

What makes social work special?

• "... It is a profession that I love because it's a profession that emphasizes the strengths of individuals, and sees the needs of individuals from the perspective of the environment in which they live. My husband is a veteran of the Vietnam War and comes from a military family. This has given me a unique sensitivity to the needs of military members and their families and a commitment to help those who have given our country so much of their lives."

- Dr. Deborah Mathews

• "I loved the versatility of the social work degree. I was interested in (and personally affected through my father's cancer diagnosis). I became committed to understanding and addressing the financial burden that people face when dealing with life-threatening illnesses."

- Dr. Christine Callahan

Get involved

• Limit distractions: "Others can practically be involved in helping the homeless by just being educated about their community and being more aware of the injustices of our society. People are too concerned with things such as the social networks and these things are distractions from the realities of life."

- Paul Frederique

• Be aware: "I think being aware of the resources within your community and knowing what your community is doing (or not doing) on behalf of its most vulnerable residents is a first step. Healthcare clinics, food banks, shelters, affordable housing, employment services; what are your special concerns?"

- Dr. Callahan

The task of the social worker

Maryland schools create programs that alter perspectives and empower communities

By Casey Boyer, Contributing Writer

If the task were in your hands, how would you promote justice for the marginalized homeless in Maryland? Maybe, it could start with a simple change in perspective.

How would you provide educational opportunities to military members and their families who are stationed in Europe?

And if you could, how would you deal more effectively with society's complex financial issues while simultaneously improving financial capability on the community level?

Society's vulnerable populations are many, and the challenges ahead are complicated and can at times feel overwhelming. But colleges and universities in Maryland are up for the task. In an effort to reach out to some of society's vulnerable populations, McDaniel College, Salisbury University and the University of Maryland, Baltimore are passionately pursuing social work initiatives that support others through education and action.

Paul Frederique, a student of the class of 2015, is an exercise science major at McDaniel College, located in Westminster, Md. This past January term, a friend enrolled him in a unique class, which Frederique expected would merely satisfy a graduation requirement. Little did he know, the class would change his perspectives and fuel within him a desire to become more educated and to educate others about societal issues, particularly homelessness. Frederique's revolutionary experience, taught by associate professor of social work, Jim Kupz, Ph.D., was a course entitled, "The



John Dean, Contributing Photographer

Salisbury University is busy providing educational programs to all branches of active military and their dependents that are stationed in Europe.

Deborah Mathews, Ph.D., is professor and chair of SU's Social Work Department. In an interview, she talks about a partnership initiated by the University of Maryland, University College that works toward providing continuing education in the social work field for the Kaiserslautern Military Community in Germany.

This partnership is in response to a request for proposals from the Department of Defense (DoD). According to Mathews, "The DoD's

In addition to the UMUC and SU initiative in Germany, the University of Maryland, Baltimore's Social Work Department began a financial training program in 2008 that has become internationally recognized, known as the Financial Social Work Initiative (FSWI).

"There is nothing like FSWI in any other schools of social work in the nation," states Jodi Jacobson Frey, Ph.D., chair of the FSWI and steering committee member. Frey closely collaborates with Christine Callahan, Ph.D., to develop research projects, identify opportunities for research funding and to maintain and grow the FSWI network. Their individual investments

• Take a class. "One of the benefits we have learned from research evaluating the Continuing Professional Education courses is that they apply within their own personal lives before integrating knowledge and skills within their social work workplace. Therefore, the financial life skills and knowledge taught in our courses are potentially helpful to anyone."

- Dr. Jodi Jacobson Frey

Other resources you can use to get involved in your community:

- For updates regarding courses, research community events and ways to get involved: www.ssw.umaryland.edu/fswi
- Give: The Woodside Foundation will match dollar for dollar grants and gifts. To give to the Financial Social Work Initiative Fund: <http://ct.umaryland.edu/checkout/campus/giving/>
- Research: Center for Pregnancy Concerns (CPC); Safe House of Hope (Human trafficking); The Helping Up Mission (Homelessness and addiction); Baltimore CASH and Maryland CASH; Economic Security Initiative from the Nat'l Council on Aging; Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW); Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Maryland and Delaware (CCCS).

