

SPRING 2015

TOPIC:
ALUMNI IMPACT

THE COLUMN

- 2 Dean's Club
- 4 Advocating with Passion
- 6 Giving People a Voice
- 8 Stepping into the Gap
- 10 A Push in the Right Direction
- 12 Preparing Students for Success in the Field
- 16 Legacy Society

SOCIAL WORK UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN





DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

Over the past year we have shown you many ways in which the School of Social Work is enacting change. We've highlighted how our faculty are conducting innovative research, how our students are serving the community through field placements and service learning opportunities, and how our alumni are navigating the ever-changing social work profession.

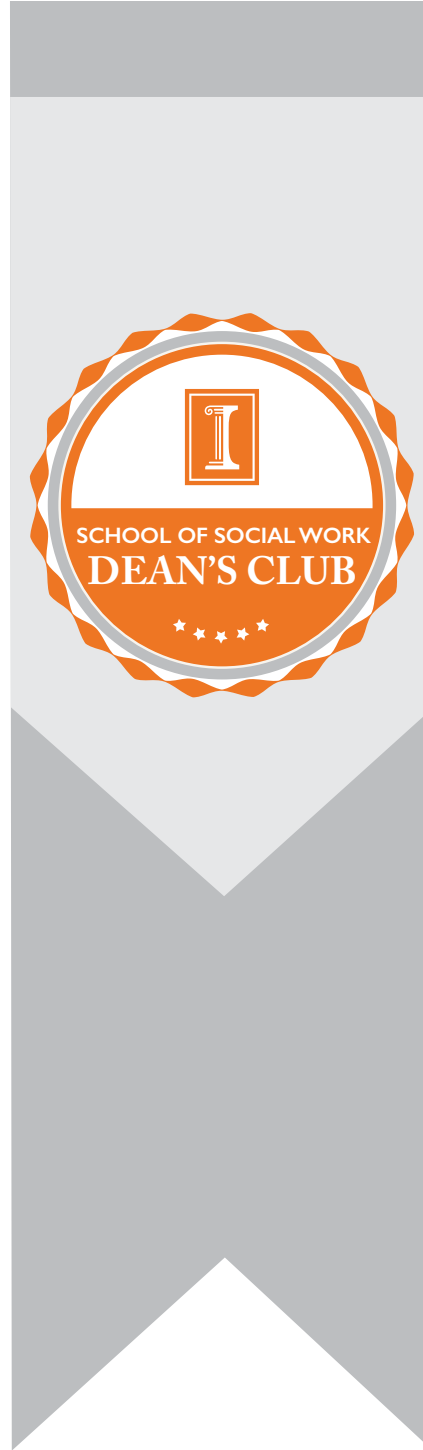
In this issue of *The Column*, we want to highlight the many ways that you – our alumni and friends – are making an impact.

Learn how mentorship impacted Sharrell Hibbler, MSW 2008, and the work she does today. Follow three Suze Orman Award recipients into their careers to see how the awards they received pushed them forward to a commitment to the field of social work. Finally, meet Carol Colburn, MSW 1997, Steve Higgins, MSW 1981, and Dave Crowley, MSW 1984 who together have provided more than 55 years of field instruction to School of Social Work students.

Of course, we also want to highlight our alumni and friends who made an investment in the School during the last fiscal year. It is thanks to you that we are able to provide scholarship assistance, mentorship and field instruction opportunities, as well as research development.

Thank you for all that you do.
Wynne Sandra Korr
Dean and Professor

THANK YOU
FOR ALL THAT YOU DO.



MAKE AN IMPACT.

THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK DEAN'S CLUB recognizes alumni and friends who make total annual gifts of \$500 or more each year. Annual gifts allow us to respond to immediate needs and opportunities within the School including: support for students, faculty, teaching, advanced technology, and innovative research.

Dean's Club gifts address these key funding priorities:

- Scholarship assistance to recruit top undergraduate students;
- Community Learning Lab programs that engage students to develop solutions in response to requests from agencies and partners in the Champaign-Urbana community;
- Emergency funding for students in crisis;
- Donors can also choose to donate to the Fund for Field supporting students in their field placements.



▶ Advocating and Articulating With Passion

As a student, Sharrell was the recipient of the Educational Opportunity Award and the Ron Moorman Award. In addition to scholarship support, the mentorship she received had a vital impact on her career path.



Growing up, Sharrell Hibbler knew she wanted to be a teacher or a social worker. Her aunt, a social worker for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), tipped the scales for her. “I saw how passionate she was toward her work, how empathetic she was,” Hibbler recalls.

Hibbler brings that same passion and empathy to her work now. Since receiving her MSW from Illinois in 2008, Hibbler has worked for four agencies: DCFS, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, the Cook County Justice Advisory Council, and now the Ounce of Prevention, which works to ensure that public policies and adequate funding are in place to give vulnerable children access to voluntary, high-quality early childhood programs.

