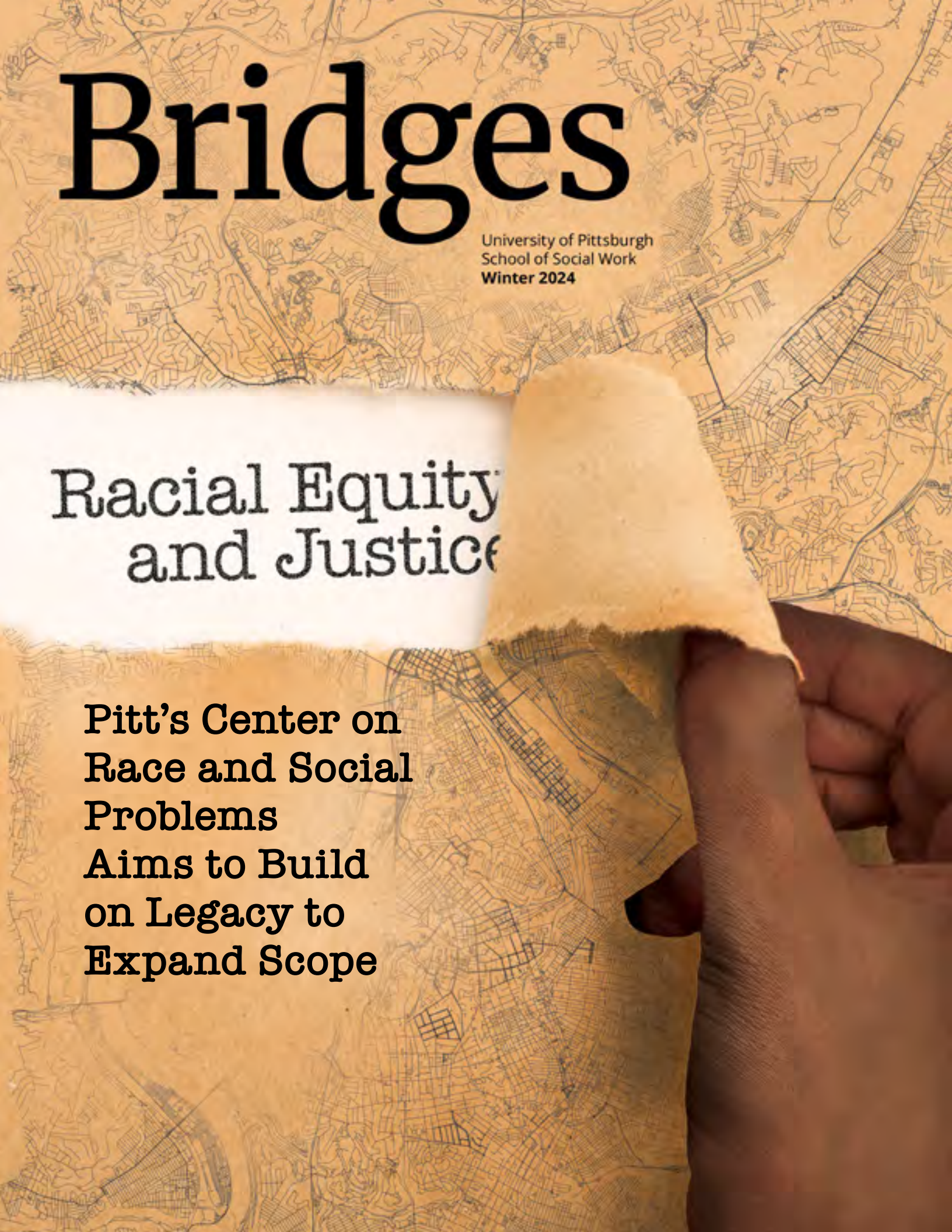
# Bridges

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work
**Winter 2024**




## Pitt's Center on Race and Social Problems Aims to Build on Legacy to Expand Scope

# 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 and friends,

It is wonderful to be connecting with you again—as we go through all four seasons within the span of one week here in Pittsburgh. I hope that things are going well for you, wherever you may be reading this.

As you'll see in the following pages, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work has been busy on many fronts. I am thrilled with the ways that our staff has expanded and changed. We have new expertise and capacity in recruitment and admissions, alumni relations and development, social media and communications, and in our innovative and expanding programs of research and interventions with community organizations and institutions around Pittsburgh. We've also had some changes in leadership within the school. Jaime Booth is our new associate dean for research, and Kyaien "Kya" Conner (about whom you'll read a great deal in the following pages) has stepped up as our new associate dean for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. It's been exciting to add their energy, vision, ideas, and considerable administrative and leadership skills to our executive team. We have no shortage of great ideas. Now it's just the challenge of figuring out how to implement everything that we want to do!

One of the most exciting updates for this year has been the launch of the next phase of the Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP). We chose this as our cover story for this issue to give everyone a sense of all that is happening, the potential that is now here, and the directions that we're exploring. Kya joined us last summer as the Donald M. Henderson Endowed Chair and director of CRSP. The center has been a critical part of the school for more than two decades now, and with Conner's arrival and support from others (particularly Ron Idoko, CRSP associate director), we have amazing opportunity to realize CRSP's true potential as a leader in research, paradigm-shifting knowledge, policy, and preparing the next generation of professionals. It's definitely a "moon shot," but when I hear this team talk about their vision and see all that they're doing, it's infectious. I truly believe that we can end racism!

As you'll see in the rest of this issue, CRSP is just one of the places where we're making strides to change the world. We're expanding our focus and footprint around innovative research in mental health, poverty, legal/justice systems, education, child welfare, health care, and many more areas. We're also broadening reach, depth, and focus in many areas of tremendous impact. In this issue, we spotlight some of these: the continued reach and impact of our Child Welfare Education and Research Programs, growth of our continuing and professional education offerings, internships and placements with our many community partners, and policy inroads based on faculty expertise and research.

We also highlight a few endeavors that are possible only because of the continued support and generosity of our alumni. These include the perspective-changing opportunities that Pitt undergrads (who are not social work majors) get through the Browne Leadership Fellows Program. We just recruited our 11th cohort for this intensive summer program, in which students from across campus work in community-based programs in Pittsburgh. In these settings, students learn and come to understand things that they can't forget and carry these with them into their careers in medicine, law, education, engineering, and so many more. And we are preparing for our third annual Florence Gibbs Momeyer Endowed Lecture. In our first two years, we hosted nationally recognized experts with lived experience in disability advocacy and societal change. In 2023, Temple Grandin came to campus for this lecture and enthralled the audience with perspective-changing information on different ways of knowing and possibilities for people with autism and other neuro-atypical ways of thinking.

And, as I experience every year, our students are amazing! We had the largest-ever number of applicants to our PhD program this year, and I'm constantly amazed at how productive, generative, creative, and passionate our students are about the work they're doing, both on their own and with faculty. I am really enjoying interacting with and being inspired by our

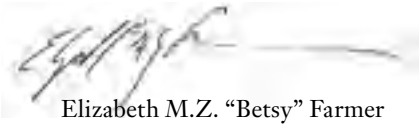


MSW and BASW students. They bring their intense drive to make a difference and hold us accountable to make sure that we're feeling the urgency and potential that they are. So for those of you who are alumni, our current cohorts make me very optimistic about your upcoming colleagues and the field's next generation.

I hope that 2024 is good for all of you! It is likely to be a challenging year in many ways. Please know that we are all in this together, bringing our unique and critical experiences and perspectives, and we'll find our way through to a future that we want to embrace.

Thanks for being part of the Pitt Social Work community!

Take care,



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



### Child Welfare Education and Research Programs Update

The Child Welfare Education and Research Programs had a productive year filled with education, training, and innovation. A total of 47 fully funded child welfare undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled in the 2023-24 academic year, and statewide, a total of 98 students completed degree studies through the education programs. The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center continued to offer a free, online three-hour course, Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse. More than 288,000 participants completed the course during the year. Feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive, with almost 90% reporting they feel more confident in their skills and that they will be able to use what they learned in the course. The resource center spearheaded the third round of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in 2023. Pennsylvania achieved the Program Improvement Plan goal for Item 14 (Caseworker Visits with Children) and as a result, Pennsylvania has successfully completed all required components associated with CFSR Round 3. This review involved in-depth reviews of 65 cases across seven counties. This achievement ensured that Pennsylvania is not subject to a multimillion-dollar financial penalty and is a true testament to the efforts made by the workforce to ensure that they are achieving the required frequency and quality of visits with children.

This past year, the Child Welfare Resource Center has continued its race equity journey. It has made structural changes to better support its efforts at every level of the organization. These structural changes also ensure that there is effective communication and clear expectations for everyone regarding the goal of becoming an anti-racist organization. The resource center continues to collaborate with outside partners for education about race equity matters and its impact on children and families of color. The theme of the Diversity Task Force event this year was Community-conscious Trauma Awareness, with a focus on racial trauma. Participants learned about the impact of racial trauma and how there can be collective healing through a trauma-informed approach. Participants also were part of breakout groups in which they had the opportunity to discuss what their experiences have been with racial trauma and strategies they can use when it touches them professionally or personally. ■

## New Staff

**Riley Belden-England** is the school's new development associate.

**Henry Cantu** joined the school as its new director of recruitment and admissions.

The Just Discipline Project hired five new restorative practice coordinators: **Tamera Dixon**, **Hella Dijsselbloem Girón**, **Nicole Hinden, Denise Korzon**, and **Alexa Marotta**.

**Katy Gallmeyer** is the new director of development.

**Alex Neumann** is the school's new research manager working with **Mary Ohmer**.

**Ginger McCrum** is the new marketing, communications, and program specialist for the School of Social Work and the Center on Race and Social Problems.


Belden-England


Cantu


Dixon


Gallmeyer


Girón


Hinden


Korzon


Marotta


McCrum

## Faculty Promotions and Appointments

**Jaime Booth** was named associate dean for research.

**Kyaien Conner** was named associate dean for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**Travis Labrum** was promoted to associate professor.


Booth


Conner


Labrum

## Faculty and Staff Awards and Honors


Molly Allwein


Aliya Durham


Shaun Eack


Ron Idoko

**Molly Allwein**, director of professional and continuing education, was the recipient of Vitamin C Healing's 2023 S.W.A.G. (Social Worker Appreciation of Greatness) Changemaker Award.

The 2023 S.W.A.G. awardees included several Pitt Social Work alumni, including Assistant Professor and Director of Community Engagement **Aliya Durham**.

**Shaun Eack**, professor and James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair, won the Gerard E. Hogarty Excellence in Schizophrenia Research Memorial Award, presented at the 40th Annual Pittsburgh Schizophrenia Conference in November 2023.

**Stephanie Eckstrom**, MSW regional program director at University of Pittsburgh Bradford, was awarded the 2023 Gateway to Equity Award from the Bradford branch of AAUW.

**Ron Idoko**, associate director of the Center on Race and Social Problems and founding director of the Racial Equity Consciousness Institute, received the 2023 University of Pittsburgh Chancellor's Staff Award for Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Idoko also was recognized as a Social Justice Advocate during the 2023 K. Leroy Irvis Black History Month celebration at Pitt and received a 2023 Atlantic Coast Conference UNITE Award.

Recruitment and Admissions Coordinator **Leah Mafrica** was recognized by the Pitt Social Work Office of the Dean as the inaugural recipient of the Excellence in Service Award.

Associate Professor **Mary Ohmer** is the vice president of the Society for Social Work and Research.



**Michael Schrecengost**, business and personnel manager for the Child Welfare Education and Research Programs, and **Megan Soltesz**, director of administration, were both honored for 20 years of service at the University of Pittsburgh.

### RISE-MH is Making New Strides

The Center for Research on Innovations, Services and Equity in Mental Health (RISE-MH) is making important strides to improve mental health services across the nation for some of the most underserved communities. Multiple new grant awards were received from the National Institutes of Health, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and other funders. These projects include a comprehensive review of the recovery literature in mental health, initiatives to improve the care of individuals with schizophrenia for whom medication is not helping, and to investigate the impact of caregiver engagement on the effectiveness of community-based maltreatment prevention programs for at-risk youths. Further, new ground is being broken by two RISE-MH students. Christian Porter is raising awareness about the emergence of dissociative identity disorder on Tik Tok, and Ana T. Flores received an F31 award through NIMH for her project "Social Cognition in Latinx's with Schizophrenia," which assesses the psychometric properties of field-standard measures of social cognition in schizophrenia in a Latinx sample. This year also saw the launch of the Lived Experience Research Academy to support diverse graduate students with severe mental illness in beginning mental health research careers in order to increase the number of scholars with lived experience who can lead advances in mental health services research for the nation. ■



## Q&A with Tonya Slawinski, Director of Field Education

Spanning 40 years, Tonya Slawinski has a deep connection to the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work as a student, teacher, and program director, with a substantial career in crisis management in between. Currently, she is the director of field education. We asked Slawinski to share more about her journey through Pitt, exciting happenings in field education, and her life outside work.

"What's meaningful to me is their absolute dedication to the education of students and their willingness to share their experiences, their training, and their guidance with our students. There aren't enough words to express our gratitude for our alumni and field instructors."

—Tonya Slawinski

**Q: Tell us about your journey to Pitt.**

**A:** I started my master's in Florida, at Barry University, but moved to Pittsburgh when I got engaged. I finished my MSW at Pitt and years later got my PhD here as well. I started as an adjunct faculty member in about 1999 and then became the MSW program coordinator for the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. I was there for several years, but then I went into a career in crisis management. I continued to teach throughout and functioned at times as a field instructor and field liaison. I continued doing that until 2019, when I became the lead adjunct. In May of 2021, I joined the faculty to teach and, shortly after, became the interim director of field education and now recently the director.

**Q: What influenced you to start a career in crisis management?**

**A:** I had to get continuing education hours for my license, and I noticed a flyer with a training about corporate crisis management. I had already been trained in the Mitchell Model [for Critical Incident Debriefing] but wasn't satisfied with that model. After responding to 9/11, I was hired by a corporate crisis management company and worked there for several years, helping to develop a resiliency model for crisis response. In 2005, I decided to start my own crisis response company and ultimately became the largest private woman-owned crisis response firm in the country, with about 850 mental health professionals functioning as consultants for unexpected events. We responded to events like the Sandy Hook shooting, Hurricane Katrina, and violence in the workplace.

I still provide crisis management and response training because I developed an approach to crisis response based on a strengths-based perspective. I was able to move away from previous crisis response models that were relied upon in many industries and used my social work background to develop an approach that focused on resiliency rather than pathology.

**Q: How have you seen the social work landscape change in your time at Pitt and in the field?**

**A:** I think one of the bigger changes—and it's only been recently—is social work's willingness to begin a historical review of how social work has participated in practices that aren't supportive of diversity, equity, and inclusion. There's been a shift from static learning to the perspective that cultural humility is a lifelong learning process. I've seen students become more interested and invested in advocacy.

**Q: What are some of the exciting opportunities on the horizon for field education?**

**A:** We're exploring ways to offer more kinds of diversity, equity, and inclusion training, which can be incorporated into internships and field sites. We want to be a resource to help think ideas through and participate with our partner agencies on what they're doing with students and how we can work together to enrich the student experience.

Another aspect I would like to see our office expand on is how we can think about field education globally. A few faculty took a trip to Uganda and Kenya two years ago to begin exploring this possibility, and we're considering other sites that we can engage with to have students more immersed in the culture and education of other countries.

There also are opportunities to do more research on field education, collaborating with departments across the country to think about how we can bring together best research, best practices, changes, and expectations.

**Q: A lot of our field instructors are alumni of our program. What has been meaningful to you in working with alumni in this capacity?**

**A:** What's meaningful to me is their absolute dedication to the education of students and their willingness to share their experiences, their training, and their guidance with our students. There aren't enough words to express our gratitude for our alumni and field instructors.

**Q: Is there anything else about field education that you want to add?**

**A:** Field education has a unique position with students because of the way we're structured. We see students in academic advising; we help place them; we do the field liaison visits with them. So I think we have our fingers on the pulse of what the students are doing across all aspects of their educational career. Field is a very flexible office where we really work to make sure that the needs are met individually on a variety of levels.

**Q: What does life outside the office look like for you?**

**A:** I live a very active lifestyle. I like to kayak, paddle board, ride bikes, bungee jump, and go parachuting, horseback riding, and fishing. I like outdoor activities, but if I'm stuck inside, I like to read and cook.

If you're interested in getting involved as a field instructor, contact Slawinski at tslawin@pitt.edu. ■



Amanda Cruce

## Student News and Awards

Doctoral student **Sommer Blair** competed in the Allegheny County Department of Human Services 2023 Local Government Case Competition. Out of 20 teams, her team placed second.

Doctoral student **Amanda Cruce** was named chair of the Council of State Affiliates for the National Foster Parent Association. Cruce also was awarded funding from Journey to Success and Sunshine Health to support her research around flourishing and procedural justice for youths who have aged out of foster care.

Blair, Cruce, and fellow doctoral student **Bianca De Bellis** were selected as part of the inaugural cohort of student scholars by the Pitt Center for Civil Rights and Racial Justice.

BASW student **Priya Gupta** received first place in the Pitt Office of Health Sciences Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 2023 Health Disparities and Social Justice Poster Competition. Her poster was titled "Assessing Bias in Mobile Crisis Intervention: An Experimental Pilot Study."

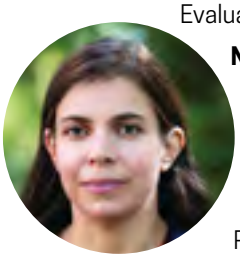
Doctoral student **Emil K. Smith** has been named a 2023 Q Caucus Society for Social Work and Research Conference Scholarship awardee.

## Faculty Grants

Professors **Sara Goodkind** and **Jeffrey Shook** have received funding from the National Institute of Justice for their project, Caring Connections for Youth: Evaluation of a Countywide Pre-arrest Diversion Initiative to Reduce Racial/Ethnic Disparities, in collaboration with Gwen's Girls and its Black Girls Equity Alliance.

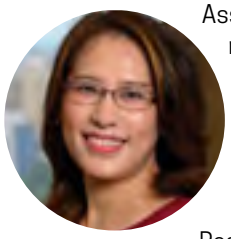
Associate Professor **Catherine Greeno** and Assistant Professor **Nev Jones** received a Priming Grant from the Pitt Momentum Funds for their project, Unpacking Racial Disparities in the Involuntary Psychiatric Commitment of Youth and Young Adults in Allegheny County. Associate Professor **James Huguley** is on a team headed by Shannon Wanless of Pitt's School of Education that received a Momentum Funds Scaling Grant for their project, Linking University-Community Initiatives to Promote a Child's Thriving Pipeline Across Early Developmental Stages.

**Leah Jacobs** has a new National Institute of Justice-funded project: Can Law Enforcement Training Address Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality? An Experimental Evaluation of Effective Youth Interactions.



Nev Jones

**Nev Jones**, Mental Health America, and the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health received an Engagement Award for a joint project on the campus mental health crisis from the Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Awards program, an initiative of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). Jones also is the coprincipal investigator, with Bevin Croft of the Human Services Research Institute, of a recently awarded $1 million contract from the State of New York to evaluate the implementation and impact of assisted outpatient treatment in New York.



Deborah Moon

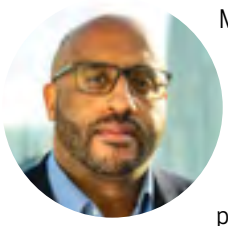
Assistant Professor **Deborah Moon** has received a new investigator career development award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct her study, titled Connected through Coaching for Flourishing Families, in collaboration with researchers at Ohio State and Case Western Reserve universities.

Research Associate Professor **Marlo Perry** is the evaluation lead on a new Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau grant led by the University of California, Los Angeles, to establish, by cooperative agreement, a quality improvement center on workforce analytics.

## Publication Highlights

Professor and James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair **Shaun Eack** published "Cognitive Enhancement Interventions Are Effective for Schizophrenia: Why Not Provide Them Early?" with coauthor Matcheri S. Keshavan in the journal World Psychiatry.

Associate Professor **Rafael Engel** and doctoral student **Soobin Kim**, along with their collaborator, Chulhee Kang of Yonsei University School of Social Welfare, published "What Convinces Donors? An Analysis of Donation-based Crowdfunding Projects from Nonprofit Charities: The Case of South Korea" in the journal Nonprofit Management & Leadership in December 2021. The article was among Wiley's top cited papers for 2021-22.



James Huguley

Associate Professor **James Huguley** coedited the March 2023 issue of the journal Race and Social Problems with Scott Seider, associate professor at Boston College. The special issue focused on the critically important issue of parenting in multiracial families.

The journal Research on Social Work Practice published the article "Who Are the Top 100 Contributors to Social Work Journal Scholarship? A Global Study on Career Impact in the Profession" by David Hodge and Patricia Turner in November 2022. Two faculty members from Pitt Social Work are included: Professor **Christina Newhill** (# 76) and Professor Emeritus **Gary Koeske** (# 90).

The Pittsburgh Wage Study; contributed to by Social Work faculty Rafael Engel, Sara Goodkind, Soobin Kim, Helen E. Petracchi, and Jeffrey Shook, has published a new report, "'I Went Back to the Bedside Because We Need to Save Healthcare': Worker-generated Solutions for the Challenges Facing Hospital Workers." This report is a follow-up to the April 2022 report, "Leaving the Bedside: Findings from the Pittsburgh Hospital Workers Survey," which described the experiences of more than 2,000 workers as they navigated increased demands due to COVID-19 and their adjustment to the new and still-changing landscape.

# An Age-friendly Initiative

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work is in Allegheny County, where 19.7% of people are age 65 or older, compared to 16.8% nationally. So it made sense for the school to join forces with Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh (AFGP), whose mission is to rethink how neighborhoods are built and to help make the region more inclusive of all ages.

Associate Professor Rafael Engel, who coordinates the school's gerontology certificate program and serves as AFGP's director of research, says that the idea of making the county accessible for all age groups is an important one.

"It's very consistent with what we do in social work—consistent with our values, our belief set, and the kind of work we do in general," he says.

As a research partner to AFGP, Pitt Social Work is tracking the impact of a robust action plan submitted to the World Health Organization's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities in December 2022. The plan covers a variety of domains—such as transportation, housing, and social participation—and includes designated age-friendly neighborhoods, of which there are currently three in Allegheny County: Clairton, Coraopolis, and the Hill District.

Participating residents in each neighborhood decide what projects would help them successfully age in place in their communities. With support, they may set up a new shuttle service; a job fair; or a project like one in Clairton, where older adults and high school students painted bright planters to be displayed in the town's business district. So far, more than 330 community members have joined in.

"The communities will define what success means, and then we determine whether they were indeed successful," says Engel. "We facilitate the conversation."

In addition to helping Pitt students get involved in the projects, Engel and Research Associate Daniel Lee are conducting focus groups and attending a range of community events. They saw a standing-room-only crowd pack the Clairton Family Center for a night of bingo and karaoke led by a group of older adults. New neighbors were welcomed. People of all ages chatted with one another. Folks offered to help take care of babies so their parents could play bingo. Teen volunteers tended to people's needs throughout the room.

"In a world where we hear about racial conflicts and intergenerational gaps, the Clairton event was a refreshing moment," says Lee. He says that because the projects are planned and executed by people in the neighborhood, there will be capacity building, and the hope is that people's impression of the community will change.

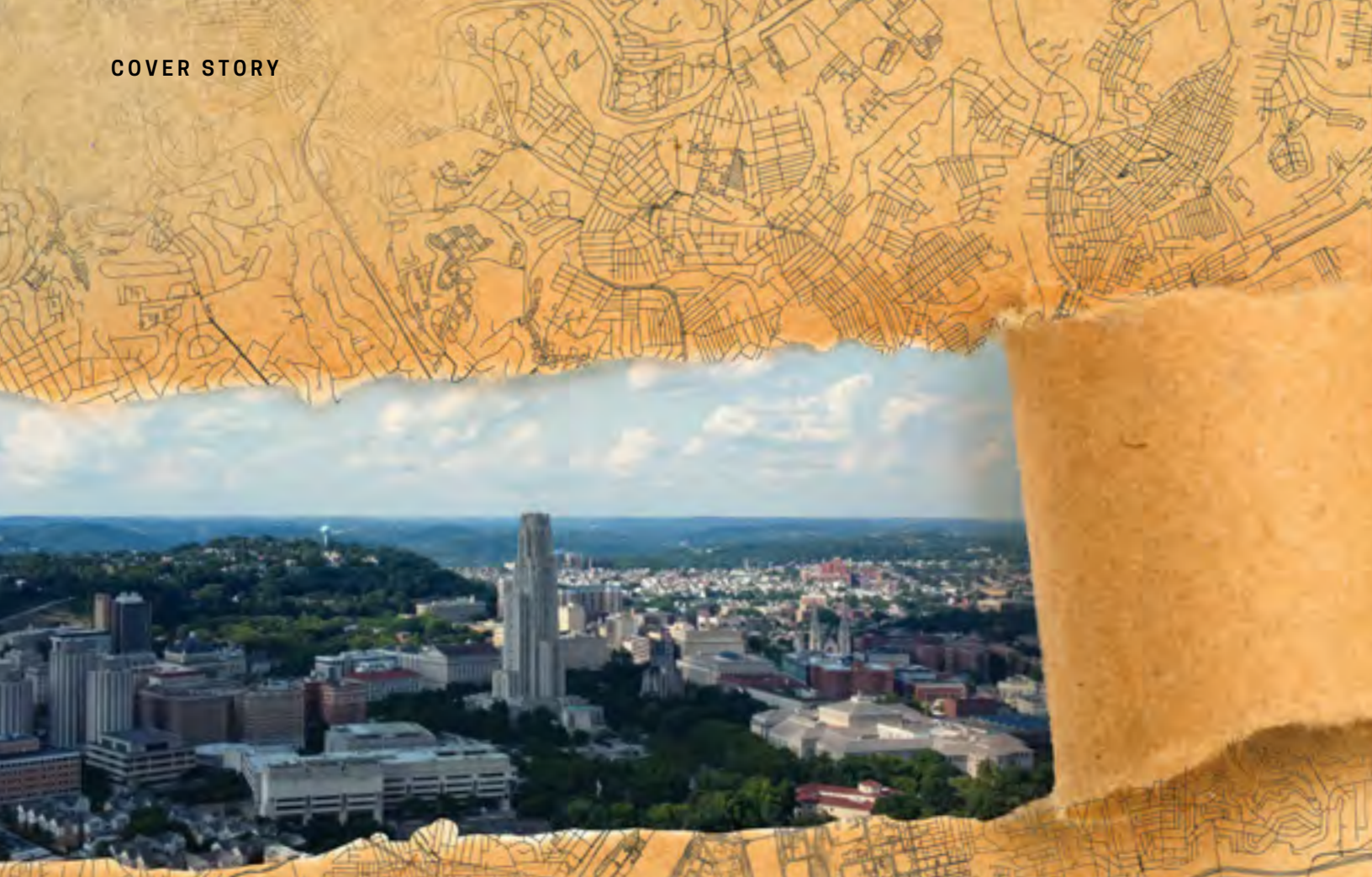
"More and more people will be showing up with the sense of membership," he says.

AFGP staff are excited about the collaboration, which also includes the Southwestern Pennsylvania Partnership for Aging. AFGP Executive Director Laura Poskin says that the collaborations are helping the program to extend its reach.

"We try to not think of everything as a challenge but instead focus on the opportunities that come with our new demographic reality," she says. "As people with career expertise, buying power, and skills, older adults are one of our few growing natural resources." ■

> "More and more people will be showing up with the sense of membership."
>
> —Rafael Engel





# Pitt's Center on Race and Social Problems Aims to Build on Legacy to Expand Scope

By Tory N. Parrish

The city of Pittsburgh often is ranked as one of the best and most affordable places to live in America by various polls, media outlets, and marketing groups. But many Pittsburghers who don't share that perspective have been overlooked, says Kyaien "Kya" Conner (MSW '04, PhD '08), who in July 2023 was named director of the Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. Pittsburgh "continues to have some of the highest rates of disparities for people of color," she says.

Conner has a vision that is focused on building on a foundation set more than 20 years ago at CRSP: for academics and students to expand their research and community outreach to address racial inequities, helping to reduce disparities in health, economics, education, and other outcomes for people of color in Pittsburgh and across the country.

"Racism is a public health crisis, and must recognize that systemic racism and racial inequities continue to significantly contribute to a myriad of challenges and poor outcomes for communities of color," says Conner, who also is the associate dean for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion at Pitt Social Work.

Founded in 2002 by Larry E. Davis, then dean of the School of Social Work, CRSP was created to conduct social science research on racial inequalities and how they influence quality of life for people across the country. The center, which was the first race-related research center to be housed in a school of social work, has risen to national prominence since then.

Conner is the first permanent director of CRSP since Davis retired in 2019. She also is Pitt's Donald M. Henderson Endowed Chair, a position that Davis held. (Henderson, who served as Pitt's provost from 1989 to 1993, is the only Black person to have held the position.)

Conner was a social work graduate student at Pitt when CRSP was founded.

"So now, 20 years later … I guess an important piece, which is also unfortunate, in many ways unacceptable, is that the mission of the center is just as important today as it was 20 years ago," says Conner.

With new energy and a realignment, the center is aiming to expand its reach and its impact.

"In addition to achieving our goal of dismantling racism and oppression through rigorous research and practice, we want to be in the business of mentoring emerging scholars [and] developing innovative training and programmatic opportunities for students, faculty, and staff at Pitt [and] also in the community. We want to be involved in advocacy and helping to make policy that improves the lives of individuals, families and communities," Conner says.

She also wants to extend CRSP's research and scholarship arm and bring in more consistent external funding to support its initiatives as well as to expand the center's collaboration with scholars nationwide to address complex social problems.

"We can't solve them in silos. We need to collaborate with one another. And we want CRSP to be one of the avenues for us to be able to do that," she says.

Other changes include the planned expansion of CRSP's staffing, a CRSP faculty affiliate program, as well as revamping the center's website and the recent creation of CRSPConnect, a newsletter that highlights the center's activities, opportunities for community members and researchers to engage, and CRSP perspectives on world events.



"We can't solve them in silos. We need to collaborate with one another. And we want CRSP to be one of the avenues for us to be able to do that."

—Kyaien Conner

## Gap persists

CRSP wades into and leads conversations and research on topics that can be sensitive to broach but necessary to have, says Ralph Bangs, who retired as CRSP associate director in 2014 but still teaches courses on race and racism through Pitt's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

Discussing race can be difficult for several reasons, including the lengthy history of the brutalization and criminalization of Black people in this country because of their skin color, he says.

"And so they have a long history and recent personal history, which makes them very sensitive about race. And then you have many white people who are sensitive about just discussing race because whenever race is mentioned, quite often some white people will feel like they're being attacked or they're being called racist, just by raising the issue of race," he says.

Those wounds are exacerbated for people of color, particularly Black Americans, who in general are not faring as well economically, educationally, and in other areas as their white counterparts.

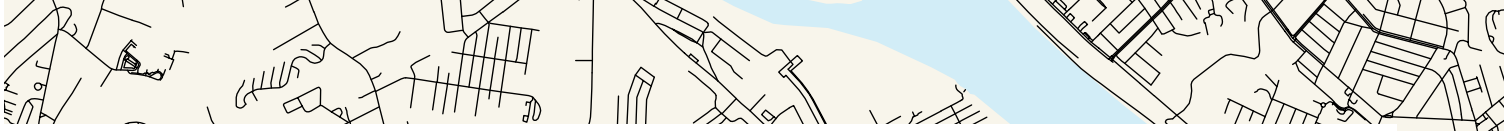
"These persistent differences reflect systematic barriers to quality jobs, such as outright discrimination against African American workers, as well as occupational segregation—whereby African American workers often end up in lower-paid jobs than whites—and segmented labor markets in which Black workers are less likely





## So how are people of color in Pittsburgh faring in relation to white residents?

- A significantly larger share of Black families (28.5%) were living under the poverty level, compared with 11.3% for Hispanic or Latino (of any race) families and 6.1% for white families, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey.
- Black residents' unemployment rate was 11.1%, compared with 8.6% for Hispanics or Latinos (of any race) and 4.1% for white residents.
- The median household income was $28,016 for Black residents, $53,470 for Hispanics or Latinos (of any race), and $65,036 for white residents, according to the Census Bureau data.
- While 19.8% of Black Pittsburghers 25 or older have at least a bachelor's degree, the rate for whites is more than double that: 51.2%



than White workers to get hired into stable, well-paying jobs," according to the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit think tank.

One of the issues creating or accelerating challenges for people of color living in Pittsburgh is the displacement of residents through the gentrification of neighborhoods, Conner says.

"There are whole neighborhoods that look[ed] completely unrecognizable to me upon my return. … And most of those communities were where Black and brown families lived, who were likely lower income. I don't know where else in the city they could afford to be," she says.

The types of challenges that Black Pittsburghers encounter are common in many large cities that lost major economic drivers, like the decline of the steel industry in the 1970s and 1980s that took away thousands of blue-collar jobs that provided financial stability to families of color in Pittsburgh, says John Wallace, vice provost for faculty diversity and development at Pitt and David E. Epperson Chair at Pitt Social Work.

"That was devastating. And for so many people in our city, it never recovered. There are many people who left because of the lack of employment opportunities," says Wallace, who also served as the interim director of CRSP from July 2021 until Conner's arrival.

Disparities affecting people of color in the city also are tied to the inequitable distribution of resources as well as to racism and resistance to change, says Aliya Durham, assistant professor and director of community engagement in the School of Social Work and a faculty affiliate at CRSP.

"When people are fighting for change, when people are fighting for equity, they risk being labeled as rabble-rouser or worse. Their work is pigeonholed [and] sometimes discredited, and their reputations are soiled when, in fact, they are speaking truth to power and making or keeping public the frustrations, dreams, anger, and hopes of so many [who] want and deserve equal opportunities," she says.

Durham and Wallace cofounded a nonprofit called the Homewood Children's Village, which was created in 2010 to provide educational and social support services to children in Homewood, a neighborhood on the eastern side of Pittsburgh.

Because of Durham's work with the Homewood Children's Village, she is involved in community engagement under CRSP to lead social work students in projects that serve residents in Homewood, the Hill District, and Hazelwood, all of which are predominantly Black, low-income communities.

"And part of that is, now that this realignment [of CRSP] has happened, having a clearer understanding of the vision that Dr. Conner is studying for the center," says Durham, who adds that the specific initiatives that students will be undertaking has not yet been determined.

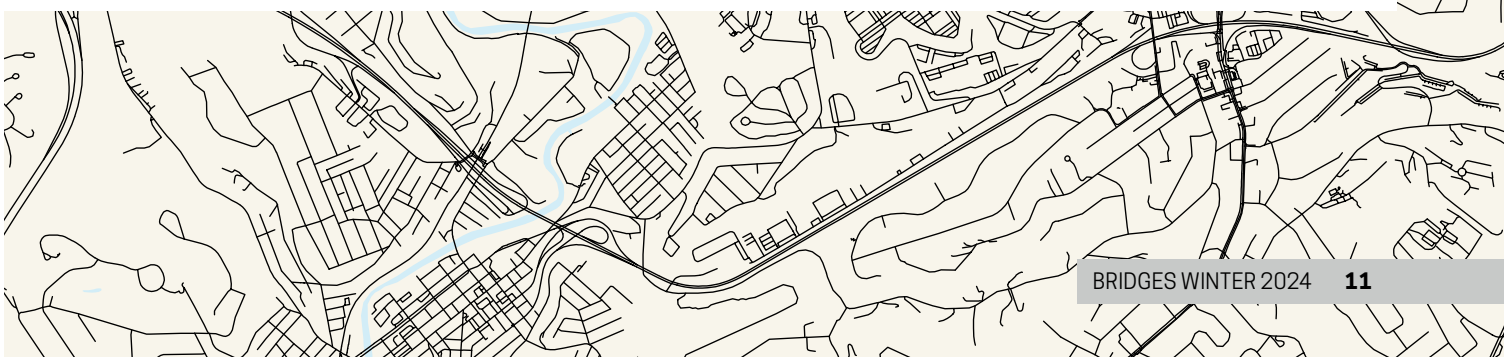
Several nonprofits in Homewood, the Hill District, and Hazelwood are already doing impactful work, so it's important that the CRSP team works alongside them to add value, she says.

Part of the challenge with effecting change to fight systemic racism is people's discomfort in discussing it—or even acknowledging it, says Ron Idoko, CRSP associate director.

In 2021, he founded the Racial Equity Consciousness Institute (RECI) with Pitt's Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, now housed within CRSP.

He says that the founding of RECI came about in the wake of the nationwide protests calling for racial justice and an end to police brutality that erupted in response to the high-profile killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. As companies and institutions were grappling with the idea of anti-racism, "I thought it was important that we help build the capacity of our community to really understand how racism works so that they're in the best position to re-change or restructure our environment through practices and policy toward equity," he says.

RECI holds community learning cohorts of 30-70 Pitt students, alumni, and staff and faculty members who voluntarily attend seven weekly sessions, totaling 15 hours, of a deep dive into curriculum to understand how racism works and how to actively cultivate racial equity. Examples of cultivating racial equity include recognizing one's own biases, being mindful of how they influence behavior, and being able to leverage data to inform the practices and policies of individuals or organizations, Idoko says.



Since 2021, a few dozen community learning cohorts also have been held, with the aim of helping participants to understand racism on ideological, institutional, and interpersonal levels.

"And it's to help people understand that most folks have not been socialized to know how racism works, which means most folks are not positioned to effectively address it, and we recognize that being passive or silent or neutral or inactive in the face of racism works in favor of racism," he says.

RECI's community learning cohort program is gaining local, national, and international momentum. Not only did the program hold its first Facilitators Academy in July 2023 at CRSP to teach people how to lead the sessions, but RECI also has applied for grant funding from the National Institutes of Health to study the intervention as a "vaccine" to racism, Idoko says. A movie about the cohort program, called "Illuminating the Vaccine for Racism: Instituting a Structured Cognitive Behavioral Training Framework to Develop Grounded Personal and Collective Racial Equity Consciousness," was released Jan. 25, 2024. And RECI, in conjunction with Pitt's Center for Civil Rights and Racial Justice and the David C. Frederick Honors College, is working with the United Nations to develop a global database to house racial equity resources.

One of the biggest research projects at CRSP is the Just Discipline Project, which started in 2015 as an initiative to reduce the use of exclusionary and punitive discipline, which disproportionately affects students of color, in Pittsburgh-area schools, says James Huguley, principal investigator for the project and chair of CRSP's Youth Development Area.

Often schools would like to address student behavioral issues with something other than punishments, but they lack the skills and resources to do so, he says.



"We partner with schools to provide staffing and expertise to allow them to move more relationally instead of punitively," says Huguley, who is an associate professor in the School of Social Work.

The program is now in 18 schools in seven school districts, including the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Woodland Hills School District, and Penn Hills School District.

The Heinz Endowments is the founding benefactor of the program, having given more than $1 million since 2015.

The Just Discipline Project's first federal grants came from the U.S. Department of Education—$3 million in 2021 and $4 million in 2022—to conduct randomized controlled trials at 15 of the participating schools to test the effectiveness of the program.

"If our control trials are successful, schools anywhere in America can point to the Just Discipline model as an evidence-based practice that they can implement in their schools," Huguley says.

Huguley believes that under Conner's leadership, CRSP can make the case to local and national policymakers that Just Discipline should be adopted in more places.



"If our control trials are successful, schools anywhere in America can point to the Just Discipline model as an evidence-based practice that they can implement in their schools."

—James Huguley

## Getting its start

When Pitt's then chancellor, Mark Nordenberg, and then provost, James Maher, recruited Davis from Washington University in St. Louis in 2001 to become Pitt's dean of social work, he was already known as a leading academic on race, Bangs says. Davis told the Pitt leaders that he had been wanting to develop a center on race for several years.

Nordenberg and Maher promised Davis that he would get the University's support, including financial resources, to create the center, says Bangs, whom Davis hired to help him start CRSP.

Davis had two main goals for CRSP. The first was to create a setting where people could discuss race in a calm, rational way, which led to the creation of a lecture series, summer institutes, and interdisciplinary faculty committee discussions on race, Bangs says.

CRSP's Race in America conference drew 1,300 scholars, researchers, students, business and community leaders, public officials, and others to Pitt's campus in 2010.

Davis' second major goal was to conduct and sponsor research in which race was the first focus of the research, not an afterthought, which often happens in research, Bangs says.

"And so we conducted our own research. And then I got funding for research. And we provided funding to faculty each year who proposed new lines of research on race," he says.

In 2009, they started a journal called Race and Social Problems, which "has been extremely successful in getting academics and researchers from around the country to submit papers and publish and republish papers in that journal that were very high quality," Bangs says.




Under its new leadership, CRSP is poised to add innovative research and programs, he says. That work would build upon the trailblazing legacy of Davis, who worked to effect change and spur meaningful communication with his research and initiatives.

Conner is the right person at the right time for CRSP, Wallace says. "She brings significant experience and expertise but also new ideas [and] fresh experiences and has her own national reputation and reach. And so I think she is the perfect person to build upon the history and legacy of the center and the work of Larry Davis. I'm confident that he would be extremely proud for her to have assumed that role, to have the endowed chair that he held, and to be poised to lead the center into this next decade and beyond."

Conner is enthusiastic about the new initiatives that CRSP is undertaking, including working with Pitt's Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to create a priority list of pressing issues in the city.

CRSP also is collaborating with the Center for Research on Innovations, Services and Equity in Mental Health, which is housed within the School of Social Work.

"One of the things that we're excited about that's going to be coming up is the development of a pilot grant program that is focused on mental health and race, racial disparities, and equity around mental health, which would provide resources to doctoral students [and] junior faculty who are interested in social justice research to plant seed money to help get them started, which we hope would then turn into larger, more expansive grants in the future," she says.

Before returning to Pitt, Conner was an assistant professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Mental Health Law & Policy. In her current position, she hopes to continue some of the successful initiatives she undertook in Florida or bring them to Pitt.

As a principal investigator, Conner has received more than $3 million to fund her community-engaged research, highlighted by a $2.5 million award from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, to evaluate a transitions-in-care intervention to mitigate disparities in hospital readmissions among older Black and Latino adults living with chronic illnesses.

She also wrote a bill, which became Florida law in 2021, whose goal was to improve access to culturally sensitive health and mental health care for underrepresented communities.

Conner plans to use her new role at CRSP "to develop relationships with policymakers in the state of Pennsylvania to continue advocating for and developing programs and policy to improve outcomes for communities of color," she says. ■

# Celebrating Ten Years of the Browne Leadership Fellows Program


Keith Caldwell

A decade ago, a visionary idea took root, aiming to weave the fabric of social work values into a tapestry of future leaders from disciplines as varied as neuroscience, education, engineering, and humanities. The Browne Leadership Fellows Program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work extends a hand to students outside the field of social work, offering them an immersion into the principles and values of social work through dynamic seminars and experiential learning. Collaborating closely with partner agencies, participants delve into community history; identify local strengths and challenges; foster understanding and appreciation for neighborhood culture; and, ultimately, bring collaborative community projects to life.

The inspiration behind the fellowship program came from the experiences of James J. "Jim" Browne (MSW '73). Having pursued a career in the finance sector as cofounder of Allegheny Financial Group, Jim found that his social work education equipped him with invaluable skills. He and his wife, Noel (MSW '74), envisioned a fellowship that would enable students from diverse disciplines to explore the root causes of social issues and actively engage in identifying effective mechanisms for lasting change.

Keith Caldwell (MSW '02), former program director of the Browne Fellowship, attributes the program's success to the visionary leadership of the Browne's, emphasizing their commitment to creating an exciting and transformative experience for students. Additionally, he credits the dedication of former Pitt Social Work dean Larry Davis to community building, which played a pivotal role in creating the foundation for the program's current success.

The program remains a testament to growth, community, and enduring commitment. The stories of Bruni, Stowe, DiSanto, and Kehinde emerge as compelling evidence of the Browne's profound impact.

Pietra Bruni, a member of the first cohort in 2013, notes that the program emerged at a crucial juncture in her personal and professional growth and became a cornerstone in solidifying her passion for collaborative work. Recently, she completed her pre-doctoral psychology internship residency at VA Boston Healthcare System/Harvard Medical School, where she engaged with a diverse team that included social workers, occupational therapists, and more. Bruni recalls that her Browne Fellows placement at a local food bank provided a new viewpoint on the value and purpose in meaningful communication with community residents. Similarly, Rachael Stowe, a graduate of Pitt's School of Education, says that the fellowship provided her with valuable insights into creating partnerships with communities, fostering trust with parents, enhancing her communication and collaboration skills, and learning the importance of meeting people where they are. Stowe's experience in the fellowship, particularly her placement at Assemble, where she helped to run summer camps and plan fundraising events, continues to influence her current graduate studies in educational policy.

Seeking to diversify their understanding of the world, many students have found their way to the fellowship from health and medical fields. Dominic DiSanto, who received his undergraduate degree in neuroscience and completed a Master of Science in biostatistics, applied to the Browne Fellowship for an experience beyond his field. Afterwards, Disanto felt equipped with the language and critical thinking skills crucial for addressing issues of health equity and caring for patients as people. Similarly, Faith Kehinde, a 2022 graduate, chose the Browne Fellowship because she is a firm believer that you cannot be a good doctor unless you are a good community member.

A crucial aspect of the Browne Leadership Fellows Program is community enrichment and engagement. Since taking over leadership of the program, Aliya Durham (MSW '02) has prioritized engaging with community partners. Opening the door for reflection, transparency, and connectedness, Durham makes sure to spend time with the partners in between student placements. She ensures that they receive all materials students



use and understand how the program operates, enabling partners to facilitate meaningful connections between academic knowledge and real-life applications.

Susan Chersky, director of operations and communications at the Buhl Foundation and a 2001 graduate of the Pitt Social Work MSW program, is a new partner who consistently finds herself impressed by the students' professionalism and readiness to engage with the foundation's work. She highlights the students' ability to bring a fresh perspective and their motivation to apply their learnings to the projects at hand. As an MSW graduate, Chersky acknowledges the impactful nature of teaching organizational skills, recognizing their broad applicability, and considers it an incredibly important aspect of student development.

Looking ahead, Durham envisions expanding the program's impact by placing students at multiple sites during the summer to expose them to the nuances of different communities and the varied approaches required for effective engagement. The long-term goal is to leverage the relationships built over a decade in these neighborhoods, exploring innovative ways for the School of Social Work to contribute meaningfully to these communities. Thinking outside Pittsburgh, Durham hopes to one day explore the possibility of taking the fellowship international. ■





# Momeyer Lecture Featured Temple Grandin

The Florence Gibbs Momeyer Endowed Lecture, hosted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and its Center on Race and Social Problems, was held on March 1, 2023, and featured renowned animal behaviorist and autism advocate Temple Grandin.

Grandin's significant contributions to the field of animal behavior and tireless advocacy for neurodivergent thinkers such as herself are paradigm changing. As noted by Pitt Social Work Dean Betsy Farmer in her introduction, "A paradigm shift is a completely new way of thinking, and once you think about it, you can't unthink it."

On the autism spectrum and nonverbal until she was 4 years old, Grandin was originally deemed "brain damaged." She has dedicated her career to using her unique skill set as a visual thinker with mechanical aptitude to improve conditions for animals in slaughterhouses and to promote awareness of diversity in thinking styles so that all students can benefit from public education.

