eaton continues to shape the lives of countless students, her role transcends the boundaries of traditional advising. She stands as a testament to the power of heartfelt mentorship and the profound impact it can have on the future change-makers of the world. Her award is not just a recognition of her exceptional abilities but a celebration of the countless lives she has touched and transformed.

Feeding the future: How an MSU Social Work student is fighting to end food insecurity on campus

Today's college students face a gauntlet of obstacles in their day-to-day lives. Managing classes, study sessions, part-time jobs, and career planning. They do this all while trying to maintain a social life and juggling personal interests.

Yet, for some, an even more daunting hurdle looms: food insecurity—the condition of not having access to sufficient food, or food of an adequate quality, to meet one's basic needs. It's a pervasive issue that affects their concentration, financial decisions, and stress levels.

Combating this issue is MSU School of Social Work junior **Olivia Heath**. Heath is the service chair of the Spartan Food Security Council (SFSC), whose mission is to achieve greater food security on campus and in the East Lansing area. Heath, who is intimately familiar with the struggle against food scarcity, recounts her journey towards activism. "I took a course in Social Policy," said Heath, "And I really got to learn more about the terminology and concerns of food insecurity." As a first-generation college student with immigrant parents, Heath understands the multifaceted impact of food insecurity on academic performance and student well-being.

Heath's role as service chair prompts her to engage with the community at large, as she spends most of her time planning events to raise awareness while also giving direct help to those in need. But before stepping into such a large role, she grounded herself in understanding the SNAP benefits systems. "Initially, I came in wanting to help students sign up and navigate the process of SNAP," said Heath, recalling her initial interest in SFSC. "It was something that I had gone through multiple times. And so, I just wanted to make sure that other people could have the same resources I did—so they're not struggling at the end of the day to make ends meet."

The co-founders of SFSC, **Aditi Kulkarni** and **Spencer Good**, look to empower students like Heath and place them in roles where they can make a tangible difference. "Our mission was simple: we wanted to feed our community," states Aditi. "Of course,



Olivia Heath

being students, we knew we wanted to center students within this conversation. So, our organization, our projects, and our solutions all emphasize student participation."

Together, they've tackled hurdles and celebrated victories, such as advocating for the *Hunger Free Campus Grant Act*. They've also put together a variety of food drives and have also testified to the House. "Simply put, I believe our efforts to push back against the stigma of food insecurity—among students, faculty, and other stakeholders at MSU and across the greater Lansing area—has made it a more approachable problem," said Good.

"Spartans know that the Spartan Food Security Council is set on ending student hunger and food insecurity; they want to join our cause and are comfortable opening up to us about their personal experiences with it."

As Heath continues to spearhead service initiatives within the SFSC, she draws inspiration from the collaborative spirit of its founders, as well as her own intrinsic values. "At the end of the day, the work that we're doing for Spartan Food Security Council is really astounding," said Heath. "A lot of this was just talks about how we could make something happen. And we have made stuff happen. That just goes to show that we are the creators of our own change."



The SFSC is running a food drive in partnership with the MSU Student Parent Resource Center. Learn more about how you can help with this project by visiting <https://serve.msu.edu/service-project.cfm?projectID=4734>.

Rural health through digital literacy

Professor **Paul Freddolino**'s project, "Virtual Connections: Rural Health through Digital Literacy," has been awarded a significant grant of \$427,397 from the 2023 Health Aging Grant Program of the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. This initiative aims to enhance digital literacy and telehealth readiness for older adults across six Michigan counties, embodying the School's commitment to community collaboration and health improvement.



Amanda Woodward

Americans. This collaborative platform unites three of Michigan's top academic institutions: The University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and since 2018, welcoming Michigan State University into its fold.

Spearheading MSU's most recent contributions to MCUAAAR—since **Dr. Joan Ilardo** (2018 to 2023)—is **Dr. Amanda Woodward**, it's co-director and professor for the School of Social Work at MSU. "The big focus for MCUAAAR," she states, "is on expanding social and behavioral research related to older African Americans, particularly urban, older African Americans." Woodward's role doesn't end there. As the co-leader of MCUAAAR's Research Education Corp (REC), Woodward's emphasis lies in "coordinating the training and support of the research scientists that we fund."

