THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

# SSA magazine

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# classroom lessons

## How Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships Impact Urban Education

ALSO INSIDE:


- Back from Iraq: What Vets Need
- The Myth of the Model Minority
- Strategies to Stem Gun Violence
- The Frontier of Social Work Research

WHEN REVEREND KENNETH B. SMITH, SR., passed away in January, Chicago lost one of its finest citizens and I lost a mentor and a friend. I think everyone who works to help distressed communities and individuals has someone like Ken in their history—someone who shined a light on both why it's so important to work for a better world and how it can be done.

I first met Ken in the early 1980s, through Leadership Greater Chicago, a program that brings together local leaders from many walks of life to study the challenges facing the region. At the time Ken was working for the program's sponsor, the Chicago Community Trust. I was impressed by how easily Ken navigated the interplay with men and women from diverse backgrounds, races, and professions. I admired Ken's ease at crossing barriers and working with people of every type.

After Leadership Greater Chicago, I followed Ken around for the next 25 years. I joined the board of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, where Ken was a board member. My introduction to the important work so necessary to support those less advantaged happened at the Y, one of the Chicago area's largest social service providers. Then it was on to the Chicago Board of Education, where Ken had been the first African-American president and I spent five years as its chief administrative officer. And of course, Ken was chair of the Visiting Committee here at SSA, a position I am now honored to fill.

The common thread is that the Y, the Chicago Public Schools, and SSA are all institutions

# The Value of Inspira

**As I read David Vitale's heartfelt letter about Reverend Kenneth Smith on the preceding page for the first time**, I reflected on Ken's life, and thought about how each of us has the ability to inspire others through our daily work.

Social welfare professionals have some of the most stressful jobs around, and it takes a unique and thoughtful person to decide every day that he or she can and will make a difference in the lives of those who are marginalized by society. Social workers and administrators who deal with some of our most pressing problems need to be reminded by examples such as the life of Reverend Smith. My hope is that what you feel as you read David's letter and the rest of this Spring issue of *SSA Magazine* are moments of rejuvenation and inspiration.

Who inspires me and my work? Our faculty, our students, and our alumni. They inspire me on a daily basis, and one of the joys of my job is having the opportunity to share their work with the readers of *SSA Magazine*. Our cover story, for instance, outlines how Melissa Roderick's study with the Consortium on Chicago School Research examines the challenges minority high school students face in applying to college and provides a framework for improving these rates that has been adopted by the Chicago Public School system, and how Charles Payne, Michael Woolley, and Dexter Viosin advocate strategies for creating and fostering a positive internal culture within schools—in terms of relationships between students, teachers, faculty, parents, and administrators.

The story also includes insights from SSA staff and long-time and recent alumni who are working in urban education, a field that the School has been involved with for years. SSA continues to invest in this field and remains at the forefront in research and theory for education and community schools. I'm inspired by the many ways SSA explores and improves the relationship between schools, communities, and opportunity, and how we are helping redefine how urban schools can advance.

Elsewhere in the issue, you'll learn about Sarah Gehlert's path-breaking research on determining environmental factors for early-onset breast cancer rates for African-American women and Jens Ludwig's research and analysis about urban crime, violence, and the economics of gun control. Jennifer Mosley's study about advocacy by non-profits is enlightening—and heartening. It recognizes that many of you who work for agencies are able to influence public

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policy while working the long hours necessary to provide basic human services.

Yoonsun Choi provides fascinating insights into racial stereotypes about Asian-American youth. And Bill Borden's paper comparing approaches to clinical theory gives ideas about how to strengthen integrative approaches to psychosocial intervention. Each of these stories represent ground-breaking work and offer professionals in the field valuable information and inspiration that can lead to positive action in formulating policy and programming to solve problems.

Jeanne C. Marsh

We need to remind ourselves about the possibilities for **positive impact that we can create every day**—even when it is only for one other human being.

I am consistently amazed by the quality and dedication of SSA students. For example, in the Memorandum section of this issue, you can read about awards won by SSA doctoral students and our master's students who attended Washington Week—a now-annual event that allows current students to experience the myriad opportunities to serve in our nation's capital, thanks to the generosity of our many alumni who work in the city as advocates, clinicians, policymakers, and researchers.

Not long ago, I was reminded yet again of how special a place SSA is when I stumbled into an encounter between A.M. student Amzie Moore and new faculty member Charles Payne. Amzie was asking Charles to sign a copy of his book, *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African-American Activism, 1850-1950*, in which Charles devotes a chapter to the civil rights work of Amzie's father. Amzie told Charles that his writing was the best available about his father's work, and that he himself moved from Mississippi to Chicago to carry forward his father's legacy through work with young people and returned to SSA to get the necessary tools.

Alumni inspire me consistently when we meet or talk via email or phone. Abigail Erikson, an alumna who is working in Thailand with Burmese refugees with the International Rescue Committee, recently wrote to tell us about her work in a program that aims to meet the safety, health, psychosocial, and justice needs of women and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence. Her program offers adult survivors access to counseling services and other psychosocial projects, (such as weaving and cooking classes), as well as training and support for local organizations.

Barbara Jackson, an SSA alumna, field instructor, and current program manager at the Chicago Public School's Paul Revere Elementary School, is another amazing example. Hundreds of children who attend the Revere School and their families have opportunities through SSA and at the Comer Youth Center because of Barbara and her colleagues. These professionals have dedicated their lives to improving the school experience for the Grand Crossing neighborhood, and a few of these children may one day decide to become social workers or research scientists because they were inspired by someone who cared.

Our profession is profoundly rewarding. We need to remind ourselves about the possibilities for positive impact that we can create every day—even when it is only for one other human being. All of the stories that you will find in the pages of this magazine—and other issues—represent the disproportionate, positive impact that SSA provides to the world. My hope is that these stories will leave you with a sense of passion and renewal.

Jeanne C. Marsh, Ph.D., is the Dean and George Herbert Jones Professor of the School of Social Service Administration.

We welcome letters to the editor. Please send your submissions to ssamagazine@ssa.uchicago.edu.

# Don't Shoot

**Gun violence, which briefly overtook motor vehicle fatalities as the leading annual cause of death** for people under the age of 39, was in decline between the late 1990s and 2003. Yet the United States still far outpaces other developed democracies in terms of guns as a cause of death—and homicides due to gun violence have started to rise again in many American cities. Gun violence also has a huge impact on distressed communities. This issue's "Conversation" covers the costs of gun violence, the options for limiting gun use, and how politics impacts policy.

SSA Professor **Jens Ludwig** is a faculty research fellow of the National Bureau of Economic Research, where he co-directs the working group on the economics of crime, and is also a non-resident senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution. He recently co-authored a paper in The Economic Journal "Underground Gun Markets" that looks at how guns are bought, sold, and used in Chicago's poor neighborhoods. **Roseanna Ander** is the program officer in the gun violence program at the Joyce Foundation, which supports research and public policies to reduce the toll of firearm violence.

**Shooting victims aren't the only victims:** Living with the fear

**Ander:** One thing that is important to talk about is the indirect costs of gun violence to society. One example: A survey has shown that a third of kids in urban settings have diagnosable PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, because of the high level of gun violence in those communities. You and Phil Cook, your mentor and colleague at times, did some terrific work trying to measure the other indirect costs of gun violence.

**Ludwig:** One of the most important things that comes out of our research is that the shooting victims aren't the only victims. Living with the fear that you or someone that you care about will be shot is an important part of the cost of gun violence, and that fear does things like drive city residents out to the suburbs. Julie Cullen [at the University of California, San Diego], and Steven Levitt at the University of Chicago have done a study about what crime does to urban flight. For every serious crime, one person leaves the city to move to the suburbs. For every homicide, 30 people leave the city to go to the suburbs. And one of the main things that guns do is they increase the chances that a serious crime turns into a homicide.

**Ander:** I was in Philadelphia last week, which has very high levels of gun violence. I talked to an executive there who's trying to recruit people, offering very high salaries. He says a salary of $500,000 a year is not enough to convince some people that they should live in a city where gun violence is such a problem.

**Ludwig:** A lot of thinking is going on around the question of how to reduce gun violence in Chicago. Roseanna, I thought you could say a little bit about how the policymakers in the city are thinking about the youth violence problem and the crime problem in general.

**Ander:** There is a whole set of activities. The mayor has his legislative agenda to reduce gun violence. Every city agency has been tasked with making youth gun violence reduction a priority. So, for example, the police department's community policing efforts are very focused on how they work with young people.

We have a new police superintendent. The mayor continues to be committed to this issue. I'm curious about what advice you would give them to redouble or maybe focus their efforts.

**Ludwig:** There's evaluation evidence that suggests that targeted policing resources can bring down gun violence levels. The pioneering work of [George Herbert Jones Professor Emeritus] Irv Spergel here at SSA laid the groundwork for much of this research. The overwhelming majority of homicides in the city of Chicago are committed with guns and a very large share are committed in public places. An encouraging strategy is to focus police resources on neighborhoods where gun crime is at the highest levels and focus police activities on trying to stop and search for illegally carried guns. There's a fine line between encouraging police to stop people when there's probable cause and turning neighborhoods into police-state communities. But there are successful examples of police departments that have been able to walk that fine line.

Another tested intervention is focused activity against gangs. In the Boston Gun Project in the 1990s, police notified gangs that if any individual gang member was involved in a shooting, the whole gang would be in a vise, including activity to shut down their drug distribution activity. That changes the social norms within the gang away from encouraging reckless, dangerous behavior towards discouraging that activity, because it makes it harder for everyone to earn some money.

It sounds like the Chicago Police Department is essentially doing something very similar, even if it's not under any sort of formal programmatic name. Sudhir Venkatesh is a sociologist who got his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago several years ago. When he went out and talked to gang leaders in Chicago for our paper on gun markets, they told him that they know gun violence scares away customers and brings

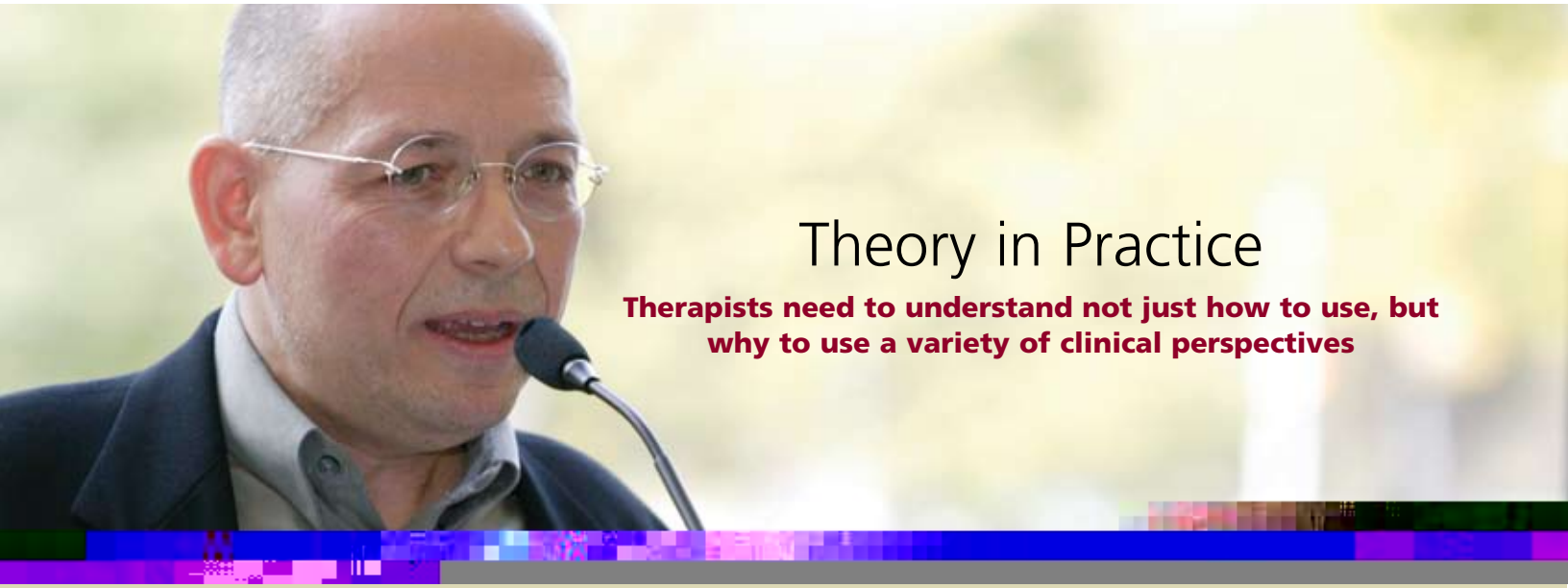
focused police attention that makes it harder to keep the drug distribution going. So Sudhir heard from the gang leaders that they regulate gun use, especially by the younger kids.

