



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

Spring 2023



SPRING RENEWAL: Reflection,
Resilience, and the Road Ahead



School students, faculty, and alumni propelled by **resilience, perseverance, and achievement**

Hello, Friends of the School of Social Work,

As we celebrate spring, we can't help but reflect on what this semester has meant to all of us at the School, at MSU, and in our social work community. The mass shooting that occurred on campus on February 13th deeply affected the MSU family. Students, faculty, staff, and community members all mourned the lives lost and those disrupted. We are still working on healing together and trying to make sense of this senseless act of violence.

As a School, we both accepted help from our wonderful social work community and gave help to the MSU community. You sent us cards, cookies, and virtual hugs. Many of you came to campus to support MSU students, faculty, and staff. We offered our expertise on trauma, recovery, returning to the classroom, and sustaining community. In Baker Hall, we created a space for the community to reflect, relax, and restore. We are so grateful for the outpouring of support from within and outside of the School of Social Work.

Our students continued to pursue their degrees, and we celebrated graduation the first weekend of May (see photos inside). This year, it was especially inspiring to see the next generation of social workers take their next steps. We are so proud of all their hard work and dedication to the social work profession. The School is piloting a new scholarship to help support our MSW students. The Future Social Worker Scholarship will provide a stipend to all MSW students as they enter their final year in the program. We are hopeful that this support will allow students to stay in the program and enter the profession with less debt.

Last spring, we launched an alumni survey and learned that our alumni would like to participate in more networking opportunities. One frequent request was to have a homecoming event. This fall, the School will host an alumni event during homecoming weekend. Please join us the afternoon of September 22 for the chance to connect with the School and other alumni. We hope to see you there!

Thank you for your support of the School of Social Work.

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



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STANDING STRONG— MSU School of Social Work: Be the change

We are proud to spotlight two initiatives that have significantly impacted our community: the establishment of Room 155 as a restorative space and the successful execution of the Bells of Change Advocacy Project.

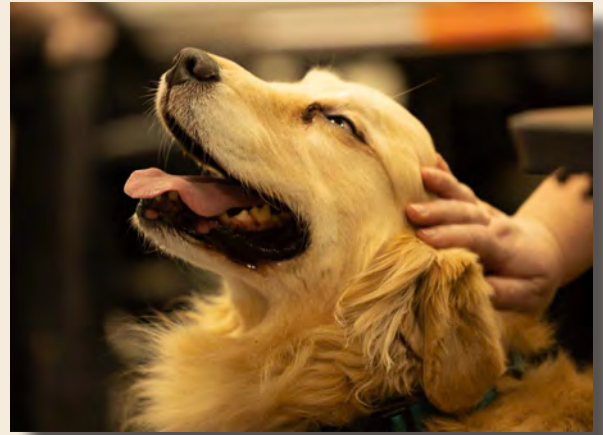
Room 155: A Haven for Reflection and Connection

Following the spring break, our community discovered a nurturing space for reflection and connection in Baker Hall's Room 155. We obtained permission from the College to repurpose this room as a sanctuary for relaxation, reflection, and reconnection for the remainder of the semester.

In light of the challenging events our MSU community had to confront, including the distressing on-campus shooting on February 13th, this room served as a lighthouse of recovery and healing. Open to all students, faculty, and staff, Room 155 provided a serene environment to take some time for oneself, recharge, and connect with others. Although our School of Social Work led in maintaining this room, it was made accessible to all members of our College community.

Bells of Change: Advocacy in Action

The Bells of Change Advocacy Project was our resolute response to the gun violence that has impacted our community. Collectively, our students, faculty, and staff hung Bells of Change on the trees near Baker Hall, each bell symbolizing our shared commitment to ending gun violence. This potent act of advocacy illustrated our united vision to reduce violence and cultivate a safer, more inclusive community.



Both Room 155 and the Bells of Change Advocacy Project reflect our School's dedication to providing a supportive environment for our community and advocating for social change. As we move forward, we are inspired by the strength and resilience of our MSU community and look forward to continuing these initiatives in the upcoming semesters.



Heather McCauley: The College of Social Science *2023 Outstanding Teacher Award* winner

The College of Social Science awarded **Heather McCauley**, ScD, with the *2023 Outstanding Teacher Award*. This award recognizes a current faculty member in the College who takes pride in and is committed to quality teaching and who demonstrates substantial, continuing involvement in undergraduate education. Nominations are submitted by chairs and directors with input from current students.

“It’s incredibly special,” said McCauley on receiving the award. “The fact that it was a process that began with my students meant a lot.”

The long-lasting impact McCauley has on her students played a pivotal role in her receiving this award. Her pragmatic, problem-solving approach to teaching—combined with an open mind, primed for mixed methods research—allowed her to push the boundaries of her role of as a teacher—something that was received as infectious and inspiring to her students. “I tend to be a scholar who pushes the boundaries of my discipline,” said McCauley. “I often teach research methods, and my goal in those courses is to help students realize that research is accessible to them—that they can use research to make social change.”

