



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

Spring 2024



CELEBRATING SOCIAL WORK



Celebrating social work graduates, research, innovation, and legacy of leadership

Hello Friends of the School of Social Work,

It is a pleasure to bring you this spring newsletter. It is packed full of updates, news, and celebrations. Inside, we bring you highlights of the amazing students we are honored to get to learn with. Spring brings graduation, and it is always such a special time for us. Students who have worked so hard for their degrees get recognized publicly and embark on their professional careers as social workers and academics. Inside you will see photos of our BASW, MSW, and PhD graduates from this spring's festivities.

We are proud to support student and faculty research and innovation. The work of several of our students is shared inside, as are stories about faculty who have been making a difference through their research. The School said goodbye to **Dr. Gary Anderson** in the fall, and we celebrate his legacy and his leadership.

Like many other schools, we have been faced with decreasing enrollments. Sadly, this means that we need to reduce the number of off-campus programs that we offer. Our weekend and Flint programs will be phased out as we modify how we offer the MSW degree. This has been very challenging for the students affected, and we have tried our best to minimize disruptions in their learning. As part of this process, we have heard from students and learned about improvements we can make to the student experience. This spring, we have developed four work groups to improve: curriculum, student engagement, online learning, and recruitment. The work groups consist of faculty and students and are charged with identifying actionable items that can be implemented in the next academic year.

As I approach my last year as director, I want to share my appreciation for all of you and what you continue to provide to our School. Your engagement, guidance, and passion for social work have been inspiring to me. If you'd like to share your story in our "Alumni Spotlight," please reach out to our communications manager, **Brandon Drain**, at drainbra@msu.edu.

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

Go Green!

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

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MSU School of Social Work's Outstanding Senior: Brianna McCray

The Michigan State University School of Social Work is thrilled to congratulate its Outstanding Senior, **Brianna McCray**.

As a first-generation college student and being raised in a single-parent household in Detroit, MI, McCray's pathway as a social worker was riddled with hardship. Her early life was spent navigating economic deprivation that led to bouts of homelessness.

However, the struggles of life would birth perseverance and a sense of duty to help others. "The lack of access to resources, for myself and those surrounding me, empowered me to want to become a social worker," McCray explained. "I wanted to make those resources, which I hadn't had access to, available to children, youth, and families who have either faced or are facing similar hardships—in addition to being a source of support for those that lack one."

McCray attributes her success and stability at MSU to key programs and mentors who have helped guide her in her collegiate journey. Being a member of the MSU FAME Program—a resource center for foster youth alumni attending MSU as well as for youth who were in kinship care, have experienced homelessness, or are otherwise independent—gave McCray a network of friends who share common upbringings and experiences, as well as an avid support system dedicated to her individual success.

"Prior to meeting Chiquita, the director of the MSU FAME Program, I struggled to navigate resources and support as a first-generation undergraduate," said McCray. "However, ever since I have gotten to work with Chiquita, she has helped me to navigate resources valuable to my success and well-being. As well as inspiring me to keep going and even helped me build the courage to get more involved in leadership roles!"



Brianna McCray

During her collegiate tenure, McCray has strived to empower her local community in a variety of ways. Being a member of the Phi Alpha Honor Society, the senior has facilitated and been involved in community service projects which "has allowed me to promote the furthering of social justice in the Lansing community."

As an undergraduate research assistant with the Great First Eight, McCray has been "granted the opportunity to work in developing a curriculum for infants and toddlers in urban areas, which seeks to help teachers make adaptations to the developmental needs of children."

Additionally, McCray has contributed to enhancing the experiences of the Black community on campus. She's done this by becoming a contributor and editor of the MSU publication *The MSU Black Book*, a map to Black networks and resources

at Michigan State University that centers on the Black student experience through a living archive to unearth Black existence at our predominately white institution and recognize the role community connection plays in student success.

For McCray, graduation will be a launching point in what is shaping up to be a prosperous career in social work. The senior plans on attending graduate school to pursue her master's in social work with hopes of one day getting her doctorate as well.

McCray's experience at MSU has "equipped me with drive, passion, patience, and motivation, preparing me for the challenges and opportunities in the field of social work," she explained. "MSU has encouraged me to take advantage of the once-in-a-life opportunities that I have been granted as well as allowed me to work on my leadership skills, which will be highly valued for big opportunities and my work within the field!"

From adversity to advocacy: Maddi Mahar named 2024 NASW-Michigan Social Work Student of the Year

Content advisory: This article mentions suicide and mental health issues.

The MSU School of Social Work would like to congratulate **Maddi Mahar**, a senior majoring in social work, on being named as one of the *2024 NASW-Michigan Social Work Students of the Year*.

Annually, one BSW and one MSW student from each accredited social work program in the state is nominated to receive the *NASW-Michigan Social Work Student of the Year Award*. Each student is recognized at a special regional awards ceremony for outstanding academic achievement, commitment to the *Code of Ethics*, leadership on and off campus, political and legislative engagement, and contribution to a positive image of the social work profession.

Mahar's journey as a social worker was spurred by a series of traumatic events she endured during her upbringing. These range from witnessing mental illness in her family, suicidal ideation, and "observing racism and discrimination toward my sisters, which created a rage inside of me and led me to become a racial advocate," said Mahar.

In 2018, during Mahar's sophomore year in high school, she lost her mother. "For the next five years, I would struggle with homelessness, food security, support, physical, mental and emotional abuse, and poverty," said Mahar. "Everything I experienced led me to social work. I wanted to be the advocate who would listen to their clients, no matter their age. I will fight for racial justice for the rest of my life. I will be the social worker that I needed when I was younger."