**Ander:** So if you're going to steal a car or you're going to be selling drugs, you don't want to have a gun on you, because that carries a double whammy.

local efforts can be a building block towards the political will for federal reform. And I think that they have the potential to have some impact. Research has shown, for example, that it would take the [U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives]—which is supposed to have oversight of federally licensed firearms dealers—years to inspect every dealer

these gun dealers?" And what a lot of them say is that they just basically never leave their neighborhood. They spend most of their lives within a four or five block radius of where they live. And so the fact that there are not licensed gun dealers in that four- or five-block radius of their neighborhood in Chicago is potentially really important in limiting straw purchases.

who was playing on a soccer field and was shot and killed in gang crossfire. The entire country was clamoring for action. One child, one 11-year-old child died, and that was intolerable and unacceptable. Now they're proposing additional restrictions on guns, other law enforcement strategies. Practically every day in cities across our country, we have 11-year-olds, five-year-olds,



# Theory in Practice

**Therapists need to understand not just how to use, but why to use a variety of clinical perspectives**

WHILE MANY SOCIAL WORKERS come to characterize their clinical approach as eclectic, the SSA clinical curriculum is unusual in that it is designed to encourage students to think critically about differing theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and technical procedures over the course of intervention.

William Borden, a senior lecturer at SSA, explores comparative perspectives and integrative approaches in social work practice in two forthcoming books, Contemporary Psychodynamic Theory and Practice and The Play and Place of Theory in Social Work: Comparative Perspectives in Contemporary Practice, an edited work that explores a range of theoretical perspectives in social work practice.

"As social workers try to strengthen the empirical foundations of practice and negotiate the demands of an applied profession, theoretical concerns receive surprisingly little consideration in the broader literature of the field," he explains. "Theory is increasingly marginalized in social work education in light of perceived conflicts with the practical concerns of the profession, the emergence of skills-based courses of study, and the growing emphasis on evidence-based practice."

Borden argues that comparative approaches to clinical theory and mastery of the foundational schools of thought strengthen eclectic, integrative psychosocial intervention. In the comparative point of view, social workers regard theories as tools for critical thinking and decision-making as they carry out their practice. The clinician learns multiple theories, therapeutic languages, and modes of intervention, and, depending on the specifics of the clinical situation, can draw on a variety of perspectives. Borden emphasizes the need for ongoing dialogue across the therapeutic traditions to clarify differences and integrate ideas in pragmatic approaches to intervention.

In his books, Borden provides a series of case studies that illustrate how pluralist points of view help a practitioner use differing perspectives over the course of treatment, broadening the range of theories, empirical findings, and technical procedures applied in the clinical situation. One account describes the psychotherapy of a young adult who developed post-traumatic stress disorder following his return from military service in Iraq. He described fluctuating periods of numbing detachment and intrusive recollections of traumatic events, and experienced a pervasive sense of dread that limited ways of being, relating, and living.

The practitioner's understanding of psychodynamic, cognitive, behavioral, humanistic, and existential perspectives provided the theoretical underpinnings that allowed him to use differing approaches over the course of intervention. For example, he drew on cognitive and behavioral approaches to help the client manage intrusive recollections of traumatic events and humanistic and existential perspectives facilitated exploration of the meaning and implications of the traumatic events. Movement from one orientation to another was guided by the nature of the specific problems in functioning, the focal concerns of intervention, and the client's capacities to make use of differing strategies. The validity of differing strategies was determined by the effectiveness in the clinical situation.

Borden emphasizes the need for ongoing dialogue across the therapeutic traditions to **clarify differences and integrate ideas** in pragmatic approaches to intervention.

"Pluralist perspectives emphasize the limits of human understanding and assume that no single theory captures the variety and complexity of actual experience in the real world. No single perspective—however encompassing it may seem—can possibly meet all of our needs over the course of intervention. Every theory carries the potential to help us out in certain ways but will inevitably fail us in other respects," he explains.

A growing number of graduate social work programs have established generalist, atheoretical, skills-based courses of study, Borden says. "They don't provide opportunities for students to develop the critical analytic capacities they need. If you've learned a template—when you encounter this, then do that—then you aren't prepared to negotiate the particularities, complexities, and irreducible ambiguities of clinical practice." While students learn how to implement technical procedures in these programs, he argues, they do not develop the conceptual foundations needed to carry out individualized approaches to intervention.

"The ethos of the social work tradition urges us to approach the person as an individual—in the words of Oliver Sacks, 'as a human being first and last,' engaging the 'experiencing, acting, living I,'" Borden says.

— Chelan David

# Voice of the People

THOSE WHO PROBABLY NEED to be heard by government the most are usually the least likely to have a voice. People living in poverty have a wide range of needs—many of which are met, however imperfectly, by programs operated or funded by government agencies. Yet the poor and disenfranchised are less likely to vote and often overwhelmed by the demands of poverty, so their input is typically absent when policies are discussed.

**Social service agencies advocate for their clients surprisingly often**

Social service agencies, with an intimate knowledge of the lives of their clients and the systems designed to help them, would seem to be a natural candidate to advocate on their behalf to lawmakers and government agencies. But the conventional wisdom has assumed that service providers are too busy and too meek to promote the interests of their clients.

A growing body of research, however, is turning that idea on its head. According to a study by SSA Assistant Professor Jennifer Mosley, social service agencies do advocacy work all the time. Mosley's research began in part to learn how the privatization of social services, growing rapidly since the Reagan era, has impacted the human service organizations that now rely heavily on government contracts. In a large study of Los Angeles County human service nonprofits, she found that about half of the organizations overall did some kind of advocacy work, but that 83 percent of the largest organizations—those with budgets over $5 million—did. She also found that those same large organizations were more likely to receive a higher percentage of their funding from government contracts.

"The assumption has been that government funding would co-opt the human service providers—you don't want to bite the hand that feeds you," Mosley says. "But my research fits in with others' that shows that the more government funding you receive, the more likely you are to advocate. The pressures that increase once an organization receives government funding make it more necessary."

Part of the gap between expectations and Mosley's findings may be due to a misunderstanding of the full definition of advocacy, which goes far beyond just picket lines or lobbying. Activities such as public education, participating on government committees, releasing policy reports, writing letters to the editor, and joining coalitions designed to influence policy can all be considered advocacy work. Human service organizations with more government funding also participate in higher rates of direct, insider tactics, Mosley points out, likely because having a seat at the table gives the organizations more access to policy-makers and rule-setters. These organizations also have a vested interest in speaking up about what policies work, which don't, and what their own organization needs.

At the same time, though, human service organizations may need a hand to be effective advocates. "Clinical workers are often not trained to do advocacy, and executive directors are already busy and over committed," Mosley says. "There is limited time for advocacy despite how important it is."
— Patti Wolter

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To learn more about the broad advocacy roles allowed for 501(c) (3) nonprofits—and how to stay within the law for lobbying—visit ssa.uchicago.edu/publications/ssamag.shtml.

# Hip-Hop Generation

## The rise of hip-hop gives insight into today's world

HIP-HOP HAS MOVED far beyond its roots in low-income, African-American and Hispanic urban neighborhoods. Today, hip-hop culture—spanning music, poetry, fashion, dance, art, and language—is, in many ways, simply youth culture. As part of a conference on hip-hop and race at SSA last fall, journalist, activist, and political analyst Bakari Kitwana provided some insight into the trend gleaned from his third book, "Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop." It's more than just hip-hop's open, evolving ethos and a 1990s marketing push from the music industry, he argues, although those factors certainly apply.

"Young black and Latino people decided in the 1970s that hip-hop will be how they survive globalization and jobs shipping off overseas," Kitwana says. "Today, that trend has reached everyone, and young people see Biggie and Jay-Z, who grew up in the poorest, harshest conditions in the country, and they say, 'If those guys can make it, what did they do?'"

Kitwana interviewed young people of every background, from Eugene, Ore., to Gainesville, Fla., for his book and found that today's youth, faced with an uncertain economic future and immersed in new technologies, feel alienated from earlier generations and more open to identification with people their own age, regardless of race and socio-economic status. At the same time, new communication tools from the Internet to cable television give kids more access to other cultures than ever before.

> They're very clear that **they're living through something that their parents have no clue about**. They're asking what does it mean, and they're finding answers from hip-hop.

"They're very clear that they're living through something that their parents have no clue about. They're asking what does it mean, and they're finding answers from hip-hop," Kitwana says.

Regardless of the factors that have contributed to the rise of hip-hop, its impact is unassailable and here to stay. Kids in high school in 2008 have never lived in a world where they don't hear hip-hop on the radio and see it in everything from movies to commercials. "If you work with young people today and you don't have a handle on hip-hop," Kitwana says, "you are at a severe disadvantage."
— Carl Vogel

FOR FIVE YEARS, starting just after the 1996 welfare reform act, researchers in New Jersey followed 2,000 welfare recipients to discern how well individual families fared under the new policies. In "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: the Uneven Economic Progress of TANF Recipients," the authors write that most women ended up better off economically than they were at the start. But they also found that "the road to economic progress is a bumpy one."

Most of the welfare recipients suffered reversals and setbacks before achieving steady employment. And the road was especially bumpy for single mothers without high school diplomas, work experience, or good health. These women were most likely to find jobs and lose them, rise out of poverty and then sink back again. And yet even welfare recipients with relative advantages, such as health, more than a high school education, and significant work history—found it hard to escape poverty and welfare permanently. The study notes that New Jersey has a relatively strong economy. In other states, says the main author of the study, Robert G. Wood, welfare recipients could face even greater difficulties.

"The whole scenario is pretty fragile," says Wood, a researcher at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. "It doesn't take much to upset it."

The study makes a case for giving single mothers more help after they leave welfare. The authors say that policy makers may have to rethink the "pure work-first approach to welfare reform" and put greater emphasis on efforts to help women achieve more sustainable progress, such as programs to provide education and training.

