

reach

FACULTY OF
**SOCIAL
WORK**
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Social Work's **New** **Leaders** PhD program fosters diversity and innovation

They are finding new ways to help families cope with mental illness, taking a fresh perspective on troubled youth, giving us new insight into groups that live outside mainstream society and exploring socially responsive policy-making. The four 2006 PhD graduates featured in this issue are just a small sample of the many others who have already, or will soon, become national and international leaders in social work teaching, research, policy and administration.

When the PhD program began at the Faculty of Social Work almost 25 years ago, there were just six students enrolled and it was the only program of its kind in the country. Today the enrolment is over 50 and the University of Toronto is one of eight Canadian universities offering a PhD in social work. Competition for the best and brightest students is on the rise, says PhD program director Sheila Neysmith, yet the Faculty's unique advantages continue to attract top scholars.

In addition to being associated with one of North America's leading research-intensive universities, the Faculty is home to the groundbreaking Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work. The rich interdisciplinary opportunities in the



doctoral program are another significant draw for students with diverse interests. There are collaborative programs available to master's and PhD students in areas such as addiction, aging and the life course, ethnic and pluralism studies, health care, South Asian studies and women's studies. "Professors and researchers are always crossing disciplinary boundaries, and we prepare our students for that reality," says Neysmith.

While the majority of the Faculty's PhD graduates have gone on to tenure-stream academic positions, some have chosen to return to senior roles in their pre-PhD fields. To better accommodate those who wish to pursue a PhD without interrupting their careers, the Faculty will begin offering a flex-time option for doctoral students in 2007-2008.

Five or more years of intense study and investigation cannot be condensed into a few paragraphs, but the brief research profiles inside of Billy Chan, Shirley Chau, Luann Good Gingrich and Michael Woodford offer a glimpse into some of the innovative and important work being undertaken by social work's next generation of leaders.

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Building on our strengths



I'M delighted to be presenting you with the first issue of *Reach* since I assumed my position as dean of the Faculty of Social Work this past summer. I consider it a great honour to lead an internationally recognized faculty, and I look forward to sharing our accomplishments through this publication.

There will be no shortage of good news stories for *Reach* in the years ahead because the Faculty is in a stronger position than ever before. I've had the privilege of observing the Faculty's evolution firsthand, from my time as a master's and doctoral student through to my roles as a field practice educator, professor and now dean. Today we are among the top schools of social work in North America for research productivity. Our research influences government policies at both the provincial and federal level. We have strong partnerships with over 100 community agencies, including collaborative research projects with many of these organizations. And our graduates continue to make significant contributions to the communities where they live and to society as a whole – you'll meet several of these outstanding individuals in this issue.

Without diminishing any of our successes, however, I believe there is still much work to be done. We need to continue to build our research strength, leading to the development of policies and programs that best meet the needs of individuals, families and communities. We are also ideally positioned to seize the opportunity to become the country's leader in social work practice education.

As we strive to move the Faculty forward, you'll be able to watch our progress in the pages of this publication. The aim of *Reach* will remain the same: to keep you – our alumni, students, faculty and friends – connected to the Faculty's exceptional people and exciting new ventures.

Cheryl Regehr

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Interested in Reconnecting with the Faculty?

The Alumni Association is currently looking for new board members to get involved in areas such as Continuing Education, Advocacy and Faculty liaison. For more information, please contact us at alumni.fsw@utoronto.ca or 416-978-4437.

Faculty Update

What's happening around our world of Social Work

Faculty Appointment News

• **Professor Usha George**, a member of the Faculty of Social Work since 1994, has been appointed dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University. George had served as associate dean since 1999 and held the Royal Bank Chair in Applied Social Work Research. She was instrumental in developing the Anti-racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Centre.

• **Professor Ramona Alaggia** has been appointed the new associate dean of the Faculty of Social Work. Alaggia has worked in the children's mental health field for over 15 years as a family therapist, group counsellor, clinical director and consultant. Her research examines child sexual abuse, the experiences of sexual assault victims in the justice system (see page 8) and violence in families.

• **Professor Faye Mishna** has been appointed director of the Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work and the Centre for Applied Social Research at the Faculty of Social Work. Mishna practiced in the field of children's mental health for 20 years and is currently the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Chair in Child and Family. Her research interests range from bullying to cyber abuse.

Research Funding Highlights

• **Professors Tahany Gadalla, Ramona Alaggia and Aron Shlonsky**

Differential responses in cases of domestic violence
Ministry of Children and Youth Services

• **Professor Ernie Lightman**

Voices from Ontario: From research to policy through community theatre

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

• **Professor Peter Newman**

HIV vaccine trial participation and community engagement

Ontario HIV Treatment Network

• **Professors Cheryl Regehr, Marion Bogo, Vicki LeBlanc and Aron Shlonsky**

Assessing children's risk of abuse:

The influence of context and worker variables on professional judgment

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

• **Professor Izumi Sakamoto**

Coming together: Homeless women, social support and housing

Wellesley Central Health Corporation
and

Re-examining the "Canadian Experience" and acculturation: The missing context of Canada's high-skilled immigrants

Wellesley Central Health Corporation

Faculty of Social Work Alumni Association: 2006-07 Board Members

<i>President</i>	Peter Murchison
<i>1st Vice President</i>	Malcolm Stewart
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<i>Bookplate Program</i>	Doris Guyatt
<i>Advocacy</i>	Malcolm Stewart
<i>Mentoring Program</i>	Bill Stern
<i>Members-at-Large</i>	Sylvia Miller, Kay Karrys, Sheila Pollock, Jessica Bonney, Michael Sullivan

Alumni in Memoriam



Lillian Messinger, a respected couples and families counsellor for more than 50 years, died on Nov. 21, 2005 at age 92. Messinger received her Diploma/Certificate in Social Work in 1935 and her MSW in 1959. She began her career with Jewish Family and Child Service of Toronto. In the 1950s, she was invited to work at the Clark Institute of Psychiatry (now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health), where she stayed until the mid-1990s when she began a home-based practice. For the last 20 years of her career, Messinger specialized in second marriages, writing a book on the subject called *Remarriage: A Family Affair*.

Alumni Memorial Scholarship



The family of Jean Shek has created a scholarship at the Faculty to honour her long and distinguished career in social work and her firm belief in social justice. Shek received her Diploma/Certificate in Social Work in 1943 and her MSW in 1953. She later returned to the Faculty as a lecturer. Her career included positions at St. Christopher House, the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto, the Volunteer Centre of Metro Toronto and the Ontario Association of Social Workers. Known for her deep love of humanity and fighting spirit, she is remembered for her many campaigns against social injustice. Shek was

86 when she passed away in Toronto on May 10, 2006.

If you wish to contribute to The Jean Avon Shek Scholarship at the Faculty of Social Work, please contact Vivien James, Administrative Assistant, at 416-978-4437 or fund.fsw@utoronto.ca

Bookshelf: Recent Releases from Faculty and Alumni

Law for Social Work Practice in Canada, Oxford University Press

By Dean Cheryl Regehr and Karima Kanani

Promoting Resilience in Child Welfare, University of Toronto Press

Edited by Robert J. Flynn, Peter Dudding (MSW 1976) and James Barber (former dean of the Faculty of Social Work)

Social Work Practice: Concepts, Processes and Interviewing, Columbia University Press

By Professor Marion Bogo

Web-Based Education in the Human Services, Haworth Press

Edited by Professor Robert J. MacFadden, Brenda Moore, Marilyn Herie, Dick Schoech

New Academic Linkage with Israeli University

Faculty of Social Work partners with Haifa University School of Social Work

Separated by thousands of miles but united by a shared commitment to social justice and the principles of academic freedom, the Faculty of Social Work and the Haifa University School of Social Work in Israel have embarked on a partnership that has opened up new opportunities for collaborative research and international education.

The initial inspiration for the academic alliance grew out of several U of T faculty members' resolve to respond to an international campaign to boycott Israel and its academic institutions. "While the boycott and our desire to assert the importance of academic freedom and equitable treatment for all groups of people sparked the association, it's become very clear that there are also tremendous opportunities for mutual learning experiences between the two faculties," says Dean Cheryl Regehr. Plans are already underway for research partnerships, faculty and student exchanges, a joint conference and student practicum placements.

The international campaign against Israel began in the spring of 2005 when a British university teachers'

association voted to boycott Haifa University and another Israeli university. While this decision was subsequently revoked, another union of British academics later passed a similar motion – which also proved to be short-lived. Here in Canada, the Ontario division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), representing more than 200,000 workers, voted in May 2006 to support the global movement to boycott Israel. When Professor Ernie Lightman of the Faculty of Social Work heard about these boycotts, he and Professors Andrea Litvack and Susan Stern formed a committee that ultimately proposed the affiliation with Haifa University.

The partnership was celebrated at a Faculty event on June 26 hosted by the Consulate General of Israel and sponsored by Vivienne Grace Ziner and Glenmorris Cohen, both board members of the Canadian Friends of Haifa University. Attendees included Michael Feldman, deputy mayor of Toronto; Rose Wolfe, former U of T chancellor; Ariela Lowenstein, a professor at Haifa's Faculty of Welfare and Health Studies; Peter

Biro, national president of the Canadian Friends of Haifa University; and David Gidron, director of Israeli House, who was representing Ya'acov (Cobie) Brosh, Consul General of Israel in Toronto.

"We hope that this partnership will lead to real and meaningful co-operation between the two universities," said Gidron on behalf of Consul Brosh at the event. "We can learn from each other, our experiences and our best practices in the field." Biro said Haifa University is a fitting institution for U of T to be twinned with because of the Israeli university's mission to promote pluralism and social democracy. "Haifa University is not just involved in advancing knowledge," he said, "but also in improving the quality of life of the surrounding community."

Though it is a relatively modest initiative, Lightman says the partnership makes a crucial statement to Canada and the international community. "Haifa's successful blending of Arab and Jewish faculty and students nicely complements our own commitment to pluralism and diversity in education. In the grand scheme of things, a linkage between two departments of social work will probably not change the world, nor will it likely change the minds of the British academics. It will, however, affirm the Faculty's and U of T's values and demonstrate what is important to us."

"We can learn from each other, our experiences and our best practices in the field."

Preventing Youth Violence

Panellists debate strategies at Alumni Association workshop

Poverty, segregation, social program cuts, gangs – these hot-button topics were all up for debate at an educational workshop on youth violence held in conjunction with the 2006 annual general meeting of the Faculty of Social Work Alumni Association.

"This is not a problem that social work alone can address," said Malcolm Stewart, 1st vice-president of the alumni association and chair of its advocacy committee, who served as MC at the May 18 workshop. "It requires a multifaceted community response."

Moderated by Shirley Hoy, city manager of the City of Toronto, the panel discussion featured researchers and community activists with a special interest in youth violence. The following are brief highlights from their presentations:

- **David Firang**, a PhD candidate at the Faculty and researcher at the City of Toronto's Community Safety Secretariat, described how the concentration of poverty in certain urban neighbourhoods breeds youth violence. Low-income housing developments in areas such as north Etobicoke and the Jane-Finch corridor isolate young people from opportunities, role models and resources in other parts of the city. More than race and ethnicity, access and equity are root causes of youth turning to violence and crime. "Segregation is not an 'old-school' problem," said Firang, but rather a contemporary issue that must be addressed as part of efforts to reduce youth violence.
- **Raymond Micah**, executive director of the African Canadian Social Development Council, summarized the content of the council's 2006 "Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy." The strategy tackles the problem of gun violence and crime and its disproportionate impact on the African-Canadian community. "We are annihilating each other one by one," said Micah. He emphasized the importance of absolute honesty about the issue, coupled with a "very

tough but supportive" action plan. Some of the council's recommendations include stronger legal disincentives to crime and gun violence, special discipline-focused second chance opportunities for African-Canadian youth charged with non-serious criminal offences, and the establishment of African-Canadian Youth Friendship Clubs.

- **Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler**, director of council relations for the Toronto Youth Cabinet, argued that young people need access to programs and services that allow them to "live with hope." Social service cuts by the previous provincial government have eroded youth programs, he said, and they must be rebuilt. The 2006 Toronto Youth Strategy, developed by the youth cabinet and adopted by city council, calls for investment in policies, programs and services that engage youth and demonstrably improve their well-being. Chaleff-Freudenthaler cited examples such as accessible post-secondary education, affordable public transit, mentorship initiatives and youth recreation programs.

- **The Very Rev. Jacob William French**, superintendent minister of the Ghana Methodist Church of Toronto, offered a faith-based perspective on preventing youth violence. He called on social workers and policymakers to work more closely with religious organizations when confronting the problem, saying that it is crucial not to neglect young people's spiritual needs. Religious youth groups can cultivate positive peer pressure and redirect youth from gangs, he said, while religious values can reinforce the preciousness of human life. "If we want to help young people respect the sanctity of life as a higher value, then faith-based groups can help."

For more information about the Faculty of Social Work Alumni Association and upcoming events, please contact alumni.fsw@utoronto.ca or 416-978-4437.



Panellists from top to bottom: David Firang, Raymond Micah, Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler and the Very Rev. Jacob William French

PhD

Class of 2006

BILLY CHAN

Managing key schizophrenia symptoms may reduce violence against caregivers



During his 16 years as a social worker at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Billy Chan has heard time and again about acts of violence by people with schizophrenia against their caregivers. While many researchers have studied the link between violence and schizophrenia, he found little data on violence within families who care for relatives with schizophrenia. Inspired by his clinical experience and this gap in the research, Chan decided to investigate the extent of the problem and the factors that contribute to physical assault and psychological aggression against caregivers.

Of the more than 60 caregivers who took part in his study, 26 per cent reported at least one severe physical assault and 44 per cent reported at least one severe incident of psychological aggression over the last year. The common thread in all of these acts of violence, Chan discovered, was the intensity of a cluster of delusional symptoms associated with schizophrenia called Threat/Control-Override (TCO).

TCO symptoms cause people to believe that their caregivers are threatening their safety and/or trying to control them, and the stronger these symptoms were the more likely there was to be violence. Chan also found that caregivers' critical comments, which are often triggered by the burden of care, contributed to psychological aggression in particular. "Interventions to alleviate patients' TCO symptoms and lower caregivers' stress – which could help reduce the tension between caregiver and patient – could decrease the risk of violence."

Present position: *Social Worker, Assessment and Triage Unit, Law and Mental Health Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*

SHIRLEY CHAU

Exposure to violence affects health and well-being of homeless youth



Despite their tough outward appearance, Toronto's street youth are not so hardened that they are unaffected by the pervasive violence in their lives. In fact, says Shirley Chau, they experience considerable distress and many could benefit from psychological support services.

Chau's field work involved shadowing the city's homeless youth for eight months. Six days per week and up to 15 hours per day, she was with them – in shelters, on the streets, in coffee shops, wherever they went. Eventually she earned their trust and

was able to get 165 youth to fill out a survey that explored their exposure to violence and its impact on their physical and mental health.

The young people's candour surprised Chau, as did the emotionally gripping content of their stories. "These youth have seen more than most people ever will," she says. Many of them fled family violence at home only to encounter it in new forms on the streets: turf wars, drug deals gone wrong or strangers targeting them for no reason. Almost half reported exposure to significant violence on the streets – whether as witnesses, victims or both – and this exposure predicted psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

"The findings from this study are similar to previous research about the adverse impact of violence on youth," says Chau. "In particular, the findings suggest a need for social workers to pay close attention to the youths' histories of violence and how these experiences affect how they manage their everyday experience."

Present position: *Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of British Columbia Okanagan*

LUANN GOOD GINGRICH

Social inclusion not an ideal for some groups



There is reason to question the commonsense notion of social inclusion as a universal value in our society, says Luann Good Gingrich. Her research developed a conceptual model of social exclusion, particularly self-imposed social exclusion, by examining the lives of a group of people who choose not to participate in mainstream society.

Good Gingrich set out to understand why the Low German Mennonite migrant workers in southern Ontario keep themselves apart from the formal economy, the educational system and social interaction outside their community. "They are a group of people who work very diligently to maintain a distinct cultural, religious and ethnic identity," she says. "They seem to live their lives in a way that makes it difficult to get ahead." Many in these diverse communities live in poverty, wear a traditional style of dress that subjects them to discrimination, do not speak English or read or write in any language, and prefer not to send their children to school.

These choices are less about self-imposed social exclusion than about preserving a way of life, according to Good Gingrich's research. "What appear to be expressions of self-

exclusion are often practices to survive – materially, culturally and subjectively. While they could assimilate, the price they would pay for that is enormous and would be an annihilation of self. So this assumed idea we have that social inclusion is a good thing for all people whether they want it or not is misguided."

Present position: *Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, York University*

MICHAEL WOODFORD

Trust and respect bring community voices into policy process



"Community participation is big business for government these days," says Michael Woodford. Contemporary policy-makers emphasize public involvement with the stated aim of creating social policies that are responsive to community needs, yet participatory policy-making is often experienced as meaningless to community participants. To make it an authentic engagement of community groups, Woodford found, not only is a political mandate necessary, but there must also be bureaucratic will and support and a readiness among public administrators to take a risk.

Woodford based his research on a study of policy-making by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, where he formerly served as director of policy and strategic planning. Part of his thesis involved analyzing four real-life cases of participation in the province: a citizens' advisory council on social development, a community-government working group concerning welfare services for victims of violence, a traditional consultation process for reforming welfare legislation and a community-government committee overseeing a provincial violence prevention strategy.

In all but the last case, they were positive examples of authentic participatory policy-making. "In the unsuccessful case, the community participants never felt they were understood and heard by the public servants," says Woodford. "The differences in mindsets were not mediated." His research showed that government players must be willing to share power and demonstrate their confidence in the process, while both sides should strive to reconcile their different values and ideologies. "We've got to look at participation as a relational process involving trust, respect, sharing power and dynamic communication."

Present position: *Assistant professor, School of Social Work, University of Michigan*

PHD PROGRAM: QUICK FACTS

- The Faculty of Social Work was the first Canadian school of social work to offer a PhD program
- 109 PhD students have graduated since the program launched in 1982
- The Faculty accepts up to 10 new students each year from Canada and across the world
- There are 52 students enrolled in the PhD program for the 2006-2007 academic session

An Instinct for Social Work

The personal and professional connect for award-winning MSW graduate

Miia Suokonautio was supporting street kids, facilitating AIDS education in prisons and advocating for refugees before it ever occurred to her that social work would be a natural career choice. Once that realization came, she could not imagine doing anything else.

“I thought my personal and political convictions would be my personal life but my work needed to be something else,” says Suokonautio, who received the 2006 Hilary Weston Award for the top graduating Master of Social Work student. She has been active in social justice work at the local and international level since high school, yet, until she began exploring graduate degree options and came across the MSW program, she assumed she would pursue her interests in math, science, political science or environmental studies. “Social work allows for all of these things to come together in a way that lets me understand the world, understand change making and understand social justice work. Where the others could all fit me, more or less, it’s social work that really felt like a made-to-measure jacket.”

After completing a degree in environmental studies at York University, Suokonautio spent the summer of 2000 working on a farm in Bowmanville, Ont., as a labourer-teacher with migrant Mexican workers. “Doing this work of accompaniment and advocacy made things start to sink in for me. It really sparked what was to come.” Looking back now, she says that in the years between this job and the time she began her MSW in 2004, she was in fact doing social work. “I think my experiences during these years can all be con-



Miia Suokonautio

sidered social work because they had an underlying intention of working with people to better the lives of their communities, families and themselves.”

Two of those experiences – both in Central America – particularly affected Suokonautio and continue to inform her personal and professional life. The first was a volunteer stint in El Salvador during which she was part of a team presenting AIDS prevention seminars to prisoners. “Working with the prisoners was at first very difficult. But the differences there were between us – which were many – began to be overcome as we shared our stories, our ideas, our humour and our genuine desire to connect with one another.” She later returned to the region to help provide educational support to street kids in Nicaragua. At her wedding, she and her husband requested donations in support of both of these projects instead of gifts.

Suokonautio continued to work with people from Latin America when she returned to Toronto in 2003, volunteering with the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples and the FCJ Refugee Project. She managed to maintain some of these volunteer commitments during her studies at the Faculty while completing practicum placements at St. Christopher House and the United Way.

Following graduation this past spring, Suokonautio left for her parents’ homeland of Finland and plans to hit destinations in Eastern Europe, Russia and Asia before arriving in Ghana in December, where she and her husband hope to work with NGOs for at least a year. From there, she cannot say where she will go, but she knows that she will be following the path she was meant to take all along. “A commitment to solidarity work, to accompaniment, to alliance building and support, and to political action is what drives me, and hopefully what I am able to follow.”



Cheryl Mitri

Finding and Fostering Student Potential

University mentorship program targets students from under-represented groups

When Cheryl Mitri first stepped onto the University of Toronto campus in 1997, she was a 24-year-old single parent and former high school dropout about to begin the U of T Summer Mentorship Program. Fast forward to the summer of 2006, and Mitri is not only a newly minted Master of Social Work graduate but is also helping to run that same mentorship program where she was a participant just nine years ago.

“I know personally that education is power. My education has given me power over my own life, and I want to help other students find that power,” says Mitri, explaining her decision to take on the job of co-ordinating the six-week mentorship program at the Faculty of Social Work.

Launched in 1994 as a way to attract more black students to medical school, the program has grown into a collaborative effort among seven U of T faculties and several local school boards. The initiative targets promising senior high school students who are under-represented in higher education for reasons such as racial or ethnic background, socio-economic status or difficult family circumstances. It aims to provide these youth with opportunities to explore the university and a professional career option of their choice – from engineering and nursing to law and social work – while obtaining two high school credits.

Guided by Mitri, faculty advisor Ramona Alaggia and a high school teacher, the 14 students who chose to immerse themselves in social work this summer learned about resumé writing, visited social service agencies, participated in workshops and completed research projects related to social work. Leading these students was an exhilarating and emotional experience, says Mitri, because she saw aspects of her young self in many of them. At different times, she assumed the role of instructor, mentor and social worker. “I provided them with individual counselling if they needed it to deal with certain issues and do well in the program,” she says.

For some participants, the program confirmed their interest in social work; for others it was a way of discovering that the profession wasn’t right for them. Either way, says Mitri, it was time well spent. “Social work exposes you to different values and ideas, and all of the students said they learned and grew from the program.”

Several students were so affected by the experience that they felt compelled to show Mitri their gratitude in concrete ways. One student wrote her a personal letter saying that she had been about to leave high school before coming to the program and now had no doubt that she would go on to post-secondary education, a confession that brought Mitri to tears.

She recently began her new job as the MSW Program Assistant at the Faculty and plans to start PhD studies when her daughter heads to university in four years. She says her personal story of empowerment through education, together with her involvement in the program, has inspired her to pursue a career in the field of student development. “You look at the news and there’s always something about troubled kids. And then you look at a program like this and see the amazing impact, and it just makes sense: invest in outreach to find these kids, and you can significantly change their lives.”

Improving Care for Canada's Aging Population

New national network will address challenges of coming demographic shift

When Professor Lynn McDonald found a grand total of two books on aging in the university library during her Master of Social Work studies in the late 1960s, it reinforced what she already knew: there was much work yet to be done in gerontological research. What she didn't know at the time was that she would be one of the key people doing this work. The launch this summer of the National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE), a project McDonald has been developing for several years, marks a new height in her contributions to the field.

"Since I began, there's been a sea change when it comes to interest in aging," says McDonald, the scientific director of the NICE network as well as the director of the Institute for Life Course and Aging at the University of Toronto, where NICE will be headquartered. "The problem is, after all these years of progress in research and knowledge, when I go out into the field today I see the same things I saw back then: people don't value older adults and the level of care isn't up to snuff."

The NICE network aims to change all that by bringing together Canadian academics and practitioners from social work, medicine and nursing to disseminate research and best practices for the care of older adults. It's the first network of its kind in the country and it comes at a critical time. The population is aging, and Canada faces serious challenges to its ability to cope with the coming demographic shift. There is a shortage of doctors, nurses and social workers who specialize in the care of the elderly, and few students today are enrolling in these specialties. Apart from the U of T Faculty of Social Work, the University of Calgary is the only other institution in Canada offering a program in gerontological social work.



With the senior population expected to reach 6.7 million by 2021 and 9.2 million by 2041 – representing nearly one in four Canadians – the time to act is now, says McDonald. "Caring for older adults is becoming more complex because people are living longer and have more complicated illnesses." For this reason, the NICE network promotes an interdisciplinary team model, where health-care and social work professionals collaborate in the care of older individuals and their families.

The network will introduce basic geriatric knowledge into core courses in medicine, nursing and social work; provide specific training programs in geriatric specializations; and run a mentorship program. Efforts to attract young people into the field should begin early, says McDonald, with programs such as "Adopt a Grandparent" that link schoolchildren and older adults in fun activities. "When younger people are exposed to older people who are full of life and involved in the community, they love it. They get hooked on the people because they're so interesting –

that's how it happened for me."

NICE began with over 40 researchers, doctors, nurses and social workers from across Canada, and new members are joining all the time. One of the most important components of the network is the advisory committee of older adults, says McDonald. "Senior citizens are right in there, looking over our shoulder the whole way."

The National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE) is funded by the Government of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence. For more information on NICE, go to www.nicenet.ca

NICE NETWORK PARTNERS TO DATE

Universities

Brock University
University of British Columbia
University of Manitoba
University of Sherbrooke
University of Toronto

Industry

Chartwell Seniors Housing REIT

Federal Government

Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Public Health Agency of Canada

Organizations and Institutions

Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care
Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry
Canadian Association on Gerontology
Canadian Geriatrics Society
Canadian Gerontological Nursing Association
Réseau québécois de recherche sur le vieillissement
The John A. Hartford Foundation
Toronto Rehabilitation Institute

Illustration: Stephanie Wunderlich/Three in a box

A Pioneer in the Field of Addictions at Home and Abroad

Professor Emeritus receives Order of Canada for his contributions

Professor Emeritus Donald Meeks transformed his humble beginnings into an illustrious career as a social work professor, internationally renowned addictions expert and human rights activist. In recognition of these many accomplishments, he was recently named a member of the Order of Canada.

Growing up in poverty in gritty Pennsylvania mill towns, Meeks managed to escape the lure of gangs – which landed many of his friends in jail or early graves – and fulfill his parents' high academic expectations. He won a scholarship to attend an African-American university in Virginia, where he flourished both as a scholar and campus leader. Yet his experiences in 1950s segregationist Virginia left an indelible mark.

Frequent encounters with discrimination, along with an upbringing as a minister's son in a home that resembled "a kind of social service centre," led Meeks to dedicate his life to serving the disadvantaged and combating racism. Social work was a natural career choice. Following his PhD at Smith College in Massachusetts in 1965, he accepted a cross-appointment at what was then called the U of T School of Social Work and the Addiction Research Foundation (ARF) – now the Centre for



Donald Meeks

Addiction and Mental Health. He was attracted to the job because it combined teaching, research and practice. The fact that the position was in addictions also interested him, but he had no idea that he was about to begin a more than 30-year career where he would enrich the addictions field in Canada and influence its development worldwide.

"When I started at the Addiction Research Foundation, it had a strict medical model," he says. "That inspired me to promote the reality of addiction being a multifaceted problem requiring multidisciplinary team intervention." Meeks broke new ground when he became associate director of the ARF hospital in 1971, paving the way for other non-physicians to assume leadership roles.

Shortly after, he became the first African-Canadian in the Faculty's history to attain the rank of full professor. He introduced courses on drug dependence into the social work curriculum and helped create the U of T collaborative graduate program in Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Psychotropic Drugs (ATOPS). At ARF, he was the founding director of the School for Addiction Studies.

Meeks began to teach and consult on addictions in developing countries early in his career, provid-

ing leadership in the development of treatment and training systems in more than 40 countries. He served as a consultant for the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and numerous governments and NGOs in Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. "Many countries had longstanding addiction problems with few treatment and prevention responses," he says. "Canada, with the Addiction Research Foundation, was a world leader in this area."

In addition to his work with underprivileged people and nations outside Canada, Meeks took an active role in promoting human rights at home. He was the founding chair of the Faculty's Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Committee and served on U of T's Race Relations Committee. "As a Black person, I've had an interest in equity and social justice all my life. That was always a prime consideration in my work."

Although his first retirement was in 1993, Meeks continues to consult on race relations and addictions. His careers in both domains have been rewarding, he says, though the international work is most gratifying. "My proudest accomplishment is starting from nothing in a number of developing countries and helping them to build drug dependence treatment programs that continue to flourish to this day."

Supporting Students Who Will Make a Difference

The Tzu Chi Foundation continues to give generously to student aid

The ongoing support of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation has enabled over 50 social work students to complete their studies and go on to make important contributions to society.

The charitable organization has been an important partner of the Faculty of Social Work since 1995, when it began providing awards for five students each year, and continues to build on its legacy of generosity. An additional Tzu Chi gift in 1996 allowed the Faculty to create a spacious student lounge, which is used extensively not only by students but also by members of the wider social work community for lectures and events.

"We're very grateful for Tzu Chi's long-term commitment to students at the Faculty of Social Work," said Dean Cheryl Regehr at a special ceremony in September where Tzu Chi presented the Faculty with this year's gift. "We share a commitment with Tzu Chi to helping those whose lives have been battered by poverty and other kinds of difficult circumstances. I'm very proud to say that our values connect."

The common missions of the Faculty and Tzu Chi make for a productive relationship with far-reaching benefits, said Tzu Chi representative Jim Su. "We deeply believe that society will be made better when students devote themselves to social work," he said, explaining why Tzu Chi has made social work education one of its priorities. In 1998 the foundation extended its support to students at the Ryerson University School of Social Work, followed by the York University Graduate Program in Social Work in 2001. Representatives from Ryerson and York were also on hand at the event to accept Tzu Chi's donations in support of student aid.

Regehr cited the work of Lynda Roy, a previous Tzu Chi award recipient who was present at the ceremony, as an example of the broader impact the organization makes through student aid. Roy was involved in a major research project at the Faculty that examined income security and developed novel approaches to poverty reduction. Like her many peers who also received these awards, she has chosen to use her education to work towards the public good.

"We deeply believe that society will be made better when students devote themselves to social work."

"Our students go on to work with the same kinds of individuals as those who are assisted by the volunteers of Tzu Chi," said Regehr. "They work with children at risk of abuse and neglect, with newcomers to Canada trying to find their place, with families challenged by disability and illness, and with communities suffering from isolation and social disintegration."

While education is a key mission of Tzu Chi, it has many others. With over five million supporters and 30,000 certified members, the foundation is involved in everything from medicine and international relief to environmental protection. Tzu Chi transformed health care in Taiwan, for example, by opening a state-of-the-art hospital in 1986 that operates according to the Buddhist principles of loving kindness. Building on the hospital's success, the Tzu Chi College of Nursing opened in 1989 followed by the Tzu Chi College of Medicine in 1994. The foundation also runs the largest bone marrow registry in Asia.

Known as the "Blue Angels" because of the sig-

nature colour of their uniforms, Tzu Chi volunteers mobilize to help people in need wherever they are, from the Tsunami in South Asia to the hurricanes in the southern United States. At the local level, members of Tzu Chi's University of Toronto student chapter improve lives by working in soup kitchens, visiting nursing homes and cleaning up city streets.

Whether they are handing over life-saving medicines, nourishing food or much-needed winter coats, Tzu Chi members always present their gifts with two hands and head bowed. It is a gesture that embodies the charitable organization's philosophy of giving, which says that the giver is enriched by the act of helping those in need and should be as grateful as the recipient.

Tzu Chi was founded in Taiwan in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen and just 30 followers. Now aged 69, she has never left her native island yet has touched the lives of people in almost 60 countries worldwide through the work of the foundation. Among her many honours, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. "We often tell our students that they will encounter circumstances in their careers that appear overwhelming," said Regehr. "Master Cheng Yen offers us an example of what one person can do."



Dean Cheryl Regehr, fifth from left, with colleagues from York University and Ryerson University and members of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation



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Healing or Harmful: Disclosing Sexual Abuse

Research examines process of disclosure in the private and public realm

Whether it is a child revealing a terrible family secret or a woman seeking justice in the courts, disclosing sexual assault and abuse is a complex, painful process for victims. Professor Ramona Alaggia has devoted much of her career to unraveling the psychological, familial, cultural and environmental factors that contribute to disclosure, and examining the repercussions that follow.

Alaggia began her career in children's mental health in the early 1980s as a family therapist. At that time, she says, the medical and therapeutic community had a more naïve view of families and the endemic problem of child sexual abuse. It wasn't until the late 1980s that awareness began to grow of an issue that had always been underground. "We started awakening to the fact that child sexual abuse was a frequent problem in the families we were seeing," she says. "As we identified it more, we felt we lacked the tools to effectively work with these families."

Determined to help create these tools in order to better assist victims, Alaggia began her research career. In the beginning, she studied mothers' responses to disclosure of child sexual abuse for her PhD thesis. Blaming the mother for not knowing about abuse going on under her roof is common, she says, yet in many cases the perpetrator is so skilled at hiding the crime that the mother truly is unaware. "Offenders can be meticulous about covering their tracks and keeping their victims silent."

In fact, most child victims stay silent until many years after the fact, if not forever.

Research has shown that between 40 and 80 per cent of child sexual abuse victims don't disclose before adulthood. "Disclosure is the nub of the prob-



Ramona Alaggia

More recently, Alaggia conducted a major research project in collaboration with Dean Cheryl Regehr to explore disclosure of sexual assault and abuse at the next level – the criminal justice system. In the first phase of the study, they compared the perspectives of the legal and therapeutic community on the experiences of victims of sexual violence in the courts. They uncovered significant differences of opinion between the legal group (defense and prosecuting attorneys, judges and police) and the therapeutic group (victim assistance volunteers, shelter workers, advocates and therapists). The legal community is unanimous about the fact that the justice system is for punishing offenders, not alleviating victims' pain. Yet some key informants from the therapeutic community maintain that going through the justice system has the potential to be a positive experience for victims.

"We found a disconnect between how the legal system actually operates and how therapists might be counseling victims to have some unrealistic expectations of the system," says Alaggia. "The legal system is not set up in any way, shape or form to act as a healing agent for a victim." Even when a perpetrator is found guilty, the light sentences that are common for these types of offences destroy any possible therapeutic effect of victims telling their stories in court.

In order to prevent victims from being disappointed by the criminal process, Regehr and Alaggia recommend training for therapeutic professionals to familiarize them with the workings of the legal system. "It's not about therapists saying, 'Don't go through the justice system because you'll be more traumatized,' or, 'You should go through because it'll have a curative, healing aspect to it.' It's about providing our clients with information so that they can make informed decisions about which route they would like to take."

The next stage of Alaggia and Regehr's study – which is still underway – focuses on victims' perspectives on their experiences in the justice system. The research findings to date suggest that it is an almost wholly negative experience for victims. Parents of child victims of sexual assault or abuse, for example, feel a profound loss of control when trying to seek justice for their children. To start, the decision whether to even move forward with a charge is taken out of parents' hands, as police and lawyers decide if the case is strong enough. Then it takes an average of one to two years for the cases to get to court, and perpetrators are almost always out on bail during this time. The final letdown comes

when the judge hands out a lenient sentence, says Alaggia. "Some parents say that if they'd known all this, they might not have reported the abuse."

Preliminary findings from another group of victims – Aboriginal women who have been sexually assaulted – suggest that their experiences in the courts are equally bad if not worse. Alaggia says this research will add to existing evidence that the justice system is not working well for victims of sexual assault and abuse: "In the end, we'll make recommendations and hope for some change."

While society has come a long way since the days when sexual assault and abuse were swept under the carpet, there is still a long way to go. Yet Alaggia approaches her research and advocacy efforts with energy and optimism. "This is such an area of hope," she says, adding that she uses her research findings both to influence policy and validate victims' experiences. "When I listen to people's stories, I'm amazed at their resilience, courage and fighting spirit. I think it's important for as many people as possible to bear witness to what's happened to them. To me, that's important work."

PERSPECTIVES OF JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE: VOICES FROM THE LEGAL COMMUNITY

"Some victims expect to find that the court process is somehow going to bring an end to the pain they're feeling, or the fear or insecurity, and they're surprised when it doesn't. They leave the system feeling ill-served or underserved."

"It is important that people understand the limits of the justice system in actually dealing with some of the fundamental psychological effects of traumatization ... the justice system is not set up to deal with emotional traumas that result from victimization."

"It's not part of my job as a judge. I have some reserve of compassion, but I am not there to heal people. I don't know how."

"After the victim testifies, they are sort of whisked away. And that is the last they are seen or heard from."

lem," she says. "We're often just seeing the tip of the iceberg because the reasons for kids not to disclose far outweigh the reasons to disclose." Children may not think they'll be believed, feel partly responsible for the abuse or be terrified that they'll cause the disintegration of their families.

Alaggia's previous research has demonstrated that children and adolescents often lack the ability to articulate their abuse to adults. Instead, they use hard-to-interpret behavioural cues such as clinging, temper tantrums or withdrawal from family life. She has also identified certain family characteristics that can create barriers to disclosure: rigid gender roles where fathers are heads of the household and mothers hold little power, inter-family violence and poor communication.

reach

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