

reach



Practical Solutions Through Advanced Research

The Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work will tackle today's urgent social problems



Government dignitaries, university officials, top international scholars, social service providers, faculty members and generous supporters of the Faculty of Social Work attended a standing-room-only event on March 30 to celebrate the formal launch of Canada's first Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work.

Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services Marie Bountrogianni officially "opened" the virtual institute with a passionate speech on the crucial role of evidence in policy-making. "I'm personally excited about this Institute not only because I wholeheartedly agree with the approach of creating policy based on solid research, but also because it will help me to do my job," she said. Bountrogianni congratulated the Institute for beginning with an ambitious research agenda focused on the welfare of children and their families, a specialization where the Faculty is a recognized leader.

The roster of prominent speakers included interim U of T President Frank Iacobucci and Provost Vivek Goel, who praised the Faculty for its commitment to research, teaching and public service. "All of us as citizens stand to benefit from the work of the new Institute," said Iacobucci.

Celebrating the launch were (from left to right): U of T Vice-President and Provost Vivek Goel, Dean Jim Barber, Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services Marie Bountrogianni and Interim U of T President Frank Iacobucci

Representatives from the Institute's many community partners were also on hand to mark the beginning of a new era in social work research.

The event attracted several renowned international experts in evidence-based social work, attesting to the excitement the Institute is generating in the field. Cornell University professor James Garbarino, one of the world's leading child protection researchers, spoke about the need to ground child abuse interventions in a strong theoretical foundation. On the day following the public launch, two of the most respected proponents of the evidence-based method – Dr. Eileen Gambrill of the University of California at Berkeley and Dr. Len Gibbs of the University of Wisconsin – led a workshop for key staff from the partner agencies.

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A year to remember



As the summer approaches and our academic programs start to wind down until fall, I've had time to reflect on what an outstanding year this has been for the Faculty of Social Work.

To start, it was the 90th anniversary of social work at U of T. We marked this milestone with a party that brought together faculty members, students and alumni from across the generations. Although I've only been at the Faculty for a couple of years now, I already feel part of its rich tradition of scholarship and public service. As Canada's first school of social work, we pride ourselves on being a pacesetter in the field. Our reputation as an innovator is increasingly spreading beyond our borders, especially with the launch of the Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work. As you'll see in the pages ahead, the Institute has captured the imagination of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers both locally and internationally.

This year also brought further proof that the Faculty's research intensity continues to grow. One of the best indicators of this is our stunning success in the latest Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant competition (see the full list of funded projects on this page). Not only was our success rate more than double the national average, but SSHRC reviewers ranked two of our faculty members' research proposals in the top eight in Canada.

And finally, the Faculty recently passed two important external reviews with flying colours. These periodic examinations ensure that social work programs are meeting the appropriate standards of scholarship and education. The Ontario Council of Graduate Schools gave us unconditional approval with the best possible ranking for quality, while the reviewers from the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work recommended a seven-year unconditional accreditation – also the best possible outcome from this process.

I hope you enjoy reading about our accomplishments and the outstanding people in the Faculty of Social Work community who help make those accomplishments possible. If you have any comments or suggestions about Reach, please contact us at reach.fsw@utoronto.ca

Jim Barber

* The U of T Faculty of Social Work respects your privacy. We do not rent, sell or trade our mailing lists. Even if you do choose to receive Reach, you may notify us at any time to change your preference.

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

Record Success in Latest Competition for Research Funding

Social work faculty members had seven out of eight research proposals funded in the 2004-2005 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant competition – an unprecedented success rate for U of T and social work faculties nationwide. At 87.5 per cent, the Faculty's success rate more than doubled the national average of 43 per cent and far outpaced the U of T average of 53.6 per cent. Here are the winning projects:

■ Professor Ramona Alaggia and Professor Cheryl Regehr

- Risky business: Disclosure of intimate partner violence and help seeking actions of women

■ Professor Beverley Antle

- Hope: The complex journey of parents of children with cancer (grant administered through the Hospital for Sick Children)

■ Professor Lynn McDonald

- Retiring to caregive (grant administered through the U of T Institute for Life Course and Aging)

■ Professor Faye Mishna

- Enhancing self-understanding and social integration for middle school students with learning disabilities