Wood, Robert G., Quinn Moore, and Anu Rangarajan. 2008. "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The Uneven Economic Progress of TANF Recipients." Social Service Review 82 (1): 3-28.

ABRAHAM FLEXNER WAS an early and influential critic of American higher education. His reports on medical schools transformed the training of doctors in the United States and abroad. But social workers remember him for his 1915 speech to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, entitled "Is Social Work a Profession?" He said it wasn't—not yet.

Social work has never gotten over Flexner. He keeps coming back, popping up in the century-long debate over the aims and identity of the field. Some recent commentators have said he's a bad influence. "It's time for us to exorcise his ghost," David M. Austin declared in 1983 in the Social Service Review

Now, in an article entitled "Reinterpreting Abraham Flexner's Speech, 'Is Social Work a Profession?' Its Meaning and Influence on the Field's Early Professional Development," Patricia McGrath Morris argues that Flexner has been given too much blame—and credit—and that some of his key ideas have been misunderstood. Social work leaders have "shadowboxed" with Flexner, she says, "in their own contemporary struggles to find answers to the inherent dilemmas within the field's professional identity."

In the early 20th century, social work, an occupation dominated by women, strove to raise its status, define its purpose, and establish educational standards. Flexner measured its progress against established professions like medicine, law, and engineering. To its credit, he said, social work was characterized by "professional association," "altruism," and "knowledge building." But in other ways it fell short. Social workers worked in so many different occupations—case workers, community organizers, charity workers, settlement house reformers—and used so many different approaches that it lacked a single coherent purpose, which also hampered the development of a specialized professional education. And it meant that unlike doctors, lawyers, and engineers, social workers were generalists without "decision-making authority."

However provocative, Flexner's speech exerted only modest influence in social work's development, Morris says. It did not, as some have supposed, produce an unhealthy preoccupation with specialization. Flexner's was one

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# Casa Central: A Home Away from Home

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

IF YOU WERE TO PLOT IT on a graph, the rise would be startling. When Casa Central was founded in 1954 to focus on the social service needs of Hispanics in Chicago's inner city, it had a budget of just $26,000. When current president and CEO Ann R. Alvarez took the helm in 1989, the group's budget stood at $3.5 million. Today, that budget is $15.8 million, and Casa Central's helping hands stretch into the suburbs and exurbs, making it the largest Hispanic social service agency in the Midwest.

Since Alvarez took the reins, the organization has seen aggressive growth in terms of size, programming, and name-recognition, while keeping to its initial mission to "transform lives and strengthen communities, with a special emphasis on Hispanics." Now, with demographic trends indicating that Chicago and its suburbs will continue to see large[illegible] the Hispanic population[illegible]king to ensure that Casa [illegible]provide its broad mix of servi[illegible]s fu[illegible]the[illegible]and better than ever before.

Casa [illegible]Centr[illegible] cu[illegible]ently serves more than [illegible]20,000 clie[illegible]nts annually with 23 differe[illegible]t pro[illegible]grams from infants in child deve[illegible]opme[illegible]t ce[illegible]ters to senior citizens w[illegible]o use the [illegible]dult wellness center. "O[illegible]r clie[illegible]ts ha[illegible]e a vision of what the[illegible] want [illegible]heir [illegible]ves to be like. Our emp[illegible]yees [illegible]ut together the programs an[illegible] serv[illegible]es th[illegible]t help children, youth, ac[illegible]lts, a[illegible]d se[illegible]iors get ahead

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Under Alvarez's hand, the agency has extended many of its programs to better meet the needs of the communities where it operates. For example, Casa Central has expanded its early-learning centers, which help prepare low-in[illegible]ergarten, and m[illegible] been devoted to[illegible]een pregnancy and teaching parenting skills to teens who have children. The agency offers domestic violence intervention, an employment program for adults over age 55, and [illegible]oster care and adoption services as w[illegible]ll.

Wrap-a[illegible]ound services are also p[illegible]rt of Casa [illegible]Central's work with h[illegible]meless fa[illegible]milies. The agency pro-v[illegible]es 21 tr[illegible]nsitional apartments, ca[illegible]d "L[illegible]osada," where those in [illegible] for up to four months. [illegible]st offer them an apart-[illegible]z says. "We help people [illegible]ave been in limbo to make their life changes. We ensure success when they leave the program." The staff works with clients to develop a plan that includes coordinating with Chicago Public Schools to bring kids up to grade level, providing adult vocational training, and offering follow-up for a year, even after the family leaves La Posada.

Approximately 84 percent of those served by the agency are Hispanic. The concept and strate

gies behind Casa Central are not that Hispanics have different needs per se than other immigrants, but that cultural sensitivity, experience, and communication improves services. All of the staff who work in direct contact with clients are bilingual, and 98 percent are bicultural, giving them a commonality with their clients and a level of understanding that is hard to find at more general social service agencies, Alvarez says. Casa Central offers ESL courses to its clients, and other programs are influenced by the agency's focus on Hispanic communities. For instance, since many lic service were part of her "cultural upbringing and values," she says. Those qualities led her to a career as a social worker, and she worked as a clinician in the Chicago Public Schools for a dozen years after earning her degree at SSA. "At CPS, I applied what I had learned at SSA on a daily basis with teachers, students, parents, and administrators. To understand where people are coming from, you must try to understand what they do and why they do it and perfect a process where you really look at people through the lens of their strengths and needs," Alvarez says. the people who need the services, says David Parkyn, president of North Park University. Alvarez was a board member at North Park and was on the search committee that hired Parkyn two years ago. He calls Alvarez, "a gift to Chicago," because of her one-two punch of compassion and consensus-building. "Her leadership style is to find a need and then champion it in front of others so that she can find others to help," he says. "She finds ways to get others to walk with her to respond to that need."

Currently, 85 percent of Casa Central's operating funds come from government contracts; recent funders include the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Illinois Department of Aging, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Many of our government grants have been stable, like Head Start, and they do not go away year after year, although the requirements have changed," Alvarez says, but she adds that to diversify funding, the team is looking to add more support from corporations, foundations, and individuals.

**4 : The Youth Options Unlimited program offers after-school programming for local high school kids.**

**5 : Ann Alvarez and her husband, Rev. Daniel Alvarez, the founder of Casa Central**

In the same vein, Alvarez is working with a number of other Chicago-area nonprofits, including Metropolitan Family Services, to develop a consortium of local social service agencies that will consolidate back-office functions. The group is hoping that the initiative will result in cost-savings in purchasing and other efforts, which would allow the organizations to focus more on their constituents.

Operating a large social service agency requires a healthy combination of administrative savvy, open-hearted compassion, and deep understanding of the clients' needs and strengths. Lucky for Casa Central, Ann Alverez has all of the above.

Fiora Scaffi contributed to the reporting of this article.

# Back From War

## An array of views on the returning vets who have been affected by their experiences—and how well we're helping them

BY SASHA ABRAMSKY

**They are starting to come home,** the more than 1.1 million active American military personnel and another 400,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001. Even as debate about whether to stay or leave Iraq continues, hundreds of thousands of veterans are returning to civilian life. Like the vets from past wars, most are fine—happy to be home, ready to return to normal life. But many have been hurt, physically or mentally, and are facing a difficult transition out of military service.

Nearly one in five veterans from the Iraq conflict experienced serious psychological distress within the past year, according to a report released by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last November. While it appears that new drug epidemics aren't being formed overseas, as happened in Vietnam, more than 7 percent of today's vets were abusing drugs, and younger, poorer, veterans were disproportionately at risk: one in four veterans in the 18-24 age group had a substance-use disorder.

Press coverage of the needs of returning vets and how well we are—and aren't—serving those needs has become a steady drumbeat. *The Washington Post* has published an award-winning series on shameful conditions at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center last year, and an article in January highlighted the rising suicide rate in the military: In 2006, nearly 2,100 soldiers injured themselves or attempted suicide, compared with about 350 four years ago, according to the U.S. Army Medical Command Suicide Prevention Action Plan.

"Over the past year, four high-level commissions have recommended reforms and Congress has given the military hundreds of millions of dollars to improve its mental health care, but critics charge that significant progress has not been made," *Post* writer Dana Priest reported.

In an article last November, the *New York Times* found that 72,000 vets are paying more than half their incomes for rent, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness. That same month, *Stars and Stripes*, the country's military newspaper, reported that the number of young veterans receiving treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) increased 87 percent from September 2005 to June 2006, rising from about 20,000 patients to more than 38,000. *The Chicago Tribune Magazine* dedicated a cover in February to the story of Eugene Cherry, an Army medic whose difficult transition from Iraq has uncovered a severe PTSD.

How vets who need help are faring is far from clear, however. Federal programs to fight homelessness include components to assist vets, for example, and the rise in soldiers receiving PTSD treatment may be due in part to new outreach programs to destigmatize the disorder and identify who needs counseling.

Further complicating the picture is that these wars are unlike any we've fought in the past, from the type of warfare to the personnel who serve. Today's all-volunteer military has a higher-than-average education level and comes from neighborhoods that are disproportionately rural. A higher number of National Guard and Reserve personnel serving means that returning vets are more likely to be married and have children. And about 11 percent of the military force that have been stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan are women, a figure that dwarfs figures from past conflicts. Compared to their male counterparts, a higher percentage of women are reporting signs of mental health issues when they return home, according to the V.A.

*SSA Magazine* has interviewed more than a dozen experts—counselors, researchers, advocates, veterans, and program administrators—for their thoughts on the issues facing returning vets. There is no definitive answer here, but their insight helps build a case for why social services need to be prepared for a new generation of returning vets and how we can begin to help.

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*The opinions expressed by these individuals are their own and not necessarily those of SSA.*

## The Interviews

- **Robert Anderson** served for 20 years in the U.S. Air Force and retired with the rank of Lt. Colonel. An SSA alum, he has provided services to military personnel during and after military and terrorist engagements and was named the Air Force Social Worker of the Year.
- **Peter Chapman**, the program manager in behavioral health at Mercy Hospital in Chicago and an SSA alum, estimates that up to ten percent of his caseload is made up of military veterans.
- **Malitta Engstrom** is an assistant professor at SSA and an associate faculty member at the Chicago Center for Family Health. She has expertise in substance abuse and co-occurring concerns, such as trauma, incarceration, and physical and mental health problems.
- **Daniel Ibarra-Fitzgerald** is the deputy director of programs and services for Illinois Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. An SSA alum, his responsibilities include operating a state program that works with mentally ill and homeless veterans, the Chicago Collaboration to End Chronic Homelessness.

# Re-Entry Services

■ **Jeanne Marsh** is the dean of SSA as well as the School's George Herbert Jones Professor. Her fields of study include integration in service delivery, social program and policy evaluation, and knowledge utilization in practice and program decision making.

■ **Stan McCracken** is a senior lecturer at SSA, a Vietnam veteran, and an expert on integrated treatment of dual disorders, chemical dependence, behavioral pharmacology, and multicultural mental health.

■ **Shelley MacDermid** is the director of Purdue University's Center for Families and the director of the Military Family Research Institute, a cross-departmental program housed at the university.

■ **Allison Murdach** is an SSA alum who worked as a psychiatric social worker at the V.A. center in Palo Alto, Calif., for nearly 30 years, retiring in 2000.

■ **Joel L. Rubin** is the executive director of the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter, which is holding its bi-annual conference, this year titled "Building Social Work Leadership for Tomorrow: Serving our Veterans Today," on September 19th in Urbana.

■ **Kate Schechter** is a clinical social worker and an adjunct faculty member at SSA. She founded the Chicago-based Soldiers' Project, a collaborative group of social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists who volunteer to provide services to vets.

■ **Michael Sosin** is the Emily Klein Gidwitz Professor at SSA. He studies social welfare institutions, social policy, social administration, substance abuse services, urban poverty, and homelessness.

"When they return to the U.S. from Iraq and Afghanistan, every individual in the military has to fill in a Post-Deployment Health Assessment questionnaire, and 90 days later they have to complete a follow-up. Anyone identified as suffering from mental health problems is brought in for counseling and further evaluation, paid for by the military. Some army bases, such as Fort Lewis, have gone one step further, mandating all returning personnel see a counselor upon their arrival Stateside. Nationally, 30 percent of National Guard and reserve personnel who have been to Iraq or Afghanistan have sought mental health services upon their return.

"A large institution like the military is always playing catch-up to some extent. The services are rising, but it's hard for them to rise fast enough. There aren't enough psychiatrists, residential treatment facilities, and counselors."

**— Shelley MacDermid**

"A recent report from the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health describes the inadequacy of services to meet the mental health needs of members of the military and their families. There's a need for additional funding and service providers, as well as additional attention to ensuring that evidence-based services are provided and that the effectiveness of services is evaluated. Because stigma is a significant barrier to seeking mental health services, a particularly important recommendation from the report is to make attention to mental health a routine part of military service.

"Between 55 percent and 90 percent of female veterans report experiencing sexual harassment in the military and nearly one in four report sexual assault. The effects often make the return to civilian life more difficult. For example, female veterans who experience military sexual assault are nine times more likely to experience PTSD than female veterans without a sexual assault history. Female veterans who experience sexual harassment or assault in the military also have higher risk of other mental health and substance use problems, as well as greater difficulty finding employment."

**— Malitta Engstrom**

"I've heard good things about the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program. It makes traumatic brain injury screenings mandatory for all returning members of the Illinois National Guard who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Vietnam vets experiencing PTSD through watching TV coverage of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"In my opinion, some sort of brief (one or two weeks or so) re-entry training should be mandatory for all military returning from a war zone. It should include simple things, like getting used to driving and being in a large shopping center, and be in the individual's home town or base. Mandatory retraining would provide some time for observation to detect symptoms that might have been missed; it would help people get used to being around civilian society, including their families; and it would remove the stigma because everyone would go through it, regardless of whether there were symptoms."

**— Stan McCracken**

# Substance Abuse

"The social work knowledge base and orientation would say that the service systems should approach support and services in a holistic way, starting with a comprehensive assessment of the vet's needs around substance abuse, mental health, employment, transportation, health problems, and, particularly for women, childcare. If these comprehensive services are provided as a part of substance abuse treatment, the outcomes are improved.

"But our services, for vets and for non-vets, have been so balkanized. Services need to be integrated. These are whole people with a set of human needs—and addressing all of these needs will ultimately be the most effective approach. The V.A. is uniquely positioned to do this. They have a long tradition of social work services. But they are going to have to reach out into the community and work not only with vets but with vets' families in a community setting."

**— Jeanne Marsh**

"In our program, we have 59 participants. We start out with stabilizing the individual's situation. We try to get as many into independent living in long-term housing as possible. It takes three-to-four months. The other piece is getting the individual dealing with their substance abuse issues. Then we do individual and group treatment. One of the successful things here is that the retention of clients is really great. We're having individuals tracked once they've been discharged successfully from our treatment services, and we're seeing a higher rate of staying drug-free, alcohol-free."

**— Daniel Ibarra-Fitzgerald**

"I worked as an adjudicator for the V.A. from 1974 to '76, and worked as an intern for outpatient healthcare in '77. I talked to people who were having a rough time. They were using drugs because of being afraid of going to sleep. They'd close their eyes and have traumatic memories bouncing around inside their heads.

"Today, most of the contact I have with vets is with the people who are providing services. Here in the United States, they're using the same substances that are being used in the community. In Vietnam, there were guys getting addicted to heroin. I don't know if anything like that is going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. With substance abuse, the company commander's going to know about it. There's a potential for adverse ramifications on your military career, so people are very reluctant to seek services."

**— Stan McCracken**

# Homeless

"The Palo Alto V.A. Medical Center and the V.A. health care system in the San Francisco Bay Area still has a very good outreach to the homeless. The number of homeless veterans sharply increased after Vietnam, and they're seeing an increase now with the vets currently returning. The V.A. has a number of community day activity programs called Vets Centers where homeless veterans can come and get counseling, join support groups, and be hooked up with jobs if they're employable. The Vets Centers also try to coordinate their planning with community overnight shelters if needed. There are three or four of these programs in the Bay Area, and they're being emulated by other places on the West Coast."

**— Allison Murdach**

"A while ago I did a study looking at people who were homeless. One of the things that often came up was military service. We found that military service might be related to homelessness, but it was people who served in peacetime rather than wartime. And the effect was stronger for women than men. We found evidence that people were more likely to enter the military because they had so few social connections, and when they get out these folks have more trouble integrating. We didn't find evidence of any unique effects of serving during wartime.

"[But] we have a volunteer army today. So if the wartime/peacetime difference was about the draft versus volunteers, then today's veterans would be more susceptible to homelessness because of how they got into the military. Also, there may be stressors today that weren't there in the past."

# Beyond the Books

## These five strategies improve urban education by focusing on the people in the school

BY ED FINKEL AND CARL VOGEL

The federal government released a bombshell 25 years ago in the form of "A Nation at Risk," a report that made headlines throughout the country with its blunt assessment of the shortcomings of public education in America, everything from student achievement to how schools recruit new teachers. In many ways, the report was the launching pad for a generation of reform. In 2003, for the first time, philanthropic funding to K-12 education outpaced the amount given to higher education. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation alone has poured well over a billion dollars into high school reform.

Urban schools have been reshaped and reformatted from efforts as varied as the charter school movement, small schools, and the rise of high-stakes testing and standards, epitomized by the monumental federal No Child Left Behind law. Plans have focused on professional development for teachers, new curriculum, school governance, and teaching styles. Chicago has been at the forefront of many of these reforms and has been a national model first for giving more control of schools to local residents, then for moving toward stronger mayoral control.

Nobody is claiming, however, that the work to improve schools—especially schools that serve low-income and minority children—is done. Charles Payne, SSA's Frank P. Hixon Distinguished Service Professor, says that urban school systems perform "marginally better" than they did 10 or 15 years ago, and he can rattle off key cities where change can be found: Boston's improvement in elementary literacy scores, Cincinnati's lowering of drop-out rates, Philadelphia's string of success in test-score growth.

However, the title of Payne's new book, *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*, pretty much tells the story on his take on how much farther school reform still has to go. "Urban school districts have the same problems they've always had, including low levels of professional capacity and climates of low expectations," he says (for more on the book, see -page 28).

Clearly, there is no one strategy to improve urban education. But add to the menu of promising results another aspect of school reform, call it the human side of education. School culture, leadership, and guidance can have an enormous impact on effective instruction and students' ability to navigate through difficult circumstances.

"Educating our children is the most important public policy department we have in cities," says Melissa Roderick, SSA's Hermon Dunlap Smith Professor and the co-director at the Consortium on Chicago School Research. "We need effective, on-the-ground systems at the district level and in individual schools to support teachers and students and ensure that they have the best chance possible to learn and succeed." These five lessons from research and practice can be added to any school reform agenda.

## 1 Pay attention to the relationships between adults.

THERE IS A "MAJOR DISCONNECT" BETWEEN THE WAY policymakers think about changing schools and the way schools operate on a day-to-day basis, according to Payne. Much of *So Much Reform, So Little Change* focuses on this gap, which he says stems to a significant degree from poisonous interpersonal relationships that breed mistrust and undermine high-quality instruction and leadership shared throughout the school.

"Part of the reason it's difficult to implement, with any fidelity, the ideas that come down from on high is the fundamental incapacity of people in schools to cooperate with one another, which is not taken into account in much of the policy discussion. It arises from a range of things, including the lack of trust between teachers, principals, and parents. It means that schools have a very weak capacity for learning from their own mistakes, and they have a very limited capacity to implement solutions," Payne says.

Vivian Loseth, executive director of the Chicago social service agency Youth Guidance and an alum and adjunct faculty member at SSA, agrees that in the past, the Chicago Public Schools had a very "closed" system in which teachers operated almost in complete isolation from one another. "There was a lot of mistrust between teachers, principals, administrators, and parents" she says. "Parents were viewed as a liability instead of an asset."

But Loseth argues that significant structural and systemic improvements began with the arrival of former schools CEO Paul Vallas in the mid-1990s and that the current CPS administration has become much more intentional about developing the kinds of interpersonal relationships that Payne finds so critical. "We must continue to develop the existing human capital, improve communication, and create positive social exchanges," she says.

Youth Guidance, for example, works with faculty on a reform initiative called the Comer School Development Program, which focuses on improving the school climate. The process encourages principals to examine their leadership style and engage faculty in creating a collegial environment. "Every adult in the building has a role in making the school successful. Once the principals in our program developed trusting relationships, they were able to go back to their schools and began promoting a climate of openness and accountability. Teachers began to trust each other, parents began to trust teachers, and there was more of a sense of 'we,' as opposed to an 'us and them' feeling," says Loseth.

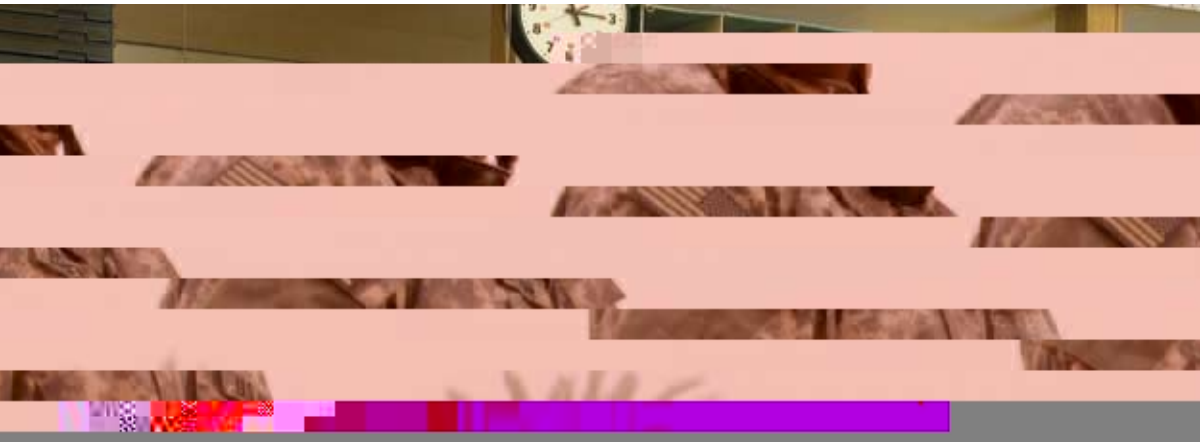
In *So Much Reform, So Little Change*, Payne cites programs like the Comer model and structural shifts, such as smaller schools, as existing tools that can improve interpersonal relationships. "High-quality professional development, for example, can improve the capacity of teachers to work with their colleagues," he says, "and so can reducing the degree to which the teaching force feels vulnerable."

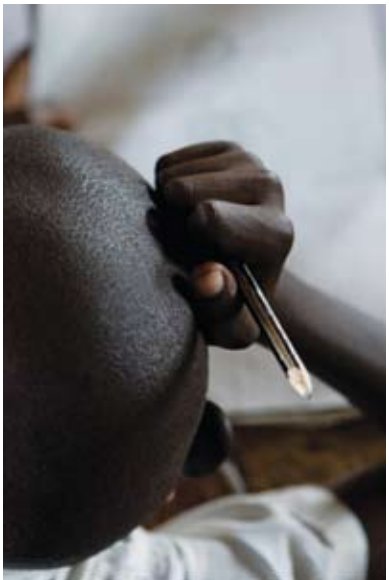
## 2 Help teachers understand the impact of how they work with students.

MICHAEL WOOLLEY, AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT SSA whose research focuses on social factors at home, in the neighborhood, and at school that have an impact on school success, is one of a number of researchers who are finding that the teacher-student relationship is particularly influential in affecting not only grades and test scores, but students' attitudes and behavior at school. Woolley has measured two aspects of that relationship: support ("My teachers really care about me. My teachers listen to what I have to say.") and press ("My teachers expect me to do my best all the time. My teachers care about the grades I make.").

"Press and support are complementary," Woolley explains. "Press is like a push. It's a specific motivation to a kid in the here and now to work hard to achieve at a school task. Support is verbal and non-verbal communications to students that teachers truly care about them."

Increased press when support is low can be detrimental, while high press combined with high support is even more important for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, Woolley has found that differences in such social relationship factors at home, in the neighborhood, and at school can explain long-standing achievement gaps for Afri10(i)10(10(i)13)-15(s)10(.5 28 398.6014ed2 1 5 28 398.6086014r90(i)10(p)10( )-15(f)10(a)10(c)10(t-15(f)10(o)





them, understood them, treated them fairly, and invested in them mattered to students.

Compared to a comparison group, students that reported feeling connected to teachers were 1.3 times less likely to belong to a gang, nearly two times less likely to report having used drugs in the past few months, more than two times less likely to report having had sex, and 1.5 times less likely to report having had sex while high on drugs. "The relationships with teachers made a significant difference," Voisin says, a conclusion that was consistent for students across various socioeconomic, ethnic, and household compositions. "The significance of relationships with teachers was associated with a number of adolescent wellness outcomes."

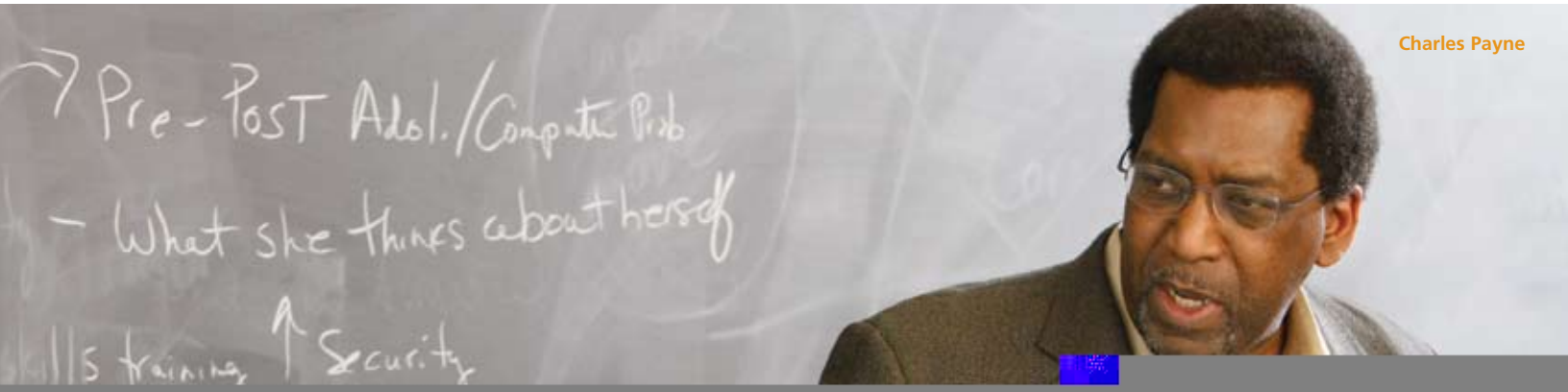
## 3 Give principals the help they need to succeed.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL reform is linked to a strong, capable school principal who can lead a culture of change, especially in today's educational climate. "School leaders are now required to ensure all the students they serve meet much tougher academic goals. You can no longer have one AP calculus class at a high school and send 5 percent of your kids to college, and declare success," says Tim Knowles, the executive director of the Center for Urban School Improvement at the University of Chicago. "It requires deep leadership in instruction, a deep understanding of change, and the ability to manage and respond to increasingly complex social issues."

School reformers are starting to emphasize the principal's role, in part because of these demands and in part simply because of the number of fresh principals. Chicago Public Schools alone hired 170 new principals last year, due to retirements and the opening of new facilities. To ensure a pipeline of ready leaders, a number of programs that provide leadership training for principal candidates have been launched: New Leaders for New Schools, the Boston Leadership Institute, New York Leadership, and others.

A two-year-old program housed at SSA goes one step further, providing crucial aid to principals who are already on the job. The Network for College Success is a professional learning community of the principals at 11 CPS high schools—ranging from small charters to large neighborhood high schools like Kenwood Academy and selective enrollment high schools like Jones College Prep. The group meets monthly to work collaboratively on specific issues at each school.

The network was started after principals began asking for help assessing and responding to a wealth of data coming from the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, which conducts research to inform policy in the Chicago Public Schools. Now, the consortium provides the network's schools with districtwide and school-specific information on factors such as how many 9th graders are on track to graduate, broken down by achievement level, attendance record, race, and gender.



Charles Payne

"We're able to distribute significant findings, examine the data together, and the principals can move on the data in a real-time way. They can make decisions about what the school needs based on what we're finding," says Mary Ann Pitcher, the project director and the founder and former co-director of the Young Women's Leadership Charter School.

Pitcher and the principals also discuss the schools' needs around issues such as instructional vision, school culture, management for improvement, and increased leadership capacity throughout the staff. "In the past, we've identified specific practice problems at a school and worked on them one by one. This year, we're focusing on the instructional leadership team," she says. "By January, we were seeing teams in place, where at the beginning of the year there wasn't one. Now the teams are targeting instructional areas that can improve student learning. To me, it's huge."

## 4 Support students' post-secondary planning.

IN TODAY'S ECONOMY, BEING A HIGH SCHOOL GRADuate is only the first step to success. In 1980, only 40 percent of all tenth-graders and only 20 percent of low-income tenth-graders hoped to complete at least a bachelor's degree, according to the U.S. Department of Education. By 2005, however, 83 percent of Chicago Public School seniors indicated that they hoped to earn a bachelor's degree or higher and another 13 percent hoped to earn a two-year or vocational degree.

Despite these goals, though, only a small percentage of CPS students end up in post-secondary education. In a major report released in March, *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*, the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that only 41 percent of CPS seniors took the necessary steps to apply to and enroll in a four-year college and that many sold themselves short—only about a third enrolled in a college that matched or exceeded their qualifications. The report also found that the most consistent predictor of whether a student took steps toward college enrollment was whether the high school had a "strong college-going culture" and if faculty worked to ensure students completed their college applications.

"We have to help these kids get ready to apply for and be accepted to college. You don't come out of the womb knowing the difference between Northwestern and Northeastern. Urban kids are encountering problems all along the line in getting into the best schools—from picking the right school to getting the forms in to having a great essay—and consequently, they're falling through the cracks," says Roderick, the lead author of the three-year longitudinal study, which analyzed data on 5,100 CPS high school graduates and interviewed 105 students in three high schools.

Roderick says that the report's most surprising finding is how many students are waylaid by the process of filing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the form required for most financial aid. "Students who reported completing a FAFSA by May of their application year and were accepted into a four-year college were almost 50 percent more likely to enroll than students who had not completed a FAFSA," the report noted. Yet each year, according to CPS, more than 20 percent of the students who've indicated that they're in compliance actually haven't turned in the appropriate paperwork.

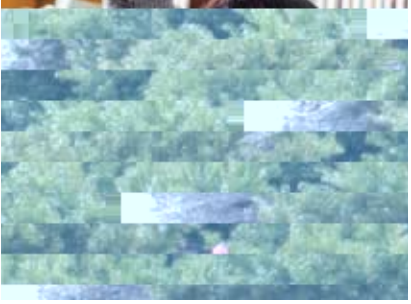
The FAFSA factor is an example of how the Consortium's work is directly connected to CPS's department of post-secondary education and student development, a four-year-old program that is unique in major urban districts in its mission to support student education plans after high school graduation. Programs include post-secondary coaches at 27 CPS high schools and Advanced Placement and AVID programming, which helps students who are not high-performers envision and prepare for a college career.

Roderick was responsible for the creation of the department, and her ongoing relationship with its director, Greg Darnieder, and its work allows the information she gathers to have an almost immediate impact on CPS policy. Roderick says that Darnieder's need to discover exactly what is keeping qualified kids out of college was the genesis for the *Potholes* report, and, in turn, her findings about FAFSA inspired a new system within CPS that gives each high school intensely detailed information about every senior's FAFSA status on a weekly basis.

"Six months ago, Melissa told me about the report's potential findings about FAFSA," Darnieder says. "Since then, we've started a campaign on the issue, created workshops, and put this new reporting system into place. Now, principals and counselors can stay on top of every single kid with data about whether the application has all been completed."

## 5 Build on the community school model.

MANY URBAN SCHOOLS ARE BENEFITING FROM AN increasingly tight coordination between the typical academic day and programs available for children, families, and other residents of the neighborhood. These community schools are usually open in the late afternoon, evenings, and on weekends to provide services like enrichment classes for students, health clinics, and classes for parents, often provided by local social service agencies. Community schools try to work with students in the context of their family and community rather than as individuals and work to leverage resear(f)10(a)10



"We are working towards seamless coordination between the school day and afternoon and weekend programming," says Sarah Duncan, coordinator of SSA's Community Schools Program, which offers masters students coursework and field placements tied to connecting community resources with the needs of schools. The program has also been instrumental in creating the Federation for Community Schools. But she stresses that doesn't mean another two hours of the same exact material: "Community schools bring in arts and cultural programming that schools do not have time for."

Community schools have been a priority for CPS—the district has opened or converted 110 to date, with another 40 to be added by the beginning of next school year, according to Colleen Coyle, a representative for the CPS Office of Extended Learning Opportunities and an SSA alum. "Schools are being asked to do a lot," she says. "The community schools strategy attempts to put resources into schools to help them bear that responsibility."

The early evaluations of the community schools initiatives in Chicago have been positive. Achievement improves among students enrolled in the after-school programs operated by community schools, according to a recent report from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Of the students identified as needing extra help, 70 percent improved their completion of homework, 72 percent improved their participation in classes, and 66 percent improved their classroom behavior.

Some schools are taking note of the broad expertise required to operate community school programming or provide counseling and are adding social workers to the school's instructional leadership team. SSA alumna Lo Patrick, for example, has been the social worker at Chicago's Donoghue Charter School, an elementary school operated by the University of Chicago, since it opened in the Bronzeville neighborhood in 2005. Her role includes much more than simply providing counseling for students in need, as important as that job is.