With a background in social epidemiology, McCauley has a strategic vision to create and sustain social change through her work—both as a researcher and a teacher. “I was put on this earth to prevent violence and to support survivors of violence,” said McCauley. Also, being a part of the MSU School of Social Work has given McCauley insight on

how to integrate values within research—giving a more interpersonal feel to her social science research.

“One of the reasons I’m so proud to be a faculty member in the School of Social Work is because it’s a values-based profession,” said McCauley. “I think about how we can incorporate those social work values in our research. I hope my students learn how they can ground their research in their values.”

McCauley uses a team science model in her work, giving her the opportunity to collaborate with a myriad of talented, diverse faculty members, all from different disciplines. She attributes those relationships to her success and growth as a professional. “Doing this work with other people has made the work more meaningful,” said McCauley. “You will never see me write a single-authored paper because I truly believe my perspectives are strengthened by bouncing them off of others’ perspectives.”

This award also comes with an invitation to be the Michigan State University College of Social Science Faculty Commencement keynote speaker at the 2023 Spring Commencement. This grants McCauley an opportunity to thank her students and colleagues for the award, as well as to congratulate and encourage those she’s taught and mentored along the way.

“The phrase ‘lift as you rise’ is something we use on our team,” said McCauley. “Recognizing every time each one of us is elevated, it is our duty to reach back and help the next generation. I’ve benefitted from those kinds of mentors, and I hope to be that for my students.”



Heather McCauley (in red gown) receiving the *2023 Outstanding Teacher Award*

Aubree Montie: The College of Social Science *2023 Matt Hansen Support Staff Award* winner

Aubree Montie, a member of the MSU School of Social Work, has been named the recipient of the College of Social Science *Matt Hansen Support Staff Award*. This award recognizes exemplary contributions of support staff members to the College and was first granted in 2020. It was renamed in 2021 in honor of **Matt Hansen**, who was the inaugural recipient of the award and support staff member in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

Aubree has been a member of the School of Social Work for 16 years in various roles and was surprised to receive this award. When asked about her reaction to receiving the award, Aubree stated, “I was shocked and really honored. There were even some tears as well.”

Aubree believes that open communication is vital in her role as a support staff member. She also stresses the importance of understanding and patience when working with others. “I think open communication is huge,” said Montie. “A lot of understanding and patience—being able to point people in the right direction for success.”

Montie’s exceptional performance in her role as the Unit HR Coordinator has not gone unnoticed by her colleagues and superiors. Her ability to navigate complex HR situations with ease,

and come up with effective solutions, has made her an indispensable part of the team. “As her supervisor, I am very appreciative of Aubree’s ability to assess a situation and make recommendations and solutions to HR issues,” said **Nancy Gray**, Aubree’s supervisor. “She is an asset to the School of Social Work.”

One of the things that Aubree enjoys most about her job is seeing students and colleagues grow and evolve over time. “That’s one of the blessings of being in a department for so long,” said Montie. “Seeing a student start off and go on to wherever they end up.”

As a support staff member, Aubree is not afraid to ask for help when needed. She knows that collaboration and teamwork are essential to her success. “I love to problem solve, but I also know when I need help,” said Montie.



Aubree Montie

The College of Social Science *Matt Hansen Support Staff Award* is a well-deserved recognition of Aubree’s commitment to excellence and service to the School of Social Work and the College of Social Science. Her dedication to her work, her colleagues, and the students she serves make her a valued member of the College of Social Science’s support staff. Congratulations, Aubree, on this well-deserved honor!

MSU Social Work student creates web platform to connect nonprofits with corporate giving programs

MSU School of Social Work MSW student **James Rawson** has embarked on a project to connect nonprofit organizations with corporate community giving programs. Rawson's project aims to create a centralized web-based platform that will make it easier for nonprofits to identify and access funding opportunities in the mid-Michigan area.

Rawson's idea for a centralized web-based platform came to fruition two years ago when he and a friend decided to manually comb through the Yellow Pages to find businesses with corporate giving programs for a nonprofit he once worked at. "We figured it out by going to the Yellow Pages and looking in the 'about' section of every single business to find their corporate giving," Rawson recalls. This long, arduous process is one of many things nonprofits must do to accurately locate funding opportunities.

Since then, Rawson has been working hard to develop a web-based platform that would provide accessibility and connection to available corporate community giving programs. Through his own experience, he recognizes the time constraints that nonprofit agencies face while researching funding opportunities and highlights the financial distress faced by nonprofit organizations in Michigan. Rawson emphasizes the need to improve social capital to foster economic development and the role of a web-based platform in connecting nonprofit agencies with corporate community giving programs.

"To address the challenges, we are making it accessible to everyone," Rawson explains. "We also want to make sure that every business that has a giving program is in the database."

Rawson is passionate about his work and is funding the project solely on his own—which means that he must find new ways to optimize cost, time, and find ways to spread the word about the developing platform.