Woodward's journey with MCUAAAR has evolved from her days as a doctoral student. Reflecting on her longstanding connection, she recalls, "I've been associated with MCUAAAR since my doctoral days, with **Dr. Robert J. Taylor**, the current Principal Investigator, guiding me as my dissertation chair at U of M." Such reflections underscore her commitment to the cause. "The mentorship and support of junior faculty, especially those of color, deeply resonate with me."

Dr. Mieka Smart, once a budding MCUAAAR Scientist and now part of an initiative to shape its future leadership, sheds light on the Center's nurturing environment. "I felt that although the scientist meetings were designed to

Shaping Social Science: PURI Award Winners

Congratulations to our Provost's Undergraduate Research Initiative (PURI) grant awardees: **Breanne Sandstrom**, **Jasmine Zavala Gonzalez**, and **Yasmen Alsuraimi**, for their outstanding research contributions. Their work, under the mentorship of esteemed faculty, underscores the School's commitment to inclusive and transformative research. We look forward to what they will discover in the near future!

Empowering the future: MSU's new era in African American research

Since its inception in 1997, the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR) has stood as a beacon for transformative research dedicated to the health and vitality of older African

Americans. This collaborative platform unites three of Michigan's top academic institutions: The University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and since 2018, welcoming Michigan State University into its fold.

offer formative and critical feedback, it was done in a way that never felt critical," she explains. While addressing the future of MCUAAAR, Smart emphasizes two pivotal leadership skills: fostering inclusion and driving innovation.

But there's another instrumental voice in this symphony of empowerment: **Dr. Kent Key**, co-lead of the community core. With Flint, a predominantly African American city, serving as the backdrop, Key's endeavors have been pivotal. "The primary goal is to increase the amount of African American elders in research," Key explains, highlighting the hesitancy of the African American community toward research due to unethical practices of the past. However, with mechanisms like the Community Ethics Review Board in place and a deep-rooted commitment to community-based participatory research, MCUAAAR aims to transform this narrative.

For Key, the approach to community engagement is anchored in presence, transparency, and mutual benefit. He emphasizes the importance of being "present at townhalls, community events, and city council meetings to show support for issues important to the community" and believes in "creating mutual benefit from research efforts."

In an era where academic diversity often finds itself in the limelight, MCUAAAR, fortified by its partnership with MSU, is not just a participant but a trendsetter. With MSU's integration, the center embraces the University's esteemed land grant mission and establishes a crucial link to the community of Flint.

With a harmonized vision, leaders like Woodward, Smart, and Key are steering MCUAAAR toward new horizons. As it evolves, one thing remains certain: MCUAAAR's dedication to bettering the lives of older African Americans remains unwavering, promising strides in research for years to come.

Empathy meets analytics: Bridging data, humanity and leadership in Chicago's heartbeat

In the heart of Chicago, where ambition and resilience intertwine, **Dave Koch** stands as a testament to how academic foundations can inspire community revolutions. As an alumnus of the MSU School of Social Work, his roots were deeply embedded in understanding the human experience. While the School echoed lessons of empathy, community engagement, and behavioral understanding, Koch envisioned a future where these lessons could be magnified through the power of data.

Dave Koch is the director of monitoring, evaluation, and learning at Broader Urban Involvement & Leadership Development (BUILD), where he is involved in data collection, strategizing, and expanding the holistic approach of the organization.

“Different organizations have different strategies,” said Koch, explaining the philosophy of BUILD. “Our strategy is to be very holistic in the work that we do. We provide gang intervention, therapy and case management, enrichment programs, after-school programs, and so much more.” The aim of the organization is to help young people on Chicago's West Side transform their lives in positive, enriching ways.

Koch's time at MSU not only prepared him to understand societal issues but equipped him to tackle them innovatively. The power of data isn't just in its quantitative essence but in its capacity to tell a story, unveil patterns, and to inform actionable change. “It's the: How to take what we're learning and then actually leverage it into change and into improved programs.”