Patrick is a part of the team at the school's weekly leadership meetings and responsible for tasks like training after-school staff on the school's cooperative learning philosophy, for example. She helped the director of family and community engagement at Donoghue think through the child developmental perspective of how the school's kindergarten program was structured. "It was helpful for him to consult with me about whether it makes sense for all of the students to stay that long—we're open until 6 o'clock," she explains.

For Roderick, the kind of input Patrick is able to provide is a perfect case study of how social workers can have a deeper impact on education. "Graduates of our program are able to attack a problem from multiple dimensions. They have perspectives on the whole school that are informed by the community school model but don't have to be limited to it," she says. "Social workers know how to figure out discipline problems, think about health issues in the school, create after-school programming. These are valuable people to have on staff for any school."

# Leading a Research Party

**With a transdisciplinary team of social, behavioral, and biological scientists, Sarah Gehlert is studying how living in a distressed community may be a cause of breast cancer.**

BY CARL VOGEL

It's the afternoon before Valentine's Day, and Sarah Gehlert has a red heart and a folded pink ribbon pinned to her blouse. Sitting at a conference table at the University of Chicago's Institute for Mind and Biology, she's trying to steer the conversation to a productive resolution of a seemingly mundane task: how to share computer files among the members of the Center for Interdisciplinary Health Disparities Research.

Gathered for CIHDR's monthly leadership team meeting is an impressive and impressively eclectic team of University social workers, psychologists, physicians, pathologists, and molecular geneticists. They're working together to answer a medical mystery: Why, despite the fact that white women are more likely to develop breast cancer, are black women are more likely to die from it?

The center was founded four years ago by three of U of C's heavyweight researchers: Gehlert, SSA's Helen Ross Professor and an expert on the intersection of social work and health issues; her co-director Martha McClintock, the David Lee Shillinglaw Distinguished Service Professor of Psychology and the founding director of the Institute for Mind and Biology; and Olufunmilayo "Fumni" Olopade, a professor of medicine and a hematologist/oncologist who has won a MacArthur "genius grant" for her work. CIHDR's unique research is looking at what may be a big answer to their core question: links between living in a disadvantaged neighborhood and the development of "triple-negative" breast cancer—which develops in women at a younger age and is more lethal than other cancers—in African-American women.

Right now, though, McClintock is wondering why she can only find full tracking information in the shared computer database for two of the women in the center's key study. She asks Maria Tretiakova, an assistant professor of medicine and a key member of the center's tissue core team, about accessing the data, but they can't agree on how to make it available. Everyone is starting to get a bit testy.

"We can't publish without this," Gehlert points out. It's a startling thought—that years of work could be brought low because of a lack of clarity about how many women were approached to participate, agreed, and were tested—and clearly one that hadn't occurred to the doctors and pathologists who comprise the tissue core, which runs diagnostic tests on the women's cancerous cells. After some discussion about liaisons and procedures, the group

Part of CIHDR's University of Chicago leadership team (from left): **Sarah Gehlert from SSA, Suzanne Conzen from the Department of Medicine, Thomas Krausz from the Department of Pathology, Bertha Delgado from the Department of Pathology, Maria Tretiakova from the Department of Pathology, and Alice Furumoto-Dawson from the Institute for Mind and Biology.**

finds a consensus and a potential crisis is averted. "A big project can fall apart on a single thing," gravely concludes Thomas Krausz, the tissue core leader and director of anatomic pathology at the University's department of pathology.

"It was a perfect example of transdisciplinary differences," Gehlert explains a few weeks later. "Maria was wondering why she was even being asked about all this, because we could gather all that information in the medical system. What she didn't realize is that those of us who aren't part of the U of C hospitals don't have access to the data in the medical school, because of federal regulations about patient privacy."

Bridging gaps big and small is a big part of Gehlert's job as the principal investigator and director at CIHDR. Interdisciplinary research is predicated on the idea that by mixing the expertise and insights from a variety of academic research, we can find answers that aren't available through the traditional disciplinary silos. Researchers who go even further, in transdisciplinary research, don't just share results at the end of their studies, they work in concert throughout the process.

"It's a perfect fit for social work, which has always taken a holistic approach and tries to look at all the determinants of a phenomenon at once. Having so many different aspects and variables—that all makes sense to me because of my background in social work," Gehlert says. "And when you're the director, you have to know about working in groups and bridging different points of view, and that's a natural role for a social worker as well."

But Gehlert's contribution to CIHDR is not limited to her role of "keeping everyone focused on the big picture," as she puts it. She's leading her own multidimensional research project of the more than 300 African-American women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer and agreed to participate in the study, requiring dozens of focus group discussions, hundreds of interviews with the women, the creation of a new way to model neighborhood dangers, and ongoing outreach to the neighborhoods being studied (her heart and ribbon pin is a bit of cheer for a Valentine's Day party tomorrow for dozens of the participants).

Mix it all together, and Gehlert is at the vanguard of a project that utilizes all the skills required to conduct social work academic research, from attracting funding to meeting with neighborhood residents, from managing a diverse set of partners and projects to writing up the findings to be published. "We're moving university research off campus and into the community and working together in a really new way," she says. "I'm really excited by it all."

"[At CIHDR], she's dealing with a group of people from very different backgrounds, speaking different languages, and from different cultures, using different methodologies," says Tim Rebbeck, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania and the director of0.5 0 0

McClintock's group found that **socially isolated and hypervigilant** rats develop mammary cancers 40 percent younger, at four times the rate, and have larger and more aggressive tumors.

HEALTH DISPARITIES OCCUR by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Black adults are twice as likely as whites to be diagnosed with diabetes, for example, and mortality rates for black men with prostate cancer have increased over the last 30 years while dropping for whites. The same story holds true for breast cancer. The rates for black women dying from the disease rose from 39.2 per 100,000 to 44.1 in the last three decades. For white women, they fell from 31.8 per 100,000 to 23.8.

Hereditary and behavioral differences account for some of these gaps, but not all. Social circumstances and environmental factors place minority groups at a disadvantage in terms of health and disease, and traditional research methodology is unable to discern why. "You can't look at just the medical or the social factors by themselves and figure this out," Gehlert explains. "To address complex human problems, you have to look at all levels of influence."

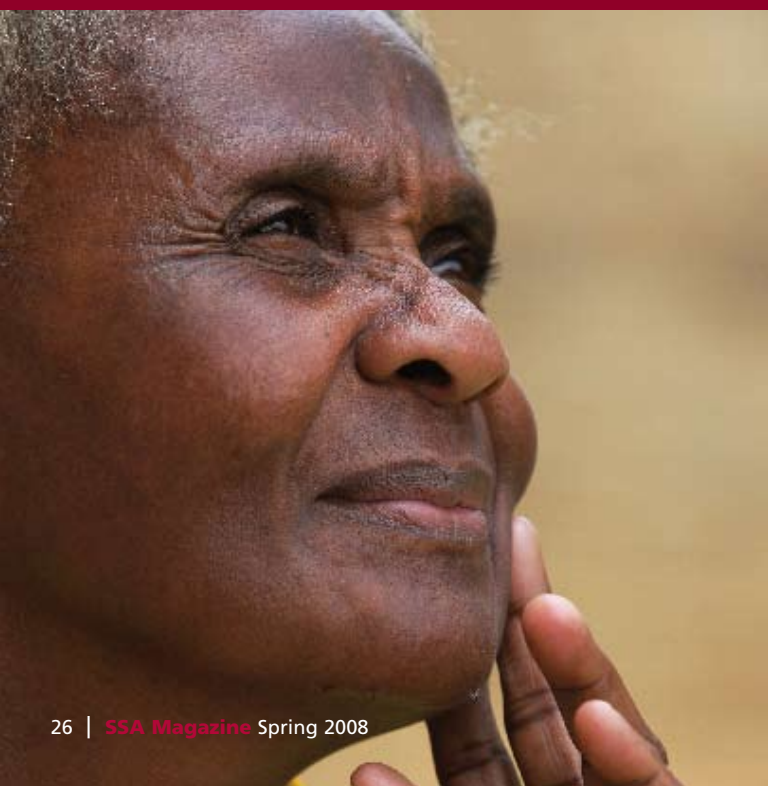
To develop more nuanced studies of issues such as these, the federal National Institutes of Health began an initiative in 2003—the Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities—and put out a call for transdisciplinary research projects. McClintock, Gehlert, and Olopade, joined by Suzanne Conzen, an associate professor of medicine who specializes in molecular biology, were awarded a $9.7 million NIH grant to launch CIHDR, one of eight such centers nationwide.

CIHDR's research model is built from four intertwined projects: McClintock is monitoring the effects of environmental factors on mammary tumors in laboratory rats. Conzen is studying the rate of tumor growth and response to chemotherapy in transgenetic mice. Olopade is looking at the types of tumors found in the sample of black women on the South Side and another in Nigeria. And Gehlert is connecting what is learned about tumorigenesis in the animal models to the lives of the women in the cohort Olopade is studying in Chicago.

"It all really starts with what we learn from the effects of the environmental conditions on the rats," Gehlert says. "We can watch what happens over the course their life cycle and see if we can see the same kind of phenomenon in the neighborhood." The big insight was when McClintock's group found that socially isolated and hypervigilant rats develop mammary cancers 40 percent younger, at four times the rate, and have larger and more aggressive tumors than a control group of rats that lived together. "When Fumni saw that data, she practically fell out of her chair because the age incidence of developing a tumor in our rats matched the age issue of African-American women," McClintock says.

Working in concert, the CIHDR

The theory is based on "downward causation," the concept that determinants at the social and environmental levels can change the way DNA and cells function. We know that from 70 percent to 80 percent of human breast cancers are due to acquired mutations of breast cancer genes, rather than hereditary factors. CIHDR's theory



diagnose the estrogen and measure the hormone receptors."

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EHLERT'S RESEARCH FOR CIHDR started with an advisory group from the community that helped her team develop a series of focus groups to better understand beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about breast cancer among African Americans on Chicago's South Side. "We created a procedure to hold the sessions in the neighborhood, where a dozen or so people could meet and feel comfortable. Nobody would know anyone else in the room, and the questions were open-ended, so we didn't inadvertently get a response because we led the group to an idea," Gehlert says.

More than 500 men and women participated, creating a wealth of data buried within thousands of pages of transcripts. "We're now going through it all and finding themes, such as a general mistrust of the health care system and that other life concerns the women have are seen as more important than thinking about breast cancer," says Rebecca Wintzer, an SSA doctoral student who is combing through the transcripts using qualitative research methodologies, including manual coding and specialized software. "We're finding out that a lot of women are discouraged by breast cancer screenings and mammograms—they're not insured or they're being told that they're not the right age. It gives us ideas about why African-American women may not be receiving appropriate treatment."

With input from the focus groups in mind, Gehlert created one-on-one interview questions and procedures for the women in the study. Starting four to six weeks after Olopade's team has a woman's tumor tissue for analysis, the interviews—all in the women's homes—take more than 18 hours in all, with three two-day sessions spaced six months apart. Each is conducted by one of a dozen interviewers who went through training that included practice interviews and sitting in on a session at least twice before conducting one.

The questions cover everything from experiences at the hospital to how the women feel about where they live. During the first session, the interviewer leaves the woman with salivettes—an oral collection tube that allows researchers to measure the level of stress hormones in the woman's body. By taking a sample three times a day for four days straight, the team can monitor stress over time, and not just rely on the women's own report of how she's feeling.