Keys to Her Work

While she is not writing grants at the Ounce of Prevention, grant writing has been part of her previous work.

“The grant writing piece has been huge in my career,” she says. “Writing grants, monitoring grants, and being able to develop relationships with funders has been very key in the positions I have assumed across these three agencies.”

Consensus building, she says, is another key skill she uses in her work. “Learning to work with and engage different stakeholders

with very different agendas and very different philosophies about how the work can be addressed” is challenging, she says.

Part of that ability to build consensus lies in the art of persuasive communication. “I left the U of I with good foundational skills and experiences in being able to speak publicly,” she says. “So now, for example, I can appropriately articulate the goals of our office from a place of funding.”

Students should also roll up their sleeves and dive fully into the research process. “Get as much as you can out of your research and methodologies courses, because our profession is connected to research,” she says. “All of the grants, all of the funding decisions, are driven by evidence-based practices. If you can’t prove that it works, it will not be funded.”

The Power of Mentors

Hibbler says she has been blessed with some great mentors early on in her career – people who have “been invested in developing me and leveraging resources on my behalf,” she says.

Her faculty mentor at Illinois was Dr. Steve Anderson. He provided her a great sounding board for what she wanted to do, and talked about how her specialization would help her.

“Students should take advantage of mentor relationships,” Hibbler says. “They should engage in those relationships. Sometimes they can create a platform for you to launch into the professional world.”

SSWAA MENTORING

The School of Social Work Alumni Association is dedicated to developing mentoring opportunities for students and alumni. You can start now by joining the Social Work at Illinois Mentor Group on LinkedIn. Visit us at <http://socialwork.illinois.edu/alumni-giving/> to learn more about this group and other mentorship opportunities.



Candyce Booker, MSW '09

▶ Stepping Into the Gap

Nicki* and her siblings had all been placed in foster care. But eventually, her siblings returned to their mother's care... while Nicki remained in foster care.

"She hadn't done anything wrong," says Candyce Booker, MSW '09, "but there was a strange dynamic between her mother and herself."

Booker, who works at Choices Coordinated Care Solutions in Urbana, Illinois, helped Nicki navigate the system.

"She ended up in residential," Booker says, "but she is getting out in May. She's in a mentoring program, and she's getting great grades. She's learning how to give back to the community, particularly to other girls in foster care." She is on her way to being adopted by her foster parents. "She's excited about that," Booker says.

Motivated to Help

It's success stories like Nicki's that motivate Booker in her work. Upon graduating, Booker received a Suze Orman award. "That award has helped me keep the bigger picture in mind, particularly in how I can share resources and skills with the greater population," she says.

"I initially wanted to go to medical school," she continues. "But I began doing crisis work in Champaign before I got into social work. I saw a lot of people who had grown up in foster care,

who had been abused, and I saw a big gap in services." Booker decided to step into that gap. "I realized in order to make the kind of changes I wanted to make, I needed to be in a position where I could provide care for these people," she says. "Social work allows me to do that."

A Team Effort

"We have the parents involved, the foster parents, the youth is part of the team as age appropriate, and we try to have people from the community that naturally are in the child's environment be part of the team as well," Booker explains. "Our goal is to maintain the kids in their natural community and have as little disruption in their lives as possible."

As the agency's name implies, it involves people from multiple systems – the schools, the welfare system, the mental health system, the juvenile system, and the court system, to name a few. "We want to empower the children, help the families get their kids back whenever possible, and help the kids be adopted and find the right home for them," Booker says. By involving the various community entities, she says, "we are really empowering the community to help those kids."

Her greatest joy, she says, is "seeing kids reunited with their biological parents, and seeing those parents become better equipped to manage and deal with the children who present challenges intermittently. When parents recognize there are causes for those challenges and they work through them with the kid, that's my greatest joy."

**name has been changed to protect the child's identity.*



A Push in the Right Direction

A HELPFUL PUSH

Swan knows what it's like to be helped. In December 2013, she received the Suze Orman award. "I felt so blessed to receive it," she says. "I had open heart surgery in 2013. Being unable to work due to the health issues, my family of five was struggling financially. Receiving the award helped us to begin to dig out of debt."



Maria Swan comes from a family of teachers, and has always loved schools. But she knew she didn't want to teach. However, when she saw the loving and expert care given in school to her nephew by his special education team, she knew what she wanted to do.

"Seeing his struggles, and how they helped him, I wanted to be one of those people," Swan says.

Now, Swan (MSW '13) spends her days helping kids. She works in Springfield (IL) School District 186, rotating between a high school and a K-8 school. Working with kids from ages 5 through 18, she sees it all. "It can be anything from homelessness to mental health issues to peer conflict resolution to teen pregnancies to suicide threats," she says. "A lot of what I do is provide emotional support and teach coping skills," she adds.

She cites one high school student as an example. "He had so much chaos going on in his life that he had pretty much given up," she recalls. "He couldn't live with either parent; he was just going from friend to friend, sleeping on couches. He was having serious suicidal thoughts and made some very concerning remarks to his friends."

Swan intervened, helping him find a place to stay with relatives, connecting him with a therapist, and regularly checking in on him herself.

"We not only got him through that rough patch; he's now on track to graduate," she says.

In her own sessions with him, Swan reminded him of how much he had already overcome and gave him that little "extra push" that he needed to continue on.

"Having him find strength in himself and using that strength to accomplish something he's been working hard for is very rewarding," Swan says.

Little Victories in Each Day

Swan notes that not all stories turn out like that young man's story, and sometimes there's a lot of hard work that goes into what, at least at the beginning, is a small success.

"But seeing kids make even little steps toward their bigger goals is very uplifting," she says. "Just finding the little victories in the day with the kids provides me with strength."

Most gratifying to her, she says, is seeing kids overcome obstacles that they at first didn't see any way around.

"Sometimes kids run into a tough teacher who tells them that they can't succeed," she says. "Unfortunately, a lot of kids hear what they can't do. Being that person who tells them what they can do, and what they've already done, and pointing out that they can be successful – that's what I like to do."

"To be that person to give them a push in the right direction is a nice place to be."



▶ Giving People a Voice

Ashley Bryan is used to high-need, high-crisis situations. Before receiving her MSW from Illinois in 2012, she worked for eight years at a behavioral hospital in Champaign, Illinois, where she routinely experienced crisis situations.

Upon graduating, she accepted a position with Mercy Housing Lakefront in Chicago, where she works as a senior case manager, where the pace is slower.

“It’s definitely a change, because it’s supportive housing versus a residential or hospital setting,” Bryan says. “We are housing people who are in at-risk populations. Individuals who are in our apartments are fairly independent. They can live on their own. We provide assistance as needed, but it’s totally voluntary.”

Challenges of the Job

That’s not to say Bryan’s job isn’t challenging. Her caseload was recently upped from 40 to 53 cases because of budget cuts. In addition to supervising other caseworkers in Mercy Housing’s two Chicago locations, she faces challenges with people who have mental illness, who struggle with substance abuse, or who are homeless, sometimes chronically so.

“There are cases where we have to petition people due to them being suicidal or homicidal,” she says. “We implement a harm reduction model to keep individuals safe.

“If supportive housing isn’t appropriate for them, based on their needs, we have to find alternative options for them. And sometimes that’s difficult, because they’re locked into a lease, and we can’t force them to transition into, say, assisted living.”

Advocating for People

In whatever situation she is in, what she finds most satisfying is giving a voice to people whom society has tuned out – the mentally ill, the homeless, the poor. “I love advocating for them,” she says, “because not many people take the time to do that.” Part of that advocacy revolves around funding, which “is difficult, because there are programs being cut with funding and mental health services, and many of our residents are on Medicaid, which is a very limited service provider,” she says.

Bryan received a big boost in her own funding when, at her MSW graduation, Dean Korr called her name out as a Suze Orman award recipient.

“When the dean announced the amount, I thought I was going to lose it,” Bryan recalls. “It took about a week to sink in.” Bryan, who recently earned her LCSW, is using the money to help pay off student loans. And just as that award heartened her, she is passing that encouragement on: “I want to encourage people to never give up,” she says. “When they think something is impossible, they need to have faith in themselves that they can do it.”

GIVING BACK

Each year, Suze Orman, BSW '77 provides a scholarship to a graduating MSW student. Thanks to the Suze Orman Graduate Award, we have been able to provide 12 students with a scholarship to help pay off their student loan debt.

Without a burdensome loan debt these students have been able to continue their commitment to the social work profession.



▶ Preparing Students for Success in the Field

Three veteran field instructors for the School of Social Work have provided more than 55 combined years of instruction for our students— Carol Colburn for 10 years, Dave Crowley for 20-plus years, Steve Higgins for 25. All three have played integral roles in helping prepare students to enter the field.

Mary Maurer, assistant dean for field education and MSW field education director, was Higgins' first intern.

“My internship with Steve was invaluable and significantly impacted my vision for the type of school social worker I wanted to become,” Maurer recalls. “Steve was a steadfast advocate for the students and families we worked with and role modeled the importance of developing positive relationships in order to engage others and affect change. He taught me many lessons – the need to maintain a sense of humor, how to navigate politics in the school setting, and the importance of being a voice for vulnerable populations. Twenty-five years later, I still think of and use the lessons I learned from him.”

The Value of Interns

“Our interns bring so much energy and enthusiasm,” Carol Colburn (MSW '97, LCSW) said shortly before she retired as clinical supervisor at the Community Resource & Counseling Center (CRCC) in Paxton, Illinois. “They are extremely flexible, stepping in to do whatever we need. And they bring knowledge on new models of treatment and on other issues.” Colburn, who graduated from Illinois with a dual Master's degree in Social

Work and Human Development and Family Studies in 1997 and earned her LCSW in 1999, noted that she has supervised about 30 interns at CRCC – and hired 11 of them, some of whom are still at the center.

Dave Crowley (MSW '84, LCSW) has been a clinical social worker for 25 years at McKinley Health Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “I've really enjoyed working with the interns I've supervised,” he says. “They're eager to learn, and it's great to be able to feed that thirst for knowledge that they have. That's very rewarding and refreshing.”

Steve Higgins (MSW '81, LCSW), a social worker at Urbana Middle School, sees the interns as a valuable resource. “Using their skills and giving them some influence in the school climate is helpful,” he says. “I will miss that part, along with the interactions with the students who are willing to learn more about themselves and how to effect change in the building they are in.”

Impacting Interns' Lives

Higgins notes that he knows of seven or eight of his former interns who are now working in the Champaign-Urbana area. He enjoys seeing them, as well as running into former middle school students, “some of whom have gone on and pursued social services in their careers. And part of that has to do, hopefully, with the positive work I've done with the kids when they were in school.”

(CONTINUED)

Crowley also derives satisfaction from the relationships he has built over the years. “It’s funny, I’ll walk on campus and hear somebody shout, ‘Hey, Dave!’ and it’s an intern from eight or ten years ago,” he says. “It’s neat to feel that you’ve maybe played a role as some people advance into their careers, and then seeing some of the things they end up doing and feeling you’re a part of what helped them get there.”

One such intern he helped along was Hellen McDonald, now a clinical assistant professor in field education at the School of Social Work. “I learned how to be focused, structured, and organized under Dave’s field instruction,” McDonald says.

Changes in the Field

All three field instructors have seen changes over the years. “When I started, we were paid from the state and we had very few insurance claims,” Colburn says. “Now the state has gone to fee for service, which has put a lot of pressure on staff to meet productivity requirements.” Colburn notes that Medicaid rules have also become much tighter, requiring more paperwork from social workers.

Crowley says that licensure has become much bigger in his time in the field, allowing social workers to move into private practice. “That’s been a significant development,” he says. “I think some of the students come into the program now thinking more along those lines.”

Higgins says the needs of families, students, and even the staff have changed over the years, and part of his work has been adjusting to meet those needs. “We’re getting a lot more issues with students developing socially and emotionally,” he says.

“We’ve had to increase services because of that, and we are also linking those people into the services they need.”

“They Have Played a Critical Role”

Higgins and Crowley will probably retire within a few years. For Colburn, that time has already come – and she is not spending her days in a rocking chair. She plans to take classes, join a chorus, learn how to dance, exercise, and be an usher at Krannert – not to mention visiting her new granddaughter in Washington, DC. She’ll also be babysitting for her other grandchild, who lives in Urbana, while her daughter begins her MSW internship. “And I’ll be sleeping in late!” she adds.

Higgins appreciates the working relationship he has had over the years with the School of Social Work. “They’ve done a great job in preparing the graduate students for coming into the field,” he says. “I think collaboratively we’ve prepared students to do well in their work.”

“Carol, Steve, and Dave have shown great commitment to the School of Social Work MSW Field Education Program, as well as to the many students they have mentored and taught throughout their years as field instructors,” Mary Maurer says. “They have played a critical role in the education of the future generation of social workers, and have modeled for these students what ethical, professional social work looks like.

“Without field instructors such as these three, we would not be able to provide students with hands-on learning experiences. We are very grateful for their long-standing involvement with the School.”

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A FIELD INSTRUCTOR?

Our field education faculty makes all introductions between agencies and students and helps to facilitate interview opportunities. The field office provides ongoing support throughout the internship.

If you have a minimum of a BSW and two years post-graduate experience, and a commitment to providing students with a hands-on learning experience with an emphasis on teaching/mentorship you may qualify as a field instructor.

Visit us online at: socialwork.illinois.edu/field-education



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Any donor can plan a legacy gift regardless of current assets or income. This special gift is a living reminder that will continue to support the causes you believe in for years to come. Legacy Gifts honor the present by making a commitment to the future.

By including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work in your will, you are providing a legacy for the children, families, and communities impacted by our work. Your gift may be a fixed amount, a percentage of your estate, or all or part of the estate residue.

We hope you will let us know when you have included the School of Social Work in your estate plans so that we can ensure your intentions for your gift are honored. By doing so, we would like to include you as an honorary member of the Legacy Society.

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