

## **Gerontological Social Workers Probe Unexpected Consequences of Licensing Law** Implications for Expanding the Workforce

*Peter Martin, LMSW; Ann Brownhill Gubernick, LMSW; Ken Onaitis, LMSW; Members, Gerontological Social Work Steering Committee*

Over 240 gerontological social workers explored interlocking issues of licensing and workforce development on March 19th at Fordham University's Lincoln Center Campus. A day long conference, organized by NASW-NYC's Gerontological Social Work Committee (GSWC), was convened to increase awareness of the emerging challenges and consequences of licensing and other workforce issues on the profession.

Peter Vaughan, PhD, Dean, Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service and Rose Starr, LMSW,

President, NASW-NYC Chapter, greeted conferees. Scott Miyake Geron, PhD, MSW, Director, Institute for Geriatric Social Work, Boston University, was keynote speaker, addressing "The Future of Gerontological Social Work." He outlined the challenge social work faces in recruiting, training and guiding the workforce that will be needed to meet the social service needs of swelling older populations. Today's geriatric social workers are retiring. Future new workers will be less likely to have degrees in social work if adequate supports to recruit and retain them are not in place.

He diagrammed career paths for various categories of workers, illustrating how paths can be advanced or blocked by licensing-related factors.

A panel of respondents moderated by Past Chapter President Barbara Silverstone, DSW, LCSW, expanded on workforce issues.

Edwin Méndez-Santiago, LCSW, Commissioner, NYC Department for the Aging, noted that by 2030, older adults in NYC will out-number school-aged

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## **Meetings Uncover New Impacts of Licensing on Workforce** Chapter Prepares Mental Health, Child Welfare, Aging, Health Care and Settlement Houses

Since the social work licensing law went into effect in 2004, the Chapter has been monitoring its impact on the profession. The focus has been on practitioners, including students, the schools of social work, as well as agencies and programs. While it is widely recognized that licensing was important to the social work profession and assures protection of the public that only qualified practitioners receive the license, there are numerous issues that have been of concern to the Chapter's Board of Directors.

In order to assure that practitioners and students would be fully informed about licensing, the Chapter created a new staff position titled "licensing specialist". A person was hired last October and has

been able to provide consultation on the requirements for licensing. In addition to this, the Chapter has held numerous meetings with agency and program leaders to make certain that service providers who employ social workers fully understand the requirements for social workers to be licensed.

In the past several months, the Chapter has held separate meetings with leaders in mental health, child welfare, aging, health care, and settlement houses. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss the LMSW and the LCSW in terms of legal compliance, and issues were identified that are seen as concerns in the present as well as for the future.

### **Issues with the LMSW**

NASW has been having discussions about the fact that licensing requires all practitioners to have, at a minimum, the LMSW to practice. While many agencies have been fully aware of this, many others have not been aware. Related to this is the concern that a significant number of graduates are not passing the exam. Social workers are allowed under a limited permit to be employed for up to one year, under supervision, while they obtain the license, but many practitioners and employers are reporting that staff have been dismissed for not passing the exam within the one year time period.

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## Message From The President

# Member Benefits and Memorable Moments

As my term as your president comes to an end in July, I have been honored to be part of a vibrant organization and professional family whose mission and direction have been evolving over many years. Our unique commitment to the social work workforce – the availability of well-trained, respected and adequately paid professionals to meet the growing needs of a culturally, linguistically diverse population with increasingly complex social, economic and health needs – has inspired me, our Board of Directors and staff to pay greater attention to the conditions necessary to recruit and retain qualified social work practitioners and executives, now and in the future as retirements mount.



Rose Starr

### A Member-Centered Organization – the Benefits that Matter

This has meant sharpening our focus on what makes a difference to social workers in general, our members in particular, and what they are looking for from the profession and the Association that no other organization or affiliation will provide.

This member-perspective has guided me to think about the benefits that prospective and current members find meaningful and how the concepts of community and political advocacy can be realized to create an organization increasingly perceived as meeting members' expectations, if not all members' needs.

Thus in this "swansong," I want to mention a few NASW-NYC initiatives that reflect this perspective and the leadership I have been proud to be a part of with our Board, Executive Committee, Task Forces, Committees and scores of active members.

### Membership Services tied to Membership Numbers

First, it is useful to recognize that a membership organization such as NASW needs members! Just as the profession is

challenged by an avalanche of retirements, so is our association. The number of NASW-NYC members in large part predicts our resource level, as member dues comprise the largest part of our budget and thus significantly determine our ability to hire staff, afford programming and supply meaningful benefits. The problem – or opportunity – is circular - it is essential that we attract and retain members to mount the programs that attract and retain members.

### The New Professionals Task Force – Meeting Needs, Engaging Members

In this regard, as described in the March 2008 issue of *Currents*, the New Professionals' Task Force established two years ago is, first and foremost, a community of support, information and advocacy for early-career social workers in New York City. Their own survey of new professionals highlighting the perceived problem of lack of agency-based supervision inspired me to convene a group of seasoned leaders to address this obstacle. The resulting survey on educational or clinical supervision disseminated via email to 640 members who self-identified as supervisors or administrators will soon be analyzed and reported on. I hope to continue to work on forthcoming recommendations for action with interested colleagues, and play a role in helping address the conditions and supports social workers view as essential for competent performance and lasting commitment to the field.

In addition to meeting its own needs, the New Professionals' Task Force has the potential to attract and retain NASW members and thus invigorate the Association with new blood, critical opinion and leadership. Moreover, it has created a community that itself is an attraction and benefit. NASW-NYC's potential to create a community of interest for the

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## New York City Chapter



National Association of Social Workers

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# NASW-NYC Members Conduct Campaign for Loan Forgiveness Additional \$1 Million Approved in the State Budget A Victory for Social Work

In the hectic, final days of passing a 2008-9 New York State budget, NASW mobilized its members to contact key elected officials for an additional \$1 million for loan forgiveness.

With information from NASW - NYC's lobbyists that loan forgiveness was still under consideration despite substantial budget cutting, NASW sent 7,193 members with emails on record a suggested text to contact Governor David Paterson and Malcolm Smith, State Senate Minority Leader.

The support of NASW members contributed enormously towards our goal.

In addition, 155 members who live in Senator Smith's district were asked to reach him given their unique position as constituents. NASW's New Professional Task Force contacted their membership echoing the importance of contacting Senator Smith.

Based on valuable contacts made by NASW in prior months, State Senators Diane Savino, John Sampson, Tom Duane and Toby Stavisky kept up the pressure for the loan forgiveness increase within the state senate.

As *Currents* went to press, Chapter leaders said that the funding had been put in the budget.

## LMSW Test Prep Workshop

Saturday, June 7, 2008  
10:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (note time change)  
Trainer: Dawn Hall Apgar

Hunter College  
School of Social Work  
129 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street  
1<sup>st</sup> floor auditorium

This workshop will provide information on the format and structure of the LMSW examination. It will help participants develop successful test-taking strategies, and will provide review material in each of the content areas. Content areas include: theories of human development; assessment, diagnosis and treatment; psychopathology; psychopharmacology; communication; professional ethics; management and

administration; research; and diversity. Practice questions will be reviewed to illustrate test-taking strategies and reinforce content material.

*Dawn Hall Apgar, PhD, LSW, ACSW, is the Director of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Institute at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Dr. Apgar has helped thousands of social workers across the country prepare for licensure examinations. She is currently the NASW-NJ liaison to the New Jersey Board of Social Work Examiners, Chairperson of the NJ Chapter's task force on licensure, and a member of the national NASW Board of Directors.*

### To Register:

Register online for the workshop by visiting [www.naswnyc.org](http://www.naswnyc.org) or download a form and mail it with payment before June 1, 2008 to:

ATTN: LMSW Test Prep  
NASW-NYC  
50 Broadway, Suite 1001  
New York, NY 10004

Or to request a form call (212) 668-0050 or e-mail: [naswnyc@naswnyc.org](mailto:naswnyc@naswnyc.org)

\$80 NASW Student Member  
\$105 NASW Regular Member  
\$210 For Non-Members  
(fee includes 236 page test prep manual)  
No refunds after June 4



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# President's Message

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membership at large or specific subgroups has been significantly advanced by the New Professionals' example.

## **Growing our Capacity to Tackle Core Workforce Issues**

Addressing social workers' concrete requirements for safe, respectful and adequately paid employment is core to our workplace and workforce agenda. To this end, we are focusing attention on the objectives we have the capacity to pursue with success, alone or in partnership with larger coalitions.

For example, we have identified a range of other-than-salary benefits that are important to workers, such as continuing education/supervision time and resources, pleasant facilities and updated equipment, participation in program and other decisions, and celebration of social workers' contributions. We began this process with a meeting of executives of agencies recognized by their peers as "exemplary" in maintaining a supportive work environment and disseminated their "tips" through *Currents* and other media.

## **Taking Small, Feasible Steps**

This is an effort we will continue to build, as we participate with other organizations to weigh in on the low salaries for professionals embedded in many service sector funding contracts and influence the inclusion of social workers as authorized providers of public and private insurances. Another similar effort is that of our Task Force on the Future of Social Workers in Hospitals that is seeking State Health Department enforcement of current regulations requiring Social Work Departments. NASW-NYC's continuing challenge is to engage the elephant in the room - social work salaries and working conditions such as caseloads - by carefully selecting feasible targets for change that can make a tangible difference in social workers' lives. With each incremental step, we demonstrate our commitment to workers' concerns and, if effective, add to our organizational and political efficacy for the struggles ahead.

## **Licensing and Loan Forgiveness**

The ability to increase the State-funded social worker loan forgiveness program and help members and social agencies understand and address State licensing-related issues and obstacles are companion priorities of our workforce agenda. No MSW social worker in New York State is unaffected by the licensing law and regulations and few are or were unaffected by education-related debt. Both may create serious impediments to recruiting and retaining social workers and addressing worker shortages, especially in agencies and communities requiring expertise in bilingual, bicultural, aging, child welfare, health/mental health and addictions practice.

Our Executive Director and I have written about our efforts in these areas in previous *Currents*. Suffice it to say that I am exceedingly proud to have helped continue these dual priorities by pressing for legislative assistance from the Senate Democrats to double the loan forgiveness program and offering NASW-NYC as the catalyst and partner for a multi-service sector campaign to define and take action on urgent licensing implementation issues.

## **Wholesale and Retail - To Unify, Respect the Difference within the Whole**

Teaching Community Organization and Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, I used the "wholesale-retail" comparison (that I do not claim to have coined) to describe differences and similarities across social work methods of practice. In thinking about some of the most inspiring and emotional activities in which I've had the honor to participate as President, this comparison again comes to mind. We need and want our profession to be unified across sectors and forms of practice, and to feel enough in common as social workers to collaborate on collective priorities, such as those highlighted above.

## **The Taskforce of Members of African Descent**

However, I have learned, if I wasn't fully aware before, that it also strengthens us as a collectivity to pay attention to important

issues or attributes that may be perceived to separate, if not divide, us. And so it has been a privilege to witness the way in which black leaders in the profession came together to develop an issue of *Currents* and in the process spoke from the heart to their fellow social workers about painful, generally unshared experiences of systemic racism affecting even those at the highest ranks. This took courage and trust, and I believe has been received with understanding, respect and a desire to create more equitable organizations and services, as has NASW-NYC leadership in the Undoing Racism project. These initiatives led to the development of the NASW-NYC African Descent Task Force and, with the leadership of Professor Darrell Wheeler, an energetic agenda of educational offerings for black, white and brown alike, will begin soon following their upcoming conference.

Another memorable experience was working with social work leaders in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender communities, part of an NASW-NYC Committee, who designed an issue of *Currents* to present key practice, policy, and research issues and personal perspectives to the membership. The feeling of community and pride in being social workers was deep, culminating in a stirring NASW *Currents* LGBT-edition Release Party at the LGBT Community Center. A milestone for our association, the articles expressed resilience amidst pain, and challenged all social workers and "mainstream" agencies to provide quality services to LGBT individuals.

## **Celebrating Social Workers - An Investment in Your Future**

Over the last several years I have had the honor and pleasure of attending a variety of Social Work Month celebrations held by diverse agencies and organizations, as have other members of our Board of Directors and staff. Before becoming your President, I did not realize how meaningful such annual recognition could be, not only to social work honorees, but to their families, agency leadership and other professional colleagues as well.

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# Study in Ghana Expands Opportunities for Cross Cultural Understanding in Social Work Policy and Practice

## Lessons for Working with West African Immigrant Families

Athena B. Moore, MS, Associate Executive Director, NASW-NYC

Students and faculty participating in the New York Social Work Education Consortium Immigrant Child Welfare Fellowship Project recently returned from an intercession study abroad tutorial in Ghana, West Africa.

The Project, a major collaboration between the metropolitan schools of social work and the Administration for Children's Services, enrolls high-performing MSW students who are committed to practicing in the field of child welfare with immigrant families after graduation.

Through a combination of specialized classes and field work, participants in the study abroad examined the history, institutions, people, cultures, immigration trends and contemporary social problems impacting families in Ghana in an effort to increase knowledge and understanding of West African families, one of the fastest growing groups immigrating to New York City.

Representatives from the Black Agency Executives, a professional membership association that advocates culturally competent policy and program development, also participated in the tutorial. Association representatives Diane Heggie, Associate Executive Director, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies; Melba Butler, Interim President & CEO of the Black Equity Alliance; and Athena Moore, Associate Executive Director of the NYC Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers joined consortium faculty Professors Julie Altman from Adelphi, Jean Bacon, Stony Brook, and Kathleen Durst, NYU Field Instructor, in providing individualized teaching and mentoring to the Fellows as they examined the applicability of what they were learning to their practice with immigrant families in New York City.

During the ten-day trip, Project fellows spent a portion of their time in class, learning from faculty of the University of Ghana about the structure of social welfare

and services for children and families in Ghana, and volunteering in child and family serving agencies. Additional experiences included guided tours of the Dutch and Portuguese Slave Castles, the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, the W.E.B. Dubois Educational Center, and participation in an interdenominational church service. With funding from the New York Community Trust, Dr. Alma J. Carten, Associate Professor and Principal Investigator of the project at the NYU Silver School of Social Work and Tandayi Jones, Project Communications Coordinator, planned the program in consultation with faculty and staff of NYU in Ghana. Akosua Anyidoho, Director; Christa Sanders, Associate Director; and Anthoniette Taylor, Faculty Affairs and Special Programs Coordinator.

Currently, Project Fellows are completing internships in Community School 133, Harlem Hospital Medical Center, and the ACS Manhattan Field

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### SAVE THE DATE NASW-NYC SOCIAL WORKERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT TASK FORCE CONFERENCE

Join us as we celebrate the kick off of a series of ongoing program and policy initiatives aimed at addressing the critical concerns of social workers of African descent and the unique needs of the communities and populations they serve. The conference will advance the Chapter's efforts to tackle issues highlighted in focus groups and past issues of *Currents* on social work in communities of African Descent, as well as new discussions with the task force.

The conference will expand the Chapter's capacity to be responsive to social work practice issues, to increase leadership skills, and to address institutional barriers and racism. The conference and the task force will also be a vehicle for advocacy and coalition building. Speakers will provide an overview of the challenges that black professionals are facing, and how to identify and further overcome them.

#### Strengthening Black Social Workers Strengthens Our Community: Balancing Across the Professional/ Life Cycle

Keynote Speaker

**Terrie Williams, LCSW**

author of

*"Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting"*

**Saturday, June 21, 2008**

**8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

City College- CUNY  
NAC Lecture Hall  
138th St. & Convent Ave.  
Harlem, New York

For more information on the task force or this event, contact Athena Moore, Associate Executive Director at [moore@naswnyc.org](mailto:moore@naswnyc.org).  
To RSVP email [rsvp@naswnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@naswnyc.org).

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# Working with West African Immigrants

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Office, helping new immigrant families from Mexico, Latin/Central America, and West African countries, cope with stressors associated with the immigration experience to keep children safe, healthy, and successful in school. The tutorial was an extension of the field practicum, and gave Fellows hands-on experiences to enhance their understanding of the immigrant families with whom they are working in their agencies.

The tutorial provided an exceptional opportunity for the integration of class and fieldwork, and for the teaching of diversity and social justice content. This was illustrated in the Fellow's Capstone Project, a colloquium held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in February 2008. Dr. Awam Amkpa, Academic Director of NYU in Ghana addressed the group, painting the broad picture of the political, economic and social context for social welfare in Ghana. Field instructors Kathleen Durst and Ian Ong led social work Fellows from New York University, Fordham, Yeshiva, and Stony Brook in a panel discussion, which revealed a number of positive outcomes that resulted from the experience. For example, Fellows reported they were able to more critically examine the limitations of practice theories based in a Western model for understanding behavior when working with immigrant families, and developed a new sensitivity to personal values and socialization experiences that can bias worker assessments and preferences in the choice of practice interventions.

An illustration of this can be quickly observed in three areas: the high value placed on including community elders in decision-making, the reliance on extended family networks and the use of cultural traditions (e.g., rituals, storytelling, proverbs or music), elements that can support and ease interventions with immigrant families, but that are often absent from US practices.

Many of the elder men and women in African societies, often referred to as Chiefs and Queen mothers, are held

in the highest regard. They assume the role of traditional rulers and help to maintain a sense of order and authority in communities. Whether among more formal settings such as the Police Department or government institutions such as the administrative offices of the Department of Social Welfare, or within schools and family homes in local villages, this reverence for the elders was ever present as a guiding force.

The use of traditional or indigenous religious practices and spirituality, which are also major forces in socialization and role delineation among African families, often are discounted factors in worker assessments and interventions in the US. For example, the practice of using rituals to honor African ancestors and to seek guidance in family life is commonly used and regarded with higher authority than the counseling offered to immigrant families by some agencies.

Some of the simplest gestures commonly used in daily social and business interactions in the US are the polar opposite of those employed by African immigrants, from handshakes and gift giving, to how people are greeted at meetings or social gatherings. For example, a US social worker might cross his or her legs in the presence of someone of importance, point at a person with their left hand, decline a gift or an offering of food from a client, or refer to an elder by his or her first name, without any concern. Among African immigrants, however, these would all be considered disrespectful and might diminish opportunities for client engagement. In the US, best practice theories also often advocate setting boundaries and keeping distance between workers and clients, while, in African cultures, gift giving, food sharing and other gestures of hospitality are highly valued. There is also a strong communal focus and a highly regarded belief in collective responsibility among West African immigrant communities. This is an orientation that is very different than the individualism in western practices in the U.S. Social work practice which integrates

communal philosophies and community-based approaches in service delivery will likely be more effective in helping practitioners serve clients from West Africa.

Volunteering at the Osu Children's Orphanage was especially meaningful for the Fellows. Some are translating concerns about resource gaps into activism by developing an ongoing mechanism for sending much needed supplies to the Orphanage. Others are considering ways for designing innovative programs that integrate customs of the native culture of immigrant families. For example, they have been exploring ways in which African values that foster strong kinship bonds, communal relationships, and respect for elders can be integrated into their work with immigrant youth. Many of these youth face additional challenges in resolving transitional tasks of adolescence. In addition they are examining ways that these values can be incorporated into counseling services that help families resolve conflicts before they escalate into more serious problems of domestic violence.

A recent forum, *Sankofa - Culturally Competent Social Work Policy and Practice: Lessons Learned in Working with West African Immigrant Families in Child Welfare*, cosponsored by NASW-NYC, Black Agency Executives, Black Equity Alliance and Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies was convened at the United Way of NYC on April 8, 2008 and provided another opportunity to share findings with social work and human service agency leaders.

Among those highlighted included the recognition that West African immigrants have endured very complex and changing economic, social and political conditions in their home countries. Upon coming to the US, they carry the history and traditions of communities mired by years of oppression, political struggle and economic deprivation alongside a great sense of pride and responsibility towards retaining their cultural identity and independence. Similarly, West African

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# Gerontological Social Work Conference

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children. He raised concerns including how to preserve and strengthen existing staff in agencies; revise budgets to increase salaries; develop career paths for the BA and AA workforce and for older social workers considering mid-life career changes; attract applicants from diverse backgrounds to schools of social work; help graduating students pass the LMSW exam; extend the LMSW/LCSW grandfather periods; and engage retired social workers and others in aging services.

Mary Pender Greene, LCSW, Assistant Executive Director, Jewish Board of Family and Children Services, brought the perspective of a large mental health and social service agency with approximately 100 students and over 400 social workers. New students and staff often question whether positions lead to the attainment of a LCSW and shy away from senior centers, synagogues/churches, child welfare or other settings for fear that it will hamper their career development. The current definition for psychotherapy is very restrictive. She urged that definitions for psychotherapy and the locations where clinical work can be performed be expanded, as both would benefit clients and the profession.

Patricia Volland, LMSW, Director, The New York Academy of Medicine's Social Work Leadership Institute, emphasized that MSWs alone cannot fulfill future service needs. BSWs and others must be recruited, mentored and retained. She reported progress in recruiting new social workers to the field of aging through the Hartford Partnership Program for Aging Education, a nationwide program in schools of social work that offers financial incentives and enhances field placements by rotating practice settings.

Commissioner Méndez-Santiago presented a Mayoral Proclamation honoring National Social Work Month to Rose Starr, Chapter President.

A second panel explored "Licensing: Implications for Social Workers & Agencies in the Field of Gerontology." Robert Schachter, DSW, LMSW, NASW-NYC Executive Director, reported problems getting LMSWs licensed and barriers for those wishing to obtain an LCSW. Many MSWs did not take advantage of the initial LMSW grandfathering period, apparently unaware that licensing (unlike the former CSW certification) is not optional.

Employers are unaware that all social workers employed by them must be licensed or covered by a one-time limited permit. He emphasized a key barrier: to provide supervision leading to an LCSW, an agency must have a Certificate of Operation as a provider of clinical services, or for this to be specified in the regulations for the program. While hopeful of effecting small changes in the way Albany interprets the law, Dr. Schachter gave a sober assessment of the obstacles to amending NYS legislation.

Ken Onaitis, LMSW, Carter Burden Center for the Aging and Co-Chair, GSWC's Workforce Sub-Committee, moderated a panel that further explored implications of the licensing law.

Martha Adams Sullivan, DSW, Executive Director, Fordham-Tremont Community Mental Health Center and Founder/Co-Chair, Citywide Mental Health Coalition for the Black Elderly, noted that people of color want the same high quality of care that all people want—services that are accessible, affordable and performed by culturally competent workers.

She emphasized the need to develop a broader definition of clinical practice; encouraged social workers to unify in identifying as social workers and form statewide city/coalitions to address workforce issues.

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## Barbara Joseph Memorial Fund



*Barbara Joseph  
December 2007*

**Barbara Hunter Randall Joseph, Ph.D.**, January 7, 1936 - December 2, 2007. Beloved mother, sister, wife, friend, teacher, therapist, social activist and human needs theorist.

The Undoing Racism™ Internship Project lost a lifelong, anti-racist, organizer-warrior when Dr. Barbara Joseph, the field supervisor of the Internship Project, died on December 2, 2007. In her spirit, we are inviting the New York anti-racist community to participate in the continuation and expansion of her work.

Barbara Joseph was a double threat. She was a master educator, supervising MSW interns, and a first-rate strategist, working with the Undoing Racism™ Internship Project to put anti-racist theory into practice.

With Barbara's and the Steering Committee's leadership, in the past 3 years, Undoing Racism™ Project interns have accomplished enormous achievements.

To honor Barbara's memory, there are two upcoming initiatives that you are invited to participate in:

**Memorial Service - May 16, 2008 from 6pm - 9pm at Hunter College School of Social Work 129 E. 79th St.  
RSVP to [allijoseph@gmail.com](mailto:allijoseph@gmail.com)**

We have established the Barbara Joseph Memorial Undoing Racism™ Internship Project Fund. The Fund's objective is to assure ongoing resources for the Project's continuation. We envision expanding the Project to include interns from every school of social work in the region.

To make a contribution to the Fund, please make checks out to: NASW-NYC  
Mail to: NASW- NYC, 50 Broadway, 10th Floor, New York, N. Y. 10004  
Attn: Undoing Racism™ Internship Project

Contributions to NASW-NYC are not tax deductible.



*Clockwise: 1.) Over 240 Gerontological social workers attended the conference; 2.) Keynote Speaker: Scott Miyake Geron, Ph.D., MSW, Director, Institute for Geriatric Social Work, Boston University, Patricia Volland, LMSW, Director, The New York Academy of Medicine's Social Work Leadership Institute, Mary Pender Greene, Assistant Executive Director, JBFCs and Commissioner Edwin Mendez-Santiago of the NYC Department of Aging discuss the future of Gerontological Social Work; 3.) NASW-NYC President-Elect Patricia Brownell, Edward Ma, Nora O'Brien join with other NASW Members including attending the conference; 4.) Commissioner Edwin Mendez-Santiago presents a proclamation to Rose Starr, President, NASW-NYC in honor of National Social Work Month*

## Gerontological Social Work Conference

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Nancy D. Miller, LMSW, Executive Director, VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, challenged conferees to inform themselves by reading the licensing law (<http://www.op.nysed.gov/article154.htm>) and to practice a "2 minute elevator speech" when securing adequate support and funding for client services. "If we can't tell people what social workers do and why we are indispensable, nobody else will." She offered a fresh perspective on recruitment, focusing on the roles that people with disabilities can play.

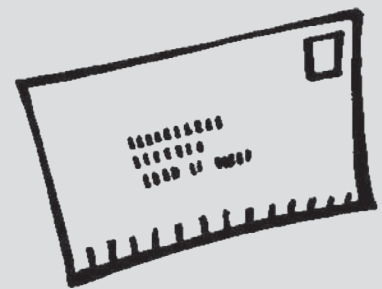
Kimberly Steinhagen, LMSW, Director, Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York, noted that most recent graduates sought the LCSW, which resulted in limiting themselves

to particular field placements and job opportunities that will lead them on the path to this licensure. Employers now struggle to fill LMSW positions where the greater need is.

Gail Siegal, LCSW, Chair, NASW/ NYC Gerontological Social Work Committee, concluded by outlining advocacy steps for changes in the licensing regulations. She urged participants to educate legislators, documenting problems in the form of letters to key NYS officials, with copies to the GSWC.

Workforce/licensing news will be shared through GSWC's e-mail listserve [gerontology@naswnyc.org](mailto:gerontology@naswnyc.org). □

### Membership Mailing Address Updates



Please let us know if you have moved or changed your address in order to ensure that you are regularly receiving *Currents* in the Mail.

Please call the membership office at: (800) 742-4089



# New Evidence-Based Resource Guide on Latino Youth and Families

A new evidence based guide for social workers and other practitioners designed to help Latino parents talk to their teenage children about sex is now readily accessible for NASW-NYC members. The content of the guide is designed to prevent premature sexual activity among Latino youths and was written for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and its Latino Initiative. The Latino Initiative was launched in March 2007 to increase national attention and action on teen pregnancy among Latinos.

Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW) Associate Professor Vincent Guilamo-Ramos, Ph.D., LCSW and doctoral candidate Alida Bouris, MSW have authored the guide.

The guide is translational in that it addresses practical tips for strengthening parent-adolescent communication about sex among Latino families. However, the strategies are based on a careful review of the empirical literature. Many of the

suggestions highlighted in the guide are based on research conducted by Dr. Guilamo-Ramos' research team.

"According to the National Campaign, 51% of Latinas are pregnant at least once by the age of 20. The Latino teen pregnancy rate is almost twice the national average and has declined about half as fast as the national rate. In addition, Latino youth also are disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS," says Dr. Guilamo-Ramos.

The primary messages that we wanted to convey to practitioners and parents is that Latino parents can make a difference and that there are specific communication and parenting strategies that can be used to help reduce the risk of teen pregnancy.

The guide provides practitioners with a communication framework within the context of Latino culture. The guide is an important part of the National Campaign's

Latino Initiative and will improve practitioner's ability to support parents in their efforts to keep their children healthy.

The guide is an important step in bridging the gap between research and practice by translating findings from the literature into practical strategies that practitioners can use to help Latino parents talk with their teenage children about sex,

The full guide can be downloaded on the Latino Initiative's website at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/conferencecall/0304/default.aspx>. In addition, a number of materials designed specifically for parents can be found on the site as well.

Dr. Guilamo-Ramos is currently developing a Latino Family Research Center at the Columbia University School of Social Work. The center will conduct applied research focused on Latino families both domestically and internationally. □

## Federal Economic Stimulus Program

### NYC Residents Eligible for Tax Benefits

Recently, NASW-NYC was invited to a meeting held at the United Way of New York City to discuss ways to spread the word about the Economic Stimulus Package (ESP), a new tax benefit. Over 500,000 New York City residents who do not normally file federal tax returns may be eligible to receive \$300 or more as part of the federal economic stimulus package – but only if they file a federal tax return. These individuals include recipients of social security, veterans with disabilities, widows of veterans with disabilities, and low-income or self-employed workers who do not normally file. NASW-NYC members are encouraged to disseminate information about these benefits to clients and eligible individuals, using the following methods:

- Putting information in newsletters and other materials.
- Hosting an event where the information can be shared.

- Reaching out to elected officials and union representatives to ensure that they have the right information and are sharing it with their constituents.
- Connecting with your local media – papers, radio and television stations.
- Training staff members that are working with eligible people on the ESP.
- Emailing members or colleague organizations, as appropriate.
- Engaging Community Boards.
- Sharing information with Home Health Aides and other home care agencies to reach home bound seniors.

Additional information can be found at the IRS website: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or the Dept of Consumer Affairs' website: [www.nyc.gov/consumers](http://www.nyc.gov/consumers).

Darrell Weinberg, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS, can answer questions you may have and can be reached at 212-436-1025 or [Darrell.weinberg@irs.gov](mailto:Darrell.weinberg@irs.gov). □

## VETERANS: A New Generation – New Challenges 25<sup>th</sup> "Hidden Client" Conference

Monday, June 9, 2008  
8:00 am – 4:00 pm

Hunter College School of Social Work  
129 East 79th Street  
New York City

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# Meetings Uncover Licensing Issues

*Continued from Cover Page*

While there is no quantitative data available, there is anecdotal evidence that social workers whose English is a second language may be less likely to pass the exam than others. The organization that prepares and administers the exam, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), does not release data that would permit an analysis of possible bias in the exam. The Chapter is awaiting an analysis being put together by the State Office of the Professions about pass rates, but this may not prove to be definitive since much of their relevant data is provided by individual practitioners on a voluntary basis.

The Chapter is encouraging everyone who needs to take the LMSW exam to take a preparatory workshop and to do everything possible to prepare for the exam. ASWB offers sample test questions that can be purchased. In addition, schools of social work and employers need to provide support to help in the preparation.

## Issues with the LCSW

A great deal of discussion has focused on the requirements for the LCSW and the need for experience doing diagnoses, assessment based treatment planning and

psychotherapy. There is a strong sense that the requirements for the LCSW do not reflect many of the realities of social work practice in organizational settings and that the requirements are overly restrictive. For example, the Office of the Professions is not simply accepting the attestation of the supervisor that an applicant for the LCSW has acquired the necessary experience. The Office has been looking for additional validation based on a program's certificate of operation or regulations that would permit the LCSW related experience to be carried out.

Providers across various service delivery systems have pointed out that such additional validation is making it difficult to support LMSWs to obtain their LCSW. Program directors have shared with NASW that they have had staff rejected for the LCSW even when they have met all of the legal criteria in the statute. Some of them have reported being successful in challenging the Office of the Professions while others have not been successful.

Members of the NASW-NYC Board, as well as social work leaders in the field, have said that there are far more settings

than acknowledged by the Office of the Professions that are appropriate for obtaining the relevant LCSW experience. While some social workers have argued that certain mental health settings are the best training grounds for the LCSW experience, many others are expressing that there are far more settings that provide a range of relevant experience. As one knowledgeable Board member expressed recently, the nature of one's experience often depends on who the supervisors is. The particular setting should not be the issue.

In the short term, over the next year, NASW-NYC will continue to work with practitioners, agency and program directors, the schools of social work, as well as the Office of the Professions, to continue to address licensing issues. One goal is to assure that everyone is well informed, aware of the issues, and to have adequate input into policy decisions

Over the longer term, the Chapter is concerned about the impact of licensing on the overall social work workforce and whether access to the profession will be overly restrictive and that additional shortages will be seen. □

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# President's Message

*Continued from Page 4*

Whether luncheons, receptions or enlarged staff meetings, these occasions to thank and acknowledge exceptional service and dedication are far from pro-forma. They not only reflect a sense of community and support, but contribute immeasurably to the growth and continuation of these essential qualities. These activities are well worth the investment; if one is not in place, I encourage you to start a "Celebrate Social Work" tradition at your agency or organization.

## The Queensboro Model

Going a step further than an agency-sponsored event are larger-scale Borough celebrations, like those sponsored by the Regeis Care Center in the Bronx and the Queensboro Council for Social Welfare (QCSW). Attending the latter reception, hosted also by the Queens Borough

President, the United Way of NYC, and NASW-NYC, I experienced the event as an opportunity to honor exceptional social workers, as well as an occasion to demonstrate and generate political support for all Queens' social workers, social service agencies and the communities they serve. Mr. Gordon Campbell, CEO and President of the United Way of NYC, Dennis M. Walcott, the NYC Deputy Mayor, Edwin Mendez-Santiago, Commissioner of the NYC Department for the Aging, Helen Marshall, Queens Borough President, State Senator John Sabini, Councilmember David Weprin and a representative for Councilmember Hiram Monseratte, spent time with those assembled and spoke from the heart about the meaning and importance of social work to them and Queens' diverse residents. It seems clear that this borough's social work community has the ear and

assistance of its officials and leaders, and that the QCSW model of community education and political advocacy merits consideration elsewhere.

As the outstanding social worker awards were presented to Mara Schecter (JASA) for service to the elderly, Mary Richardson-Rainford (NYC ACS) for her commitment to children, Shelley Hoffman (Samual Field Y) for work with holocaust survivors, Han-Ping Tsai (Creedmore Psychiatric Center) for work with Asian and other populations with severe mental illness, and Eleanora Babayev (FEGS) the founder of a program for Bukharan immigrants, I was profoundly grateful to be in their presence. Joan Serrano-Laufer, QCSW Executive Director, summed it all up when she said to all the honorees and their families, "Queens is better for all of you, and together we will make the world better for everyone." □

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# Working with West African Immigrants

*Continued from Page 6*

immigrants are constantly seeking ways to reinvent themselves and to relocate comfortably in their new environments, while simultaneously managing some of the trauma and sense of loss they inevitably experience as they leave behind their homes, supports and familial connections. For some, the effects of the migration experience may materialize in the form of grief, depression, and isolation, and if unaddressed, may increase opportunities for mental illness, domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, joblessness and other social ills over time.

Another major area of learning centered around the vast diversity of languages and cultural ethnicities within West Africa which have implications for social work practice. Working with West African immigrants requires sensitivity to the differences of those coming from the northern or southern regions, urban areas vs. rural areas, those who live inland or by water, as well as someone who speaks Ewe, Ga or Twi, three native languages belonging to different ethnic groups. In the US, practitioners must continue to be sensitized to the risks of treating Africans as a homogenous group and ignoring the unique needs that accompany each group. Formulating questions that seek to deepen understanding of these nuances in early assessments is essential.

Accordingly, there are many assumptions made and values placed on the educational history, backgrounds and capabilities of African immigrant groups who are encountered by social work practitioners in the US, and these assumptions impact the level of treatment that they receive as well as the types of service referrals made. Many West African immigrants have been educated through informal learning structures (e.g., a rich oral tradition of storytelling passed down through the generations) and the formal education structures (e.g. traditional schools). As a result, they bring to the US ongoing struggles – one rooted in the need to excel in the traditional settings and the other with an eye towards resisting years of colonial subordination and oppression, historical

traces of which can still be found in the modern day institutions affecting their lives.

These struggles are further exacerbated as families seek to navigate differences between first generation immigrant parents and their second generation, American educated children whose processes of assimilation and acculturation take on different forms, often with major implications for child rearing. For example, U.S. practitioners may characterize parental efforts to get their children to respect long held cultural traditions as being limiting or punitive, but for some parents it is akin to a matter of life and death in their minds. In addition, heavy reliance on extended kinship networks for child rearing and the use of children as domestic workers may be practiced in some West African households, but in the US, these practices might raise questions about risk of abuse or neglect.

Practitioners in the US are challenged to respond to the critical needs of families while at the same time avoiding a rush to judgment on complex issues, which if misunderstood, could lead to the unnecessary disintegration of families. Many of these families may solely require special counseling and supports to help them adjust to the norms and rules required for them to effectively operate in their new environments.

Learning about the economic conditions of the country also clarified and helped to dispel many of the myths that are held about West African families. For many, Africa is viewed as a largely economically deprived nation, and it is often assumed that its citizens are impoverished. While there is enormous poverty, there are also areas of great wealth. Unfortunately, few in the U.S. are seemingly aware of this and perceptions of Africans in the U.S. are sometimes shaped through limited contacts with those who are most visibly seen in occupations such as cab drivers and street vendors. It was clarified that while many African immigrants who make it to the U.S. are well educated and highly skilled, often holding comparable credentials

to their counterparts here, they are at times treated insensitively when moving through social service systems despite their advanced status. Practitioners in the U.S. who recognize and are able to factor this in as they are working with West Immigrant African families, will likely yield a better result in planning appropriate interventions and treatment plans. In addition, those who take the time to learn more about the complex educational, economic, political and social factors shaping clients lives and the ties they maintain to the customs and norms of their home countries, will have greater success in fostering communications.

The resilience and strengths of West African families as well as of the social work workforce there were apparent throughout Ghana. Despite enormous shortages of staff, poor working conditions, and limited resources (e.g., child caring caseloads double U.S. rates, two staff overseeing an entire district, and antiquated record keeping systems found at the orphanage and department of social welfare), the dedication and enormous contributions of the social work staff could not be denied. The sense of determination to succeed and to provide critical services for those in need, despite the odds, was apparent throughout. Whether passing groups of mothers journeying miles to obtain needed water for their villages while carrying their children on their backs or the unrelenting local vendors exchanging goods from sun up to sun down only to make a parcel of the earnings they deserved, one could not help but to be touched by the spirit of resilience surrounding them. It is the hope that this study abroad in Ghana will promote best practices for culturally competent social work practice and help current and future practitioners work more effectively with diverse immigrant populations in child welfare and other human service settings. □

*This article incorporates excerpts of a description of the study abroad which has been reprinted with permission and can be found at NYU Silver School of Social Work website [www.nyu.edu/socialwork/news.html](http://www.nyu.edu/socialwork/news.html)*



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April	February 20 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> week in March
May	March 20 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> week in April
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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS MAY 2008 - JUNE 2008

(All meetings held at the Chapter Office unless otherwise specified)

### Friday, May 16, 2008

Disaster Trauma Working Group  
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

### Monday, May 19, 2008

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee  
LGBT Community Center, 208 W. 13th St  
6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

### Thursday, May 22, 2008

New Professionals Meet Up  
Hallo Berlin  
626 10th Avenue, near 44th Street  
New York, NY 10036  
(212) 977-1944  
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

### Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Addictions Committee Meeting  
9:15 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

### Monday, June 2, 2008

Social Workers Advancing the Human Animal Bond  
6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

### Thursday, June 5, 2008

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Addictions Institute  
Fordham University  
113 West 60th St. at Columbus Avenue  
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

### Friday, June 6, 2008

Private Practice Committee  
Topic: Rewarding Specialties for Mental Health  
Clinicians: Developing Your Practice Niche  
with Rona LoPresti PhD  
12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

### Saturday, June 7, 2008

LMSW Test Prep Workshop  
Hunter College School of Social Work  
129 East 79th St., 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Auditorium  
Please register online at [www.naswnyc.org](http://www.naswnyc.org)  
10:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

### Wednesday, June 11, 2008

P.A.C.E. Committee Meeting  
6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

### Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Addictions Committee Meeting  
9:15 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

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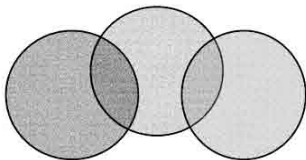
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- **INTRODUCTION TO INTERACTIVE GROUP:** Wednesday, June 18th, 2008 at 8:00 P.M.
- **INTRODUCTION TO DREAMWORK:** Wednesday, August 27th, 2008 at 7:00 P.M.



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