

Meg Woodside, MSW '07



The editors of *Connections* recently sat down with Meg Woodside, MSW '07. Meg is not your typical alum. After a long and distinguished career in banking, she turned from her career of wealth building for clients to helping people get out of debt and building more secure financial futures for those who most need it.

Q. You earned your MBA in 1984. What were your early career goals and how did they evolve to social work?

A. The first half of my career in commercial and private banking focused on helping clients achieve their business and wealth creation goals. Through my community work, I became increasingly interested in how that wealth was being used to invest in our community and address social problems. I transitioned into roles leading corporate philanthropy and community relations with two large employers in Maryland. After retiring from full-time work, I wanted to return to my early career interests in helping people to get out of debt and build secure futures, but I felt I needed a better understanding of human behavior and how systems and the environment worked for or against people. A graduate degree in social work was the perfect venue to explore those issues and gain the skills and perspective I sought to be effective on a larger scale. In my second year, I developed a plan to become an advocate for family economic security and asset building programs as a means to address poverty and economic inequities.

Q. What makes you so committed to promoting financial social work efforts?

A. Social work is a profession invested in advancing social justice and poverty alleviation, and financial social work is a cross-cutting approach that produces measurable economic results for families and communities. Opportunities and outcomes differ vastly between people who understand how to navigate our financial and economic systems, and those who do not have the skills or access to legitimate sources of assistance. Social workers are uniquely positioned to integrate our history of championing vulnerable populations with today's realities of financial complexity, and undertake a leading role in direct service, program development, and public policy to effect changes that are needed.

Q. You have backed up your commitment with a generous gift to the School for financial social work. What are your goals when it comes to financial social work education/implementation?

A. I would love to see the fundamental content of the School's elective financial social work course interwoven in the Foundation year courses of the MSW program. This content needs to be more broadly infused than an elective course can offer, even if it is cross-listed. We need to talk about money as social workers – to process our own "stuff," and become confident that we can add the element of financial capability into our client and community assessments and intervention strategies. I'm very excited about some of the ideas the Initiative has about collaborative financial social work education targeting practitioners working with domestic violence survivors, military families, and vulnerable seniors. There is so much work to be done to meet the demand in both training and client service. It is exciting to know that there is a growing group of academic institutions who are engaged with us in financial social work research and teaching nationally. Increasingly, I sense that social work practitioners and educators are facing a need to develop competence in this area, recognizing that we need to attend to the person-in-financial-environment as an integral part of our work, regardless of the area of practice.

Q. You are not alone in your efforts; you have had a lot of help and support, correct?

A. Yes, it has been a broad partnership from inception in 2008, beginning with Robin McKinney's (MSW '01) vision for how social workers could expand their skills to assist clients in their path toward financial capability and economic stability. Dean Barth saw that this could be transformative for the profession and has been tremendously supportive, as has Dick Cook through the Social Work Community Outreach Service. Recently, we have been very fortunate to attract Dr. Jodi Jacobson as our new Chair and she continues to expand on the foundation we've built.