The same interest in augmenting subjective self-reporting led Gehlert to develop a unique system to map each subject's immediate built environment. By linking data from the Chicago Police Department and other agencies, such as violent crime incidents and health indicators, with information gathered from a walking tourhe

a model of what I thought was happening, then talking in depth with men and women about their thoughts in a structured way. It's really proved to be invaluable," Polite says.

## Johnson New Ford Fellow, Launches Bowman Lecture Series

Associate Professor **Waldo Johnson, Jr.** was named a fellow in the Ford Foundation's Scholars Network on Masculinity and Well-being of African-American Males. His research focuses on male roles and involvement in African-American families, non-resident fathers in fragile families, and the physical and psychosocial health statuses of African-American males. Through the network, scholars in the humanities, professions and the social sciences meet regularly to conduct and exchange collaborative research.

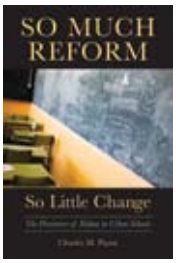
Waldo E. Johnson, Jr.

In January, Johnson presented the first Bowman Lecture of the year at the University of Chicago Medical Center, titled, "African-American Males Engagement with Public and Private Institutions: Physical and Mental Health Implications." The lecture focused on his current research by discussing the problems that black males encounter in the health care system. In addition to serving on the SSA faculty, Johnson is director of the University's Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture.

## Two New Books from Payne

**Charles Payne**, the Frank P. Hixon Professor at SSA, has two new books out this spring. Payne co-edited Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition, an anthology about education as an instrument to help African Americans think more critically and actively about the social forces shaping their lives, from early models such as Citizenship Schools in the South to today's Freedom School curriculum.

So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools discusses education in urban schools and how past failures can lead to improved education in urban districts. Payne is an award-winning author whose interests include urban education and school reform, social inequality, social change, and modern African-American history. The completion of So Much Reform was supported by the Lewis-Sebring Family Foundation, which also helped to bring Payne to SSA, and the book was also supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Joyce Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and an Alphonso Fletcher fellowship.




## Gehlert Named Helen Ross Professor

**Sarah Gehlert** has been named to the Helen Ross Professorship for SSA. A leading authority on the connections between social work and health care, Gehlert is also a professor in the Institute of Mind and Biology, the director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Health Disparities Research, and the associate director of the Institute for Translational Medicine. Gehlert is also the co-editor of the recently published Handbook of Health Social Work, and has published on the interactions of genes and environment, women's health and mental health, psychosocial aspects of epilepsy and other chronic health conditions, team science and transdisciplinary functioning and on issues relating to maternal and child health.

Sarah Gehlert

The Helen Ross Professorship in Social Welfare Policy was established in 1971, and honors longtime SSA friend Helen Ross, who advanced the field of psychoanalytic education through her writing, teaching, consulting, and service to individuals and institutions.

## Guterman Named to Firestone Professorship

**Neil Guterman** has been named to the position of the Mose and Sylvia Firestone Professorship. The director of the Beatrice Cummings Mayer Program in Violence Prevention and a faculty associate for the Chapin Hall Center for Children, Guterman is interested in services targeting children and violence, particularly as they relate to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, as well as children's exposure to violence outside the home. Guterman currently directs two studies examining the effectiveness of strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect, and a third study examining the role of fathers in risk for physical child abuse and neglect. In addition, he is the principal investigator of a study examining adolescents' exposure to violence outside the home.

Neil Guterman

The Mose and Sylvia Firestone Professorship was established in 1995. Mose Firestone is a distinguished graduate of SSA's clinical social work program. He and his wife Sylvia established this professorship to support a School of Social Service Administration faculty member in the field of clinical social work. Guterman is the second SSA faculty member to hold this professorship.

## Choi Named Associate Professor, Joins NASW Committee

**Yoonsun Choi** had been named to the position of associate professor. In her research, she examines the familial and environmental processes that influence the development of ethnic minority children and the development of cultural and age appropriate preventative interventions. She has also been appointed to the National Association of Social Workers Advisory committee for transporting evidence to social work practice. In her role with the NASW, she will be working on evidence-based interventions targeting female youth suicide prevention.

## Roderick Receives Funding for Principal Program

**Melissa Roderick**, SSA's Hermon Dunlap Smith Professor, recently received renewed funding to support the Network for College Success from the Polk Bros. Foundation and the McDougal Family Foundation (see "Beyond the Books" starting on page 16 for more information about the network). Roderick is an expert in urban school reform, high stakes testing, minority adolescent development, and school transitions. She is also the co-director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago and faculty director of the Community Schools program at SSA.

Melissa Roderick

## Parks Named Sage Scholar

Assistant Professor **Virginia Parks** was named a Russell Sage Scholar for the 2008-2009 academic year. Each year, the foundation selects scholars from around the country to work on research or writing projects. Parks, whose fields of special interest include urban geography, urban labor markets, immigration, racial and gender inequality, residential segregation, and community organizing and development, will be in-residence at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City for the academic year. The foundation promotes the conduct and dissemination of social science research.

**Virginia Parks**

## Pollack Publishes on Health Care

A new book co-edited by SSA Associate Professor **Harold Pollack** explores the health consequences that policymakers overlook in traditional cost-benefit evaluations of social policy. Making Americans Healthier: Social and Economic Policy as Health Policy examines six critical policy areas—civil rights, education, income support, employment, welfare, and neighborhood and housing—including the robust relationship between educational attainment and health and an unanticipated improvement in the health of African-American women following the enactment of civil rights legislation in the 1960s.

## Norton Funded for Child Study

**Dolores Norton**, SSA's Samuel Deutsch Professor, has received a grant from the Irving and Joan Harris Foundation to support her research project, Preschool Functions of Language and Early School Achievement. The Harris Foundation is a long-time supporter of Norton's work, and this grant will allow her 20 years of videotaped interviews of high-risk children and their families in Chicago from two days after birth through the teenage years to be coded for communication and nurturing cues. The tapes will then be transferred to digital tech, which will enable them to become a learning tool for counselors, case workers, and others.

**Dolores Norton**

## Henly Speaks on Work and Family

Associate Professor **Julia Henly** was invited to present a colloquium at the University of Alabama School of Social Work on April 21. Her presentation, "The Intersection of Public Policy, Low-Wage Employment, and Social Networks: The Coping Strategies of Low-Income Families," discussed her research in how low-income parents manage employment and childcare responsibilities.

**Julia R. Henly**

## SSA Partners on New Gun Violence Initiative

Chicago Mayor **Richard M. Daley** visited SSA on April 10th to announce a collaboration between the City of Chicago and the University of Chicago to help reduce gun violence among youths, a program to be lead by SSA Professor **Jens Ludwig** and Associate Professor **Harold Pollack**. The pair will head a team of University and national scholars who will work with the City to develop scientifically rigorous interventions to diminish youth crime (for more about gun violence, see "Don't Shoot" on page 4).

Part of the University of Chicago Crime Lab initiative, the program will aim to steer youth away from behaviors like crime and gang involvement and toward productive activities like schooling and work, as well as reduce the likelihood that guns are involved in violent events that do occur. "If this collaborative project is successful, the result would be fewer shootings of Chicago youth as a direct result of our pilot interventions," Ludwig said.

"Developing rigorous evidence about effective strategies will help determine what works and what is not the best use of scarce resources when it comes to reducing youth gun violence," Pollack added.

The team includes **Charles Payne**, SSA's Frank P. Hixon Professor, and other researchers from across the University, as well as other institutions such as Yale University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois, Chicago. "We need the research. We need research and evaluation to have an effective program. Otherwise, we in government are going off on tangents," said Daley at the event.

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**1 : Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley and SSA Dean Jeanne Marsh greet Alderman Willie Cochran as they arrive at SSA for the press conference.**
**2 : Daley explains the cost of gun violence on Chicago communities.**
**3 : SSA Professor Jens Ludwig talks to a reporter after the presentations.**
**4 : Daley and the press.**

4

## SSA Faculty at SSWR Conference

Social workers from around the United States gathered in Washington, D.C., on January 17-20 for the 12th Annual SSWR Conference. SSA faculty members conducted workshops and gave lectures on topics ranging from publishing empirical studies in social work to the influence of neighborhoods on child maltreatment. **Beth Angell**, **Sarah Gehlert**, **Neil Guterman**, **Sydney Hans**, **Julia Henly**, **Waldo E. Johnson, Jr.**, **Susan Lambert**, **Jeanne Marsh**, **Gina M. Samuels**, **Michael Sosin**, and **Michael Woolley** were among the presenters at the more than 500 symposia, workshops, roundtable, paper, and poster presentations featured at the conference.

## Child Welfare Conference

More than 100 people came to Chapin Hall on November 27th for a conference co-sponsored by SSA, "Child Welfare and Child Well-Being: Bridging Research, Policy, and Practice." Back-to-back panels examined two major themes of child protection: interventions for at-risk infants and young children, and evidence-based parenting programs for families in the protective services system. The authors of the book Child Prevention: Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice **Ron Haskins**, **Mary Bruce Webb**, and **Fred Wulczyn** moderated the first discussion, and SSA Professor **Sydney Hans** joined the panel for the second topic.

## SSA Hosts Girls' Science Session

On March 27th, SSA hosted Project Explorations Girls' Health and Science Day in the Mies Building, the eight annual event and the second time that SSA has served as the host site. More than 150 girls from 15 Chicago Public High Schools

## Lost Boys of Sudan Share Experiences

Members of the Lost Boys Rebuilding Southern Sudan shared their experiences as orphaned children growing up in the war-torn Sudan at an event at SSA on January 25th. After overcoming hunger, dehydration, diseases, and attacks by wild animals on their way to becoming refugees in Kakuma, Kenya, the men now are working to build schools

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**1** **Over spring break, Dean Jeanne Marsh visited Hong Kong to meet with Anna Pao Sohmen, EX '70, the chair of the World-Wide Education Group, to discuss growing needs for preparing social work professionals to address China's rapidly transforming society. She also met with colleagues at the University of Hong Kong: Pictured (left to right) Sandra Tsang, the chair of the university's Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Dean Marsh, Amy Chak, Ph.D. '93, and Daniel Wong.**

## UC Community Liaison Webber Retires

**Henry Webber**, the University of Chicago's vice president for community and government affairs, retired in February after 22 years of service to the University. Webber's career at the U of C began in 1986, and as vice president, his duties included building relationships between the University and the community, government relations with federal, state and city officials, and promoting programs that encourage local economic development and that enhance the quality of life in mid-South Side communities. A senior lecturer at SSA, Webber also taught in the Law School and Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies. In addition, Webber has also written widely over the years on issues of health care policy and community development.

Webber sits on the governing board at the University of Chicago Charter School Corporation and on the board of directors for many Chicago institutions, including the Fund for Community Redevelopment and Revitalization, Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corporation, Partners for Livable Communities, the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, and the Metropolitan Planning Council.

## Simmons Retires

After 29 years of service to SSA, **Edwina Simmons** retired from her post as secretary to the School. A party with faculty and staff was held in her honor on December 12, 2007.