Community has played a vital role in Mahar's integration and success while at MSU. Battling poverty and homelessness prompted the Battle Creek, MI, native to join the MSU FAME Program. Joining granted Mahar a chance to learn from, teach, and connect with students with similar backgrounds. "I created a family here—with classmates, coworkers, friends, and mentors," said Mahar. "Without their love and support, I probably wouldn't have made it here."

Mahar uses her lived experiences and passion to help others in every aspect of her life. This is evident in the myriad ways she's involved in programs on and off campus.



Maddi Mahar

Mahar is a part of the MSU Adaptive Sports and Recreation Club—a club which seeks to establish a space where athletes with physical disabilities and able-bodied volunteers can come together to create an integrated community of peers that serves to eradicate negative stereotypes about disability by highlighting the abilities of individuals with physical disabilities. She is also a part of the African Languages Center on campus as well, where she strives to "educate about breaking down stereotypes people perceive of African countries."

Mahar also interns at AmeriCorps where she operates as the LeaderCorps representative. "I represent five different AmeriCorps organizations for the Ingham

County Health Department," Mahar explained. "As the leader, I try to influence program directors to provide more funding for my organizations, which will benefit all the communities we interact with. I lead in hopes to help all my fellow co-workers, programs, and communities."

As a Fulbright-Hays Scholar, the then 20-year-old Mahar was awarded the opportunity to study abroad in South Africa, where she would meet the U.S. South African ambassador at the embassy. This meeting and experience served to refine Mahar's focus in the field of social work. "While I was there, I was allowed to ask questions about equitable education in South African communities, especially when comparing urban and rural areas," said Mahar.

"Many of my ideas prompted the ambassador and my classmates to think, especially when I questioned the access to resources and language teachings."

After graduation, Mahar plans to join the Peace Corps, a long-standing dream of hers. She will be living in South Africa, working as a Primary English School Teacher, as well as "advocating and providing resources in rural areas."

Mahar's journey as a social worker stands as a testament to how adversity forges the human spirit. Her drive, compassion, and will to move forward stems from everything she's walked through and triumphed over. Her late mother will forever remain at the heart of passion. "Another thing that helps me overcome everything, is dedicating all of my work to my mom," Mahar explained. "I do everything to make sure she will always be proud of me."

Three 2023 PURI grant recipients chosen

The Provost's Undergraduate Research Initiative (PURI) grant allows College of Social Science undergraduate students a unique opportunity to conduct transformative research—either one-on-one with a tenured faculty member or part of a research team. This is a University-wide effort—spearheaded by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Office at MSU—to provide all undergraduate students opportunities to engage in research or creative activity throughout their education, regardless of their academic discipline or academic abilities. This year, the School of Social Work had three of its undergraduate students receive the award: **Breanne Sandstorm**, **Jasmine Zavala Gonzalez**, and **Yasmen Alsuraimi**.

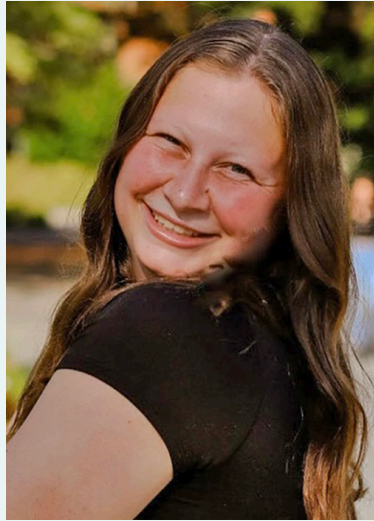
Breanne Sandstorm

This opportunity grants **Breanne Sandstorm** the chance to fuel her project which aims to explore “the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in long-term care (LTC) settings and the relationship ICTs have with quality of care and health outcomes,” Sandstorm explained. Sandstorm, alongside School of Social Work grad student **Stephanie Cuevas**, has used this past semester to collectively gather a complete literary analysis around ICTs in the LTC settings. The two plan on taking the analysis work to form preliminary questions to ask social workers, nurses, and other staff who operate in LTC settings.

Sandstorm's interest in LTC work was spurred by her year-long volunteering endeavor with Heart-to-Heart Hospice, where she gained firsthand knowledge in LTC settings, residential care, and overall experience. “I have been volunteering with this organization for over a year now, and I have visited with residents in various different long-term care settings and have seen how they run firsthand,” Sandstorm explained.

Sandstorm will be partnering with School of Social Work professor and avid aging and technology researcher, **Dr. Paul Freddolino**. Freddolino takes on the role of principal investigator for the project, as well as a mentoring role for the budding researcher. “Professor Freddolino has been a helping hand throughout my experience with research,” Sandstorm said, explaining the value of working alongside tenured faculty. “Coming into the project, he knew I didn't have much experience with research in my past and has been very understanding and a guide throughout the process, allowing me to learn about research hands on and as I go.”

The PURI grant has given Sandstorm the unique opportunity to develop her skillset in conducting research,



Breanne Sandstorm

offers firsthand quality mentorship from an experienced tenured faculty member, and the chance to transform the lives of those who operate in LTC settings. “I hope our research will positively impact the quality and outcomes in long-term care homes,” Sandstorm explains. “I am hopeful that new technologies are being used, and where they are not being used, that our research outcomes can help individuals see the true impact of technology and can allow for increased quality of care in LTC settings that may have not had access to ICTs previously.”

