Defining the Roles and Contributions of Social Workers in the Advancement of Economic Stability and Financial Capability of Vulnerable Populations

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Acknowledgements

University of Maryland, Financial Social Work Initiative
- Steering Committee
- Research Subcommittee

Additional Contributors and Supporters
- Dr. Cathy Born, Dr. Susan Roll, Dr. Shoshanna Ringel, and Carole Alexander, MSW
- The Woodside Foundation
Introduction to Social Work and Financial Capability

Finances are integrally related to child, family and community wellbeing – critical to working with vulnerable populations

Social Work is uniquely situated to address the Person-in-Financial-Environment

- Strengths-based, ecological systems approach
- Integration and interrelation of multiple levels of practice and intervention
- Core values of profession address poverty, commitment to vulnerable populations, and strive for social and economic justice
- Behavior change requires support to be sustained at all levels
Social Work Settings

Social workers are employed in a wide range of public and non-profit organizations, including schools, hospitals, shelters, non-profit organizations, government settings, employee assistance programs (EAPs), mental health & substance abuse programs, programs for older adults, courts, military, and more.

Social workers serve a diverse clientele, focusing on vulnerable and at-risk individuals, families and communities.
Social Work’s Role in Financial Capability

Social Workers:

- Understand the financial barriers faced by communities and their residents
- Reach out to existing financial institutions to engage them around financial education with low-cost, appropriate products
- Participate in local asset building coalitions
- Give a voice to disadvantaged and disenfranchised people
- Identify policy barriers to financial security and advocate for change
Relevant Social Work Education Accreditation Standards

In addition to our Code of Ethics, Schools of Social Work adhere to the Council on Social Work Education, Accreditation Standards that require teaching social workers to strive for:

- Social and economic justice
- The prevention of conditions that limit human rights
- Elimination of poverty
- Enhancement of the quality of life for all persons

Standard 2.18 – social workers must “engage in policy practice to advance social and economic wellbeing and to deliver effective social work services”
Why UMSSW?

- Social work needs to continue to find ways to address poverty through personal social services now that income assistance and services are so separate.

- No-, low- and moderate-income individuals can benefit from financial social work—but all individuals and communities can also benefit.

- UMSSW is committed to responding to emerging needs in ways that are timely and effective—so FSW must be studied as it is developed.
Setting the Stage

Three characteristics about the UMSSW positioned it to play a leadership role:

- UMSSW’s dual *Clinical* and *Management and Community Organizing* (MACO) MSW tracks
- UMSSW’s Social Work Community Outreach Service (SWCOS) links the campus and the community with faculty led field units
- Alumni working in asset building field locally
Creation of the University of Maryland’s Financial Social Work Initiative: A Timeline

- Social workers in the community began to recognize the need for additional financial skills in working with clients and communities (2003/2004)
- Initial conversations about social work’s role in financial capability increased while the financial and economic crisis accelerated
- Demand for clinical and community-based services outpaced the capacity of those with training
- Alumni challenged the School to take a leadership role
- Funders invested in building the UMSSW’s training and community-based program capacity
- The School responded to media attention regarding the financial crisis
UMSSW FSWI Steering Committee

Chair: Jodi M. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Office of the Dean
Office of Continuing Education
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Campus Wellness Hub

UMSSW Board of Advisors
Social Work Community Outreach Services (SWCOS)
MSW students
Maryland CASH
Baltimore CASH
SEEDCO
Woodside Foundation
1) Social Work Education

- Development of 3-credit course for MSW students
- Option for independent research study for MSW students
- Continuing education training for social work practitioners
- Publications for social work educators and practitioners
Education, Continued: What is Involved?

- Financial education, values and attitudes
- Behavioral economics and behavior change
- Access to financial products and resources - time and skill to navigate systems
- Federal, state and local policies that impact financial wellbeing – effective advocacy
2) Social Work Direct Practice

Field Placements

- Social Work
  Community Outreach Service (SWCOS)
    - Maryland Community Fellows
    - Financial Literacy Volunteer Initiative
    - Neighborhood Fellows
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Sub-specialization
- Traditional social work agencies and community programs
  - House of Ruth
  - DC Rape Crisis Center
Social Work Practice, continued

Attending to the needs of the broader campus and surrounding community

- Credit Cafes
- University Wellness Hub
- Money Power Day
- Student Interest Groups:
  - Alliance for Workforce Development and Empowerment
  - LASO (Latin American Solidarity Organization)
3) Social Work Research

Research on IPV/DV and Financial Capability
- Dr. Ringel’s research with the Evangelical and Jewish Orthodox communities
- Dr. Born’s research on family violence prevention programs and welfare receipt in Maryland
- Ms. Deborah Svoboda’s (Ph.D. student) research on economic justice for survivors of intimate partner violence

Additional Research Studies Related to Financial Capability, Workforce Development and Asset Building
- Foster Parent Reimbursement: Establishing Adequate and Reasonable Rates
- Research in Support of Welfare Reform
- Adding ‘Cents’ to Social Work Education

National communication facilitated through University’s online scholar network and listserv
4) Social Work Policy

- Advocate at the local, state and national levels for legislation supporting programs and policies to support vulnerable populations
  - Job applicant credit checks
  - Employer notification about Earned Income Tax Credit
  - Prevention of landlord discrimination
  - Disclosure of criminal convictions on employment applications
  - Enhancement of benefits to provide rental assistance, healthcare and energy assistance

- Attendance at the Financial Literacy Education Commission and President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability
Next Steps and Recommendations

- Infuse financial capability concepts into social work education and field placements.
- Conduct research to identify evidence-based programs and social work interventions targeted to vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to IPV.
- As a profession, underscore the relevance of financial capability when providing assistance and support to vulnerable populations and communities.
Thank you

For additional information, please contact Dr. Jodi Jacobson at jjacobson@ssw.umaryland.edu or visit the University’s FSWI website: http://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/fsw/