



**CELEBRATING  
SOCIAL WORK**

*Continued from cover.*


In addition to our traditional media outreach tools, this year we are adding some exciting new tools to the Social

Work Month promotions. We are building a Web-based application that will give people more information about the profession of social work. This application, called "50 Ways to Use Your Social Work Degree," will draw people into the minds and hearts of dedicated social workers. We will also be working with programs and schools of social work to encourage people to become social work students. To find out more about these new tools, please see page 28 in this toolkit.

#### GOALS OF SOCIAL WORK MONTH 2009

NASW, with the help of chapters and sister social work organizations, hopes to recruit more social workers to the profession, expand the public perception of the breadth and depth of social work, reach out to the media to promote the importance of social work services and social work professionals to society, and promote a theme that builds pride among social workers.

If you have any questions about Social Work Month 2009, please contact **Emily Norton**, Communications Coordinator at 312.212.3717 x125.

Here is the link to the Social Work Month 2009 Toolkit: <http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/swMonth> 

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The Social Work Month 2009 logo conveys the infinite possibilities and connections that social workers make in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

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**KARI SMITH, MSW, PRESIDENT-ELECT FOR THE ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS**



## Recruitment and Retention of African Americans to the

*The following are three perspectives given by African American Social Workers in relation to African American History Month and Social Work Month.*

**R**ecruitment of African Americans into the social work profession begins when a student is in high school (Berger, 1989). Prior to students determining the college they want to attend, it is important to give them information regarding various fields, including the field of social work.

Many students decide to attend community colleges due to the financial and schedule accessibility many community colleges offer. Schools of social work are honing into this and offering more night, evening, and weekend classes for students. This type of schedule is imperative for busy students who have other obligations including work and family. Offering courses which are physically accessible to students is imperative, too. Satellite offices should be placed in African American communities or at least be accessible to African American communities (e.g. less than a 25 mile drive and close to reliable public transportation).

Social work departments on college and university campuses need to have strong alliances to African American communities, including schools, local organizations, and community leaders who can serve to (gently) push potential professionals into the field. Departments need to host workshops, lecture series, and provide information on their programs to current and potential students, particularly African American students, so that they may become familiar with what the school offers and opportunities for a social work education (Berger, 1989).

Let's face it; there are professionals who are considered to be social workers, either by job title

or function, who do not hold a social work degree. Let's formally bring them into the fold by encouraging them to pursue a social work degree, and subsequently licensure. In many states, social workers are recognized only if they have a license. No matter where you stand on this issue, it is clear that as social workers, we have certain skills and training that make us social workers.

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As an African American social worker, I would like to see the profession change the focus on "fixing" people to focusing on "fixing" the systems that keep people in the dire situations that they are in.

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Once we have recruited African Americans to the profession, we need to retain them. Retention of African Americans in the field of social work is achieved through mentoring and support. Mentors serve career and psychological functions (Simon, Perry, Roff, 2008). According to Kram (1988, as cited in Simon, et al., 2008), the



# Social Work Profession

psychosocial aspect of mentoring involves social support and building a person's career self-image. The career function of mentoring involves co-authorship of scholarly articles and research, assisting the mentee in successfully maneuvering within the organization, and assisting the mentee in professional goals and priorities (Simon, et al., 2008).

As reported by respondents in a study by Simon, Perry, and Roff (2008), mentors assisted both doctoral students and faculty members with career activities, but less than half stated their mentors introduced them to people who could advance their

careers or exposed them to important professional experiences. Mentors did not assist them in obtaining a balance between career and family demands as a graduate student, and only one commented that she received this type of assistance as a professional. No gender difference was noted between the numbers of career behaviors demonstrated by male or female mentors at the doctoral level (Simon, et al., 2008). In regards to the psychosocial aspects of mentoring, female mentors were found to engage in more of these behaviors than male mentors at the doctoral level.

Technically, it does not matter if the mentor and mentee are of different ethnic backgrounds or gender. Understandably, some mentees and mentors

may prefer a counterpart of the same ethnic background or gender; however, no evidence was found to support the assertion that an African American female must have an African American female mentor in order to be successful in the profession (Simon, et al., 2008). What was noted, however, was that complementary styles of engaging in discussions of race and confronting racial barriers tended to result in more successful mentor-mentee relationships (Simon, et al., 2008).

Continuing professional development is another important aspect of the recruitment and retention of African

Americans in the profession of social work. As social workers, we must continually grow and develop. We need to be aware of our limitations as well. Agencies that encourage continuing professional development through offering workshops, offering support groups, and encouraging professionals' membership in organizations such as the National Association of Black Social Workers, support and validate their employees by treating them as professionals.

It must be noted, however, that the recruitment and retention of African American social work professionals is everyone's concern. It is not just the concern of management, direct service professionals, or African American social workers themselves. Our clients benefit from receiving services from a diverse group of professionals, just as we, the professionals benefit from working with a diverse client base. Let us recommit ourselves to recruiting not just African American social workers, but social workers from other underrepresented backgrounds. We cannot just recruit them, but we must support, mentor, and offer them professional development opportunities as well. 🌍

## ABBREVIATED REFERENCE LIST

Berger, R. (1989). Promoting minority access to the profession. *Social Work*, July 1989, 346-349.  
Simon, C. E., Perry, A. R., & Roff, L. L. (2008). Special Section: The status of women in social work education. Psychosocial and career mentoring: Female African American social work education administrators' experiences. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 44(1), 9-22.



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