



# TUMULTUOUS TIMES: RACIAL INJUSTICE & COVID-19

## Fighting Racial Injustice

### A Movement For Social Change

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Like you, the School of Social Work is reeling in the wake of the brutal killing of George Floyd. This is the latest in a long line of deaths that reflect the racism embedded in our nation. Our students, alumni and community have taken to the streets to protest, organize and educate. Social workers are calling for change based on our code of ethics. We have a professional and moral obligation to address and end racism. The stories below show our social work community leading during these challenging times.



### **DILLON CATHRO, MSW '19**

Director of Youth Organizing, 482Forward, Detroit

"I work as a community organizer with adolescents, and these last few weeks have been hard for them. We have a deadly virus killing Black and Brown and Native people, and cops are still profiling us and taking our lives. These kids could be the next George Floyd, or, if you want to talk age proximity, Tamir Rice or Trayvon Martin. Where I work, staff and young people are advocating for total divestment from our current system of policing. If we maintain police we are depending on people who are murdering us. Social workers and social work educators need to think how we are contributing to systemic violence and oppression. We need to change the social work curriculum, but we also have to do the work within ourselves. Without that, we'll see the same divisions in the academy that we see outside it."



### **MEGAN DIEBBOLL, MSW '19**

Bail Disruptor, The Bail Project, Detroit

"I currently work in Detroit as a bail disrupter for The Bail Project. We combat mass incarceration by disrupting the cash bail system one person at a time. I interview, advocate for and develop community release models for clients before posting bail. Since the death of George Floyd, there has been an increased awareness of our organization and the injustices people of color face in the criminal justice system. I am amazed by the community as they have come together on such a large scale to stand up and demand justice. However, I hope that this is a movement that is sustainable and will continue fighting every day for justice. I and my colleagues will not stop until meaningful change is achieved and the presumption of innocence is no longer for sale."



### **JORDAN WALKER, MSW STUDENT**

"I've been harassed. At 18, I was pulled over by cops who said my car was too loud, and for the first time I saw what was happening. Now, my understanding of systems and policies has grown, and I know it does not have to be this way. Social workers have tools to take these frustrations our communities feel and turn them into action and educate one another. So it is my duty to protest, to cover what is going on. I have a political blog, and I use it to translate things, including the protests. The networks might only show the tear gas and someone throwing rocks, not the hours of peaceful protest before. As social workers we have to be better storytellers. And what comes after the protests? We need policy recommendations, like defunding police or prison abolition. I also helped create the #EnoughisEnough online candlelight vigil for the people we lost to police violence. They are people's fathers and brothers and so on, and they are never coming back."



**ROGÉRIO M. PINTO**, Professor and Associate Dean for Research

In light of COVID-19 and ongoing protests in the wake of George Floyd's death, Pinto spoke about both the timing and the power of this moment of unrest. "Historically, white supremacy in the United States has been executed and reinforced by violent means, police brutality being one of them. This time around, the deliberate, slow, cold-blooded assassination of a Black man by white Police Officer Derek Chauvin was performed in broad daylight for all to see. The political context of COVID-19 has shed a brighter light on health inequities and a second pandemic of police brutality against the communities most affected by COVID-19."

Pinto told MLive, "Protests can be a powerful strategy to enact change, and already the movement has scored some results. That includes having criminal charges filed against all four Minneapolis police officers involved in Floyd's death and an upgrading of charges from third- to second-degree homicide for the officer who knelt on Floyd's neck. The simple fact they've been charged already is a phenomenal result."

[View the MLive Article Here](#)

# COVID-19

## Social Workers are Everywhere — Especially During a Pandemic

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Alumni are working on the front lines in hospitals and agencies, and working online, devising new means and methods to care for their clients. Students are adapting their field placements from home to the online world. Faculty have learned and embraced alternate methods to continue their teaching and research.

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## On the Front Lines



**AMY GOOD, MSW '80**  
CEO Alternative For Girls, Detroit

"As long as there are girls and women to assist, Alternatives For Girls intends to be there to support them one way or another. Our crisis resource center and shelter remain open throughout the coronavirus pandemic, and staff are following CDC guidelines to serve in the safest possible ways. The nonprofit also manages a crisis line and walk-in center. Anyone in crisis may call (888) AFG-3919 any time. "

[Learn More on YouTube](#)



**RAE MITCHELL, MSW '19**  
Social Worker, Care Management Department,  
Michigan Medicine, Ann Arbor

Since visitors aren't allowed in the U-M hospitals right now, Mitchell serves as an advocate for both patients and families, and reaches out to patients' families to update them about their loved ones. "Our program at the School of Social Work taught us how to adapt and that we have an obligation to be there for people," says Mitchell. "Despite the circumstances, I show up, because social workers still have work to do."