■ Professor Peter Newman

- HIV vaccine acceptability among vulnerable communities in Thailand

■ Professor Julia Sudbury

- Gender, racialization and social change in the new global economy

■ Professor Julia Sudbury

- African-Canadian young women, intergenerational relations and social change

In addition, Professor Wes Shera was co-applicant on a successful project submitted by Professor Ben Gottlieb from the University of Guelph, and two other faculty members received major SSHRC grants for projects that will be jointly developed and undertaken with a wide range of academic researchers and community organizations. Each project was awarded approximately \$1 million in Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) funding:

■ Professor David Hulchanski, Lead investigator

- Community gentrification and building inclusive communities from within: A case study of Toronto's West-Central neighbourhoods

■ Professor Ernie Lightman, Co-investigator with Professor Lea Caragata of Wilfrid Laurier University

- Lone mothers: Building social inclusion



Faculty of Social Work Continuing Education Courses, 2005-2006

Certificate Programs

- Crisis Response to Disaster and Workplace Trauma
- Therapeutic Family Mediation Program
- Cybercounselling
- Solution-Focused Counselling
- Brief and Narrative Therapies with Families, Couples and Individuals
- Advanced Theory and Clinical Practice with Children, Adolescents and their Families (NEW)

Workshops

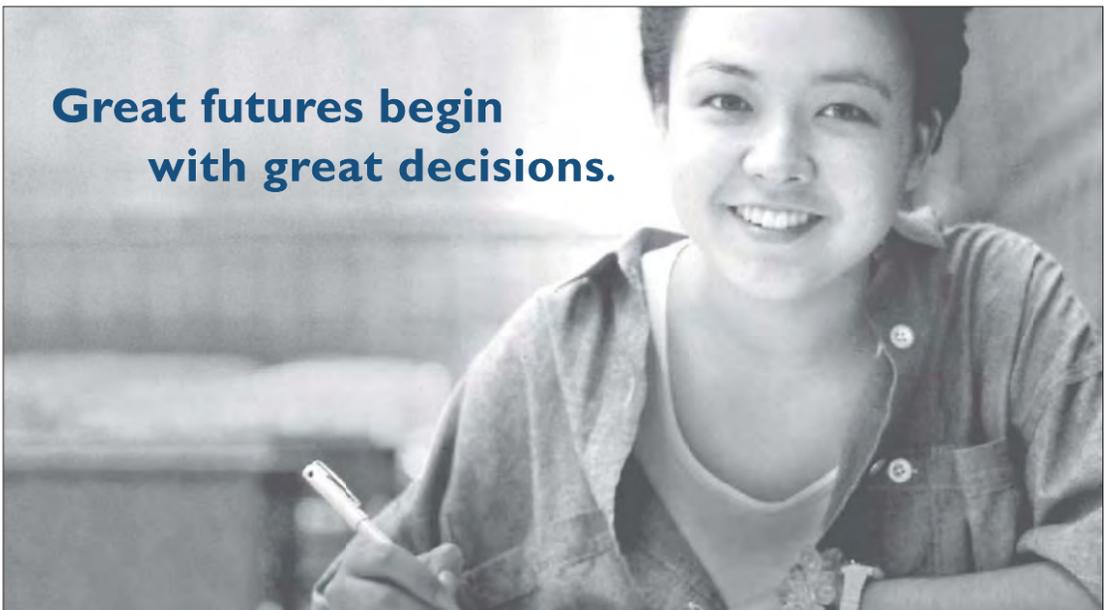
- Assessing Parenting Capacity
- Cybercounselling
- Spirituality
- Working with Children and Families
- Stress Reduction Using Mindfulness Meditation
- Anti-Oppression Training (NEW)
- Working with Same Sex Couples and Working with Same Sex Families (NEW)
- Incorporating a Focus on Culture in Palliative Care (NEW)
- Program Evaluation Using the Logic Model (NEW)
- Fund-raising in Non-Profit Organizations (NEW)
- Play Therapy with Children (NEW)
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Basics for Social Phobia (NEW)

FOR MORE DETAILS, please consult the web site at www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/conted.html or contact the Continuing Education Administrator at 416-978-3259 or fsw.conted@utoronto.ca

Alumni In Memoriam

Mae Harman (MSW '55), a passionate advocate for social justice and loyal alumni volunteer, died at her home in Toronto on Feb. 23, 2005 at the age of 84. Harman was a longtime member of the Social Work Alumni Association and served as editor of its newsletter, The Communicator. Her long and productive career included leading roles with the YWCA, University Settlement House and the Ontario Association of Professional Social Workers. After retirement, she volunteered with various health and social policy organizations. Harman received many honours in recognition of her dedicated service, including the Alumni Association's Walking the Talk Award.

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90 Years of Service and Scholarship

The challenge of creating social work's knowledge base continues

IN 1914, the University of Toronto opened its doors to Canada's first school of social work. Eleven students came to the Department of Social Service to learn an emerging profession that had only gained a proper name at the turn of the century. The concept of trained social workers was still relatively new. Social service was largely the domain of an eclectic group of local charity organizers, says John R. Graham in his 1996 doctoral thesis on the Faculty's history. This group included "philanthropists of a religious inclination; business and professional people proffering enlightened self-interest; university students youthfully assured of their ideals; well-to-do society ladies confident of their obligations and decency; and newly arrived immigrants and working-class people interested in mutual aid and public provision."

Despite the widespread presence of charitable activity across Canada, there was a growing need for social workers to inject stability and efficiency into the process. Following U of T's lead, schools of social work soon opened at McGill University in 1918 and the University of British Columbia in 1928. The original curriculum at U of T included both theoretical courses (such as social economics, social psychology and social ethics) and practical courses (including settlement house work, penology, medical social services and recreation).

From the start, says Graham, there was tension in the school between the distinct and often conflicting priorities of the field and the academy. On one side, there were field instructors and those whose main interest was in training social workers for the real-life challenges of the profession. On the other were those devoted to scholarship and the development of social work theory.

"There has always been an ethereal aspect to the profession's knowledge base," says Graham, "as well as considerable dissension over what this knowledge base ought to constitute." In a 1930 article, former department head E.J. Urwick expressed the young profession's essential dilemma: "In most fields of professional work you will find a definite body of accepted knowledge – theological, legal, medical and so on – which supplies, as it were, the orthodoxy of the profession. . . . But in our field there is no such authority. We have no bible nor accepted body of knowledge; we have no determining authority for our aims or our methods."

In the decades since then, the Faculty has seen an ever-increasing number of successful collaborations between social work researchers and practitioners, yet this "bible" still does not exist. In its 90th anniversary year, the Faculty is taking a giant step forward in efforts to create this crucial foundation by launching the Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work. The first of its

kind in the country and one of just a handful worldwide, the new research institute will shape the future of the profession while building on the proud history of Canada's oldest school of social work.

Reference: John R. Graham, A History of the University of Toronto School of Social Work (PhD thesis, 1996).

Graham is now Professor of Social Work and Murray Fraser Professor of Community Economic Development at the University of Calgary.

Another Milestone: 10 Years of Celebrating Diversity

Since the Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Centre's founding in 1995, it has been a place for students, faculty members, researchers and members of the community to find resources on diverse racial and ethnic populations. One of the Centre's most significant research achievements is the Cultural Profiles Project, funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Over the last few years the Centre has developed easy-to-read, richly detailed profiles of 102 countries. The Cultural Profiles are available online through the Faculty of Social Work web site or at <http://www.settlement.org/cp/>



Illustration: Martin Jarric

An Evolving Identity

1914	Department of Social Service
1929	Department of Social Science
1941	School of Social Work
1972	Faculty of Social Work

Degrees of Progress

1915-1923	One-year Certificate of Social Service
1918-1948	Two-year Diploma of Social Service
1947-1969	Bachelor of Social Work
1947-Present	Master of Social Work
1952-1982	Doctor of Social Work
1982-Present	PhD in Social Work

From Humble Beginnings...

In 1915, 11 students graduated from the Department of Social Service. This year more than 150 students will earn a degree from the Faculty of Social Work

Leaders

1914-1918	Franklin Johnson Jr.
1918-1920	Robert MacIver
1920-1927	James A. Dale
1927-1937	Edward Johns Urwick
1937-1940	A.E. Grauer
1940-1941	Agnes McGregor
1941-1944	Stuart K. Jaffary
1944-1945	Agnes McGregor
1945-1951	Harry M. Cassidy
1951-1969	Charles E. Hendry
1969-1976	Albert Rose
1977-1988	Ralph Garber
1989-1993	Heather Munroe-Blum
1993-1995	Marion Bogo
1995-2002	Wes Shera
2003-present	James G. Barber

A Place to Call Home

1914 – 1931 The Faculty was housed in a series of historic buildings and houses around the perimeter of central campus that have mostly been demolished.

1931 – 1970 The Faculty's first long-term home was in McMaster Hall, U of T's old Economics Building at 273 Bloor St. West. This site is now the headquarters of the Royal Conservatory of Music.

1970 – present The Faculty's current home at 246 Bloor St. West was built in 1957. U of T purchased the building from the Texaco Oil Company, and in the beginning it also housed the U of T School of Business.

Reaching Out

In the 1970s, the Faculty's research and teaching began to reflect the changing society by examining topics such as visible minorities, working mothers and people with disabilities.

THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

for Evidence-Based Social Work

Keeping Kids Safe Online: Bell Canada reaffirms its commitment to child welfare research

Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant stressed the urgent need to stop the exploitation of young people on the Internet at a special event recognizing Bell Canada for its generous support of a new research initiative on the Cyberabuse of Children.

"This initiative complements the Ontario government's ongoing efforts to ensure our kids are safe while on the Internet," said Bryant at the March 30 lunch in honour of Bell, which followed the Institute's official launch. He applauded the Institute for recognizing and tackling a dramatic problem in society that shows no sign of abating.

Bell Canada is a longtime supporter of the Faculty of Social Work, having established the highly respected Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit in 1998. Building on its leading role in contributing to research aimed at protecting children from abuse and neglect, the corporation stepped forward as the Institute's First Corporate Partner and sole funder of the cyberabuse project.

Charlotte Burke, Bell's senior vice-president of consumer Internet services, said the corporation looks forward to working with the Institute to combat growing threats such as online sexual solicitation, bullying and stalking. "By collaborating with others in the private sector, educational institutions and government, Bell is providing parents, teachers and children with a better understanding of some of these threats, as well as tools to better protect themselves whenever they surf on the Internet or communicate online." In cooperation with Kids Help Phone, the initiative will also develop a web site containing the latest research and resources on cyberabuse.

In addition to the cyberabuse project, the Institute's first phase of research on children and their families includes these two projects:



(From left to right) U of T Vice-President and Chief Advancement Officer Jon Dellandrea, Bell Canada Senior Vice-President of Consumer Internet Services Charlotte Burke, Dean Jim Barber and Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES DATABASE - Made possible through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Li Shun Xing, the **Canada Foundation for Innovation** and the **Ontario Innovation Trust**, this project will revolutionize child welfare research in Canada by consolidating case level information from four of Ontario's major children's services agencies into a common database. When complete, it will enable large-scale research projects on service trends, child well-being and service outcomes within and across agencies. It will also provide a platform for the integration of further datasets in the future. The end result will be better co-ordination of interventions and better life chances for children from high-risk groups.

Partner Agencies: *Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Catholic Children's Aid Society, Hincks-Dellcrest Centre and Kids Help Phone.*

AN EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL FOR RISK ASSESSMENT IN CHILD WELFARE - Child welfare agencies across North America are struggling to target their limited resources in the face of a growing demand for services. In this environment, it is essential to have reliable methods for assessing which children are at highest risk of abuse and violence. This national research initiative, supported by the **Jessie Ball duPont Fund** and the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada**, aims to develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive child abuse risk assessment tool suitable for Canada's multicultural population.

Partner Agencies: *Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Catholic Children's Aid Society*

YOUTH AND THE INTERNET

- Almost half of young Canadians use the Internet from home for at least an hour every day, many with little or no adult supervision
- More than 40 per cent of youth say they have met someone new online who asked for personal information
- A quarter of Canadian kids have been asked by someone they've met online to meet in person

Source: Media Awareness Network



Illustration: Barroux/illusion

How the New Institute Will Work

This groundbreaking initiative puts the University of Toronto at the forefront of a growing international movement to apply leading-edge scientific research methods to the social work field. Experts at the Institute will use advanced computer technologies to analyze data on social work practice from around the world. They will identify the most efficient and effective practice methods from the research literature, test and refine them in the field, and ultimately produce an unprecedented body of evidence for use by social work practitioners everywhere.

RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS: JOINING FORCES TO IMPROVE LIVES

The Institute will combine the research strength of the Faculty with the frontline expertise of a wide network of local and national community agencies. These agencies will work side by side with Faculty members to set the Institute's research agenda based on the highest priorities in the field. Seasoned social work professionals and policy makers will be in a position to immediately access and implement the Institute's research findings. This intense collaboration will ensure that the Institute invests in up-to-the-minute research that is directly relevant to real-life practice needs.

To set the Institute's initial research agenda and establish priorities, the Faculty has been collaborating with the following community partners concerned with the welfare of children:

- Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre
- Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- Child Development Institute
- Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- The Hincks-Dellcrest Centre
- The Hospital for Sick Children
- Integra
- Jewish Family and Child Service
- Kids Help Phone
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
- Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

While the Institute is concentrating on the welfare of children in its first research phase, eventually all four of the Faculty of Social Work's established areas of research expertise will form the Institute's organizational framework. The following are just a few of the issues within these themes that the Institute hopes to explore:

1. Children and their Families

Bullying is on the rise

- How can we help parents and teachers recognize and respond to bullying?
- What educational programs are most effective in stopping kids from bullying?

2. Diversity and Social Justice

More and more newcomers unable to use their skills in Canada

- What barriers prevent foreign-trained newcomers from accessing trades and professions in Canada?
- What are some of the promising policy and program initiatives for the integration of foreign-trained professionals in the Canadian labour market?

3. Mental Health and Health

Depression becoming an epidemic in younger generation

- What influences in society are driving up the rates of youth depression and what public prevention programs work best?
- What can we do to make it easier for children to receive help for mental illness?

4. Social Work in Gerontology

Alzheimer's and related dementias growing with aging population

- What are the challenges of caring for people with dementia?
- What are the most helpful support programs for caregivers (one-on-one, small groups, online, etc.)?

Evidence-Based Practice in the Classroom: A student's perspective

The Faculty of Social Work's revamped curriculum emphasizes hands-on experience in evidence-based practice, so the new Institute will also enrich students' learning environment.

"Our graduates will go out into the workforce knowing how to use the latest and best research to tackle social problems they encounter in their careers," says Dean Jim Barber. Soon after arriving at the Faculty in 2003, Barber developed a course on evidence-based practice for first-year Master of Social Work students. "Students select real cases from their fieldwork and identify the best possible intervention using evidence-based practice methods."

MSW student Joseph Antwi-Boasiako, who recently completed the course, offered to share the knowledge he gained by outlining the five basic steps of evidence-based practice as they apply to his case study involving domestic violence:

1. CONVERT THE PRACTICE PROBLEM INTO AN ANSWERABLE QUESTION

"This question should be of direct practical importance to the client. My question was: Does advocacy intervention reduce the risk of further abuse in women who have been victims of domestic violence? A lot of research has been done on the subject of domestic violence, but we don't know much about the effectiveness of specific social work interventions with battered women."



"When all the relevant research is in front of you, you systematically evaluate its validity and usefulness to your case"

- MSW student
Joseph Antwi-Boasiako

2. TRACK DOWN THE BEST EVIDENCE TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION

"You need to objectively and efficiently gather the best evidence to guide your decision-making. I searched all of the available research literature on advocacy intervention for domestic violence using several computer databases."

3. CRITICALLY APPRAISE THE EVIDENCE

"When all the relevant research is in front of you, you systematically evaluate its validity and usefulness to your case. In the end, you narrow it down to the evidence that is most applicable to your client. There are structured instruments to assist you in this and you need to be able to combine statistical information."

4. INTEGRATE THE INFORMATION WITH THE SPECIFIC CLIENT AND HIS/HER VALUES AND JUDGMENT

"Once you've identified the best evidence, you try to apply it to your practice situation. It's not something you impose on your client – there's a process of consultation where you take into account all of the different factors that might influence the effectiveness of the intervention. For example, a woman could be financially dependent on her abuser and not have anywhere else to live. There are also cultural and religious proscriptions that prevent some women from leaving."

5. EVALUATE

"By recording the outcome of the intervention, we as social workers contribute to the ongoing development of evidence-based practice. Ultimately, this whole process is motivated by a desire to help your client – to find the best possible intervention that will make a positive difference in their lives."

Keeping Families Together

New professor adds to Faculty's strength in child welfare

When Professor Aron Shlonsky was a teenager growing up in Los Angeles, a lot of kids at his high school started ruining their lives with drugs. Instead of just sitting back and watching it happen, he decided to do something about it. At just 17 he became a substance abuse peer counsellor, demonstrating the drive to make a difference that would propel his later career.

Shlonsky's family always had strong ties to the helping professions. His mother is a former teacher turned social worker, for example, while his uncle had a long career in child protection services. "I'm not sure whether it's genetic or socialized, but it's

definitely in me," he says with a laugh. "It was just an organic process. I gravitated toward counselling and working with kids to try to bring them out of a tortured existence."

Moving into the related area of child welfare was a natural next step, and today Shlonsky is a respected researcher in the field. Currently an assistant professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work in New York City, he is the latest international recruit to the Faculty of Social Work.

Shlonsky gained some invaluable hands-on experience in child protection after completing his Master of Social Work degree at the University of California at Los Angeles. "It was crucial," he says of the two years he spent as a caseworker and family preservation specialist in South Central LA. "If you're stuck in the academic universe and never get out, you really don't get a sense of how different policies will impact people on the ground."

As he struggled to keep troubled families intact while dealing with a lack of social services and multiple administrative barriers, Shlonsky decided to tackle the system's problems from a different perspective. "I still wanted to work on keeping families together, but I wanted to go farther upstream and work on issues at a broader level."

This realization led him to further study at the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a Master of Public Health and PhD in social

welfare. Since then, he has examined several aspects of child welfare. One of his key interests has been the use of subsidized legal guardianship by relatives as a way to prevent children from languishing in long-term foster care. He has also done extensive research on the issue of siblings in foster care and edited a forthcoming issue of *Children and Youth Services Review* on the topic. "There's so little information on how to keep siblings together and the consequences of not doing so, and sibling relationships are some of the longest, most enduring familial relationships we have."

The need for hard data to guide decisions in the field is something Shlonsky understands firsthand, prompting his interest in the use of risk assessment tools in child welfare. He has also been researching and teaching evidence-based practice for several years. So in addition to being attracted to the Faculty's reputation for excellence in child welfare, the Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work was a major factor in his decision to come to U of T. "The Faculty has positioned itself as a leader in creating a climate where real evidence-based practice can start to occur. Canada is in the forefront of taking these ideas and not just intellectually massaging them, but putting them into the field. And that's really important for me – I hate to just sit around and talk about things without trying to make them happen."



Protecting Refugees at Risk

Recent grad lands UN internship

Nadia Zelisko has heard many stories of displacement, loss and human resilience since she began an internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Ecuador, but there is one that stands out in her mind.

It involves a woman from Colombia who turned up for her meeting with Zelisko looking polished and professional in a neat blazer. She was calm, articulate and well-prepared, even producing a raft of official documents to corroborate her statements. These things were remarkable in themselves, says Zelisko, considering the chaotic circumstances of many refugees' lives in the early days after their arrival. As her tale unfolded, however, Zelisko became even more impressed by the woman's composure. Her son had been taken away when guerrillas forcefully recruited him, and she had to leave the rest of her children behind when she fled for her own safety. The next day, on a home visit, Zelisko found the woman had been sleeping on a piece of cardboard since coming to Ecuador.

"I was just blown away by her capacity to keep it together despite the terror of her situation," says Zelisko, who graduated with a Master of Social Work in 2004 and began working with the refugee agency in January 2005. Her job is to interview refugees, many of whom are trying to escape the escalating conflict in neighbouring Colombia, and identify their individual protection needs.

The competition for the UN internship was fierce, but Zelisko's education and experience set her apart. During her undergraduate degree, she spent a year studying and working in community development in Quito, Ecuador's capital. It was an adventure that consolidated her interest in international development and inspired her to become a social worker. While studying for her MSW, she worked with Latin American refugees at a commu-

nity mental health unit and was a research associate for Professor Usha George at the Joint Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement. Along the way, she also managed to become fluent in Spanish.

"I knew the kind of work that I'd be doing here and felt equipped to do it," she says, "but it's taking me a bit longer than I thought to make sense of the responsibility involved in my role." She's found herself grappling with the fact that she has a direct impact on decisions that affect people's safety and well-being.

"The stories we hear are real and the need is dire. Women on their own, for example, are vulnerable to increasing discrimination against Colombians," she says. "If they don't have access to

financial resources, they might be more subject to things like prostitution." Ecuador's proximity to Colombia also presents unique concerns for refugees. "They may still be in imminent risk because the reasons that caused them to flee sometimes follow them across the border."

While most of Zelisko's previous social work experience taught her to counsel patients on a long-term basis, she now has only a few hours to assess people's needs. "My main challenge is to create a good environment in which people can tell their stories." It's an unfamiliar approach for her, so every day brings a new discovery. "Most of what I've learned about my work has come from the refugees themselves. Each one teaches me something that will in turn help me benefit the next one."



Shaping the Next Generation of Social Workers

Teaching centres bound by a common purpose

IT takes a village to educate a social worker, and that village extends beyond professors in the classroom to practitioners in the field who give their time to teach the next generation.

Over the last few decades, the Faculty of Social Work has developed a widely respected system of field practicum education based on educational opportunities in two types of setting. One type includes social service, social policy and health care agencies that accept a limited number of students when their resources permit it, while the other involves agencies that have made a formal, long-term commitment to social work education and regularly train several students at a time. The latter are called teaching centres and are joined together in the independent Association of Teaching Centres, which offers educational resources and support to its members and the Faculty. “The Association sets a high standard of teaching excellence in the field,” says Roxanne Power, the Faculty’s academic practicum director. “The teaching centre model has been emulated and adapted nationally and internationally.”

Illana Perlman, a social worker in the trauma program at Sunnybrook and Women’s College Health Sciences Centre, says a passion for education is the central motivation for most people who get involved in field instruction. “Working with students to enable them to be better practitioners is extremely rewarding,” Perlman, who was chair of the Association of Teaching Centres for four years, is an educational co-ordinator at Sunnybrook. Every teaching centre has someone in this position who is responsible for designing and administering the practicum program. It’s a time-consuming job, she says, so it has to be at least partly a labour of love.

Yet there are many advantages to becoming a teaching centre. “Agencies get an entrée to the university,” says Perlman. “They can turn to the Faculty for consultation, advice and access to the latest research.” Educational co-ordinators are appointed adjunct social work practice professors and have a voice on Faculty curriculum committees. “There’s a true mutuality in



Illustration: Régis Leiondagoodson.com

this collaboration,” she says. “It works for the Faculty and students and it works for those of us in the field.”

This community-university collaboration sustains the whole enterprise of social work education, says Power. “We’re bound by a common goal of educating ethical, competent and professional social workers to serve societal needs.” There are currently over 100 agencies and institutions across Toronto that offer field practicum placements, 23 of which are teaching centres, but the Faculty is always looking for new placement opportunities and offers a hands-on training program for first-time field instructors.

Students who do practicum placements in the teaching centres gain exposure to prominent service agencies, work on multidisciplinary teams, and develop job and mentoring networks. Perlman says she and many other educational co-ordinators perceive a responsibility to give today’s students the same or better calibre of learning experience they enjoyed. “Throughout my own training I had some wonderful teachers and supervisors, and I know how critical that was in developing my love of and commitment to the profession. So my hope is to try to give some of that back to the students.”

Mentoring Program Celebrates 10 years

Bridging the gap between school and career

IT was a perfect match from the start. Graduating MSW student Natasha Pereira and her mentor The Honourable Judge James P. Felstiner had known each other barely two weeks before they started finishing each other’s sentences.

“He’s the exact right fit for my career interests,” says Pereira, who recently worked as part of a team doing risk assessments of young offenders in a field placement at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Her ambition is to counsel juvenile delinquents, and Felstiner spent almost 30 years as a judge in Ontario’s youth courts before his recent retirement. “I feel so fortunate to have met him because he gives me insights into the field that I couldn’t get anywhere else.” Felstiner has already given Pereira an inside look at the system, arranging for her to hear a case in court and sit in on a discussion in judges’ chambers.

Felstiner had a law degree from Harvard when he graduated from the U of T School of Social Work, as it was known then, in 1961. From his early

days working in children’s camps, he knew he wanted to work with young people. His ambition was not to be a lawyer or social worker, however. He wanted to be a judge. After completing his MSW, he spent a few years in Toronto as a street social worker, gaining firsthand knowledge of the people and places that influence young offenders.

Following his appointment to the Ontario Court of Justice, Felstiner’s social work roots served him well. He worked closely with the social service professionals who provided consultations on the young people in his court and says he has great respect for their role in the judicial process. Now he hopes to help Pereira find a job that will allow her to make her own contribution to the system.

The mentoring program began as a pilot project of the Alumni Association in 1993 and officially launched in 1995, a time when social work jobs were scarce. Mentors assist with resumé preparation, interview skills, networking, and offer general support and encouragement during a student’s career search. “We



started the program to help students make that difficult transition from academic to professional life. Mentoring bridges the gap,” says Sylvia Miller, a longtime member of the Alumni Association who developed the program and co-ordinated it for almost a decade. Bill Stern took over in 2004.

This year Stern recruited a record 65 mentors from diverse professional backgrounds. The majority are alumni, but several are graduates of other social work schools who want to nurture their up-and-coming colleagues. “Mentoring relationships are personal, mutually beneficial and involve dedication that can lead to lasting collegial friendships,” says Miller. “It’s really an amazing thing because all of our mentors are very busy people, but they choose to give their time. They love meeting and working with the students and reconnecting with the Faculty.” As for Felstiner, he says he signed up for these reasons and one more – “It keeps me young!”

Family Man

A pioneer in the study of Canadian family life



Photography: Jayson Gallop

esteemed Merrill-Palmer Institute in Detroit, Mich. Armed with a deeper knowledge of the marital relationship, he went to Cornell University for his PhD and promptly met the woman who was to become his wife of 46 years. “On our first date, I said to Rachel, ‘I’m going to marry you.’ She just laughed, because she had a boyfriend at the time.”

In 1960, after one year of marriage, the couple returned to his alma mater and he began his long career as a professor and researcher of family life. Along the way, the Schlesingers had a family of their own – first Avi, then twins Leo and Esther, and finally Michael. The couple travelled the world with their young children, taking advantage of visiting professorships in places ranging from Australia to Jamaica. “Very early on I said to myself, ‘I’m going to have a family and work hard at it.’ Today, I look at my kids and I’m so proud that their father was always with them. My family was always my first priority.”

In his academic study of family life, Schlesinger quickly became frustrated by a serious deficiency in the social work literature. “All the books we were using at the Faculty were American, so I decided to make it my life’s work to write about Canadian families.” Twenty-five books later, Schlesinger is one of the country’s foremost experts on the subject and the first social work professor to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Known for penetrating the façade of the “typical family,” he has made a career of uncovering and analyzing the true story of Canadian family life over the last four decades. One-parent families, delayed childbearing, elder abuse, the sandwich generation – he was studying all of these phenomena before they hit the mainstream media.

“If I look back, my choice of research topics often reflected where we were in our own family cycle,” he says. His first research study at U of T was about single parents, a topic he knew intimately from his own upbringing. In the late 1970s, he led a landmark study on sexual behaviour in Canada and pioneered a course on sexuality and social work. “This was a taboo topic. When I suggested it to the Faculty they laughed at me, asking, ‘What does sex have to do with social work?’ Everything!”

From sex he turned to marriage, examining the crucial ingredients in a lasting partnership. As his children married and had children of their own, his interest then shifted to a subject that few if any researchers had explored – grandparents’ role in the lives of adult grandchildren. Several of his research studies since the late 1980s, including the one on grandparents, have been collaborations with Rachel, a social sciences professor at York University. “It’s always a joy,” he says of these joint efforts. “We don’t compete with each other.”

These days, the couple is looking behind another door that has traditionally been closed in discussions of Canadian families – the romantic life of seniors. They are studying people who marry or cohabit after age 65 and say that their findings will be eye-opening. Many respondents, for example, report better sex lives now than when they were young. “This is challenging the mythology that after 65 you’re finished,” he says. “Oh no – they’re having a good time!”

Schlesinger officially retired in 1994, but he still gives guest lectures around the world and frequently contributes to media reports about family life. After almost half a century of studying Canadian families, he has decidedly low-key advice about coping with the inevitable troubles that come up at home. “Rachel and I always say, ‘Just cool it, that’s life.’” No marriage is perfect and no parent-child relationship is perfect, he says, but family is important and worth working on when the going gets tough.

“We all know that Ben is a very fine scholar,” says Dean Jim Barber, “but that’s not what I admire most about him. I admire Ben because he is such a fine human being. He is wise, kind and irrepressibly optimistic. My hope is that one day I might become like Ben Schlesinger.”

BY the time he was 10 years old, Professor Emeritus Ben Schlesinger had lived in a foster family, a stepfamily and a single parent family. As difficult and disorienting as this experience might have been for a young boy, it taught him to embrace every variation of family life that offers love and support. It also inspired him to build a life where family comes above all else, both personally and professionally.

Meeting Schlesinger today, no one would guess at the sadness of his early childhood. Only a fleeting shadow passes over his usually smiling eyes when he tells the story. “I was born in Berlin in 1928, and my mother died four days later. My father couldn’t care for me on his own, so he placed me with a foster family. I was seven when he remarried and I left my foster family to go live with him and my stepmother. Soon my brother was born, but not long after that my father was taken to a concentration camp and we never saw him again.”

Fleeing the Nazis with his stepmother and brother, he went to Belgium, France and then Portugal. In 1942 they arrived in Montreal as refugees. To support himself through college, he took a job providing settlement assistance to other Jewish immigrant families. This experience in community advocacy convinced Schlesinger that social work was the profession for him, leading him to complete his MSW at U of T’s School of Social Work in 1953.

Following graduation, he got a job with the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto as one of the pioneers in a new program aimed at helping “multi-problem families.” He had 10 deeply troubled families assigned to him right off the bat. “I’m telling you, that was an experience,” he laughs. He rose to the challenge, however, and a few years later gained a coveted internship in marriage counselling at the

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reach

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