WINTER 2025 | NEWSLETTER

MSU School of Social Work

For Alumni & Friends

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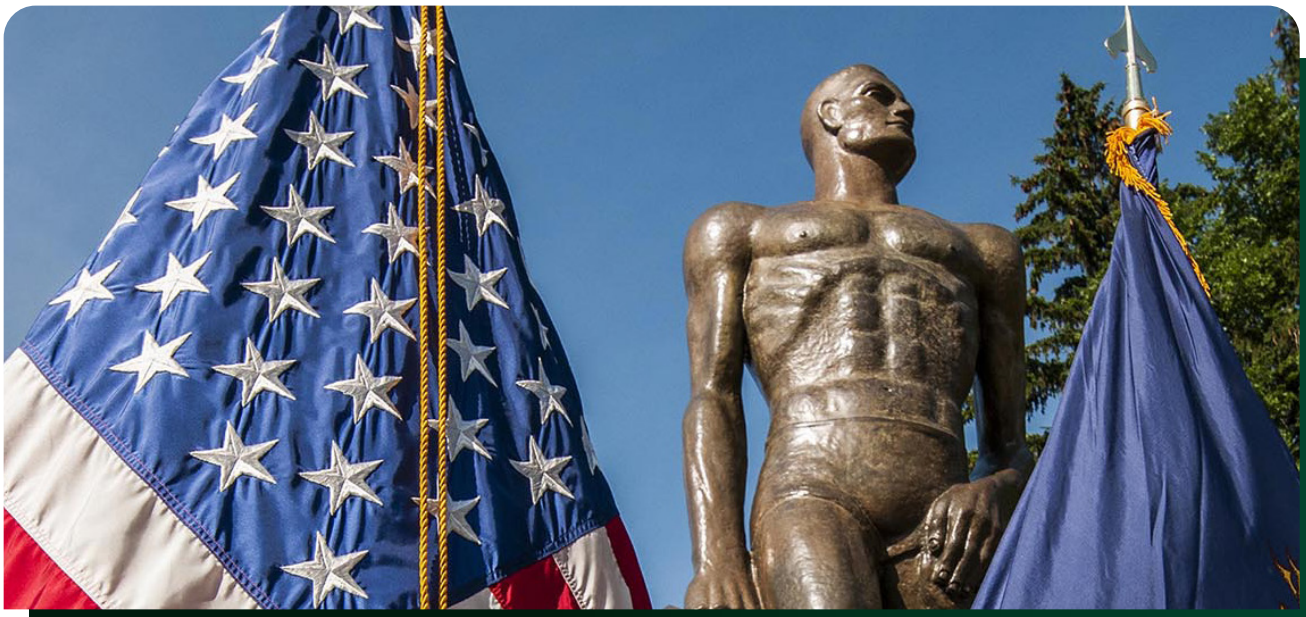
FEATURES



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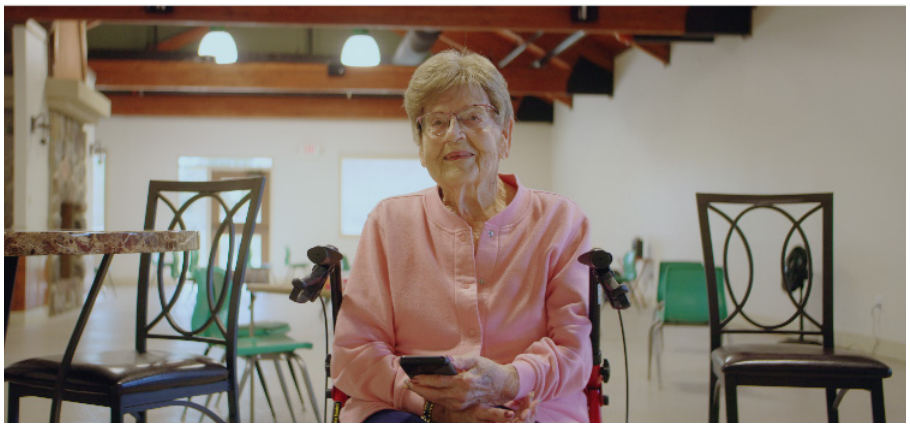

LETTER FROM DIRECTOR:

Carrie Moylan

Hello Friends and Supporters of the School of Social Work,

As I wrap up my first semester as Director of the School of Social Work, I am reflecting on the power of new beginnings as an opportunity to embrace the things that contribute to our strength and re-envision where we see potential for growth. Though I have been faculty in the School for over nine years, I have enjoyed engaging in different ways with our students, staff, and faculty. We truly have a special team, one in which each person contributes to our mission and helps make the School a better place.

In this newsletter, you will learn about some of the work that our faculty and students are doing that benefits communities. We hope you'll see the breadth of our work, spanning working with incarcerated youth, preparing students to work with veterans, and supporting centenarians as they adapt to today's digital world. You will learn about some of our incredible students, tireless faculty, and impressive alumni. As you flip through the pages of this newsletter, I suspect you will feel as proud as I do to be a Spartan!

I hope that each of you will think about ways that you can continue to support the School in our continual growth. It has been a challenging year for higher education, but we are as committed as ever to the mission of social work and our role educating future social workers and conducting research that improves the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. Please consider supporting us financially (see opportunities for giving on page 30), or with your time and interest. Stay connected to us via social media, including Instagram, Facebook, X, and LinkedIn. And if you have ideas for how we can stay better connected with our alums, please reach out to me!

#MSUSocialWork

Carrie Moylan, PhD

Director, Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Michigan State University

MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR:

Carrie Moylan

As of August 16, 2025, Dr. Carrie Moylan has stepped into the role of Director of the School of Social Work for a five-year term. An associate professor whose work focuses on gender-based violence, sexual violence, domestic violence and campus sexual assault, Moylan brings more than two decades of experience in the gender-based violence field, along with a deep record of university service and leadership at MSU.

Her scholarship and practice center on how communities and organizations prevent and respond to harm, and how institutions can better support survivors while transforming the systems around them. That lens—grounded in survivor-centered, research-informed change—will help guide the school's next chapter.

We also extend our gratitude to Dr. Anne Hughes for her steady leadership through some of the most challenging periods in recent MSU history. With Carrie now in place as director, Anne has transitioned into a well-earned sabbatical and research leave, leaving behind a strong foundation for the work ahead.

> I see great value in what the Kinship Care Resource Center is, and has been able to do. **It is the only one of its kind.**
>
> - Laura Bouse

Bouse's ties to KCRC run deep. Over the past decade, "I have had the pleasure of working with some of Dr. Robert Little's contemporaries at the time he founded the KCRC," Bouse said. "Their stories and impressions of him and his original vision drove me to learn more about its history."

This gave Bouse a clear vision of what the program could become, and how she could directly impact its future trajectory by empowering MSU's student base.

"We saw MSU as a place where we could hopefully influence students to understand the importance of family dynamics, and that this idea of kinship care and community care is really the best way to build success for children and families," said Bouse.

Bouse is the Executive Director of a nonprofit that serves foster, adoptive, and kinship families and advocates for change to improve outcomes for children and families in Michigan and across the nation. She also holds seats on the MDHHS Kinship Advisory Council and Child Welfare Improvement Task Force, and has been instrumental in the work of the Michigan Kinship Care Coalition. Her experience and dedication towards improving the child welfare

New gift honors kinship caregivers, strengthens MSU's child welfare mission

The Michigan State University School of Social Work received an endowment of $50,000 to support its Master of Social Work (MSW) students pursuing a career in child welfare services.

This gift was made possible by Laura Bouse, a highly decorated advocate in the child welfare space and a former kinship caregiver herself.

Despite not being an MSU alum, Bouse's inspiration for this gift was strongly influenced by MSU's Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC)—a resource center housed in the MSU School of Social Work that "provides services to hundreds of families across Michigan, providing resources, support, education, and a sense of community," said Anne Hughes, the director of MSU's School of Social Work. "Kinship families are often the unsung heroes, providing a safety net for children in Michigan," she continued.

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child. Currently, there are 60,000 children in the state of Michigan who are living in kinship families, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

"I see great value in what the Kinship Care Resource Center is, and has been able to do," said Bouse. "It is the only one of its kind."

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landscape has been exceptional, yet she believes there's still much room for improvement.

"We're not there yet," said Bouse. "There are some things that still need to get better."

Over the past decade, many changes in Michigan legislation have been made in the kinship care space. One of those changes being MDHHS's expansion of the definition of 'relative' under law, "so that it includes fictive kin," said Bouse. "People that are not related to a child by blood or marriage, but are a trusted adult for your family."

Bouse believes this is a great step forward in making things better, with the ultimate goal being to fully support kinship caregivers and their children. This is best done when people enter spaces of direct service or policy and practice oversight that have studied and understand the real needs of those they are serving, she noted.

"The end goal looks like a grandmother, an aunt, an older brother, or somebody who finds themselves in a position raising a child they didn't plan on raising, knowing where to go to get help," said Bouse. "It doesn't have to be food and dollars. It might be therapy. It might be some training and some work on family dynamics issues. It might be having a case manager that helps you make sure you've got all your stuff lined up."

The MSU School of Social Work is thrilled to have this new endowment in recognition of the great work of the KCRC and kinship families across Michigan, said Hughes.

"This financial support could mean a student doesn't have to get an extra job or can go full-time rather than part-time—enabling them to earn their degree in less time," said Hughes. "Also, it raises awareness among students of kinship families and the work that is done to support children and families in Michigan."

FEATURE SPOTLIGHT:

Serving Those Who Served Our Country

For a lot of combat veterans, the story doesn't end when they step off the plane. It shifts. The uniform comes off, the memories don't, and the work of building a life after war begins.

That's the space Sage Gonzales is preparing to step into.

Sage is an MSW student at MSU and an active member of the Army National Guard. He knows the cadence of drill weekends and deployment briefings, the gallows humor, the quiet ways people check on each other without ever saying the word "therapy." When he talks about why he came back to school, he doesn't reach for big abstractions. He says he wanted to work with people. He wanted to do therapy. And he realized he had a perspective that might actually help.

Sage is completing the Combat Veterans Certificate (CVC) alongside his MSW, and he's the current recipient of the Reeves Combat Veterans Fellowship, which supports veterans who are earning an MSW specifically to serve other veterans. The fellowship doesn't erase the cost of graduate school, but it does buy something just as important: time and breathing room, so he can balance coursework, an unpaid internship, Guard duties and a job without losing sight of why he's here.

The CVC is where the threads of his experience and his training really meet. The program is coordinated by Tina Thompson, an instructor in the School of Social Work, who designed it out of her own life. Years ago, Tina was an MSW student at MSU when she started dating Kevin, a Marine Corps combat veteran just home from Iraq. She knew theory and case notes; she didn't know what to do with the nightmares, hypervigilance and anger that followed him home, or the way everyday moments—trash on the side of the road, a child's tantrum—could trigger a cascade he couldn't shut off.

In a reflection for MSUToday, Tina wrote about the day Kevin nearly became one of the 20 veterans who die by suicide every day—a number that still anchors her work. He eventually found what she calls "HEALING, not just treatment" through a program called Save A Warrior, and now works as a readjustment counselor at a Vet Center. But those years changed how she thought about social work education.

The Combat Veterans Certificate grew from that reckoning. Instead of relying on textbooks and distant case studies, the program asks MSW students to get as close as they safely can to the lived reality of combat veterans. Seven veterans serve as instructors through video; students wear dog tags, eat MREs, relive 9/11 through text messages, audio and footage, and move through scenarios that surface moral injury, survivor's guilt and the complexity of coming home. The goal isn't to mimic trauma, but to push students toward a deeper, embodied empathy before they ever sit with a veteran in crisis.


NURENBERG
U.S. ARMY
SEAMON
U.S. ARMY
U.S. ARMY
GONZALES
U.S. ARMY

Sage is one of those students. He doesn't need the simulations to understand the culture; he lives in it. What the certificate gives him is a shared language for what he's already seen, a framework for trauma-informed, military-informed care, and a cohort of peers willing to sit with the hard parts together. It's also the bridge between his current service and the work he wants to do long-term, including exploring emerging approaches like psychedelic-assisted therapy for veterans living with PTSD and moral injury.

None of this exists in a vacuum. Behind Sage's fellowship and the CVC is another group of Spartans quietly shaping what's possible: donors who decided to put their gratitude and their own stories into motion.

In "To serve those who serve our country," Spartan Magazine profiles two of them: retired Air Force Lieutenant General Ronald Sams and former School of Social Work director Gary Anderson. Ronald, an MSU Army ROTC graduate who went on to nearly 38 years of military service, talks about how much of his career he credits to MSU. He's seen firsthand how much veterans benefit from support from other veterans, and his giving to the MSW Veterans Scholarship fund is a way of making sure there are more MSW-trained professionals in that role.

Gary's motivation is rooted in family. His father, Richard, was a World War II veteran who attended MSU on the GI Bill, lived in a Quonset hut on campus and laid the foundation for the family's future in the College of Social Science. Gary became a social worker and later led the School of Social Work. For him, supporting the MSW Veterans program is a way of honoring his father's service and MSU's long history as a veteran-friendly campus. He describes the program as "one more opportunity to address the array of issues facing families and children… and to better prepare the workforce that will serve those who serve our country in this special way."

Together, the MSW Veterans Scholarship, funded through the Arlene Brophy Reeves and Larry W. Reeves Combat Veterans Fellowship, and additional gifts from donors like Ronald and Gary, create a pipeline: veterans who want to become social workers can actually afford to be here, complete the Combat Veterans Certificate and step into roles where their lived experience is not just a backstory—it's an asset.

When you zoom out, the story you get isn't just "student receives fellowship" or "faculty member creates program" or "alumni give back." It's the way those pieces interlock.

Gary Anderson at his retirement party. Photo by Brandon Drain for Michigan State University.

A veteran-friendly university makes room for someone like Sage to come back, stay in the Guard and still believe an MSW is possible. A faculty member who has lived through the aftershocks of war at home builds a curriculum that refuses to treat combat veterans as an abstraction. Donors who remember what MSU did for them—and for their families—decide that the next generation of veterans deserves that same shot, plus a workforce that actually understands what they're walking through.

The result is not a single initiative but an ecosystem: scholarships that pull people in, coursework that changes how they see veterans and themselves, and graduates who carry that combination of training and lived experience back out into clinics, Vet Centers, hospitals and communities across the country.

For now, that ecosystem might look like one student in a classroom wearing dog tags and taking notes. Ten years from now, it looks like hundreds of veterans sitting across from social workers who "get it" in a way they didn't have to explain.

And that's really the point: serving those who served our country isn't just a slogan we print on Veterans Day. It's the slow, deliberate work of building the people, programs and support that make that promise real.

> This Veteran's program is one more opportunity to address the array of issues facing families and children. **It is an opportunity to better prepare the workforce that will benefit from an MSU education** and serve those who serve our country in this special way.
>
> - Gary Anderson

Our mission and how to give

The CVC is designed for civilians, service members, and veterans who have a passion to help those who have been exposed to the trauma of war or military conflict through their service in the U.S. Armed Forces, the Combat Veterans Certificate is open to current MSW students and Human

GIVING INFORMATION

The MSW Veterans Scholarship is funded through the Arlene Brophy Reeves and Larry W. Reeves Combat Veterans Fellowship in the School of Social Work

LEARN MORE about the MSW Veterans Scholarship fund by contacting Senior **Director of Development Rachel Schmidt at rschmidt@msu.edu or (517) 432-7047 or visit MSU CrowdPower.**

Scan the QR code to give support

#MSUSocialWork

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

Kai Matsushita

Social work is much more than a career path—it's a calling. For those who heed the call, it not only has the power to transform their lives individually but also positively impacts the lives of those they touch thereafter.

For rising junior Kai Matsushita, this call began the moment he got to college. Matsushita first entered Michigan State University studying international relations at the James Madison College, with a strong passion to create systemic change.

That changed during his sophomore year when he "realized that my passion lay closer to fixing the systems that are failing our youth, especially those within juvenile justice and child welfare," said Matsushita.

He switched to social work to better align with his deepening commitment to systemic change. This change would be "one of the best decisions I have ever made," he said, as he was now exposed to a wide variety of professions along with the immense career agility a social work degree could provide. "As I enter my junior year, I can finally say that I am beginning to figure out how to make my dreams of impacting systems a reality," he continued.

This past summer, Matsushita interned at the General Motors Student Corps Program: a community outreach program focused on supporting high school students from underserved Detroit neighborhoods. His role allowed him to work directly with at-risk students who face significant barriers to success.

He worked at Mumford High School in Detroit, MI, a school with one of the highest rates of child welfare-involved youth in the state of Michigan, he said.

Kai Matsushita.

> As I enter my junior year, I can finally say that I am beginning to figure out how to **make my dreams of impacting systems a reality**.
>
> - Kai Matsushita

Kai Matsushita working at his summer internship at the General Motors Student Corps Program

"Many of these youth have experienced trauma and are placed in environments beyond their control," said Matsushita. "Hearing their stories and experiences so early in life left me deeply impacted, and pushed me to work harder and inspired me to create an environment where they feel valued, heard, and, most importantly, safe."

The program had two components: one focused on career readiness, and the other on community service projects.

One of those projects was revamping the 'Senior Room', which was a space created for seniors to relax and study. "This year, the students wanted to build upon that by providing their class with a space not only to relax and study but also to gather resources to support them after high school," said Matsushita.

Mumford High School doesn't have a library, and although Matsushita and his team didn't have the funds/resources to build one from scratch, they instead elected to build a mini version themselves.

"We purchased bookshelves and countless books to support the students in the fall," he said. "With literacy rates declining and resources and resources and funding being cut, it was important to provide students with access to literature."

Additionally, he and the team added an information board to the room, which included regular postings of various networking events, job training, and financial aid opportunities.

Despite this, one of the most powerful additions to the room was the college pennants hanging from the overhead, he noted. "The students were able to touch their future," said Matsushita. "They could physically reach their goal. Their aspirations became tangible. It was a strong reminder that even the smallest details in a space can spark the biggest dreams."

His impact on the students went beyond just providing resources. He was able to connect with the students in deep, meaningful ways, which contributed a lot to his success as an intern. "What I realized is that being the first to open up leaves the door for them to walk through," he said. "It creates that trust and connection that was once blocked as strangers, but now we share that connection and create a relationship where we can learn from one another."

A large part of his role was to be there for the students when they needed him, even responding to late night emails and text messages whenever students had questions. "That is what it is all about," he said, "being a support system in an environment where one is not always given."

Matsushita's experience in his summer internship further solidified his transition into social work. "The program pushed me out of my shell and helped me realize that I have always had leadership traits within me," he said. "Being part of a space where I could connect with communities and listen to young people made me even more certain that social work is the right path for me."

Caring for the Caregivers

HOW MSU RESEARCHERS ARE ADDRESSING A GROWING CRISIS

As of 2020, 53 million adults in the U.S. are actively engaged in caregiving—supporting a rapidly growing population of older adults, according to researchers at Michigan State University.

Informal caregivers provide vital services that aid in helping older adults live longer at home, and help reduce healthcare costs that come with long-term formal healthcare services.

In short, informal caregivers play a crucial role in society, serving as the backbone for the older adult population. Yet, those caregivers need care themselves, as the toll of their role is taxing physically, financially, mentally and emotionally.

Informal caregiving is associated with depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and worse mental health, according to Jen Hirsch, doctoral student for MSU's School of Social Work. These findings come from a study led by Hirsch that examines the caregiving effect: the impact of the act of providing care for someone who is ill.

This effect varies from the family effect, which is defined as the impact of caring about a loved one who is ill. Informal caregivers often experience both simultaneously, yet "the family effect happens whether or not you are engaged in caregiving tasks for a loved one," said Hirsch.

Caregivers experience opportunity costs and trade-offs, as caregiving competes with leisure time, employment, and other household obligations, leading to reduced abilities to take care of their own needs and health, according to the research team.

Our health system relies on informal caregivers. We couldn't function without family and friends providing care for their loved ones.

- Jen Hirsch

The study found that caregivers who engage in 20 or more hours of caregiving per week were associated with poor mental health. They also found that caregiving in general was associated with poor mental health at some level for all caregivers—regardless of the time spent providing care.

High-intensity caregiving is not only associated with increased anxiety and depression but also decreases relationship quality with the care recipient, potentially impacting both the family and caregiving effects.

Hirsch and their team explore various methods for supporting caregivers. This study mainly focuses on policy and organizational level support, which target structures which aim at reducing the caregiving workload or competing demands. These include programs like workplace benefits and respite programs. Respite has been found to be an effective support for caregiver burden, well-being, and depression, and is a frequently offered support that has been identified by many caregivers as the most beneficial service, according to researchers.

Hirsch believes "the most efficient use of our funding to support caregivers would be to offer financial support like a stipend." By providing financial support to caregivers, it gives them the option to purchase the support they need without being reliant on the social safety net of other programs. "Those with higher incomes typically have lower caregiving stress," said Hirsch.

Despite informal caregivers being a well-researched population, the work that they do is often in isolation.

The current demographic is shifting, leading to fewer caregivers and more people who need care.

The role of informal caregivers is becoming more critical than before, and finding ways to support them is equally important.

“Our health system relies on informal caregivers,” said Hirsch. “We couldn’t function without family and friends providing care for their loved ones.”

Learn More:

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/

Access Champion:

How Nicki Moody turns lived experience into better mental health for students and clients

Growing up in low-income housing and watching social workers move through her neighborhood, Nicki Moody saw early what support can look like when systems actually show up. Now a clinical instructor, field coordinator, and practicing therapist, she's helping students map out their own paths in social work while insisting that caring for others starts with the unglamorous, everyday work of caring for yourself.

BY EMILY JODWAY


Name
How Am I Do
Mood
Thoughts
Anxiety
Sleep
Appetite
Exercise
Relationships
Work, school or recreatio
Tobacco, alcohol or drug
Medicine, side-effects
Physical health
Other problems in my life
How Am I Helping My
What Are My Goals?
For the next two weeks
For the next two months
For next year
What Do I Want The Docto

Our Access Champion for the month of October and World Mental Health Day was Nicki Moody, a clinical instructor and field coordinator for the School of Social Work. In addition to teaching, Moody is in charge of coordinating and developing field placement sites for graduate and undergraduate students and provides professional guidance to students preparing for a postgraduate career in Social Work. She is both an instructor and an active practitioner, providing therapy for clients through her own private practice.

Growing up in a low-income housing area and with her own family struggling through poverty and undiagnosed mental health issues, Moody saw firsthand the importance of social workers and the services they provide. “I saw things in my neighborhood—social workers and CPS coming to do their investigations, doing supportive home visits to families who had crises or certain needs,” she explained. She had always felt the call to be a helper, and this first planted the seed within her to eventually study social work.

The first in her family to graduate college, Moody earned a degree in social work before spending time as a member of the Peace Corps living in southern Africa. It was her first experience living abroad and working with refugees and individuals with needs often different from what a social worker in America might encounter. “It really helped me to understand what being a community-based social worker meant, and I learned about the intersection of culture and human services and mental health through the work that I did there.” She then attended graduate school and began her career in social work in Lansing working with immigrants, refugees and undocumented minors.

While at her previous job, Moody would frequently work with MSU to host interns from the School of Social Work. When they informed her of a full-time position opening, she eagerly applied. For Moody, this was the ‘sweet spot’ in which she could teach and mentor while also working one on one with families and in the community. Her identity as both a teacher and a clinician also play a combined role in how she educates

> *“Being in a position where I am able to practice my craft is really amazing, and it’s beneficial in the classroom as well.*
>
> *- Nicki Moody*

young students hoping to become social workers.

“Being in a position where I am able to practice my craft is really amazing, and it’s beneficial in the classroom as well,” she said. “Students are eager to hear about what mental health looks like in the practitioner world, how I provide mental health services, and what it could look like for them. I also believe it’s essential for social work students to be trained by those actively engaged in the field.”

Social work is a multifaceted profession and academic discipline, and one of Moody’s favorite parts of her job is working with students on career development and learning about the many different forms a career in social work may take. She enjoys sitting down one-on-one with students to create an education plan based on their interests and start to map out a potential career path.

In the classroom, Moody is committed to making sure students take care of their own mental health and wellbeing, especially as they prepare to enter a career field in which they will be helping others with similar struggles. Her students work together to create a community classroom contract and a self-care plan. “That self-care plan includes notes about building community with one another, but also identifying all the different ways they can care for themselves,” she explained.

Moody coined the term ‘boring self care,’ to remind students that taking care of themselves might not always look as glamorous as spending a weekend away or having a spa night. It can be as simple as making sure to plan ahead to arrive at class on time, turning in homework assignments when they are due, and keeping a clean living space. “There’s an end goal here, and that might not include a Tuesday bar night,” she said. “It might mean that you have to make different decisions given your position and responsibilities.”

In a similar vein, Moody makes sure not to neglect her own mental health. She hopes that the stigma surrounding seeking out help in the form of therapy, medication or other mental health assistance continues to fade, as she has seen it do in recent years. Moody believes that especially for those working in a social work or mental health field, understanding and taking care of one’s own needs should be addressed in order to do their best at helping others. “We can’t expect to take on this incredible,

vulnerable experience from others when we haven't been willing to do that work ourselves," she says.

"It's so important for us to do our own therapy—to actually work through things in a clinical setting—largely to understand the weight of what we expect people on the other side to do for us. We want practitioners to say to their clients, 'Tell me your deepest, darkest struggles,' but many have never been on the other side of it and don't know what it feels like to unzip yourself emotionally in front of someone else."

Moody approaches the field of social work from a three-tiered perspective, and suggests doing the same when looking at ways we can continue to destigmatize mental health care. At the micro, or individual level, "We should acknowledge what our capacity is and not feel shame around what might be perceived as a limitation—everyone has a different capacity in what they can and can't do." At the meso level, she looks at ways the community around us can help. She views it as an organization's responsibility to provide a culture and environment that supports people taking care of themselves and attending to their mental health. "Having services like an Employee Assistance office, offering flexibility in work plans and schedules, modeling care from leadership around mental health, are a few examples." Lastly, when looking at our society as a whole, she encourages us to play a role in advocating for mental health services and policy at the administrative level. It takes all three levels working together to truly see change become a reality in society.

"There are many definitions of social work, but for me, it's about helping individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, all of those various levels, to live their best lives as defined by them, and in ways that keep everybody safe and healthy."

Office of Institutional Access (OIA)

At the College of Social Science (SSC), we believe that the quality of our academic programs, learning, and work environments, depends upon our capacity to uphold the principles of instutional access. We strive to cultivate an inclusive and welcoming college environment that celebrates a diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives.

ACCESS: the transformative power of education

Access means more than just the ability to attend classes, teach, or work—it means empowering every member of our community to dream bigger, reach higher, and make a difference. It's about giving every student, faculty member, and staff the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their background. Because when you have access to education, resources, and support, you have access to a world of possibilities.

OIA supports access, supports futures.

Learn More:
https://socialscience.msu.edu/access/

ASK THE EXPERT:

Understanding the realities of domestic violence

Content Note - mentions of domestic and sexual domestic violence

Domestic violence is one of the most pervasive public health and social issues in the United States—yet it remains deeply misunderstood.

As awareness grows around different forms of abuse, from coercive control to digital harassment, experts emphasize the urgent need for culturally informed prevention, early intervention, and survivor-centered care.

Hyunkag Cho, professor and director of the Ph.D. program in the Michigan State University School of Social Work, studies the patterns, consequences, and prevention of intimate partner and domestic violence. His research explores how race, culture, and systemic barriers shape survivors' experiences and how social workers and communities can better respond.

In this Q&A, Cho shares insights on common misconceptions, emerging challenges, and how we can all play a role in preventing violence and supporting survivors.

"Be empathetic, respect survivors' choices, stay culturally aware, and care for your own well-being.

Hyunkag Cho, PhD

Associate Professor, MSU School of Social Work

Learn More:

https://socialwork.msu.edu/news

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAT YOU'D LIKE THE PUBLIC TO BETTER UNDERSTAND?

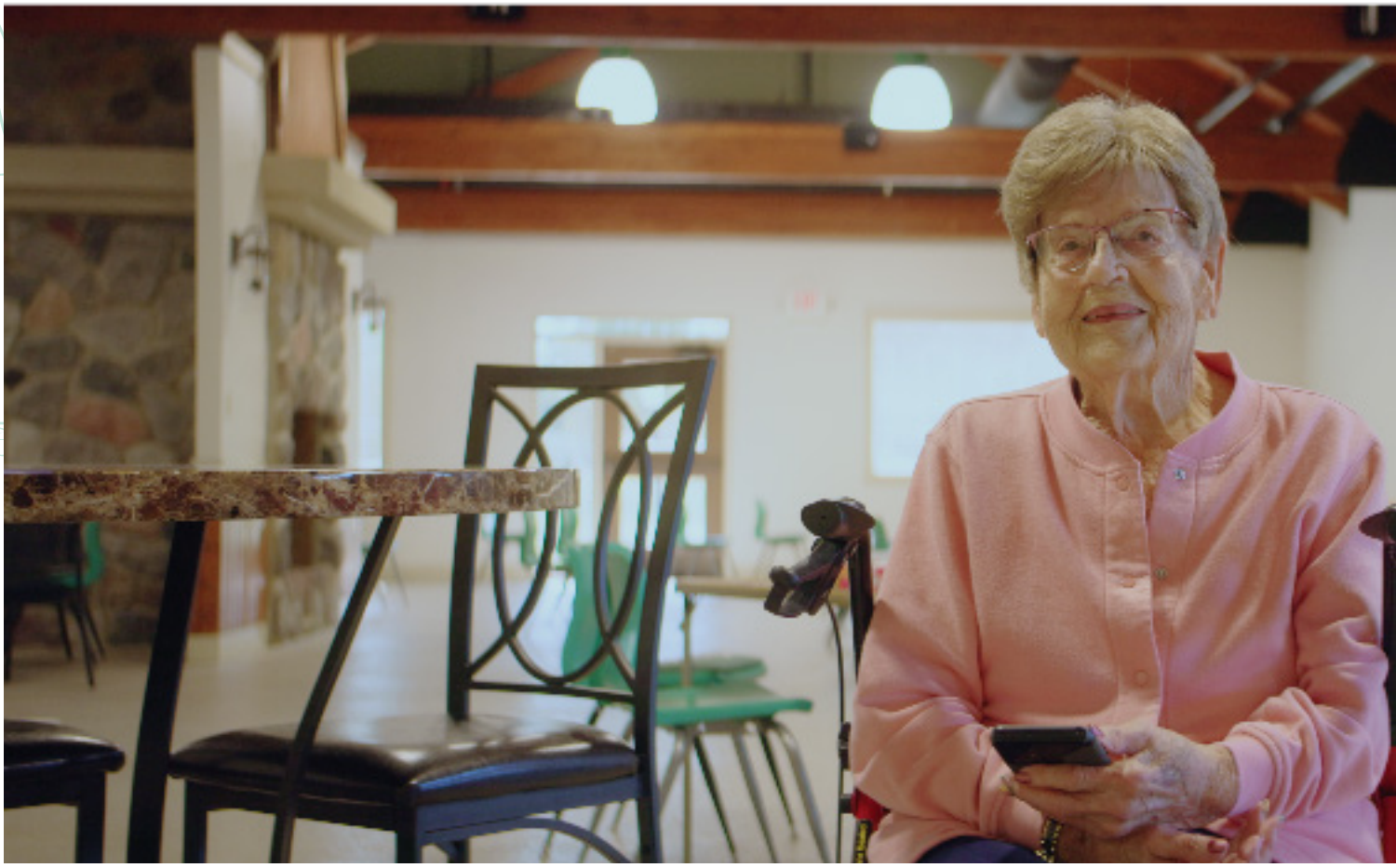
Domestic violence (DV) doesn't happen only to people in bad luck or by bad people, like meeting the wrong people, being in the wrong relationship, or just being stressed out. It can happen to everyone, regardless of their gender, race, age, income, religion, and citizenship.

HOW HAS THE CONVERSATION AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS, AND WHAT CHALLENGES REMAIN?

A variety of DV forms have been recognized recently in addition to physical and sexual DV. Coercive control is a pattern of acts and behaviors that an abuser uses to take away your freedom and to control your life, which includes continuous monitoring of the partner and control of the partner's money. The use of technology, such as cell phones and videos, to harass and abuse the partner is also rapidly increasing. It is still challenging to measure DV as many survivors do not report and certain forms of DV are not easy to measure. Racial, ethnic, and gender minorities' experiences of DV are not studied well.

HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERSECT WITH OTHER ISSUES SUCH AS HOUSING INSECURITY, POVERTY, OR CHILD WELFARE?

DV is not only a private or interpersonal issue but also a structural one, tightly linked with housing, poverty, and child welfare systems. DV is one of the leading causes of homelessness among women and children. Leaving an abusive relationship often means choosing between safety and financial survival. Children who witness DV are at higher risk of emotional, behavioral, and developmental problems.



You're Never Too Old to Learn

At 101, Williamston resident Marlowe Hart is learning smartphone and telehealth skills through MSU's Virtual Connections program. Her story traces a lifetime of change—from wartime factory work to online banking and video visits—and what digital literacy can mean for older adults' independence and connection.

If you ask Marlowe Hart how old she is, she'll tell you the number. But she doesn't really live by it.

"I don't think of me as being 101 years old," she said. "I just think I'm just another one of you."

Marlowe was born in Williamston, MI, in a big brick house on Rowley Road. She grew up on her grandparents' farms just outside of town, moved "over the hill" to another family farm, and eventually built a house on an acre her father gave her when she got married. She stayed there for decades, raising five children, before moving into the city of Williamston about 23 years ago.

Her work life reads like a compressed history of the 20th century. She graduated from high school in 1942, just months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. She'd planned to go to beauty school and become a hairdresser—but World War II changed that.

"Because of World War II, all of the factories in Lansing changed over to making war products instead of cars," she recalled. "Our boys were being drafted, and the women had to go to work. So, I quit beauty school and went to work at Nash Kelvinator, making airplane propellers for our bombers."

When the war ended and she married in 1946, Marlowe shifted into a new role: telephone operator. She worked the switchboard for eight years before trading headsets

for a steering wheel and driving a school bus—work that fit the rhythms of a growing family. “Driving school bus is a wonderful job when you have kids in school,” she said. “When they’re off school, I was home.” Later, she took a civil service test and joined the State of Michigan, retiring from the Michigan State Police in 1982.

By the time she left, computers were just arriving in the office. “Three weeks before I retired from state police, they got their first computer,” she said. “Because I was retiring, I didn’t get a chance to go to school or anything. So, I had no experience, no exposure to technology of any kind, really.”

That’s part of what makes her latest chapter so striking.

LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE AT 101

In 2024, Marlowe heard about Virtual Connections—an MSU School of Social Work initiative that partners with senior centers and community agencies to provide one-on-one smartphone and telehealth coaching for older adults. The project builds digital skills, supports safer technology use and helps older adults stay connected to family, community and care.

“I don’t think of me as being 101 years old. I just think I’m just another one of you.

- Marlowe Hart

She learned about the coaching sessions through the Williamston Senior Center and signed up.

Her kids had already nudged her toward an upgrade. “Okay, Grandma, it’s time to get a new phone,” they told her. She bought it herself—“I’ve spent a few hundred dollars buying a new phone; I wanted to learn as much as I could about it,” she said, and then decided she might as well actually enjoy using it.

Working with Stephanie, one of the volunteer coaches, Marlowe started from the basics and moved steadily forward.

“Stephanie showed me how to take pictures and send them with text,” she said. “She showed me how I could talk a text—I didn’t always have to write it—that I can use the microphone and do the voice thing.”

Before the session started, she was already checking her online banking at home on a computer, doing all her banking digitally. In class, a fraud-prevention section caught her attention. She’s had her account hacked twice through her debit card use, and the discussion made her uneasy.

“I went home that afternoon and called the bank,” she said. Staff there walked her through the protections on her account, reassured her, and explained how they monitor suspicious charges. “So I feel secure to use it—but it was something that was brought up here in class, and I took advantage of it. That made me feel better.”

Another session focused on telehealth. As it happened, she had a doctor’s appointment that same afternoon.

“I brought it up to him, and he was thrilled,” she said. Her provider helped her install the health app on her phone, and now they plan to use video visits for routine check-ins, especially during the winter. “I won’t have to get out in the cold, which is great.” This is the same doctor who gave her a watch for her 100th birthday and came to the

party—someone she trusts, now meeting her in a new digital space.

STAYING CONNECTED ACROSS GENERATIONS

One of the sweetest parts of Marlowe's digital life sits 4,000 miles away.

Her great-great-granddaughter—her second great-great-grandchild—lives in Germany. The baby is named Marlowe, too. Her father is in the service, and the family won't be back in the States until next June, which means Hart will go more than a year before seeing her namesake in person.

But thanks to text messages and photos, she's already watching her grow.

"Being able to send pictures back and forth, I'm able to keep up with her," she said. "I'll see her growing up."

That mix of old-school rootedness and new-school tools shows up everywhere in her story. She came of age in an era where "cashless" sounded far-fetched. Years ago, she read an article predicting a time when people wouldn't carry money. "I thought to myself, this is ridiculous. How can the world go by without carrying money?" she said. "Well, it's me today." Her pension and Social Security are direct-deposited; when she needs cash, she goes to the bank.

Now, the smartphone class is simply the next practical adaptation: understand how things work, make them safer where you can, and keep moving.

"YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN"

When asked what she'd tell other older adults who might be hesitant to sign up for a smartphone or telehealth class, Marlowe doesn't hesitate.

"I think it's great to learn all you can," she said. "If you have the phone, you want to use it. I just wish that I could even learn more, but the class certainly has helped me a lot." Then she added the line that has become her unofficial motto: "You're never too old to learn."

She also appreciated the human side of the program. She enjoyed Stephanie's coaching so much that the two have a standing plan to meet for coffee sometime. "I enjoyed the whole class very much," she said. "I think all seniors that have that phone should take it. You can always ask your questions, and we get those answered."

For the Virtual Connections team, Marlowe is a powerful reminder of why this work matters.

Virtual Connections

Virtual Connections began with a Michigan Health Endowment Fund grant to MSU's School of Social Work to support digital literacy and telehealth awareness among isolated, low-income older adults receiving home-delivered meals in Otsego County. Working with the Otsego County Commission on Aging, volunteer coaches delivered tablets and in-person coaching; 20 of 25 participants completed the program. A second grant shifted the focus to smartphones, and the latest grant supports coaching in six Michigan counties through agency partnerships.

Its mission is to help older adults, families, and community partners build digital and health literacy—so connection, independence, and care are easier every day.

RESEARCH IN ACTION:

Understanding the mesothelioma caregiving journey

Caregivers of people with mesothelioma often face a long, confusing path from diagnosis through end-of-life and grief. A new study led by Professor Amanda Woodward traces that journey and is helping shape an online support program tailored to what mesothelioma families say they actually need.

In a new study, Professor Amanda Woodward and her team sat down with mesothelioma patients, caregivers and bereaved caregivers to map what the journey actually feels like—from first symptoms and diagnosis through treatment, end-of-life and grief.

What they heard was clear: at diagnosis, families are desperate for straightforward information; as time goes on, that need widens to include emotional support, financial help and guidance on what to expect at the end.

The study also shows how much experience can vary depending on health and digital literacy, income and social networks, and how the rarity of mesothelioma makes it harder to find peers or providers who understand the disease. Those insights are now being used to shape an online caregiver support program designed specifically for people walking through mesothelioma, so they're not left to navigate it alone.