Often students see their research published in academic papers or journals. Sandstorm will also have the opportunity to showcase the results of her research at MSU's University

Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum (UURAF)—an annual, University-wide forum that grants students the chance to present their research findings, scholarship, and creative activities with faculty, staff, peers, and external audiences—with the chance to win a grand prize up to \$500.



2023 PURI grant recipients

Social Work students look to unmask how the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic affected immigrant women in Detroit

Both **Jasmine Zavala Gonzalez** and **Yasmen Alsuraimi** will collaborate on a community-based project that “focuses on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting women of color and immigrant women in Detroit,” Alsuraimi explained. This project looks to investigate the accessibility of assistance resources within childcare, elderly care, and the overall economic disparities that were brought on upon by the COVID-19 pandemic “and how it affects labor force participation and their access to community-based family care resources,” Zavala Gonzalez added. The team, led by School of Social Work Professor **Dr. Anna Maria Santiago**, hopes to uncover the persistent effects from the pandemic by focusing on these areas. “By exploring these areas, it provides a broader understanding of the ongoing struggles faced by women of color and immigrant women in Detroit,” Alsuraimi continued.

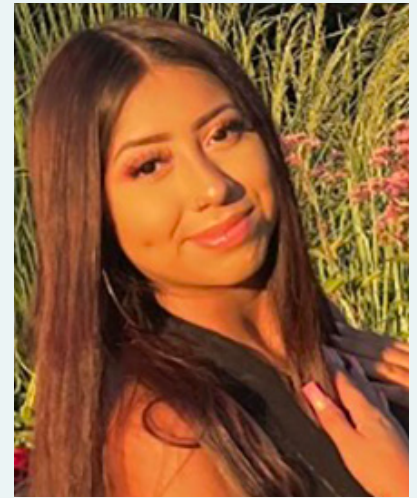
The significance of this project lies close to the hearts of both Zavala Gonzalez and Alsuraimi. Both being first-generation college students with immigrant parents, they each have a firsthand, nuanced perspective based in lived experiences that enhances their overall understanding and approach to their research. “My family and I also face the social, economic, and cultural challenges brought about by the pandemic,” Zavala Gonzalez expressed. “That is why having the opportunity to listen and work for a positive change within these communities is important to me as I can personally connect with the experiences of women of color and immigrant women in Detroit who share similar challenges.”

Alsuraimi echoed these sentiments shared by her research partner, stating, “Whether dealing with economic hardships or social challenges, I understand the struggles of making ends meet—especially when lacking access to a supportive community network or being unaware of available resources. This inspires me to look for opportunities to listen to others’ experiences and see how they’ve navigated or continue to confront similar challenges. By listening to their experiences, I hope to increase awareness in any community I tend to serve.”

The two social work undergraduates believe this project will further enhance their knowledge, skillsets, and overall



Yasmen Alsuraimi



Jasmine Zavala Gonzalez

experience within their budding careers. “I am confident that participating in this study project will have a big impact on how I approach making a positive impact in the community that I wish to serve,” Alsuraimi explained. “I hope to get more understanding and increase awareness of the difficulties that people may face. This initiative is critical to contribute to creating a successful approach to addressing the problem.” Zavala Gonzalez adds, “As a social work student, the experience of navigating and interpreting data, understanding diverse perspectives, and contributing to meaningful solutions will prepare me for future opportunities and careers.”

Community and social impact act as the foundation for research in the social work field. Despite being four years removed from the initial wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large segment of the at-risk, marginalized communities still suffers the consequences of its destabilizing aftermath. What Zavala Gonzalez and Alsuraimi are doing goes beyond the formal practices of research—beyond even their own personal ties to the issue. They are each a beacon of hope in the process of restoring community cohesion and equity for immigrant women in the Detroit community. “As a woman of color who has experienced economic hardship, I want to be of help to others facing similar difficulties in any community I serve,” Alsuraimi said. “I am well aware of the need for increased awareness in order to have a meaningful impact.”

PIONEERING PROGRESS: RESEARCH AND INNOVATION



2024 University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum (UURAF, pronounced: you-raf) provides Michigan State undergraduate students with an opportunity to showcase their scholarship and creative activity. Held each spring, UURAF brings together an intellectual community of undergraduate students to share their work with faculty, staff, peers, and external audiences. Participants gain experience in presenting their research, answer questions about their work from audience members and guests, and receive constructive feedback from judges. This year's event was held on April 12, 2024, at the Breslin Center.



Criticism of deficit-focused models has led to more research in strength-based models.

MSU research supports Michigan bipartisan bill to implement reform in juvenile justice system

On December 12, 2023, **Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist** signed a first-of-its-kind, bipartisan legislation transforming Michigan's juvenile justice system and investing in diversion and re-entry services to better position Michigan's youth for successful adulthood.

This reform goes into effect on October 1, 2024, and includes several changes, including requiring courts to adopt evidence-based practices such as administering screening tools and risk and needs assessments. These changes should lead to "more desirable outcomes, increased opportunities for alternatives to detention with more funding for community based-programming, and almost a complete elimination of juvenile court fines and fees," said **Ashlee Barnes-Lee**, assistant professor at MSU School of Social Work.

Barnes-Lee is an interdisciplinary, action researcher whose research focuses on juvenile legal system reform, with a specific emphasis on promoting racial equity and strength-based approaches to assessing and treating justice-involved youth.

"In my community-driven research, I partner with juvenile court administrators who are interested in co-developing strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparities and improve outcomes for the youth they serve," said Barnes-Lee. "This new legislation broadens my opportunity to partner with courts looking to be trained in juvenile risk and needs assessment, analysis of existing data, as well as those interested in evaluating their programs and services."