**CHARLES WILLIAMS II, MSW '20**  
Joint PhD in Social Work and Sociology student in Fall '20  
Pastor, Historic King Solomon Church, Detroit

"Initially, I was unfazed," remembers Williams. "I figured I'd BlueJeans my way through a couple of weeks of classes, and everything would be back to normal. However, the COVID-19 pandemic became real. The numbers grew daily, and it became increasingly clear that, due to health disparities, immobility and poverty, Detroit would face a severe problem."

His church worked with the community and with U-M social work students and faculty to build a volunteer infrastructure and set up a hotline for those in need. In three days, they received 800 calls. In two weeks, they delivered over 500 care packages. Today, they provide meals and make mental health calls to senior citizens and, together with World Central Kitchen, distribute 50,000 meals a week.

"Social workers are movers, workers and actors on the stage of the fight against poverty, inequality, racism and disparity," says Williams. "Social problems move us into action. Like many of my colleagues, I reached deep into my inner calling fueled with a mixture of faith, duty and love."



# Reaching Out to Provide Social Work Services Online



**CHRISTOPHER SANJURJO MONTALVO**, MSW Student

Field Placement: CHASS, Detroit

Montalvo now sees clients, many of whom have substance use issues, via telehealth. Many clients are no longer going to jobs, so Montalvo discusses how to be active at home and not turn to substances. "I am engaging in other social work roles," he says, "I am a broker, connecting clients to resources; an educator, discussing COVID-19 safety measures with clients; and an advocate, if clients aren't getting resources they need."

**STEVEN WARE**, MSW '16

Substance Use Disorder Supervisor,  
Central City Integrated Health, Detroit

Ware supervises a team of five Certified Advanced Alcohol and Drug counselors, and his agency has three SSW students. He and his colleagues are now seeing people via telemedicine. "People are alone at home and afraid," Ware says. "They see how therapy can play a bigger role in recovery from substances." Integrated Health is a COVID-19 testing site in Detroit and is developing the ability to test people in homeless shelters and low-income housing developments.

## Embracing Technology to Support Learning



**RYAN BANKSTON**, IT Associate Director

On March 16, our entire university went online. At the School of Social Work, Bankston and his team worked around the clock to train faculty, staff and students on teleconferencing platforms. They ensured every single faculty and staff member could interact with their students, clients and colleagues online. Social work classes — usually interactive, with small-group work — can be challenging online, and the IT team guided this transformation. "It's a great testament to our faculty, staff and students that the switchover went as well as it did," says Bankston.



### **AYESHA GHAZI EDWIN**

Lecturer and ENGAGE Program Coordinator, the School of Social Work Community Engagement Program



### **DANIEL FISCHER**

Assistant Dean of Field Education



### **TRINA SHANKS**

Professor and Director of ENGAGE, the School of Social Work Community Engagement Program

Michigan's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order created particular challenges for MSW student field placements. Some organizations and agencies have suspended operations or programs; in other cases, students found themselves unable to attend their placement. In the face of these hurdles, the Office of Field Education worked together with the School's Community Engagement Team to rethink field education and community engagement in this time when stringent limitations have changed the way social workers can interact with the community.

"U-M students are creating telehealth therapy practices and putting together resource directories for communities. They become teachers at times like this. It's not about your major, method or concentration; it is about the skills, tools and knowledge," says ENGAGE Program Coordinator Ayesha Ghazi Edwin. "This is what real professional social work is."



### **ELIZABETH GONZÁLEZ**

Lecturer



### **ALIA WESALA**

Assistant Director of Continuing and Professional Education

González and Wesala recognized the need for social workers to deliver online teletherapy and telehealth services during the pandemic. González went to work and within days had created an online CE course — "Teletherapy: Start It Up!" — which attracted more than 1,200 registrants within 24 hours. "Many social workers have been forced to work with clients online or by phone for the first time, and they were not prepared for it. It is stressful to suddenly have to figure out how to serve clients remotely," said Wesala. "There are many ethical considerations to understand and navigate around system security, privacy, informed consent and HIPAA compliance."