Despite the challenges, Rawson is excited about the connections he has made through his work. With two years in development, liaising with over 80 various local corporations and businesses, Rawson has cultivated a profound appreciation for the focused, independent nature of his work. "We're forming connections, forming relationships and feeling trust," said Rawson. He believes that by investing in different programs, the Lansing area can give hope to its residents and turn its economic fortunes around.

"I feel like the Lansing area is on a downward spiral," Rawson explains. "I think if we're investing in these different programs, we give hope to the residents that things are getting better."

Rawson's initiative is a critical step toward improving the accessibility and connection between nonprofit agencies and corporate community giving programs. For more on Rawson's project, visit his website: <https://businesscharitydirectory.com/>



James Rawson

Undergrad student named MSU's 13th Udall Scholar

Roxy Sprowl is the 13th Udall Scholar to be named from Michigan State University. Sprowl is an Honors College junior majoring in social work in the College of Social Science with minors in race and ethnicity of the United States, and American Indian and Indigenous Studies. She is a member of the Social Science Scholars Program, recipient of the STARR Charitable Foundation Scholarship, and leader in the North American Indigenous Student Organization at MSU.

Sprowl is one of 55 students from 46 colleges and universities selected as 2023 Udall Scholars. Of those 55 scholars, 37 intend to pursue careers related to the environment; nine Native American/Alaska Native Scholars intend to pursue careers related to Tribal public policy; and nine Native American/Alaska Native Scholars intend to pursue careers related to Native health care. The applicant pool included 384 students nominated by 172 colleges and universities. This year, 55 students were also awarded Honorable Mentions.

Sprowl is passionate about Indigenous child welfare, Tribal sovereignty, and Native representation. She plans to pursue a future devoted to preserving Indigenous sovereignty, advancing Indigenous leadership, and advocating for Indigenous youth and communities.

Sprowl is Ojibwe from the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and attended Marquette Senior High School in Marquette, Michigan.

"I am extremely honored and grateful to have been named a Udall Scholar for my commitment to serving Indigenous communities, both at Michigan State and beyond," Sprowl said. "Chi miigwech (thank you) to my university mentors **Dr. Emily Sorroche**, **Dr. Kristin Arola**, and **Dr.**

John Waller; my supervisors **Lorna Elliott-Egan** and **Jason Cross**; and my Indigenous community and family. Without their endless support and guidance, I would not have the honor of being chosen for this incredible scholarship."

Kristin Arola, Associate Professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and Cultures, and **Emily Sorroche**, Associate Director in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, said, "We cannot speak highly enough of Roxy's character. Take for example that after the acts of violence on campus in February, she

immediately sprang into action, calling in the Greater Lansing community to donate traditional medicines (tobacco, sweet grass, cedar, and sage) to gather into care packages for Native MSU students. We've heard from parents who were beyond grateful knowing their children were in a community that could support and care for them. Roxy has not, and will not, take the credit for this activity, but it was her leadership in NAISO that made this happen."

Department of History Associate Professor and Director of the Social Science Scholars Program John Waller said, "The specifications of the Udall award could have been written to describe Roxy: She is dedicated to the recovery and celebration of Indigenous culture and committed to devoting her life to advancing Indigenous civil rights causes through wise policy. Just as importantly, as a forceful advocate and respectful collaborator, Roxy epitomizes the virtues celebrated by the Udall Foundation: civility in debate, integrity in the defense of principles, and consensus in leadership."

"Roxy is an exceptional scholar who embodies the values of Anishinaabe leadership," said **Christopher P. Long**, Dean of the MSU Honors College and of the College of Arts & Letters. "She puts consensus, integrity, and civility at the heart of everything she does, and we are thrilled that her outstanding work has been recognized by this well-deserved Udall Scholarship."

Each scholarship provides up to \$7,000 for eligible academic expenses for the scholar's junior or senior year of academic study. Since the program's inception in 1996, the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation has awarded 1,898 Udall Scholarships totaling over \$9.9 million and 1,279 Honorable Mentions. The 2023 Udall Scholars will connect August 2-6 for the annual Udall Scholar Orientation to meet one another and program alumni; learn more about the Udall legacy of public service; and interact with community leaders in environmental fields, Tribal health care and governance.

The National and International Fellowships and Scholarships (NIFS) Office, administered by the Honors College, helps interested undergraduate and graduate students pursue major national and international awards by providing information and direct support throughout the competitive application processes.

This story originally appeared on the NIFS website.



Roxy Sprowl

School's first annual Advocacy Day: An evening of insight and inspiration

Thank you to everyone who joined us for our first annual Advocacy Day, a special event designed to galvanize our community and encourage active participation in social work advocacy. The evening was filled with enriching presentations, student advocacy posters, and interactive sessions, all alongside a delicious Qdoba Taco Bar and MSU Bakery Cookies!

We started the evening with a warm welcome from **Monaca Eaton**, our Associate Director and BASW Program Director. **Duane Breijak**, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Michigan Chapter, gave an enlightening talk on the state of social work advocacy in 2023. He shared valuable insights on the changes in licensure, the impact of the national social work compact, workforce shortages, and the increasing role of social workers in political office across Michigan.