"This bill signing accelerates the implementation phase of a statewide collaboration that began with Lt. Governor Gilchrist's leadership and the hard work of partners on the task force, and Michigan courts are ready for this challenge," said **Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Elizabeth Clement**.

One of the ways Barnes-Lee wants to better serve justice-involved youth is by implementing more strengths-based Juvenile Risk-Need Assessments (JRNAs) for treatment and rehabilitation.



Ashlee Barnes-Lee

This approach aims to strengthen the widely implemented Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model—which has a deficits-focus, as it postulates that targeting youths' risk factors when developing court treatment plans is the most effective way to reduce likelihood of future delinquency. While risk factor detection is important and effective, many scholars, including Barnes-Lee, have criticized its overall efficacy for not placing a stronger emphasis on youths' strengths, assets, or protective factors.

Criticism of deficit-focused models has led to more research in strength-based models.

"Strengths-based approaches to treatment and rehabilitation for justice-involved youth is important because it destigmatizes youth, increases optimism among juvenile probation officers, and could theoretically lead to more accurate predictions of future delinquency," said Barnes-Lee. "Strengths-based approaches may also be particularly beneficial for youth of color and other historically marginalized youth, who are perceived more negatively, and are overrepresented in the juvenile legal system."

In 2020, Barnes-Lee published two manuscripts detailing the development of a strengths-based tool called Protective Factors for Reducing Juvenile Reoffending (PFRJR). This tool was adopted by a Michigan juvenile court and has been benefiting youth on probation in that county for almost 10 years.

The bill reform gives Barnes-Lee and other Michigan researchers the opportunity to partner with juvenile court administrators to provide evidence-based practices to better serve justice-involved youth.

"Countless youth and families have unfortunately been harmed by our juvenile legal system. I believe it's important for us to focus on both prevention and reform. I am proud of the work that Michigan lawmakers and community advocates are doing to advance justice and equity in our state. Although there is much work to be done, we are moving in the right direction."

New School research finds paid family leave helps prevent child abuse

Child maltreatment is a serious public health issue in the United States, particularly affecting young children who are most vulnerable due to their dependence on caregivers. Infants under two years old account for over one-quarter, or 28.1%, of all maltreatment cases in the U.S., and infants under one year of age experience the highest rate of victimization, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

But new research from Michigan State University may have found a way to prevent this abuse: state-paid family leave.

Previous research found that paid family leave policies have the potential to promote secure and healthy attachments, improve maternal and child health outcomes, enhance parental mental health, and support household economic stability. These outcomes are known protective factors for child maltreatment. Michigan State University researchers have now established a direct link between paid family leave and reductions in infant maltreatment.

The World Health Organization states that child maltreatment includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.

"Child maltreatment is a complex issue that requires innovative tools to address the multiple challenges faced by vulnerable families," said **Jenny Tanis**, MSU School of Social Work doctoral candidate and assistant professor of social work at Hope College. "Our research provides evidence that paid family leave policies may be an effective innovative policy tool to promote child safety and family well-being."

According to co-author **Dr. Sacha Klein**, an associate professor in the MSU College of Social Science's School of Social Work, the United States is one of only five countries in the world that does not provide federal compensation guarantee for maternity leave, the other four being the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and Papua New Guinea.

"In the absence of a national paid family leave policy, U.S. states have been left to decide whether they should adopt this as a state policy," Klein said. "To date, 14 states and Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico have taken the matter



Dr. Sacha Klein

into their own hands and enacted state-paid family leave policies. Several other states, including Michigan, are actively considering adopting this policy."

The research team compared four states that implemented paid family leave (California, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island) to states that do not have it. They found a statistically significant reduction in infant maltreatment rates over time for states that passed paid family leave policies compared to those that did not. The researchers noted that although the pool of states with paid family leave was small, the differences in infant maltreatment rates were large enough to produce statistically significant results.

They also found these policies may be especially protective for infants in states with high levels of family poverty and adults without a high school education.

According to Klein, this research adds to the growing evidence that policies aimed to support household economic stability could be a vital child maltreatment prevention policy tool.

"Traditional arguments in support of paid family leave policy highlight its positive effect on maternal labor force participation and maternal and infant health benefits," Klein said. "The results of this study highlight considerable implications for the design and implementation of future paid family leave policies.

"We hope our results inform national and state debates about paid family leave policy by providing evidence of the beneficial effect on infant maltreatment rates. States considering paid family leave policies should also consider the importance of designing policies prioritizing the needs of low-income workers, who would benefit the most from such policies and are more likely to encounter the U.S. child welfare system."

It's important to note that paid family leave is not just an economic support policy, Tanis said. "Paid family leave provides designated time at home to care for and bond with a new child without the added pressure of economic hardship. When we approach child maltreatment prevention from a socioecological model, we recognize the importance of addressing risk factors at all levels: individual, family, community, and society."

The research was published in the foremost child welfare journal, *Child Abuse & Neglect: The International Journal*. Along with Tanis and Klein, doctoral candidate **Hannah Boyke** also contributed to the research.

MSU researchers are using storytelling to prevent youth violence and promote inclusivity

The School of Social Work's SPARK Research for Social Change lab (@SPARK4Change) is partnering with Safe Haven Ministries to evaluate Safe Haven's Grow, Engage, Read, Imagine program (GERI)—an initiative that utilizes books, from preschool through high school, promoting education, and facilitating spaces so young people can have conversations about social norms, behaviors, and boundaries in the Kent County, MI, area.

This collaboration is part of an overarching CDC-funded grant called "Cultivating Communities for Change." The purpose of this grant is to raise awareness, correct misperceptions around norms, and to "get Kent County folks to become aware that child sexual abuse happens in their backyard," said **Dr. Joanne Smith-Darden**, MSU researcher and co-director of SPARK.

GERI books cover a broad range of topics such as gender equity, leadership, respecting boundaries, and community. The books, selected by Safe Haven staff for the GERI program, are developmentally tailored and curated for each developmental age and stage—from preschool through high school. "What we're trying to do is scaffold a healthy trajectory throughout childhood and into early adolescence," said Smith-Darden. "GERI books were chosen to broaden their scope of knowledge around personal choices and respecting other's choices."

GERI is also equipped with an interactive, take-home component for parents to become involved as well. Each book comes with its own reading guide, coupled with corresponding joint activities for the child and parent. "Not

only do these books help spark conversations and spark creativity in children," said **Dr. Heather McCauley**, also MSU researcher and co-director of SPARK. "The parent toolkits are really important to help support parents as they have some of the tougher conversations with their children."

Storytelling is, and has been, a powerful vehicle for inspiration, creativity, and knowledge dissemination. Reading and storytelling is also a vital tool for children that "helps with their language development, problem-solving skills, and it also helps them learn to interact in a positive social way with others," McCauley explained.

"If we can put books in the hands of children that broaden their horizon around topics that can be very sensitive—whether it be consent, race, diversity, equity, or gender identity—we're hoping we provide a platform to raise awareness," said Smith-Darden.

In addition to the GERI program, SPARK, Safe Haven Ministries, and the MSU School of Social Work Ruth T. Koehler Endowment partnered on an event to further raise awareness. The community conversation-driven event took place in Grand Rapids on April 12, 2024. "What we were hoping is that community folks would come to dialogue about their concerns, passions, or investment related to different aspects of working with children and protecting children's rights and safety," said Smith-Darden.

The teams are also directing communities to the GERI program by outfitting four buses in The Rapid's fleet with program material. "We were excited that these bus lines run right through the communities that we work with," said McCauley. "It's kind of like a living, breathing advertisement."

The GERI program is still in its infancy, yet the teams have the utmost confidence that its importance and value to the community will allow it to thrive. "The ability to impact a community—and create healthy, thriving communities—is by working first with children," said McCauley. "The Grow, Engage, Read, Imagine program is one example of an initiative that really speaks to that; that really gives children the tools that they need to be successful, and gives parents tools to have important conversations to help children be the best that they can be."

The GERI program is also supported by MSU School of Social Work graduate students **Morgan Wright, Nicole Macon-McKendree, Rachelle Rosario, and Kristen Ryder**.



GERI Library

Social Work students launch resource hub for bilingual K-12 learners

A group of MSU School of Social Work students has built an online resource hub dedicated to enhancing accessibility for bilingual and Spanish-speaking K-12 students and those seeking resources for them.

Their aim is to mitigate the profound impact that language barriers have on individuals immigrating to the United States by providing a comprehensive array of resources tailored to the needs of bilingual learners.

The team consists of three MSW students: **Megan Timmerman**, **Mollie Brandell**, and **Sage Gonzales**. “We are firmly aligned with the mission of promoting cross-cultural understanding and facilitating smoother transitions for immigrant students as they settle into their new homes,” the team said. “We are committed to fostering an environment where language is not a barrier but a gateway to mutual understanding and collaboration.”

The website consists of a wide array of multimedia resources for K-12 students, their caregivers, and educators. These resources span from videos, online interactive games and activities, tutors, translation tools, online Spanish books, tools, tips and advice. The site also includes a list of grants that schools can utilize to further promote equitable education.

“We hope that Spanish-speaking students can utilize these resources to aid in their educational journey,” the team said. “We envision caregivers being able to use these resources to help them better understand and interact with their children’s education. Lastly, we hope educators utilize these resources to better understand and communicate with their Spanish-speaking students as well as to empower their school system to create a more equitable environment.”

As macro-focused social workers, the team is dedicated to ensuring their work contributes to broader policy and advocacy discussions surrounding immigrant rights, language access and social justice. By engaging in policy and advocacy and empowering communities by providing them with resources and tools to overcome language barriers, they hope to challenge linguistic discrimination by promoting inclusivity and encouraging a more equitable society where everyone has equal opportunities and access to resources.

“Our initiative can serve as a helpful tool to inspire research to evaluate the impact of language access initiatives on immigrant students’ educational outcomes, and community well-being, informing future policy and practice efforts.”

As a student-led team, they are looking for ways to grow, adapt, and sustain their website for the ever-evolving needs of their users and community. “As of right now, the website will be available for another year,” the team stated. However, the team is fully invested in their mission and is seeking help from the community to share the word, provide feedback, and advocate.

“By amplifying the voices of bilingual and non-native English speakers, we contribute to a more equitable and just future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.”

“We hope that Spanish-speaking students can utilize these resources to aid in their educational journey.”

The team consists of three MSW students: **Megan Timmerman**, **Mollie Brandell**, and **Sage Gonzales**.





Rachel Harris



CaRynn Harris

Evidence Based Trauma Treatment Certificate

The Evidence Based Trauma Treatment Certificate provides students with the opportunity to develop competencies in working with individuals who have experienced trauma and implement an evidence-based practice.

The certificate is open to Clinical Practice students in their concentration year. Here are two testimonials from students who have completed the certificate.

MSW student Rachel Harris: The Evidence Based Trauma Treatment Certificate has provided me the opportunity to have incredible training, supervision, and consultation around the Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) model. I was able to complete intensive skill-based training from **Dr. Kate Chard**, who is an international expert and one of the developers of the CPT model. Each week, a group of approximately 10 students has been able to meet for consultation with Dr. Chard. Consultation includes presenting our cases and receiving guidance and feedback. It's rare to be able to graduate with your MSW with this amount of extensive training in an evidence-based model. I am incredibly grateful to be able to meet criteria to be on the national registry for CPT post-graduation. And, I feel confident in my ability to work with trauma survivors.

MSW student CaRynn Harris: The classes I took as part of the trauma certificate were the most directly applicable and interesting classes that I took in this program. As social workers, we work with clients who very often have a history of trauma, and I think it is essential to be able to identify trauma reactions and be able to help clients work through trauma using evidence-based methods. I know I want to do therapy with children in the future, so learning Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) so early in my career has enabled me to help my clients more effectively. The resources I have received as a part of this certificate and the incredible support network I have created as part of this certificate will contribute to my future success.

<https://socialwork.msu.edu/MSW/certificate-programs/evidence-based-trauma-treatment.html>

Reflecting on the legacy of MSU School of Social Work Professor Gary Anderson

Dr. Gary Anderson served at the MSU School of Social Work for 25 years—15 years as its director and another 10 years as a faculty member. Anderson developed and supported many innovative programs and projects, like the Community Programs, which continue today and allow the School to fulfill its service mission across the State of Michigan.

During his 15th year working as a professor at Hunter College School of Social Work in New York City, New York, in early 1998, the then 45-year-old Gary Anderson noticed a one-page printed job announcement for the Director's position at the Michigan State University School of Social Work. It was pinned to a hallway bulletin board on the seventh floor of the 12-story building.

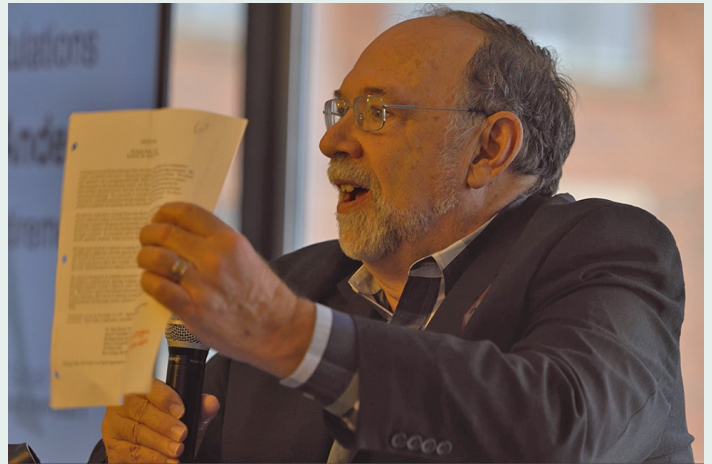
His father was an MSU graduate, so after reading over its contents a few times, Anderson was curious. He was interested enough that he unpinned the announcement and took it for himself to study and show his family; an announcement Anderson still keeps as a memento today.

A few weeks later, and a few conference calls after that, the course of Michigan State University's School of Social Work, as well as Anderson's life, significantly changed. The School not only found its new director, but it also ushered in a new era of innovation, program development, and teamwork and set new precedents for the field of social work as a whole.

Anderson's journey toward becoming a social work leader, both in the academic space and the practical child welfare space, began with tragedy. At the age of 16, being the oldest of four, Anderson's mother died due to metastatic cancer. His world and foundation of support was shaken up. "I was a wreck; I had no idea what to do," Anderson said. "I thought there's got to be people out there. There has to be someone who knows what to do when things are this bad and sad. Is there someone outside your family who can come alongside you, even if just for a little while, and be helpful?"

Those trying times would spur Anderson toward getting the help he so desperately needed as a teenager. He started his career in the child welfare workforce space as a Children's Protective Services caseworker. In this role, Anderson would immerse himself in the "hardest situations a social worker can be in." Through often unannounced home visits, talking to parents, and meeting with at-risk children, as a social worker, he tried to envision a brighter future for the families if they were provided support. It was a tough job that is oftentimes "thankless," Anderson expressed, yet, it was one that aimed to preserve and protect the well-being of children and families across the state.

Anderson's roots as a social worker lay in his passion to promote a prosperous future for at-risk children and their families. In his role as director for the School of Social Work,



Dr. Gary Anderson holds the very announcement where he first learned of the directorship of the MSU School of Social Work while he worked at Hunter College School of Social Work in NYC, NY, in early 1998.

he systematically turned this passion into a working reality. Being in the academic space posed a strong dichotomy for Anderson. As an academic institution, the School had an obligation and the opportunity to consistently fund, focus on, and disseminate new research related to the field of social work and its components. This could mean less time spent on the front lines of the community at large, and more time operating in a research-focused, academic capacity.

While this endeavor was crucial to the School and its positive mission—as the research can help to create new practices and develop new means of understanding the community and its issues—the need for and value of community engagement also needed attention and resources. "Social work, for me was an action-oriented approach to helping people and communities," Anderson said. "It's a profession as well as an academic discipline." The School's special purpose was to combine this commitment to academic and research excellence and make a difference in the community.

With this focus in mind, Anderson, alongside his colleagues, team, and key partners, went on to found and develop the MSU School of Social Work Community Programs. The Community Programs initiative created and embedded four different organizations in the School: The FAME Program (to support MSU students with lived experience in the foster care system), Chance at Childhood (to prepare social work and law students together to better serve children and families), Kinship Care Resource Center (to support family members raising at-risk children), and Continuing Education. These programs collectively aimed to create pathways for people to access the resources they needed to be successful and supported. These programs acted as

Continued on next page...

Anderson legacy continued

social work agencies within the School and helped to bridge the gap between being an academic institution and acting as the on-the-ground, action-oriented resource hub that Anderson and his team envisioned. “These are all things that key partners and colleagues invested in, and that mattered to me,” Anderson said. “We were the only school of social work in the United States that had programs like this; it’s like running an agency. So, we’ve got an academic program, and then we’ve got four agencies as an important part of our School at the same time.”

The Community Programs have become a defining pillar of the School of Social Work as a whole and continue to strive toward the goal of being a service to the community. They each operate in different, yet overlapping areas, to best support as much of the community as possible. The foster care community with the FAME Program; the protection of children in Chance at Childhood; resources for kinship families and children in the Kinship Care Resource Center; and Continuing Education Program to vastly support professional development and social work education.

This multi-tiered, agency-like approach was part of Anderson’s vision to galvanize every working member of the School toward action and contribution. “One thing I’m proud of is an ethic or a value that says, ‘There’s so many different ways to contribute to the School, to students, to the profession and the community,’” Anderson said. “And each person does something of value to make that happen. So, the Community Programs don’t hang out there by themselves. They’re an integral part of the School—the people who run them and work in them are crucial leaders within the School.”

“His legacy endures in our focus on improving the child welfare workforce, whether in training first line workers, leaders, or policy advocates,” said **Dr. Anne Hughes**, the School’s current director. “His impact on the child welfare field nationally has been tremendous. We hope to honor his legacy by continuing his pioneering work.”

Anderson and his team successfully led over 75 eternally funded grants to provide funds for School projects including support for student scholarships, building the child welfare workforce, and programs to support adoptive and kinship families. During his directorship, the School also added over five million dollars to its endowment to increase financial aid for students, promote advocacy, and support faculty research. He also co-authored several books and articles describing program evaluation, leadership, and workforce development.

Anderson also had a passion for other people’s passions. He would often give his colleagues the freedom and resources to pursue their ideas—no matter how wild they were initially seen to be. One such idea was the formation of a one-of-a-kind online course called “Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse—Catastrophes and Human Behavior.” This course, designed and taught by School of Social Work instructor **Glenn Stutzky**, was intended to learn how human behavior and nature change after a catastrophic



event. The online class became one of the most popular courses at Michigan State University, with over 100 students enrolling in it each semester.

This amazing idea for a class, which was inspired by the website of the U.S. Center for Disease Control’s Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, got its wings from a conversation between Anderson and Stutzky. “I was smart enough to give him some time to be creative,” Anderson said. “He went wild and made up this bizarre, wonderful class. And it took off like mad. And everybody really kind of grew from that experience.”

As director, Anderson was known for his supportive nature to faculty, staff, and students. He made it his mission to let colleagues within the School know that he was in their corner and appreciated their contributions, no matter how modest it might seem. Anderson spent countless hours reading faculty reviews from students and would write letters to faculty echoing the positive sentiments from those they taught. The positive quality of teaching and the student experience were crucial goals for the School.

Known for his nature as “an optimist and believer in making what seems impossible, possible,” said **Beth Lindley**, director KCRC, Anderson attributes his success as director and as a professor to his valuing relationships such as his colleagues within the School and partnerships outside of the School.

“In every relationship, I’m learning something,” Anderson said. “Investing in relationships pays off. And social work is a relationship business. I know that so much of the School’s success was due to relationships across campus, across the community, and across the country.”

As Anderson ends his 25-year tenure with the School, his impact and legacy will continue to live on through each person he’s touched and every community he’s helped build. “He was a great leader and colleague,” said Dr. Hughes. “His lasting impact endures in our collegiality, the care we provide our students, and the deep appreciation of the power of social work to make meaningful change.”

Embark on a journey of resilience, passion, and transformation with our **recent PhD graduate:** **Dr. Abbie Nelson**

WATCH/LISTEN HERE: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=981856756910512&ref=sharing>



I
AM
A
SPARTAN
OF
POSITIVE
CHANGE.

I will continue to approach my next endeavors with the same passion, love and perseverance as I have this one. And continue to hope each day I can make small steps towards supporting a more just and loving world. ”

ABBIE NELSON DOCTORAL GRADUATE



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



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

Our second annual Advocacy Day event was a success. We brought together community members and Advocacy Scholars for a day rich in dialogue and learning. The event featured insightful talks from guest speakers and showcased the impactful work of our students in social justice advocacy.

We thank all participants for their engagement and contributions to the success of Advocacy Day. Together, we continue to strive for progress in social work advocacy. We hope to see you all at next year's event!



ADVOCACY and ACTION



EQUITY and JUSTICE



INSIGHT and INSPIRATION



“Youth Mental Health Literacy”

LISTEN HERE: <https://socialwork.msu.edu/research/research-spotlight.html>

In this installment of our Research Spotlight podcasts, **Dr. Angie Kennedy** talks to **Dr. Joanne Riebschleger** about building and testing a new mental health literacy (MHL) program for middle school students, especially those with a family member with a mental illness. The ten-session **Youth Education and Support (YES) program** is an action-based learning program focusing on mental illness and recovery, mental illness stigma, positive coping strategies to manage stress, and seeking and providing help for what may be mental health symptoms of self or others.

A new MHL scale with good psychometric properties revealed that YES program participants’ mental health literacy levels increased significantly from pre- to post-test. Ninety percent of participants reported improved positive coping skills usage by the end of the program.

It is recommended that funding begin for randomized clinical trials to explore longer-term outcomes of youth MHL programs, including youth mental health symptoms and wellness.



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Spotlight

RESEARCH PODCAST

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Dr. Joanne

Riebschleger

Former School of Social Work Associate Professor

Diversity Spotlight: Rabbi Simon Stratford

Simon Stratford is a proud alumnus of the College of Social Science and currently serves as the associate rabbi and director of lifelong learning at Temple Sholom in Cincinnati, OH. While at Michigan State University, Stratford earned a degree in social work and completed a minor in Jewish studies through the Serling Institute. He is being honored as part of Holocaust Remembrance Day for his community efforts to educate and enrich the lives of Jewish individuals and family through prayer, ritual, and togetherness.

Stratford knew early on that he wanted to enter rabbinical school after college, and he pursued a social work degree with the thought that it would give him a great foundation for how to be a service professional and helping others.

“I think social work is one of the most versatile degrees anyone can get,” he explained. “It teaches you people skills and a certain worldview that allows you to care for others, and put caring for others and the greater good at the center of your life. That’s what I do every day as a rabbi, as a clergy person, and leader of a faith community.”

During his time at Michigan State, Stratford was involved in fraternity life, the Hillel system, and the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies. He also had the opportunity to study abroad in Israel at Tel Aviv University. He credits several of his professors as important mentors who helped him along his way and gave him the confidence to continue his studies along to rabbinical school. He particularly enjoyed his time in Hebrew language class with **Ellen Rothfield**, Israel studies with **Kristen Fermaglich**, and with **Cindy Huey**, the former director of MSU Hillel.

“[Cindy] was a great mentor to me,” Stratford said. “She was such a rock in the Jewish community at Michigan State, and she’s really well known. Everywhere I go people ask me if I know Cindy. I also got in touch with Kristen Fermaglich two years ago and had her do a virtual presentation for my synagogue on her thesis topic, which was really fun.”

Educating his congregation is a large part of what Stratford does in his work at Temple Sholom. He is the director of their religious school, and he manages educational and social programming as the Director of Lifelong Learning. He coordinates with community leaders and scholars to come in as guest speakers to supplement his teachings



Simon Stratford

while also teaching classes of his own to children and adults of all ages. The lessons range from studies of Jewish texts and Hebrew scriptures to education surrounding a specific holiday or ritual when it occurs during the year. He describes the idea of ‘lifelong learning’ as an important value in the reformed Jewish community.

“One event I do every year is I put together a kid’s program for our High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur,” he says. “It’s a really fun opportunity because it allows me to think creatively and bring Jewish traditions and customs to families and kids in a new way.”

Even when the past can seem so far behind us, Holocaust Remembrance Day serves as a reminder that the horrors many experienced during the Holocaust happened less than 85 years ago. This number can be seen as a juxtaposition between the fact of a tragedy being relatively recent, but its survivors also getting older and passing away. Stratford explained this phenomenon:

“The Holocaust wasn’t too long ago; it’s still in this lifetime for some people who are older. But it’s becoming more imperative that we share stories of survivors because they’re getting to be over 100 years old, they’re dying. So it’s all the more crucial that we remember and to commemorate those who survived and helped others, but also remember the atrocities and what can happen when we stop caring about each other’s humanity.”

Stratford also mentions the benefit of experiencing these individuals’ stories in person when possible, by visiting local museums. While it may be hard to find opportunities to hear a Holocaust survivor speak in one’s own community, many museums offer educational videos and are even recording hours of interviews with them in order to create holograms of real survivors that people can visit and have a ‘conversation’ with.

“It’s pretty impactful,” Stratford commented. “It’s as raw as you could possibly get, regarding somebody sharing their own story. And then to see the numbers tattooed on their arm, something tangible and real...then getting to know them outside of that, it’s so powerful. A lot of Holocaust survivors see themselves as living testaments to the fact that Hitler did not win. It didn’t work; these folks are here, they have families and they’re still living their lives. They made it.”

Empowering Change:

Celebrating the MSU Social Work Graduates of 2024

As this academic year comes to a close, we are thrilled to celebrate the graduating class of 2024. These students have shown exceptional dedication and passion for social work, embodying the spirit of learning and growth.

Throughout the year, our students have excelled in their studies, demonstrating a commitment to academic excellence. They have engaged in community service, advocacy and activism, contributing positively to society while honing their professional skills.

The graduates have not only achieved academic success but have also developed a rich array of experiences and

skills. They have been involved in innovative research and meaningful advocacy, preparing them to make a significant impact in the social work field.

As we say goodbye to the Class of 2024, we are filled with pride and look forward to their future contributions. We are confident that they will use their knowledge, experiences, and dedication to make a difference in the lives of those they serve.

To our graduates, we offer our heartfelt congratulations. Continue to excel, innovate, and advocate. Remember, you are always a valued member of the MSU School of Social Work family.



Empowering Change



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.

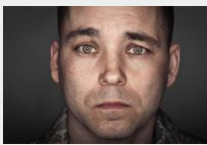
If you share our values, please consider supporting these efforts with a gift to one of the scholarship and endowment funds highlighted below. A full list of giving opportunities and links to donate online can be found at **socialwork.msu.edu/Alumni-and-Giving/Endowments**.



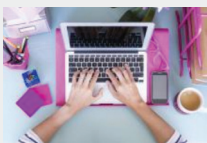
Robert Little Scholarship Fund
This fund provides scholarships for graduate students with a career interest in child welfare, with preference for those who want to work in kinship care.



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