

the utopian

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN | STEVE HICKS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

THE POWER OF HUMAN INTERACTION

Working with detained migrants

A WRITING DREAMSCAPE

Youth and creative writing

MORE THAN A DIAGNOSIS

New Department of Health Social Work

SPRING 2020



A Writing Dreamscape p.2

FROM THE DEAN

"HISTORY HAS
BEEN WITNESS
TO MUCH HUMAN
SUFFERING.
THOSE WHO
HAVE WRITTEN
THEIR STORIES OR
TOLD THEM TO
OTHERS SHARE
WITH US ALL
ACCOUNTS THAT
SHOULD NEVER
BE FORGOTTEN."

Someday, I hope, the children and parents held in our nation's immigration detention centers will write their stories.

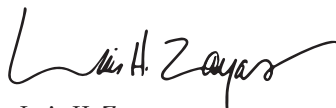
We know that giving testimony is a powerful way for people to be heard. Writing is one manner of doing this. I recall reading long ago about human rights workers helping refugees from war-ravished countries write their stories. They described their experiences, named names, and gave witness to the atrocities they saw and endured. The workers acted both as therapists eliciting the narratives and editors helping the refugees author their stories from an authentic voice and complete telling. Each refugee had their story recorded, printed and bound into a volume. Their children and grandchildren, and the public at large could later read and learn about them as individuals—not as anonymous statistics but as real people in a human drama

In this issue of *The Utopian*, the topics of immigration, deportation, and writing come together. Alums Laurie Cook Heffron and Ana Hernández describe the traumatic experiences of asylum-seeking families in their home countries, during their trek through Mexico and in the detention centers in the United States. They show how the social work volunteers who visit the detention facility in Karnes help individuals tell their stories—stories that are profoundly painful—in preparation for their credible fear interviews.

Master's student Rosa Alvarez Velez offers a glimpse into the lives of female returnees to Guatemala who have been deported from the United States. They too have suffered the wrenching separations from their children and from the homes they have known for years, if not decades.

And alum Heather Jones uses writing as a way for children and adolescents to tell their stories, process their feelings and find their voices.

History has been witness to much human suffering. Those who have written their stories or told them to others share with us all accounts that should never be forgotten.



Luis H. Zayas
Dean and Robert Lee Sutherland Chair



CONTACT US!

Have questions, comments or story ideas? We would love to hear from you. Please email: utopian@utlists.utexas.edu



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 The University of Texas at Austin
Steve Hicks School of Social Work

Send comments, news items, suggestions and address changes to:

The Utopian Editor
Steve Hicks School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Austin
1925 San Jacinto Blvd., Stop D3500
Austin, TX 78712-1405
Email: utopian@utlists.utexas.edu
Phone: (512)471-1458

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Dean
Luis H. Zayas

Editor & Director
of Communications
Andrea Campetella

Photography
Montinique Monroe

Art Direction & Design
Jennifer Idol, The Underwater Designer

Contributors
Catherine Arjet



THE POWER OF HUMAN INTERACTION

Against a backdrop of increasing dehumanization of migrating families, social workers strive to address trauma in a Texas detention center.

BY LAURIE COOK HEFFRON AND ANA HERNÁNDEZ

As Texans, we see the consequences of immigration detention from up close. Our state shares the expanse of its southern border with Mexico and holds a high number of detention facilities. As social workers in this region, we work closely with migrant individuals and families who endure the direct or indirect results of detention. We also uphold a code of ethics and professional directives that require us to be informed about, engaged in, and actively resisting inequity and oppression.

On any given day, more than 40,000 migrating individuals are detained and incarcerated in facilities managed by an entanglement of governmental and private entities including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection, and private prison corporations, according to ICE statistics for 2020.

Depending on each case, immigrant detention may last a few days or be indefinite, and the consequences of either are often long-lasting. The harmful impact of incarceration on individuals and families is well documented and includes increased risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation and

Laurie Cook Heffron (left) and Ana Hernández (right).
Photo by Montinique Monroe.

suicide attempts, depression, traumatic stress, and anxiety. Detention also causes disruptions to the family unit, can create role reversal between parents and children, and undermines attachment relationships critical to child development and family wellbeing.

Volunteering at Karnes

In 2016, faculty and student volunteers from the Steve Hicks School of Social Work and St. Edward's University began working with incarcerated parents and children at Karnes County Residential Facility, an ICE detention center located outside of San Antonio and run by the GEO Group, one of the nation's largest for-profit prison operators. The volunteers' goal was to support the efforts of RAICES, a nonprofit providing parents at Karnes with immigration information and resources.

The volunteers focused mostly on helping parents understand the purpose and logistics of credible fear interviews. Through these interviews, immigration officials screen individuals charged with inadmissibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act to prevent those who may be eligible for asylum from being wrongfully removed. Essentially, by telling their stories during the interview, individuals have to show that there is a credible fear of danger to their lives if they are returned to their home countries. These stories generally involve traumatic experiences that migrants may not have processed or may have difficulties recounting to a stranger in an environment often perceived as hostile, such as immigration detention.

Volunteers were able to use clinical skills such as empathy, active listening, and social perceptiveness to help migrants articulate their stories while validating them. For instance, during an interview with a mother from Guatemala, the social work volunteer was able to establish rapport and ask questions that uncovered a long history of domestic violence—a relevant piece for her asylum case—that otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

Over time, the effort from social work merged with a parallel effort from the UT Austin School of Law into a joint project with shared coordination. Through this ongoing effort, once a month volunteer students from social work and law pile up into a van, make the trip to Karnes, and



Karnes County Residential Facility is an ICE detention center located outside of San Antonio, Texas, and run by the GEO Group, one of the nation's largest for-profit prison operators. The nonprofit RAICES has been providing detainees at Karnes with immigration information and resources.

spend the full day supporting RAICES efforts by assisting with credible fear interviews and other tasks. The overall objective of the joint project is to build capacity, cross-train, and utilize legal and social work clinical expertise to best serve individuals detained at Karnes.

Addressing trauma in traumatic places

From a social work perspective, one of the major challenges the team faced was how to address trauma in the context of immigration detention.

A trauma-informed approach first has to understand and acknowledge what trauma is, its effects, and how widespread it is. Second, it has to acknowledge individuals' capacity of healing from trauma and understand different ways of responding appropriately when someone has a traumatic response.

At Karnes, the team of social work volunteers has focused on providing a sense of support and well-being in a space that often does not feel safe for those detained. Based on recent research and our experiences in the detention facility during these past three years, we share four main ways of operating in a trauma-informed manner despite a setting that is isolating and often serves to reproduce trauma.

"THE HARMFUL IMPACT OF INCARCERATION ON INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IS WELL DOCUMENTED AND INCLUDES INCREASED RISK OF SELF-HARM, SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS, DEPRESSION, TRAUMATIC STRESS, AND ANXIETY."



Gateway International Bridge connects the cities of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. In addition to visiting the detention center at Karnes, social work volunteers have been making trips to the US-Mexico border to provide support to migrant women and children. Photo courtesy of Ana Hernández.

“TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OFTEN LEAVE PEOPLE FEELING AS IF THEY HAVE LITTLE CHOICE OR CONTROL OVER WHAT HAPPENED. IN DETENTION CENTERS, THIS FEELING IS COUPLED WITH AN ATMOSPHERE THAT REMOVES MOST CHOICE FROM DAILY LIVING.”

1. Finding physical and psychological safety

Physical and psychological safety, as defined by those who’ve experienced trauma, may not be possible in the detention center as a result of the constant threat of deportation. In addition, frequent intercom calls for individuals by their inmate number, night-time bed checks, and cases of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and even death while in detention enhance the climate of instability and danger.

One way of promoting wellbeing in this hostile environment is the strategy of grounding exercises—something as simple taking a few minutes to guide clients through feeling and relaxing different parts of their bodies, and breathing. These are techniques designed for trauma survivors who may feel distress, re-experience trauma, and have difficulty regulating their responses. Social work volunteers at Karnes have found that grounding exercises helped migrants find calm, center in the current time and space, and prepare for re-entering a fear-inducing system. Many of the migrants had never experienced an activity like that, and found the short exercise relieving—as one mother put it, “*Sentí un desahogo*” (“I felt relieved”).

With clients who will be returned to their home countries and may face considerable danger upon arrival, the team helps them identify resources and put together a safety plan.

Finally, working inside immigration detention facilities also offers an opportunity to identify abuses within

the system and try to address them alongside a larger network of advocate organizations and immigrant detention visitation programs. For example, members of the team have helped RAICES collect records of abuse from migrants detained at Karnes that may later be used as examples in potential lawsuits. Volunteers also drew from their experience at Karnes to submit testimonies to the Texas Legislature against the 2018 motion to license family detention centers as childcare facilities.

2. Building trust and transparency

Due to frequently shifting policies and procedures within the detention center and in the larger context of immigration policy, individuals in detention often do not know who they can trust. In addition, individuals in detention receive little to no reliable information from immigration officials about procedures, applications, hearings, and timelines.

Volunteers at Karnes provide information about rights and immigration procedures, individual case consultation, preparation for release from detention, preparation for deportation, and referral to low-cost immigration legal services.

For maximum transparency, our team members always explain their roles, and the limitations to them. For instance, volunteers make clear that they don’t work for the detention center or the government, and that they don’t have information such as asylum interview dates or the state of their cases.

Volunteers are also mindful that their work in the facility happens within a patchwork of efforts by nongovernmental organizations that strive to provide the best information possible within systems that are not always transparent, and in a rapidly changing legal and political context.

3. Promoting empowerment, voice and choice

Traumatic experiences often leave people feeling as if they have little choice or control over what happens to them. In detention centers, this feeling is coupled with an atmosphere that removes most choice from daily living, including when to wake up, when to eat, which side of the hallway to walk on, and so on. When

it comes to parenting, lack of choice becomes particularly poignant. Detention centers inhibit parents' authority and decision-making related to their children's sleeping, feeding, clothing, and disciplining. They also restrict parents' responses to the social, educational, and medical needs of their children.

Within these restrictive parameters, our team members aim to recognize and give as much choice and control as possible to parents in detention. For example, they choose where to sit in a visitation room, when and what part of their stories to tell, and whether or not to have their child present during the visit.

4. Resisting dehumanization

Negative cultural stereotypes about immigrants are often reinforced in the detention context through, for example, insults by guards.

From a broader perspective, the system does not recognize or address the dehumanization and criminalization of migrating families in the public discourse, the histories of gender-based violence or trauma that detained individuals bring with them, or the historical contexts that pushed them to leave their home-countries.

In every interaction with detained individuals, our team members strive to incorporate an understanding of cultural differences, historical trauma, and gender-based violence. This is particularly important when helping individuals prepare for their credible fear interviews. For example, one of the volunteers was helping an indigenous woman from Guatemala at Karnes through the process of appealing the denial of her asylum case. When reviewing the transcript of her declaration before the judge, the volunteer realized that the woman had not brought up her story of domestic violence. When asked why, she said that in her country domestic violence was a private matter and not something that you would bring to the authorities. The volunteer was then able to bridge the cultural gap and explain that in the United States domestic violence was not only reportable but also relevant in the context of asylum law.

Within the limited context of immigration laws and policies, team members are also able to validate detained individuals' lived



Social work volunteers from UT Austin and St. Edward's visit Karnes County Residential Facility in 2019. From left to right: Maria Rene Morales, Melissa Forrow, Lynn Panepinto, Margarita Guerrero, Ana Hernández, Laurie Cook Heffron and Mackenzie Gilchrist. Photo courtesy of Ana Hernández.

"WHEN IT COMES PARENTING, LACK OF CHOICE IS PARTICULARLY POIGNANT. DETENTION CENTERS' INHIBIT PARENTS' AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING RELATED TO THEIR CHILDREN'S SLEEPING, FEEDING, CLOTHING, AND DISCIPLINING."

experiences of oppression while providing guidance for how they can understand their unique histories. To validate their fear as “credible,” regardless of what immigration and asylum law establish, is an important reinforcement of migrants’ humanity and rights.

Finding meaning

When working to support migrants in detention, we often have the feeling that we were not able to see enough people, do enough, or circumnavigate physical and legal barriers in effective ways. When it comes to the student volunteers in our team, we cannot dismiss the toll on them of entering such oppressive spaces and witnessing the daily undermining of human rights that occurs in them.

We recognize that immigration detention is a particularly challenging context to implement trauma-informed practices. But we also know, because we witness it through our work at Karnes, that every positive human interaction, no matter how small it may seem, has a powerful impact. This power is the underpinning of trauma-informed work in detention contexts, and is the basis upon which our student volunteers can understand the impact of their efforts.

Our work with student volunteers at Karnes during these past few years has yielded dozens of now graduated social workers armed with first-hand knowledge of the detrimental impact of immigration detention and the resolve to make systems change. We know they will accomplish this change through individual clinical work, community organizing, and policy advocacy with the hope of creating trauma-informed integrative systems of support for those seeking refuge in our nation.

Laurie Cook Heffron, PhD '15, MSSW '02, is the director of the Social Work Program and an assistant professor at St. Edward's University. Ana Hernández, MSSW '18, coordinates Girasol, a program at the Steve Hicks School's Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing that aims to create a global community of trauma-informed professionals working for the wellbeing of all immigrant families. A longer version of this article was published in *Youth Circulations* (youthcirculations.com)

On the TED stage

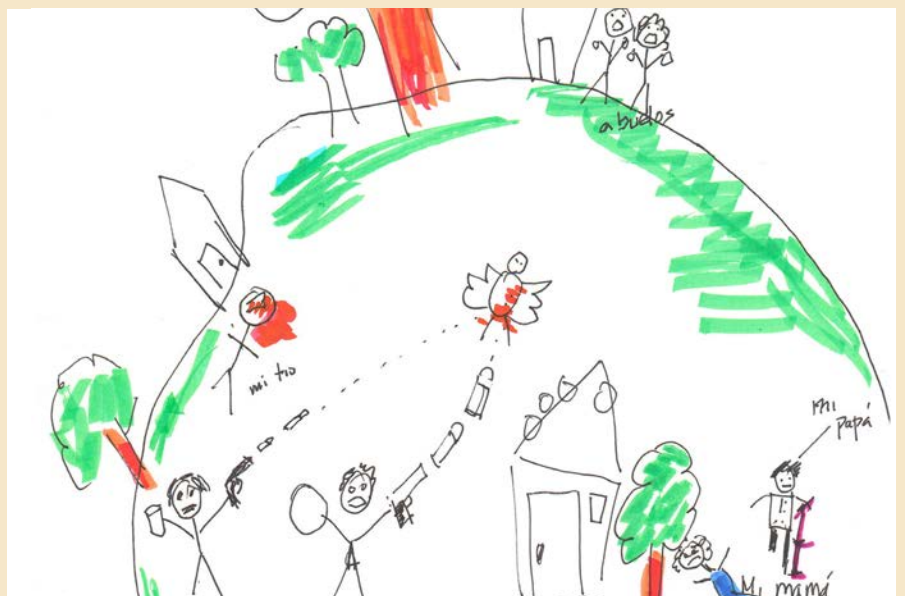
Dean Luis H. Zayas is a proud active mental health practitioner through his evaluations of immigrant children and families facing deportation, and of refugee and asylum-seeking mothers and children in detention centers.

Last September, Dean Zayas participated in the TEDSalon “Border Stories,” which explored immigration on the US-Mexico border. In his TEDTalk, Dean Zayas discussed the distressing conditions immigrant families face during their journey to the United States, which has escalated since children began being separated from their parents and held in detention centers. He also urged our country to reframe its practices, replacing hostility and fear with safety and compassion.

Watch: <http://tiny.cc/ZayasTEDTalk>



Dean Zayas discusses the psychological impact of child separation during the TEDSalon: Border Stories at the TED World Theater in New York City on September 10, 2019. Photo: Ryan Lash/TED

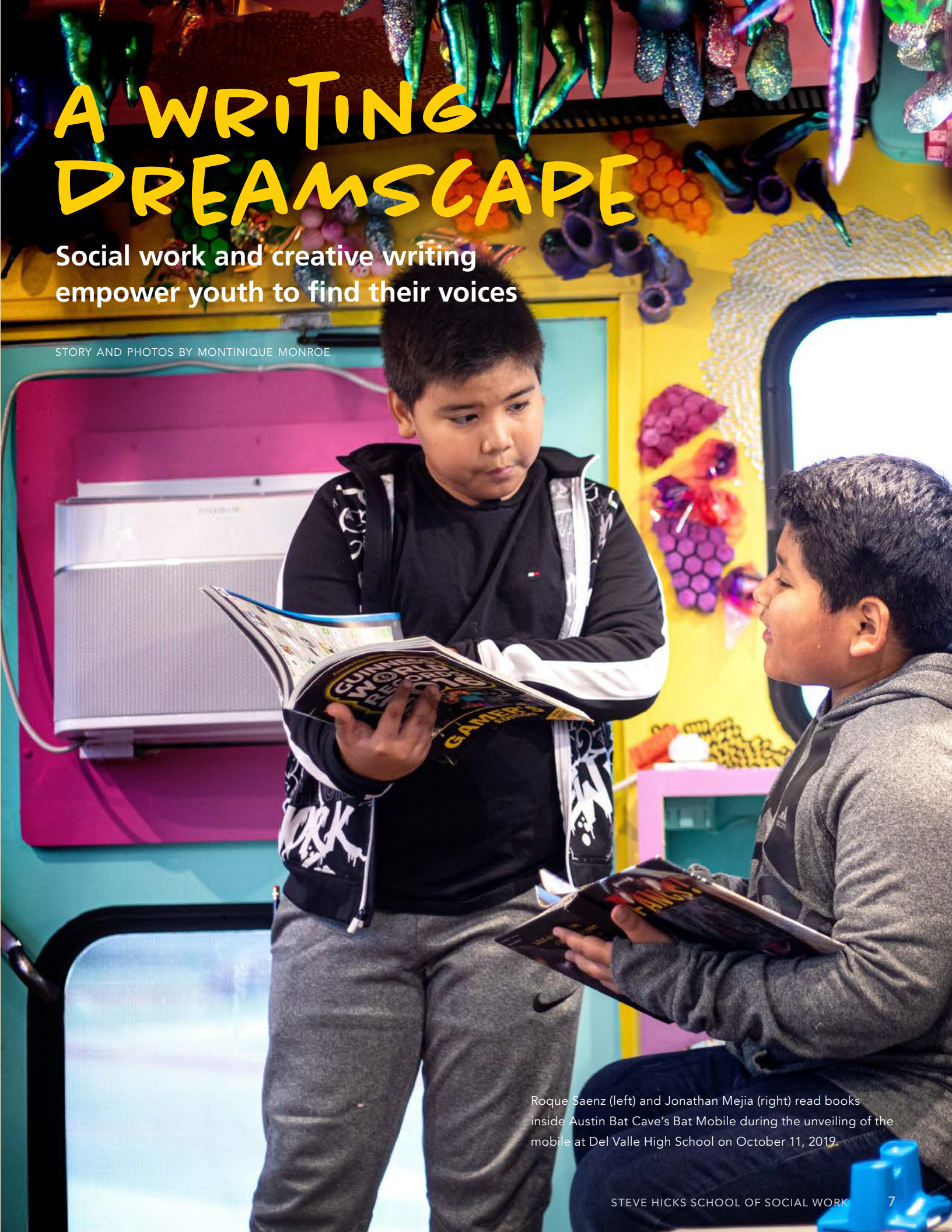


Violence experienced through the eyes of a migrant child, as reflected in a picture drawn during a mental health evaluation. © Luis H. Zayas

A WRITING DREAMSCAPE

Social work and creative writing empower youth to find their voices

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MONTINIQUE MONROE



Roque Saenz (left) and Jonathan Mejia (right) read books inside Austin Bat Cave's Bat Mobile during the unveiling of the mobile at Del Valle High School on October 11, 2019.



Austin Bat Cave volunteers Patrick Rihlman (left) and Mary Johnson (right) listen to students read their stories in the Bat Mobile on December 11, 2019.

"MY FAVORITE THING ABOUT WRITING IS THAT YOU HAVE TO PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU'RE WRITING ABOUT. WHEN YOU'RE WRITING, YOU'RE GIVING YOUR HAND AN EXERCISE."

GERRY

Two vibrant energetic third graders spring out of their cafeteria lunch table seats as the after-school program counselor says it's time to make their way toward the Austin Bat Cave Bat Mobile.

"Excuse me miss, are you the new Austin Bat Cave teacher," Gerry, 9, asked *The Utopian* as he walked toward Mary Johnson, ABC's actual volunteer.

Gerry couldn't wait to get back inside the Bat Mobile, a short bright yellow and baby blue CapMetro bus converted into a mobile writing lab. Every inch of the mobile's colorful walls was covered with paper bats, magical tentacles and decorative lights to resemble an underwater cave. It was a dreamscape, filled with books ranging from "Guinness World Records" to "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" sitting in little cubbies throughout the mobile. Writing prompts written on little pieces of paper were hidden in tiny spaces all over the bus for students to find and discover the beauty of creative writing.

"I wish I was in Austin Bat Cave every day," Gerry said. "My favorite thing about writing is that you have to pay close attention to what you're writing about. When you're writing, you're giving your hand an exercise."

Gerry was overjoyed. Over the course of four weeks he'd worked on a spooky story about a ghost who had joined him, uninvited, in a game of Fortnite. He was eager to complete the final tasks: selecting a title, writing a dedication and creating artwork for the cover. Above all, Gerry had to prepare to read his story in front of dozens of students and teachers.

As a nonprofit, Austin Bat Cave (ABC) provides literacy, storytelling and writing workshops for youth and adults.

Heather Jones (MSSW '15), ABC's program director who received her bachelor's degree in French and comparative literature, began her journey with the nonprofit as a volunteer at Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center in 2011. Writing sessions with youth at the center often evoked past histories of trauma and depression and Jones sometimes didn't know what to do in those situations.

"It was a transformative experience for me, mostly because I'd never witnessed what was happening inside a detention facility," Jones said. "I was really concerned about a lot of the things I witnessed. I started to feel that I wanted to get involved with either preventative work or criminal justice reform to prevent kids from ever being in a situation where they're incarcerated."

Jones entered the Master of Science in Social Work program at UT-Austin with clear goals in mind. She wanted to learn about criminal justice reform and restorative justice practices so she could be more prepared to address the emotional and personal experiences that come up for youth while writing. As a student at the Steve Hicks School, Jones co-developed a 10-week protocol for using writing in detention facilities with her friend and teaching partner Louise Hanks (MSSW '15). The protocol, called Write to Restore, is used in ABC's programs to this day.

"What we're trying to do is help youth understand the emotions they're feeling, process difficult experiences they've been through and learn positive coping skills to help them deal with stress," Jones said. "As a social worker, I've realized that writing can be an effective tool for that. I want Austin Bat Cave to be a way for people interested in working on criminal justice related change to connect with youth or people who are incarcerated."

"WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO IS HELP YOUTH UNDERSTAND THE EMOTIONS THEY ARE FEELING [...] AND LEARN POSITIVE COPING SKILLS. AS A SOCIAL WORKER, I'VE LEARNED THAT WRITING CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR THAT."
HEATHER JONES



Heather Jones (left), ABC regional program manager Leticia Urieta (middle) and LEAD Coordinator Maria Allen (right) pose for a photo in front of the Bat Mobile at Del Valle High School on Oct. 11, 2019. Urieta organizes and runs the Bat Mobile program.

Austin Bat Cave's work has been made possible with help from volunteers and interns. For the 2019-2020 school year, Avery Nelson (MSSW '21) will serve as the nonprofit's first official social work intern. But the Steve Hicks School's strong ties to Austin's restorative justice community connected Brooke Bernard (BSW '19) to the organization in January 2019.

As an ABC volunteer Bernard facilitated writing workshops for a diverse group of male teenagers at Giddings State School, a maximum security juvenile facility for youth who've committed violent crimes such as murder and aggravated robbery. Bernard used music as a way to connect with them, allowing them to pitch their favorite songs to analyze. They selected "Pride" by rapper Kevin Gates and listened to the lyrics to discuss underlying meanings of the song and how it applies to their lives. Then they began writing. The exercise brought out myriad emotions for everyone.

"I went home and cried because it was my first time interacting with youth behind bars and it was a lot," Bernard said. "They were so real and open. You make things a reality when you speak it out loud. You can think about it all day but when you actually speak it out, it's a whole different thing."

In 2019, ABC served 1,099 students and partnered with 38 schools and nonprofits to lead 57 programs taught by 167 volunteers. With much more work to do and many more communities to serve, Jones said she looks forward to exposing more youth like Gerry to creative writing.

As the final writing session of the semester came to an end, Gerry sat in a chair in the back of the Bat Mobile preparing to read his story aloud in front of *The Utopian*, ABC's volunteers and one of his peers.

"Are you nervous Gerry," *The Utopian* asked.

"I'm not worried, I've got this," he replied.

Then he began reading.



Austin's quickly changing landscape as a result of gentrification led Austin Bat Cave's executive director Ali Haider to pitch the creation of the Bat Mobile. The goal was to create a mobile classroom that would specifically serve more rural communities outside of Austin such as Del Valle where there's less access to museums, public events, parks, creative arts activities and after school programs.





More than a diagnosis

A first-of-its-kind Department of Health Social Work reflects medicine's need to see the whole person – and the whole system.

BY HANNAH JANE COLLINS. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DELL MEDICAL SCHOOL

“Build a workforce to integrate social care into health delivery.”
That’s one of the top directives in a recent report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. And, after 18 months of gathering evidence on how to incorporate social determinants of health into care delivery, the committee concluded that social work sets the foundation for improving the health of the whole person.

A longer version of this story was published in the December 2019 issue of *REthink New Perspectives on Health*

Enter the Department of Health Social Work at Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin, established in 2019 as the first of its kind. A collaboration with the Steve Hicks School of Social Work, the department creates an academic home for social workers at Dell Med and builds on interprofessional training that places social work students side-by-side with medical, nursing and pharmacy students.

“Interprofessional health training has been a focus of Dell Med since it opened,” Barbara Jones, social work professor and the department’s inaugural chair, said. “It started with the course ‘Foundations of Interprofessional Collaborative Practice,’ which brings together faculty and students from the health professional schools at UT Austin to work and learn together.”

The structure of the department reflects the need for social work to be a building block of interprofessional health teams. Licensed social workers embedded in teams across the Dell Med enterprise—as clinical social workers, researchers, administrative directors and program managers—are all members of the department as well as of their own individual units. They also qualify for faculty appointments at the Steve Hicks School.

Care for mind and body

Before she arrived at Dell Med’s Musculoskeletal Institute, Cynthia Corral (MSSW ‘06) had gained experience as a medical social worker in Austin’s major care providers for both insured and uninsured populations.

At the institute, Corral and fellow social workers provide mental health care and care coordination for patients. With the benefit of a shared academic home, the social work team can more easily pinpoint opportunities to improve.

One example? Corral and her teammates noticed that many chronic pain patients had histories of complex traumas such as physical or sexual abuse or a history of incarceration.

“The more you experience pain, the more attuned to it you are; it’s a fight-or-flight response, which is exactly what’s experienced with trauma. The physical pain symptoms can become exacerbated as a result,” Corral said.



Social workers are essential care providers on the patient-centered team at UT Health Austin’s Musculoskeletal Institute. Left to right: Sylvia Deily, DC; Cynthia Corral, LCSW; Mark Queralto, M.D

To better help these patients, Corral and her teammates trained in cognitive processing therapy, a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder that has been shown to clinically reduce symptoms over time.

Karl Koenig, medical director of the Musculoskeletal Institute, says that having social workers play a direct role in care makes the institute’s patient-centered approach much more effective.

“Our clinical outcomes in the Back and Neck Pain Center are some of the best I’ve ever seen: 65% of patients report improvement within six months,” Koenig said. “The combined approach there includes cognitive behavioral therapy and incorporating social workers in the coordination of follow-up care. Having that touchpoint leads to massively improved outcomes, including fewer unnecessary ER visits.”

Research with a social work angle

The benefits of a multidisciplinary team in the context of patient care are clear. Research is perhaps a less obvious setting where social work, and interprofessional practice more broadly, makes a difference.

Shadia Lahlou (MSSW ‘16) is a research project manager in Dell Med’s departments of Oncology and Internal Medicine. She is currently coordinating the launch of a pilot study focused on improving support for patients with breast cancer.

“People are often surprised to hear about the work I do, or think that you have to have an M.D. or Ph.D. to do clinical research,” Lahlou said. “When I apply my social work and public health skillset,

I can bring a macro lens that focuses on individuals in their lived environment. This helps with effective translation of studies to the real world.”

Following the creation of the Department of Health Social Work, Lahlou became an associate professor of practice at the Steve Hicks School, where she can teach current social work students how to impact health through research.

A social justice framework

If you ask Jesús Ortega, a school like Dell Med can’t properly serve community members and patients if its own culture is not built on a foundation of equity.

As director of Dell Med’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Ortega works with faculty and staff on workplace bias and the pursuit of equity in their own work. He says that the opportunities to create a more equitable health system are numerous, from hiring decisions to addressing bias in patient care and more.

Ortega also holds an assistant professor of practice appointment at the Steve Hicks School, which enables him to be a faculty facilitator for the “Foundations of Interprofessional Practice” course. He works with Jones to teach students how to recognize and reduce implicit bias to improve care.

“Social workers are, by default, trained on a foundation of social justice and equity,” Ortega said. “It’s that lens that allows me to have a broader effect on health than I would have through one-on-one case management. I can bring my expertise to work that focuses on inclusivity and understanding by all professionals who touch a person’s health.”



Stories of Return

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ROSA ALVAREZ VELEZ

"WE DON'T OFTEN HEAR THE STORIES OF RETURNEES [...] IN THE LARGER MIGRATION STORY, RETURNEES ARE JUST ONE MORE STATISTIC, ANONYMOUS PEOPLE FOR WHOM THE AMERICAN DREAM NEVER COMES TRUE."

Most of us have heard the stories of immigrants who come to the United States in search for a better life but are forced into the shadows, the horror stories of separation at the border, and what happens inside immigrant detention centers.

But we don't often hear the stories of returnees, that is, migrants who are deported or who, for a host of different reasons, decide to return to their countries of origin. In the larger migration story, returnees are just one more statistic, anonymous people for whom the "American dream" never comes true.

As part of my graduate work at UT Austin, I traveled to Guatemala last summer to interview female returnees. Talking to these women, I learned that each story is unique, that life continues after returning, and that people find resilient ways of surviving and thriving in the midst of much pain and struggle.

Here I highlight the impact that migration had on the familial relationships of four of the women who shared their stories with me. These are only glimpses into their lives and cannot encompass their full experience and resilience.

Maricruz

32 years old, migrated as unaccompanied minor, voluntary return at age 17

"I would tell myself that I was going to work hard, I was going to help my grandmother, I was going to send for my sister [who stayed back in Guatemala]. I was going to do for my sister what my mom couldn't do. I quickly learned that I could not just send for my sister to come to the United States, and that she couldn't migrate the way I did because she struggled with schizophrenia. In 2002, after spending years in the United States, my family learned that someone had broken into our house in Guatemala and sexually abused my sister. My mom was making plans to return when I volunteered to come back myself. My baby brother had just been born, and he needed my mom to stay.

"Part of me arrived extremely sad. I had left family and the possibilities of having a different future. As a little girl I never had to worry about what was going on around me: if there was violence, if there were bills to pay. All of a sudden, I had to adapt to something completely different and take charge of my own responsibilities. In the United States, despite the fact that I was 17, it was as if my mom held my hand. But there was no one to hold my hand when I came back to Guatemala. On the contrary, I had to hold my sister's hand and guide her. From one day to the next, I transformed from being a girl into being a woman. As time went on, I realized that people here have the perspective that if you've lived in the United States you are promiscuous, so I would get harassed a lot. I had to fight against that, take my place and show everyone that I wasn't the way they saw me. It was crazy to think about the fact that I traveled alone to the United States when I was 11 and no one laid a hand on me, but I was raped by someone who I thought was my friend when I came back to Guatemala. I regretted ever coming back."



Alejandra

44 years old, deported after living in United States for more than 20 years, separated from her son

"During our first two years back in Guatemala we stayed focused and felt productive while taking care of our new restaurant. It was almost as if nothing had changed. We were so busy trying to be providers for our son, who we brought back with us, that we didn't realize that he was going through a very severe depression. We tried to find the best place possible for him, but it wasn't easy because he really struggled to adjust here. It was a very difficult decision for us because he is our only son, but when we asked him if he wanted to go back to the United States and he said yes, we realized it was the right thing to do.

"That is the hardest part of me until this day, and I think it will always be. I have missed so many important events in my son's life and it's something that I haven't overcome. As a mother it is very hard because I couldn't be there when he graduated [from] middle school, I couldn't be there when he graduated [from] high school, and so many other really important things. As much as it hurts, I can't be selfish to have him close to me if he has other aspirations in life. He returned to the United States when he was 12 and has lived with a few different friends who have very kindly offered to help. But he really struggled in high school because he had to wake up at 4:30 in the morning to take three buses to school. When it rained, he would get wet, when it was cold, he would suffer through it. Those are the things that as a mother make me feel absolutely horrible."

Valeria

41 years old, reunited with oldest son in Guatemala after living in the United States for 10 years

"My son was two-and-a-half years old when I left him on my journey to reunite with my husband in the United States. At the moment that I left, I wanted to take him with me, and it was always my intention to send for him. But the years passed, and we began to create a new life in the United States. In 2004 we made a very abrupt decision to return to Guatemala after we experienced some violence in the business we owned. At that point my son was already 12 years old, and I was filled with emotion thinking about how long we had been away from him. One can't stop them from growing, I have to educate him, be with him, spend time with him, take care of him. I had stopped sharing time with him for many years, and my husband hadn't seen him since he was 3 months old.

"It was hard to communicate with him when we were reunited. Four years after we returned, he finally started expressing the resentment he felt toward us and began to reject us. He felt abandoned because we left him, and he felt that we prioritized the other children over him. Migration has many positive and negative consequences. For us, the positives were economic, but the negatives were deeply personal."



Elena

31 years old, signed voluntary deportation at age 18 after living in United States since age 6

"I had depression when I was a teenager so when a friend in high school who was always happy told me that he was taking some type of 'natural' medication that would help him out and asked me if I wanted to try it, I thought, 'I've tried everything to make me happy it doesn't work, so if it makes you happy let's do it.' I took a pill before going to school the following morning and when I got there, I felt like I was going to die. My face got numb, I stopped talking, and I had to be taken to the hospital.

"My dad went back to school the next day with the pill I had left to make sure there were consequences for the person who gave them to me. But instead, I got locked up right then and there. I was in jail for 14 days with women who had committed much more serious crimes than me. I felt like it was unfair that they were punishing me so harshly for what I did, but because I was undocumented, I didn't have any choices. A few days later I saw that the guy who gave me the pills was arrested, but because he's a citizen, he was only locked up for a few days before he got

out. He got to go home, and I got deported. People told me to run away, but I would have been hiding my entire life and I knew that eventually they would get me, and it would be worse. Instead, I signed my voluntary departure so I could spend my last 6 months with my family and friends.

"Now that I am here, apart from struggling to get used to how different everything is here, I miss my mom. I miss her face, hugging her, seeing her in the morning. I miss her perfumes. Not having her here has been the hardest part. I know if I had her here with me, I would be doing even better than I am on my own. If you go and ask my mom about me, she'll tell you all my qualities, and I always feel how much she loves and supports me. I even miss her scolding me."

* Rosa Alvarez Velez is a master's student completing a dual degree in social work and Latin American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin.

MAPPING OUT YOUR CAREER

Strategic career planning involves identifying opportunities in your current situation that will propel your career to the next level.

JENNIFER LUNA, director of the DiNitto Career Center, shares six strategies to ensure that your next career move contributes to a clear and logical trajectory when you put it on your résumé.



1. EXPLORE CERTIFICATIONS

Certifications go beyond CEUs; they are programs that demonstrate a specific competence on an advanced level (for example, Dialectical Behavior Therapy or DBT). Do your research before your next job interview or performance evaluation: identify what credential you would like to have, how it relates to your current job and career goals, how much it costs, and whether your employer can pay for it.

2. RECOGNIZE TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Transferable skills are portable, make you unique and help you set a niche for yourself. Examples are communication (writing, presenting, clinical documentation), supervision (hiring, training, orienting, supervision), leadership (advocacy, project management, ability to inspire others), and social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, blog writing). It is important to identify the transferable skills you have and be able to articulate them for employers.

3. USE CE STRATEGICALLY

Continuing education is required of all social workers, but what is your plan? Use continuing education as an opportunity to add to your toolbox, and choose carefully according to your career goals. Take advantage of two-for-one opportunities—for example, if you are interested in trauma-informed care, you might choose a course on trauma-informed care and ethics. Think about who else may be participating in these trainings and what networking opportunities they offer.

4. JOIN THE “CORPS” OF SPECIALIZED PROFESSIONALS

For virtually every area of social work, there is an organization or group to participate in. Begin with the National Association of Social Workers, which

has practice sections for nearly all areas of our profession. Continue by searching for like-minded professionals through advocacy groups, LinkedIn groups or alumni networks. Once you find your community, volunteer to be a leader—take meeting notes, chair a committee, or run for office. All these steps will refine your expertise in the subject area and develop your leadership skills.

5. CONVEY YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO OTHERS

A way to start sharing your expertise is by presenting at your favorite conference. Learn how to write abstracts and workshop proposals. To approach your first proposal, you may want to team up with someone in your field you trust and work together to co-present. After you have completed your proposal, always get writing feedback to assure your product is perfectly edited.

6. CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROFESSION

The best way to contribute to the profession and gain skills at the same time is to narrow down the practice area or population that you want to focus on and others are inquiring about. You can share your expertise through workshops, guest lectures, panels, or publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Or you may want to become a field instructor or adjunct faculty. Or perhaps you are drawn to writing letters to the editor, leading advocacy efforts, or serving as a consultant. This is your time to shine and contribute to the profession and social work education. Always remember that collaborating with others is imperative to growing your network and sharing your knowledge.

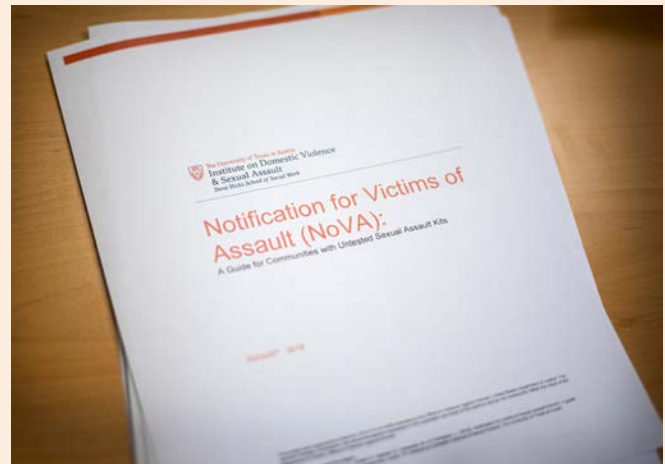
*For more career resources, visit socialwork.utexas.edu/dccs. A longer version of this article was published in the Fall 2019 issue of *The New Social Worker*, tiny.cc/mapyourcareer.*

HOW TO NOTIFY VICTIMS WHEN SEXUAL ASSAULT KITS ARE TESTED

Many communities and police departments across the country are clearing their caches of untested sexual assault evidence kits, but they face a challenging question: how best to notify the victims. In some cases, when the sexual assault evidence kits are processed, investigations are reopened, and the sexual assault victim may be involved again. The ways in which victims are reengaged is critical to the victim's well-being and to the investigation and potential prosecutions.

The Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault has responded to this national need by developing "Notification for victims of assault (NoVA): A guide for communities with untested sexual assault kits." The guide distills best practices and current science into an empirically based five-step process called the NoVA Change Process, which provides a framework for confronting unique challenges and opportunities in a manner tailored to local realities and needs.

Learn more: sites.utexas.edu/idvsa



Poster award

Master's students Corinna Archer Kinsman, Jeremy Bennick, Diandrea Garza, Hannah Garza, and Mark McKim received third place Outstanding Graduate Student Poster Presentation at the 43rd Annual NASW Texas Conference last fall. Their poster offered a critical analysis and strategic action plan to address the school-to-prison pipeline.



Twitter and mental health

What do health providers and patients tweet about schizophrenia? Professor Mercedes Hernandez is a co-author on a study that answered this question by exploring trends in health information about schizophrenia exchanged by patients, doctors, and health organizations through tweets posted using the hashtag #schizophrenia.

Study results indicated that most tweets focused on improving schizophrenia literacy, followed by personal experience or motivational stories and biological explanations of the disorder. Results of the study were published in the journal *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*.

New LGBTQ-affirming training curriculum for healthcare settings

In 2016, researcher Amy Lodge from the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health administered a survey to staff at Texas local mental health authorities to assess providers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes on culturally affirming care to LGBTQ populations. She found that a majority of providers felt that gender identity and sexual orientation were not relevant to their work. And, although attitudes towards the LGBTQ community were generally positive, providers lacked the knowledge and skills to offer culturally-affirming care.

Lodge assembled a workgroup composed of individuals in the LGBTQ community with lived experience working as peers in behavioral health service settings, with the goal of developing a comprehensive, organization-wide training. The result was *Creating Affirming Environments for LGBTQ People Receiving Services*, a four-module training package designed to be used in orientations for new employees, including everyone from front-desk staff to clinicians to leadership and the maintenance team.

Learn more: tiny.cc/lgbtq-affirming-care





Health and Latino children with IDD

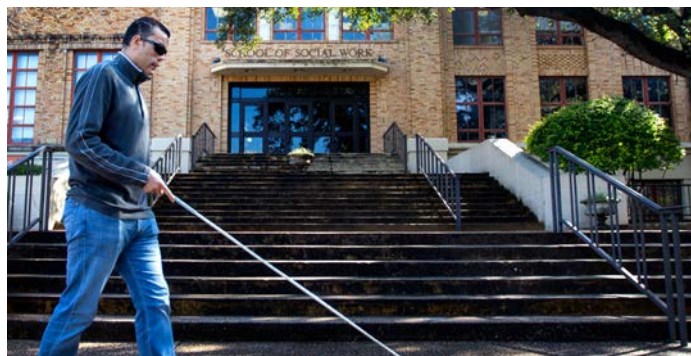
Children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the United States are more likely to be obese than non-disabled children. In addition, Latino children have higher rates of obesity than white children. Despite these disparities, there is very limited research on health and obesity among Latino children and adolescents with IDD.

Professor Sandy Magaña is addressing this gap through a new project funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. The goals of the project are to generate new knowledge about Latino children with IDD and their health, and to develop and test an intervention to promote healthy lifestyles among Latino children and adolescents with IDD and their families.



Field Liaison of the Year

Professor Dede Sparks was selected as the 2019-2020 Field Liaison of the Year by the Texas Field Educator's Consortium. This award recognizes excellent work with field practicum students and contributions to social work education.



A second chance

Social work major Qusay Hussein was featured on a Guardian article about people who are given a second chance in life. Hussein, a native of Iraq, suffered life-threatening injuries as a victim of a suicide bombing in 2006, when he was 17 years old. He lost half of his face and his vision. He came to the United States as a medical refugee through Doctors Without Borders. Hussein graduated from Austin Community College in 2006 and is now a double major in psychology and social work at UT Austin. He is also an advocate for refugees and people with disabilities.



Advocacy matters

Professor Michele Rountree is a co-instructor of Community Classroom, a UT Austin initiative that offers advocacy training and resources for concerned residents in low-income neighborhoods. Spearheaded by the Center for Community Engagement, this eight-week course pulls from lessons taught in Rountree's undergraduate course on the U.S. welfare system.

"The way I teach at the university is to demystify individual opportunity to contribute to social change," Rountree said. "Many of the issues addressed in this course weren't new to the community members, but the lessons they learned heightened their understanding of the solutions."

Read more: diversity.utexas.edu/access



Outstanding citizen

Professor Lori Holleran Steiker received the 2019 Civitatis Award from The University of Texas at Austin. This university-wide award honors outstanding citizenship on campus.



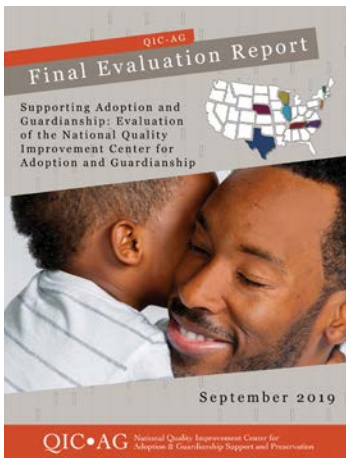
Podcast

Professor Eboni Calbow shared parenting tips and tricks on how to survive the school years in the November 6, 2019 episode of the podcast The TopKnot Squad.



Book award

Professor Noël Busch-Armendariz won the Hamilton Book Award – Textbook for the book Human trafficking: Applying research, theory, and case studies (Sage), co-written with Maura Nsonwu and Laurie Cook Heffron (PhD '15).



Supporting Adoption and Guardianship

Last October the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing released findings from the National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation.

Through this five-year project, a multidisciplinary research team worked with eight sites across the nation (Texas, Vermont, Illinois, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Catawba County in North Carolina, and the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) to implement evidence-based interventions or develop and test promising practices to achieve long-term, stable permanence in adoptive and guardianship homes.

Find the reports: tiny.cc/supporting-adoption



Making science inclusive

As a blind undergraduate studying psychology and trying to accumulate research participation hours, Nazanin Heydarian found that most studies either excluded her as a disabled student or were unwelcoming. She remembers showing up for a study and awkwardly rearranging the computer monitor and keyboard to accommodate her own usable vision while the research assistants watched without knowing what to do.

Heydarian, who is now a post-doctoral fellow at the Steve Hicks School, shares resources to enhance the accessibility of research for disabled participants in the October issue of the Observer Magazine: psychologicscience.org/observer.



American dream at stake

Master's student Anayeli Marcos was one of four Dreamers interviewed by USA Today last November, as the U.S. Supreme Court took up the Trump administration's plan to end DACA. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, established during the Obama administration, has provided a reprieve for some undocumented immigrants who, like Marcos, were brought to the United States as children.

"It feels, in a way, very surreal. Sometimes it's a bit overwhelming, feeling that your fate is in the hands of people who don't know you," said Marcos, who is in the dual degree program with Latin American Studies.

Older adults and marijuana

The latest surveys and research indicate that marijuana acceptance and use among older adults are increasing. Explanations for this trend include the aging of the Baby Boomers—whose attitudes toward psychoactive drugs are more relaxed than those of their predecessors—and the growing number of states with medical and recreational marijuana use laws.



And yet, despite this trend, scientific evidence on marijuana short- and long-term health effects is slim. In a recent article published in Public Policy & Aging Report, Namkee Choi and Diana DiNitto conclude that while a majority of older adults appear to use marijuana medically or recreationally without problems, epidemiologic studies show significant associations between marijuana use and polysubstance use, comorbid psychiatric disorders, DUI, and injuries. They also found that these problems are more applicable to long-term, chronic users than to new users who began using marijuana medically.

Awards from the Office of Field Education



2019 Field Instructor of the Year Award

Rob Thurlow, clinical field director at LifeWorks.



2019 Friend of Field Award

Sarah Frazier, third from left, and the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System.



Mapping veteran service organizations

The Institute for Military and Veteran Family Wellness has partnered with the nonprofit Combined Arms to conduct a comprehensive mapping of veteran service organizations in the Greater Austin area—Bastrop, Hays, Caldwell, Williamson, and Travis Counties.

The information, collected through surveys, will help veterans identify organizations near them, and learn about the types of services they provide. The goal of the project is to improve connections among organizations and the veterans and family members they serve.



A bittersweet burden

Doctoral student Christian Vazquez is part of an interdisciplinary team that received the President's Award for Global Learning in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean region for 2020.

The team will receive up to \$25,000 and fully-funded travel to implement the project, "A bittersweet burden: Understanding causes and consequences of diabetes complications using design-thinking in Puebla, Mexico."



Being first-gen

The transition from high school to UT Austin wasn't easy for social work major Grace Farley. As a first-generation college student, the application process was a challenge in itself. But becoming a full-time student brought even more stress and pressure.

Farley eventually learned that adjusting to college life isn't an overnight process. She is now helping other students who share her story through her position as resident assistant (RA) for the university's first residence hall for first-gen students.

"I wanted to be an RA because they're close to first-year students and support them as they go through the difficult journey of learning how to love themselves," Farley said. "I'm comfortable with the messy and complicated parts of life. I want to be a friend and an ally to my residents as they face setbacks."



Substance use in Texas

In the latest report about Texas substance use trends, professor Jane Maxwell shares the following findings:

Methamphetamine is the top DEA-reported drug threat.

The Texas Prescription Monitoring Program has led to a decrease in prescriptions of opiate, synthetic narcotic, and benzodiazepine drugs.

Texas' response to the opioid epidemic has resulted in additional outreach and training to prevent overdoses.

Cannabis indicators are focusing on effects of CBD oils, edibles and other products brought in from states where they are legal. In the past, indicators had focused on the quantity and quality of cannabis imported from Mexico.

Read the full report: tiny.cc/drug-trends-Texas



Collaboration with Chile

Professor Rubén Parra-Cardona co-led the training of the first generation of Chilean interventionists who will become certified in culturally adapted versions of GenerationPMTO. GenerationPMTO is an evidence-based, structured intervention designed to help parents strengthen families at all levels.

Looking for CEUs?

MARCH 26

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What Are You Thankful For?

BY ALLAN HUGH COLE JR.

Allan Hugh Cole Jr. hugs his wife and daughter during the New York City Marathon, November 2019. Photo by Andre Costantini.

It's bedtime for our young daughters, Meredith and Holly. They have taken baths, put on pajamas, and brushed teeth. Their mom Tracey and I have read a nightly lineup of books to them. The smell of lavender baby shampoo, lingering on still damp brown bangs that fall just above sleepy eyes, prompts my delight.

All of us sit on Meredith's bed preparing for the last nightly ritual.

"Ready, Mommy?" Holly asks as Tracey smiles, "...What are you thankful for?"

We then each take turns speaking about our gratitude for what we have and experience.

Challenges to Gratitude

I think a lot about gratitude these days. Three years ago I felt my life more or less had ended with a Parkinson's diagnosis at the age of 48.

With chronic illness, gratitude can be elusive. When I labor to button my shirt with stiff fingers, or on my fourth night of waking up at 2:00 a.m., unlikely to fall back asleep, it's hard to feel grateful. When I have painful cramping in my toes and feet—a condition called dystonia and a common Parkinson's symptom—gratitude remains a distant thought at best; just as it is when my legs feel like they have cinder blocks tied to them as I walk.

Cicero observed, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others." As a result, we benefit from practicing gratitude as often as possible, and especially when facing life's challenges.

Getting to Grateful

How do I get to gratitude?

First, I *acknowledge* my hardships, including the things I have lost or will never have. It is essential to recognize and affirm what causes pain, disappointment, anger, sadness, regret, fear, or any other feeling that accompanies my struggles. In order to feel grateful, I must first recognize challenges to gratitude.

Second, I have to *accept* my illness. I don't live with resignation, but I have to accept my situation as something that has to be, perhaps forever. Going forward, life will be different, but it can still be good. As Michael J. Fox points out, "Acceptance doesn't mean resignation; it means understanding that something is what it is and that there's got to

be a way through it."

Third, I focus on what I *do* have, on what I have not lost, including aspects of my life not diminished by Parkinson's. I also focus on how my life is better by virtue of living with this disease.

I consider how my relationships deepened, values shifted, and priorities changed; how my hopes and dreams morphed into more beautiful and life giving possibilities; how I am graced by new friendships with those in the Parkinson's community.

Finally, I recognize hardships more severe than mine. Never would I hope to benefit from someone else's adversity or despair. In fact, I want to be a source of comfort and joy. But when I pay closer attention to others and empathize with their struggles, I often find that my own difficulties pale in comparison. I acknowledge that "it can always be worse" and for some it already is.

Practicing the Refrain

When gratitude eludes me, I ask myself, "What are you thankful for?" Then, I look at what I have, or could have; at what enhances my life, relationships, sense of purpose and meaning, ability to support others, and new goals. I consider the abundance with which I live.

Oliver Sachs, a renowned neurologist, pioneered the use of a drug called levodopa, which remains the gold standard for Parkinson's treatment. Learning he had terminal cancer, he wrote the following, "I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written... Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure."

I think of these words often, grateful that my own privilege and adventure continues.

Allan Hugh Cole Jr. is a professor in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. A version of this piece appeared in PDWise (pdwise.com), a blog that seeks to be a hub for sharing personal stories, experiences, and wisdom gained from living with Parkinson's.



What's new? Share your personal or professional news with us: utopian@utlists.utexas.edu

'68 Mary Ellen Branan, MSSW '68, received her PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Houston in 1991. She has published a poetry collection, *Weavings* (Blue Light Press, 2011), which won the 2011 "Best Book of Poetry" from Peace Corps Writers. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Poland, 1994-96. Mary Ellen currently lives in Bastrop.

Stuart Jacobson, MSSW '68, is a semi-retired clinical social worker. He received his PhD in East-West Existentialism from Union Institute and University in 1996. He has had a private practice since 1973, taught at Oklahoma College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery, and occasionally provides continuing education workshops. He is currently writing a book on the search for meaning. On a personal level, Stuart has been through two cancers but has been stable during the last eight years.

'78 Michael Daley (PhD student 1976-78) was recently named a Social Work Pioneer by the National Association of Social Workers for his advocacy in favor of BSW education and his contributions to the field of rural social work. He is currently professor and chair of the Department of Social Work at Texas A&M University.

'81 Miguel Ramirez, BSW '81, has retired and lives in Washington, D.C.

'82 Ilene Babs Federman, MSSW '82, has retired and lives in Roswell, Georgia

'87 Ron Ambruster, MSSW '87, and Peg Gavin, MSSW '89, will be celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary this September. They met through their social work internship with Austin Wilderness Counseling, and had a long and fulfilling social work career serving the needs of children and families in Austin. They have recently retired and are enjoying live music and traveling.

'89 Rhonda McDuffie Chambers, MSSW '89, is a social worker at the Institute of Surgical Research – Burn Clinic in San Antonio, Texas.

'92 Anthony Scott, BSW '92, is chief juvenile probation officer in Liberty County, Texas.

'94 Kate Allen, MSSW '94, is a therapist at Montgomery County Government. Kate feels that she has had a very rewarding and successful social work career. She has been licensed in five states and lived and worked in three of them. She never had difficulty finding a job when relocating. Twenty-five years after graduation, she is still in contact with

her field supervisor. She has worked with social work graduates from many other institutions and feels that her education has always proven to be far above what others received and experienced. Kate wrote, "I could not be prouder or happier to be a Texas Exes!"

John Phillip Brown, BSW '94, is an assistant principal at Frisco ISD in Texas. John received a Master of Special Education from Texas A&M-Commerce in 2002.

'96 LeShawn (Dempsey) Arbuckle, MSSW '96, is Division Director of Counseling Services at LifeWorks. In addition to her regular duties as director, she has stepped in as project manager for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to help LifeWorks journey to becoming a more equitable agency for clients and staff.

'97 Lee Gustafson, PhD '97, MSSW '92, BSW '91, has retired from teaching social work and serving as program director and chair of the master's and bachelor's program at The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. Lee has relocated to Texas and has been reminded of how hot the Texas summers can be!

Rosie Rodriguez, BSW '97, received her Master of Social Work from Texas State University in 2001 and is a licensed clinical social worker.

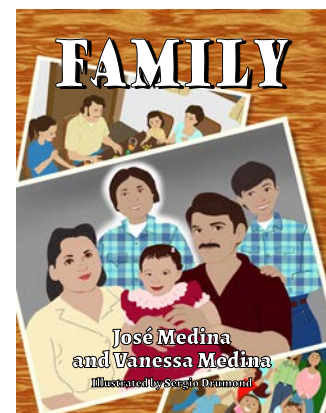
'98 Karen (Russell) Confer, MSSW '98, is a teen-parent coordinator at Round Rock ISD, Texas. She also has a part-time private practice where she sees children and adolescents. Her practice specialties are play therapy, EMDR, foster care and childhood trauma.

Deborah Stokes Sharp (MSSW '98, BSW '97) is director of the Conflict Mediation and Dispute Resolution Office at The University of Texas at Austin. As a Certified Group Psychotherapist, she also maintains a part-time private practice in the community where she runs Interpersonal Process Groups, as well as serving individuals and couples.

'00 Danielle (Van Cleave) Vice, MSSW '00, is living in Denver, Colorado.

'01 Mark Catalano, MSSW '01, has transitioned from a clinical role to an IT/relationship-management role in his new position as release coordinator with Texas Health and Human Services. Throughout his clinical social work career, Mark worked in management roles and ended up in charge of IT-related projects in hospitals and clinics. He always enjoyed the technical aspects of these projects. His current position allows him to use both sets of skills. He develops relationships with stakeholders, trains new product owners, and coordinates projects through an agile development process. The last of his four children will be leaving home for college this summer, and he has his first grandchild on the way in July

'02 Kristina Ramirez Wilson, MSSW '02, is Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment at Del Mar College, in Corpus Christi, Texas. She received her doctorate in education from Lamar University in 2016.



'06 Vanessa Medina, MSSW '06, has been working as a professional writer in the healthcare industry since 2015, after being in direct practice since graduation. Her first children's book, *Family*, has been recently published by Velázquez Press, in English and Spanish. *Family*, which she co-authored with her brother José Medina, is a collection of stories from their perspectives growing up on the Texas/Mexico border. In her spare time, Vanessa enjoys hanging out with her husband and miniature schnauzer.

'07 Laurie (Hernandez) Rios, MSSW '07, is a program manager at DataLogic Software, Inc. in Harlingen, Texas.

IN MEMORIAM

Dianna Flint Ashcraft, MSSW '68

Steve Cadwell, MSSW '80

Loren Pousson, MSSW '90

Faculty

Barbara E. Williams

Julia (Donnelly) Remington, MSSW '07, has transitioned from being the campus-based social worker at Reagan High School in Austin to being a mental health specialist for the Austin Independent School District. This transition has allowed her to enhance her clinical skills and have a better work/life balance. Julia is also launching a private practice with a focus on supervising LMSWs working towards becoming LCSWs.

'08 Carly Bassett, MSSW '08, received second place in the Adult Writing category in the 2019 Texas Mental Health Creative Arts Contest for her poem, "Because You Matter to Me."

'09 Rachel Carnahan-Metzger, MSSW '09, was a guest in the podcast Grief is a Sneaky Bitch, in the episode "It's out of order." She talked about what she has learned from accompanying parents as they endure the devastating illnesses and often death of their children. Listen to the podcast: <http://tiny.cc/rachel-carnahan>

'10 Anna (Phillips) Francis, MSSW '10, and Will Francis, MSSW '10, met as social work students in 2008. They married in 2011 and welcomed their third child this past February.

'11 Shannon (Schaefer) Perri, MSSW '11, BSW '09, earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Texas State University, where she teaches in the English department. Her story, "Liquid Gold," was one of the Texas Observer's 2019 short story contest finalists. She is at work on a novel set in Big Bend National Park.

Sean Michael Reilly, MSSW '11, has a private practice in Alpharetta, Georgia.

Cynthia Sorto, MSSW '11, is an assistant director in the Office of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Dallas.

'12 Clarissa Joy DiSantis Humphreys, MSSW '12, is the sexual misconduct prevention and response manager at Durham University in the United Kingdom. With co-author G. Towl, she has recently finished the book,

Addressing student sexual violence in Higher Education: A good practice guide (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing).

Lindsey Nowacki, MSSW '12, is a Kids Path Counselor at Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro, North Carolina.

Rebecca (Miller) Wickes, BSW '12, is a family coach at Stand Up Eight, a nonprofit program in Austin dedicated to empowering adoptive families by providing trauma-informed behavior management intervention in their homes.

'13 Tanne Gabler, MSSW '13, has opened her own child and family therapy practice, Play it Forward, LLC (www.playitforwardportland.com), in Portland, Maine, where she moved last summer. Tanne formerly worked with Dr. Eliana Gil at The Gil Institute for Trauma Recovery and Education, and brings Dr. Gil's philosophies into her practice.

Linda Rangel Gonzalez, MSSW '13, moved back to the Lone Star State, got married, and started a new job as site coordinator for Communities in Schools-North Texas.

Katherine Leigh Montgomery, PhD '13, MSSW '08, is an adjunct professor at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. She is also the owner of Little Sunshine's Playhouse and Preschool in the Nashville area, Tennessee.

Heidi Vance, MSSW '13, is a quality assurance manager for the State Supported Living Centers division of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. She and her wife, Alison, are still living in Austin and will celebrate 20 years together in 2020.

'14 Delilah Dominguez, MSSW '14, is a physician assistant student at Quinnipiac University. She has been recently elected to the American Academy of Physician Assistants' House of Delegates.

Cameron Dumas, MSSW '14, is a trauma therapist with Affinity – Family Support Services. She lives in Midland, Texas.

Katherine Keegan, MSSW '14, is director of the Office of the Future

of Work in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

Danielle Oviedo, MSSW '14, is a social worker at the University Transplant Center in San Antonio, Texas. She also is an LCSW.

Christian Rodriguez, BSW '14, got married to the love of his life, also a UT alum, in October of 2019. He is the operations coordinator of Trinity Center in downtown Austin, serving individuals experiencing homelessness. His main responsibilities include the agency's kitchen, which feeds 80-150 clients daily, and the financial assistance program, which helps clients obtain identification documents. He wrote, "I am still able to utilize my education within different aspects of my role, more in a non-profit management sense. I love it."

Annie Adams-Roselle, MSSW '14, and Alex Roselle, MSSW '13, are celebrating their third anniversary this March. They met in November 2012 when a group of social work students when together to Fun Fun Fun Fest. They live in Sacramento, California.

Audrey Vo, BSW '14, is an education and career development coordinator at The Gatehouse in Grapevine, Texas.

'15 Tiffany Allen, MSSW '15, is a therapist at Intervention Services in Austin.

Alison Mohr Boleware, MSSW '15, is an LMSW and the NASW/TX Government Relations Director. Prior to this position she worked as a health policy analyst in the Government Affairs Department of the Texas Medical Association. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and cat, traveling, hiking, finding new coffee shops, and relaxing with yoga.

Asia (Howard) Haynes, BSW '15, is a clinical case manager at LBJ General Hospital-Harris Health. She received her MSW from the University of Houston in 2016 and currently holds a license in the State of Texas.

Levi Josiah Marquez Mariano, MSSW '15, is a social worker at Community Regional Medical Center in Fresno, California.

'16 Aftyn Behn, MSSW '16, is senior regional organizer for Kentucky and Tennessee for Indivisible, a national grassroots organization that builds progressive political power.

Leah Mesches, MSSW '16, wrote "Can I really spend another summer working at camp?" for the American Camp Association blog. Leah has more than 13 years in the camp industry, and 30 summers at camp! She believes every student should work at least one summer at camp before joining the workforce. Read the blog: <http://tiny.cc/mesches-summer-camp>

Steven Moore, MSSW '16, BSW '15, has been accepted into the doctoral program for social work at The University of Texas at Arlington

Shubhada Saxena, MSSW '16, is the founder & CEO of Aspire to Age, PBC. She is no longer on the board of SAIVA (South Asians' International Volunteer Association) but volunteers as a founder to ensure succession as well as to build a chapter model to expand to other cities in collaboration with strategic partners.

Ellen (Barg-Walkow) Wilder, MSSW '16, is program coordinator at the SAFE Alliance in Austin.

Marley William, MSSW '16, is a health equity manager with Public Health Alliance of Southern California. She is based in San Diego, California.

'18 Lindsey Kay Honeycutt, MSSW '18, is the social services director at Gracy Woods Nursing Center in Austin.

Amber Mehrling, BSW '18, moved to San Luis Obispo, California, and is a general manager for Shake Smart--she worked at their Austin location as a student. Amber is looking for social work jobs in the area and thinking about what her next career steps will be--she is considering going back to school.

'19 Aranda Salazar, MSSW '19, BSW '14, is an assistant learning specialist in Intercollegiate Athletics, The University of Texas at Austin.



A win-win

Many Central Texas nonprofits can't host social work interns because they don't have master's level social workers on staff who can supervise students.

A new \$1.7 million grant from the St. David's Foundation addresses this challenge through the creation of the Earl Maxwell Scholars Program at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. During the next seven years, the program will support ten master's level social work students selected as Earl Maxwell Scholars each year as well as a full-time clinical faculty member to supervise these scholars in their internships.

The program honors Earl Maxwell, who retired as CEO of the St. David's Foundation in December 2019, after more than 12 years in that professional role.

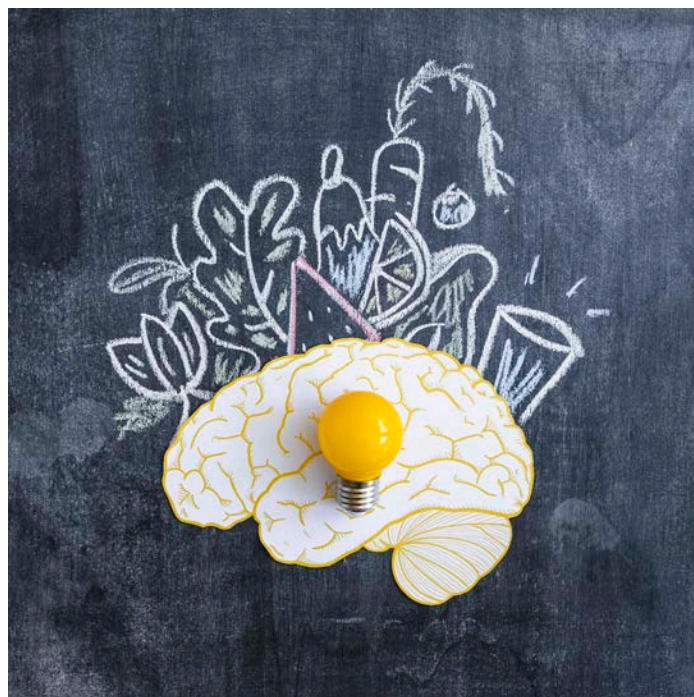
Food for thought

In 2014, social work faculty started an informal food pantry in the building to help students under financial stress have access to healthy meals. Under the motto "Take what you need; give what you can," the pantry offered canned and dry goods and functioned on a self-serve, anonymous fashion.

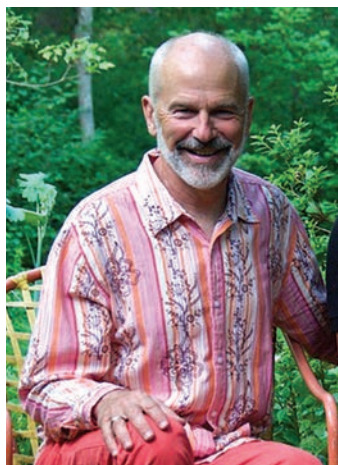
The pantry now receives donations through the school's Development Office and runs with the support of the Social Work Student Council. A 2019 internal survey found that 48% of social work students experience food insecurity—defined as "disruption in food intake because of lack of money or other resources"—and that 13% had used the food pantry when in need.

"I really appreciate the food pantry! Not only has it really helped me out in some tough times, I think it's also added significantly to building a community in the school."

—Anonymous survey respondent



Alan Silverman



Steven Cadwell

Alan Silverman and Steve Cadwell's legacy

The late Alan Silverman (MSSW '80) and Steven Cadwell (MSSW '80) were classmates, friends, and fellow LGBTQ activists. They treasured their time in the social work program and, through the establishment of an endowed fellowship, wanted to ensure that future generations of individuals committed to LGBTQ issues could attend the program and benefit from the diversity and classroom exchanges that were so enriching for them.

The Development Office is seeking to honor their legacy by raising the last \$10,000 needed to complete the Alan Silverman and Steve Cadwell Fellowship in LGBTQ Social Work Studies.

If you are interested in helping with this initiative, please contact Cassie Alvarado, 512-232-8376, cassiealvarado@austin.utexas.edu.



Supporting doctoral students

Sherry Miller Melecki Endowed Graduate Fellowship in Social Work

Sherry Melecki interacts daily with doctoral students through her job as graduate program coordinator at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. Since 2008, when she started, she has helped shepherd 94 doctoral students toward graduation.

“It is exciting to see the students come in, so full of ideas and energy,” she said. “They go through several developmental processes as PhD students—like asking themselves ‘what have I done!’ in the first semester or having impostor syndrome— and I find a lot of satisfaction in being there for them.”

Melecki always knew that she wanted to leave something that stayed beyond her time on Earth, but she was not sure what shape it would take. This past December, when she was making her yearly donation to the school, she realized that the Steve Hicks Matching Challenge was still open.

“I thought, this is what I should do!” Melecki said of her wish to establish an endowment to benefit doctoral students. “I could not wait to come back in January, because I was ready to get this done.”



Steve Hicks Matching Gift Challenge

Steve Hicks likes to say that the real secret to being a philanthropist is that you receive much more than what you give. Because he wants others to share in the joy of giving to social work, he has issued a \$5 million matching challenge to create endowed scholarships. The rules are as follows:

- Give or pledge \$50,000 or more (to be completed within 5 years).
- Steve Hicks will match the amount.
- Your name — or that of a family member, friend or organization — will be linked forever to scholarly excellence at The University of Texas at Austin.

To participate in the challenge, visit sites.utexas.edu/steve-hicks-challenge or call 512-475-6840.



Why I give

Tiffany Davis, MSSW '95

Tiffany Davis remembers dressing up as a development officer—a navy blazer and khaki pants—for Career Day in middle school. Davis' father has a long career in higher education development, and her mother became a development director at an independent school when she went back to the workplace after raising her children.

“I always say that I came out of the womb giving to my university,” Davis said laughing. “I never made the big bucks, I’m in social work! But I have drilled in myself the practice of giving, of being a loyal and consistent donor. I give to the Steve Hicks School of Social Work monthly, because in essence it means that you give more over the years that way.”

Davis graduated in 1995 and had a fulfilling career in Nashville in community mental health. In 2007, she felt that she needed a change and jumped at the opportunity to open her own private practice. Twenty-five years after graduating, she finds much satisfaction in having stayed true to social work.

“Last year I exchanged Christmas cards with a classmate, and we both shared how happy we were to be in this field,” Davis said. “It’s a meaningful and valuable profession, and it was very heart-warming to share that with a classmate after all these years.”



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WHY YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

Jonathan Spinks, BSW '21

As an at-risk youth growing up in Northeast Washington, D.C., Jonathan Spinks never imagined he'd be where he is today. After graduating high school, he spent four years moving and working various jobs before realizing his way to real stability and financial freedom would be through higher education.

"College wasn't always seen as the track I'd follow, so money wasn't set aside for me," Spinks said. "But I was tired of my lifestyle and I was tired of hearing people tell me I had potential I'd never meet. I wanted to do things my way but I eventually got sick of proving myself wrong."

As a former high school athlete, Spinks entered the UT Austin Bachelor of Science in Social Work program in Fall 2018 with a desire to make an impact in sports social work. As the first social work student to volunteer with the Texas Longhorns women's basketball team, Spinks leads team discussions on topics such as how to deal with trauma, make an impact through social justice, mental health wellness and their love for basketball. Outside of discussions, Spinks uses his time with the team to investigate the appropriateness of social workers in athletic organizations and how social work students can become more involved with athletic teams across the Forty Acres.

"There's a chance for UT Austin to break the mold in terms of coupling its athletic programs with its mental health programs, to ensure our athletes are just as mentally sound as they are physically sound to perform both athletically and academically," he said. "The overall goal is to get to the point where the mental health of athletes is seen as serious enough that there is a very common perspective that social workers are necessary in athletic organizations."

After graduation, Spinks hopes to enter the Steve Hicks School's dual master's degree program with the LBJ School, continue his work with the women's basketball team and venture into policy.