"The first step is to realize that different ways of thinking exist," she said. "When I was in my 20s, I thought everybody thought in pictures they way I did. It wasn't until I was in my late 30s when I realized other people think in words. And it was a shock to me!"

Grandin emphasized that visual thinkers tend to be practical problem solvers. She noted, "School systems, which insist upon a graduation requirement of a totally abstract subject like algebra, are failing too many students. I can't do algebra, and because of that, I couldn't pursue a qualification in veterinary science today. Yet I am a professor of animal science."

Grandin made a persuasive case and is a vibrant example of the fact that with the right support and encouragement, neurodivergent thinkers can make significant—even paradigm-shifting—contributions to society. The American school curriculum seems to have narrowed in recent years, and Grandin's core argument was that this is a serious mistake that must be rectified.

The lecture was made possible through the generosity of Alan G. Momeyer (MSW '72) and his brother, Richard W. Momeyer, who established the Florence Gibbs Momeyer Endowed Lecture and Program Fund in 2021 to honor their mother, a social worker who fought to ensure that all children received a free quality education as promised in the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Alan Momeyer related how his mother was initially rebuffed by members of the state legislature, who told her, "We are not set up to educate special-needs children." Momeyer noted drily that his mother's response, which she argued all the way to the Supreme Court , was: "Then get set up for it." Not only was Pennsylvania the first state to include special-needs children in public schools, but all 49 other states eventually followed the example. ■



# The VanKirk Career Center is Here for You

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work's VanKirk Career Center has a wide array of services to help you achieve your career goals. The center offers individual consultations, workshops, and job fairs throughout the year. You also can find job opportunities from all areas of the field on the center's website. In addition, the center provides support to alumni who are preparing to take the social work licensure exam.

## Julie Sokolow (MSW '23) speaks about her experience with the career center:

"The career center was hugely influential to me as I started on the path to pursue my [social work] license. Bobby Simmons—the director of the center and a beloved associate professor—gave a great presentation that demystified the complex process of applying for licensure. The center provided me with practice exams and materials that helped build my confidence. I believe this preparation helped me to pass the exam and acquire my license efficiently. Also, I felt lucky to have a go-to place in the Cathedral [of Learning] where I could stop by for guidance and resources. I now work at a fantastic practice called the Philadelphia Center for Psychotherapy, where my goals from my Pitt days are being realized. I'm grateful to the career center—and Pitt's School of Social Work more broadly—for supporting my journey."

**Scan the QR code for more details about upcoming events and workshops.**

# 2023 School of Social Work Alumni Award Recipients

On Nov. 16, 2023, members of the University Pittsburgh School of Social Work community gathered to celebrate the newest group of alumni award recipients. Following opening remarks from Dean Betsy Farmer, Katy Gallmeyer, the school's director of development, announced the 2023 honorees. After the presentation of awards, Yodit Betru, director of the MSW program and clinical associate professor, led the recipients in a discussion about their work and the pathways they've taken since graduating. It was an incredible event and a great opportunity to bring our community together for a night of celebration around not only the amazing work our alumni are doing but also the friends, mentors, and communities they've made along the way.

**Congratulations again to our 2023 Alumni Award recipients!**



## SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

### MARY ELIZABETH RAUKTIS (PHD '93)

Research Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

Mary Elizabeth Rauktis is a 1993 graduate of the doctoral program at Pitt Social Work and was thrilled to come back in 2007 following her career working in local governments and nonprofits. At Pitt Social Work, she teaches at the BASW and MSW levels. Her research has focused on out-of-home care (foster care) in the United States, Europe, and India, and in the past five years, she has begun to examine human and nonhuman relationships in her work on pets in families.

She was a Fulbright scholar in Portugal in 2017 and a Fulbright specialist in India in 2022. Rauktis is an associate editor of the journal Social Work in Mental Health and serves on the editorial boards of four other journals. She has also co-edited four special issues of journals focusing on humans and animals, child safety in care, and issues supporting new researchers at her Fulbright universities. She chairs the Fulbright Association Greater Pittsburgh Area Chapter. She is currently coediting a book with her colleagues at Assam Don Bosco University on service learning in Indian universities.



## SOCIAL WORK LEADERSHIP

### YANTI KUSUMAWARDHANI, (MSW '05)

Child Protection Advisor, Save the Children Indonesia

Yanti Kusumawardhani received her Master of Social Work and completed a certificate in children, youth, and families at Pitt in 2005. After graduation, she consulted on numerous projects for the U.S. Agency for International Development. In 2013, Kusumawardhani joined Save the Children Indonesia as a staff member for child protection programs. She has held numerous positions at Save the Children and currently serves as a child protection advisor. Over her career, she has worked with dozens of social workers and reached thousands of vulnerable children.

Kusumawardhani holds international accreditation in child protection from The Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education. In 2015, she was the first winner of Most Talented Social Worker awarded by the Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia, and in 2017, she was valedictorian of the Social Service Leadership Program at the National University of Singapore. In 2019, Kusumawardhani was named to the board of the Indonesian Association of Social Workers. She is currently Indonesia's representative on Children's Rights for the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children.



## SOCIAL WORK LEADERSHIP

### JEFFREY BOLTON (MSW '79)

Retired Chief Administrative Officer, Mayo Clinic

Jeffrey Bolton currently provides health care and business development consulting services to organizations and corporations and serves on several boards. Prior to his consulting business, he served as the chief administrative officer of Mayo Clinic from 2013 until his retirement in 2021. In that role, he was responsible for leading a workforce of more than 76,000 who cared for more than 1.3 million unique patients each year from all 50 states and nearly 130 countries.

As chief administrative officer, he led Mayo Clinic's administrative functions for clinical and hospital operations; education and research activities; the Mayo Clinic Platform and international businesses; and enterprise shared services, including business development, the Center for Digital Health, finance, facilities, human resources, information technology, marketing, philanthropy, public affairs, risk management, and strategy. He was a member of the Mayo Clinic board of trustees from 2011 to 2021. Prior to his role as chief administrative officer, he served as Mayo Clinic's chief financial officer from 2002 to 2013.

Prior to joining Mayo Clinic, Bolton held various business and finance positions at Carnegie Mellon University, including chief financial officer and vice president of business and planning. Bolton has a bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University and master's degrees in social work and business administration, both from the University of Pittsburgh.



## SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### LISA FREEMAN (BASW '02, MSW '04)

Founder and Owner, Freeman Family Farm & Greenhouse

Lisa Freeman received her bachelor's degree in social work in 2002 and proceeded to earn joint master's degrees in social work and public administration, concentrating in direct practice and urban and regional affairs. After graduation, she worked alongside former mayor of Braddock John Fetterman at Turtle Creek Valley Community Services., to address the homicide rate in Braddock, Pennsylvania. She continued working in at-risk communities with agencies like the Salvation Army; Project Destiny, Inc. of Pittsburgh; the Center for Family Excellence; and the Weed and See initiative in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.

Combining her knowledge as a social worker, passion for helping the disenfranchised, and affinity for her North Side community, in 2011, Freeman founded Manchester Growing Together Farm. Since then, the farm has grown to become a community hub, providing an outdoor learning space for children; jobs; volunteer opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities; and at its core, a reliable site for healthy and fresh food for under-resourced individuals and families. In 2022, Freeman received a $175,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Healthy Food Financing Initiative. She used this funding to build a market that will soon offer farm-to-table meals, health services, exercise classes, and other programming along with fresh organic food. While Freeman will say that she just thoroughly enjoys playing in the dirt, her neighbors will insist that she has been a catalyst for community building and combating food insecurity in the North Side's Manchester neighborhood.

Freeman recently was appointed to the Pennsylvania Farm Service Agency State Committee to support farmers across the commonwealth. She also is a member of the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council.

## The school also recognized three alumni for their outstanding contributions to the community.



### ADVANCING EXCELLENCE AWARD

**DAVID WILKES (MSW '11)**
Director of International Programs, Tutapona

David Wilkes has more than 20 years of experience implementing programs to support vulnerable populations around the globe. As director of international programs at Tutapona, Wilkes oversees the implementation of mental health services to facilitate the emotional healing of those impacted by war and conflict.

Wilkes served as the lead author of the Heroes Journey, a post-traumatic growth curriculum to support children impacted by war, which has been used to facilitate healing for thousands of children traumatized by conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Ethiopia; by ISIS terrorist attacks on Kurdish and Yazidi people; and by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He was instrumental in a number of other innovations, such as the development of Healthy Habits, an addiction program to support the refugee community in Uganda; the initiation of an online training program equipping the social service workforce of East Africa in trauma and adversity interventions; and the establishment of numerous program partnerships that have improved mental health service and collaborations with health, education, and livelihood specialists serving refugee communities.

Wilkes' previous experience includes providing support services for a range of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including widows and orphans forcefully evicted from their homes, dual-diagnosis homeless populations, trafficked and prostituted women, and children orphaned by war and HIV.



### SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE AWARD

**KE'AMBER FORD (MSW '20)**
Lead Trauma Teacher, Beloved U

Ke'Amber Ford is a wellness consultant helping organizations to create healing spaces through trauma recovery education. Ford has 14 years of experience working in K-12 educational spaces, universities, community third spaces, corporate organizations, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and the criminal justice system. She is well versed in trauma and attachment, developmental psychology, behavior analysis, socioemotional learning, instructional design, and program evaluation.

Before specializing in trauma, Ford completed her bachelor's degree in human learning and development, with specializations in educational psychology and counseling, at Georgia State University. She went on to teach before pursuing her Master of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh and becoming a licensed social worker.

Ford operates Beloved U, a wellness community supporting leaders in recognizing, responding to, and recovering from trauma exposures. Ford is chair of the Pitt Social Work Alumni Council and the Pitt Social Work representative to the Pitt Alumni Association.



## SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE AWARD

### GENAFIE MCKNIGHT (BASW '09, MSW '15)

Founder and Lead Clinician, GSM Therapeutics and Consulting Services

Genafie McKnight received her bachelor's degree from Pitt Social Work in 2009. Afterwards, she worked in the Office of Children, Youth and Families at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for six years before returning to Pitt for her master's degree. Postgraduation, McKnight remained employed in child welfare and provided mobile therapy services until 2020. She went on to found GSM Therapeutics and Consulting Services, through which she offers individual, couples, and group therapy. Her passion for the child welfare population moved her to pursue a contract with Allegheny County to provide mental health treatment, coached visitation, and trauma-informed eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy at GSM.

McKnight is pursuing a doctoral degree at La Roche University to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. Currently, she also is developing a holistic therapeutic resort center called GSM Holistic Houses of Healing, where high-risk youths who are in the custody of child protective services can receive individualized, holistic, and culturally informed and trauma-informed treatment. On top of all this, McKnight has served as a field instructor at the School of Social Work for the past two years.



# Keep us updated!

Between our newsletters, this magazine, and more, we hope you will keep us updated on all the exciting things happening in your life. New job? New mailing address? Let us know so we can keep our systems updated and can reach you with exciting opportunities.

**Scan the QR code to update your personal or professional information!**

# The Three C's of the Alumni Council: Connection, Community, and Commitment

In a recent University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Alumni Council meeting, members reflected on the meaning of their involvement in the council and their shared experience as alumni. What emerged from this were three common themes that not only define their time on the council but also encapsulate the essence of their lives after leaving the school: connection, community, and commitment.

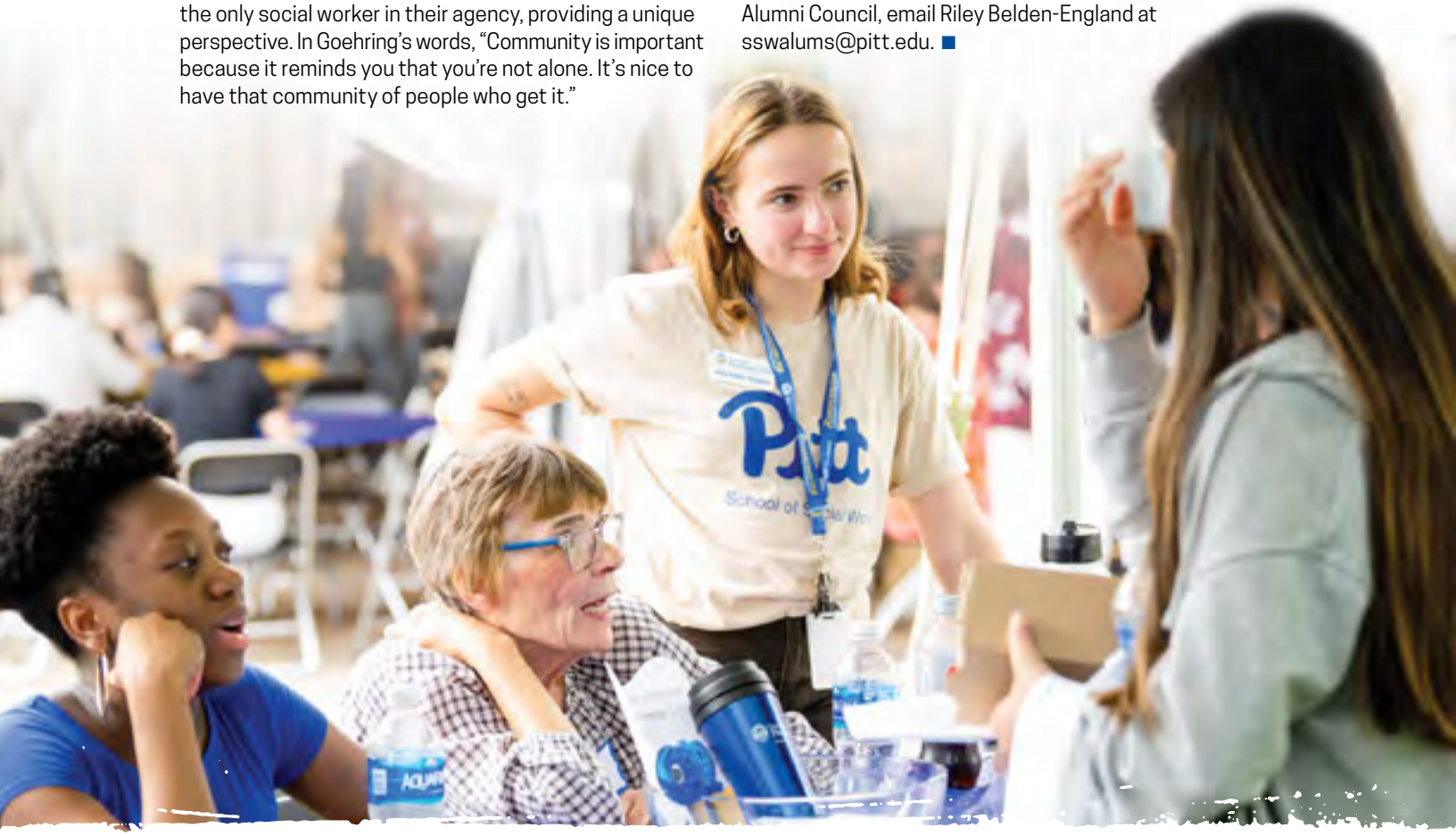
Connection, as offered by Alumni Council Chair Ke'Amber Ford (MSW '20), is more than just a shared affiliation. It begins with and is strengthened by shared values, understanding, and desire. Members of the Alumni Council not only are connected through their alma mater but also are bound by a commitment to the profession and a shared vision for creating positive change in their communities.

Vice Chair Ariel Goehring (MSW '17) emphasizes community as a vital concept that serves as a reminder that social workers are not alone in their journey. This sentiment is particularly significant for those who may be the only social worker in their agency, providing a unique perspective. In Goehring's words, "Community is important because it reminds you that you're not alone. It's nice to have that community of people who get it."

Talia Nevitt (MSW '19) highlights the importance of commitment in shaping the ethos of the Alumni Council. She notes, "The people who are members of this council are committed to the mission and aim of this profession and who we want to help. We are committed to helping other alumni, students, and the community." Jasmine Wilson-Bryant (MSW '11) echoes this sentiment of commitment to the next generation of social workers, adding, "What we're able to do in terms of empowering students, helping them get to the next level, and guiding them to their goals in their social work career—that speaks highly of the Alumni Council."

These three themes—connection, community, and commitment—are not just words on a list for the Alumni Council members; they are principles that guide their daily lives. As they continue to embody these values, they not only strengthen the Alumni Council but contribute to the enduring legacy of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.

If you're interested in learning more or joining the Alumni Council, email Riley Belden-England at sswalums@pitt.edu. ■



# Why I Give:

## SANDRA "SANDI" SOLOMON (MSW '80)

Current Chair, School of Social Work Board of Visitors

**Please tell us more about your career.**

Prior to pursuing an MSW from the Pitt School of Social Work, I worked as a case-worker in a hospital and in community mental health. Following graduation in 1980, I decided to pursue a newly developing specialty in occupational mental health. Through a lucky conversation at the Mt. Lebanon swimming pool, I met the director of human resources for Westinghouse Electric Corporation. I convinced him—and myself—that I could present a seminar on stress management for employees. This seminar was the start of my corporate consulting business. I hired social workers, and together we developed employee assistance programs, stress management seminars, and executive coaching services. I have followed a nontraditional path, using my social work skills and training to create new opportunities and become an entrepreneur.

**What are some of your fondest memories of Pitt Social Work?**

My brother and I were in school together. We both took Paulina McCullough's class on family systems and were always willing to share our family stories. Paulina was certainly a favorite faculty member, but so were other professors, such as Ed Sites. I would not have started graduate school without the support of Barbara Shore. My daughter was not quite 2 years old, and Barbara convinced me that with the three-year program, I could do this. She was right. And then there was the Original Hot Dog Shop. My brother and I celebrated the end of each week with a chili dog at the O. Best ever!

**What motivates you to give to Pitt Social Work?**

I had not been involved with the school until I retired and my dear friend Jim McDonald (former chair of the Board of Visitors) connected me to Dean [Betsy] Farmer. As I became more engaged, my husband and I decided we wanted to recognize the importance of social work values and the school's mission with our philanthropic investment.