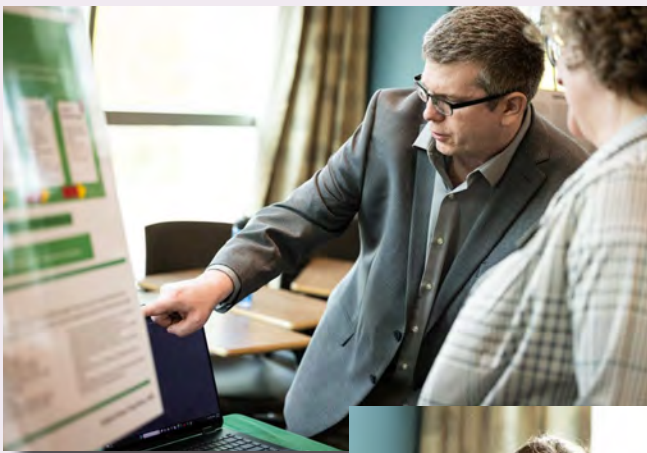
Saylor Reinders represented "Students Demand Action at MSU for Gun Sense in America," sharing their important mission and their ongoing efforts. We also had the privilege of hearing from **Dr. Anna Maria Santiago**, who emphasized the role of activist social work scholars in advocating for racial justice.

We held a book raffle and showcased advocacy organization tables and MSW student advocacy posters. Our 2023 Campaign School Participant Panel featured MSW Candidates **Sterling Bentley** and **Polina Naumova**, facilitated by **Dr. Takisha LaShore**, MSW Program Director.

The representatives from SPARK Research for Social Change, **Dr. Heather McCauley** and **Dr. Joanne Smith-Darden**, shared about their community-engaged research, training, and practice aimed at ending violence.

Finally, PhD Candidate **Leo Kattari** engaged us all with an interactive workshop on storytelling as a powerful tool for advocacy. His session highlighted how social workers can utilize storytelling to promote equity and justice in their practice.

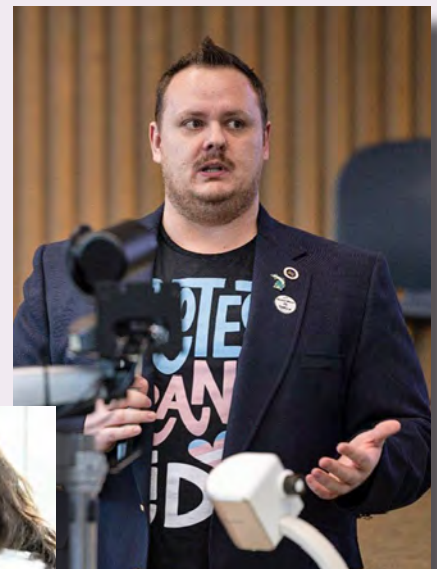
We concluded the evening with closing remarks from **Dr. Anne Hughes**, Director of the MSU School of Social Work. As we reflect on the event, we're filled with a renewed sense of purpose and look forward to seeing the impact of our collective efforts in the field of social work advocacy. We plan to make this celebration of social work advocacy an annual event at the School!



ADVOCACY
and ACTION



EQUITY
and
JUSTICE



INSIGHT and
INSPIRATION

“It [violence] impacts your sense of safety, your mental health, your physical health, and the quality of your neighborhood.”

Dean’s Research Associate Kendall Morris seeks to reduce community violence in Black communities within Detroit

Kendall Morris is a College of Social Science Dean’s Research Associate whose focus is on community violence and trauma in Black neighborhoods. She is a part of a team of researchers who were recently funded by the College as part of the Strategic Partnership Grants Program to improve understanding of community-based violence reduction and neighborhood safety.

There are many underlying issues that plague Black communities. These range from economic deprivation, outright poverty, cyclical crime, systemic racism, and more. However, none of those issues have the immediate and long-lasting impact as community violence—an issue that rips families apart, reshapes neighborhoods and communities, and creates a rippling effect from generation to generation, ensnaring families to relive traumas of the past.

For Kendall Morris, her focus for this issue came during her MSW Program at the U of M, where she was a part of a pilot study that looked at the impact of sudden death on families in Detroit, Michigan. This sparked a deep concern and interest for the subject study in a more broadened sense, leading her to pursue her doctorate at Boston University with community violence as her concentration.

“What’s happening in Black communities is a chronic cycle that continues to plague neighborhoods and communities,” Morris said. “It’s really shaping the outlook of the community, even if you don’t have a direct member of your family killed.”

Morris’s philosophy on her research is more qualitative, given the issue. A more community-based approach *vs.* a quantitative study offers a more in-depth, interconnected feel for the most affected aspect of the issue: The families who are impacted.



Kendall Morris

“I like to talk to the people who are being impacted,” Morris said. “In order to really understand this issue, we need to get into these communities and talk to the people who are dealing with it firsthand.”

While completing her graduate studies at Boston University, Morris’s research pursuits became all too real.

“My aunt was murdered in her home on the east side of Detroit by the father of her children,” said Morris. “This was someone that we knew very well, someone we vacationed with and did things with. It makes it even more saddening.”

Dealing with the loss of her aunt, while being miles away from home, prompted the Detroit native to further pursue her education with more drive, focus, and empathy. It also reinforced the perspective she had on the issue of community violence within Black communities, as Morris comes from a more well-off, educated family, which deviates from the stereotypical narrative of the issue stemming from poor Blacks.

Kendall Morris’s journey has led her to Michigan State University as a Dean’s Research Associate, where she hopes to imbed a sense of awareness and action in the research community as a whole.

“I want my work to inform the greater research community because, unfortunately, the topic that I’m researching isn’t being heavily researched,” said Morris.

A revival of Detroit is also one of her aims, and she continues to put the needs and perspectives of those affected first.

“It’s going to take a multi-tiered approach,” said Morris. “We need to invest more into these communities and neighborhoods so that people feel a sense of community and belonging again.”

“When people allude to the issue of race, they are allowing themselves to be amenable to discrimination and exploitation. With the removal of race from discourse, it creates the perfect opportunity for the world to unify.”

The undertones of racism: MSU professor proposes a nuanced perspective on race he hopes will unify the world

One of the most prominent, empirically-based forms of evidence on racism can be linked to the oppression of dark-skinned races, according to **Dr. Ronald E. Hall**, Professor at Michigan State University. This association of complexion and oppression, defined as colorism, has been dubbed a taboo subject of research in academia—which has led to “a literature void that exceeds the context of traditional local race categories to permeate global borders,” Hall said.

Hall intends on bringing this issue of colorism to light, as he embarks on releasing his new book in August of 2023 titled, *Routledge International Handbook on Colorism: Bigotry Beyond Borders*.

“Because this is a taboo subject, no one wants to speak about it,” Hall said. “This is a product of colonization. We’ve internalized those Eurocentric norms, and we’ve assessed ourselves on the basis of how close we are to being white.”

This idea of relative whiteness is the basis of Hall’s ideology and area of research, as he suggests that colorism has played a major role in the way Black people operate within society.

“We are the group that has to learn how to step outside of our cultural norms,” Hall said. “Because this is a Eurocentric culture, one must have the skills to navigate it. Euro-Americans don’t have that necessity because their native culture is the standard.”

Hall’s ideology and research suggests that the matter of colorism goes beyond the duality of Black and white but permeates the entire globe.

“Subsequent to melanin content in human skin is the evolution of a status hierarchy that has spread globally,”



Dr. Ronald E. Hall

Hall said. “Its manifestation among select groups is nuanced to each particular population. However, all but absent from exception, dark skin equates with inferiority and/or less status. Light skin equates with superiority and/or utmost status.”

Hall believes that the elimination of race from the equation—which he suggests is confined by subjective interpretation—is the answer to creating unity. By looking at the issue from an objective, quantifiable set of parameters, like the content of melanin in one’s skin, we can get to the root of discrimination and oppression.

“I want to diminish this whole racial construct,” Hall said. “Complexion is objective and cuts across all racial lines. The only purpose that race serves is to divide. When people allude to the issue of race, they are allowing themselves to be amenable to discrimination and exploitation. With the removal of race from discourse, it creates the perfect opportunity for the world to unify.”

Having a full understanding of how his claims and area of research are perceived—not only in the world of academia, but in the eyes of the public domain—Hall continues to push forth his studies and research.

“There were people that struggled to ensure I have the opportunities that they didn’t have, and some paid with ultimate sacrifice,” Hall said, alluding to the Black heroes of the past. “So, if I have to take some hits, that’s okay; that’s par for the course.”

Hall is set to host a two-day virtual conference on colorism August 17–18. It’s slated to be the largest meeting of faculty, scholars, practitioners, students, representatives from businesses and industry, organizations, community members, and others interested in colorism across various disciplines and specializations.

“We really want to increase the quality of life and quality of care for the person with dementia,” said Sun. “So that they can live in the community longer and avoid nursing homes—so that people can age in place.”

MSU School of Social Work research team seeks to create equitable dementia care support to ethnic minorities in rural communities

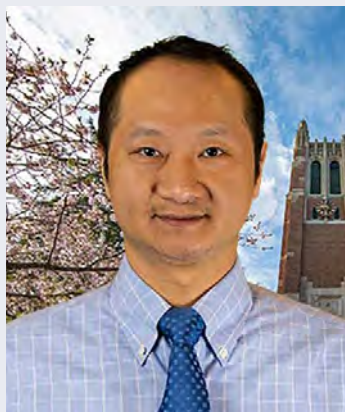
This project was funded with a grant of \$333,096 from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, which supports a program entitled, “Expanding Dementia Care Support in Underserved Communities and Populations in Michigan.”

In-home dementia care provides those in need with the comfort, safety, and assurance needed to properly age in place—while being surrounded by their loved ones. Yet, this ideal reality for dementia patients runs into barriers. Currently, there are about 190,000 people living with dementia in Michigan, per the MSU research team. Ethnic minority groups, and those living in rural communities, in particular, lack access to the resources and support necessary to adequately provide for dementia patients, which often leads to those patients being put in institutional care facilities, which can be costly and mitigates the time spent with loved ones, per the MSU research team.

To bridge this gap within those underserved communities, **Dr. Fei Sun**, lead researcher for this project, and his team will offer a two-tiered service to help patients and family providers alike.

“We are providing two social work services to those families,” said Sun. “One is general case management—which provides information, education and linkage to services. The second is more clinical, like counseling [for the family providers].”

One of the focuses of this project also includes the Latino community living in rural areas, who also lack access to adequate care and resources. Spearheading this aspect of the project is **Dr. Daniel Vélez Ortiz**, who states:



Dr. Fei Sun



Dr. Daniel Vélez Ortiz

“The Latino focus is to also create materials and trainings that are culturally appropriate because the Latino population has been lagging in general,” said Vélez Ortiz. “When it comes to Latinos in rural areas, they face similar cultural barriers, plus the lower resources in those communities. We would like to continue reaching Latina/o/x in all areas, urban or rural.”

This project will be funded for two years, which the team hopes they can use as a model to build on for a potential federal grant to expand its reach across other underserved communities in Michigan. The underserved communities in this current project include the 12 rural counties covered by Region 9 Area Agency on Aging, a division of Northeastern Michigan Community Service Agency (NEMCSA), who is a key partner of this project. The partnership will assist family caregivers with complicated needs by providing case management or counseling support through social work interns at the Dementia Care Support Office at the MSU School of Social Work. In addition, the team hopes to expand the access and usage of Trualta—the online case management service—across those communities as well. At the heart of this research initiative lies a shared goal.

“We really want to increase the quality of life and quality of care for the person with dementia,” said Sun. “So that they can live in the community longer and avoid nursing homes—so that people can age in place.”

Dr. Paul Freddolino (Co-I), from the School of Social Work, will assist with education of technology use for older adults and family caregivers.

Reconnecting the disconnected:

MSU researchers work to combat social isolation and loneliness in older adults while bridging the gap in the digital divide

Drs. Paul Freddolino (PI) and Fei Sun (Co-I), together with doctoral student Ha Neul Kim, MSW student Megan Bentley, and BASW student Marie Huber from the MSU School of Social Work have received a grant of \$96,994 from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. The project entitled, “Supporting Older Adult Literacy and Health Equity,” will be conducted in collaboration with the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA).

Throughout the United States, there are older adults living alone, at risk of social isolation and emotional loneliness. One such group are recipients of home-delivered meals, often delivered by Meals-on-Wheels programs operated by local community agencies. In the U.S., approximately 800,000 older adults receive these meals. Although research has shown that information and communication technologies (ICTs), like email and videoconferencing, can help reduce isolation and loneliness, older adults as a group have a lower rate of adoption of these tools than other age groups. This is the situation targeted by an innovative model developed by Dr. Paul Freddolino and his team to mitigate isolation and loneliness in older adults, while also increasing their overall usage and literacy in ICTs.

This study plans to build upon the success of a pilot study, and aims to “...improve all of the resources that we have developed so we can launch a bigger project in more communities and really test the model,” said Freddolino.

“The ultimate goal is to reach older adults who are hard to reach—minority groups, the less educated, as well as those in rural areas—and offer them digital skills,” said Freddolino. “That’s the thing that’s driving us.”

This project builds upon a successful pilot project with OCCOA called Virtual Table, where isolated older adults who received home-delivered meals were approached by the driver who delivered their meals; drivers asked if they would be interested in learning about ICTs in a project with MSU. The drivers were people they knew and trusted, and this appeared to overcome their resistance. Participants received peer tutoring in ICTs and also in telehealth. Twenty-five older adults signed up for the project, and 20 completed it. Results were positive; the number of ICTs used and the frequency of their use increased, particularly the use of videoconferencing. This



Dr. Paul Freddolino



Dr. Fei Sun

set participants up to connect with family and friends, and to be active participants in telehealth.

Virtual Table’s participants also added an unexpected dimension to the mix. After learning more about ICT and increasing their skill sets, participants wanted to immediately put those newfound skills into action and expand their social networks.

“From our participants, we got the request to link them with each other,” said Freddolino. “So, we started to have a get-together every other month on Zoom. We did a collective call and were able to provide them with a light meal, something to drink, and dessert... [the idea] was fascinating because it came from them—that was the fun part.”

Looking forward: Virtual Tables II and III

The new project also aims at testing the inverse of their previous method by introducing participants to the telehealth portion first.

“What we want to explore is teaching people about telehealth first,” said Freddolino. “Then, after they see the usefulness of technology tools, we hope they will want to learn more about information and communication technologies.”

This value proposition strategy may help to further alleviate the hesitation and fears older adults have toward ICTs by showing them the intrinsic value and the possibilities they offer.

MSU alumnus works toward bettering Native American communities and reflects on his career cultivation

Austin Lowes is a School of Social Work MSW alum who graduated in 2020. He is now the Tribal Chairman of the Sault Tribe of the Chippewa Indians.

Deep within the heart of every social worker is the undying passion, drive, and determination to help and advocate for others, regardless of the size and magnitude of the task. For Austin Lowes, his time at MSU strengthened this passion and helped focus and direct it on a broader level than micro-level social work.

Lowes's Spartan journey began after spending time as a child welfare caseworker, where he felt the need to further his education to pursue a much broader goal. "I knew if I was going to advance my career, I needed to also advance my education," said Lowes.

MSU's Master of Social Work Program attracted Lowes because of its prestige and flexibility, allowing the father of two daughters—with the oldest being deaf from birth—a chance to further his education while continuing to build his family.

"I had a young family, and it was a hybrid program," said Lowes. "So, I knew that I would be able to have flexibility within my schedule to manage working full-time, being a full-time father, and have my graduate studies taken care of. I was working 40 hours a week, doing 16 hours a week in my field placement, and my second daughter was born."

Lowes was awarded a fellowship to the National Congress of American Indians for his commitment to addressing Tribal issues—something that would become a turning point in his career trajectory. This fellowship granted Lowes an opportunity to meet and connect with government officials and Tribal leaders in DC, which "created a spark in my head...I started to think about the good I could do in my community with this education."

After a virtual graduation in 2020, amid the pandemic, Lowes immediately went to work as he was soon elected to the Sault Tribe's council. He took his expertise in social work and applied it to the macro level. He identified the tribe community as a "client," and his focus was fixed on linking the tribe toward the necessary resources to meet their needs.

Lowes had his hands full, as the COVID-19 pandemic shook the foundations of the Sault Tribe, where he played a hand in various initiatives funded by the *CARES Act 2020* as well as the AARP. Lowes and company worked to alleviate housing instability and substance abuse through the creation of several programs within the tribe. In addition, they worked toward purchasing more land, acquiring 560 acres of land and 7,000 feet of shoreline on Sugar Island—the Sault Tribe's native lands—which they intend to use for hunting, fishing, and practicing culture while also acting as a site for future housing.

Lowes was recently sworn in as the Tribal Chairman for the Sault Tribe, officially making him the youngest Tribal Chairman in Sault Tribe history at age 34. His time at MSU proved to provide him with the roadmap to success by giving him the tools, resources, and education necessary to advance his career.

"Looking back, I wouldn't have done anything different, because I firmly believe my time at MSU put me on track to where I am today."

"It was going to be a short-term sacrifice for a long-term goal."

Austin Lowes and his two daughters



Michigan State University alumna creates library to foster education and break the cycle of poverty in Namibia

Auguste Shikongo, an alumna of Michigan State University's School of Social Work, is on a mission to bring literacy and education to her home country of Namibia. Shikongo's passion for education and desire to give back to her community has led her to create a library and community learning center, with the hope of breaking the cycle of poverty in her area.

Shikongo, who grew up in a small village in Namibia, knows firsthand the challenges that come with living in an underprivileged community. "Most of the parents in that area don't know how to read or write and are not able to assist their children with schoolwork," said Shikongo. "Access to education and resources is limited, and it's a struggle for children to even have the chance to pursue higher education."

Despite these obstacles, Shikongo was able to attend college and earn an MSW from MSU's School of Social Work. She credits her success to the support of her family and community, as well as her own determination to break free from the cycle of poverty. "I destroyed that poverty cycle within my life and my family's as well," said Shikongo.

Now, Shikongo wants to provide that same opportunity for the children in her community. Her growing library and community learning center will serve as a place for children to access books, educational resources, and technology. Shikongo hopes that by providing these resources, she can help children gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life.

"I want the children to have access to the resources they need, so that they can become successful, gain employment, and gain economic independence," said Shikongo. Her goal is for the students to go on to college and find a way to give back to the community in their own ways.

Shikongo's library and community learning center is still in the developmental stages, but she, and the community, are optimistic about its potential impact. "They are really on board with the initiative," said Shikongo. "They are very excited!"

Auguste Shikongo's story is a testament to the power of education and the importance of giving back to one's community. Her determination to break the cycle of poverty and provide access to education for children in her community is the hallmark of an admirable goal.

For more on Shikongo's mission, the Auguste Community Aid Project—Auguste Community Aid Project, visit <https://www.augustecommunityaidproject.org/>



Auguste Shikongo credits her success to the support of her family and community, as well as her own determination to break free from the cycle of poverty.

"I destroyed that poverty cycle within my life and my family's as well," said Shikongo.

Celebrating the illustrious career of Dr. Joanne Riebschleger: A legacy of innovation and compassion in social work

Dr. **Joanne Riebschleger**, Associate Professor and Director of the PhD Program, is retiring in August of 2023. Joanne came to Michigan State in 1999 and joined the School of Social Work full time in 2004. Joanne is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in youth mental health literacy and the needs of children whose parents have severe and persistent mental illness. She has developed an evidence-informed mental health literacy intervention that is being adapted in school districts in Michigan and Australia currently, with plans to expand internationally. The efforts she has made to increase awareness of the needs of children of parents with mental illness and decrease mental health stigma through the Mental Health Information for Teens website (mwhiteens.org) has changed lives.

