



REACH

The Power of Mentoring

Why It Matters

Mentoring has an extraordinary impact. We've seen what it can do over and over again. That's why mentoring is integral to the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Graduating MSW students who participate in the Alumni Mentoring Program tell us that being mentored makes a tremendous difference during an all-important transition period in their lives. Students receive much-needed help from experienced alumni as they take first steps into the field and launch their social work careers. And every new faculty member who is hired at the FIFSW is matched with a mentor.

We asked six alumni why they think mentoring matters and what their own experience has been like. Some have been mentors or mentees through the FIFSW Alumni Mentoring Program and others have experienced informal mentoring.

What comes across is how mentoring works on many levels at once. For some, it is highly concrete and specific help with resumes, cover letters, networking, resources, preparing for interviews, timelines and setting and achieving critical professional goals.

For others, at different stages of their careers, it's a kind of guidepost. An opportunity to check in with someone who truly knows you, who lends an ear, provides advice, and keeps you on track, accountable and moving forward.

Whether formal or informal, something else comes through in these stories – how mentoring works on a deeper level. How something is activated. A kind of spark. How something happens when someone believes in you, when they see your talents and capabilities even before you do yourself.

Here are their stories.



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In this issue of REACH, we wanted to highlight the importance of a few key social work concepts that are intrinsic both to our Faculty and to our profession. And the best way we found to do this was to tell stories about some committed members of our Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work community – stories that show just how much can be accomplished as a mentor, volunteer or field instructor. Telling these stories is a way to provide insight into that community, while also confirming the kind of underlying principles and values that unite us.

These stories make me feel prouder than ever to be a social worker and to be dean of this Faculty with its remarkable alumni, volunteers and field instructors. Reading them makes me think of the importance of mentoring in my own career. Like so many others in our profession, I've experienced the impact of being mentored and mentoring others. I consider myself lucky to have had extraordinary mentors – people I still check in with regularly. And mentoring others has given me enormous gratification and pleasure.

This is a very exciting time at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and I invite all alumni, field instructors, friends and supporters to strengthen your ties to our Faculty. If you would like to become a volunteer or participate through the FIFSW Alumni Association or as a field instructor, please contact us. As always, we'd love to hear from you.

With best wishes,

Faye Mishna, Dean
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work

1 STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF

[Christina Abounassar \(MSW 2016\)](#) has been working since November 2016 as a Child and Family Clinician at Peel Children's Centre. She received a 2016 Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Award for her contribution to building the University community as a leader in the FIFSW Buddy Program.

When **Christina Abounassar** talks about her own experience of being mentored through the FIFSW Alumni Mentoring Program, she says that it all comes back to a fundamental lesson. Learning to stay true to herself and her own core values.

Staying true to herself is especially important to Abounassar, who graduated last June and is now working in a job she loves as a Child and Family Clinician at Peel Children's Centre. But the path to get there wasn't straightforward. And it was that important lesson that helped her along the way.

"I took another job, soon after graduation, and then realized that I'd made a mistake," she says. "It wasn't the right fit for me, with my needs, and didn't coincide with my core values. I just kept thinking that I had to be true to myself but I also wanted to do well there. All too often new grads sell themselves short and end up taking the very first thing that is offered."

2 A WIN/WIN SITUATION

[Greg Mann \(MSW 2009\)](#) is a Hospital Care Coordinator at CAMH where he coordinates homecare arrangements for patients who are being discharged. He has been an FIFSW Alumni Mentor for years and has been awarded the Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award twice.

Greg Mann entered the FIFSW MSW program as a mature student after working for many years in the shelter sector. That experience made him a strong believer in the value of being mentored and mentoring others. Mann has been a FIFSW Alumni Mentor for years – he has received the Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award twice – and calls it a win/win situation.

"I have very much appreciated the opportunity to liaise with the Faculty and I have benefitted from being an Alumni Mentor. I believe we have a responsibility – as social workers and across other healthcare fields – to give back and help future generations. These are the people we are going to be working with after all," he says.

"The one thing I remember from being a student is how it felt to be a male social worker – there aren't a lot of us – and how much it meant to me to have a male preceptor. It was really important to have the chance to see another man doing this work. He was one of the best social workers I've ever had the privilege to work with. As a mentor, I try to remember what it was like when I was getting my own start in the field. I also think about that really great preceptor I had and how much I learned from him," he says.

Stay Connected

We want to stay in touch. We want to keep you informed about all the activities and events that are taking place at the Faculty. Please be sure to update your alumni profile on the Faculty website by going to "Alumni + Friends" and clicking on "FIFSW Alumni Information Update Form."

“Upon transitioning from this organization, within a couple of weeks, I was hired where I am now and I’m very happy. Now I really have a chance to grow, overcome new challenges and learn,” she says with enthusiasm. “I’m running groups, doing individual therapy, and working directly with families. And I’m in a supportive environment. It’s what I wanted when I was in school.”

Abounassar had two mentoring relationships, one formal and the other informal. Talking to her mentors helped her to understand the importance of remaining true to her values and being herself in job interviews and in jobs. What really helped was how open and honest her mentors were about challenges they had experienced professionally.

“Students experience so much anxiety about competitive job prospects when they’re finishing their MSW degrees,” Abounassar says. Having two exceptional mentors helped her to prepare for that tough job market. She is extremely appreciative of the concrete and specific help they provided. They helped her craft her resume and cover letters, target goals, and suggested resources and contacts. She also worked closely with her mentors prepping for interviews by rehearsing sample questions.

What really made a difference was *how* the help was offered. “My mentors were extremely flexible about their time, happy to meet when it was convenient for me, and aware of the accessibility issues that I have, because of a car accident I was in while I was a student at the Faculty. It was really important to me that the mentors I had were so available. They understood the time constraints I had and went out of their way to make it easier to meet which I really appreciated,” she says.

Having mentors also opened doors and expanded her network. “If there’s one position and twenty new MSW grads applying for it, odds are that the field will be quite even. But knowing someone who worked where I was applying was a real advantage. It helped me to make my cover letter and resume stand out because I was able to identify with what the organization was looking for and the tasks that would be required in the job,” she says.

“But ultimately,” says Abounassar, “while mentoring is about practical advice -- expanding networks, making contacts and using resources -- it’s also about something much deeper. It’s about having mentors who believed in me and about staying true to myself.”



Mann believes it is important to see mentoring as a relationship. That means being available to students and adapting to their needs. “Graduating is incredibly intimidating. Across the GTA, there are maybe 400 MSWs graduating each year. So if I can be a resource and help students with finding websites to consult or meeting people, that’s easy to do,” he says.

Students who nominated Mann as an Outstanding Alumni Mentor described him as going above and beyond what was called for. “It really moved me to be nominated,” he says. “I don’t think I was doing anything out of the ordinary. A lot of the Alumni Mentors do exactly what I do and see it as a relationship. Sometimes my relationship with a student will just be a few e-mails and there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that. That might be all the student wants. Other times, it’s more complex. It changes according to the student’s needs.”

Mann has learned that it’s important to clearly define the mentorship role. He sees himself more as a cheerleader than a coach. Believing that there could be risks in being

too directive, he offers himself up as a resource.

He says that there are enormous benefits to being an Alumni Mentor. “First, it’s genuinely fun and stimulating to meet the students. They are dynamic people, driven, super interesting and impressive. Many have already pursued different careers,” he says.

“Also, I like how versatile it is. Sometimes it’s limited, depending on the students and their needs. Other times I’ve kept in touch for over a year. It’s also easy. Most of the relationship is by e-mail. Often, I meet with the students a handful of times,” he says.

“Above all else, it’s extremely rewarding and easy to give the students what they need. I get to feel that I’m giving back at this stage in my career. And I’m in awe of the students. I look at their resumes and can’t believe how much they’ve done. I love their passion. In our profession, people can lose that. It’s a real risk so it’s wonderful to be around this kind of commitment.”





3 THE POWER OF BELIEVING IN SOMEONE

Cheryl Mitri is a Counsellor at Seneca College's Counselling and Accessibility Services department. She provides personal and accessibility counselling to students living with disabilities, using a variety of therapeutic modalities including yoga therapy. She was a Co-coordinator of the FIFSW Summer Mentorship Program.

Cheryl Mitri (MSW 2006) tells the story of her own life because she believes that others can learn from it. That story is strongly linked to mentoring – she's experienced both being mentored and mentoring others and knows how valuable it can be. Mitri, who is a Counsellor at Seneca College, recounts her life story as a way of showing people that if she could make it, then others can, too. Mitri has been a FIFSW Alumni Mentor and the Co-coordinator of the FIFSW Summer Mentorship Program.

Mitri dropped out of high school as a single mother and then returned as an adult, determined to attend university. "I went back to high school as an adult when my daughter was three years old. I didn't even have a Grade 9 education, just four credits," she says.

It was participating in the University of Toronto's Summer Mentorship Program that crystallized her ambition to complete university. "I knew by then that I wanted to go to university but it was attending the program that made my dreams bigger. I had the motivation but it revved it up and amplified all my desires. So if I was at seven, it took it to a ten. In going back to school, I saw how my own life changed completely. It was experiencing my own empowerment through education that led me to a career in social work," she says.

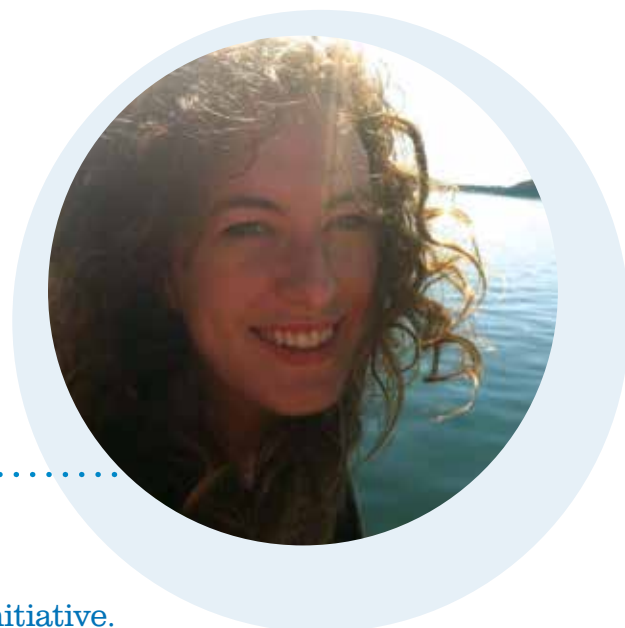
Years later, after graduating with her MSW from the Faculty, Mitri became the FIFSW Summer Mentorship Program Co-coordinator. "It was enormously meaningful. I was coming full circle. It was a gift to be able to help others by talking about my own experience. I felt that I was honouring my past. I looked around the

room and saw kids who were sitting where I'd once been. I could show by example. I described how disengaged I'd been from the education system. If you see someone who was previously disengaged and hear that they now have a Master's degree, then you think, well if she could do it, I could too."

For Mitri, mentorship's power is all about belief. Eight years ago, after giving a keynote speech, a young woman came up to her, asking Mitri to become her mentor. That relationship has continued. "She was a single teenage mother and what she needed when I first met her is different from what she needs now. In mentoring, you're being practical and concrete. You want someone who has more experience, who knows the field, and knows your abilities and skills. I may not hear from her for months and then she'll call. Now she's finishing her MSW. Working together, we've really built trust so when I say something, she believes me. So much arises out of that strong connection," she says.

"When you believe in someone, it does something very powerful. That person walks away with a stronger sense of purpose, a renewed sense of what is possible. I've had wonderful mentors in my own life, people I still check in with. Having someone who believes in you, when you don't think you can do it, is the most incredible thing in the world. It made all the difference to me in my own life," she says.

4 HAVING SOMEONE IN YOUR CORNER



Kaitlin Schwan (PhD 2016) is a Postdoctoral Fellow at York University's Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a national research and policy initiative. She wrote her PhD thesis on the history of homelessness and now works on issues related to homelessness, knowledge mobilization and research impact.

Having someone in her corner. That's how **Kaitlin Schwan** thinks of mentoring. It's a powerful image, capturing vividly a relationship that Schwan considers one of the most valuable in her life.

Schwan, who graduated last November with her PhD from the Faculty, came to social work through what she calls a non-traditional route after degrees in art history and philosophy. (She is also the designer and owner of her own jewelry company.) For Schwan, the experience of being mentored has opened up new possibilities. It has helped her to define specific professional goals and follow a clear path as she moves toward them.

Schwan's mentoring relationship is an informal one that grew naturally out of a work situation, although now, says Schwan, "We have formalized it and meet or talk every two weeks to check on my progress. It's been an incredible process. I wish everyone had a mentor like this. It's amazing to have a force like this in my life. It's very motivating to have someone who is genuinely interested in my professional development and wants to help me achieve it."

Working with her mentor has helped Schwan envision a different future and strategize about pathways to get there. "She's helped me to put together a timeline for the next one and a half years with the outcomes I want and need to accomplish. And she holds me accountable. It all began when she sat down with me and said that we were going to map out detailed goals and then told me that I was going to check in with her regularly. She will ask, 'Where have you moved on this goal this week?' and 'What are the next steps you need to take to move forward?' It is enormously motivating," she says.

Schwan also says that having a mentor who has years of experience and knowledge has been helpful. "In academia and in social work, there are lots of informal customs," she says. "There's so much unarticulated information that no one explains. It helps to check in with her as a sounding board. It's also a bit of a shortcut. I can ask her, 'Would it be okay to approach this person?' or 'Was what just happened okay?' But it's not only the advice she offers. There's another benefit to being mentored: the networking it offers. My mentor has opened up so many opportunities for me."

She believes that mentoring is particularly important for people who feel marginalized. "I think mentoring really matters, especially for people who are underrepresented, marginalized or face discrimination. Feelings of confidence can be linked to how people in authority respond to you and your work. If you frequently feel dismissed, misunderstood or talked over, that experience wears at your confidence. I think this often happens for people of particular genders, races and ethnicities in academia, and they end up blaming themselves," she says.

"I felt that my self-confidence was really eroded and I had the classic imposter syndrome," she says. "So to have someone who can help you identify the factors contributing to those feelings is extremely valuable. It enables you to stop the negative internalizing. My mentor helps me to make sense of a professional experience in a way that doesn't re-enforce feelings of incompetence. Talking to her builds me right back up."

Do you know who the very first mentor was?

In the epic poem *The Odyssey*, written by the great Greek poet Homer, Odysseus was the king of Ithaca, a small city state in ancient Greece. He left his wife Penelope (famous for her slender ankles) and his infant son (and heir to the throne), Telemachus, to fight with the Greek alliance in the Trojan War.

Wars dragged on for years (Odysseus did not return for twenty years), so he entrusted the care of his household to Mentor, an old friend, who served as teacher and general guide to Telemachus.

5 WHEN SOMEONE BELIEVES IN YOUR CAPABILITIES BEFORE YOU DO

Steven Solomon (MSW 1994, PhD 2015) is a full-time Contract Lecturer at Ryerson University's School of Social Work and a former School Social Worker for the Toronto District School Board's Human Sexuality Program. He is the author of the 2013 interactive children's book, "Homophobia: Deal with it and turn prejudice into pride."

Steven Solomon (MSW 1994, PhD 2015), who has been a FIFSW Alumni Mentor, begins by telling his own life story when he discusses why mentoring matters. Solomon has taught social work since 2000 at Ryerson University and says that he got to where he is today because of important relationships he had with informal mentors.

"I always say I'm an accidental social worker," he says. "I started out as a union steward and then did a BSW at Ryerson with the goal of getting a placement as a union organizer. It was all I wanted. I was offered a union placement but instead, after listening to a professor who was an important mentor, I went to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), where I never expected to be. After my MSW, that led to a full-time job at the TDSB, to my PhD at the Faculty, and to teaching social work at Ryerson."

As the school social worker for the TDSB's Human Sexuality Program, Solomon went into classrooms, talking to kids from Kindergarten to Grade 12 about issues related to gender, sexuality, equity and discrimination. He helped to generate a dialogue about homophobia, counselling students who were being bullied and organizing anti-homophobia workshops. (He often tells students that he was painfully shy as a student and they have a hard time believing him.) In 2012, he was awarded a TDSB Excellence Award for his work helping students establish Gay-Straight Alliances in schools. Solomon completed his PhD at our Faculty while he was at the TDSB.

Solomon's own mentors pushed him to take risks. "Mentors are often the people who tell you not to discount yourself. They saw in me something I didn't

6 COMPLETING THE CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE

Ambreen Su (MSW 2010) has worked as an Intake Worker at the Children's Aid of Toronto since 2007, when she graduated with her BSW from York University. Su took time off from her job to complete her MSW at the Faculty and then returned to work. She has mentored students through the FIFSW Alumni Mentor Program and received the Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award twice.



Ambreen Su says that she looks at mentoring "as a way to complete the circle of knowledge." For Su, who is an Intake Worker at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, the act of mentoring itself is an important choice. As a FIFSW Alumni Mentor, she is paying it forward.

Being a mentor enables Su to pass on the knowledge she has gained over years of working at the Children's Aid to the next generation. Because the field is changing so fast and has evolved so much since she first started working in it, she considers mentoring to be an important way to transfer that knowledge to new social workers.

Su has been an Intake Worker since graduating with her BSW from York University. She went back to school and obtained her MSW at the Faculty through a program offered by the Children's Aid that allowed her to return to her job after graduation.

"When I completed my MSW, I was lucky enough to have a job to go back to," she says. "Having that job security

eased my worries. I knew so many people who were anxious about the job market. I understand how hard it can be for students who are just starting out."

It's that kind of empathy and awareness of what it's like for new grads that motivates Su to be an FIFSW Alumni Mentor. Su believes that one of the most important factors in being a good mentor is being available, responsive and flexible.

"When I work with students, I've always made it clear that they can text or call me or we can meet. I make sure I'm there for them. I understand they may have classes or commitments until late at night so that availability often has to take place when they need it and it fits with their schedules," she says.

Su has received the Outstanding Alumni Mentor twice. Students who nominate her note that what makes Su so exceptional is how accessible she is and how far she is willing to go to meet the students' needs.



know was there. They recognized capabilities I didn't know I had. And provided a persistent nudge. It's so important to have someone who sees past the insecurities and fears. All too often, you don't know what you can accomplish. That was the case with me. I was encouraged by my mentors to take risks and seize opportunities. I tell students you never know where things will lead," he says.

When Solomon mentors students, he tries to offer what he received. In addition to providing practical help by going over resumes and cover letters, discussing interview strategies and providing contacts and resources, he believes it is crucial to discuss deeper issues.

"For me, mentoring is so often about having those conversations. I think it's important to talk about the choices and mistakes I've made. I encourage students to consider opportunities to develop and grow. I always say what someone once told me: Ask for what you need because you never know how it will turn out," he says.

Su focuses on practicalities when she mentors. "I've been in the field a long time and I make available to students my experience, knowledge and contacts," she says. "I've written a lot of resumes over the years and I use the experience and knowledge I've gained to help students. I make sure that I sit down with a student and rework their resume. While we're doing that, depending on the level the student is at, we discuss what their goals are and what the student wants. We also discuss the types of questions they may encounter in an interview."

For Su, the circle of knowledge is not only about transferring what she knows to the students. She credits a wonderful supervisor in her undergraduate placement as an inspirational model. "The learning I experienced in working with her was incredibly intense. She is someone who remains an informal mentor and advisor to this day," says Su.

She says that she learns from mentoring students by talking about her own experiences and discussing challenges she's encountered. "The questions students ask force me to think in new ways. Mentoring has helped me to grow as a social worker. So again, it all comes back to the circle of knowledge," she says.

The FIFSW Alumni Mentoring Program is an important way we are helping new MSW grads to launch their social work careers

FIFSW grads have the skills, knowledge, passion and commitment to make a real contribution in our communities. And the sooner our terrific grads find their footing in the field, the sooner they can start having an impact. The FIFSW Alumni Mentoring Program matches graduating MSW students with alumni who act as their mentors from January until May of their final year (and sometimes beyond graduation) to support the transition from school to work.

Sponsored by the FIFSW Alumni Association, this program gives students the opportunity to learn from experienced social work professionals working in the field. These alumni – who volunteer their time – provide their knowledge and experience as a resource and support to graduating students. Each January, students and their mentors have the chance to meet for the first time and begin the relationship at an Alumni Mentoring networking event held at the Faculty.

Alumni mentors help with resumes and cover letters; work with students on interview skills; provide information on the job market; and suggest contacts and resources. They help students to move forward successfully at this crucial career point, enabling new grads to start making a contribution as quickly as possible.

For graduating FIFSW MSW students, this mentoring relationship offers an invaluable boost of support and encouragement as they begin their professional careers. It's also a great way for new grads to develop their professional network – which is crucial to successful practice in the field – with alumni who will be future colleagues.

THE OUTSTANDING ALUMNI MENTOR AWARD

But the real proof of the success of the FIFSW Alumni Mentoring Program can be found in the nomination letters students write each year for the Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award. In a moving ceremony at the annual AGM each May, students read these letters (frequently with their mentors present), thanking them for the impact they've had. Here's what students had to say about **Greg Mann** and **Ambreen Su**.

"Ambreen is the definition of someone who goes above and beyond to help others. She is intelligent, insightful, honest and an extremely supportive mentor. She is a shining example of the kind of mentor I would like to be."

[Excerpt from Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award nomination for Ambreen Su.]

"Greg has been willing to meet outside the normal time frame for the mentorship program. It is rare to come across individuals, such as Greg, who are genuinely interested and committed to the success of new graduates."

[Excerpt from Outstanding Alumni Mentor Award nomination for Greg Mann.]

WITH GRATITUDE TO SIMON WOO AMBASSADOR AND FRIEND EXTRAORDINAIRE

Our Faculty has always had a special relationship with **Simon Woo**. Ever since he first started working at the Faculty in 1970, there's been a strong bond that has deepened over the past forty-seven years. From the beginning, Woo played many different roles. He joined the Faculty and worked here for thirty-three years as the media co-ordinator; he was also a Tai Chi instructor and Chinese translator; and he has provided invaluable help with fundraising from across the Chinese community.

A true friend, ambassador and promoter extraordinaire, he has worked tirelessly over the years on behalf of the Faculty. We are most grateful for his invaluable contribution – it was a lucky day for us and for the generations of students he has helped when Woo joined the Faculty.

Woo was a newcomer to Canada with a degree in social work from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a young family to support when he began working at the Faculty. "I was a social worker in Hong Kong before emigrating and it is in my nature to help others. From the moment I stepped in the door at the Faculty, I felt at home. I've always known exactly what I'm supposed to do when I'm there: help students," he says.

Even after retiring in 2002, students continued to keep in touch. "I developed strong connections with students because I worked closely with them, helping with media needs and teaching Tai Chi. Sometimes, students who'd already

graduated and were back visiting the Faculty, would leave notes saying that they missed seeing me. Whenever that happened, that always made me feel so good," he says.

Woo thinks of the students he has interacted with over the years in terms of his own life cycle. "At first, I thought of them as my sisters and brothers. Then when I retired, I saw them as my children. And now – and I am proud to say that I have four children and five grandchildren – I look at the students as if they could be my grandchildren," he says.

Now, at 81, Woo (who still starts his day with his Tai Chi practice), has been an important asset to the fundraising team. He's had many successes in securing funding on behalf of the Faculty, securing in excess of \$500,000.00 from individuals and foundations over the years. In 1996, the University honoured his committed service to U of T by presenting him with the Chancellor's Award. This award is given to administrative staff members who have provided exceptional leadership by advancing the University's mission.

Woo has assisted the Faculty by securing funding to name rooms at the Faculty with recognition plaques engraved in both Chinese and English. "People donate funds to have a recognition plaque put up, in honour of or in memory of a loved one. The recognition plaques mean a lot to people, especially since we use Chinese lettering. I'm happy to say that the third floor is completed and now we have one plaque on the second floor," he says.



Three rooms on the third floor have been dedicated to Woo. "Simon's Garden" and "Simon's Lab" (a Meeting Room and Writing Lab) are spaces for students to work or meet in, designed to enhance students' learning experience. And recently one of the donors Woo has been working with named an additional room in his honour. As well, in keeping with Woo's steadfast commitment to students, the Simon Woo Scholarship was created, an endowment that will ensure funding in perpetuity to help MSW students, and Woo enjoys meeting with the recipient at the Appreciation Event each year.

Ultimately, the secret to Woo's longstanding dedication to the Faculty is apparently in his initials. "Let me tell you something. Social work is SW. And SW is Simon Woo," he says.

Whatever the secret, we are extremely grateful to be able to count Simon Woo as a valued member of the FIFSW family. He has had an impact on generations of social work students and we thank him for his commitment and exemplary service to our Faculty.



FIELD INSTRUCTOR HEATHER McDONALD RECOGNIZED FOR CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN FIELD INSTRUCTION

Congratulations to field instructor **Heather McDonald** who has received the 2016 Heart of Social Work Award. A long-standing FIFSW field

instructor, McDonald has made an important contribution to the education of MSW students, working closely with the Practicum Office to expand options and develop exciting new learning opportunities.

McDonald, who received her MSW from Wilfrid Laurier University, is the Director of Adult and Youth Services at LOFT Community Services, which offers supportive housing, multi-disciplinary support teams and practical help to people with mental and physical health challenges, addiction issues or cognitive impairment. The Heart of Social Work Award

is a prestigious award presented annually by the North American Network of Field Educators and Directors, in recognition of excellence and innovation in field instruction and service to the University.

"There are so many ways that Heather has demonstrated creativity at a systems level and in the development of competencies with individual FIFSW students," says Eileen McKee, Assistant Dean, Field Education. "Heather has a long history of demonstrating leadership, exemplary care for the clients she works with, modeling her values of empowerment and inclusiveness to her students and staff. She continues to innovate, implementing refinements to learning activities."

McKee says that it was McDonald's innovative response to a pressing challenge experienced by many social work schools

that was exemplary. Responding to the need for increased options for high-quality learning opportunities for practicum students, McDonald developed her own model at LOFT by co-supervising with other LOFT supervisors who were not social workers. In this manner, students benefit from the experience and rich teachings of LOFT staff and service users, while McDonald ensured that the social work lens was included.

Committed to developing "a community of practice," McDonald sees the award as an important way to promote community placements. "People want to remain in their homes and our mission is to make that happen. The future of healthcare is in the home and in our communities," she says.