## Washington Week

The fifth annual Washington Week, March 24-28, gave 27 SSA students an opportunity to learn about career opportunities in and around Washington D.C. Launched with a reception at the Cosmos Club, hosted by alum **Ruth Knee**, and accompanied by **Virginia Karl**, the week centered around onsite visits at the workplaces of dozens of local alumni, allowing students to learn about the many career options for SSA graduates in the nation's capital and make connections with the city's alumni network.

## The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007

The U.S. Department of Education has created a new call center for borrowers to obtain information about the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, which forgives outstanding education debt for employees that have made 120 monthly payments on their loans while serving full-time in social work in public child or family service agencies, government, non-profit, military, education, and others areas.

The loan forgiveness provisions became effective on October 1, 2007. It is important to note that payments made after October 1, 2007 on an existing loan can count towards the 120 payments if the loan meets certain criteria. For more information call (800) 433-3243 or visit https://ssl.capwiz.com/socialworkers/issues/alert/?alertid=10355231.

**2** **Washington Week Guests of Honor: Virginia Karl, AM '40 (far left, in beige) and Ruth Knee, AM '45 (far left, in blue) with students.**

**3** **Henry Webber (center) enjoys his retirement party.**

## Doctoral Students Receive Awards

SSA doctoral students **JiYoung Kim** and **Jason Bird** have received dissertation awards from the Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation, which provides support for research that contributes to better understanding and research into the problems that affect individuals, families, and communities. SSA has a total of three active Fahs-Beck Dissertation awards. **Luke Shaefer**, was given the Fahs-Beck award in the summer of 2007.

**Clark Peters** was awarded this year's Influencing State Policy Award for his proposal, "Retaining Illinois Foster Youth in Care Beyond Age 18: Legal and Organizational Challenges," which explores why more than half of Illinois foster youth outside of Cook County leave care before they even turn 19, although they can stay until age 21. The award is given to one masters and one doctoral student or team each year that demonstrate a project that influenced or advocated for a state social policy or piece of state legislation.

Last fall, **Matthew J. Thullen** was awarded the inaugural Carol G. Harding, Ph.D. Award from the Illinois Infant Mental Health Association, which provides a stipend to support research on social-emotional development or mental health during the prenatal and/or zero-to-three period. Thullen was honored for his work with the Chicago Doula Project, investigating the best way to characterize patterns of social support over time and the connection to parenting behavior.

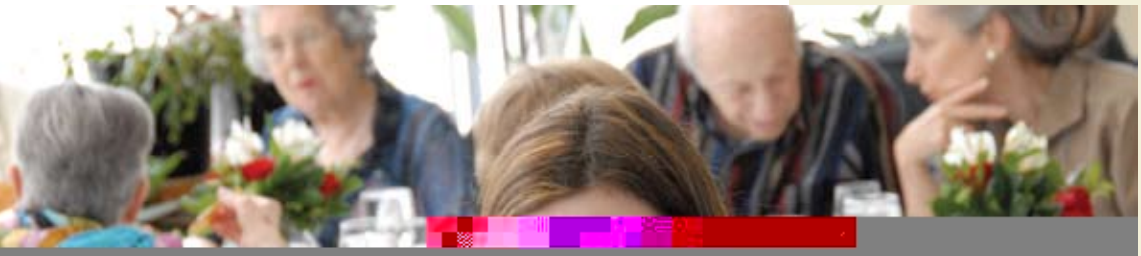
## Mies Building Closed Over the Summer

On June 16th, the Mies Building will close for renovations as its window frames will undergo maintenance and repair. The building is slated to re-open in early September. The administrative offices will remain open but be re-located one-half block south to the Edelstone Center at 6030 S. Ellis Ave. The main number for the SSA will be the same: (773) 702-1250.

If you need access to SSA's library, the main collection of books and journals will be available at the Regenstein, A-level. Alumni can gain library privileges using a day-pass. For questions, please call (773) 702-1199 or e-mail ssad@lib.uchicago.edu.

An art exhibit of the work of **Margot Neuhaus, A.M. '70**, was held at the Meridian Gallery in San Francisco, Calif., from January 24 to March 1, 2008. Neuhaus' interest in sculpture began while working as a psychiatric social worker at the Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, and she attended art school in Rio de Janeiro while she lived there with her husband, Paulo Neuhaus, who holds a doctorate in Economics from the University of Chicago. Her work has also appeared in exhibits in Brazil, the Washington, D.C. area, and Paris.

The Institute for Healthcare Disparities at Nassau University Medical Center has appointed **Carlos Alvarez, A.M. '71**, to the position of executive director. U



# in memoriam

SSA Professor Emerita, **Mary Louise Somers** died January 12, 2008, in Pomona, Calif., where she spent the last 11 years of her life. Somers began her career at SSA in 1958 and taught at the school for 21 years. When she retired in 1979, Somers moved to California, where she studied Spanish and re-connected with her "major first love," English literature. She also kept busy by teaching in Australia and Hong Kong and re-certifying social work schools throughout the United States.

**Rev. Kenneth B. Smith** died on January 21, 2008. A longtime community leader in Chicago's civic and educational institutions, Rev. Smith served as the chair of SSA's Visiting Committee from 1984 to 1998. In 1979, Mayor Jane Byrne appointed him to the Chicago Board of Education, and later he was named the first African-American president of the board. Rev. Smith was chairman of the Chicago Urban League during the late 1970s, and in 1984, he was named the president of Chicago Theological Seminary, a post he held for 14 years. During that time, he recruited talented professionals to fill the school's teaching and administrative ranks and bolstered the financial standing of the institution. Rev. Smith also worked for the Chicago Community Trust for 25 years, and chaired the executive committee of the Trust from 1994 to 1996.

**Alex Elson**, prominent lawyer and labor arbitrator, died Tuesday, March 11 in Chicago at the age of 102. A graduate of the University of Chicago Law School, Elson and his surviving spouse **Miriam Elson, A.M. '43**, are generous donors to SSA's Jacovie Elson Miller Student Endowment Fund and the Alex and Miriam Elson Endowed Scholarship Fund, which support students with an interest in working with children from Chicago's most disadvantaged communities. Miriam is a former SSA faculty member and noted psychiatric social worker.

**Morton J. Adler, A.M. '52**, died at the age of 92 in Jamaica Plain, Mass., on December 5, 2007. Adler had lived in Chicago and Washington, D.C., and was retired from his service to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

**Lillian Greenwald, A.M. '65**, died on September 8, 2007. Greenwald was a social worker who pioneered the practice of sex and marital therapy. Greenwald held a position on the board of the Scholarship and Guidance Association and served as a member of SSA's Visiting Committee. She generously contributed her time to developing Chicago's cultural landscape and was an ardent supporter of Jewish education. Her friends remember Greenwald for her wisdom, sense of humor, humanitarian endeavors, and her enduring love of all things colored purple.

SSA has learned of the death of **Earnest Woodrow Butler Jr., A.M. '76**. Butler received his bachelor's degree at Kent State University before moving to Chicago to attend SSA. He worked at Universal Family Connection on Chicago's South Side as a director/counselor for more than 18 years and in 2005 began his employment at Camelot Community Care of Hazel Crest, Ill., also as a counselor. He is survived by his wife, daughter, two sisters, and a host of other relatives and friends.

SSA has recently learned of the death of **Vincent James Rubino, A.M. '71**. He was in private practice as a psychiatric social worker in Lee's Summit, Mo.

**Yolanda Hernandez, A.M. '01**, died on December 8, 2007. She was a member of the SSA Alumni Association board of directors and the chairperson of the nominating committee. A Chicago native, Hernandez was dedicated to improving the lives of the people she encountered, particularly through her encouragement of higher education for minorities. As a passionate defender of abused children, she was the director of advocacy services for the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center.

# False Perceptions

## The damage done by stereotypes about Asian Americans' model behavior

27.9%

**Vietnamese boys who smoke, according to a study in Massachusetts, a higher percentage than Hispanic or black youth**

Racial stereotypes and prejudices are tenacious in the general public and within academia. Asian Americans, for example, are often seen as the model minority, the group that has "made it in this land of opportunity" and is largely without vice. The reality of the needs, behaviors, and attitudes of Asian Americans is much more nuanced, however, and the blind eye society turns to that truth can impede needed interventions and policy attention, particularly to at-risk Asian youth.

To a large extent, the model minority stereotype is not true, according to my recent studies using the data from nationally representative samples of secondary school students from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (known as Add Health). In several measures, Asian youth did report fewer problem behaviors. They were doing better in school and were less likely to commit aggressive offenses than black and Hispanic youth and less likely to report having sex than black youth. Compared to white youth, Asian youth were less likely to ever smoke, to drink, to consume five or more drinks in a row, and to get drunk.

However, the results also showed that white youth were 17 percent less likely to engage in aggression and 19 percent less in nonaggressive offenses than Asian youth. Black youth were also 29 percent less likely to report nonaggressive offenses and had lower rates of various substance uses than Asian youth. Grade point averages of Asian youth were higher than that of black and Hispanic youth but not significantly different from those of white youth. No differences were found between Hispanic and Asian youth in nonaggressive delinquent offenses, substance use related behaviors, experience of sex, and exposure to sexually transmitted disease.

### Mixed Results

These results are notable in part because empirical data and research findings on Asian Americans and their youth are seriously limited. They've also been inconsistent: Some of the few studies that have been conducted confirm positive and healthy outcomes, while others report serious problems of poor mental health, gang activities, and violence. Others suggest a bimodal distribution, where Asian-American youth have both notable successes such as good grades and problems such as membership in a gang. These inconsistencies might be due to severe methodological limitations in the studies, which have relied on regional, clinic-based, or convenience samples or on a subgroup to represent the entire Asian population.

The data from Add Health, however, failed to show any noteworthy differences in the distributions of behaviors across groups. The results also demonstrated significant Asian subgroup differences, putting to rest any idea that Asian Americans are a monolithic group. Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese American youth reported largely similar outcomes, but Filipino, "other" Asian, and multiethnic Asian-American groups reported other outcomes. It's worth noting that neither of these groups has distinctively better results, just different.

### The Damage From Stereotypes

Stereotypes can have serious consequences. The most obvious is their use as an excuse to discriminate. The model minority stereotype also has been used by the dominant society to justify glossing over the structural barriers and adversities that Asian Americans struggle to overcome.

Stereotypes can also be internalized. A false self-image, even if positive, can be psychologically damaging for children who cannot live up to their own and to society's expectations. It has also falsely led Asian Americans to believe that they have reached socioeconomic parity in society (when they in fact have not), and other groups have reacted to the stereotype with hostility.

The stereotype may also stymie efforts to identify and address the needs of this growing group of Americans. For example, because teachers and school administrators perceive Asian students as problem-free, they are likely to overlook the difficulties encountered by these students. Because Asian Americans are stereotyped as successful and self-reliant, programs and services are lacking for this group. The mental health and social service needs of Asian youth are at least as great as those of their white counterparts, and the needs of Asian American youth increase with the length of their family's residence in the United States.

Numbers, when used properly and accurately, can help debunk racial stereotypes. It is critical that researchers look beyond the stereotype so as not to run the risk of perpetuating false perceptions in research and theory. We need to accrue more accurate estimates about Asian Americans. With better data we can determine social service needs, adequately allocate resources, shed light on disparity across groups, and initiate future studies to investigate why differences between groups are emerging. In the long run, better numbers can be a critical and fundamental component to developing effective interventions to prevent problems.

Yoonsun Choi is an assistant professor at SSA and a faculty associate at the Chapin Hall Center for Children.

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