reach

Social Work
Without Borders

Finding creative solutions to social problems
at the local, national and international level

Illustration: Steve Adams

The University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work has always had an impact on communities across the city, but in recent years the Faculty's influence has expanded to include communities across the world.

"We're providing leadership in the study and improvement of social problems at the local, national and international level," says Professor Jim Barber, dean of the Faculty. "Many of our researchers are constantly crossing national boundaries to compare methodologies, exchange ideas and come up with creative solutions."

The Faculty's ongoing research collaborations with countries in every corner of the globe are strategic partnerships with a clear intent, says Barber. "We don't pursue international connections for their own sake. We want to work with other leaders in the field, wherever they may be, to determine best practices in social work."

With its location in one of the world's most culturally and ethnically diverse cities, the Faculty also interacts with the international community at home. "One of our main objectives is to ensure that our students and faculty members gain experience in multilingual, multicultural environments," says Barber. "Diversity issues are woven throughout the Faculty's teaching and research, and we're always on the lookout for how we can improve in this area."

The recent addition of a number of professors from outside Canada has further increased the breadth and depth of international research at the Faculty. Barber, a native of Australia who arrived at U of T at the beginning of 2003, is just one of these newcomers. In the pages ahead, we profile Barber and several other faculty members—most of whom are new recruits— whose international research is shaping social work practice in areas such as immigration, HIV/AIDS, child welfare and urban poverty. The settings for their investigations range from the Faculty's front step all the way to Asia, but the social relevance of their work is universal.

Faculty update
What's happening around our world of Social Work
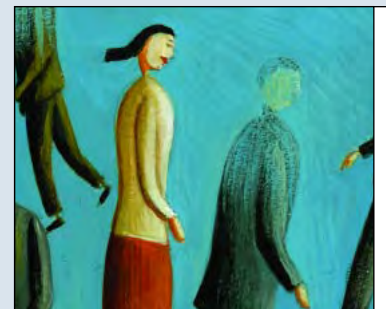
Why the name *Reach*, you might ask?

S oon after I arrived at the Faculty of Social Work in early 2003, I started to think about how we could get the word out to the Faculty's alumni and friends about the impressive work being done here. After consulting with my new colleagues, we decided that a highly read-able, attractive publication would be the perfect way to share our successes and to celebrate the people who make this Faculty great. Now, about a year later, I'm happy to welcome you to the first issue of *Reach*, the magazine of the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work.

Why the name *Reach*, you might ask? Because social work is an outward-looking discipline that strives to reach individuals and groups in Toronto and around the world through its educational and scholar-ly endeavours. Coming as I do from the other side of the world, I know that this Faculty's research has an impact on social policy and social work practice, not just in Toronto and in Canada but, increasingly, in countries around the world. Our students also connect with people from every walk of life in their field placements through-out the local community. And our gradu-ates are leaders in the profession across all fields of practice.

Reach will tell the stories of one of North America's premier schools of social work. It will introduce you to our innovative professors, talented students and accom-plished alumni. And it will keep you up-to-date on the latest Faculty news and events.

This issue could only highlight a few of the great minds in our Faculty. So in each subsequent issue, we plan slowly but surely to cover all of our fascinating people and projects.

If you enjoy our inaugural issue and would like to continue to receive this biannual publication, please contact casr.fsw@utoronto.ca or 416-978-5659. We are committed to a judicious use of resources and will only mail upcoming issues to those who respond by May 31, 2004.*

JIM BARBER

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Memorial Scholarship for Human Rights Trailblazer

Dr. Daniel G. Hill, founding director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the recipient of an MA, PhD and honorary doctorate from U of T, passed away on June 26, 2003. "Dr. Hill will be remembered as a pioneer of the human rights movement in Canada. His dedica-tion to the quest for equality for all people of all backgrounds continues to inspire all of us at the Faculty of Social Work," says Dean Jim Barber.

The family has asked that memorial donations be directed in support of the Dr. Daniel G. Hill Senior Scholarship. The scholarship was established to promote the recruitment and retention of black students and is awarded to a student enrolled in the Master of Social Work Program on the basis of financial need. Academic merit is also considered.

Please send donations in Dr Hill's memory, payable to the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, to the attention of: Jody Greenlaw, Associate Director of Advancement
University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work
Suite 106A - 246 Bloor St. West,
Toronto ON   M5S 1A1

Latest Ontario Graduate Scholarship a Family Tribute

Elizabeth and Martin Gammack established the *E.A.G. Memorial Ontario Graduate Scholarship in the Faculty of Social Work* in memory and in honour of Martin's mother and father, Elsie and Albert Gammack. Elsie and Albert were orphans. They immigrated to Canada in the 1920s and never forgot the separation from their brother and sisters and the difficulties of growing up without the love of family. Martin and Elizabeth Gammack decided to honour Elsie and Albert in this way because they wanted to support the education of social work students who will later work to improve the lives of the more vulnerable segments of our population. It is their hope that the students will work in the area of child care and welfare. Ontario Graduate Scholarships are jointly funded by the Ontario government, universities and private donors.

Endowed Research Chairs: A National Leader

The generous support of alumni and friends has allowed the Faculty of Social Work to establish six endowed chairs— more than any other school of social work in Canada. These chairs are based in key academic areas and play a critical role in allowing the Faculty to remain competitive with the finest public research institutions in the world. The individuals who occupy these chairs are leaders in their fields.

Margaret and Wallace McCain
Family Chair in Child and Family
Professor Nico Trocme
Norman and Honey Schipper
Chair in Gerontological Social Work
Professor Elsa Marziali

Sandra Rotman Chair in Social Work
Professor Cheryl Regehr
K.K. Leung and Sons
Social Work Chair in Multiculturalism
Chair holder to be determined
Royal Bank Chair in Applied Social Work Research
Professor Usha George
Dr. Chow Yei Ching Chair in Housing
at the Faculty of Social Work
Professor David Hulchanski

Illustration: Anson Liaw

Fast Facts About the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work
- Founded in 1914, the U of T Faculty of Social Work was Canada's first school of social work.
- The Centre for Applied Social Research at the Faculty of Social Work currently administers more than $8 million in research funds.
- Together, Social Work faculty members are involved in approximately 30 international collaborations with countries that include Australia, Belgium, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States
- Master of Social Work students complete their hands-on learning experience, called the field practicum, in more than 100 community settings across the Toronto area. These settings include social service agencies, hospitals, government ministries and community centres.

Research Funding Highlights

- Professor Nico Trocme's Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect- Cycle II has received over $1 million in contract funding from Health Canada, Bell Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services.
- In 2003, the following professors received a total of more than $250,000 in Standard Research Grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada:
  - Professor Adrienne Chambon, for research on art practices in social work
  - Professor Usha George, for research on newcomer South Asian women
  - Professors Cheryl Regehr and Ramona Alaggia, for research on retribution, restoration and victim healing

Charmaine Williams

Post-diagnosis: Challenging perceptions about serious mental illness

Every so often, Professor Charmaine Williams bumps into former clients from her years working in mental health care in Toronto. Sometimes they're riding the subway on their way to work. Other times they're panhandling on the street.

Seeing these two very different outcomes always reinforces her commitment to understanding the psychological and social implications of being diagnosed with a serious mental illness. "The faces of the people that I used to work with are still very much with me when I do my research," she says.

Williams chose to work in the mental health field after completing her Master of Social Work at U of T partly because of an incident during her undergraduate years. A roommate had a psychotic episode and the experience left an indelible impression on Williams. "That was such a baffling time, with the mysteriousness around what was happening with him, and not knowing what to do or expect."

The confusion she felt then is typical of a lot of people's responses to mental illness, she says, especially a serious mental illness like schizophrenia. "Many people are scared by what they think they know about schizophrenia," she says. "It's hard to speak freely about it. It's hard to say, 'I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, but now I'm fine.' People may not rally around you if you have experienced schizophrenia." For all of these reasons, Williams became very interested in schizophrenia during her six years of practice in general psychiatry at Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and has since explored it in her research.

"It's just so terribly misunderstood, and the stigma is so severe, so it keeps me particularly interested not just in the illness, but in pushing people's thinking about it," she says. Because schizophrenia is defined by a loss of touch with reality, and because it's often portrayed in the mass media as a deteriorative lifelong affliction, many people assume that it is a hopeless diagnosis.

"Society has a vision of schizophrenia that's very narrow, with few possibilities. People diagnosed with it sometimes don't see other options and end up functioning within that narrow space, or other options might not be available to them. The messages they hear are: You're going to be sick for the rest of your life. You're never going to be like everybody else. You're not going to have a job and you're going to have to live on very little money."

So it's no surprise to her that some people who receive a schizophrenia diagnosis don't accept it and opt out of the available treatments. Society's negative attitudes about the disease can help to shape a person with schizophrenia's perception of his or her worth and competence, Williams says.

But not everyone with schizophrenia is overwhelmed by these odds. Recent research proves that many people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia can partially or fully recover. "Even mental health care professionals have to remind themselves that the statistics say that one out of every three people who receives a diagnosis of schizophrenia will never have to come back to the hospital." It's a reality check that Williams says she had to do herself when she was practicing. These days, she tries to help remind her colleagues in mental health care of this message through the articles she publishes and presentations she makes in the community.

"A lot of my work is about tweaking people's thinking about clients with serious mental illness and about how we work with them in practice." In the past, social workers tended to err on the side of caution when dealing with people with schizophrenia, for example by automatically helping them to apply for long-term disability insurance. While this may be warranted sometimes, she says social workers also have a responsibility to address and avoid the potentially harmful social stereotypes associated with the illness. "It's partly about an openness to other possibilities and how we talk to our clients about why we're planning certain interventions and what the future holds for them."

In addition to her efforts to educate students and mental health care professionals about the social construction of disability in schizophrenia, Williams is also very active in tackling racism and oppression in the mental health care system. Her concerns about access and equity grew out of some early experiences in practice. "When I found myself thinking, I wouldn't want a member of my family to be in this situation, I felt I had to do something about it." She developed and evaluated an educational intervention to increase cultural competence in social workers for her doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Social Work and continues to build on this early research.

There is ample research evidence showing that ethnoracial and ethnocultural groups often receive inadequate or inappropriate mental health care, and having observed it herself, Williams became involved in community and organizational development to combat the problems. She provides continuing education workshops for professionals who want to increase their awareness of the issues around providing equitable, appropriate care. Transforming the system will be a long and incremental process, but she is happy to report that there is high demand for this type of workshop because many agencies and professionals are interested in making positive changes.

Williams knows firsthand that a lot of people "fall through the cracks" of the mental health care system. Sometimes it's because of their race/ethnicity, sometimes it's because of society's low expectations for their recovery, but it's never because the system doesn't care, she says. "The system just isn't equipped appropriately yet and the people who work in it don't have the tools they need." She's optimistic because she believes that the system is capable of change, and she looks forward to a future where more people will get the help they need and be on their way to recovery.

"I've had the opportunity to spend time with people who have found ways to live lives that are fulfilling, despite serious mental illness. They have families and friends. They contribute to their communities. They have reasons to get out of bed in the morning. They're so much more than just their illness."

> "Schizophrenia is just so terribly misunderstood, and the stigma is so severe, so it keeps me particularly interested not just in the illness, but in pushing people's thinking about it."

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Six faculty members who are having
an impact on the international scene

JIM BARBER
Children of no fixed address:
Preventing serial evictions in foster care

Imagine having 24 different homes in the space of just four months. Now imagine you're just 12 years old. This is the real story of a boy that Professor Jim Barber encountered in his research on troubled children in foster care, and there are many stories just like his.

"Generally speaking, the outcomes in foster care are very good. But there is a group that does extremely badly," says Barber, who began his term as Dean of the Faculty of Social Work in January 2003. "About 15 to 20 per cent of kids in care fall into this group, and I've become very interested in them because their plight can be just desperate."

Barber's research on foster care began when the government of South Australia asked him to track the psychosocial outcomes of a large group of children that entered the foster care system between 1998 and 1999. The fact that he was chosen to undertake this important study reflected his stature as one of Australia's foremost social work scholars. Before coming to U of T, he was head of social administration and social work at Flinders University in Adelaide and had developed an international reputation for his research on child and adolescent welfare, addictions, and the relationship between human development and social policy.

Social policies related to the care of emotionally troubled children are changing throughout the western world, says Barber. Specialized residential facilities designed for their care are closing, so more and more high needs children are ending up with foster families, where they often have very short-lived stays.

Photo: Susan King

"They're still in an environment where there's some hope."

Barber is currently leading an international research project that is looking for ways to avoid this foster placement instability. "We're trying to determine how we can prevent what I call the 'serial eviction' of disruptive kids in foster care," he says.

While the study is based in Australia, he is collaborating with researchers in Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada to identify and evaluate programs aimed at helping troubled children in foster care. In the end, the findings will point to the most effective interventions and will

contribute to research-based, or evidence-based, practice – a relatively new trend in social work that Barber is passionate about.

Studying children in foster care is a way to tackle much broader problems affecting youth, he says. "It allows me to work with a group of troubled kids who are still in an environment where there's some hope. They're not yet in jail or living on the street. They're in someone's home where there's still some chance of reaching them. If we can shave even a few percentage points off that 15 to 20 per cent that have so much trouble, imagine all the social strife we will prevent around the world."

PETER A. NEWMAN
No magic bullet:
Preparing for an HIV vaccine

It could be 10 years or more before initial HIV vaccines become available, but Professor Peter A. Newman says public health leaders worldwide need

"It's not either/or, a vaccine or behavioural prevention. We need both."

to start planning now how they'll introduce a vaccine into high-risk groups. "If a vaccine comes and we're not ready, we'll waste several more years of people getting infected and dying," he says. "What a tragedy that would be."

While scientists are working to produce a viable vaccine, Newman and his research team are on the forefront in trying to understand the behavioural issues that will help or hinder vaccine adoption. Their findings indicate that there is a real and widespread fear of vaccine-induced HIV infection, for example. It doesn't matter that, with certain types of vaccines, this is scientifically impossible, he says. "In some ways the truth with a capital T is of less consequence—it's what people believe that we have to work with."

Newman's research also suggests that the introduction of an HIV vaccine could lead to a "lightening up" of safer sex practices that might subvert the vaccine's ability to control the AIDS epidemic. "It's not surprising because we know that after the new AIDS drugs came out there was some elevated risk behaviour. And this has also happened in some people participating in HIV vaccine trials." It's very unlikely that an HIV vaccine will be close to 100 per cent effective, he says, so education and risk reduc-

tion interventions will be crucial to help people understand that the vaccine is not a magic bullet. "It's not either/or, a vaccine or behavioural prevention. We need both."

Newman has almost 15 years of experience in the HIV/AIDS field, going back to his first job counselling patients at San Francisco General Hospital's AIDS program in the early 1990s. "There was a white board up in that clinic, and week after week there would be at least 20 names on it of people who had just died." Going into AIDS research was a natural choice, he says, because it seemed to offer more possibilities to effect broad changes.

Since shifting his career path, Newman has studied diverse populations at high risk for HIV/AIDS. For his doctoral degree at the University of Michigan, he examined sexual risk behaviour among gay and bisexual youth. As a National Institute of Mental Health postdoctoral fellow, he helped implement a community-based HIV prevention program for sex workers in Northern India.

Newman has been at U of T for almost two years now and continues to expand his research on HIV vaccine preparation. Most recently he has begun studies in Thailand and local Toronto communities. "A vaccine might look different to a 20-year-old gay kid in Toronto or a sex worker in India or a woman in Thailand whose husband is her only risk," he says. "Different audiences require different messages and different education to be able to make an informed and intelligent decision."

IZUMI SAKAMOTO
New horizons:
Shedding light on cultural adaptation

Professor Izumi Sakamoto knows from personal and professional experience that adapting to a new culture is rarely simple or predictable, and her research

"Immigrants may constantly fluctuate between accepting and resisting their new and old cultures."

is helping social workers gain a more sophisticated understanding of this complex process.

Sakamoto left Japan in 1993 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Michigan on a prestigious Fulbright scholarship. The isolation she felt in her early days there eventually influenced the whole course of her research career. "I just felt marginalized

in general, not connected with the American students," she says. When she realized that many international students on campus shared her struggles, she founded and directed the International Families Outreach Project (IFOP) – a program that continues to this day. The IFOP offers a variety of resources to ease international families' transition to their new country and it is one of her proudest achievements.

While she was devoting every spare minute to this community venture, Sakamoto came up with research questions she wanted to explore further in her doctoral thesis. The outcome of this eventual research on Japanese academic migrants' cultural adaptation was a new theoretical model of what she calls "cultural negotiation." While traditional concepts of acculturation are static and straightforward, her model is fluid and ever-changing. Depending on their social circumstances, she says, immigrants may constantly fluctuate between accepting and resisting their new and old cultures.

Since coming to U of T in 2002, Sakamoto has been building on this research by investigating the cultural negotiation process of one of the largest newcomer groups to Canada and Toronto—skilled immigrants from Mainland China. Her pilot study, funded in part by a Royal Bank Fellowship and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, revealed that multiple factors such as gender roles, employment status and access to social services influence Mainland Chinese immigrants' cultural adaptation.

Sakamoto plans to expand the Mainland Chinese study and may examine other immigrant communities in the future, but her research has already given social workers a new perspective on immigrants' multifaceted experiences. Despite all of the challenges newcomers encounter, though, she says one of her most striking findings to date is their underlying optimism. "They survive, they are resilient and they are motivated to make things better."

DAVID HULCHANSKI AND USHA GEORGE
Sickness in the city:
Health and the urban poor in India
Growing up in India's villages can be inadequate preparation for surviving in its big cities. As a result, the growing number of rural migrants living in urban areas without the support of their families face many challenges. Professors David Hulchanski and Usha George are exploring the link between changing family structures and health status in one of the country's most destitute cities.

Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh state, has India's highest rate of urban poverty and ranks among the three worst states in terms of overall health. Life expectancy for the residents of Bhopal is just 54 years.
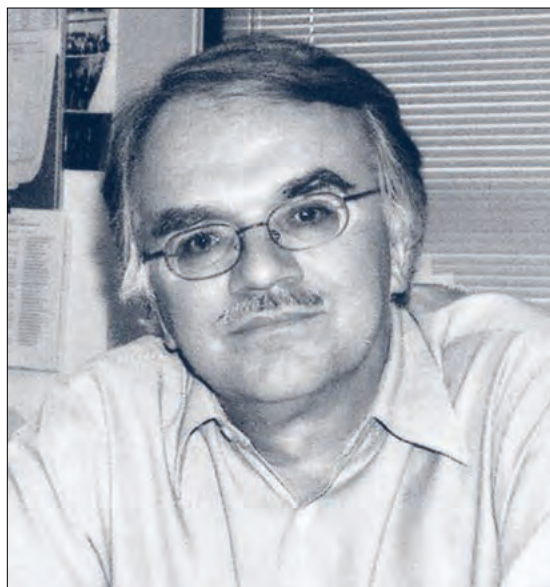
"One of our main tasks is to find ways to develop affordable, accessible urban health care."

With support from the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, an educational enterprise funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, Hulchanski and George are collaborating with a research team headed by Dr. C.A.K. Yesudian of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India. One of the team's first objectives is to study the impact of urbanization on family composition in three slum communities in Bhopal.

"Immigration to urban areas has been an ongoing trend in India, but it's been heightened in recent years by the drought in rural areas and the fact that the agricultural industry is becoming unprofitable for small landowners," says George, who holds the Royal Bank Chair in Applied Social Work Research. When people move away from the villages where they lived with extended family in large, mutually supportive communities, they often end up unemployed and lacking their main sources of economic and social support.

This disruption of traditional family structures has resulted in extreme poverty and conditions relat-

"The basic necessities of life are often not available."

ed to poor health such as inadequate nutrition and sanitation. "The basic necessities of life are often not available," says George, "so some of the traditional kinds of illnesses that we assume aren't a problem anymore, like TB, are exaggerated."

The absence of health care facilities in the urban slums only exacerbates these health concerns. One of the researchers' main tasks is to find ways to develop affordable, accessible urban health care. "We'll also be working with local policy makers to identify health promotion approaches that are sensitive to the needs of urban migrant families," says Hulchanski, who holds the Dr. Chow Yei Ching Chair in Housing at the Faculty of Social Work.

While the project is focused on a relatively small region, he says the findings will have broader significance. "The people in this city are pretty typical of the urban poor in India, and in fact have some similarities with the urban poor outside of India. The results should have implications for how health services can better reach that group all over the world."

A. KA TAT TSANG
Home-grown learning: Building social work education for China's future
When Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang was studying social work in Hong Kong, his textbooks were North American. The theories and concepts he learned were rooted in a culture very different from the one where he had to apply his knowledge. Now, more than 20 years later, he's leading efforts to ensure that the next generation of Chinese social work students don't experience the same frustration.

As director of the China-Canada Collaborative Project on the Development of Social Work in China, Tsang is working with Chinese scholars to create a social work curriculum tailored to the country's unique needs. "China is going through rapid changes as it shifts to a market economy, and there are many personal and social implications for the Chinese people that will affect social services," he says.

Unemployment—unheard of before—is now a serious concern, bringing with it problems such as family disintegration, addiction and prostitution. Recognizing that international collaboration would enhance China's capacity to cope with these challenges, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs was very receptive to the idea of a partnership with the U of T Faculty of Social Work focusing on social work edu-

cation. A lead gift from Dr. Annie Wong, substantial donations from Irene So and Mr. and Mrs. To Yu Lim, and the tireless fund-raising efforts of volunteer Grace Chum helped make the partnership possible.

One of the project's major initiatives has been the creation of new textbooks co-edited by social work scholars from China and North America. "This

"We want to work with them from the ground up to provide them with what they want and need."

method is labour intensive, with all the long-distance correspondence and translation, but we believe it's worth the effort," says Tsang. Some of his colleagues in the Faculty have contributed their time and expertise to this venture.

The project participants are also setting up an online dictionary of social work terms that will help Chinese social work students and researchers access the wealth of knowledge available in the field. The interactive dictionary will not presume to offer authoritative definitions, says Tsang, but will invite discussion and debate.

From the outset, Tsang has consulted extensively with his Chinese partners to ensure that the project produces resources that are relevant in the local environment. "We didn't want to go in as foreign experts telling them what to do. We want to work with them from the ground up to provide them with what they want and need."

Albania to Zambia and Everywhere in Between:
The Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Centre

One of the first things visitors to the Faculty of Social Work see when they walk in the front door is the AMNI Centre. This prominent location reflects the Centre's importance in the Faculty and its goal of being a welcoming, accessible place devoted to issues of equity and social justice.

Since the 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. The Centre is part of the Faculty's broader Diversity Initiative, which includes minority student recruitment and retention, faculty recruitment and development, community outreach and research.

One of the AMNI 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, yet richly detailed, profiles of 102 countries spanning the globe. The profiles appear in the form of individual booklets and offer social service providers and regular Canadians insight into immigrants' diverse backgrounds. To date, over one million of these booklets have been distributed across Canada.

The Cultural Profiles are available online at http://www.settlement.org/cp/index.html

Sheila Neysmith
Provisions for the new economy:
Recognizing women's unpaid community work

IF a woman spends hours every week running a community food co-op so that she can get nutritious meals on the table for her family, how do you classify this work? It's not paid employment in the public sphere. It's not unpaid caregiving in the private sphere. It's something in between. That nebulous "third area" of women's work is the current focus of Professor Sheila Neysmith's research.

"It's much like 15 years ago when we were trying to document women's caring labour. It's work that women do, but they have no name for it," says Neysmith, who is recognized internationally for her expertise on women's paid and unpaid work.

The fact that most North Americans today have at least heard of the concept of women's unpaid or invisible work—the caregiving they do every day for their families—is partly due to her groundbreaking feminist research on the subject in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1996 Census of Canada was the first to ask questions concerning unpaid work, officially bringing the subject onto the public discussion agenda.

More recently, Neysmith has turned her attention to the impact of economic restructuring and cuts in public services on women's work. Many of the costs of this restructuring are borne by low-income families, she says, and especially by women. She recently completed an innovative study funded by the Atkinson Foundation on the repercussions of Conservative Party social policy reforms for Ontario households. "We found that, in order for households with precarious financial situations to get by, there was an awful lot of unpaid work going on," she says. "The informal economy was alive and well."

Women are often at the centre of the informal economy because of their traditional role in meeting their family's basic needs—cooking the meals, for example, and ensuring the kids have warm clothing. To secure the resources they need for this role, Neysmith says, many women from poor households undertake "provisioning work." This is unpaid, unmeasured work that is usually situated in the community, or what is known as the third sector.

Provisioning work can be anything from setting up employment support groups to tending a communal garden. Women undertake this work in an attempt to counteract some of the results of restructuring, such as higher costs of living, increased user fees and reduced social services. In essence, she says, it is a survival strategy.

With the aid of a development grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's "Initiative on the New Economy" program, Neysmith and her research partners completed a pilot study on provisioning work. In the spring, they plan to begin a larger study of low-income women at five community sites in Ontario and British Columbia. She will be responsible for two case studies in Toronto involving young immigrant women and aging poor women.

One of the project's goals is to identify the social, economic and political conditions that support or limit this type of women's work. Another objective is simply to make this work visible and give it a name, says Neysmith. "Our job is to try to document it so that at the end of the project it takes on a presence in society, just like caring labour did in the 1990s."

Robert MacFadden
High touch in high tech: The marriage of
social work and information technology

Professor Robert MacFadden sometimes watches in amazement as his daughter conveys warmth, humour and caring in her rapid-fire online conversations. He admires her skill because he has been trying to integrate information technology into social work for more than 20 years, and he's learned that the ability to humanize computer interaction is key.

Social work's justifiable reputation as a "people profession" initially made it resistant to the introduction of technology, says MacFadden, who is known as one of the earliest pioneers of IT in the field. When he led the development of the Faculty of Social Work's first Web-based distance learning course, critics said it was a cold way to teach. But his students said otherwise. Their positive response was the result of his careful planning and research on the factors that contribute to successful online learning.

Online course instructors need to communicate regularly with their students in multiple ways—not just through e-mail—and should be very attentive to students' emotional experience, says MacFadden, the Director of Continuing Education at the Faculty. "When people talk, they can hear each other's tone of voice and see each other's faces, but when you're in an e-mail scenario you sometimes don't know how to take things. Right now we're working on ways to create text-based communication that has a deep human connection to it." Even simple things like emoticons can enhance emotional expression, he says. These findings and others will appear in a new book he's editing, due out later this year, called *Web-Based Education in the Human Services: Models, Methods and Best Practices*.

Online learning is not MacFadden's only interest. In a master's level course he has been teaching since 1981, he introduces students to the wide variety of applications of IT in social work. Information technology has transformed social services agencies, he says, allowing them to maintain large databases of client information, perform quick statistical analyses and create online communities. "Information technology automates the social action and community development process. Even the smallest social action group can start up a Web site and use it as a focal point for things like showcasing resources and gathering people with similar interests."

MacFadden teaches his students how to create their own Web sites and says he takes great delight in converting self-proclaimed technophobes. "Probably one of the most gratifying things that I do here is watching people who've defined themselves as non-technical begin to use technology to create something that could help them in their careers as social workers," says this winner of the Faculty's Teacher of the Year award.

The next frontier, he says, is online therapy, also known as e-therapy. While MacFadden has not incorporated this innovation into his own psychotherapy practice, he is watching the battle between its proponents and detractors with great interest. "Ironically, to understand the impact of technology in human services, we have to distinguish what we can do from what our computers can do. In essence, we have to reflect on what it means to be human."

Rachel Zhou

Stories behind the stigma: Exploring the daily
lives of people living with HIV/AIDS in China

ON a December day back in 1997 when Yanqiu (Rachel) Zhou was working as a journalist in Beijing, she was assigned to interview a man dying from AIDS. Today, the third-year doctoral student looks back on that encounter as the pivotal moment that led to her current research on the life experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS in China.

Before she met him, the man she interviewed as part of World AIDS Day coverage had tried to commit suicide several times and was feeling desperate about his situation. People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) kept themselves virtually invisible in China at that time because of the heavy stigma attached to having the disease, and he was the first one to show his face in the Chinese media.

"The reason he accepted my interview was that he felt he had nothing to lose," says Zhou, a Royal Bank of Canada Graduate Research Fellow. "I remember I went in and took his hand to shake it, and he was a bit shocked because no one outside the AIDS ward ever dared to touch him." Even the nurses who worked in other wards in that hospital were terrified of him. What affected her most was not only his personal misery, but the pervasive fear and lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS in China.

The Ministry of Health in China estimates that there are 1 million PLWHAs in the country. Though this is a relatively low number in a population of almost 1.3 billion, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS reports that China is currently experiencing one of the most rapidly expanding HIV epidemics in the world.

While public education campaigns have somewhat improved the situation in China in recent years, many PLWHAs still keep their disease a secret and do not seek out health and social services, says Zhou. Her goal is to explore their daily lives and needs from their own perspectives and use this information to help develop social work interventions such as family support networks and counselling programs.

In the summer of 2003 Zhou went to China and interviewed the main sources for her dissertation project, including frontline professionals who work with PLWHAs and two men living with HIV. She was warned that the two men might be somewhat withdrawn, but once they recognized her openness and acceptance they were willing to share their stories.

One man told her he was immediately fired after his employer learned of his diagnosis. The other man cried while telling her that he had not dared to kiss or hug his only child after his diagnosis five years ago, even though he knew that HIV could not be transmitted through this type of contact. These pilot interviews allowed her to gain access to the community of Chinese PLWHAs and laid the groundwork for the next phase of her research.

Even though she's only about half-way through her doctoral program, Zhou is already thinking about what comes next. "I want to translate the knowledge developed through this research into action," she says. "I really hope my study can contribute to possible changes in these people's day-to-day lives, even just a little bit."

Illustration: Marie Lafrance

Dr. Bernice Bell

Life lessons: A career
devoted to learning about learning

**Dr. Bernice Bell and Jody Greenlaw, Associate Director
of Advancement at the Faculty of Social Work**

Once in a while, out of the blue, Dr. Bernice Bell picks up the phone to hear the voice of a former student. Often it's someone she taught decades ago, but they still think of her when they want to recount a proud achievement or share a difficult struggle.

These callers represent just a handful of the many people Bell (BSW 1960, MSW 1964, EdD 1992) has touched over the course of a career dedicated to discovering and nurturing the potential in everyone. "Whatever their age or level of ability or disability, all people are learners. They all have strengths," she says.

In the more than 40 years since Bell graduated from the Faculty of Social Work, she has helped students of all ages and aptitudes from every type of background find their unique gifts. Now, by making a bequest to the Faculty, she has contributed to the education of future social workers and given them the same opportunity to have a positive impact on people's lives.

While her first jobs were in child welfare and children's mental health, later on Bell entered the field of learning disabilities. At Seneca College, she developed a program for students who struggled in traditional educational settings. "So many of these students would come to me and say, 'I was told I would never make it to college,'" she says. "Those kids graduated, and it was because they believed in themselves. I only worked as a vehicle to that end."

Bell also played a pivotal role at the U of T Faculty of Social Work throughout most of her career. At different times she was a lecturer, field instructor and contributor to curriculum development.

Since her so-called retirement to Prince Edward Island in 1992, Bell has turned her attention to how seniors learn. "Seniors bring a sense of wholeness to learning because of their experiences," she says. "They bring the pieces of the puzzle together." She lectured in social gerontology at the University of PEI for eight years, was a field instructor in social work for Memorial University of Newfoundland, volunteered extensively with seniors' community programs, served as a research consultant and wrote several reports on aging for the government.

As she begins to "retire from retirement," Bell has been reflecting on what social work education means to her. Her decision to leave a bequest to the dean's discretion is the culmination of decades of service to the Faculty and a symbol of her deep belief in the value of social work. "One needs to have a good, solid education for this momentous profession," she says. "It's a means for students to attain a sense of responsibility to society and to maintain the value of the common good. I don't think you get that anywhere else except in social work."

Faye Mishna

Not your average bully:
New perspectives on schoolyard aggression

Photo: Jayson Gallop

Bullies are big, tough boys who push around the smaller kids on the playground, right? At least that's how they tend to appear in the public imagination. But what about a popular girl who relentlessly teases an unpopular girl— is that bullying? And is it possible for children to be bullied by their friends? Yes on both counts, says Professor Faye Mishna, whose research is revealing just how complex and confusing bullying really is.

"People pay attention when bullying is dramatic and involves violence," says Mishna, "but if it's more indirect or involves social exclusion, I don't think people realize how bad it can be."

Mishna's interest in bullying was sparked by her PhD research involving group therapy for children and youth with learning disabilities. When she asked the young people what they found helpful about group therapy, several of them remarked on the fact that they didn't get harassed or rejected by the other kids in the group. "What really struck me was that they all talked about how nice it was to be treated like a 'human being' for once," she says.

She knew from 15 years of experience in the field of children's mental health that having a learning disability makes kids vulnerable to bullying, but until that moment she had somehow not fully appreciated just how front and centre the problem could be. "Then I had the obvious realization that bullying shouldn't be a part of their lives, and that they needed adults to intervene," she says.

Since that time, Mishna has made bullying an integral part of her research program. With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and co-operation from the Toronto District School Board, she is currently leading a study that examines the issue from the perspectives of Grade 4 and 5 victims of bullying, their parents, teachers and school principals. It's a fresh take on the subject because most research has focused on bullies, not the bullied, and few studies have explored the perspectives of those directly involved.

The study's pilot findings show that a number of factors make it very hard for both the victims and the significant adults in their lives to determine when an incident constitutes bullying. Even when they agree on the basic definition of bullying—a form of aggression where there is an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim—they often can't identify it when it's happening to them or right in front of them.

When bullying is non-physical, or when the victim is considered to be at fault, the study found it tends to be downplayed. "There are essentially two kinds of victims," says Mishna. "The first is meek, quiet, shy, sensitive and tends to cry easily—they're a classic target. And then there's the provocative victim who annoys everybody."

The common thread among all the victims comes down to one thing: difference. "Any kind of difference can be a target," she says, whether it's a learning disability, appearance, race or, something that surprised her, simply wearing glasses. As far as gender, the traditional assumption that more boys than girls are involved in bullying doesn't hold true, she says. "Until recently, some of the ways girls bully haven't been recognized as bullying. Instead girls have been depicted as 'nasty' or 'catty,' when in fact their behaviours represent the ways girls may tend to bully."

Another factor that complicates the identification of bullying is that it can occur within the context of a friendship. This was one of the study's unanticipated findings, says Mishna. Parents and teachers involved in her research struggled to unravel the meaning of aggression when it happened between children considered to be friends.

Adding to the difficulty of recognizing bullying is simply the fact that victims seriously underreport it. "It's like any kind of abuse," says Mishna. "Kids are ashamed and many don't want to talk about it, so they often won't unless you specifically ask them. And they don't want to tell adults, because they're scared telling will make it worse."

She says the psychosocial toll bullying takes on victims can be serious and potentially long-lasting. "For kids, being accepted is so central, and when they're not it interferes with all aspects of their development—social, emotional, academic and psychological." Her earlier research found that children can grow to accept the idea of being rejected and may start to feel inferior and blame themselves, a harmful propensity that can later affect their adult relationships.

"I remember one girl from the study who said, in a matter-of-fact way, 'People can't stand me because I'm very annoying.' It's really heartbreaking. So what we must try to do is show these kids that it's not OK to be treated this way." Other victims said that their situation had improved, but when she probed them she would discover that they meant being bullied twice a week compared to twice a day.

The teachers involved in Mishna's study are very interested in the study's findings because they are often on the frontlines when it comes to dealing with bullying in schools. While they have recourse to established policies on violent bullying, several of them commented on the lack of clear direction when they are confronted with more subtle forms of aggression.

Social workers are in a unique position to intervene, she says. "While they need to become more aware of bullying, social workers are trained to recognize the complexities of the problem, particularly with relational bullying." One of the main objectives of Mishna's research is to contribute to the development of social work practice principles for addressing bullying. Armed with this knowledge, social workers who work in the school or community could open children's eyes to the broad spectrum of bullying while helping parents and educators navigate the tricky path of intervention. "It's just not as simple as coming up with school guidelines. It's not a clear-cut issue."

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