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

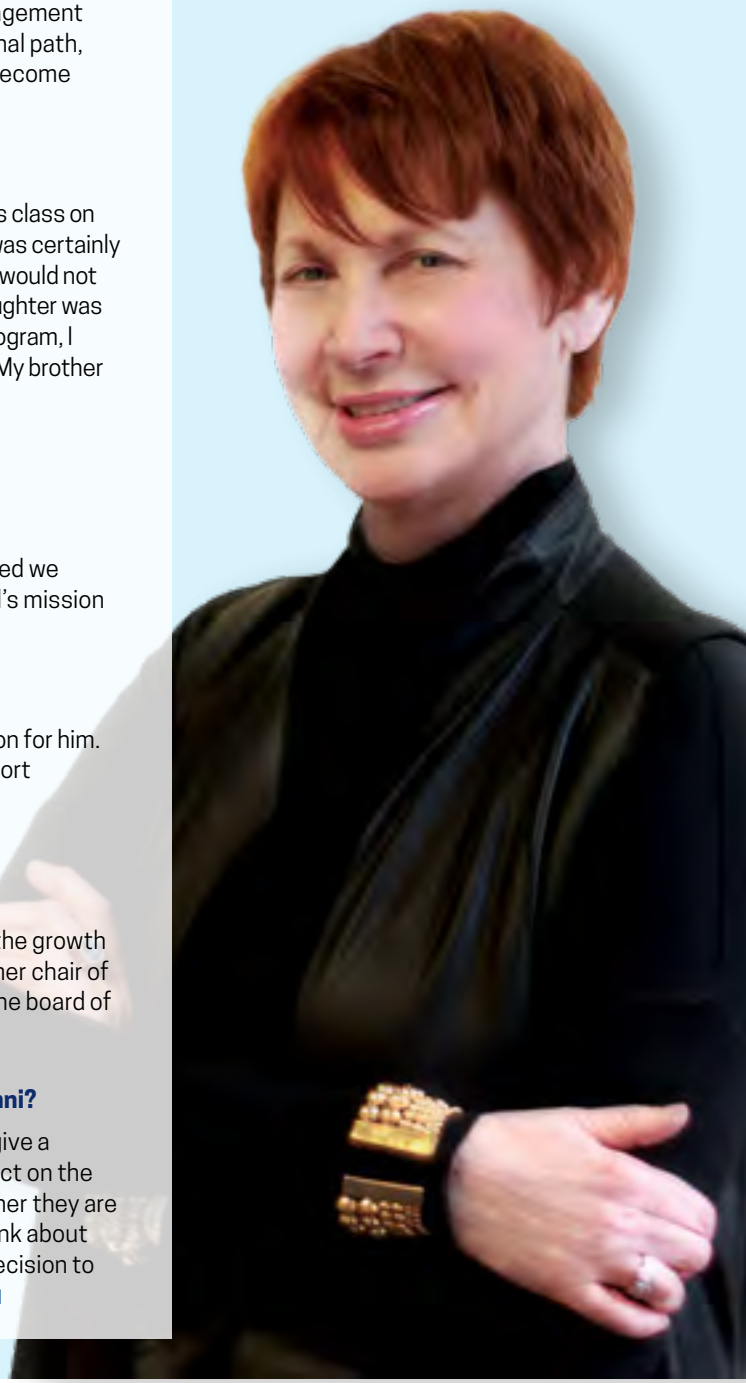
Sadly, my brother passed away recently. Helping adolescents was a passion for him. In his honor, I created the Charles Goldstein Student Resource Fund to support education-related expenses for students who plan to focus on adolescent mental health.

**What other causes or organizations do you support?**

The School of Social Work is my primary commitment, but I also support the growth and development of arts initiatives in the city of Pittsburgh. I am the former chair of the board of the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and currently serve on the board of City Theatre.

**What parting words do you have for your fellow Pitt Social Work alumni?**

Giving isn't something that comes with requirements. You don't have to give a certain amount of money or time to help others and make a positive impact on the community. I would encourage alumni at all stages of their careers, whether they are recent graduates or seasoned professionals, to look inward and really think about how they can personally make an impact on others. This will guide their decision to give and help them to create lasting changes that are truly meaningful. ■



# Bridging Barriers for Aspiring LCSWs

In a field that provides invaluable support to communities and individuals in need, the path to becoming a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) is not always an easy one.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania mandates that LCSW candidates amass a minimum of 3,000 supervised field experience hours in a clinical setting, spanning two to six years, with 150 hours under the direct supervision of an LCSW practitioner. This requirement can present considerable hurdles for aspiring social workers. Many employers do not provide supervision as part of their employment benefits, and even when they do, the assigned supervisor's specialty may not align with the supervisee's area of interest. In scenarios where a job placement fails to facilitate a supervisor pairing, social workers are left to navigate the intricate process of finding a qualified supervisor independently. Additionally, many of the supervisors charge fees for their supervision, creating a tremendous financial barrier.



Molly Allwein

The LCSW Supervision Matching Program, conceived as a solution to these challenges, originated from a candid conversation between Molly Allwein, director of professional and continuing education at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, and Bethany Hemingway, senior program officer at Staunton Farm Foundation. Both graduates of the Pitt MSW program, they recognized well the barriers that social work graduates encounter as they strive to establish their careers.

This program, with support from a Staunton Farm Foundation grant, strives to make the path to becoming a licensed clinical social worker more accessible by pairing aspiring LCSWs with supervisors who have completed a 20-hour comprehensive training. Because Pennsylvania lacks mandatory training and credentialing for supervisors, a crucial part of this program is preparing supervisors for this role.



Mikea Wall

Currently, the program is working to onboard its second cohort. Each cohort includes two supervisors and eight supervisees. Cohort members have four years in the program to complete their supervision hours. The program places significant emphasis on supporting social workers with marginalized identities, recognizing the importance of patients having access to clinicians who share their background and can empathize with their unique traumas. It also addresses individuals living in rural communities, where access to social workers may be limited.

The matching program additionally offers career services support to aid participants in preparing for the LCSW exam. It provides practice tests, exam booklets, and one-on-one support from Bobby Simmons, Pitt Social Work's director of career services. The program also includes seminars covering topics like resume building and establishing private practices that feature experts in these areas.

The LCSW Supervision Matching Program not only provides aspiring social workers with necessary tools to overcome barriers in their career path but also fosters a sense of community and professional networking through the cohort experience. Reflecting on the program's impact, Brittani Berkeley (MSW '18), an aspiring LCSW, highlights the value of the program's network and community, which has provided her with a platform to engage in meaningful discussions about field experiences. She emphasizes that the program has bolstered her confidence in trusting her instincts and expanded her skill set. Although her busy schedule limits her attendance at seminars, Berkeley values the program's role in keeping participants informed about the latest developments in the field and their potential impact on the profession.

Current supervisor Mikea Wall praises the program's intentional matching of licensed social workers and LCSWs, emphasizing the opportunity it provides for growth, networking, and mutual support. She expresses appreciation for the chance to meet and build relationships with Black women in her field. As a supervisor, Wall has learned to be self-aware and is able to hold space for others who are still growing. Together, these narratives underscore the program's dual impact: equipping social workers with essential skills and creating a supportive community for professional development.

With participation not limited to Pitt alumni, this program positions Pitt Social Work as a dependable resource at every stage of social workers' career paths, extending networks beyond fellow Pitt alumni to social workers in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Allwein is hopeful that programs like this will become more widely adapted and available to aspiring LCSWs. Additionally, Allwein is actively advocating for supervisor training in Pennsylvania, using the LCSW Supervision Matching Program's 20-hour comprehensive training as a model to influence future mandated programs.

> "I am really grateful for this opportunity because I feel like I have grown, not only as a clinician but as a cohort. We've all grown together."
>
> —BRITTANI BERKELEY

## New Programs and Courses from the Office of Professional and Continuing Education

In 2024, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Office of Professional and Continuing Education will be:

- launching a statewide eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) training and certification program in partnership with the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for Medicaid providers;
- offering two new continuing education (CE) intensive courses, titled Racial Equity Consciousness Training Institute and Mental Fitness;
- advocating for a nationwide professional licensure compact, a statewide program to reduce barriers and support licensed social workers (through supervision and mentoring) in obtaining their clinical licensure, and a stronger workforce pipeline for social workers and other helping professions;
- continuing to provide live, virtual, and asynchronous CE course options for licensed professionals to obtain their necessary CE hours in the way that is most convenient for them; and
- offering monthly CE program highlights (and discounts!) through our email newsletter.

More information about all these options (and the sign-up form for our email newsletter) can be found by scanning the QR code. ■

## In Memoriam

**1950s**

Barbara G. Lackey (MSW '57)
Regina S. McGraw (MSW '57)
Anne D. Novak (MSW '56)
Elizabeth L. Pinner (MSW '55)
Richard M. Sax (MSW '52)
Richard S. Scobie (MSW '58)
Christine B. Singer (MSW '53)

**1960s**

Jack S. Bader (MSW '69)
Robert Henry Boyer (MSW '63)
Michael J. DeStefano (MSW '66)
Mary Jane Dunlap (MSW '66)
Rolf W. Lotz (MSW '65)
Virginia L. Maine (MSW '63)
Carmen Egbert Merritt (MSW '63)
Judith Anne Miller (MSW '67)

**1970s**

William F. Bradley Jr. (MSW '78)
Sara Ferguson (MSW '78)
Runetta C. Gee (MSW '75)
Audrey S. Horne (MSW '78)
Lori O. Jennings (BS '79)
Jovita A. Jones (BASW '76)
Charlotte B. Kauffman (MSW '71)
Wesley E. Kerlin Jr. (MSW '71)
Thomas R. Kimmerle (BS '74)
Jay K. Loy (MSW '79)
Paul L. Neidhardt (MSW '74)
Susan K. Shuey (MSW '77)
Ellen H. Suchman (BASW '79)
Harold T. Wilks II (MSW '76)
Margaret A. Wilson (MSW '73)
Molly L. Wright (MSW '76)

**1980s**

Catherine M. Amann (BASW '80, MSW '83)
Charmaine S. Barker (BASW '81)
Jean I. Brainard (MSW '81)
Albert L. Brewster (PhD '89)
Jo Ellen H. Brewton (MSW '85)
Iruaku A. Brodie Mends (MSW '85)
Lynn C. Chambers (MSW '81)
Diane M. Conti (BASW '85, MSW '86)
Suzanne R. Fagan (MSW '88)
Charles E. Goldstein (MSW '80)
Ellen A. Ruffolo (MSW '80)
Edward L. Shaftic (MSW '87)
Nancy Van Den Bergh (PhD '81)

**1990s**

Karen A. Carlson (MS '97)
Miriam J. Ventura (MSW '91)

**2000s**

Mr. Abdul N. Hakim Jr. (MSW '00)
Charlotte C. Manges (MSW '07)

**2020s**

Brandon S. Thomas (BASW '20, MSW '21)

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