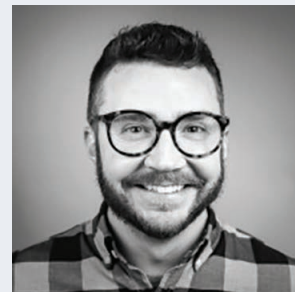
Rather than viewing data as a mere metric, Koch regards it as a lens, offering deeper insights into the nuanced complexities of the human experience. This approach also informs the rest of the staff with how they're impacting the community, as well as identifying avenues for improvement in strategies and methodologies. The end result of this process is geared toward empowering West Side Chicago youth.

But what truly sets Koch apart is his commitment to collaboration and community-building. Understanding the niche nature of his data-focused role in community-



Dave (far right) and members of the BUILD team

based nonprofits, he took the initiative to create the “Data Storytelling Cooperative.” This platform serves to bring together like-minded individuals working with data at various organizations in Chicago, facilitating a shared space for learning, innovation and growth.



Dave Koch

“There's no natural way for us to come together across organizations,” said Koch. In doing so, this co-op aims to create a space for data-focused staff and leaders to build relationships, share successes, and find ways to tell better data stories. Yet, with his leadership, barriers are breaking down, fostering a collaborative spirit. His mission isn't just about individual growth but about raising others alongside him. “The longer I go, the more I get passionate about investing in the people on my team. It's about leading other leaders, allowing their skills and strengths to shine.”

In Dave Koch and his contributions to BUILD, Chicago has not only a data-driven strategist, but a beacon of hope for the youth. A hope that stems from the synthesis of academic rigor and heartfelt compassion. A hope that with the right tools, empathy and leadership, communities like Chicago can rewrite their narratives toward a brighter, more inclusive future. To learn more about Koch's work, and BUILD's nearly 55-year history of working with young people in Chicago, visit www.buildchicago.org.

MSU School of
Social Work Alumni
Homecoming Event
of 2023



Invest in initiatives meaningful to you

Students enter the profession of social work with a strong commitment to service, integrity, and competence. As social work educators, we believe that the good our graduates do is multiplied and extended across generations, and we are honored to help prepare them for their service.

In keeping with land-grant principles of education, research, and outreach/service, we take seriously our

responsibility to the education and training of students as well as outreach for community engagement.

If you share our values, please consider supporting these efforts with a gift to one of the scholarship and endowment funds highlighted below. A full list of giving opportunities and links to donate online can be found at **socialwork.msu.edu/Alumni-and-Giving/Endowments**.



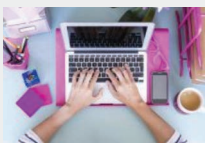
Robert Little Scholarship Fund
This fund provides scholarships for graduate students with a career interest in child welfare, with preference for those who want to work in kinship care.



Dr. Mary Bremer Barron Scholarship Fund
This fund supports scholarships for students, with preference for those from the greater Flint community.



MSW Veterans Scholarship
This fund supports veterans by providing scholarships for study in the MSW program.



Paul P. and Donna K. Freddolino Endowment for Distance Education
This fund supports the School of Social Work's distance educational programs, including both student support and the development of new educational technologies.



The School of Social Work Endowed Fund
This fund provides a range of supports for the School, including student scholarships, support for faculty research, and support for School programs.



Future Leaders Endowed Scholarship in Social Work
This fund supports graduate students through scholarships, assistantships, or fellowships.



Gary R. Anderson Endowed Fund for Child Welfare Leadership
This fund supports workshops, lectures, and scholarships in the School related to child welfare leadership and workplace development.



Chance at Childhood Endowment Fund
This fund supports research, education, training, and outreach concerning intervention and treatment for at-risk children and families; children's justice; and coordination of professionals dealing with at-risk children and families.



Youth Education and Support
This fund helps build, test, and disseminate research focused on real ways to increase child and youth access to accurate, non-stigmatized knowledge of mental illness and recovery.



David and Nancy Hanafin Neal Scholarship Fund
This fund supports student scholarships that enable BSW or MSW students to continue their education and complete their degrees.



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Contributing writers: Anne Hughes, Brandon Drain
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MSU School of Social Work

Baker Hall, Room 254
655 Auditorium Road
East Lansing, MI 48824

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A Mission of Social Justice and Positive Change: The MSU School of Social Work is dedicated to educating students for ethical, competent, responsive, and innovative social work practice, and to conducting and disseminating high quality research that improves the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. Our teaching, research, and outreach synergistically promote social justice, positive change, and solutions to the problems facing diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS