



By Ronald Hube

The Financial Social Work Initiative (FSWI), a unique University of Maryland program led by the School of Social Work that focuses on economic stability and financial wellness – especially among vulnerable communities – is getting a boost during the 2015-2016 academic year from the SunTrust Foundation. Funding from the foundation, a philanthropic arm of SunTrust Banks, Inc., is helping to launch two financial social work scholarship and fellowship programs.

The timing, supporters say, could not be better.

With protests and violence drawing attention to disparities faced by people living in the poorest areas of Baltimore, “we are all reminded of how complex and embedded economic and social inequalities are,” says School of Social Work alumna and Board of Advisors member Meg Woodside, MSW ’07, MBA. Woodside is a co-founder of FSWI.

“I share the school’s excitement to be partnering with SunTrust Foundation to invest in educating social workers to advance family economic security,” she says.

The SunTrust Foundation Fellowship in Financial Social Work, a onetime award with a \$10,000 field-placement stipend and a \$3,000 supervision fee, was given to Holly Mirabella, an MSW/JD student who will perform field practice at the Maryland CASH Campaign, which promotes financial security for families with low and moderate incomes.

The recipient of the inaugural SunTrust Foundation Scholarship Endowment in Financial Social Work, an annual \$2,000 award to a first-year MSW student, is Melanie Stettz, MBA, a former Peace Corps volunteer whose background includes financial system project management.

Speaking on behalf of the SunTrust Foundation, Sam DiPaola, MBA, president of SunTrust Banks’ Maryland region, says funding of the fellowship and scholarship is aligned with SunTrust’s purpose of “lighting the way to financial well-being.”

“A strong grounding in financial literacy is a crucial element in building self-sufficiency and creating economic security in our communities,” DiPaola says. “With formal training in financial education, students will be able to educate and coach families in the greater Baltimore community, delivering high-quality financial education where it is greatly needed.”

Jodi Jacobson Frey, PhD, LCSW-C, associate professor and FSWI chair, says SunTrust’s support “is deeply appreciated by all as we work to advance economic stability and financial capability for the clients, communities, and systems we serve.”



Holly Mirabella, an MSW/JD student



Melanie Stettz, MBA



Christine Callahan, PhD

“We can attest that this kind of support makes a world of difference to students as they get through their coursework and field placements,” adds Christine Callahan, PhD, LCSW-C, research assistant professor at FSWI.

Mirabella and Stettz were chosen to receive the SunTrust awards “through a highly competitive process,” according to Richard P. Barth, PhD, MSW, dean of the School of Social Work.

“There is a price to pay in the cost of learning to become a more effective helper,” Barth adds. “These gifts will help reduce those costs. They also signal the increasingly high standing of financial social work in our School and in our profession.”

Stettz says she hopes to use her business and financial background “in the service of social and economic justice,” and the scholarship endowment is helping to make that possible.

“I am inspired by and grateful for the award from the SunTrust Foundation,” she says.

Mirabella, who says the unrest in Baltimore this year “stems from decades, if not centuries, of disenfranchisement,” is “humbled to have the opportunity to help close financial gaps with support from the SunTrust Foundation.”

“It is an honor to have been granted a chance to do this work,” she says.