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JUSTICE, PEACE, AND ALL THAT SHIP

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2025-2026 Newsletter

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Department of Social Work
and Gerontology

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Faculty Kudos

This past August, the University held a General Meeting to celebrate and look forward to the upcoming academic year. In this meeting, colleagues are recognized across multiple departments for their outstanding dedication and passion. This year, **Dr. Samuel R. Benbow** received the inaugural Bradshaw Cultural/Community Spotlight Award. This award was designed to recognize cultural taxation. Cultural taxation refers to, “the historically invisible and/or uncompensated labor performed by faculty in support of values that are key to the university's DEI mission”. Dr. Samuel R. Benbow has served Shippensburg University since 1999.



Dr. Samuel R. Benbow, Award Recipient

Dr. Benbow has served on many committees, such as the Ethnic Studies Minor Steering Committee, the Academic Success Program Advisory Board, the Disabilities Studies Minor Steering Committee, University Retention Strategy Response Team Institute for Social Inclusion, and Academic Integrity Tasks. Dr. Benbow teaches in both the Social Work Undergraduate & Graduate Programs, and has taught classes in the Disability Studies Program, the Gerontology Program, and Ethnic Studies Program. Dr. Benbow strives to teach students how to think deeply and more critically. His mentorship is meaningful, and he frequently meets with students to discuss assignments, their career plans, and questions. Dr. Benbow's work is long-lasting and has had positive impacts on both students and faculty



Dr. Samuel R. Benbow Accepting Bradshaw Cultural/Community Spotlight Award



Dr. Liz Fisher was recognized by APSCUF-SU with the Outstanding Chapter Leadership Award. She has served in multiple union leadership roles over the years.



Mrs. Heidi Beam was recognized with other academic clerical assistants with a Presidential Medal. They make things work around here!



Dr. Jen Clements was accepted and received a scholarship into the 2025 WeCOACH - NCAA Women Coaches Academy in Indianapolis. This is a multi-day growth and development program available to collegiate women coaches in sports. This program is designed for women who are ready to elevate their coaching by learning leadership skills and strategies.

MSW Graduation

Dr. Jen Clements was the faculty speaker at the MSW Commencement Ceremony. Her speech is copied below.



Dr. Jen Clements Speaking at MSW Graduation

To the graduates, your families, your mentors, and everyone who supported you along the way—thank you for being here to celebrate this moment. I LOVE graduation. I have lost count of the number of ceremonies I have attended at this point, but they are all so special to me. I typically find myself with a few of my amazing social work colleges, yelling and cheering the loudest. We know it's a big deal and I want to give you all the props! Tonight is also part of a graduation sandwich for me, last weekend I attended my oldest daughter's

college graduation and next weekend I will attend my youngest daughter's college graduation. So tonight gets to be the sweet middle part! When I was asked to give this speech, I have to admit—my first thought was not about inspiration or legacy. It was: What's the rubric? Because if there's one thing you should know about me, it's that I like a clear rubric. Tell me the criteria. Tell me how to be evaluated. Tell me how many points this is worth – and I'm in.

And to be fair, I was given some guidance. I was told this speech should focus on all of you, your families, and how this graduate degree will impact your professional future. I was told it should be about 6-7 minutes long, due on May 4th and no swearing (I added that part!). I submitted this before 11:59pm on May 4th so we are good on the deadline part! So, at the end of this you can tell me how I did, maybe let's keep it pass or fail?

Graduates, today is a milestone. But more than that, it is a transition. Because earning a graduate degree is not just about completing a program. It is about becoming someone who is now trusted to think differently, to lead differently, and to take on greater responsibility in the world. And that is what will shape your professional future. Not just the degree itself—but how you use it.

I have been listening to an audio book by Bill Perkins called Die with Zero. His idea is basically if you leave with something left (for him it was money) then you are wasting your time. It immediately reminded me of some of the best advice my dad gave me. He said you are never going to have enough money or time, so do it anyway (there was a swear word there of his version, but I have been reminded to keep it clean).

So, the concept Die with Zero that I've been thinking about as I reflect on all of

you it asks a simple question: Are you using your time, your energy, and your resources at the right moments in your life?

Now, that idea is often talked about in terms of money, but today, I want to talk about it in terms of your career. Because no matter your field – whether you are entering social work, business, public service, healthcare, education, or another profession – your most valuable resources are not just financial.

They are your time. Your attention. Your willingness to step into moments that matter. This degree gives you access. Access to leadership roles. Access to decision-making spaces. Access to opportunities that you may not have had before. But access alone is not impact. Impact comes from recognizing the moment you are in – and choosing to engage with it. Your professional future will not be defined only by where you work. It will be shaped by how you show up when it counts.

It will be shaped in the meeting where you decide whether to speak or stay silent. In the moment when a colleague needs support and you choose to step in. In the decision to take on something that stretches you, even when you don't feel completely ready. These moments are not always obvious. They don't come with a title or recognition. But they are where careers are built – and where impact happens.

And here's something to understand. You will not always have the same capacity you have right now. There will be seasons of growth, and seasons of challenge. There will be times when your responsibilities increase and your time feels limited. There will be moments when the path forward is not clear. In those moments, it becomes easy to delay. To wait until you feel more confident. To wait until things settle down. To wait until the timing feels perfect. But the reality is – perfect timing is rare. And meaningful moments do not wait. Your degree does not just prepare you for a future point when you will make an impact. It prepares you to recognize that your impact begins now. In the early decisions you make. In the relationships you build. In the risks you are willing to take.

And to the families and supporters here today – You have been part of this journey in ways that often go unseen. You have supported late nights, long hours, and moments of uncertainty. You have encouraged persistence when things felt overwhelming. And you have helped make this achievement possible. This degree belongs to graduates – but this moment belongs to all of you.

So, as we celebrate today, I want to leave the graduates with this: Your professional future is not something that will simply unfold over time. It is something you will actively shape – moment by moment, decision by decision. This degree gives you knowledge. It gives you credibility. It gives you opportunity. But what will define your future is how you use those things when it matters. How you use your

time. How you use your voice. How you use your presence in the moments that matter most. Because years from now, when you look back on your career, it will not only be defined by titles or achievements. It will be defined by the moments you chose to step forward. The moments you chose not to wait. The moments you fully engaged in the opportunities in front of you.

Graudates, you are ready. Not because you have all the answers – but because you have developed the ability to think, to adapt, and to act when it matters. Aim to leave this life as close to zero as you can: Zero times you didn't say "I love you" to someone who mattered to you. Zero times you help back encouragement when someone needed it. Zero times you walked away from a moment you knew was important.

Not because you did everything perfectly. But because you chose to be present in what mattered most. So tonight know that I am so darn proud of you! I will have zero regrets in the time I spent with you on your journey. Congratulations to each of you.

Graduation Highlights



Dr. Galarza Patterson and Dr. Clements with MSW Graduating Class



Professor Masgalas with BSW Graduating Class



Social Work Professors at Graduation Ceremony



Dr. Fisher and Professor Masgalas with MSW Graduates at Commencement

Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2026! We admire your level of enthusiasm, dedication, and resilience that you have shown the past few years.

Lavender Graduation

Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson was the faculty speaker at Lavender Graduation. Their speech is copied below.

I want to thank Miller for inviting me to give the faculty address at this year's Lavender Graduation. It is truly an honor to be standing here. Each time I have the opportunity to attend this event, whether sitting on the platform or in the audience, I am consistently in awe of the magic in the room. Yes, magic. I do not take for granted how powerful it is to witness and celebrate the magic in each of us, in each of you. This is especially important given our current societal climate but also because of history---honoring all the stories, the names known and unknown, the ancestors who made history and carved the path to make today even possible



Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson Speaking at Lavender Graduation

Today's speech was also inspired by one of my tattoos (you heard that right). This tattoo is of a phrase that was scribbled on a post it by an alum, colleague, and friend to many of us in the Social Work & Gerontology Department, Sonja Payne. She died a couple of years ago and they found this post it at her work desk--it read, "Until Further Notice, Celebrate Everything."

This simple yet powerful phrase stuck with me – so much so that I got it tattooed along with a few other social work colleagues on the anniversary of her death.

I firmly believe that life should be celebrated – not just the big moments like today but in the ordinary, mundane day-to-day.

However, these days, I often wonder about the feasibility of celebrating life. How do we center joy or even thrive when the world is on fire? How do we do this when the world continues to target, isolate, and try to erase so many of us? How do we learn to see and honor the magic within us while others seek to extinguish it?

To transgress and dismantle boxes means to live our most authentic selves. I know this type of liberation is not easily accomplished and living authentically in this world can feel insurmountable; yet I also wholeheartedly know centering and celebrating trans and queer joy is essential to our survival, our resistance.

The fabulous writer and performer, Alok, wrote in a recent conversation regarding their book of poetry, *Your Wound/My Garden*,

Your wound/my garden. The things that you hate about yourself/I love them in me. That doesn't make me wrong (or even right). It just makes me, me. And, perhaps, makes me...queer. Queerness is about the perennial, stubborn attempt to reclaim and inhabit the places with us that have been colonized by shame.

To reclaim and inhabit these spaces often requires vulnerability, and vulnerability is risky. Each day, we decide what risk means to us, and we negotiate what we are willing to risk to be free or, in the words of Toni Morrison, to free someone else.

My relationship to risk has evolved over the years and taken a different meaning. I often share that my "coming out" as a 17-year-old high school student was an explosion of rainbows. At that time, I developed a personal ethic in which I would never hide no matter the risk. For a long time, I did just that. No matter the discomfort, the comments, or outright discrimination, I remained steadfast in this commitment. However, over the past 13 years, I've noticed a shift within myself. I started to pause a little longer before sharing my queerness with others. The rainbow and trans flags that once flew so easily outside my home were moved and displayed inside. I felt the realities of an increasingly transphobic, violent world too close to home. And then I became the direct target of transphobic systems, and I realized all too suddenly that I needed to shift my relationship to risk so I could continue to love life as fiercely as I once did. However, this shift was accompanied by shame.

I asked myself, "Am I proud? If I don't hang my flag outside...or omit key details from my story when I sense limited safety...or when I ask for allies to accompany me and my little family to a pride parade?"

I hold a privileged position on campus, as well as in our communities, and I take this positionality seriously each time I decide to speak out, to be loud, to be visible. I know that if I have asked myself these questions and adapted the ways I interact with the world, I know there are other folks who have done the same with less choice and, in some situations, no other alternative than to thrive in less visible ways. And I know they may also grapple with shame and self-doubt about what it means to be proud, to be "out."

After extensive self-reflection, I've settled on an important understanding—this shame is not mine to wear. I do not need the permission or validation of oppressors to exist authentically and fully. I know the magic within me is real, is beautiful, and is deserving of celebration every day...it is deserving each morning I wake up next to my trans husband, inside the walls of our little queer home, and holding our daughter's hand as we walk downstairs to start our morning routine. And this is true regardless of my decision to hang flags publicly or not; to wear rainbows or not; or to have allies accompany me to a pride parade or not. I am still queer, still non-binary, no less of who I

am at my core. It doesn't stop me from showing up as my whole self and using my voice when and where it matters.

I share all of this because today IS a day of celebration. I understand the weight of these words, the meaning made in each heart beating in this room and to those who aren't here, unable to share in this celebration. I see you. You are magic. You are the light needed in this world. And, I will keep choosing to speak, to keep raging against oppressive systems so you can one day experience the liberation you deserve. And, I will keep choosing to speak, to keep raging against oppressive systems so you can one day experience the liberation you deserve.

Today is about trans and queer joy in a world that tries on a daily basis to erase us. Regardless of our personal decision to risk visibility or not, they will never ever be able to fully write or legislate us into extinction.

We've been here, and we will always be here. So, as you commence your degrees and start a whole new chapter in life, please continue to carry the magic with you and be assured you will always have community, people fiercely fighting alongside you.

Inclusive Basketball

The Inclusive Basketball Program, We're at It Again!

What is Inclusive Basketball?

It is a program designed to connect community members with intellectual/ and or developmental disabilities with university students for a fun game of basketball.

When and where is it?

Sessions are held throughout the fall and spring semesters on Saturdays from 11:00 am-12:00 pm in the Henderson Gymnasium.

Who leads it?

This semester, the coordinating team includes MSW Graduate Assistants, Sara Plant, and Maris Swartz. Dr. Samuel R. Benbow provides faculty leadership.

What does basketball play look like?

Play, in this case, refers to 1 on 1s, full court, small group, and/or just having a wonderful socialization experience. The rules include no score keeping and shoot until you make it, while providing support and encouragement to one another.

How can someone get involved?

Members and volunteers do not have to know how to play basketball. They need a willing spirit to be involved. To learn more about the program as well as view pictures, please follow this link on Facebook.

<http://www.facebook.com/InclusiveBasketballAtShippensburg/>

If you have further questions or would like to further discuss if the program is right for you or others, please contact Dr. Benbow: srbenb@ship.edu or 717-477-1781.



Inclusive Basketball Members and Volunteers

Student Spotlight

Hello! My name is Sara Plant, and I started my generalist year in the MSW program this fall. I earned both of my bachelor's degrees from Penn State University Park in Psychology and Criminology. After the second year of my undergraduate program, I completed a summer internship at Dauphin County Prison and spent time shadowing and learning from the treatment department. I spent a lot of time sitting in on group therapy and learning how to apply what I was learning in class. Originally, I planned on working as a correctional counselor, but after finishing my internship, I decided I wanted to explore outpatient therapy with a clinical focus.



Sara Plant, MSW Student

I chose the field of social work because I was unsure which direction I would take in the helping field. The advanced generalist program at Shippensburg University allows me to explore all levels of work and find what I am most passionate about! This year, I am completing my field work at Arkview Behavioral Health. Arkview offers inpatient and outpatient care for people with substance use disorders. They also offer intensive outpatient therapy for mental health. Although I've only had a few classes so far, my favorite is probably Research Methods with Dr. Lyman (which is surprising because I'm not a big fan of research). My advice to students who are getting their BSW is to get involved. Class is so much more interesting when people participate and are willing to get involved, so don't just sit there!

As a graduate student, all these responsibilities can seem overwhelming and exhausting at first. During the past few weeks, I've been able to find a schedule that works for me, but my biggest tip is learning efficient time management. It's important to make the most of your free time and do things that you genuinely enjoy and are fulfilling for you. This is a necessary factor of self-care and a way to prevent future burnout.

Faculty Spotlight

My name is Ashley Bryan. I am a first-generation college graduate from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I completed my undergraduate degree at Shippensburg University from 2003-2008. When I started, I was actually an Elementary Education major. The reality is, it wasn't going so well for multiple reasons. Luckily, I ended up taking an elective course in Social Work and Gerontology and met Dr. Fisher. The rest is history!



Dr. Ashley Bryan, Social Work Professor

The social work department felt like home, and the professors, many of whom are still in the department, were both supportive and challenging! I was always gifted at interacting with people, lifeguarding, daycare, and sales all came naturally when I started working. What I didn't know until I found social work was that it was actually a skill. In 2005, I started working in residential facilities for individuals with profound mental health diagnosis, many of whom had recently been released from Pennsylvania state hospitals. This was a great training ground for understanding the world of nonprofits, gaining awareness of community resources, and building empathy. When I began my first graduate degree at Penn State, I ended up pursuing an internship in a nursing home.

That internship turned into a ten-year career, with mentorship that truly allowed me to grow as a professional. I had a few titles there: Intern, Director of Activities, Director of Social Work, Dementia Unit Coordinator, and Director of Admissions, even Hospice Social Worker for a short stint when a colleague was on maternity leave. I am so thankful for the opportunity this organization gave me in areas including interdisciplinary quality assurance, long-range planning, grant writing, program development, and training. I completed two master's degrees during my time at the nursing home, the first in Community Psychology and Social Change, and eventually a second Master's in Social Work from Temple University in 2016. I earned my LSW in 2017 and felt pretty comfortable professionally.

When the pandemic hit, things changed drastically in long-term care. I knew it was time for me to make a change, so at the end of 2020, I quit a job I had loved for so long. I wasn't sure how it would play out, but I trusted the process. I started a doctorate program in 2021 and resumed my clinical licensure process. For two years, I worked as a therapist for a community mental health agency and started building my private practice clientele. In May 2023, I completed my requirements for LCSW and graduated with a doctorate in Applied Learning Science from the University of Miami.

I continue to work on building a business that provides mental health services and products to the local community and online. I am passionate about holistic health, reducing stigma related to mental health, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. I have had the pleasure of teaching as an adjunct at Shippensburg University since Fall 2022. I am currently teaching three graduate courses, Advanced Practice with Groups and Families, Micro/Mezzo Social Work, and Advanced Micro Practice and Assessment. It's too hard to choose a favorite! I love teaching because I get to share and learn at the same time! There is such a powerful exchange of ideas that happens in a classroom setting!

One thing I hope that students take away from my classes is the importance of self-care. As social workers, we pour into others daily. We have to make sure our own cup is full first! Another concept that I hope students take away from my courses is the ability to think critically. Textbook knowledge is helpful, but we can never know everything, and in some cases, there is no clear right answer. I hope to encourage future social workers to choose to value creativity and look for solutions, rather than problems! There is good all around us, if we only choose to see it, if we only choose to be it.

SCRC News

Emily Fox is the new Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC) Coordinator, who joined SU in May 2025. Emily grew up “over the mountain” between Shippensburg and Gettysburg and attended Harrisburg Area Community College before transferring to Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. She lived in Western North Carolina for a decade, where she gained the bulk of her community-building and nonprofit leadership experience running food rescue and economic justice programs.



Emily Fox, SCRC Coordinator

Emily completed her Master's in Social Work in macro practice through Boston University while working in LGBTQ+ advocacy in the South. She moved back to PA a few years ago as an HIV social worker and is now excited to focus on supporting Shippensburg while working with social work students through Shippensburg University. Emily has two cats and loves to knit. She is often seen with a cup of tea.

#ShipBeKind Week with the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition

#ShipBeKind Week is a movement to encourage and spread kindness within the Shippensburg Community. Each year, the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition collaborates with the Shippensburg Area School District to encourage SASD students to spread kindness. This year, the Shippensburg Borough re-declared "Be Kind" week to November 10th through November 16th, to incorporate National World Kindness Day on November 13th. To bring awareness of the importance of kindness in schools, "Be Kind" activities are hosted during lunch or resource periods. The SCRC also collaborates with Shippensburg University and the Wellness Program to encourage kindness on campus.



#ShipBeKind
[@Ship_scrc](#) [@Shipwellness](#)
[@ShippensburgU](#)



Kindness is defined as "the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate". Genuine kindness expressed through daily living has the potential to change lives by making individuals feel cared for. The #BeKind movement brings awareness of the importance of kindness in everyone's lives during the week of November. **#ShipBeKind** encourages people to carry out acts of kindness in our community.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

Scan this QR code to learn more about SCRC during #ShipBeKind

November 10-16, 2025 Shippensburg University Calendar

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
10 CUB GREAT HALL 2-4PM KINDNESS SHOUT OUT!	11 Veterans Day! CUB GREAT HALL 10AM FREE HEART SHAPED DONUTS	12 CUB GREAT HALL 2-4PM WRITE A THANK YOU CARD TO A VETERAN	13 National World Kindness Day! CUB GREAT HALL 2-4PM PAINT A KINDNESS ROCK WEAR #SHIPBEKIND MERCH!	14 SHARE A POST ABOUT KINDNESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA USING #SHIPBEKIND	15 SHOW KINDNESS BY SUPPORTING A LOCAL BUSINESS, DONATING ITEMS, OR VOLUNTEERING	16 SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER

www.shipresources.org/bekind

#ShipBeKind Weekly Schedule

Support SCRC Youth Programs

Community supported the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition's (SCRC) youth programs this spring through **Match Madness** and a **Silent Auction** at the Luhrs Center on April 24th. Proceeds benefitted SCRC's Youth Programming, including Hound Packs and the Summer Learning Program.

From March 1st until March 31st, every dollar SCRC received through Match Madness was proportionally matched. Thanks to the Partnership for Better Health, WellSpan Health, and other partners who matched the first \$1,500 dollar for dollar. All other donations were matched proportionally to their \$150,000 stretch fund.

The Silent Auction took place at the Luhrs Performing Arts Center at Shippensburg University on April 24, 2026, at 7:00 PM during Bored Teachers "Is It Friday Yet?" Comedy Tour. Community members donated themed baskets centered around a fun category (examples: pet supplies, baby essentials, game night, spa, movie night, gardening, sports, coffee, and more). The Silent Auction raised **over \$750** that will be put towards SCRC's Youth Programming.

If you're interested in learning more about SCRC and their Youth Programming, visit **shipresources.org**.

Racial Justice Teach-In

On October 28th, 2025, the Social Work and Gerontology Department held their annual Racial Justice Teach-in with the theme "Dialogue for Liberation." This year, we worked to bring the Sustained Dialogue Institute to campus. Elena Martínez-Torres, Program Director, and Joyce Blyander, Facilitator and Board member presented three of the four workshops. Sustained Dialogue Institute is a "patented and adaptable peace process to transform difficult relationships and resolve conflict" and defines dialogue as "listening deeply enough to be changed by what you learn". The Sustained Dialogue Institute supports individuals and teams to lead change processes through new ways of engaging and interacting. The final session of the teach-in was presented by the social work professors. The sessions included:

The 4 C's: Asking Strong Questions to Open Conversations

with Elena Martínez-Torres and Joyce Blyander

I H.E.A.R. You: Enhancing How We Practice Disagreement

with Elena Martínez-Torres and Joyce Blyander

Four Lenses for Exploring Identities and Backgrounds

with Elena Martínez-Torres and Joyce Blyander

Advocacy & Action: What next?

with Dr. Samuel Benbow, Dr. Jen Clements, and Dr. Ashley Bryan



Professors and Students
Participating in Workshop

In Workshop 1: **Asking Strong Questions to Open Conversations**, attendees learned what the dialogue process looks like, and how to engage in it using the 4 Cs. Students and staff were able to practice engaging in dialogue in small groups.

- **Clarify** terms that are being used. "Can you clarify what you mean by..."
- **Change the Conversation to Experiences** through asking "Tell me more..." or "What experiences from your life are important for helping us understand what you're sharing?"
- **Create Space** to share group impact: "How do others feel about what they just heard and what experiences have led you to feel that way?". Or "What perspectives haven't we considered yet?"
- **Challenge** by inviting different experiences or perspectives: "I've heard another perspective..."

In Workshop 2: **I H.E.A.R. You: Enhancing How we Practice Disagreement**, attendees learned how to navigate through disagreement while maintaining positive relationships with others using the “I H.E.A.R. You” model. Students and staff then had the opportunity to practice with each other.

- **Hedge claims:** “My understanding is that heating some plastics is not safe”
- **Emphasize Agreement:** “I think we both agree we don't want to feel unsafe whenever we go to heat food.”
- **Acknowledge:** “I hear you. You trust that many products are safe and that there are good systems set up to look out for this type of thing.”
- **Reframe Toward the Positive:** “I think it is so important to consider public safety and what we need to do to look out for ourselves and others.”

Workshop 3: **Four Lenses for Exploring Identities and Backgrounds**, focused on how different lenses can impact our dialogue. Our different lenses include:

- **Personal Identities Lens:** important relationships, fundamental patterns: how you think and feel, emotional & behavioral patterns, personality traits, etc.
- **Group Identities Lens:** Age, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, gender etc.
- **Systemic Lens:** employment, impact of environment, chronic poverty, health, security & safety, political structures, access to resources, etc.
- **Future Identities Lens:**
 - Challenge – Accept
 - Defend – Question
 - Repress – Express
 - Deconstruct – Build

The last session, “Advocacy & Action: What next?” was presented by Dr. Samuel Benbow, Dr. Jen Clements, and Ashley Bryan from the Social Work and Gerontology department. Their workshop guided students to reflect on dialogue and how it can be put into action. In small groups, students reflected on what they could do to better prepare themselves for future dialogue. Students were guided to practice forming their commitment statements. In groups, students were prompted to finish the following sentence: **“As a social worker, I commit to...”** Here are some examples of what students wrote:

“As a social worker, I commit to creating a safe environment for uncomfortable conversations, advocating for others, challenging racial stereotypes by advocating for equality, educating others through discussion, and listening to other perspectives.”

“As a social worker I commit to the willingness to have uncomfortable conversations, releasing toxic family patterns, seeking common ground, being patient, showing up with grace, recognizing my own lens, and cultivating a safe space for clients to comfortably share thoughts”.

“As a social worker, I commit to having more uncomfortable conversations, withholding judgements, asking questions, checking in with myself, being proud of my identity, and doing the hard things with confidence”.

“As a social worker I commit to keep learning, be curious, have hard conversations, and lead with compassion”.

The Annual Racial Justice Teach-In is held every fall semester and introduces a new theme each year. This was the 10th Racial Justice Teach-in. The event was supported by a Human Understanding Grant, The Provost’s Office, The College of Education & Human Services Dean’s Office, and The Department of Social Work and Gerontology. Thank you to all who made this event possible, and all who participated.



Professors and Students who Attended Racial Justice Teach In

Social Work Organization Fall Semester Recap

By Zoe Barahona, SWO President 2025-2026

SWO stands for Social Work Organization, and we are a student-led organization that encourages leadership, community-based service, opportunities to create peer relationships, enhancement of social work skills, and involvement within the social work department. We encourage all social work students to attend our general meetings, which we host three times during the semester. The general meetings begin with an informational portion that allows students to learn who is involved in SWO and what we do. We typically hold executive board meetings once a week, where our board discusses plans for the semester, the semester theme, and how we can get more students involved. Students can get involved in SWO by coming to general meetings, talking to one of the board members, or talking to Dr. Benbow.



SWO Members in Community

SWO suggests ideas to incorporate student views and perspectives to help the social work department grow as a whole. We may be asked to attend faculty meetings to give student insight on ways to improve certain areas, give ideas about what could help the student/professor relationships, and make classes flourish. We help create a sense of community and belonging within the department itself. SWO helps bring students together and create a sense of “family” among the student body. SWO has hosted three events this semester, as well as donation drives and a current fundraiser where we partnered with La Tee Daa candles.

Our theme for the semester was “Giving back to the community”. A lot of our donation themes, as well as general meetings, were based on our current theme. In September, we held our informational meeting which we hold every semester as a way to inform students about SWO, what we do, and how to get involved. In October, we hosted a meeting to make goodie bags for the G Blues Elementary School on campus, for teachers to hand out during their Character Parade that they hold every year during the week of Halloween.

For the last meeting of the semester, we held our end-of-the-semester "De-stress with SWO" meeting, where students were able to come in, listen to music, color, make stress balls, and have a great time while de-stressing before finals. We had taken part in a donation drive during October, where we went around Shippensburg and gathered donations for the homeless shelter here in Shippensburg, "Community Cares more than Shelter." This was a successful donation drive. Our executive board members and Dr. Benbow dropped off the donations.

Our goal for SWO is to hopefully continue growing our group and find new ideas to expand our horizons and create opportunities for the social work department. We will continue to host general meetings three times a semester, attend open houses, and continue to strengthen our skills as future social workers. We have big plans ahead and hope to reach the goals that we have in store for the spring semester!

Student Service Learning Projects

As a part of their required course, SOWK 370: Social Work Practice with Organizations and Communities, students complete a group project with an organization on campus or in the community that benefits people through education, fundraising, advocacy, and/or other outcomes. This project is important because it allows students to put into practice the concepts and skills that they learn related to macro social work. It includes tasks such as planning or promoting the event or project, gathering resources or information to educate the community, and securing resources for programs. Students are also required to develop an evaluation plan, measure whether the project met their goals, and write a summary for the department newsletter. The following projects were completed during the Fall 2025 semester under the guidance of Professor Laura Masgalas.

No Table Empty

Belle Bakner, Rachel Emerson, Marina Smith, and Alexis Gagnon assisted Shippensburg Produce Outreach (SPO) while raising awareness about food insecurity throughout Franklin County. SPO is a non-profit organization that provides fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs, milk, and other items to individuals who qualify within the Shippensburg community. A donation box was placed on campus in Shippen Hall. There was also a donation box placed at Hero Dogs, a non-profit organization that improves the quality of life for veterans and first responders with disabilities, located in Ashton, Maryland.



Flyer for No Table Empty Event

Group members distributed informational flyers on campus and in the Hero Dogs office to educate the community about hunger rates in Franklin County. The fundraiser, No Table Empty, was created to collect non-perishable donations for distribution at the food drive occurring on November 18, 2025, at Katie's Place in Shippensburg.

In total, 29 non-perishable donations were collected. Sixteen of these items were collected from the Shippen Hall donation box, and 13 items were collected from the Hero Dogs office. All donations were delivered to Katie's place and distributed to families experiencing food insecurity in Franklin County.

Safer Sex Gab

Hailie Grenner, Loren Suomela, Lauren Jordan, and Amelya Mauriello hosted a Safer Sex Gab on campus in collaboration with the PAGE Center to provide inclusive and accessible sexual health education. The event offered free condoms, dental dams, and informational materials, along with interactive activities for students. Approximately 65 students attended the Gab.

Participants engaged in educational activities such as STI prevention and healthy communication. To increase participation and involvement, there were giveaways that included prizes like Legos and plushies. Despite a few last-minute adjustments, the team remained flexible and assured.

The event ran smoothly. Overall, the Safer Sex Gab successfully promoted safer sex awareness on campus and provided students with an educational experience, resources, and a supportive environment.



Students Listening to Safer Sex Gab



Safer Sex Gab Event

U.S Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots

Bri Davis, Eliza Sweeney, and Jesse Stewart assisted the Washington County, Maryland Toys for Tots by collecting toys and donations. Students held a raffle that took place in the Ceddia Union Building.

The students raised a total of 150 dollars during this event. Students also organized a toy collection drive. Toys were collected using two donation boxes. One was in Memorial Presbyterian Church of Blue Ridge Summit, PA, and a second box was at one of the group members' parents' places of employment. When it came to the students' overall effort to collect toys, they exceeded their own expectations. Their overall goal was to raise a total of \$500. Collectively, they raised a total of \$1,847 in toys, with 104 collected. Students then delivered the donations to Kathleen Prest, the Toys for Tots Washington County coordinator.



Toys for Tots Donations

Shippensburg Area Middle School Cultural Celebration Week

Sophia Beitler, Paige Rothermel, Zack Harfst, and Kailee Johnson recently assisted the Shippensburg Area Middle School (SAMS) complete their first cultural celebration week. The Shippensburg Area Middle School has been experiencing increased diversity among their student body, so school staff and group members wanted to hold an event where diversity was welcomed and celebrated. The event took place from April 7-10th, during each grade's lunch periods. Haitian, Syrian, French, and Filipino cultures were highlighted.

The week before the event, a bulletin board outside of the lunchroom was created with images and symbols from each culture, highlighting the importance of each cultural celebration. The group created a presentation for each day of the week to teach students about different countries, cultures and customs. Cafeteria staff prepared and served a meal for day of the cultural celebration week.



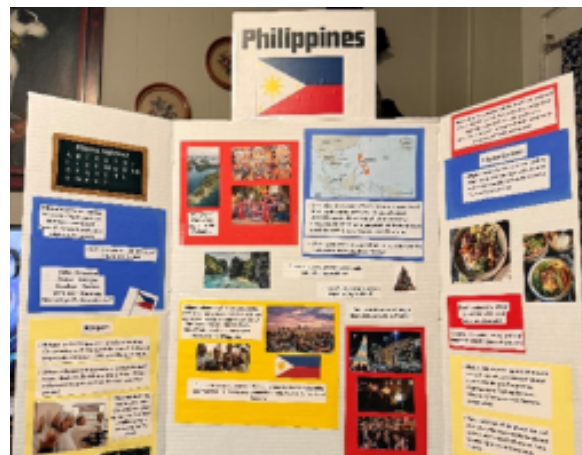
Multicultural Celebration Event Flyer

Syria was celebrated first, with Chicken Schwarma and Fasoliyyeh Bi-Zayt being served at lunch. Wednesday's lunch was from France, with French Onion Soup and Croque Monsieur, Thursday's lunch was from Haiti, with Griot style Pork Stew with Haitian Sweet Potato Casserole, and Friday's lunch was from the Philippines, Chicken Abodo with white rice.

Students responded positively to the event and lunches, with many trying the new dishes each day! Middle school staff reported they plan to make cultural celebration week an annual event going forward. The purpose of this event was to show and recognize the importance of cultural celebration to students and celebrate the cultures of students from these backgrounds.



Multicultural Celebration Event Bulletin Board



Multicultural Celebration Event Presentation

Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition Silent Auction

On April 24th, 2026 Shakyah Young, Eliza Sweeney, Kiyah Johnson, and Marian Goates assisted the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition with their annual silent auction. The SCRC silent auction serves to raise money for their food program in order to fight food insecurity in the Shippensburg Area School District.



Baskets Collected to Support SCRC

Their goal was to collect themed baskets as well as donations. They received 19 baskets and collected over \$750 to support SCRC! With the money raised, three children will be fed for the entire year.



Group Members: Shakyah Young, Eliza Sweeney, Kiyah Johnson, Marian Goates

Advisory Council

The mission of the department's advisory council states, "The Social Work Department Advisory Council will work to promote a reciprocal relationship between the Social Work & Gerontology Department and members of the profession, in order to enhance the quality of social work education and professional practice". The purpose of the advisory council is to maintain strong connections with the social work practice arena, provide information to members about department activities and programs, and receive feedback from community members.

During the meeting on December 4th, 2025, members discussed how the state budget impasse affect social service organizations, news from agencies, and department related events such as the Annual Racial Justice Teach-in, career information day, and the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition. They also talked about social work field placements for BSW and MSW students, assessment results from the BSW and Gerontology program, and special events within the Gerontology Program. The Advisory Council also met on April 27, 2025, and reflected on the year and the upcoming BSW CSWE reaccreditation next year. Members are generally alumni from the Social Work and Gerontology Department, and we are always looking for new members! The council meets twice a year and offers a zoom option to attend. If you have a desire to join, please contact Liz Fisher at eafish@ship.edu

Current Members:

Dr. Samuel Benbow – Shippensburg University
Dr. Dara Bourassa – Shippensburg University
Jarvis Brown – Veterans Multi-Service Center
Dr. Ashley Bryan – Grace Be Mental Health
Dr. Jen Clements – Shippensburg University
Nicole Crisp – Cumberland County Children and Youth Services
Dr. Liz Fisher – Shippensburg University
Emily Fox – Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition
Professor Cecilia Luna – Pennsylvania Department of Health
Professor Laura Masgalas – Shippensburg University
Michelle Smith – United States Navy
Rebecca Van der Groef – Hoffman Homes
Gail Witwer – Partnership for Better Health

Thank you to each member for your service on the Advisory Council. A special thank you to Nicole Crisp, Council Coordinator, and Rebecca Van der Groef, Recording Secretary.

MSW Students Volunteer for Homelessness Event

On January 21st, 2026, Professor Laura Masgalas, SCRC Coordinator, Emily Fox, and MSW students in the advanced macro practice class volunteered for the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires Continuum of Care Programs (COCs) to count how many individuals are experiencing homelessness on a given night. The Continuum of Care Program is a federal initiative implemented to end homelessness. This program aims to increase access to local programs and promote autonomy and self-sufficiency among individuals experiencing homelessness.

This project is important in order to better understand the needs of the Shippensburg community, and to hear stories of those who are currently homeless. This count typically occurs in the last ten days of January, because it is typically the coldest time of the year.

Students went in supervised small groups to count and survey those who were unsheltered. The term "unsheltered" means that individuals or families are living in a public place not meant for human habitation. In addition to counting the number of people who are currently unhoused, the PIT Count allows the community to understand the demographics and needs of the people living in their community and provide resources to the people they talk to during the event.

Katie Ernst, one of the MSW students who had the opportunity to attend the PIT Count, stated that "students liked attending the count and thought it was very interesting. It was nerve-racking but a great experience with macro social work. It got us out of our comfort zones and pushed us to understand the community on a deeper level. We learned a lot about the Continuum of Care Program and the benefits of the count."



Faculty and Students who Participated in Point-in-Time Count

In Memory of Former Department Chair, Dr. Anne Gero

September 28, 1940 — January 11, 2026



Dr. Anne Gero, Former Department Chair

Dr. Anne Gero served as chair of the Department of Social Work and Gerontology for many years. She was also a mother, grandmother, friend, teacher, and a passionate feminist. She held a bachelor's and master's degree from Marycrest College in Davenport, IA, and a Doctorate from the University of Iowa. Dr. Gero was recognized as "a highly successful and widely acclaimed University level professor and an active and impactful leader on the Shippensburg University Campus". The Gero award is presented each year by the PAGE center, honoring Dr. Gero's legacy.

A Celebration of Life was held on Saturday, March 14th at 2:00pm at the Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley. Cards may be sent to 100 Linn Drive, Carlisle, PA 17012. Memorial contributions can be sent to the Shippensburg University Foundation for the Social Work Department.



Dr. Anne Gero, Former Department Chair

Aspiring Summit

On Friday, March 27th 2026, faculty from the Social Work and Gerontology Department presented at the SU Aspiring Summit. The Aspiring Summit provides an opportunity for junior and senior high school students to connect with and learn more about the programs offered through the SU College of Education and Human Services. There were 228 students and 34 chaperones who travelled from 17 different districts to attend this year's summit.



Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson and Dr. Michael Lyman Presenting at SU Aspiring Summit

Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson and Dr. Michael Lyman represented social work at the event. Students were welcomed by Victoria Kerr, Executive Director of the Career Center, and Dr. Adam Powell, Interim Associate Dean of the College of Education and Human Services. The Aspiring Summit included 35 individual sessions across 9 disciplines within the College of Education and Human Services, with one session hosted by the Career Center. These 35 sessions were hosted by 27 individual session presenters.

Students that indicated social work as their primary interest had the opportunity to attend two sessions presented by Dr. Galarza Patterson and Dr. Lyman where they learned what social work is, common misconceptions about social work, and the diverse fields of practice. Students also listened to stories from social work alumni about how they apply their education in real-world settings and how the social work program prepared them for their professional careers. Students also learned that the field of social work is expected to grow 6% by the end of 2034, which is faster than the average job field, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

During these sessions, students asked great questions pertaining to self-care and how social workers deal with challenging situations and environments. Students were interested in learning how social work compared to other related helping professions and majors. George Vaites, Director of the Office of Partnerships, Professional Experiences, and Outreach, led a reflective exercise at the closing of the summit. He encouraged students to think deeply about what they could take away from their experience exploring the College of Education and Human Services. Thank you to the Shippensburg University Foundation and Academic Affairs for sponsoring this event!

Why Study Abroad?

Christela Jeune is an undergraduate social work student who had the opportunity to study abroad in France during the Fall 2025 Semester. She completed French courses to complete her minor, and her classes abroad helped her with language skills and cultural immersion. Christela said this about her experience:

"I was surprised by how much people prioritize family and personal time. Life there felt slower and more balanced than I expected. The pace of life was different, which took some time to get used to. Learning the cultural norms and routines was an adjustment at first."



BSW Student, Christela Jeune

Christela learned that she could adapt to new cultures and environments. She traveled through France and other nearby locations, and she realized that she enjoys exploring and learning from new experiences. When asked if she recommends studying abroad to other social work students, she stated, **"Yes, I recommend it. Studying abroad exposes you to new perspectives and strengthens cultural understanding. This experience improved my cultural awareness and understanding of different ways of life. It will help me better connect with clients from diverse backgrounds."**



BSW Student, Christela Jeune

Students who are interested in studying abroad should talk to their academic advisor and plan approximately one year ahead. Any major can study overseas, and short-term programs ranging from two to six weeks are available during the summer as well. Freshman year is the best time to start working towards a study abroad goal. By studying abroad in the second semester of your sophomore year, you can complete many of your General Education requirements! Here is Christela's advice for social work students who are interested in studying abroad:

"To make sure studying abroad fit into my academic plan, I reviewed my degree requirements, selected courses that counted toward my graduation requirements, and worked with my advisor to ensure everything was approved. I would also like to give a big shout-out to Dr. Blandine Mitaut and Mary Burnett for helping throughout the process."

For any questions about studying abroad, or if you are interested in studying abroad, contact the Center for Global Education:

717-477-1279

Globaleducation@ship.edu

Association of Pennsylvania State Colleges and University Faculties Shippensburg University (APSCUF/SU) Department Award

This year, **Timothy Carr** was selected as the recipient of the APSCUF/SU Department Award. The Departmental APSCUF Award is granted to an outstanding student within a specific department to acknowledge academic excellence and professional commitment. Each year, the Department of Social Work and Gerontology faculty select a student that is graduating from the MSW program as the recipient.

What initially drew you to the MSW program?

"What initially drew me to the MSW program was a lifelong desire to help others, especially children and families facing difficult circumstances. My experiences as a volunteer first responder and my previous eighteen years of professional experience working with children and families in the mental health field exposed me to the realities of trauma, loss, and crisis.

Along with my own personal experiences of loss, these moments stayed with me and shaped my desire to make a bigger difference in people's lives. Returning to graduate school after more than three decades was not something I took lightly, but it reflected my belief in lifelong learning and following what truly motivates you. I wanted to strengthen my knowledge, develop my clinical skills, and better support individuals during some of the most challenging moments in their lives."

Is there a class or project that has impacted you in some way?

"Two courses that had a profound impact on me were Narrative Therapy and Advanced Practice with Groups and Families. These courses strengthened my commitment to working with youth and families and helped shape how I approach helping relationships. Narrative therapy showed me the power of people's stories and the importance of meeting individuals where they are in their lives. It reinforced that people are more than the challenges they face, and that helping them recognize their strengths can be transformative. Advanced Practice with Groups and Families highlighted the importance of connection, shared experiences, and support systems in the healing process. Both courses deepened my passion for helping children and families and strengthened my sense of purpose in this field."



MSW Student, Timothy Carr

How have you changed since joining the MSW program?

"Since joining the MSW program, I have grown both personally and professionally. I have become more reflective, more grounded in my purpose, and more confident in my ability to support others. Returning to school later in life challenged me in many ways, but it also strengthened my resilience and reaffirmed my commitment to lifelong learning. The program helped me better understand the importance of empathy, self-awareness, and meeting people where they are in their story. I have learned to listen more deeply, appreciate different perspectives, and approach others with compassion and understanding."

Where do you hope that social work will take you in the future?

"I hope social work will allow me to continue supporting children, adults, and families who are experiencing trauma, stress, and major life transitions. My goal is to help individuals build resilience, recognize their strengths, and find hope during difficult times. I want to continue doing work that promotes healing, empowers others, and strengthens families and communities. Ultimately, I hope to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those I serve."

What advice would you give to other social work students?

"My advice to other social work students is to never give up on your passions or what motivates you, even if it takes years — or even decades — to follow through with them. Trust your journey and believe in the value of lifelong learning. Your experiences, both personal and professional, shape who you are and can become powerful tools in helping others. Stay open to growth, learn from your professors, lean on your classmates, and remain grounded in compassion. Most importantly, remember to meet people where they are in their story. Even small acts of understanding and care can make a lasting impact."

Vision for Excellence

The Robert L. Hewitt Vision for Excellence Scholarship is named in honor of Dr. Robert L. Hewitt, who was a professor in the Department of Social Work and Gerontology for 21 years. This scholarship was created by the department advisory council and began in 1997. Eligible students apply for this scholarship by writing a statement about what excellence in social work means to them. Applicants must be a senior in the BSW program, have a social work GPA of 3.0, and an overall GPA of 2.5. The finalist exemplifies what excellence in social work means and shows promise in the profession. Congratulations to this year's winner, Hailie Grenner. The essay that follows is published with the student's permission.

Personal Excellence and Excellence in Social Work **By Hailie Grenner, BSW Student**

The definition of excellence varies depending on who you ask. Some may say it involves working hard or simply succession within the things one is passionate about. When I think of excellence, I immediately think of personal excellence. I define personal excellence as self-growth, resourcefulness with what one has, and following your passion with both your heart and mind. I believe that to have excellence in social work (or any field), you must first work towards personal excellence. In social work, we are constantly providing resources, support, and advocacy for others, but we cannot do all of that if we do not do it for ourselves too.

Excellence in Social Work

Prior to college, I wanted to study mortuary science. More specifically, I wanted to be an embalmer. My hope was to provide families with the best care possible when going through the loss of a loved one, especially those who wanted an open casket. I wanted them to be able to see their loved one at peace and well taken care of, looking as if they were sleeping serenely regardless of how they passed. I wanted their last vision of their loved one to ease their hearts and their grief. I had the opportunity of touring a funeral home and interviewed the director of the home. When the director asked me why I wanted to work in that field, the first and only thing I said was, "I want to help people". Afterwards he began to explain that he saw a spark in me, but not one for mortuary science. He was the first person to introduce me to the field of social work.

I am a very empathetically driven person. My family is not. When I told my two families that I had decided to pursue social work, my mother tried to persuade me to major in psychology instead. At the home I lived in, my father and stepmom told me that I was "too emotional", I "should pick a different field", and that I "would never be able to do social work". The statements filled my head constantly; they still do on occasion. It has fostered much self-doubt, however, from the first time I entered Social Work in Social Welfare with Doctor Fisher up until now in my Prep for Practicum with Professor Masgalas, all those doubts disappeared. I felt and still feel such a passion for this field, and I know both mind and soul, that this is where I am meant to be, that social work is what I am to pursue. These social work courses and professors have not only helped me grow as a person but are what inspired me to stay and to be passion driven. Excellence in social work requires many personal excellence skills. It requires the passion, empathy, and even the negative viewpoints of others. It allows us to grow, reflect, and find what drives us to make a difference whether that be on the micro, mezzo, or macro level. It allows us to be that support for someone when they feel hopeless or help them learn self-determination through their own strengths.

Accomplishment in Career

Like any other social worker, within my career I hope to make some sort of change. Before officially becoming a social worker, my first step is completing my internship. I hope to have the honor of working with the YWCA in Carlisle, empowering women and working within their youth programs. Afterwards, I wish to pursue either school social work or medical social work. To do this, I will need to complete my MSW. My goal is to apply for graduate school here in Shippensburg for next fall and apply for the graduate assistant program. I hope that within my MSW experience, I will learn more about these two fields and reflect on which one I am more passionate about. After that, I am unsure. Nothing is ever certain, so I am keeping an open mind to new opportunities and mindful of any challenges that may arise.

Accomplishments Within my Undergraduate Study

Throughout my time as an undergraduate student, I feel I have accomplished many things both individually and on campus. The four things I am the proudest of are being a social work tutor in Mowery, becoming the vice president of our NAMI on campus mental health club, completing summer research with Doctor Lyman, and becoming the president of our Shippensburg Social Work Honors Society (Phi Alpha). Looking back at freshman year, I would have never thought I would branch out as much as I have. All of these accomplishments have allowed me to grow as a person and learn to use my leadership skills. They have also taught me that we never stop educating or learning. I have met so many new people from various backgrounds and have had the honor of listening to some of their experiences that allow me to carry new knowledge. Additionally, I have helped fellow social work students use their strengths to develop confidence in themselves and to better understand the material that they needed clarity on.

No matter who you ask, one's definition of excellence will always differ from another definition. There are also so many factors that influence excellence such as our internal thoughts, our social groups, and our passion for things we do. I believe that for me to achieve excellence in social work, I must also continuously enhance my personal excellence. Within social work, we strive to provide resources, support, and advocacy for others. To provide these things competently, it is vital that we first apply them to ourselves.



Dr. Liz Fisher and Hailie Grenner, Robert L. Hewitt Vision for Excellence Scholarship Finalist

Silent Witness Peacekeepers Alliance

As a public institution, Shippensburg University belongs to the public, who have the right to come to campus and exercise their First Amendment Right. The silent witness Peacekeepers Alliance advises those who want to protect members of Shippensburg University's campus. The Shippensburg University Peacekeepers will activate when groups visit campus and target members of our community.

If you are interested in joining the Shippensburg University Peacekeepers to respond when groups come to campus to condemn students, please email socialequity@ship.edu. The Shippensburg University Peacekeepers are a symbol of belonging to all students, staff, and faculty.



Students Volunteering with the Silent Witness Peacekeepers Alliance

Gero Awards

Shippensburg University's Pride and Gender Equity (PAGE) Center announced the recipients of the Gero Awards during the International Women's Day event on March 4th, 2026. The Gero Award ceremony honors those who have made a remarkable contribution to the status and climate of women on campus.



Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson, Award Recipient

Dr. Jayleen Galarza Patterson received an award in the faculty category. Dr. Jay openly educates and advocates for women's reproductive rights, and they create an inclusive environment for individuals across campus. Dr. Jay stated, "Receiving the 2026 Faculty Gero Award was such an unexpected honor. Quite frankly, it felt great just to be nominated, especially when I heard from the social work student who submitted my name for the award.

Hearing her words was such a gift because I don't always get to hear directly about how I've impacted somebody's life. I'm very lucky to be where I am, doing what I love."

Dr. Jay, Professor Laura Masgalas, and the Social Work & Gerontology Department were all included in this year's Directors Legacy Award. This award was given "In recognition of the many years of carrying and passing the baton to bring free and accessible menstrual products to Shippensburg University Campus". Professor Masgalas stated, "I am happy to have student groups in SOWK 370: Practice with Organizations and Communities help with this project over the past few years and see it come to fruition."



Professor Laura Masgalas, Award Recipient



Gero Award Recipients

Thank you to the PAGE Center and Office of Global Engagement for sponsoring the International Women's Day event!

Social Work Career Information Day

On Tuesday, March 24th, the Department of Social Work and Gerontology held the 2nd annual Career Information Day in collaboration with the Criminal Justice Department. There were 24 agencies who set up a table in the Social Work and Gerontology Department hallway, and 14 agencies who presented. The presentations from the agencies included information about their work and the services that they provide in their communities.

The agencies that hosted tables gave students the opportunity to connect directly with professionals and explore potential job and internship opportunities. Agencies reported that "It was a great success" and that they "Loved connecting with people". All of the agencies noted that this was a great way for them to connect and network with students. There were many different aspects of the event that the agencies found valuable such as:

- "The connections with community members"**
- "Talking with students about possible internships"**
- "Ability to present directly to students"**
- "Networking, promoting our sector of social work"**
- "The presentation in the classroom"**
- "Speaking with students"**
- "The amount of agencies that were present"**
- "Connecting with other companies and the presentation"**
- "Student discussions about internships"**



Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition Table



Pride and Gender Equity Center Table



A Better Tomorrow Starts Today Table



Arkview Behavioral Health Table

The event allowed students from a variety of majors and disciplines to learn more about the diverse fields within social work while building meaningful connections within the community. Many students found the presentations were informative and useful. Students commented:

"They were all great!"

"Keep up the good work!"

"This was a great event that was well organized and very helpful for networking!"

Thank you to all the agencies who presented and who set up informational tables. The students and faculty greatly appreciate it! Our goal is to continue holding Career Information Day every spring semester! If you would like to participate, please email socialwork@ship.edu.

Thank you to the following organizations who hosted information tables and/or presentations during the event:

Better Tomorrow Starts Today
Catholic Charities
San Mar Family and Community Services
Northeastern Counseling Services
Shippensburg University Head Start
Shippensburg University PAGE Center
Yellow Breeches Educational Center
Franklin/Fulton Drug and Alcohol program
Occupational Services Inc.
York County Children, Youth, and Families
Shippensburg Area School District
Shippensburg Community CARES
Pennsylvania Counseling Services
United States Department of Veteran Affairs
UPMC Children's Advocacy Center
Franklin/Fulton Drug and Alcohol Program/Franklin County Human Resources
York County Children, Youth and Families
Cumberland County Children and Youth Services
Domestic Violence Services of Cumberland and Perry Counties
Dauphin County Juvenile Probation
Hoffman Homes
Cumberland County Children, Youth, and Families
Perry County Children, Youth, and Families
Capital Area Intermediate Unit #15
Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition
Washington County Department of Social Services
Arkview Behavioral Health
Adams County Office for Aging, Inc.
Franklin County Human Resources
Franklin County Children and Youth Services
Compass Immigration Legal Services

Social Work Organization 2025-2026 Academic Year Recap

By Zoe Barahona, 2025-2026 SWO President



This year, SWO has taken part in many new, exciting, and informative meetings and events. It has been an eventful year, but we continue to strive for new opportunities to be a part of. For the fall semester, we held general meetings in September, October, and November, with our theme for the fall being Giving Back to the Community. Our general meetings consisted of an Introduction to SWO and who we are, making goodie bags for G. Blues Character Parade in October, and a De-stress event at the end of the semester, where students came in and colored or made stress balls. SWO also took part in attending all of the open houses throughout the semester where we were able to talk to potential students and their families. During the fall semester, we were also successful in completing a fundraiser by selling candles from La Tee Daa.

Finally, for the fall, SWO supported two POC teams, purchased carnations and donuts for senior presentations, and hosted an inclusive basketball session. Another event that we hosted was two separate donation drives. We hosted our first donation drive, where we were looking for coffee to donate to Community Cares More than Shelter here in Shippensburg. SWO asked for donations from different stores on and off campus, and had a great turnout with donations from each location. Another donation drive that we had participated in was a hygiene drive for Gettysburg Area Middle School. SWO set up a table outside of the Dollar Tree and filled three bins with donations and were able to bring a large amount of hygiene items to the Middle School in December.

For the spring, we have hosted our meetings every Monday consecutively since January. We hosted three general meetings that were based on our semester theme which was Social Justice in everyday life. We welcomed our new secretary, Taneejah Shuler, to our E-board. Our meeting themes consisted of How to Use Your Voice, and Advocating for Social Justice, Know your Miranda Rights where we had a guest speaker, Chief Taylor come in and talk to students about knowing and understanding your rights, and our last general meeting which was an Anti-Stalking event where we partnered with Miller Hoffman from the PAGE Center to inform students on how to be safe.

We participated in open houses this semester as well. SWO participated in yet again, another successful donation drive where we donated hygiene items to Big Red's Cupboard on campus. We successfully donated eight full boxes of hygiene items to Big Red's.

As the spring semester starts to wrap up, SWO is at the point in time again where we start getting ready for the next Academic Year. We are doing this by hosting our weekly E-board meetings where we are discussing plans for what our next themes and events will be. We are excited as always to see what the next academic year will bring us! This was yet again another successful year for the Social Work Organization.

Gerontology Update

The gerontology minor has held many events this year, like the Dementia Friendly Pennsylvania webinar on October 7th, 2025. This webinar had 6 presenters, and the topics discussed included: health care access and services, experiences of supporting individuals living with dementia in rural Pennsylvania, as well as actionable steps that can be taken to promote dementia awareness, inclusion, and support in rural PA. Additionally, on November 19th, 2025, three staff members from the Cumberland County Office of Aging and Community Services held a "Discover Local Aging Services" event, where students had the opportunity to learn about the programs and support that is offered in Cumberland County to older adults. Most recently, on February 24th, 2026, Brittany Cabanas, Executive Director for Stonewall Gardens Assisted Living, spoke to the University about Stonewall Gardens. This is an assisted living facility in Palm Springs, CA that is specifically designed to serve LGBTQ+ seniors and their friends in a welcoming, respectful, and supportive environment. On April 30th, 2026, from 3:30p-4:30pm, Krystal Winkelman, Music Therapy Manager, from Living Unlimited, Inc. will speak to the campus and community about music therapy and its importance for older adults who have dementia. If anyone would like to present on any topic related to aging, please contact Dr. Dara Bourassa. They can present in person or online. dpbourassa@ship.edu

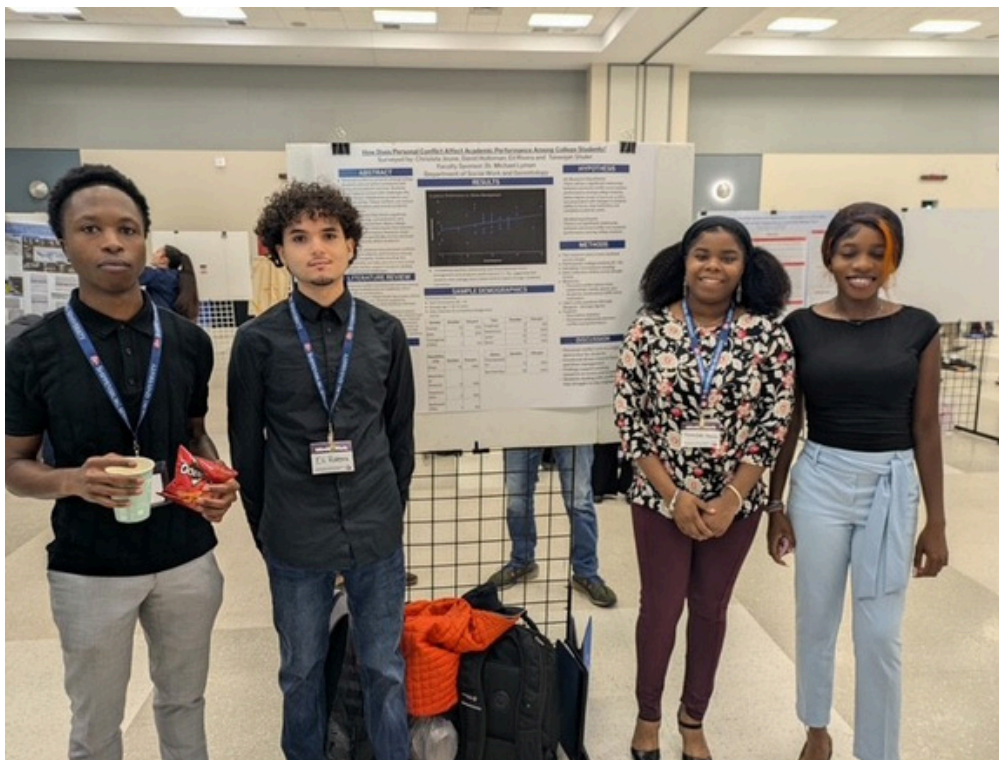
MSW Update

The MSW program held a Virtual Information Session on March 25th, 2026, from 7:00-8:00 pm, educating prospective MSW students on financial aid and graduate assistantship information, certification options, and specific coursework details. Additionally, The Coverdell Fellows partnership between Shippensburg University's Department of Social Work and Peace Corps is now officially renewed for five years! This program is a graduate fellowship for returned Peace Corps Volunteers wishing to pursue a Master of Social Work.

Minds@Work Conference

Shippensburg University's Minds@Work conference provides the opportunity for students to engage in research and to showcase their findings to other students and staff. This experience helps students develop communication and presentation skills. This semester, many social work students were provided the opportunity to present their findings at this years Minds@Work. The following were research projects presented by social work students:

SOWK 360 Presentations:

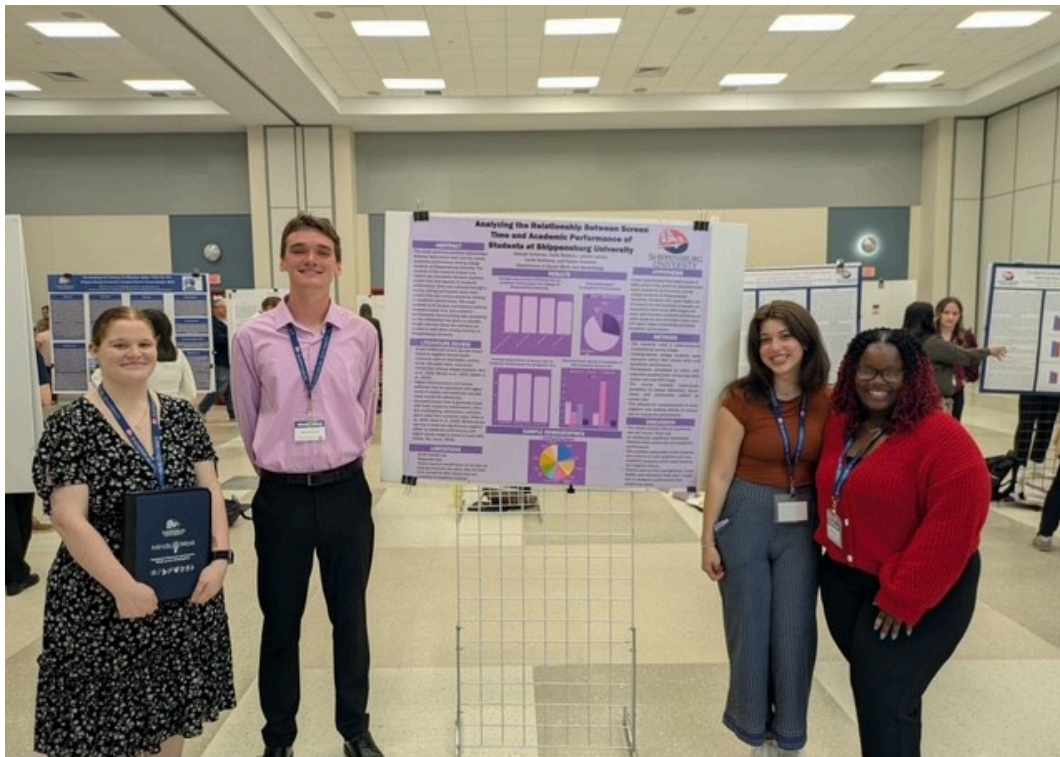


How Does Personal Conflict Affect Academic Performance Among College Students?

Christela Jeune, David Holloman, Eli Rivera and Taneejah Shuler
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman



How Does ICE Impact the Stress and Well-being of Individuals?
 Josh Woods, Kaylee Smith, Metzly Rivera, Zoe Barahona, Katie Resendiz
 Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman



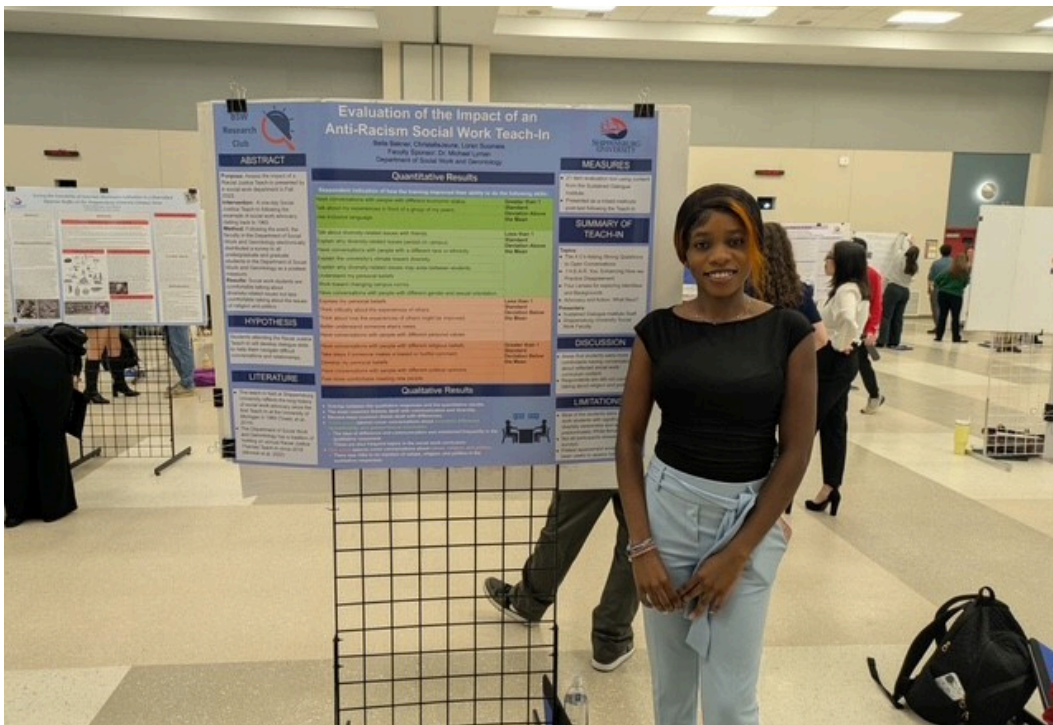
Analyzing the Relationship Between Screen Time and Academic Performance of Students at Shippensburg University
 Aaliyah Gutierrez, Sofia Baldwin, Laiken Lomax, Carlie Holloway, Kaden Emerick
 Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman



Idleness Aversion and Burnout Among Different Demographics of College Students at Shippensburg University

Cassidy Albright, Zakarai Coble, Tess Naylor, Shaun Sampson, Imyree Teal, Zianna Whigham
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman

Research Club Presentations:



Evaluation of the Impact of an Anti-Racism Social Work Teach-In

Belle Bakner, Christela Jeune, Loren Suomela
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman

Independent Study Presentations:



Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Men in Long-Term Care

James Miller

Faculty Sponsor: Professor Laura Masgalas



Reducing Employee Turnover in Behavioral Health Organizations

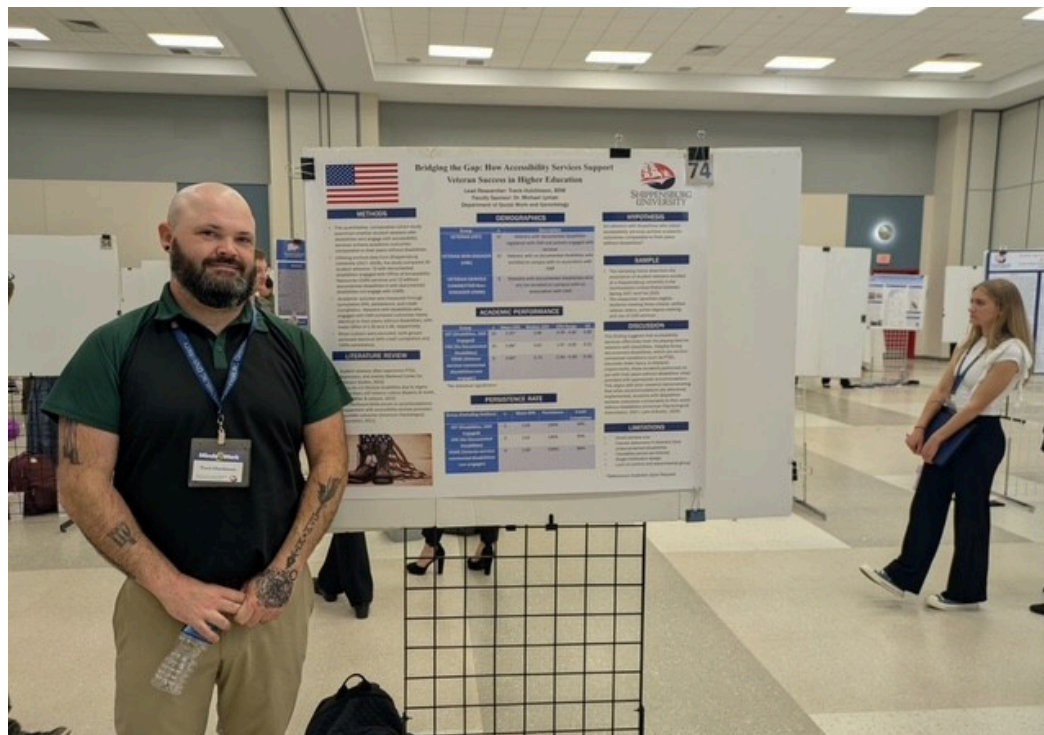
Evan Walschburger

Faculty Sponsor: Professor Laura Masgalas



Got Tested? The Misconceptions of HIV and AIDS

Karmen Alicea, Marian Goates, Susanna Gore, Kailee Johnson, Andrea Medina
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman



Bridging the Gap: How Accessibility Services Support Veteran Success in Higher Education

Travis Hutchinson
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lyman

Alumni Spotlight

Nakeesha Kenney-Futrell is the Chief Executive Officer of Elevated Mental Health Services, an agency that provides therapy for various aspects of mental health. The mission of Elevated Mental Health Services is to be fully committed to the mental wellbeing of individuals, their families, and the community through prevention, intervention, treatment, and education. Elevated Mental Health Services provides outpatient mental health services to individuals and families.



CEO of Elevated Mental Health Services, Nakeesha Kenney-Futrell

What year did you graduate?

I graduated from Shippensburg University in May 2014 with my Master's Degree in Social Work. I completed my undergraduate degree in Social Work at the University of Georgia.

Where do you currently work, and how long have you worked there?

I am currently the owner and clinical director of Elevated Mental Health Services, an outpatient counseling practice that I founded in 2021. Elevated was created after I had a vision to build a space where individuals and families could receive quality mental health support while also feeling supported and empowered in their healing journey.



Elevated Mental Health Staff

My career in social work has allowed me to serve children, families, and individuals in several different settings. I began my career with the Department of Family and Children Services in Oconee County, Georgia as a Child Welfare Investigator. After relocating to Pennsylvania, I worked as a Medical Social Worker with 365 Hospice in Camp Hill. I later worked in behavioral health as a Behavioral Specialist with T.W. Ponessa, a Child Care Behavioral Consultant with Christ Cornerstone Academy in Steelton, PA, and an Outpatient Therapist with Diakon Family Services. In addition to my clinical work, I also serve as an Adjunct Professor in the Social Work Department at Messiah University.

What are you passionate about in the social work arena?

I am especially passionate about supporting women—particularly mothers—who are navigating their own healing while raising children. Many mothers carry invisible burdens, trauma, stress, and the pressure to hold everything together. Through my work and programs like “Jesus + Therapy = Healing,” I strive to create spaces where women can process their experiences, reconnect with their identity, and strengthen their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

What do you do in your current role?

In my current role, I oversee the clinical and operational aspects of Elevated Mental Health Services. I provide therapy, mentor clinicians, and develop programs and support groups that help individuals and families navigate mental health challenges and move toward healing.

What challenges do you experience in your role?

One of my biggest challenges is balancing the realities of life and work. I am a mother of five children and a wife, and while I am deeply committed to the work we do at Elevated, family life also requires a great deal of time and energy. Sometimes the demands of both worlds can feel heavy, and learning how to balance it all continues to be an important part of my journey.

What is your favorite thing about your role?

My favorite part of this work is witnessing transformation in people’s lives. Seeing someone move from a place of pain or uncertainty into healing, clarity, and growth is incredibly meaningful.

What advice would you give to social work students?

My advice would be to stay connected to your purpose and remain open to learning. Social work can be challenging, but it is also one of the most meaningful professions because you have the opportunity to walk alongside people during some of the most important moments of their lives. Seek mentorship, take care of yourself, and don’t be afraid to pursue the vision placed on your heart. Sometimes the path you take in social work may lead you to places you never expected, but those experiences will shape you into the professional you are meant to become.

Highlights of the Senior Presentations



BSW Fall 2025 senior student presenters and Department of Social Work and Gerontology faculty



BSW Spring 2026 senior student presenters and Department of Social Work and Gerontology faculty

BSW Field Placements

Laurel Life
Shippensburg Community Resource
Coalition
Occupational Services, Inc.
Franklin County Jail
Celebration Villa
Occupational Services, Inc.
New Visions Inc.
Veterans Outreach of PA
Cumberland County Children & Youth
Services
Domestic Violence Services of
Cumberland & Perry Counties
Laurel Life - Camp Hill School District
Menno Haven
SU PAGE Center
Washington County Public Schools
Alexander Hamilton Memorial Free Library
Church World Service
Franklin County Children & Youth
Brethren Housing Association
Yellow Breeches Educational Center
Franklin County Crisis
River Rock Academy
Family Care Services
Cumberland County Children & Youth
Children's Aid Society
Domestic Violence Services of
Cumberland & Perry Counties

Shippensburg Community Resource
Coalition
Shippensburg Area Head Start
San Mar Family & Community Services
York County Children & Youth
Franklin County Children's Advocacy Center
Cumberland County Office of Aging &
Community Services
Franklin County Children & Youth Services
Lancaster County Children & Youth Services
San Mar Family & Community Services
YWCA Carlisle
Salvation Army
Laurel Life - SOAR
Yellow Breeches Educational Center -
Carlisle campus
CASA Hagerstown
Yorkview Nursing and Rehabilitation
Community CARES Family Shelter
Laurel Life - Middletown High Transition
Classroom
Washington County Public Schools
SU Office of Veteran Services
Ponessa Behavioral Health
River Rock Academy
Franklin County Children & Youth Services

MSW Generalist Field Placements

Blue Ridge Eating Disorder Care Center York County Early Intervention Cumberland County Prison The Village at Rockville Wraparound Maryland Blue Ridge Eating Disorder Care Center Beyond Violence, Inc. Pennsylvania Comprehensive Behavioral Health (PCBH), Children's Aide Society San Mar Family & Community Services Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition The Homeland Center Cumberland County Children & Youth Services UPMC REACCH program UPMC REACCH program Laurel Life Center for Family Services IFC Services Board of Child Care/Everstand Adams County Children's Advocacy Center Jewish Family Services of Greater Harrisburg Domestic Violence Services of Cumberland & Perry Counties Mid-Atlantic Rehabilitation Services (MARS) Waynesboro School District - Fairview Elementary Wellspan Philhaven - Gettysburg Harrisburg School District Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition Elevated Mental Health Services Cumberland County Office of Aging Communities in Schools	Ulster County Department of Social Services Compassus Juniata Valley Tri-County Drug & Alcohol Commission Laurel Life Services/Folium, Inc. SU Pride & Gender Equity (PAGE) Center Daystar Recovery Center Chambersburg Area School District Children's Aid Society Waynesboro New Hope Shelter Abraxas Youth & Family Services Laurel Lakes Wellness & Rehabilitation Center Chester County Intermediate Unit UPMC Muncy Place Skilled Nursing Facility CONTACT Helpline SU Office of Accessibility Resources Montgomery County Office of Children & Families Penn State Dickinson Law Children's Advocacy Clinic Capital Area Intermediate Unit (Diakon Center Point) Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition Milton Area School District Chestnut Hill Lodge Rehabilitation Center New Story Schools Arkview Behavioral Health South Western School District Attain ABA A Better Tomorrow Starts Today (BTST) Potomac Community Services Potomac Community Services Round Hill Services
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MSW Specialization Field Placements

Monroe County Children & Youth Uplifted Counseling Integrative Wellness Management PA Counseling Services Where Hope Happens Catholic Charities - Labre Clinic River Rock Academy Little Creek Recovery City of Philadelphia Children & Youth Winchester Public Schools Fresenius Kidney Care UPMC Memorial York Second Grace Manheim Central School District Torrance State Hospital Bhutanese Community in Harrisburg/Lehigh University Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition Midd West School District Elevated Mental Health Services Veterans Multi-Service Center UPMC Child Advocacy of Central PA A Better Tomorrow Starts Today (BTST) UPMC Central PA New Hope Recovery Center Jewish Family Services of Greater Harrisburg Mechanicsburg Area School District Momentum Services Center for Family Services Everstand Penn State Health Community CARES Cumberland County Prison Central Dauphin School District Community CARES/Cumberland County Housing Coalition Service Access & Management Inc. (SAM) Free Baltimore	Roxbury Treatment Center; NASW-PA Chapter Potomac Community Services SU Connections AOD program NASW-PA Chapter Franklin County Crisis UPMC Community Health Choices PA Counseling Services - Gettysburg Penn State Health ESU Gender and Sexuality Center River Rock - Newville campus Cumberland County CYS Salvation Army Lock Haven Corps Laurel Life: Conewago Valley School District Mechanicsburg Area School District RTQ Academy Education & Family Services Greater Minnesota Community Services Laurel Lakes Rehabilitation & Wellness Center Chambersburg Area School District Capital Area Intermediate Unit Alleghenies United Cerebral Palsy Cumberland County CYS Penn State Health SU PAGE Center Fresenius Medical Care Perry County CYS Berlin Brothersvalley School District Esperanza Cyber Charter School Families United Network Lebanon VA Medical Center Allentown School District Arkview Recovery Center Catholic Charities - Labre Clinic Second Grace Capital Area Intermediate Unit Hoffman Homes Momentum Services, LLC Winchester Public Schools Phoenix Counseling Services Children's Service Center
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