[Learn More](#)



**BARB HILTZ**, Clinical Assistant Professor and MSW Program Director

Providing students with a comprehensive and excellent education in the face of these challenges requires creativity, innovation and thoroughness. Hiltz is leading the School's planning efforts for the fall term. Given the unknown effects of the pandemic, she is developing strategies for a number of possible scenarios, including an unconventional residential schedule that would allow for another shutdown in the case of a second outbreak, and social distancing considerations which limit class size and building density.

In addition, she is introducing a "hybrid/flipped" class model which can be implemented in person or online regardless of whether students return to campus in the fall. Hybrid classes combine in-person, asynchronous and online learning methods. In flipped classes, lectures, reading and research are done individually, so time together can focus on discussion and application of the new ideas.

## Social Work Research Offers Support and Solutions



**TERRI FRIEDLINE**, Associate Professor

The recent COVID-19 stimulus package includes \$1,200 cash stimulus payments to individual Americans. Some citizens, however, may have trouble accessing their money because they do not have bank accounts. Friedline's research proposes universal bank accounts through both existing banks and through financial or public institutions like postal banking. "In the absence of a universal account structure, those without bank accounts might have to wait up to four months for their payments. This delay is going to disproportionately affect people who are already marginalized or burdened to begin with, and who especially need relief now, including Black and Brown, lower-income white and female-headed households," says Friedline.

[Learn More](#)



**SHAWNA LEE**

Associate Professor



**KAITLIN WARD**

PhD Student

Lee and Ward co-authored a report examining how parents have responded to their children during the coronavirus pandemic. Their research shows an increase in shouting, yelling or screaming at children during the first two weeks that schools and businesses were closed. In addition, during that same time-frame, one in six parents spanked or slapped their child. "For a large number of parents, financial concerns, other worries, social isolation, loneliness and sadness are getting in the way of parenting," said Lee. Their work has been cited in numerous news stories, feature articles, radio programs and podcasts, shedding light on the immediate impact of the pandemic on family life.



**JULIE RIBAUDO**

Clinical Associate Professor



**PAIGE SAFYER**

PhD '19, Assistant Professor of  
Social Work at Arizona State  
University



**SARA STEIN**

PhD Student

Ribaudo, Safyer, Stein and the team from Zero to Thrive created a trauma-informed storybook to help children understand COVID-19. In the absence of concrete explanations, young children often imagine the worst and blame themselves for the changes they are experiencing. "Georgie and the Giant Germ" supports caregivers in holding difficult conversations and gives children a way to express and manage their worries.

[Download "Georgie and the Giant Germ"](#)

"Young children aren't always able to tell us directly that they are worried, confused or sad. Their big feelings often come out in tantrums, acting out, extra clinginess and/or sleep problems," says Ribaudo. "We have heard from parents that the story has helped them understand and better respond to their children's feelings and thoughts about the pandemic and the changes the children are experiencing. Parents have also told us that the story helps them feel less alone, and that their children are relieved after reading it. One mom reported that her 7-year-old daughter said, 'It makes me feel like everything is going to be okay.'"





**ROGÉRIO M. PINTO**

Professor and Associate  
Dean of Research



**SUNGGEUN (ETHAN) PARK**

Assistant Professor

Pinto and Park published new findings, which assess how the COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting HIV care and prevention including testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and primary care visits. Their new research lays out a plan of action to move through the pandemic, as well as the end of the HIV epidemic, in this decade.

"COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of practitioners who provide lifesaving services to underserved racial/ethnic and sexual minorities across the country and the globe. Consequently, service provision has been uneven and not always coordinated," notes Pinto. "This paper offers a research agenda that will help us think about and develop strategies to improve future responses to service disruption due to a second wave of COVID-19 or other future pandemics."

[Read More](#)

## Thank you for supporting the Student Emergency Fund

During the pandemic this fund has been a lifeline for students. Your generosity has helped our students cope with transportation, housing and other basic needs related to the closing of our building, the U-M campus and many student field placement sites. Your gift will make a difference to students working toward degrees in social work in these challenging times. Our world needs them now more than ever!

[Learn More About Making a Gift to the Student Emergency Fund](#)

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