Learn More:

https://www.curemeso.org

RESEARCH IN ACTION:

Breaking the loop of incarceration through improv

Thanks to grant-funded work led by Dr. Heather McCauley and Dr. Joanne Smith-Darden, the global podcast Ear Hustle is shining a spotlight on Drama Club, a New York City–based organization that uses improvisational theater to support youth who are incarcerated or court-involved. Ear Hustle (a Radiotopia/PRX podcast with more than 85 million downloads) released the first episode of "The Loop," a six-part series that lets young people describe, in their own words, how Drama Club helps break the loop of incarceration through improvisation, connection and community.

The team's project, "Drama Club: Sparking Creative Problem Solving for Violence Prevention," funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, evaluates how Drama Club's curriculum builds social-emotional skills, non-violent conflict resolution and hope among young adults incarcerated in New York City. Partnering with Ear Hustle is one way the project is lifting up those stories beyond the justice system, centering the voices of youth who have experienced incarceration and stayed connected to Drama Club.

Listen to The Loop on the Ear Hustle website or wherever you get your podcasts: **https://www.earhustlesq.com/theloop**

Welcoming Our Largest BASW Upper-Level Cohort Yet

Back in early fall, we kicked off the semester by welcoming the largest upper-level BASW cohort in the history of our program. Nearly 100 BASW students packed into our welcome event to meet faculty, connect with peers, and start thinking about life after graduation—from field placements to careers and grad school. It was a good reminder that interest in social work is growing, and that our students are ready to step into the work communities are asking for.

RESEARCH IN ACTION:

Neighborhood violence tied to earlier alcohol/ tobacco start among teens

MSU researchers link higher violence exposure to earlier substance use initiation in a Denver cohort study.

A new study led by MSU Social Work professor Anna Maria Santiago finds that teens in higher-violence neighborhoods start alcohol and tobacco earlier and at higher rates than their peers.

Using data from roughly 1,100 Latino/a and African American adolescents in Denver, CO, the team found heightened exposure to neighborhood violence increased the hazards of alcohol use initiation by 32% for all adolescents and 38% for adolescent males in particular.

The risk of starting tobacco use was about 36% higher overall and 30% to 50% higher in some groups, including African American teens.

"Adolescent alcohol and tobacco use have been linked to adverse preventable adolescent and adult behavioral and physical health outcomes over the life course," said Santiago, with some of those negative outcomes include increased risky sexual behavior, sexual victimization, as well as dependency on those substances.

The team noted that stress and feeling unsafe can push some teens to try alcohol or cigarettes sooner as a coping strategy.

"These heightened perceptions of danger or feeling unsafe trigger psychological reactions such as stress, which in turn, may lead to initiating the use of tobacco (by all subgroups of adolescents) as a way of coping," the team noted.

This community focused approach to the study also requires a community focused method for prevention.

One of the key challenges facing communities is, "Providing all adolescents the opportunity to live in healthy and safe neighborhoods and homes offering supportive environments throughout childhood and into adulthood," the team said. "Designing opportunity-rich housing and neighborhoods is crucial to ensuring that disadvantaged teens gain better access to places that enhance their opportunities over the life course," they continued.

Violence prevention requires the creation of safe public spaces, with prosocial activities that enhance neighborhood safety.

"Neighborhood youth clubs, sports teams, community centers, and parks may serve as powerful deterrents to substance use initiation among adolescents," the team said.

NEW STUDY

Denver neighborhood violence study

1,100

LATINO/A AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS FOLLOWED IN DENVER, CO

32%

HIGHER HAZARD OF STARTING ALCOHOL USE FOR TEENS IN

30–50%

HIGHER HAZARD OF TOBACCO USE INITIATION FOR BOYS, LATINO/A AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO MORE NEIGHBORHOOD VIOLENCE

Early alcohol and tobacco use are linked to worse health and behavioral outcomes across the life course.

LEARN MORE

ACCESS SPOTLIGHT:

Kristen Columbus

During the month of July, we commemorated the historic signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26, 1990, the first law of its kind ensuring equal access and protection against discrimination for individuals with disabilities. Disability Independence Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the strides we have made in inclusivity while being reminded of the ways in which we can support the disabled community and create a more accessible society for all.

Our July Access Spotlight was Kristen Columbus, President and CEO of the Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy (WACA) and a 2020 graduate of the School of Social Work. Her work includes advocacy, development and grant writing, and program planning and evaluation. Columbus's interest in special education support and advocacy comes from her experiences as the mother of a young adult who lives with complex developmental disabilities.

Growing up, Columbus was interested in the fields of chemistry and biology, in part inspired by her chemist mother. Originally from Pittsburgh, she first arrived in Michigan with plans to earn her PhD in chemistry at the University of Michigan. Right after finishing her first year, she found out she was expecting her first child, a baby boy, and life began to change rapidly.

"When he was about six to eight months old, he started showing some signs of developmental delay and being behind on his milestones, and that took me off the chemistry path and on to where I am now," she explained.

Columbus and her husband embarked on what would eventually become a lengthy and oftentimes difficult journey towards finding support and answers for their son. "When we first started to see these signs, we went down the path of appointments with specialists and therapies and testing, trying to figure out what was going on," she said. Through the Early on Michigan special education program for infants and toddlers, Columbus was introduced to the world of raising a child with special needs. She also joined a parent support group. Feeling very alone at first, she was quickly welcomed by the other parents.

"That was my introduction to parents networking and advocating and helping each other out, so I started thinking beyond my own child, thinking about how I could help others' kids, and learning about advocacy."

When her son began school full time, Columbus got involved with several grassroots disability groups, which saw her become appointed to the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council, first by Governor Jennifer Granholm and again by Governor Rick Snyder. While working for the Michigan Alliance for Families, she made the decision to go back to school, and chose Michigan State to earn her Master's of Social Work on the Organization and Community Leadership (OCL) track.

"I had learned so much about policy advocacy and systems that people with disabilities need, and these systems can be so complicated if you're someone that needs these services and you aren't a social worker," she explained. "I wanted to help people like me and other families navigate these systems, and social work seemed like the logical way to go."

Columbus participated in MSU's Weekend MSW program, a hybrid program that allowed her to continue working while earning her degree. She was also drawn to its emphasis on macro-level social work, which focuses on using social work for large-scale changes through policy and advocacy. During her time at MSU, Columbus was part of the Advocacy Scholars Program and Michigan Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (MI-LEND), a disability-focused leadership development program and a collaboration with seven other Michigan higher-ed institutes.

Columbus also had the opportunity to intern in the House of Representatives. At that time, the majority of student interns were law and public policy students hoping to work in politics. Social work students were few and far between.

"I think that's something about social work that people don't realize," Columbus said. "There are so many social workers doing good work as therapists and clinicians, but also in policy spaces, advocacy organizations, places you don't typically think about social workers being, but when you think about the impact of laws and policies on people who are vulnerable or marginalized, we're really uniquely positioned to solve those kinds of issues."

As the current president and CEO of the Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy, whose main goal is to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization wants to see individuals with disabilities be able to participate fully in community and everyday life. "It's about being able to do ordinary things, like go out to a restaurant without being blocked at the front door, or have a job, or get married if they choose to," she explains. Washtenaw ACA accomplishes this utilizing advocacy as a service, rather than the commonly thought-of services such as assisted learning devices or hired caregivers. They advocate for children with disabilities in schools, disabled adults in the community, and local mental health programs and organizations.

"These individuals need advocacy to make sure they're getting the right type of services, and enough of them that they need in order to live. These aren't luxuries, they're things that are essential and necessary."

Columbus has stayed motivated to help both these individuals and their caregivers through her work, knowing firsthand what it's like to navigate these systems and how beneficial it can be to have someone with experience to help guide through the process. She also hopes that the advocacy work of her and others will inspire those in the community to be accepting of and aid in empowering people with disabilities.

"Communities have to recognize and accept that people with disabilities are a part of them, and have a right to be there," she says. "Just because you've never had an experience with disability, it doesn't mean that you never will. So to be a part of that community that is welcoming and accepting and affirming, I think that would be remarkable."

With July 26 marking Disability Independence Day, Columbus returns to the idea of disabled individuals being able to live their lives and be part of their communities just like everyone else. "They're not aiming to be anybody's inspiration for doing ordinary things," she explains. Community advocacy and bringing attention to the ways in which we still need to make society more accessible are crucial.

"That, to me, is their right— to have an ordinary life that's fulfilling and meaningful and has the things and people in it that they want. People with disabilities deserve and have the legal right to those things. That's why we have the ADA and it's so important. That's what might be the aspiration sometimes, the recognition of the ADA and that we need laws to bring that about and to make it a reality."

RESEARCH IN ACTION:

Study links climate-driven flooding to cognitive decline in older adults

By tracking older adults in flood-affected Thai communities, MSU researchers connect climate disasters to cognitive decline and point to Bangkok's Resilient City Policy as a promising defense.

Temperature increases and extreme weather events due to climate change have caused vulnerable regions like Thailand to experience a high frequency of floods.

These volatile, inclement weather events not only have detrimental effects on city infrastructure and the physical wellbeing of the population but also contribute to "high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety among affected populations," said Fei Sun, a professor at MSU's School of Social Work.

The acute stress triggered by floods also significantly impairs an individual's cognitive health, with decreases in attention, working memory, and verbal memory, especially amongst the older adult population, the research team noted.

Exposure to floods also had a long lasting negative impact on an individual's orientation to time—which tends to get worse as the years go on.

The floods also "increased the risk of exacerbation in individuals with pre-existing diabetes by 25.9% within one year of the disaster," said Sun, "32.3% within one to three years of the disaster, and 39.5% more than three years after the disaster, respectively, and this negative effect increased progressively with time."

Bangkok's Resilient City Policy (RCP)—a multi-component policy aimed at improving structural systems, community preparedness, and healthcare access—shows promise in mitigating the adverse effects of floods on residents' cognitive health.

RCP has two major components: improving quality of life, and reducing risks and improving adaptation.

At the city level, the RCP can generate direct benefits by improving urban flood defenses, such as road drainage systems, drainage tunnels, and major canals, the team noted. "These measures can reduce flooding incidence and severity, enhancing the living environment and directly improving cognitive health," said Sun.

At the community level, RCP initiatives supported community disaster risk pilots and a network of community leaders who build capacity for disaster and climate risk management, mobilize resources, and improve flood communication.

"The RCP represents a shift from 'fighting flooding' to 'living with water'," said Sun. "This approach not only emphasizes recovery from flooding but also promotes a comprehensive strategy to adapt to changing socio-ecological conditions."

This adaptive approach is what Sun and his team attribute to the RCP's effectiveness in reducing the cognitive decline associated with flood disasters.

They also found that the RCP intervention increased memory test scores, both in the short- and long-term.

"These results imply that the RCP could be promising in protecting certain cognitive domains, such as memory and calculation, but might not be for other cognitive domains such as orientation to time," said Sun. The possible protective mechanisms included reduced depression risks by 8.1% and the exacerbation risks in individuals with existing diabetes by 15.5% between one and three years after the disaster.

Urban resilience policies that combine infrastructure, preparedness, and access to health and social supports can help buffer cognitive harm, particularly for aging populations.

"The research underscores the importance of integrating climate adaptation into urban policies, emphasizing infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and social inclusivity," said Sun. "Strengthening resilience policies through research and collaboration is crucial to protecting vulnerable populations from the growing threats of climate change."

HOW TO GIVE

Invest in initiatives meaningful to you

Students enter the profession of social work with a strong commitment to service, integrity, and competence. As social work educators, we believe that the good our graduates do is multiplied and extended across generations, and we are honored to help prepare them for their service. In keeping with land-grant principles of education, research, and outreach/service, we take seriously our responsibility to the education and training of students as well as outreach for community engagement.

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

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

Dr. Mary Bremer Barron Scholarship Fund
This fund supports scholarships for students, with preference for those from the greater Flint community.

MSW Veterans Scholarship
This fund supports veterans by providing scholarships for study in the MSW program.

Paul P. and Donna K. Freddolino Endowment for Distance Education
This fund supports the School of Social Work's distance educational programs, including both student support and the development of new educational technologies.

The School of Social Work Endowed Fund
This fund provides a range of supports for the School, including student scholarships, support for faculty research, and support for School programs.

Future Leaders Endowed Scholarship in Social Work
This fund supports graduate students through scholarships, assistantships, or fellowships.

Gary R. Anderson Endowed Fund for Child Welfare Leadership
This fund supports workshops, lectures, and scholarships in the School related to child welfare leadership and workplace development.

Chance at Childhood Endowment Fund
This fund supports research, education, training, and outreach concerning intervention and treatment for at-risk children and families; children's justice; and coordination of professionals dealing with at-risk children and families.

Youth Education and Support
This fund helps build, test, and disseminate research focused on real ways to increase child and youth access to accurate, non-stigmatized knowledge of mental illness and recovery.

David and Nancy Hanafin Neal Scholarship Fund
This fund supports student scholarships that enable BSW or MSW students to continue their education and complete their degrees.

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MSU School of Social Work
Baker Hall, Room 254, 655 Auditorium Road, East Lansing, MI 48824

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The MSU School of Social Work is dedicated to educating students for ethical, competent, responsive, and innovative social work practice, and to conducting and disseminating high quality research that improves the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. Our teaching, research, and outreach synergistically promote social justice, positive change, and solutions to the problems facing diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

socialwork.msu.edu