Above: Left to right: Jodi Jacobson Frey Ph.D., LCSW-C, associate professor, chair of the employee assistance program sub-specialization, chair of the FSWI, Christine Callahan, Ph.D., LCSW-C, lead research specialist, clinical, Financial Social Work Initiative, and Sally A. Hagerman, doctoral student, at a meeting of the steering committee of the FSWI at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

According to Frederique, the class is about "finding the TRUE meaning of homelessness. Not just 'the person who does not have a home and is living on the street' stereotypical homelessness." He comments about the faces behind homelessness, the causes, stereotypes, and even examining statistics and laws. It was a course, he states, that is about "putting life in perspective."

The course offered Frederique and his classmates several opportunities to expand their education beyond the limits of the classroom. He specifically recalls a trip to Baltimore where his class, along with hundreds of others from various schools participated in the Injustice Walk. Frederique refers to the walk as a "tour" that he says, "exposes the reality of homelessness in downtown Baltimore."

Frederique had the privilege of seeing different shelters and health services that provide for this population, while guides who had experienced these realities first hand, offered historical explanations of different parts of downtown Baltimore and its landmarks, and how those places are significant to the homeless community.

In addition, Frederique was invited by Kunz to testify in Annapolis based on his primary accounts during the course in an effort to pass a bill that he says, "... helps people in our communities gain a better count of homeless youth." He took part in a survey called the, "Point in Time Survey in Carroll County," coming to the conclusion that the survey was not as effective as it could be because it was not designed to count the homeless youth.

"I now, because of this course, have gained a better awareness of injustices in my surroundings and give them more attention. I used to pay no mind to people experiencing homelessness on the street because I used to think some put themselves in that situation. Now, I realize that I can never assume what someone has gone through or what they are going through," Frederique concludes.

As McDaniel motivates its students to action by offering perspective-altering educational opportunities, the Social Work Department of

from their commitment to provide resources for those in the military and their families." "I think [this] is impressive," she states, "given the country's recent increased sensitivity to the needs of veterans."

Currently, SU's Social Work Department is located at four satellite sites statewide, beginning in 2006 when the Department expanded to include satellite programs at Cecil College, the Eastern Shore Higher Education Center at Chesapeake College, the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown and the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center in California, Md., in 2013.

"The concept of developing a satellite program," she states, "grew from the realization that not all potential students can leave their home communities to participate in a traditional, on-campus academic experience," including the military.

SU's mission is to provide opportunities for the military and their dependents to study social work while being stationed in Germany. A mix of students enrolled after the program's launch this past March 2014, including students who are currently in the military, some who are retired military operating as civilians with the military and a few are spouses of military members.

As a social work educator, not a social worker providing direct practice, Mathews notes from her experience that those experiencing a military life encounter all of life's problems like anyone else, however, those situations may become amplified due to separation from their extended families, because they are living in foreign countries, because seeking help can put them in jeopardy of losing their current Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) or because of the reality of deployments."

In seeking to meet the educational needs of those with military connections, Mathews believes that the support and resources available to provide that support must be "more sophisticated," an effort she sees being made on their behalf.

in the work of the FSWI are grounded in desires to affect positive change on a broad scale through research and practice.

The FSWI strongly strives toward policy advocacy and direct practice to empower individuals and communities to take control of and invest in their own personal development. Their work supports various community partners who create and promote effective financial programs and safe financial products that, according to Frey, "support financial independence and the ability to create and build wealth to eventually help families move out of poverty and sustain greater economic stability."

In preparing social workers and other human services professionals to tackle the task of building financial well-being on an individual and community level, UMB's FSWI steering committee has also delved into continuing professional education (CPE), open to anyone interested in financial social work.

One such CPE course, is "Financial Stability for Individuals, Families and Communities," which is committed to teaching students about social and economic justice and teaches the importance of financial stability on both the macro (policy) and micro (clinical) levels of social work.

In addition, the Social Work Department offers a CPE course entitled, "Online Tools and Techniques to Enhance Financial Stability," which is introduced in the previous course and offers skills-based training. This course is unique because it teaches its participants how to address clients' complex financial problems. Clients whom, Frey notes "might be in vulnerable positions to be taken advantage of by predatory companies online."

Social work outreach is a challenging field, but the passions and efforts from schools like McDaniel, SU and UMB create valuable and lasting impacts in our everyday lives, communities and abroad. Please view this edition's sidebar for ways you can make a difference just as you are today. •