Joanne is a senior scholar and team leader in the collaborative known as the International Research Collaborative for Change in Parent and Family Mental Health. This is a biennial meeting in Prato, Italy, of field experts from 30 countries who collaborate on projects to improve intergenerational mental health. In 2016, this group recognized Dr. Riebschleger as one of the top 10 most influential scholars in the prevention of transgenerational mental illness. Dr. Riebschleger currently serves this group as a member of the Leadership Committee.

Joanne is also ensuring her legacy of international collaboration and enriching educational exchanges is passed on to the next generation of scholars. She has launched seven international doctoral and master's students, who now have a richer understanding of the importance of international partnerships and research.

She is known at the School of Social Work for her excellent mentoring of students and junior faculty, as a kind friend, a feisty advocate, and a wonderful team member. Joanne's warmth and kindness will be greatly missed. On May 10, we celebrated Joanne's retirement with friends and family at the MSU gardens. We wish her all the best in this next phase!



The efforts she has made to increase awareness of the needs of children of parents with mental illness and decrease mental health stigma through the Mental Health Information for Teens website (mwhiteens.org) has changed lives.



MSU School of Social Work launching the “Future Social Worker Scholarship”

We are thrilled to announce an exciting new initiative at the MSU School of Social Work: **The Future Social Worker Scholarship!** This pilot project is our proactive step toward alleviating the burden of educational debt, enhancing the retention of master’s-degree students, and investing in the next generation of social work professionals.

We’ve listened to your concerns regarding educational debt, and we understand that it can pose a significant obstacle to pursuing and completing an MSW degree. With the Future Social Worker Scholarship, we aim to

It’s our way of supporting you, our future social workers, as you strive to make a difference in the world.

empower our students to overcome this hurdle and take the next step in their journey to becoming influential social workers.

Starting in fall 2023, all MSW students entering their advanced year in the program will be eligible to receive a \$1,500 scholarship. This financial boost will be awarded to students enrolled in a SW 894 section after the drop date and is available once per student during their time in the MSW Program.

The processing of scholarships will be handled by our graduate office, ensuring a smooth and efficient distribution of funds to our deserving students. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing this scholarship, with future funding dependent on the financial health of the School.

We believe that this scholarship represents a significant investment in the future of social work. It’s our way of supporting you, our future social workers, as you strive to make a difference in the world.

We’ve heard your feedback, and we’re excited to announce a new addition to our calendar!

MSU School of Social Work Alumni Homecoming Event

On the afternoon of September 22, 2023, we invite you to join us for a memorable event aimed at rekindling old connections and forging new ones. It’s the perfect opportunity to reminisce about your time at MSU, catch up with familiar faces, and network with fellow alumni.

We can’t wait to welcome you back to campus this fall. Save the date—we look forward to seeing you there!

SAVE THE DATE
HOMECOMING

SOCIAL WORK

Join Us

SEPTEMBER 22ND, 2023 @ 3:00PM-4:30PM

SNYDER PHILLIPS HALL
RM C202 + C204

Saluting the Class of 2023: Strength, Perseverance, and Achievement

As we bid adieu to the academic year, it's with great pride and excitement that we celebrate the accomplishments of our graduating class of 2023. Despite facing an extraordinarily challenging year, these students have demonstrated an unyielding resilience, a relentless pursuit of knowledge, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of social work.

The events of this past year—from the heartrending tragedy of the campus shooting to the ongoing global uncertainty—have tested our strength and solidarity. Yet, these trials have also brought to the fore the indomitable spirit of our community. Our graduating students were at the forefront of this resilient response, supporting each other, learning, and serving as beacons of hope and empathy in an uncertain world.

This year's graduates have shown an exceptional dedication to their studies and to their future profession. They have balanced academics with community service, activism, and advocacy work, all while navigating an often tumultuous and unpredictable environment. We are not just proud of their academic achievements, but also

of their character, their courage, and their unwavering commitment to making a positive difference in the world.

Our graduating class is not only leaving MSU with a degree in hand, but also with a wealth of experiences, skills, and wisdom that extend far beyond the classroom. From participating in innovative research projects, to engaging in meaningful advocacy work, to serving our community in countless ways, these graduates are ready to leave their mark on the world of social work.

As we send off the Class of 2023, we're filled with a sense of pride and optimism for what the future holds for them. We're confident that they will use their education, their experiences, and their MSU spirit to effect positive change and to continue advocating for the vulnerable and marginalized in society.

To our graduates, we say: Keep shining. Keep pushing boundaries. Continue to be a voice for those who need it most. And remember that you will always be a part of the MSU School of Social Work family.

[See more photos on next page.]



Saluting the Class 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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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.

Michigan State University is an equal opportunity educational employer.



School of Social Work
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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS