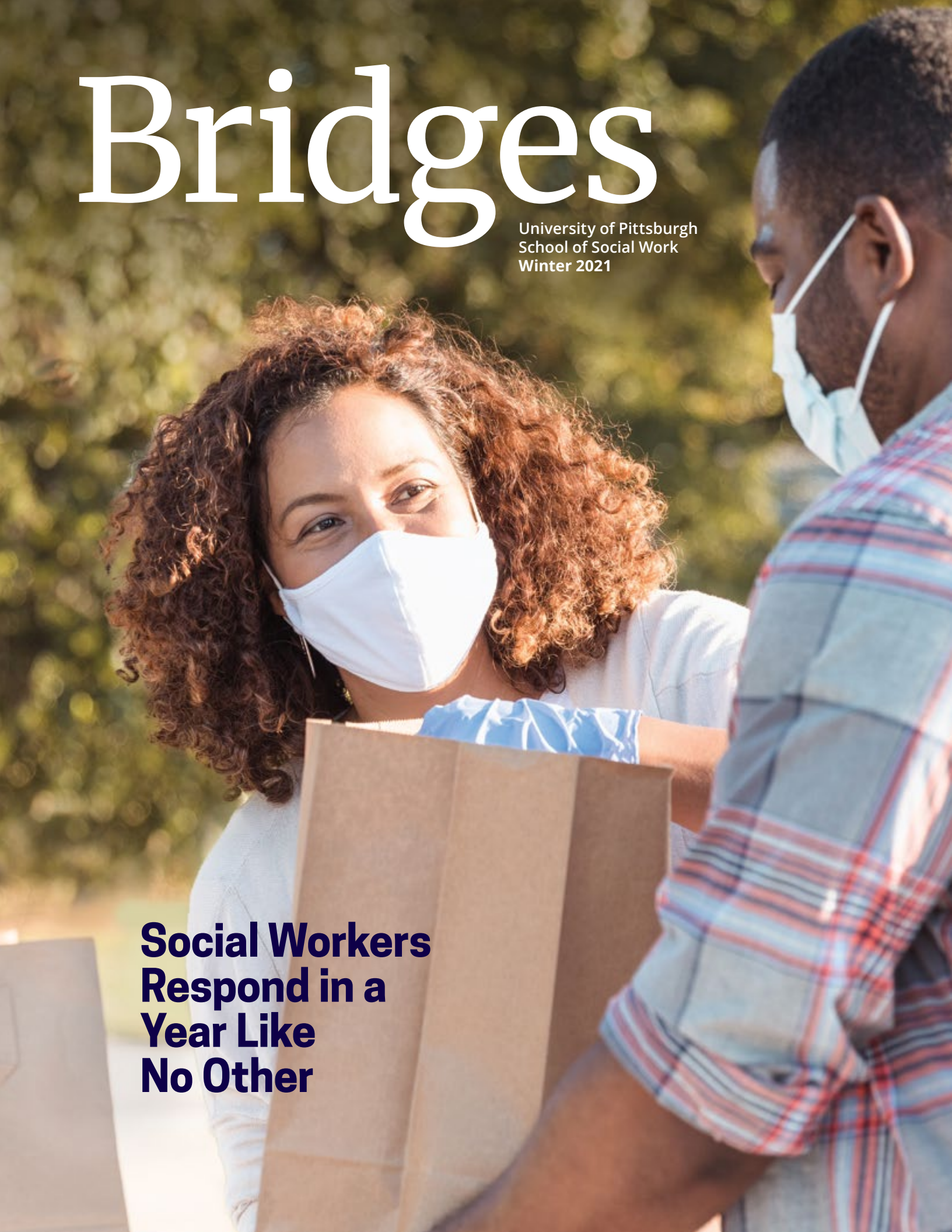
Bridges

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work
Winter 2021



Social Workers Respond in a Year Like No Other

Bridges

Bridges is the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work alumni magazine. We selected the name Bridges largely because of its symbolism. The term provides an important metaphor for both our profession and our school. Social work is a profession that has, as part of its mission, the goal of building and sustaining bridges among individuals, families, groups, neighborhoods, and communities, and we felt that the title Bridges captured this part of our professional mission. At the same time, the city of Pittsburgh has more than 450 bridges, and Allegheny County has almost 2,000, suggesting an uncompromising desire of the city's inhabitants to remain connected with one another. In keeping with this heritage, it is the school's goal to sustain and build bridges among those needing social work services; our students, alumni, faculty, and staff; the community; and corporate and governmental partners. We believe that the information in this magazine is an important way to achieve this goal.

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Dear alumni,

Greetings from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work as we embark on a new year! 2020 was a year that was clearly unlike any other. It was a year of overwhelming challenges and devastating loss. It was a year of creative adaptations as we figured out how to come together and support each other when we couldn't physically be together. And it was a time to appreciate and value how fortunate we are to be part of a school of social work and a profession that is so crucial to the solutions that lie ahead.

Within the school, it was amazing to see how quickly we could pivot when the world moved to remote learning last spring. Challenging as it was, I was incredibly impressed with how our faculty, staff, students, and community partners pulled together to make sure that we could continue doing all that we needed to do. And as summer dawned and the nation was wracked by unconscionable brutality and racism, we came together to figure out how to support each other; what role we could play in creating a more just society; and how to ensure that our school moves forward to become a truly anti-racist, anti-oppressive, welcoming, and inclusive environment. It was clearly a year in which our recently developed vision statement—Transforming our world, our future, ourselves—took on new meaning and guided our actions.

Throughout the challenges and efforts of the past year, I've been repeatedly struck by the truly essential and wonderful work of our alumni. Within the Pittsburgh area, across the country, and around the world, connections with alumni and stories of their projects, programs, leadership, activism, interventions, and bold innovations have helped us to stay focused on what we need to do and on what a difference we can make.

You may notice some changes in this issue of Bridges. We want to make sure that we're connecting with our alumni—helping you all to stay connected with what's happening at the school and highlighting some of what our alumni are doing. We hope that this revised format is engaging; helps you to connect with and remember faculty, classmates, and fellow Pitt alums; and conveys the scope and impact of all that our school embodies.

As we move into 2021, I am continuing my work with a renewed energy and commitment to the potential opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. We are still in the midst of a devastating pandemic, yet there is light on the horizon, and our collective action and commitment will determine how and when we get there. The long-standing structural racism and systemic violence and inequities that captivated so much attention in 2020 are far from resolved—more than 400 years of history will not be changed in a season or a year. It is our responsibility to continue to fight for change, to demand accountability, and to ensure that racism and oppression are addressed at every level and in every context. A new year brings the promise of a new future, and this year it is exciting to think about what we can become! It also is critical to remember what we must all do if we are to create this world that we want to share. It is an excellent time to be surrounded and inspired by social workers who are overcoming obstacles, figuring out creative solutions, and imagining a better future—all of the things that social workers bring to the table are what we need to create the new normal.

Thanks so much for being a part of our school and community, and please be in touch.

Onward to a brighter 2021!



Elizabeth M.Z. "Betsy" Farmer
Dean, School of Social Work
University of Pittsburgh





Elhattab



Piel



Rinella

Staff Retirements

September 30, 2020, marked the last day for some of the longest-serving members of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work staff. **Mary Pat Elhattab**, academic administrator for the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) program; **Marcia Piel**, recorder and academic administrator; and **Rosie Rinella**, executive assistant to the dean, all retired after a combined 133 years of professional service.

Elhattab joined Pitt Social Work in 1982. When asked what she will miss most about her role, Elhattab said, "I have had the privilege of watching each new group of BASW students grow from nervous kids into mature professionals, and it always made me proud to be a part of it." Once the COVID-19 pandemic ends, she is eager to return to volunteering at UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital in the cuddler program for babies who are going through withdrawal and at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

Piel worked at the school for 43 years. Like Elhattab, she will miss "communicating with staff, faculty, and students in a variety of ways." In retirement, she will be taking time to relax after a busy, stressful career, focusing on spending more time with family and completing projects she didn't have time for while working. She's also excited to resume traveling after the pandemic is over.

Rinella's entire career was spent at Pitt Social Work, starting with her first day on the job in May 1968. She saw many changes in the school in that time, serving four deans and supporting countless faculty, staff, and students. Rinella says that she will miss "the interaction with faculty, staff, and students and contact with other administrative offices in the University as well as meeting new people from outside agencies and organizations." In retirement, she looks forward to spending more time with her family and taking a long-awaited vacation postpandemic.

"It is difficult to imagine the school without Rosie, Marcia, and Mary Pat. Everyone who has interacted with the dean's office in the past 50 years has experienced Rosie's delightful institutional knowledge, warmth, and caring. Marcia has been a keystone holding so many aspects of the school together. And Mary Pat's entourage of devoted students know that her generosity and kindness helped to solidify the school as a hub for so many. We are so grateful that our lives have been enriched by having known and worked with them," says Betsy Farmer, dean of the School of Social Work.

News from the Center on Race and Social Problems

This past year has marked a time of successful transition for the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP). With the retirement of founding director and Dean Emeritus Larry Davis in fall 2019, CRSP welcomed James Huguley, assistant professor at the school, as interim director and John Wallace, vice provost for faculty diversity and development, David E. Epperson Endowed Chair, and professor of social work, as senior faculty fellow for research and engagement. Their appointments come after many years of involvement with CRSP. Each brings research and practice expertise on race and community engagement that will advance the center's mission and the strategic goals of the University.

As its dynamic new leadership team took shape, the center also undertook a strategic reinvestment in digital content delivery. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, CRSP began an effort to share its work through an expanded range of online platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. These channels host a wide variety of live and prerecorded content on race-related topics that are accessible to viewers around the world. CRSP was thus well positioned to connect with audiences when the pandemic began and has more than doubled its social media following nationally and globally since March 2020. The strategic focus on digital media is both timely and important: It has elevated CRSP as a national voice in online race conversations at a critical juncture and has made important empirical resources available to thousands of people at a time of converging racial crises.



New Faculty

Alicia Johnson joined the school as clinical assistant professor and Child Welfare Education for Leadership academic coordinator.

Misha Zorich was named the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown MSW program coordinator.

New Staff

Sinika Calloway was hired as the new Baker Fellowship program manager.

Jocelyn Horner joined the school as its new director of development.

James Huguley's Just Discipline Project added two new staff members: **Elizabeth Osayande-Davis**, school-based restorative practice coordinator, and **Aaron Erb**, restorative practice coordinator.

Elizabeth Zimmerman-Clayton was hired as the new student training program coordinator.

Promotions

Jaime Booth has been promoted to associate professor with tenure.

Catherine Greeno joined the leadership team of Pitt's Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health as its deputy director.

Toya Jones is the new BASW program director.

Elizabeth Mulvaney has been promoted to clinical assistant professor.

Christina Newhill is the new doctoral program director.

Jessalynn Oliver has been promoted to recruitment and enrollment manager.

Helen E. Petracchi has been named acting associate dean for academic affairs.

Mary Elizabeth Rauktis has been promoted to research associate professor.

John Wallace, David E. Epperson Endowed Chair, has been named Pitt vice provost for faculty diversity and development.


Johnson

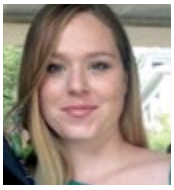

Zorich


Calloway


Horner


Osayande-Davis


Erb


Zimmerman-Clayton


Booth


Greeno


Jones


Mulvaney


Newhill


Oliver


Petracchi


Rauktis


Wallace

Faculty Awards

Jaime Booth received the 2020 Deborah K. Padgett Early Career Achievement Award from the Society for Social Work and Research. The award recognizes Booth's innovative scholarship, rigorous approach to social work research, and emerging influence in the field.

Professor **Valire Copeland** and **Shaun Eack**, James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair and associate dean for research, received a $25,000 prize from the 2020 Pitt Innovation Challenge for their project, Thinking in Speech.

Larry Davis, dean emeritus of the school and founding director of the Center on Race and Social Problems, was honored with the Phyllis Black Lifetime Achievement Award at the National Association of Social Workers Pennsylvania Chapter 2020 Annual Conference.

Dean **Betsy Farmer** was selected as a fellow of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. The Society for Social Work and Research held a virtual induction ceremony at its 2021 annual conference.

Mary Ohmer, chair of the Community, Organization, and Social Action specialization, and her research team were honored at the 2020 Pitt Community Engaged Scholarship Forum with a Senior Vice Chancellor for Engagement's Partnerships of Distinction award.

Faculty Retirements



Cynthia Bradley-King, former clinical assistant professor and academic coordinator for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program, retired in August 2020.



Hidenori Yamatani, former director of strategic planning and quality assurance, retired in December 2019.

Q&A with Molly Allwein

Molly Allwein, a certified licensed social worker, joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work in July 2019 as the director of professional and continuing education. While the COVID-19 pandemic changed some of her office's plans and goals for 2020, Allwein and her team have worked through the challenges and launched new initiatives for the Pitt Social Work community.

Q:

You've rolled out a lot of new programs in the Office of Continuing and Professional Education since you joined Pitt Social Work. What has been your most exciting accomplishment so far?

I am very proud of the work the Office of Continuing and Professional Education has achieved during 2020, even in the midst of very trying times. We were able to pivot from offering only in-person courses to moving fully online within two weeks' time so that there was no disruption for social workers attaining the credits they needed for their licensure cycle.

Q:

Continuing education (CE) is focused on keeping social work professionals informed of the latest research and practice in their field. What are the emerging trends in CE that Pitt Social Work alumni might want to know about?

Right now, we are very focused on building up our courses in the following trending subject areas:

- evidence-based clinical interventions
- substance use disorders training
- mind/body connection
- LGBTQIA+ populations
- trauma
- racial equity

Q:

2020 was a challenging year for us all. How have you stayed productive and positive during the COVID-19 pandemic? What self-care recommendations would you give to others?

For me, the lesson of 2020 was flexibility. There were a lot of barriers at first; processes and procedures had to quickly change to facilitate working from home. For both my work productivity and personally for my self-care, it was important to let go of expectations of how the year would unfold and instead be adaptable to the many changes that occurred. Also—and this is key—give yourself and those around you grace during this time. We all need it.

Q:

What are you most looking forward to when you can return to work on campus postpandemic?

I am looking forward to being able to talk to my coworkers in the hallway and networking with the wonderful social workers, counselors, and marriage and family therapists who take our CE courses!

Office of Professional and Continuing Education Unveils New Online Offerings

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, the School of Social Work Office of Professional and Continuing Education was prepared. Having already launched an online course initiative, the office seamlessly pivoted to remote instruction and accelerated its efforts to grow its online course catalog.

In a year like no other, the Continuing Education (CE) Program has continued to meet the educational needs of the social work community with high-quality professional development programming and is pleased to share highlights of its accomplishments:



- **Growing online offerings:** Over the last year, the CE Program has expanded its live virtual and asynchronous course options to increase access to its educational offerings. CE On Demand now includes more than a dozen professionally recorded CE courses that participants can access at any time online, with more added every month. Live remote courses also are offered every month in a wide range of topics. From self-paced to live remote courses, continuing education at Pitt Social Work offers programming options that work for professionals with a variety of schedules.
- **New micro credential program in problem gambling:** The newly launched Problem Gambling Certificate Program meets training and education criteria for certification by the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board. This program also provides three hours of ethics training and one hour of suicide training through the lens of problem gambling.
- **Pivoting to paperless:** The Office of Professional and Continuing Education is now paperless! All CE forms, policies, and procedures can now be found online at socialwork.pitt.edu/continuing-ed.

In the next year, the CE Program will continue to expand its online programming, adding asynchronous and live virtual courses throughout the year. The office also will launch additional micro credential options along with a new licensed clinical social worker supervision training institute and a professional coaching program designed in partnership with the school's career services office. Visit socialwork.pitt.edu/continuing-ed.



Updates from the VanKirk Career Center

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we live our lives, and social workers are needed now more than ever. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the social work profession is projected to grow by 13% from 2019 to 2029, much faster than the national average of 4% for all professions. The VanKirk Career Center at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work provides students and alumni with career services and job search strategies to maximize their professional success. Current highlights from the career center include the following:

- **Career services in a virtual world:** The VanKirk Career Center continues to provide a full range of career development services during the COVID-19 pandemic. All individual consultations, workshops, and job fairs are virtual and open to students and alumni. Upcoming events can be found on the center's website or on the School of Social Work's Facebook page.
- **Setting the bar for licensure:** In 2019, Pitt Social Work alumni passed the Association of Social Work Boards exam to become a licensed social worker at a rate of 85%, while the national average was 74%. Those taking the licensed clinical social worker exam fared even better, with an 87% pass rate as compared to a 74.2% pass rate nationwide. The VanKirk Career Center offers licensure test prep and individual test coaching for both exams.
- **Seeking employment opportunities for alumni and students:** The VanKirk Career Center wishes to assist all Pitt Social Work alumni and students in obtaining the job of their choice. The career center frequently posts job listings on its website and through social media.

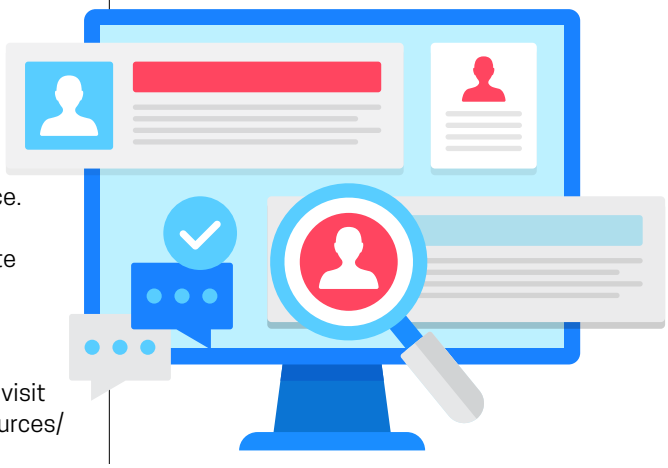
For more information about career services available to Pitt Social Work alumni and students, visit socialwork.pitt.edu/student-resources/career-services.

Field Education Office Seeks New Instructors and Agencies to Support Student Placements

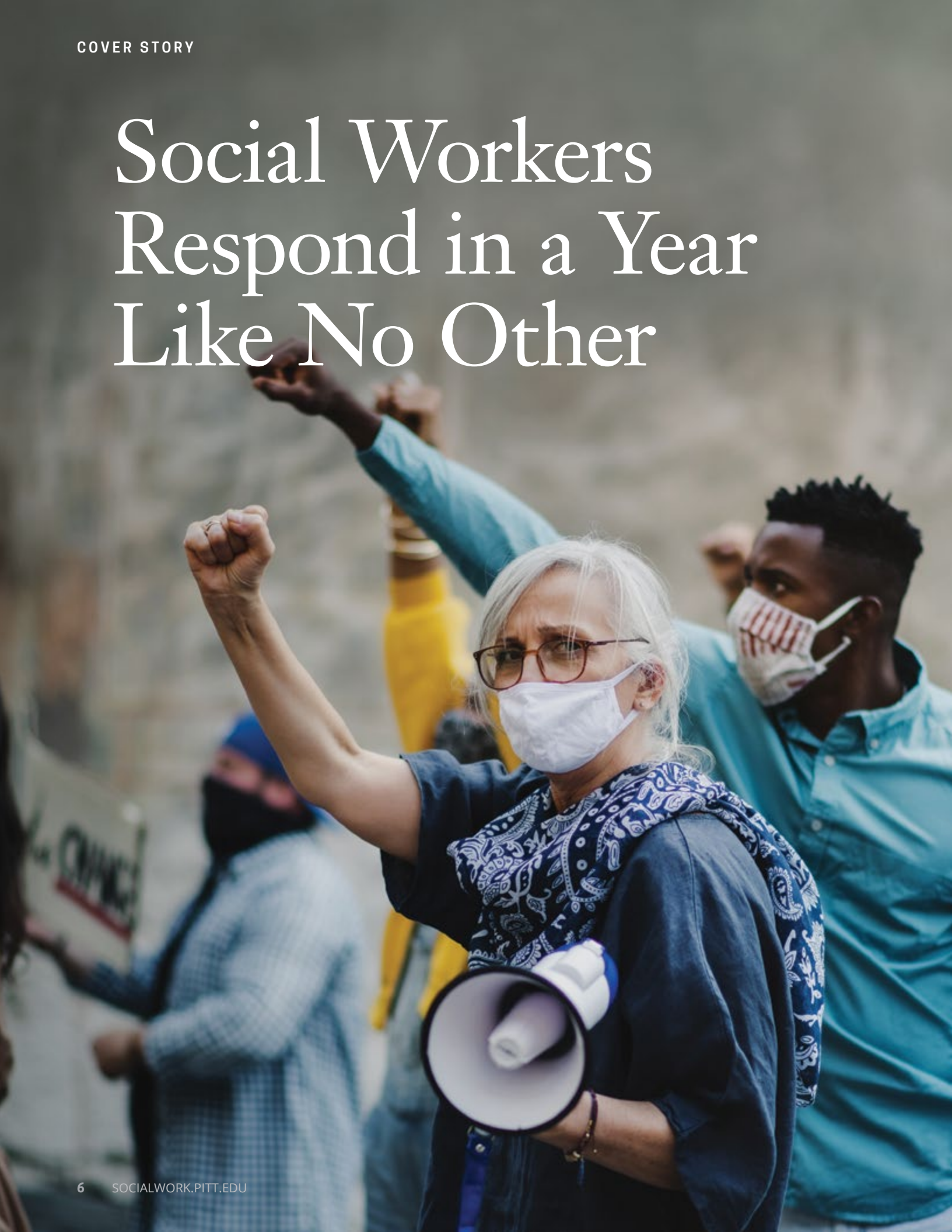
Every year, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work places hundreds of social work students in professional field placements to complete a key component of their social work education. These placements help social work students to expand their practice knowledge while also supporting the needs of local service providers.

For the 2020-21 academic year, despite the numerous challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the school's Field Education Office secured placements for **331 MSW** and **35 BASW students** in a wide range of agencies and organizations. As part of its commitment to keeping students and community members safe, the office reviewed COVID-19 safety plans for all in-person placements and helped agencies to design virtual placements when possible. Combined, this year's field placements provided more than 211,000 hours of social work practice training for Pitt Social Work students

The Field Education Office is currently looking for field instructors. Social work professionals with an MSW and at least two years of professional experience are encouraged to learn more about this exciting opportunity to train the next generation of social workers by visiting socialwork.pitt.edu/academics/field-education or emailing John Dalessandro, director of field education, at dalessan@pitt.edu.



Social Workers Respond in a Year Like No Other



American society was severely tested in 2020 by the dual challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the outrage over racial injustice ignited by the police killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many other people of color.

But if anyone is equipped to deal with two crises at once, social workers are. And with particular strengths in direct practice and community organizing, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work has produced graduates who are not just surviving in times of upheaval but finding opportunities to effect meaningful change amid the unrest.

"In talking to our alumni," says Dean Betsy Farmer, "we've found them to be immersed in trying to meet the needs of whatever community or clients they work with in these difficult times."

"We all have a role to play, especially social workers. We're taught this code of ethics, and if we really want to live them out, we have to take an active role in advocacy to make sure that the needs of the folks we serve are being met."
—Monica Ruiz

Alumni Respond



Image by Joshua Franzos for The Pittsburgh Foundation

MONICA RUIZ

(BASW '15, MSW '17)

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pittsburgh's Casa San José has distributed about 1,000 meals a month to members of the Latino community it serves. That number is all the more remarkable considering that Casa San José, a resource center dedicated to ensuring that immigrants and others are treated with dignity and respect, had never before distributed food as part of its work.

"A lot of the community members were completely out of work," says Casa San José executive director Monica Ruiz, and many in the community were unsure where their next meal would come from. A number of the people Casa San José serves are undocumented and therefore ineligible to receive either unemployment benefits or payments from the relief packages passed by Congress, and many of them work in fields like construction and hospitality that were shut down completely by the pandemic. COVID-19 also exacerbated existing problems, like a lack of public-interest information available in Spanish language.

"A lot of the community did not know what COVID-19 was or the severity of it," Ruiz says. This led many to fail to take adequate precautions against the virus. The problem was compounded when many students and parents were unable to understand school districts' plans for online and hybrid learning.

But Ruiz says that the community's resilience has been inspiring. Many families who receive support from Casa San José, recognizing that the need is even greater for immigrant families outside the city of Pittsburgh, volunteered to deliver meals to others in need in Cranberry and New Kensington.

"They [members of the Latino community] have the same needs we all have, just a lot more barriers," Ruiz says. "Yet somehow they find a way to make it happen. It's really an honor to work with this community."

Getting community members to fill out the U.S. Census was a priority in 2020. While fundraising for Casa San José, Ruiz spoke to people who questioned the size of the Latino community in Pittsburgh.

"It's a community that is very much in the shadows," Ruiz says. Being counted is a key step toward representation.

"My education helped me to see how every decision that's made about money moving around this country directly affects people," Ruiz says. "That means seeing how systems are put into place to benefit certain people and allow others to continue to be oppressed."

Like Casa San José's food distribution efforts, its fundraising efforts expanded rapidly this year. Ruiz began with the goal of raising $100,000 to distribute one-time $700 cash payments to needy families. She met that target within days and upped it to $300,000. She eventually raised $1 million.

But Casa San José's work is never done, a lesson Ruiz sees clearly in the way that a lack of language access intensified the pandemic's ravages in the Latino community.

"We all have a role to play, especially social workers," Ruiz says. "We're taught this code of ethics, and if we really want to live them out, we have to take an active role in advocacy to make sure that the needs of the folks we serve are being met."



JOHN SCOTLAND
(MSW '83)

As pastor of Community Presbyterian Church in Brigantine, New Jersey, John Scotland serves not only Brigantine's mostly middle-class residents but also residents of nearby Atlantic City, which was hit hard by unemployment and poverty well before COVID-19.

Navigating these different communities and assessing their assets, opportunities, and needs were skills Scotland acquired at the School of Social Work, where he earned his MSW degree while also attending Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

"Those skills became pretty critical in the 1980s after the steel mills closed," says Scotland, who served for 10 years as associate pastor at the First United Presbyterian Church of Allegheny on Pittsburgh's North Side. There he drew on the examples of Pitt Social Work professors like Jim Cunningham and Moe Coleman, whose efforts to build a network of organizers and administrators helped many in Western Pennsylvania to weather economic disaster.

Though Scotland's current locale is different, the need for regional planning and networking among social services is every bit as important in Atlantic City. He's employed those skills to operate the food pantry at his church safely during the pandemic and to find creative ways of keeping Sister Jean Webster's Kitchen, an Atlantic City soup kitchen, up and running.

And while anti-racist principles are at the center of much of today's social justice movement, Scotland received lessons in anti-racism decades ago from Bill Pollard, then coordinator of what is now the school's Community, Organization, and Social Action specialization. Those lessons from years ago have informed his engagement in the social justice movement of today. When Scotland led a Black Lives Matter march through the mostly white suburb of Brigantine, he says, he faced protests.

"It was ugly," Scotland says, "but the School of Social Work taught me that if we're not engaging in those issues, what's the point?"

CHARLIE BOROWICZ
(MSW '18)

As the first-ever Transgender Health Project manager at Allegheny Health Network (AHN), Charlie Borowicz takes a lead role in educating AHN staff and in advocating for transgender patients who enter the health care system.

"I make sure anyone who connects with the Transgender Health Project has all needs met regardless of whether they are transition related or not," Borowicz says.

COVID-19 has made Borowicz's work more challenging. Previously, they made a point of meeting patients in person to offer support and resources. As someone who identifies as nonbinary, Borowicz can offer a reassuring presence to such patients. Now, they're just another anonymous voice on the phone.

"When I say something in a training about Black trans women being murdered at exponentially higher rates, it's harder to read the room," Borowicz adds. "I can't notice over Zoom who squirms [or] who shakes their head."

At the same time, the pandemic's challenges have made Borowicz's job more urgent.

"Some folks have lost their jobs and insurance; we're figuring out how to get them care," Borowicz says. "It's unethical to leave them without it. Trying to bridge those gaps has been challenging."

The summer's protests for racial equality also highlighted the importance of the Transgender Health Project's work.

"We know that trans people of color experience poorer health care and more discrimination," Borowicz says. "There is a huge racial justice element in doing any work in health care if you're trying to broaden the scope of what health care can do."

At Pitt, Borowicz earned dual master's degrees in social work and public health. Classes in topics like social administration were critically important to understanding how organizational structures run and how change is made.

The opportunity to effect change drew Borowicz to the Transgender Health Project, along with its unique model, which aims to provide care as broadly as possible. Rather than a single clinic addressing trans issues, it's a systemwide initiative that provides comprehensive care for transgender people at any and all AHN offices.

"We bring care out into every area that the AHN footprint touches—anywhere people will see trans people," Borowicz says, "which is everywhere."



CELESTE FIELDS-STANBACK
(MSW '96)

As a community medical social worker, Celeste Fields-Stanback connects low-income seniors with health care services in the Atlanta area. The job has changed drastically with the onset of COVID-19. The goal of visiting every patient, in person, every 30 days became not just difficult but potentially dangerous.

"Everything that we needed to do for our patients," she says, "suddenly became a threat."

But the "COVID gap," the result of seniors' being increasingly isolated during the pandemic, shrank more quickly than she feared as seniors learned to use cell phones and FaceTime and as patients' family, friends, and neighbors stepped up.

An unexpected challenge was the muted response from state and federal governments. "Those were the stillest moments," she says, recalling the dawning realization that authorities would not be stepping in to offer more help. But those were also the moments when Fields-Stanback and her colleagues grew most inventive.

"American ingenuity kicked in," she says. She and her colleagues connected with churches, synagogues, and mosques that were stepping up to create new food pantries to meet a surging demand. "It was wherever we could find the connections," she says.



The senior population she serves brought unique challenges. Some clients would have needed to take public transit or attend large gatherings to access other food pantries, all problematic in the pandemic. "I can't send someone with a walker to stand in the elements," she says.

So, Fields-Stanback reached out to the Atlanta Area Council of the Boy Scouts, who were able to arrange food deliveries to seniors' homes.

The resourcefulness required during the pandemic was familiar to Fields-Stanback from her training and experience as a social worker. After finishing her bachelor's degree in social work at Hampton University, Fields-Stanback worked as a union social worker before Coleman recruited her to Pitt.

> "Even in a pandemic, social work is still about the person in the environment, and the environment is still inclusive of all those elements that make up the community proper."

"Even in a pandemic," she says, "social work is still about the person in the environment, and the environment is still inclusive of all those elements that make up the community proper."

That perspective also informed her response to the summer's police killings of Taylor and Floyd. It was important to make space for at times difficult conversations about race but also to focus her clients on registering to vote and paying attention to all levels of government, including the ways that current events reflect earlier legislative action.

"You're concerned about what's happening in the streets with law enforcement," she says, "but you have to look all the way down the ballot as well."

KATHI ELLIOTT
(MSW '08)

Like many organizations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, Gwen's Girls was forced to adapt quickly. The Pittsburgh nonprofit had to go beyond the after-school services it offers to approximately 100 girls in and around the city.

"Our focus quickly went to supporting our families and our girls in ways that we traditionally didn't have to," says Kathi Elliott, chief executive officer of Gwen's Girls. That included making sure that families had adequate food and shelter.

Although the organization shifted to address more basic needs, Gwen's Girls never abandoned its mission to provide a broad range of educational services to the girls it serves.



continued

"Our focus quickly went to supporting our families and our girls in ways that we traditionally didn't have to."

"The school districts are doing what they can, but it frightens me to think about just where our kids will be academically, especially those who are missing out on formative educational years," Elliott says.

Fortunately, Gwen's Girls has developed a virtual academic learning support service catering to a broad range of children in grades K-12 in Allegheny County. The program explicitly includes often-overlooked students in the juvenile detention and child welfare systems.

During the summer's social justice protests, Gwen's Girls was well prepared for difficult conversations with its girls. As far back as 2016, Elliott says, the organization taught a unit on the inequities faced by Black girls within various systems.

"It's definitely something we've been talking about, but now it's been amplified," she says.

Elliott is uniquely well qualified to respond to the challenges of 2020. She earned a degree from Pitt's School of Nursing while enrolled in the MSW program, a combination that underscored, for her, the impacts of mental health and trauma. A field placement at Pittsburgh Mercy Behavioral Health, followed by her first job at the Center for Victims, only made clearer the long-lasting effects of traumatic violence.

"Even when it comes to girls in our program," she says, "if we can do some preventive work early on and address the issues they have, we can make sure it doesn't lead to them being adults with some kind of traumatic aftermath and issues we see adults struggle with throughout their lifetimes."

She adds, "It's important to be flexible and adapt to help any way we can. I feel like that is going back to the true essence of what social work is about."

The School of Social Work Responds

Just as School of Social Work alumni have responded with creativity and resilience to the challenges of 2020, the school itself has worked tirelessly to address the dual crises of COVID-19 and systemic racial inequality.

In March, as Pitt's campus emptied, the social work faculty faced the Herculean task of rapidly shifting to an online instruction model that would allow the school to continue to offer high-quality instruction.

"It was a chance to come together as a school to make sure we were doing everything we could to meet students' needs," says Dean Farmer. "And it worked really well."

"It was really about trying to provide students with as much clarity as possible at a time when there was none," says Keith Caldwell, associate dean for student success.

Students stayed connected with Caldwell and with Yodit Betru, director of the MSW program, expressing their desire for flexibility and rigor.

"They're our partners, and they challenge us," says Betru. "They make us a better institution."

Though the sudden shift to virtual learning modes was challenging, working through it helped to uncover opportunities to leverage technology in ways many had not previously considered, says John Wallace, David E. Epperson Endowed Chair and Pitt vice provost for faculty diversity and development. Among other responsibilities, Wallace oversees the University Center for Teaching and Learning, which played a critical role in the shift to online learning.

"Even when things get better, I don't know that we'll return to the old way," he says. "With digital and virtual learning, I think of it as adding tools to the toolbox."

COVID-19 also exposed systemic failings that underlie many of the problems social work strives to address. Wallace worries that young people who were already struggling academically will only fall further behind their peers as economic disparities grow more pronounced.

"COVID-19 has brought those disparities into greater relief," he says. "We can see more clearly the challenges linked to poverty."

In a similar way, the brutal killing of Floyd at the end of May laid bare serious and persistent social problems.

"The school is committed to work together to dismantle this existing system and create an anti-racist society, institutions, policies, practices, attitudes, interactions, and behaviors."

From the School of Social Work anti-racism statement

"Long-standing issues around systemic racism [and] state-sponsored violence—particularly against African Americans and other communities of color—became so overwhelmingly prominent and real that for a while the pandemic faded into the background," says Farmer.

"These events bring into bold relief where we are as a nation," says Wallace, "and how much more work we have to do despite the progress that has been made."

It was clear to students, faculty, and administrators alike that a meaningful response from the School of Social Work was needed.

"We have this long and important history, as a school and [as a] profession,



"Issues of social justice and trying to ensure that populations that are often left out have a seat at the table—that's implicitly what social work does."
—John Wallace

of engaging in civil rights and social justice efforts," says Caldwell. He cites both the leading role that the Center on Race and Social Problems has played in that work and student activism in response to the June 2018 shooting death of Antwon Rose II in nearby East Pittsburgh.

Wallace agrees: "Issues of social justice and trying to ensure that populations that are often left out have a seat at the table—that's implicitly what social work does."

"Students told us that business as usual doesn't work," adds Betru. "The usual process needs to be moved up."

But there's a tension between presenting a swift response and a thoughtful one, says James Huguley, cochair of the school's Inclusion and Diversity Committee and interim director of the Center on Race and Social Problems, which took a leading role in drafting what would become the school's statement on its commitment to anti-racist practices and principles.

"We're building the plane while we fly it," he says. "It's urgent, so we don't want to wait, but we also want to make sure it's good."

"If you rush or are sloppy," adds Betru, "it can have devastating unintended consequences and harm the people it's meant to help."

Navigating the tension between speed and thoughtfulness was a learning opportunity for students, says Caldwell. Forming committees and task forces may not feel exciting, "but this is the way change happens," he says.

Drafted and adopted over the summer, the school's statement of its commitment to anti-racism is a first step toward meaningful change. Grounded in the idea that it is not enough to simply not be racist, the statement articulates guiding principles that affirm the school's dedication to anti-racism, addressing systemic racism, and reducing racial inequalities.

"The school is committed to work together to dismantle this existing system and create an anti-racist society, institutions, policies, practices, attitudes, interactions, and behaviors," reads the statement, posted on the School of Social Work website.

The statement was drafted following "a lot of meetings and a lot of work," says Farmer.

At a full school meeting in June, faculty and staff talked over concerns and priorities. Participants broke into small groups to think about areas to focus on and target goals within each, work that continued throughout the summer in learning groups, committees, and task forces. A draft of the commitment statement was presented at the school's August meeting, with faculty and staff breaking into groups to discuss the draft and offer feedback. A final version was adopted at the school's September meeting.

The importance of adopting the statement so publicly, says Farmer, is demonstrating that "our commitment to this is not just our words but our actions and the changes we make over months [and] years as we move forward on all of this."

Huguley agrees: "We don't see this as a quick fix; we see this as a real shift in how we operate institutionally. We're a school of social work that has a reputation for doing anti-racist work. Are we meeting that standard? Are we doing change? Part of our work will be to see how we think we're doing and make sure we're accountable to our ideals."

Wallace characterizes the commitment as an "acceleration" of the school's long-standing work and culture rather than a change in direction.

"This is the kind of work we have done for literally decades at the School of Social Work," he says. "Whereas other folks are wringing their hands, trying to decide what to do, this is our moment."

Back in the Game Program Helps Athletes to Develop Core Mental Skills for Success

Robert Bumbaco (MSW '07), a former Division I ice hockey player, knows the psychological challenges confronting athletes well. While competing in college, he struggled with anxiety, depression, and the pressure to perform but felt uncomfortable speaking with his coaches about his mental state. "I worried it would affect my playing time and that I would be seen as 'weak minded' if I admitted what was bothering me," Bumbaco says. Afraid of the stigma and unsure of where to get help, he focused on his physical performance instead, but the mental strain took a toll.

Bumbaco's personal experience was a powerful motivator to pursue a career in social work. As an MSW student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, he met Jody Bechtold (MSW '02), an adjunct professor specializing in addiction and mental health disorders who later became his mentor and licensure supervisor. In 2018, the two cofounded The Better Institute, a Pittsburgh-based mental health services provider focused on addiction and recovery, mental health, skills development, and confidence building for diverse clients.

At The Better Institute, Bumbaco saw an opportunity to revisit the gaps in mental health support for players that he'd witnessed as a college athlete. He established Back in the Game, a sports performance program designed to provide players of all ages and skill levels with accessible tools to optimize their performance and overcome psychological obstacles to success. Back in the Game works with individuals, teams, and coaches to address the challenges surrounding competitive sports play and promote a strong mental game among athletes through a combination of education, prevention services, and skills development. It also strives to reduce the stigma around mental health in sports among players, coaches, parents, and audiences.

"Success in sports is about much more than physical skills," says Bumbaco. "So much goes along with performance."

Back in the Game focuses on strengthening six core skills in participants: goal setting, preparation, confidence building, self-talk and visualization, focus and motivation, and working through adversity. Bumbaco and Bechtold identified these key skills through a combination of clinical practice, research, and on-the-field experience. Each one is designed to help athletes excel in a specific area of performance and minimize the risks that competitive players often are susceptible to, such as addiction, burnout, depression, and performance anxiety.

Since its inception, Back in the Game has worked with a wide range of athletes and teams, including the Robert Morris University men's basketball team and EXCEL Hockey Academy, a partnership between North Catholic High School and the UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex. Each client or team benefits from a customized performance plan that is tailored to meet their specific goals on and off the field. Sessions can look drastically different from client to client or week to week, says Bumbaco. He shares the example of an athlete who felt uncomfortable talking in a traditional sit-down arrangement but opened up after Bumbaco moved the meeting to the basketball court. Passing the ball back and forth put him at ease to discuss the challenges he was facing and helped him to connect the dots between his mental state and his physical performance.

While COVID-19 has prevented Bumbaco and his team from interacting with clients in person, the switch to remote services has made it easier for them to share Back in the Game with a wider audience. The Better Institute will soon release an online mental skills training for athletes, and Bumbaco has been working with his clients remotely during the pandemic, encouraging them to make the most of their downtime. After all, he says, "Even though we can't have physical practice and play games with our teammates, there's no better time to develop a strong mental game."



VISTA and Pitt Social Work:
A HISTORY OF CONNECTION

BY DAVID FEEHAN (MSW '81)

Volunteers in Service to America, or VISTA (now AmeriCorps VISTA), was launched on December 12, 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson met with the first enrollees at the White House. Vice President Hubert Humphrey called VISTA "one of the most exciting adventures of our time. VISTA brings to the lives of people the precious commodity of hope, and no opportunity can be more rewarding than this."

I am not sure when I applied to VISTA, but it must have been sometime in 1967. I applied to both the Peace Corps and VISTA because I knew that my deferment from the draft would run out in June 1968, and I would then have to decide what to do: depart for Canada, resist and go to jail, or find another way to avoid military service. And as I was adamantly against the war in Vietnam, a year in VISTA would offer me a one-year reprieve.

The telegram came to my mother's home and advised me that I had been accepted into VISTA and would be receiving an official letter soon. I should be prepared to report to training in Baltimore in September. What a relief!

The connection between VISTA and the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work dates back to 1967, when George and Patricia Wright came to Pittsburgh and eventually became faculty members at the School of Social Work.

The Wrights were among the first VISTA recruits nationwide. They were in the second cohort to be recruited and were trained at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Pat was a graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C.; George graduated from Tuskegee University in Alabama. Pat earned a degree in psychology, and George majored in physical education. Both said they were inspired by John F. Kennedy's inaugural address when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

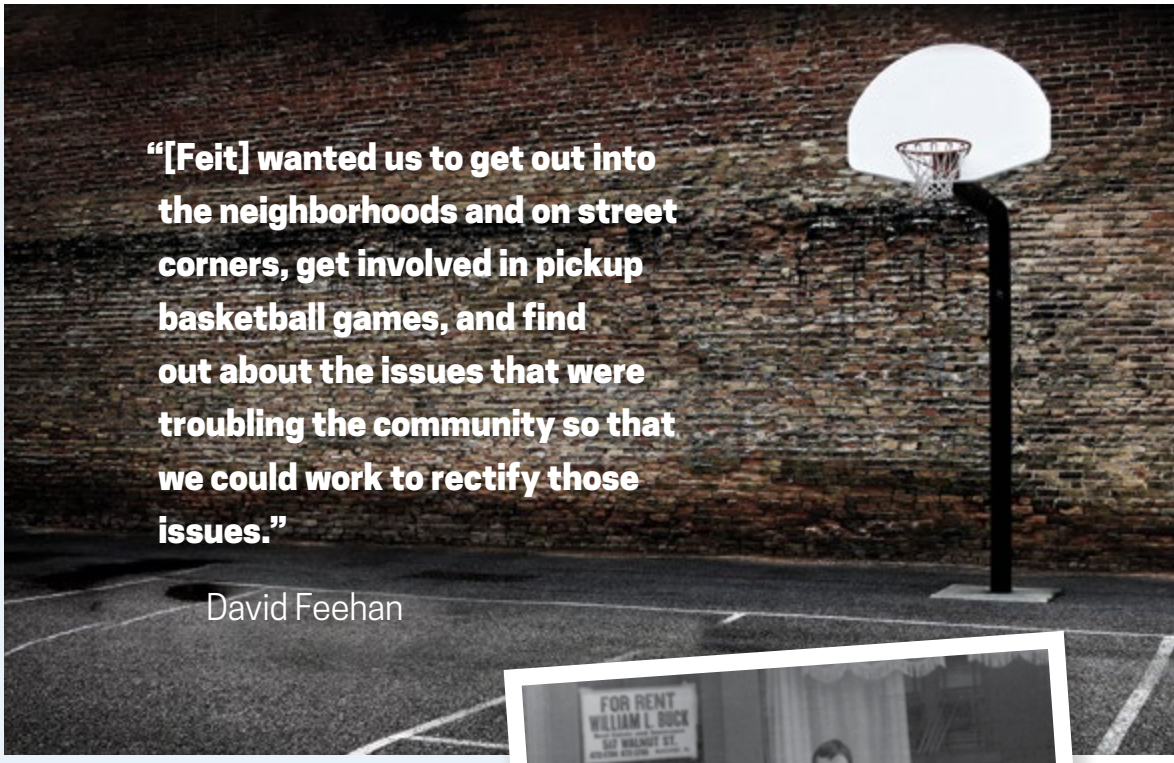
When I arrived in Baltimore for VISTA training at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, I met Marvin Feit, who was working on a dual degree at Pitt—a PhD in social work and a master's degree in public health. Feit was to be our supervisor in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, and would become my first connection to Pitt.

We were trained to be community organizers. We were warned that our nonprofit sponsors might try to use us as clerical staff or in some other capacity. But Feit, our supervisor, made it clear: We were organizers, and he did not want to see us in the office. He wanted us to get out into the neighborhoods and on street corners, get involved in pickup basketball games, and find out about the issues that were troubling the community so that we could work to rectify those issues.

During my year in VISTA, I helped to organize a campaign to reduce racial discrimination in the McKeesport Housing Authority, organized a campaign to fight corruption in a local magistrate's court, and brought dozens of mothers to downtown Pittsburgh to protest cuts to the Mon Valley Early Childhood Development Center Program. I helped Major Mason III, who chaired the local community action committee, to publish a community newspaper called NOW.

Tracy Soska (BA '74, MSW '78), a former faculty member at the School of Social Work and a national leader in community organization, joined VISTA at a time when it had shifted its focus from recruiting nationally to recruiting people who were native to where they'd be volunteering.

Soska signed up and went to work at the East End Cooperative Ministry, where his main assignment was making breakfast. The nonprofit organization had a free breakfast program for 300 youngsters, and Soska was the pancake maker. He also tutored and supervised a group of students doing home repairs. Over the summer, his participants learned useful work skills and helped low-income and elderly residents with home repair projects. This work led him to graduate school at Pitt and a master's degree in social work. Before he graduated, he was hired by the Pittsburgh Neighborhood Alliance, and he later



served as its director for a number of years.

He worked briefly at the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh with ex-offenders and then for the Human Services Center Corporation in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, for 26 years. Ultimately, that led him to seek a teaching position at Pitt, and while working with Jim Cunningham and Moe Coleman, he developed and refined the Community, Organization, and Social Action program, becoming recognized as a national leader in community organization.

Michael Eichler (MSW '86), founder of the Consensus Organizing Model, originally began his career as a conflict organizer. He served as a VISTA recruit on Pittsburgh's North Side in 1975-76, working with Tom Murphy (who would later serve as mayor of Pittsburgh). Eichler also helped to launch the Perry Hilltop Citizens Council and later created a credit union for residents. He also created a real estate office to help market homes in the Perry Hilltop community. I bought a home through that real estate office.

In the early 1980s, Eichler was contracted to work for the Perry Hilltop neighborhood. The community was the target of blockbusting by several real estate agents, which involved provoking racial fears; flooding the market with home sales; and, ultimately, decreasing property values. Eichler responded in traditional conflict organizing fashion, and the community of Perry Hilltop was successful in its immediate efforts. However, Eichler realized that conflict organizing led to short-lived victories and did not have long-term effects; from this realization, he developed the Consensus Organizing Model, which ties the self-interest of the community with the self-interest of others to achieve a common goal.

Following his success in Perry Hilltop, Eichler was contracted by a new project in the Monongahela Valley of Pennsylvania, where he applied the Consensus Organizing Model. Through the collaboration of community members and owners in the steel industry, the Mon Valley Initiative was established. For the first time in Mon Valley history, stakeholders of all socioeconomic levels were working together to formulate solutions in which everyone benefited. From this experience, Eichler learned that the Consensus Organizing Model could not only be successfully replicated in a different community but also could facilitate long-lasting systemic change.

While these alumni and faculty members are only some of those who were involved in VISTA, the connection between VISTA's mission and methods and Pitt Social Work is unmistakable.



Feehan as a VISTA volunteer in McKeesport in 1968

Grants

Molly Allwein, director of professional and continuing education and a certified licensed social worker (LSW), received a $200,000 grant from the Staunton Farm Foundation to establish a licensed clinical social worker training institute and LSW supervision matching program in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Associate Professor **Jaime Booth**, along with collaborators from Pitt's School of Computing and Information, received a $590,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to work with high school youths living in Pittsburgh neighborhoods that have largely been left behind in the recent shift from manufacturing to technology jobs.

Professor **Valire Copeland** received a School of Social Work pilot grant for her project, Addressing Autism in African American Families.



Shaun Eack, James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair and associate dean for research, along with his coprincipal investigator from the Pitt Department of Psychiatry, received a $2.9 million grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development for their project, Change-sensitive Measurement of Adult Functional Outcomes in Developmental Disabilities.

Associate Professor **Rafael Engel** received a Heinz Endowments grant to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of health care workers.

Assistant Professor **Rachel Gartner** and her team of collaborators received a 2020 Pitt Seed Grant to work with transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, and otherwise gender-nonconforming students on identifying and addressing gaps in the University's sexual violence prevention and response efforts.

James Huguley, assistant professor and interim director of the Center on Race and Social Problems, received a $500,000 Heinz Endowments grant for his Just Discipline Project Regional Impact Model.



Research Assistant Professor **Marlo Perry** received a 2019 Steven D. Manners Faculty Development Award from the University Center for Social and Urban Research for her project, Emotional Awareness in Child Welfare Professionals and Its Relationship with Emotional Variability, Compassion Satisfaction, and Commitment to the Field: A Pilot Study Utilizing Ecological Momentary Assessment.



Professor **Fengyan Tang**, along with collaborators from Pitt and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, received a $2.2 million grant from the National Institute on Aging to study strategies to prevent cognitive decline and dementia in older Chinese immigrants.



Darren Whitfield, assistant professor and chair of the Direct Practice specialization, received a $440,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to investigate the relationship between psychosocial factors (depressive symptomatology, substance use, social support, perceived HIV risk) and adherence and persistence to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis among young Black gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men.

Books

Dean **Betsy Farmer** coedited the "Handbook of Research on Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Interdisciplinary Developmental Perspectives on Children and Youth."

Professor **Christina Newhill** coauthored the book "Dynamics of Family and Intimate Partner Violence." The book also featured contributions from Clinical Assistant Professor **Elizabeth Mulvaney** and doctoral student Allison Little.

Other Publications



Associate Professor **Sara Goodkind**, as part of a research collaborative, published an independent report with colleagues from Gwen's Girls and the

Black Girls Equity Alliance on racial disparities in Allegheny County's juvenile justice system.

Assistant Professor **Brianna Lombardi** served as a guest editor of a special issue of the journal Social Work in Health Care titled Social Work Practice in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Innovations.

Research Associate Professor **Mary Elizabeth Rauktis**, along with colleagues from Cornell University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, edited an issue of the journal Residential Treatment for Children & Youth titled Safety Perceptions of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care.

Rauktis and a team of gerontology students, faculty members, and other community partners created a guide for those aging in place in Allegheny County who have pets. The resource guide is for professionals, caregivers, and pet owners.

Other News and Events

Dean Emeritus **Larry Davis** delivered the annual American Experience Distinguished Lecture for the Dick Thornburgh Forum for Law and Public Policy, titled "Will Race Always Matter?" on Sep. 22, 2020.

The Center on Race and Social Problems hosted its fall institute, Race, Politics, and Fighting Voter Suppression, on Oct. 20, 2020. The institute featured leading researchers, political analysts, and community advocates who spoke on racial equity, voter engagement, and voter protection.



Doctoral student **LauraEllen Ashcraft** received a second year of funding from the National Institutes of Health for her Clinical and Translational Science Fellowship. The fellowship is a translational research training program for pre- and postdoctoral students who find innovative ways to advance research from initial discovery through improved patient outcomes and health policy.



Doctoral student **Kess Ballentine** received the National Association of Social Workers Foundation's 2019-20 Eileen Blackey Doctoral Fellowship. The fellowship provides partial support to social work doctoral candidates who are engaged in dissertation research in welfare policy and practice.



MSW student **Rochelle Burks** received a Census 2020 Outreach Grant from Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development. She created a short animated video encouraging fellow Beaver County, Pennsylvania, residents to complete the census.



Doctoral students **Laurenia Mangum** (left) and **Cortney VanHook** (top right) were named 2020-21 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) minority fellows. The CSWE Minority Fellowship Program is designed for doctoral students who are preparing for leadership roles in practice, research, teaching, and/or policy promulgation



in the areas of mental health and/or substance abuse with racial/ethnic minorities.

Mangum also received a prestigious award from the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs. She was selected for a 2020 Go Beyond MCH Graduate Student Scholarship, which provides leadership development opportunities to emerging leaders in maternal and child health research.



Serwaa Omowale, a joint PhD/Master of Public Health student, received a grant from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Her research project will focus on understanding the relationship among stress, discrimination, and adverse birth outcomes.



MSW student and Student Executive Council President **Daisia Williams** received the George F. and Mary Ann McGunagle Award through the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh. She plans to use the funds to travel to Uganda in summer 2021 to work with the nonprofit Bright Kids Uganda to develop a transitional program for youths aging out of the organization's support system.



Postdoctoral fellow **Yan Yuan** was awarded a Fahs-Beck dissertation scholarship for her dissertation, "Exploring the Roles of Trauma and Emotion Dysregulation in the Developmental Pathways for Borderline Personality Disorder among a Sample of Inner-city Women."

Letter from the Alumni Advisory Board Chairs

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have a number of new and exciting opportunities that all alumni can participate in, including our Alumni Speaker Series and Pitt Social Work Mentoring Week.

Dear School of Social Work friends and family,

On behalf of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Alumni Advisory Board, we want to take a few moments to share more about what we have found to be an extremely meaningful and valuable experience since we graduated from the school.

After graduating from the master's program, both of us realized that maintaining the important connections we developed during our time in graduate school would take a bit more effort than when we were going through the program. As chair and vice chair of the Alumni Advisory Board (AAB), we have been able to remain connected to the school and fellow alumni.

AAB serves as a bridge between Pitt Social Work and the larger social work community. We are committed to connecting and engaging current students and faculty with alumni of the school. We do this in many ways, including hosting networking events and professional development opportunities as well as recognizing alumni excellence.

One of our favorite aspects of the board is that there is truly something for everyone. The larger board is made up of three subcommittees. The engagement subcommittee's primary focus is on making sure that the school's current students are aware of and connected to the board and the school's alumni. The programming subcommittee plays a significant role in supporting the school's events that are open to alumni participation, such as networking and volunteering opportunities. The membership subcommittee focuses on both recruiting and maintaining alumni members of the board.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have a number of new and exciting opportunities that all alumni can participate in, including our Alumni Speaker Series, in which we spotlight the expertise of school alumni, and Pitt Social Work Mentoring Week, for which we use the virtual Pitt Commons platform to connect alumni with current students.

If you are interested in becoming a member of AAB, have questions about membership, or are interested in any of the events mentioned above, please reach out to us at sswalums@pitt.edu.

Stay safe; stay well; and, as always, hail to Pitt.



Jessica Murray (MSW '14)
Chair, Alumni Advisory Board



Talia Landerman (MSW '19)
Vice Chair, Alumni Advisory Board

2020 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

Each year, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work recognizes a select group of alumni with its highest honor: the Distinguished Alumni Award. These individuals have achieved the highest standard of professional integrity and personal conduct, have advanced knowledge of the social work profession, and have supported public and social policies that ensure equal rights for all.

On October 19, 2020, Pitt Social Work honored its newest Distinguished Alumni Award recipients. More than 110 people from 13 states gathered virtually to celebrate the honorees and their work in the field.

Following the award presentations, the honorees joined a panel discussion moderated by MSW Program Director Yodit Betru that touched on timely and critical issues, including the impact of COVID-19 on social work, efforts toward racial justice and equity, the role of coalition building in professional life, and the importance of stress management.

Although the awards ceremony could not be held in person as in previous years, the virtual event was filled with joy and inspiration as attendees filled the chat box with greetings, notes of congratulations, and acknowledgments of the recipients' impact in their communities.



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

JAN M. IVERY (MSW '97)

Assistant Dean for Academic Programs, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University

Jan M. Ivery is assistant dean for academic programs at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies and an associate professor of social work at Georgia State University in Atlanta. In addition to her degree from Pitt Social Work, Ivery holds a BA in sociology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a PhD from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in human behavior, research methods, community development, and nonprofit management.

Ivery has published journal articles and book chapters on how to leverage community partnerships to develop programs and services for such client populations as older adults, caregivers, and ex-offenders transitioning from prison into the community. Her research on collaborative partnerships explores systemic and environmental factors that influence program development and implementation in economically diverse communities.

During the 2017-18 academic year, Ivery was a visiting scholar in the Social Justice Transdisciplinary Core at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she worked with colleagues to develop the framework for a policy lab to address poverty and inequality in the city of Richmond. She has served in multiple leadership roles in social work education and macro practice, including as former cochair of the Council on Social Work Education's Council on the Role and Status of Women in Social Work Education and as current interim cochair of the Association for Community Organization and Social Action.

continued



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

JODY R. BECHTOLD (MSW '02)

Cofounder and CEO, The Better Institute

Jody Bechtold is a licensed clinical social worker, an international certified gambling counselor, and a board-approved clinical consultant in the international gambling treatment field. She is the cofounder and CEO of The Better Institute. Bechtold serves on the board of directors of the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board and on the advisory board of Gamban, a gambling-blocking software used worldwide.

In addition to previously teaching as an adjunct professor at Pitt Social Work, Bechtold has conducted numerous continuing education training sessions and workshops, training more than 200 clinicians in the region in the treatment of problem gambling. Her research with Pitt Social Work professor Daniel Rosen helped to form a local tech and mental health start-up company.

Bechtold has presented on problematic and disordered gambling at numerous conferences locally, nationally, and internationally. Shortly after her 2019 TEDx Talk in Pittsburgh, she was the keynote speaker on problem gambling at the first-ever international Beacon of Hope conference in Mauritius. She has coauthored chapters on gambling disorders in the fourth edition of the "Social Workers' Desk Reference," which is scheduled for release in 2021. Her book, "The Gambling Disorder Treatment Handbook: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals," which she coauthored with Alyssa Wilson, will be published in early 2021.

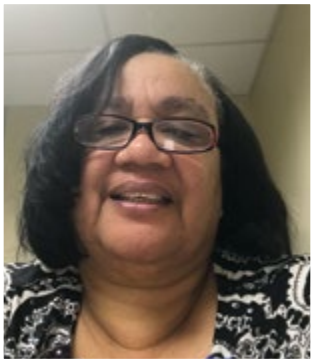


OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD

JONI S. SCHWAGER (MSW '84)

Executive Director, Staunton Farm Foundation

Since 1998, Joni S. Schwager has served as executive director of the Staunton Farm Foundation, a private family foundation that awards grants in the field of behavioral health in 10 counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Founded in 1937, the foundation sees a future in which behavioral health is understood, supported, and accepted. Schwager has helped the foundation to distribute more than $40 million during her tenure. She has served on numerous boards and committees, including LEAD Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Health Funders Collaborative, and Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, and has participated in many community activities. Schwager spent the first half of her career working as a clinical social worker at Jewish Family and Community Services Pittsburgh and in private practice, specializing in women's issues, including eating disorders and trauma.



OUTSTANDING FIELD INSTRUCTOR AWARD

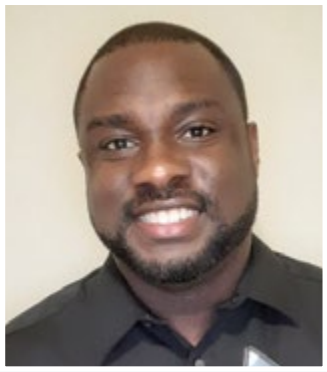
MAXINE J. THOMAS (MSW '09)

Social Service Supervisor and Grievance Officer, Kane Glen Hazel Community Living Center

Prior to returning to school as a nontraditional undergraduate student, Maxine Thomas drove a school bus in the McKeesport Area School District for 17 years. After completing her bachelor's degree, Thomas worked as a caseworker for Kane Community Living Centers for eight years before being promoted to social service supervisor. Today, she works at the Glen Hazel Community Living Center as a social service supervisor and grievance officer. She enjoys the opportunity to build relationships with and advocate for residents and their families.

Thomas has taught Introduction to Social Work as an adjunct professor at Carlow University. In addition, she has been a Pitt Social Work field instructor for many years and continually provides a safe space for students to develop their knowledge and skills in gerontological social work practice. Thomas makes her home in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, where she is active in her community as an elected school board member, the superintendent of Sunday schools at Bethlehem Temple Church, and a foster parent to several children.

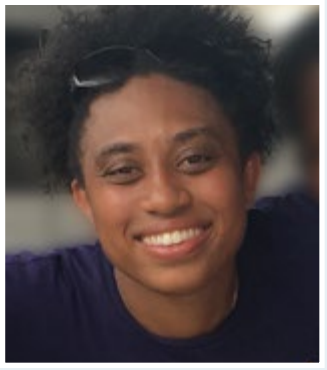
RISING STAR AWARDS



JOHNNIE R.M. GEATHERS (MSW '13)

Mental Health Therapist, Familylinks

Johnnie R.M. Geathers is a mental health therapist for Familylinks who works with children in first through third grade at Pittsburgh Carmalt PreK-8 using the therapeutic classroom model. Outside his work in the field, Geathers does community work for his fraternity, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc., where he holds three positions: community service chair for the Beta Omicron Omega alumni chapter in Pittsburgh; director of community service for the Atlantic Coast Region; and national coordinator for Much More Than A Hashtag, an initiative that he cofounded to educate the community on voter registration, citizen review boards, the jury selection process, and property taxes. Geathers also speaks regularly on the topics of mental health and wellness to diverse audiences as part of his work to destigmatize mental health treatment for communities of color and increase equity in mental health services.



GABRIELLA JONES-CASEY (MSW '13)

Organizing Training Lead, Western Pennsylvania and Kentucky, Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ

Gabriella Jones-Casey began working with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) during her time at the University of Pittsburgh, first as a graduate intern/campus organizer and then as a union organizer. In 2014, she worked as a labor organizer with the Fight for $15 campaign, a project of SEIU. Jones-Casey then moved on to become a coordinator in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, where she was responsible for coordinating strikes by hundreds of fast-food workers across the state and building relationships with ally organizations to encourage participation in parallel actions to fight for economic justice. After three years with the Fight for $15 campaign, she transitioned to an internal organizing field representative position with SEIU Local 32BJ (Property Service Division). In November 2019, she became an organizing training lead for Western Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

Do you know a Pitt Social Work alum who is making an impact in the field on a local, regional, or national level? Nominate them for a Distinguished Alumni Award today! Descriptions of the award categories and nomination form are located on the Distinguished Alumni section of the Pitt Social Work website at socialwork.pitt.edu/alumni.



SPECIAL RECOGNITION: THE LARRY E. DAVIS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN RACE RESEARCH

The Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) presented its inaugural Larry E. Davis Award for Excellence in Race Research in 2020. The award will be given annually to an outstanding researcher focused on race and racial justice issues. Award recipients are influential thought leaders in their disciplinary areas whose projects have local and national impact on both policy and practice. The award is named for Pitt Social Work Dean Emeritus Larry E. Davis, who founded CRSP in 2002.

The inaugural recipient of the Davis Award is **Michael A. Lindsey** (PhD '02). Lindsey is a noted scholar in the fields of child and adolescent mental health as well as a leader in the search for knowledge and solutions to generational poverty and inequality. He is executive director of the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University, the Constance and Martin Silver Professor of Poverty Studies at the NYU Silver School of Social Work, and an Aspen Institute Health Innovators fellow.

At the McSilver Institute, Lindsey leads a team of researchers, clinicians, social workers, and other professionals who are committed to creating new knowledge about the root causes of poverty, developing evidence-based interventions to address its consequences, and rapidly translating their findings into action through policy and best practices.

News and Notes

1980s



KAREN DEPASQUALE (BASW '89, MSW '90) was promoted to vice president of clinical operations at UPMC Health Plan in Pittsburgh. In this role, DePasquale is responsible for clinical and operational oversight of all UPMC Insurance Services Division product lines.

GAY FOGARTY (MSW '85) was moved to join the Center for Victims board of directors after visiting its Healing Rivers Project. Located at the organization's headquarters in Pittsburgh, the Healing Rivers Project is an exhibit that provides a safe space for visitors to reflect on the meanings of trauma, support, and self-care as well as to seek ways to heal.

In June 2020, Bishop David A. Zubik appointed **C. MATTHEW HAWKINS** (BASW '83, MSW '84) to serve as parochial vicar of the newly created personal parish dedicated to the Black Catholic community in the Diocese of Pittsburgh under the title of Saint Benedict the Moor Parish. A personal parish is one that responds to specific spiritual needs, often related to a particular culture or an extraordinary need, and anyone who desires to be a part of that Catholic community is welcome to join.

1990s

GRETCHEL HATHAWAY (PhD '93) was appointed to serve as Franklin & Marshall College's first vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Highmark Inc. announced the election of **KEVIN L. JENKINS** (MSW '90) to its board of directors.

ANDRE STEVENSON (MSW '91, PhD '05), a social work professor at Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina, was selected as one of 16 scholars to participate in a Fulbright Seminar focusing on Taiwanese politics, economics, and culture. He will be working with faculty from various disciplines in Taiwan in June 2021 to learn about how his program can partner with them to develop either study abroad or exchange opportunities for their students.

2000s

ANNE R. SCHLEGEL (MSW '02) was named director of Washington County, Pennsylvania's Children and Youth Services agency in May 2020.

2010s

JOSHUA P. BERMAN (MSW '15) became the new community engagement manager at Aunt Bertha, a public benefit corporation, in July 2020.

SAMANTHA J. BUFFONI (MSW '19) is a patient care specialist at RISE, a medical marijuana dispensary.

TALIA LANDERMAN (MSW '19) started a new job as a development specialist at The Neighborhood Academy in Pittsburgh.

COLLEEN PEDDYCORD (MSW '18) and **TIERRA THORNE** (MSW '19) launched Blanket & Board, a business that creates simple yet sophisticated outdoor dining experiences for people throughout Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Their creative work has been featured by NEXTpittsburgh and The Incline.

2020s

ASHLEY S. ASHLEY (MSW '20) was named to the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary board of directors.



MORGAN OVERTON (MSW '20) was appointed by Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto and Pittsburgh City Council to serve on the city's Gender Equity Commission, for which she will be working to achieve equitable and transformational change at the community and policy level.

Do you have news to share with the Pitt Social Work community? Send your updates to sswalums@pitt.edu.



Alumna Celebrated for Organizational Work on Behalf of Seniors

On October 22, 2020, the board of directors of the Hill House Association was honored at the UPMC 12th Annual Celebrating Senior Champions event. The UPMC Senior Services Community Champion Award is given annually to recognize exceptional organizational leadership that improves the lives of seniors. University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work alumna **Emma Lucas-Darby** (MSW '77, PhD '86) accepted the award on behalf of the Hill House Association, whose board of directors she chairs. Under Lucas-Darby's board leadership and in collaboration with community partners, the Hill House Association has overseen the expansion of many critical services to seniors in Pittsburgh's Hill District.

Student Fills Void of Black Hair Care Products for Kids in Foster Care, Peers

Originally published in Pittwire, *September 8, 2020*



Social work graduate student Ashlé Hall (BASW '18) is a busy entrepreneur with a new line of hair care products designed to fill two very important needs. (Aisha Salami)

40 Under 40

Each year, Pittsburgh Magazine and PUMP recognize 40 outstanding individuals under the age of 40 whose creativity, vision, and passion enrich the Pittsburgh region. The 2020 class includes three Pitt Social Work alumni: **Natalie Bencivenga** (MSW '13), a journalist, media personality, and digital media consultant; **José A. Diaz** (BASW '08, MSW '09), senior director for community outreach and impact at the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh; and **Sharise Nance** (MSW '06), founder of Vitamin C Healing, LLC. Nance also was named a 2020 Pittsburgh Smart 50 Award recipient. According to Smart Business, "the Pittsburgh Smart 50 Awards recognize the top executives of the 50 smartest companies in the Greater Pittsburgh region for their ability to effectively build and lead successful organizations."

In Memoriam

1940s
Mary Virginia Butcher (MSW '44)
Ralph D. Meister (MSW '48)
Eleanora Mary Thomas (MSW '46)
Bernard Warach (MSW '42)

1950s
Jean Agnew Klein (MSW '56)
Eleanore J. Phifer McLaughlin (MSW '57)

1960s
Ruth T. Glosser (MSW '63)
Robert C. Lee (MSW '65)
Laurance W. Miller (MSW '64)
David A. Pratt (MSW '61)
William C. Shelton (MSW '69)
Lydia R. Strehl (MSW '62)

1970s
Wanda E. Burwell (BA '73, MSW '75)
Joseph C. Carolin (MSW '72)
Elizabeth J. Clark (BASW '72, MSW '74)
Monique Dietz (MSW '73)
Susan S. Edwards (MSW '73)
Joan M. Gibson (MSW '73)
Cynthia A. Hardy (MSW '76)
Lee Brun Johnson (MSW '77)
David E. McCue (MSW '76)
Margaret A. "Peggy" Merhaut (BASW '77)
Pauline R. Moore (MSW '72)
Diane K. Pile (BA '74)
Charles J. Schafer (MSW '70)
Ethel M. Tittnich (MS '71)
Catherine E. Whitely (BASW '79)
Paul W. Wysong (BASW '78, MSW '80)
Stephen Zivkovich (MSW '71)

1980s
Judith M. Bauersfeld (PhD '86)
Sandra Jean Beyer (BASW '85, MSW '86)
Duane R. Brokenbek Jr. (MSW '83)
Linda G. Buchsbaum (MSW '87)
Sherley F. Craig (MSW '88)
Valerie N. Danish (MSW '89)
John C. DeWitt Jr. (MSW '84)
Patrick J. Fenton (MSW '88)
Richard T. Knouff (MSW '86)
John J. Morey (MSW '87)
Carol M. Runco (BASW '83)
William Reese Victor (BASW '80)

1990s
Lauren E. Alexander (BASW '99)
Joan P. Bach (MSW '90)
Patricia A. Beahan (BS '91)
Nora Day (MSW '93)
Sandra L. Kistler (MSW '93)
Kathleen E. Tennant (MSW '95)

2000s
Walter Mueller II (BASW '01, MSW '02)
Bernard J. Tychinski (MSW '01)

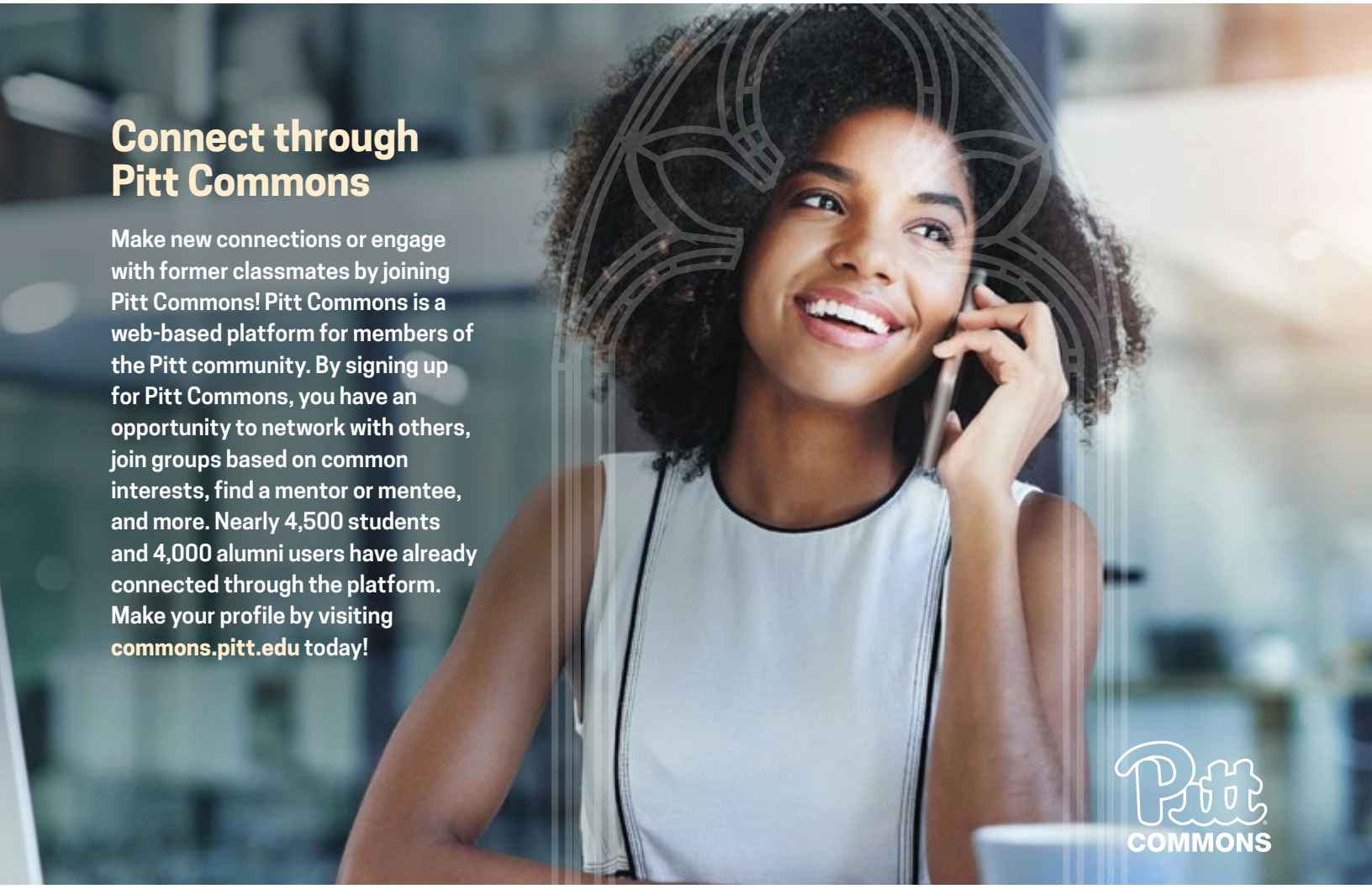
2010s
Roman R. Phillips (BASW '14)

Mark Your Calendars: February 23 Is Pitt Day of Giving

February 23, 2021, marks the fifth annual Pitt Day of Giving, the University's most important fundraising day of the year. During this 24-hour online event, alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of Pitt come together to celebrate the University's founding in February 1787 by making a gift to the area that means the most to them. Various challenges throughout the day add excitement and friendly competition.

Last year, more than 130 donors supported the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and its students on Pitt Day of Giving. Pitt Social Work also won the School and College Social Ambassador Challenge by obtaining the most gifts via social media sharing, which led to an additional $2,000 grant for the school!

On February 23, let's make this the most successful Pitt Day of Giving yet! Donate, encourage former classmates to make a gift, and share the news with others in your network. Visit pittdayofgiving.com to learn more and make your gift.



Why I Give:

JOSH BERMAN (MSW '15)
director of community food initiatives,
Economic Development South

Thinking back on your time at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, what are some of your fondest memories?

School went so fast, but one of the best parts was serving as a member of the MSW Student Executive Council. My field placement [with Just Harvest] was also an experience I learned a lot from, and it helped me land my first job in the field. I also met and learned from so many great people along the way!

What motivates you to give to the School of Social Work?

I give because the school helped me develop skills to make an impact in the community, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to do the work I do. But more than that, I want to support the school so current students receive the same great education that I received.

Do you support a specific fund or program at the school?

I was excited to support the Centennial Scholarship Fund because the fund will support students and social workers for generations to come. I also continue to support the School of Social Work Endowment for COSA Students.

What other causes or organizations do you support?

Locally, I support Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Pittsburgh; Just Harvest; and, of course, Produce Marketplace in Clairton. [Berman was named one of Pittsburgh Business Times' 30 Under 30 class of 2019 because he played a key role in the creation of the Produce Marketplace Clairton, a fresh food nonprofit.]

Many young alumni think of charitable giving as something they will do in the future, when they have the financial resources to make large donations. What would you say to a recent social work grad who thinks their gift would be too small to make an impact?

Truly, it's not about how much you give; it's that you support access to quality, meaningful social work education and career development. I know that our support—even a small amount—is a perfect way to fulfill that vision.

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

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On Pitt Day of Giving, you can help the School of Social Work in two ways:

1 GIVE

- To support Pitt Social Work students
- To the Pitt Social Work fund or program that means the most to you

2 SHARE

- Challenge funds will be awarded to the school that attracts the most donors.
- Let your friends and fellow alumni know that you're supporting Pitt Social Work.
- **Post to social with downloads you can find online at pittdayofgiving.com**

