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COMMUNITY NEWS

U of M Grant Helps Increase Amount of Social Workers in Mid-South

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U of M Master of Social Work students

Three University of Memphis professors have been awarded a six-figure grant to establish an initiative for training social work students on violence prevention, behavioral health, and primary care.

Associate professor Dr. Susan Neely-Barnes and assistant professors Dr. Elena Delavega and Dr. Susan Elswick, all part of the U of M's department of Social Work, collectively received an "Administration Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training for Professionals" grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The award is \$473,892 during the first year, with a possible \$1.4 million over a three-year period.

The grant will be used to establish the "Mid-South Social Work Professional Development" initiative. Through the plan, 102 advanced Master of Social Work (MSW) students will be trained over a three- to four-year period on six areas of social work: violence prevention; integration of behavioral health and primary care; working with transition-age youth; inter-professional education; engagement with families; and cultural and linguistic competency.

"The grant provides us with things like speaker fees and travel funds, so we would like to bring some national experts into this area to talk to the students," Neely-Barnes said. "We're also hoping to link [the grant] to continuing education for social workers and other mental health professionals in the area and other related professionals. We [want to] bring in some people who have national modules around some of these important topics, and also bring more evidence-based practices to the area. We hope that we can raise the caliber of the services that are provided in this region."

The Mid-South has been identified as a region boasting a shortage of mental health professionals. This is a contributing factor to HRSA's decision to fund the U of M initiative.

For example, the Shelby County region's Department of Children's Services (DCS) is the largest public child welfare office in Tennessee with 286 case managers. However, DCS records indicate that only one of the nearly 300 case managers holds a MSW degree.

Considering that statistic, the Mid-South Social Work Professional Development Initiative will help increase the amount of master's level trained social workers who are able to provide child welfare, as well as mental health work, school social work, and violence prevention in Memphis.



"It's a critical need in this region for more trained mental health professionals, and by giving this grant to the University of Memphis, the hope is a lot of these folks will stay here and continue to work with transition-age youth and others who have a critical need for services," Neely-Barnes said.

Students who are interested in accessing the initiative must be advanced year MSW students. They can click [here](#) and apply to the MSW program.

Selected program participants will receive a \$10,000 stipend. And they will be given experiential training while providing direct services to children, adolescents, or transition-age adults (16 to 25 year olds).

Fourteen community agencies are collaborating with the U of M's Social Work department for the initiative. Amid them are the Church Health Center, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, Shelby County Schools, Youth Villages, and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

The Mid-South Social Work Professional Development program is part of the "Now Is the Time" initiative. President Barack Obama launched the initiative in 2013 after several events of gun violence in the nation, including the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting that left 12 dead and 58 wounded, and the Sandy Hook Elementary mass shooting, which claimed the lives of 20 first grade students and six staff members.

The "Now is the Time" initiative's goal is to reduce gun violence by encouraging executive and legislative action that would abate the chances of illegal firearm ownership, ban assault weapons, limit ammunition magazines to 10 rounds, and increase school safety and access to mental health services for youth and young adults.

The U of M's Social Work department is holding an open house about MSW admissions Saturday, October 18th from 10:30 a.m. to noon. Prospective students can sign up to attend the event [here](#).

Tags: University of Memphis Department of Social Work, "Administration Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training for Professionals" grant, Health Resources and Services Administration, Memphis Flyer, Louis Goggans, News Blog, Image



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