A New Treatment Program for the Grief That Won’t End

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Bridges to the Future: A Savings Program for AIDS orphans

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Spectrum

Winter 2013

Spectrum, the magazine for the Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW), is produced twice a year by the CUSSW Office of Communications.

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Columbia University School of Social Work has been a leader in social work education and research since 1898. It joins rigorous academic theory with real-world practice to enhance the welfare of citizens and communities in New York City, the nation and around the world.
Winter 2013

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Command Central for Hurricane Sandy
In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, our site was the place to go to find out about recovery efforts in need of volunteers. We also have a special post in which students, faculty and staff share their personal experiences of responding to the mega-storm.

PROFILE: ARTiculating PEACE
CUSSW student Lina Hamdan (MS’13) answers our questions about an arts boot camp she organized in her native Jordan in summer 2012 for 14 Arab youth, with funding from the Davis Projects for Peace. She explains her decision to use drama as the vehicle for young Arabs to express their personal experiences of the Arab Spring.

25th World AIDS Day: “Getting to Zero”
Two CUSSW professors contributed to our Web special in honor of World AIDS Day on December 1, 2012, the theme of which was getting to zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination, and zero deaths from AIDS-related illness. Nabila El-Bassel, the Willma and Albert Musher Professor of Social Work, comments on the special problems faced by female AIDS sufferers and potential AIDS victims—which will need to be addressed to reach such ambitious goals. And for Associate Professor Rogério Meireles Pinto, the quickest path to zero lies in fostering provider–research partnerships.

Newtown Tragedy
The tragedy that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School elicited sadness, grief, anger, and confusion. Social workers recognize and have studied this kind of anxiety. Assistant Professor Anne Conway provides recommendations for individuals and families looking for ways to cope.

Self-Care Day
Sixteen CUSSW students share their best (and worst) tips for self-care, the practice of which is vitally important for social workers:

• Know your boundaries.
• Pay attention to both body and mind.
• Do at least one thing a day unrelated to work/school.
• Make time for self-care in your daily schedule.
• Take care of yourself so that you are more able to take care of others.
• And many more...

Nabila El-Bassel
Rogério M. Pinto
Lina Hamdan
Dear Friends:

As we move into 2013, we are all cognizant of how dramatically the world and our nation have changed. We may have avoided the plunge off the fiscal cliff, but we are reminded that the ideological divide continues to rent us as a nation.

Like others in the tri-state region, our School remains deeply concerned about the devastation that Hurricane Sandy wrought, but is heartened by the efforts being made by a number of CUSSW students, alumni, and colleagues to help victims, many of whom are still in need of relief.

Our School’s strength has long been in trauma- and loss-focused interventions, and now we add to this a new Center on Complicated Grief led by Dr. Katherine Shear, the Marion Kenworthy Professor of Psychiatry in Social Work. An article by Simone Scully describes the pioneering treatment for complicated grief that the new Center will help to promote.

This year we will welcome Angela Davis back to Columbia University. She was the keynote speaker at a conference organized last year by our students’ Criminal Justice Caucus—an event that has since been recognized by the Harlem community as one of the noteworthy 2012 Columbia happenings.

Our involvement in the Harlem/Manhattanville community is deepening. This is thanks in part to the continuing work of faculty such as Professor Ron Mincy and in part to a new partnership the School has forged with the State and City Departments of Education, Columbia’s Double Discovery, the Center for American Studies, and others to create a new CUSSW Achievement Institute at the Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School.

One of the highlights of last year was being invited by the Columbia Alumni Association to sponsor a public lecture on redefining poverty featuring three of our professors: Irv Garfinkel, who has contributed an article to this edition; Neeraj Kaushal; and Jane Waldfoel. Also last year, Columbia University Press issued the Guide to Social Work Writing, co-edited by Warren Green—Mr. Writing Center at our School—and Associate Professor Barbara Simon, with articles by many of our faculty.

The newest member of our faculty, Assistant Professor Heidi Allen, has contributed an article to this issue about the research she has led on the Medicaid program being implemented in Oregon.

Meanwhile, promising junior faculty from many other universities were everywhere in evidence at the School during several faculty-led events, including the Fragile Families Workshop, held at the School for the first time; the NIH Summer Institute, led by Senior Associate Dean Allen Zweben (PhD’77); and the HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Underrepresented New Researchers, under the leadership of Associate Professor Elwin Wu (MS’00) and Professor Nabila El Bassel (DSW’89).

Unrelenting in his work for AIDS orphans in Uganda, Associate Professor Fred Ssewamala launched a new savings intervention program funded by the NIH. This issue features an interview with Professor Ssewamala and his assistant, alumna Vilma Iljic (MS’10), about the day-long launch event they organized last fall in Masaka Town.

Our students are always a source of pride and joy. For almost thirty years, the School’s Social Enterprise Administration concentration, under the leadership of Professor Shelley Akbas, has blazed a trail, opening new opportunities for our students and alumni in corporate and other atypical settings. This edition of Spectrum features just two such settings: Starwood Hotels and the Ms. Foundation. We are also pleased to present the experiences of two students who were deeply engaged in community development last summer—not in the U.S., but in Tamil Nadu, India.

Also featured in this issue is Trélan Holder (MS’06), an alumna who will serve as president of our School’s Alumni Association, following in the capable footsteps of Emily Jabbour (MS’06).

Finally, we want to set the stage for our next issue by mentioning that our Fisher-Cummings Washington Fellows will be in the nation’s capital this semester, thanks to a generous gift by Marjorie Fisher and Julie Cummings (MS’12), and that we will be offering a Tony Tripodi Lecture on International Social Work because of a much appreciated gift from doctoral alumnus Tony Tripodi (DSW’63), who has shown stellar leadership as a researcher and educator. Thanks to these and other alumni who have given generously, we have been able to make many of students’—and our School’s—dreams come true.

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Passage to Tamil Nadu

Two students—Golda Calonge and Kimberly Nasatir (both MS’13)—journeyed to Tamil Nadu last summer to observe a self-help model of community development initiated by the Srinivasan Services Trust (SST), the philanthropic arm of India’s TVS Group.

SST’s employees—who are known as Community Development Officers or “animators”—live and work in the tribal villages they serve. They encourage villagers to create self-help groups (SHGs) in the belief that this will empower more women—thought to be a crucial step in getting the community to take ownership of the development process.

The students’ two-month immersion in Tamil Nadu village life was intense. They visited several SHGs as well as a few of the schools that collaborated with SST to secure safe and constructive learning environments for village children.

Recording her final thoughts in their joint blog, Kim said that while the villagers would benefit from more health care and education, she recognized that day-to-day survival often takes precedence in their lives. Golda for her part was impressed that because of living in the community, animators do not have a “power imbalance” with their clients, as so often occurs in the West.

ON THE WEB: Student blog

Called to Serve in Hurricane Sandy Cleanup

Martin Luther King Day of Service is the last day of winter break for Columbia students. The temptation must be great to spend it relaxing and having a last hurrah before classes begin again in earnest.

But this year five CUSSW students embraced the spirit of the holiday by spending the day volunteering for a Sandy relief effort in Rockaway, Queens, with New York Cares.

Donning sturdy shoes, hard hats, and hazmat suits, they “basically gutted a house,” said one of the participants, Nadine Rose (MS’13, above far right), who as president of the Student Union Executive Board (SUEB), had helped to organize the event.

“It was hard work,” she added, “but a great opportunity to serve the city at a time that is still difficult for many people.”

The other participants were (above, from left) Florence Capinding (MS’14), Seth Thompson (MS’14), Nicole Abrams (MS’14), and Camille Santistevan (MS’13 and SUEB vice-president).

Angela Davis to Reprise Her Keynote Role in 2013 Criminal Justice Conference

Internationally acclaimed social justice activist Angela Davis will return to Columbia University on April 5 to address the group that convenes for “Beyond the Bars: Moving Forward,” the third annual conference on criminal justice to be organized by the School of Social Work in conjunction with other schools and departments across the university.

Davis was the keynote speaker at last year’s conference. She addressed a standing-room-only audience—an event that the Harlem press would list as one of its 2012 highlights—made up of students and faculty from across Columbia University and New York City, along with leading criminal justice activists, a number of whom are former prisoners. Participants expressed a desire to learn more about one of the major social justice issues in the United States, the nation with the highest incarceration rate in the world.

Last year’s event also attracted Velmanette Montgomery, a New York State senator and respected advocate for criminal justice reform. She led a discussion with children of incarcerated parents.

“Beyond the Bars: Moving Forward,” to be held April 5–6, is a joint student–faculty undertaking between CUSSW’s Criminal Justice Caucus and its Criminal Justice Initiative, led by adjunct assistant professor Kathy Boudin and research scientist Cheryl Wilkins.
CUSSW Stands Up for Bread and Roses

The School of Social Work is the lead partner in a new initiative to assist the students in the Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School in Harlem with college counseling as well as workforce training, with funding provided by the New York State Education Department’s Liberty Partnership Program.

The initiative aims to assist a select group of students with obtaining the means to earn a living and share in life’s glories—the “bread and roses” invoked by Andrew Oppenheim in his poem of that name.

Other partners in the initiative, to be known as the Achievement Institute, are Columbia’s Double Discovery Center, led by Kevin Matthews (CC’80), and the Center for America, led by Andrew Dalbango, one of the University’s most well-known professors. Jenna Tutjer, who graduated from the School of Social Work in 2006, will serve as executive director.

Poverty Redefined

Alumni from across Columbia University gathered in the Morgan Library’s newly constructed event space to hear CUSSW Professors Irwin Garfinkel, Jane Waldfogel, and Neeraj Kaushal discuss “Redefining Poverty within the Context of Changing Global Economies,” the Columbia Alumni Association’s sixth annual Spring Faculty Lecture, on June 13, 2012. Professors Garfinkel and Waldfogel explained new measurements of poverty in the United States. Professor Kaushal spoke of the varying methods by which poverty is measured in developing countries, particularly India.

ON THE WEB:
Audio of the event

Destination China

In mid-December of 2012, Dean Jeanette Takamura visited China to meet with educators and government leaders and talk about expanding social work education and clinical practice within the PRC. Accompanying her were Professors Irwin Garfinkel, Ada Chan Yuk-Sim Mui, and Elwin Wu. A high point of their visit was a day spent giving lectures and holding group sessions at the Columbia Global Center/East Asia in Beijing. Asked to comment on the trip, Dean Takamura said, “I was particularly gratified that our lecture series at the Beijing Center generated some rewarding intellectual exchanges.”

CUSSW Hosts NIH Summer Institute for First Time

The School of Social Work held a week-long NIH Summer Institute on social and behavioral intervention research in July 2012, chaired by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Allen Zweben. The event marked a first for the School, which had never before hosted a training session open to junior investigators who have completed their doctorates and plan to write NIH grant applications to conduct further research.

Experts on intervention research, including three prominent members of the CUSSW faculty—Nabila El-Bassel, Steven Schinke, and Katherine Shear—led instructional sessions on research design, measurement tools, and the NIH review process.

“At this year’s event, up-and-coming social work practitioners and related professionals were exposed to the ideas of well-renowned researchers in the social and behavioral prevention field, said Dr. Zweben. “They emerged better prepared for conducting NIH-funded research.”

The 34 participants, who had been chosen from a pool of 139 applicants, met several times in small groups to talk about their specific research plans. Each of them was also assigned to a faculty mentor whose expertise and background was closely linked with theirs. With the benefit of all of this feedback, they worked on honing their grant proposals.

“Fantastic!” one of them tweeted when the workshop was over.

ON THE WEB:
Key presentations available for download

Featured Book

Social workers must be clear, persuasive and comprehensive in their writing, especially on provocative subjects and when advocating on behalf of their clients. The Columbia Guide to Social Work Writing, edited by Writing Center Director Warren Green and Associate Professor Barbara Levy Simon, was published last year with Columbia University Press. Many of the contributors are CUSSW faculty members.
President Obama is the first president since Lyndon Johnson to win reelection after aggressively expanding the welfare state. His critics say that he is trying to bring the nation closer to European-style socialism, where more and more wealth will be transferred from one part of the population to another.

These critics further assert that a more generous welfare state will lead to more government waste and further cripple our weak economy.

But I would contend that these critics misunderstand the welfare state because of some common myths and mismeasurements. They subscribe to a definition of the “welfare state” that focuses narrowly on cash assistance and social insurance, ignoring the broader set of social welfare transfers such as education, employer-provided benefits, all in-kind benefits, and other social welfare programs that serve to boost overall economic productivity.

Here are four of the most prevalent myths.

1. The welfare state is a drag on productivity.
   Critics of the welfare state argue that the taxes required to finance it blunt economic incentives and thereby undermine productivity.

   While it is true that taxes dampen incentives, the expenditures that the taxes finance—on roads, harbors, bridges and other infrastructure—can increase productivity. The same, of course, holds true for public education and public health—two large elements of welfare states.

   Social insurance programs and aid to the poor—how most people define “welfare”—have little effect on growth.

   Two large plusses combined with even a small negative add up to a large plus.

2. The United States has an unusually small welfare state, which gives us an advantage over other wealthy nations.

   Of the 14 wealthy welfare states I measured for my book on this topic—including the United States—all were strikingly similar in size and structure. The size of the American welfare state is small compared to other well-off nations only if we ignore the fact that our government heavily subsidizes employers who provide health-care benefits to their employees, and compare total welfare-state expenditures to

In the list of policy predictions for 2013, it is a safe bet that various states will be deciding whether to take advantage of an influx of federal dollars under the Affordable Care Act to support an expansion of the current eligibility requirements for Medicaid.

Some policy makers will take a neutral stance, concerned that Medicaid isn’t very good insurance as low provider reimbursement rates limit access to quality health care.

Others will argue against the expansion on the grounds that low-income adults already have access to care through safety net clinics, charity care, and emergency departments.

Proponents will insist that a health insurance expansion would benefit everyone in a particular state by bringing in new money and reducing the systemic burden of uncompensated care. They may also reason that improving the health of poor adults will be cost effective in the long run.

The challenge of measuring health-care outcomes

Why are we still having these debates? Doesn’t health care have outcomes that can be observed and measured?

Unfortunately, outcomes related to health insurance are notoriously difficult to study. To understand what outcomes are caused by insurance, researchers would have to apply the gold standard of random assignment: some people get the expanded coverage, whereas others do not.

Random assignment of health insurance would be unethical in any research setting. Without random assignment, researchers must try to control for all of the known (and unknown) differences between the insured and uninsured—or their research can produce misleading results, such as that Medicaid makes you sicker, when in fact sicker people are more likely to have Medicaid.

Oregon’s health insurance experiment

In 2008, Oregon held a lottery for access to its Medicaid-expansion program called the Oregon Health Plan Standard, which was designed to serve adults with incomes under 100% of Federal
to Low-Income Adults?

By Dr. Heidi Allen

Poverty Level who would otherwise not be eligible for Medicaid. The program had been closed to new enrollment for several years prior.

Anticipating high demand, the state did a massive outreach campaign, and around 90,000 adults put their name on a list that the state used to randomly select to whom they would send applications on a monthly basis.

This was an unfortunate position for the state to be in, but it presented a perfectly timed, natural, as well as ground-breaking opportunity for health care researchers to understand the causal impacts of expansions in coverage.

As a member of the interdisciplinary research team that studied the state’s experiment, I can report that expanding Medicaid resulted in an increased use of health care and improved self-reported mental and physical health among recipients.

Although the program did not pay for itself within the first year, the benefits to recipients were considerable—which suggests that expanding Medicaid to low-income adults may be more cost effective than previous studies have suggested.

KEY FINDINGS: THE OREGON HEALTH STUDY

- Relative to those who did not win the health insurance lottery, people who obtained coverage were 35% more likely to get all the health care they needed and far more likely to follow preventative care guidelines, such as getting mammograms (60%) and PAP tests (45%).
- Expanding Medicaid led to a 10% decrease in the probability of screening positive for depression.
- Expanding Medicaid led to a 25% increase in the probability of good, very good, or excellent health.
- Financial strain for low-income families was significantly decreased across multiple measures. For example, those who obtained coverage were much less likely to rely on family and friends or to skip paying other bills to pay for medical expenses. There was also a 25% decrease in the probability of a medical collection.
- Consistent with an improved sense of well-being overall, participants experienced a 30% increase in self-reported happiness—roughly equivalent to a doubling of income, according to the literature on happiness.
A New Treatment Program for the Grief That Won’t End

Grief can be difficult. As one of the first medical experts to recognize this, Dr. M. Katherine Shear has developed an effective 16-session treatment.

It was over a year ago when Sarah first heard a one-minute radio advertisement in the car that caught her attention. “Have you lost someone you love?” the woman's voice in the ad asked. “Does the pain feel almost as strong today as it did in the beginning?”

The ad went on to describe a syndrome that Sarah hadn’t known about, but felt described what was happening to her after losing several family members over the past ten years.

“It was just one after the other,” she said, “but when my Mom died, I think that’s kind of what threw me over the edge. I was very angry and sad. I pretty much stuck to myself and shut people out.”

By that evening, Sarah was calling to see if she was eligible to participate in the Columbia University research treatment project described in the ad.

Sarah, whose name is changed in this article to protect her privacy, suffered from a condition called complicated grief. This is a syndrome that Dr. M. Katherine Shear, the Marion E. Kenworthy Professor of Psychiatry in Social Work at CUSSW, has been researching and developing treatment for since 1996. Dr. Shear has had a life-long interest in the impact of separation from close attachments, which led her to work with Dr. Myron Hofer, now emeritus at Columbia University Medical School, in the 1970s.

“Part of what drew me in,” said Dr. Shear, “was that it became apparent that complicated grief grabs some people by their heels and pulls them under so they are drowning in their lives.” She estimates the syndrome afflicts seven percent of the bereaved population.
Everyone else, I thought there would be a gap in the space of two years. Lee said, “Like I experienced the loss of four family members also requested to go by a different name, it’s missing, it’s complicated grief. ”

Shear explained: “If it’s been more than six months, Grief Program working with Dr. Shear, further commented, “can be suffered article for Bereavement Care natural grieving process. Healing, complicated grief blocks the way medical doctors speak of “complicated grief.” The term “complicated” applies to grief in the same way medical doctors speak of “complicated illness” or a “complicated wound.” Just as a wound can develop an infection, delaying healing, complicated grief blocks the natural grieving process.

The syndrome, wrote Dr. Shear in an article for Bereavement Care, “can be suffered for years, even decades, after a loved one dies.”

Dr. Natalia Skritskaya, a research coordinator and therapist for the Complicated Grief Program working with Dr. Shear, further explained: “If it’s been more than six months, or more than a year, and the [bereaved] still feels as if it happened yesterday, and the relief is missing, it’s complicated grief.”

Lee, another patient of Dr. Shear’s, who also requested to go by a different name, experienced the loss of four family members in the space of two years. Lee said, “Like everyone else, I thought there would be a grieving process and then it will be over, but it didn’t work out that way. It never ended. Things just seemed to be getting worse, and a lot of my friends, they tried to be helpful … but … they didn’t really understand. I didn’t really understand myself … I lost myself.”

Commenting on Lee’s experience, Dr. Shear said: “Some people are so upset about the loss that they can’t bear to think about it. Their life comes to a standstill because they’re avoiding things and not allowing themselves to process it, problem solve and come up with how they can make peace with the situation.”

Certain types of loss, such as the death of a child or a sudden, unexpected or violent death can increase the chances of developing complicated grief. People with a history of mood and anxiety disorders or of multiple traumas and losses are also more susceptible.

**Targeted therapeutic treatment**

Dr. Shear’s treatment method consists of a structured, 16-session psychotherapy program that focuses on helping those suffering from complicated grief accept the finality of their loss and rebuild their lives.

One of the treatment procedures used in the sessions is “imaginal revisiting.” Under the therapist’s guidance, the patient tells the story of learning about the death and then engages in a period of self-observation and reflection. The story is also recorded, and the patient takes it home and listens to it once a day.

Imaginal revisiting helps the grieving person find a way to come to terms with the reality of the death. It also helps sufferers of complicated grief learn to do this in doses, by confronting the pain and then setting it aside.

In addition, patients spend five weeks keeping memory worksheets, exploring positive and negative memories of the loved one. They are also encouraged to do an exercise that involves imagining having a conversation with the deceased person after the death. “Imaginal conversation” techniques help patients resolve troubling issues and enhance their sense of connectedness to the departed loved one.

At the same time as these procedures are taking place, therapists try to get patients to focus on their own lives and futures through “personal goals and aspiration work.” A major focus of this restoration-oriented treatment is on identifying and working to achieve a meaningful personal goal. Lee, for example, rediscovered a love for writing.

Another exercise used in the sessions is “situational revisiting,” in which patients revisit situations they are avoiding because they evoke painful emotions about the loss. This procedure addresses not only the loss but also the need for a new focus. Patients reflect on the consequences of the loss while also trying to remove restrictions they have placed on their ongoing lives.

In the 2005 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, Dr. Shear reported that her Complicated Grief Treatment performed significantly better than a good supportive psychotherapy of the sort that someone with this condition might otherwise receive.

**Official recognition as a University “center”**

In fall 2012, Dr. Shear received the news that her program would be given the status of a Columbia University “center”. She said she appreciates the official recognition of the work she has been doing for years—consisting of developing and testing assessment and treatment tools for complicated grief with National Institute for Mental Health funding.

The focus of the new center, she added, is on educating the public, training health and mental health professionals, developing educational curricula, and supporting innovative research around the topic of complicated grief. She has already started conducting a series of training sessions for mental health professionals who are interested in understanding complicated grief as well as the principles used in her therapy.

So, do Dr. Shear’s patients feel like the treatment helped them? “I finally had hope and joy in my life again,” said Lee about life after the treatment. According to Dr. Shear, Lee’s reaction is typical. “Loss is forever and so is grief, but by the end of the program, most people say they have regained a sense of purpose in life and feel they can experience joy and satisfaction,” she said. “They also leave the program feeling more at peace with the death and with new ways of dealing with difficult times, like holidays or birthdays.”
When Professor Fred Ssewamala first proposed a program to give AIDS orphans in his native Uganda an opportunity to open their own savings accounts, skeptics doubted whether a child in one of the world's poorest countries could be taught to save money. Almost ten years on and many of those skeptics are now believers.

After following the children who received this intervention for five years and taking assessments, Dr. Ssewamala has the evidence to show that vulnerable youth are less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior when they have even small amounts of savings, along with plans to use it for higher education or a small business.

Communications Director Mary-Lea Cox Awanohara spoke with Dr. Ssewamala and his research associate, Vilma Ilic, shortly after they held an official launch event in Uganda for their latest initiative, Bridges to the Future. The following is an edited version of the exchange.

**Q:** Vilma, you've been working with Dr. Ssewamala as a research associate and helped with the planning of the special launch event for Bridges to the Future, held in Masaka on September 29, 2012. How did you feel on that day?

**VILMA ILCIC:** It was indeed a special day for the research team and for all of the communities where Fred has been conducting studies since 2004. We decided to hold the launch event at the Kimaanya Parish Grounds, located within the Catholic Diocese of Masaka, to honor the role of the Diocese as Fred's collaborating institution since he started this research.

**Q:** Fred, was this a milestone in your research career?

**FRED SSEWAMALA:** Yes, because it was on a much larger scale than my previous studies, attesting to how the program has grown over nearly a decade. Not only have I been gathering outcomes data and publishing it in journals, but I've also been building up the research team and community partnerships. All of this takes time in Africa. On September 29th, more than a thousand children opened savings accounts...
at one of the three financial institutions with which we work, as part of Bridges to the Future, a program supported by a multi-million dollar grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Q: Dean Jeanette Takamura attended the event and gave one of the speeches. What were her impressions?

VILMA: A highlight for the Dean, as for many of us, was when the graduates of Fred’s previous programs gave speeches describing the hardships they endured as orphans—struggling for daily survival—and the psychological and economic transformations they underwent after the program equipped them with asset-building tools, mentorship, and income-generating skills. Many now have professional careers and university degrees. One said he’d never imagined he would be standing before an audience numbering in the thousands, recounting his successes and achievements in life. Many in the audience, myself included, were moved to tears.

Q: Fred, quite a few high-level government officials attended the event. What do you think they took away from it?

FRED: I hope they learned something about the potential for asset-based programs to influence the health, education, and overall development of the nation’s youth. At the very least, I’m sure they perceived the economic benefit of Bridges for a poor region like southern Uganda. Bridges provides the initial deposit for every account opened, which means that US$15–20,000 was poured into the region’s financial institutions on launch day. Actually, it was even more as some of the children’s caregivers opened accounts as well. That money can now be used for loans, credit, and liquidity—it can drive development.

VILMA: A clear beneficiary are the 48 primary schools that have been selected for the study. As part of the overall intervention package, the project provides new textbooks to the schools—which are extremely expensive, costing tens of thousands of dollars. Additionally, each participating child receives a school uniform, notebooks, a school lunch, and counseling during every term. When children are properly clothed and fed, they typically perform better in school and have higher attendance rates. As a result, the schools have better performance rates and are eligible to receive more government funding.

FRED: I may be a social work researcher but my ultimate goal is to change policy. When I gave my speech at the event, I urged the invited Members of Parliament to legislate policy that would create asset-building tools housed at formal financial institutions for every child in Uganda.

Q: Fred, as you are from Uganda, it must feel good to go home again and deliver such a hopeful message.

FRED: In fact, I’m not from the southern part of the country, where I’ve been conducting this research. Southern Uganda is nestled between western Uganda, the west coast of Lake Victoria, and the northern border of Tanzania. HIV was first identified there, and to this day, the region has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence and incidence rates in the country, although the factors driving incidence are different in 2012.

Q: But surely the fact that you are Ugandan strengthens your ability to do such ambitious research?

FRED: I’ve had my share of challenges. When I first proposed this idea to community leaders in 2004, most were hesitant and skeptical. How could orphaned children save money? What money did these children and their caregiving families possibly have to save, when the majority were living on less than two dollars per day? By holding this event, we wanted to say, look what microfinance does. It brings hope and an enterprising spirit to children and their communities. Families don’t need handouts. They need a helping hand.
What's a Social Work Student Doing at a Foundation, in a Hotel?

By David G. Palacio

Many think of social work as a calling to helping our fellow human beings change their lives for the better, usually within a clinical setting. Only the most dedicated and selfless among us can be suited to this sort of one-on-one challenge. In fact, however, there is no shortage of ways in which a calling toward social work can be manifested, or venues through which the skills of a social worker can be applied.

Staff in the CUSSW Field Department, ably led by Clarener Moultrie (MS’81), know this very well. The department offers placements in non-traditional environments to students in the Social Enterprise Administration (SEA) concentration. SEA is an initiative of Professor Shelley Akabas, who started it up nearly thirty years ago (the concentration was recently renamed to better capture its focus).

Two of these seemingly unusual field venues are the Ms. Foundation and the headquarters of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc., where two current CUSSW students and a recent alumna can be found. All of them are practicing social work skills to improve people’s lives.
Julia Haley (MS’13), student intern at the Ms. Foundation

Since 2008 the Ms. Foundation, located on the 26th floor of 330 Jay Street in Brooklyn, has served as a field site for CUSSW. Students quickly become an integral part of a team, according to field placement supervisor Patricia Eng, who has been with the foundation for eleven years.

“I think the process has become an enriching event for students,” said Eng. “We try to give them assignments that speak to their interests and coincide with what they learn in school.”

The Ms. Foundation differs from other field placement sites in that it is not a hospital or a community agency but rather a national grant-making foundation concerned with the “real challenges facing women”—especially women of color, low-income women, and women living in poverty.

Through a grant-giving budget of $2–4 million, the Ms. Foundation is able to empower various organizations across the country to advocate for change and provide concrete assistance to women who are victims of violence, in need of reproductive health care, and the like.

For Julia Haley, a second-year student at Columbia University’s School of Social Work, working at the Ms. Foundation has given her a window into a world that aims to bring about large-scale social change on women’s behalf.

For her first-year placement, Haley worked with terminally ill patients at a hospital in Queens. At the Ms. Foundation, she is a member of the Safety Team that focuses on the topic of child sexual abuse prevention. The nature of the work at the Foundation is obviously very different from that of the hospital.

For Haley, those differences are what make the work at the Ms. Foundation so stimulating. “I wanted the juxtaposition of both experiences, of the day-to-day clinical interaction and the bigger strategic picture of policy-making and movement-building,” she said. “I wanted the clinical focus of last year to inform me now.”

Indeed, had she not had the clinical experience first, Haley thinks she would not have appreciated her second field experience as much as she does.

“The practice of social work is different in this environment in that the clients are organizations that receive funding from Ms.,” said Haley. “While the work does not focus on specific individuals, it focuses on women’s issues and creating real social change.”

Haley further appreciates the range of experience of her Ms. Foundation colleagues. “We have folks here with backgrounds in policy and organizing, and law and fundraising,” she said. Despite this wide range of backgrounds, staff have in common their uncommon dedication to women’s issues. “I think above all there’s something personal that brings someone to this foundation,” she said.

Kristin Meyer (MS’10), former intern at Ms. Foundation and now working at Starwood Hotels & Resorts

Meanwhile, across state lines in Stamford, Connecticut, Kristin Meyer applies her social work experience in the context of a major corporation: Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc. Starwood is the owner of such hotel brands as Westin, Sheraton, and W Hotels, among others.

An alumna of the School of Social Work, Meyer also holds the distinction of being the first Columbia student to be placed at the Ms. Foundation—in 2008. She still remains in contact with Patricia Eng.

“The Ms. Foundation was an incredible placement,” said Meyer. “It really taught me what it meant to work hand in hand and develop partnerships with key players and leaders in the community, and ultimately that’s what my job here [at Starwood Hotels] is about. It’s a skill I use every single day.”

Currently Meyer works as part of a seven-person team that focuses on creating opportunities for Starwood Hotels to participate in corporate social responsibility programs.

Within Meyer’s team she is the only one with a degree in social work. The team leader has an MBA, while several other members have combined their business background with environmental studies. In addition, there are members with a liberal arts background.

“We are creating partnerships with the community,” Meyer said. “That’s ultimately where my social work background comes in. I feel it’s really important to have that social work experience on a team like this. We are trying to understand what is going to help make the communities where Starwood operates successful.”

This year Meyer was able to spearhead a volunteer pilot program within the company that allowed associates in the Stamford corporate office to participate in 16 hours of paid release time to volunteer. The results of the program were presented in January for possible company-wide application.

“When we launched our volunteer program I had no idea if it would be taken seriously,” said Meyer. “But when I presented it to our senior leadership team, our CEO was really supportive and excited to get personally involved.”

Meyer feels fulfilled in being able to apply her social work background to a macro-level context and address needs within a local community.

Jennifer Myers (MS’13), student intern at Starwood Hotels & Resorts

Kristin Meyer is passing on the benefit of her rich social work experiences, at the Ms. Foundation and now at Starwood, to Jennifer Myers, a current CUSSW student who has been placed with Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

Myers recalls being pleasantly surprised by the Starwood setting. “I’m a member of this team. I have autonomy,” she said. “I’m given independence to see a project from start to finish. Having that amount of responsibility has been unbelievable.”

Myers has always been interested in being a part of a career field that addresses the needs of a community or constituent group. Before attending the School of Social Work, she worked as a coalition coordinator for Family Services of Westchester, in Port Chester, New York. She continued her work with the coalition for two years while attending CUSSW in the reduced residency program.

At Starwood, Myers is able to continue catering to the needs of a community and doing work that she finds important. “Corporate social responsibility is a new area where social workers are not typically seen,” said Myers. “I personally believe that social workers provide a completely different lens to a corporate environment looking to be socially responsible.”

Placements at the Ms. Foundation and Starwood Hotels & Resorts may not be typical options for field placement in a social work education. But, for a few CUSSW students, such placements represent an opportunity to apply a social worker’s skill set to a variety of enterprises. “You can take this degree and go anywhere,” said Myers, “and I think that’s the myth about social work. There’s more than a clinical social worker; there’s more opportunities. It’s a really exciting and robust profession.”
Recent CUSSW faculty achievements,

ACHIEVEMENTS

- King Juan Carlos University in Madrid, Spain, formally recognized Associate Professor Rogerio Meirles Pinto (PhD’03) for his contributions to the social sciences and for the impact of his research in shaping implementation of HIV services in community settings, during the Week of Science (November 5–18, 2012). Dr. Pinto is currently engaged in a collaborative project in Madrid that compares the use of evidence-based and ethical practices by HIV prevention providers in both American and Spanish contexts.

- NYU Law School gave Kathy Boudin, Director of the Criminal Justice Initiative: Supporting Children, Families, and Communities, its Rose M. Sheinberg Scholar-in-Residence Award, in November 2012. She will be giving a lecture at NYU Law on Monday March 4, 2013.

- Cheryl Wilkins, Associate Director of the Criminal Justice Initiative: Supporting Children, Families and Communities, received the Vivian D. Nixon Leadership in Education award from Citizens Against Recidivism, in November 2012, for her work encouraging and concretely supporting the educational aspirations of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

- The U.S. Census Bureau has named Irwin Garfinkel, Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems, as one of the inaugural members of its newly established National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations. The committee, which comprises 32 members from multiple disciplines, will advise the agency on the cost, accuracy, and implementation of its programs and surveys, including the once-a-decade census.

- Assistant Professor Heidi Allen was invited to participate in briefings for the Senate and House of Representatives, which were organized by the Partnership for Medicaid on October 2, 2012. She reported on the outcomes from the Oregon Health Study, the first randomized trial to examine the impacts of a health insurance expansion on uninsured adults (related article, page 6).

- The American Society of Hispanic Psychiatry (ASHP) has elected new Assistant Professor Leopoldo Cabassa to its Board of Directors, 2013–2015. ASHP fosters multidisciplinary collaborations in mental health treatment with a particular focus on Latino populations. Its members are practicing psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health workers.

- The Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York (CCC) conferred its 2012 Founders’ Award on Sheila B. Kamerman (PhD’73), Compton Foundation Centennial Professor Emerita of Social Work for the Prevention of Children’s and Youth Problems, citing her exceptional career as a renowned child, family, and social policy scholar and her significant service to CCC’s board.

- Lauren Gates, director of the Center for Social Policy and Practice and a senior research scientist, has been recognized by the NYC Administration for Children’s Services with the New York City Commissioner’s Child Advocacy Award, for her outstanding contribution to keeping children safe and strengthening families. The award was presented at a ceremony held on May 16, 2012.

“…Neeraj Kaushal examined the effect of in-state tuition on enrollment rates at universities in California, New York, Texas, and Utah, and compared those rates to 46 other states. She concluded that favorable in-state tuition policies resulted in a 31% increase in college enrollment rates.”

— Charles Garcia, graduate of Columbia Law School and former White House Fellow, CNN Opinion (9/12/12)

“To help students, teachers and social workers should collaborate and be open to each other’s skill sets.”

— Professor Rogério Pinto, “Talk Back,” WBAI New York (1/28/13)

CUSSW–Open Society Foundation Photo Exhibit: California Youth Behind Bars

On view during the Fall 2012 semester in the Social Work Building were photos from the “collaborative portrait” of high-risk juvenile offenders in youth detention facilities and adult prisons across California, created by displaced Armenian photographer Ara Oshagan. At right and far right are two representative photos.

**ON THE WEB:**

An exclusive interview with Ara Oshagan
awards & media coverage

GRANTS

**WHO GOT IT:** Fred Ssewamala, Associate Professor
**WHAT FOR:** To examine the impact and cost of an innovative economic empowerment intervention for HIV-positive adolescents on antiretroviral therapy (ART).
**WHO GAVE IT:** Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD)
**HOW MUCH:** $3.8 million over five years

**WHO GOT IT:** Nabila El-Bassel, Willma and Albert Musher Professor of Social Work and director of the Social Intervention Group (SIG), and Elwin Wu, associate professor and associate director of SIG.
**WHAT FOR:** To continue their innovative HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Underrepresented New Investigators (HISTP). Specifically, the grant will be used to enhance a research training infrastructure and program of activities aimed at facilitating the development of promising new scientists from underrepresented groups who are conducting HIV-related dissemination and implementation research.
**WHO GAVE IT:** National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
**HOW MUCH:** Renewal of initial grant over another five years

**WHO GOT IT:** Associate Professor Rogério Meireles Pinto
**WHAT FOR:** To conduct the first-ever longitudinal study involving training and follow-up of HIV prevention counselors, program managers, educators, and coordinators in New York City.
**WHO GAVE IT:** National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
**HOW MUCH:** $3.3 million over five years

**WHO GOT IT:** Assistant Professor Michelle Ballan and Kathleen Chiarantona (MS’12)
**WHAT FOR:** To conduct a research study on social security benefits for wounded warriors. Notably, the prestigious grant is awarded to only eight student-faculty mentor teams in the U.S., and Kathleen Chiarantona was one of only two master's students to receive the award.
**WHO GAVE IT:** U.S. Social Security Administration's Disability Determination Process Small Grant Program

“[In the height of the recession,] everybody took a hit. What's disconcerting is that inequality is going up post-recession, and it's happening because the top is starting to pull away again.”
— Professor Jane Waldfogel in *Washington Post* (9/12/12)

“The orphan child is taught that he has to be part of the struggle for his own upbringing. [The study] also demystifies the old belief that the orphan children are too poor to save.”
— Professor Fred Ssewamala in *The Daily Monitor* (10/1/12)

“[Grief] can get complicated so that it doesn’t do that natural healing... Months and months have gone by, and someone is still experiencing intense, intense emotions and it's disrupting their lives... When a person isn’t [putting the loss behind them], it’s not because they don’t want to, it’s because there is something stopping them. That’s when they really need help, instead of just pushing.”
— Professor Katherine Shear, on WCBS-TV (4/29/12)

*The segment featuring Professor Shear and one of her patients has been nominated for a Health/Science 2013 New York Emmy.*
Q. Tell us about your trajectory as a social worker. Did you know that’s what you wanted to be when you grew up?

TRÉLAN HOLDER: For as long as I can remember, I’ve been interested in working with people and finding a way to be useful. As a student, I developed a particular interest in advocating for children. Before CUSSW, I worked in the city’s Administration for Children’s Services to investigate reports of alleged child abuse and neglect. At CUSSW, I had the opportunity to study abroad one summer in Cape Town, South Africa, where I helped care for HIV/AIDS patients, many of whom were children. My first job after graduation involved providing clinical and support services to youth in the Bronx who are living with HIV infection in the face of social stigma—often exacerbated by poverty and social inequality.

Q. You did your undergraduate degree at Clark University. What did you study there?

TRÉLAN: I majored in psychology with a minor in American government. I also did an internship with a lawyer who was representing a child who had been a victim of sexual abuse and placed in foster care. This experience cultivated my interest in the field of social work and the legal system—that’s why I eventually applied to CUSSW.

Q. What was the most surprising thing that social work school taught you?

TRÉLAN: Actually, it’s something I’ve learned more in retrospect—which is that getting your MSW is akin to getting a driver’s license. Getting a license does not make you a good driver; it only proves you have mastered the minimum requirements, the basic rules of the road. Likewise, social work is a field you will never master; you are always practicing, always evolving. I think about this a lot when interacting with my students. I am an adjunct at the School.

Q. Besides teaching, what else do you do?

TRÉLAN: I recently became the acting director of the Counseling Center at the City College of New York. In this new capacity, I have to wear many hats—from performing administrative and clinical duties, to serving a diverse and vibrant student population.

Q. You are also the president-elect for CUSSW’s Alumni Association. When does your term begin?

TRÉLAN: July 2013. However, as president-elect, I am learning all I can by shadowing Emily Jabbour (MS’06), our current president.

Q. It’s early, but do you have an agenda in mind for your presidency yet?

TRÉLAN: Increase awareness of the Alumni Association and all that it can offer to current students as well as graduates. Networks are so important, and alumni can play a very large role in helping to build a network of young professionals. I’d also like to continue with bringing Alumni Association programs to regions outside the tri-state area. So many alumni are not in this region, and with technology and strategic planning, we can provide our alumni with informative, educational, and exciting ways to stay connected. Emily and many of the past presidents have been working hard on this, and it’s important to keep building on this initiative.

Q. Not everyone stays in touch with their graduate school in an active way. Can you tell us why you find it fulfilling to do so?

TRÉLAN: I’m a native New Yorker, and Columbia University is the epicenter of academic excellence in the city. I am proud to be an alumna, and I see my affiliation with CUSSW as a lifetime relationship and commitment.

Q. CUSSW hosts a Self Care Day every year. What’s your favorite method of self-care and how often do you practice it?

TRÉLAN: I love to travel and vacationing is a must! It is also important to keep your loved ones close and have some time just for you, whether it’s a massage or a mani–pedi at a day spa. Working out is part of my weekly routine—I recommend boxing as a great way of getting out one’s aggressions!
CUSSW was part of your success.

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“Columbia gave me my life. Without my Columbia education, I would not have been able to accomplish all that I have been able to do as a social worker and entrepreneur.”

— Elaine Bruney (MS’58)

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- Offering field placements to current students
- Serving as a field instructor or advisor
- Sharing career insights with students
- Conducting informational interviews with recent graduates
- Hiring one of our graduates
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- Connecting with us on social media

Your support truly makes a difference to our community!
We hope you will continue working with us to advance the School.

Would you like to get involved with CUSSW?
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