

MOSAICS



Advancing the dignity and worth of humankind since 1934



8

Social work in the Black community

12

Showing up for the City of Good Neighbors

14

Alumni through the generations



Dear Alumni and Friends,

As the School of Social Work's 90th anniversary year continues, I'm reflecting on the collaborative effort it took to establish and grow our school into the world-class institution it is today. Beginning with humble roots in 1934, our school community has been united by our goal as social workers to advance the dignity and worth of humankind. Indeed, working together is the only way that we can effectively achieve our mission of education, research and service.

It is also through unity that we will boldly chart the future of the UB School of Social Work. This year, U.S. News & World Report once again ranked UB among the top 25 schools of social work in the nation, but we are certainly not resting on our laurels.

We have begun implementing a new five-year strategic plan that builds upon our many strengths and incorporates perspectives from stakeholders across the school. At the core of this plan — and our school's mission — is a commitment to elevating trauma-informed care and human rights and to promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in a society where such assurance is needed more than ever. We know that to be trauma-informed one must also be racially informed. We seek to understand the immensity of racial trauma and we remain committed in our quest for social and racial justice.



The five pillars that will guide our progress over the next five years are:

1. Accelerate social work research and scholarly eminence for a trauma-informed, equitable future
2. Create a dynamic learning environment that prepares leaders, practitioners and scholars to solve diverse 21st century challenges
3. Increase the diversity and success of our faculty, staff, administration and students to reflect the communities we serve
4. Foster a culture of community, belonging, inclusion and accessibility
5. Deepen our engagement with communities to foster mutually beneficial relationships

I invite you to read more at socialwork.buffalo.edu/strategic-plan. Achieving such lofty goals will require engagement from every member of our school community, so I hope you will join us in building upon our 90-year legacy through this vision. As we uphold our longstanding connectivity, we will keep striving to make a positive difference. This favorite refrain is one that I wholeheartedly espouse.

Thank you for your continued advocacy and partnership. As alumni, you carry UB with you wherever you go, and I look forward to the meaningful work we will do together in the months and years ahead.

In camaraderie and solidarity,

Keith A. Alford, PhD, ACSW
Dean and Professor

MOSAICS

The magazine for alumni and friends of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work

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QUOTABLE

“The School of Social Work’s 90th anniversary of excellence celebrates the school and our alumni, who are compassionate, purpose-driven people, dedicated to helping improve society. I am proud to be part of the School of Social Work.”

— Rita M. Andolina, MSW '88, Alumni Advisor

For more alumni reflections in honor of our 90th anniversary, visit socialwork.buffalo.edu/90th-reflections.



MEET THE TEAM

6 Things to Know About Kathryn Franco, MPH/MSW '18



Since graduating, **Kathryn Franco** has stayed involved in the School of Social Work by serving as a field educator and an adjunct professor, and now she’s back full time as our new director of alumni engagement and community relations. She spends her days representing the school in the community and engaging with our alumni, so feel free to reach out and say hi at kfranco@buffalo.edu or **716-645-1262**.

1. Franco’s career has ranged from working in HIV/AIDS to holding banks accountable for redlining at a nonprofit law firm to running for Buffalo Common Council with the local Working Families Party’s endorsement.
2. She was recognized by the John R. Oishei Foundation as part of the 2019 inaugural cohort of the Oishei Fellowship for Leaders of Color.
3. Franco is a lifelong learner and has been taking American Sign Language classes for several years. She’s already used this skill in her UB position at Buffalo’s Juneteenth Celebration. She plans to start Spanish lessons in 2025.
4. In 2020, during the height of the protests over the murder of George Floyd, she was one of many social workers to show up and support Daniel’s Law, which would remove police as the default first responders for mental health crisis calls made to 911.
5. During her time working in the world of HIV/AIDS, Franco became a Peace Corps volunteer in Uganda. Here she hosted the inaugural World AIDS Day 5k race, bringing awareness and testing to residents of Mbarara in the southern part of the country.
6. An avid traveler, Franco seeks out street art and a good thrift store at every destination. She’s finishing her goal of taking a picture with every continental state sign and currently has 35 of the 48 signs.



HIGHLIGHTS



InSocialWork

Listen now at [inSocialWork.org](https://www.insocialwork.org)

ON THE PODCAST

The DEIA Landscape

“We can certainly talk about having folks at the table, but once they’re at the table, are we making sure that their voices are heard? Are we making sure that we hear where they’re coming from?”

— **Keith A. Alford**, dean of the UB School of Social Work, during a conversation on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) and the way forward for leaders and social workers during tumultuous times.

GOOD NEWS

Weaver honored for research impact

Professor Emeritus **Hilary N. Weaver** has been named one of the 100 most influential contributors to social work research worldwide, according to the journal *Research on Social Work Practice*. The accolade recognizes Weaver’s academic career, which has been marked by groundbreaking research and dedicated advocacy for marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous Peoples and refugees.

Weaver published 67 papers between 1992–2023, with more than 800 citations in other scholarly works. Before retiring in 2022, she spent 28 years at the UB School of Social Work and held roles as professor, associate dean for academic affairs, co-director of the Immigrant and Refugee Research Institute and associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Weaver now serves as board chair for the Council on Social Work Education and the inaugural global Indigenous commissioner for the International Federation of Social Workers.



Hilary N. Weaver

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

How exposure to gun violence affects the health of Black Americans

Exposure to firearm violence, including vicarious exposure, has a powerful and cumulative effect on the functional health of Black Americans, especially women, according to research co-authored by Associate Professor **Christopher St. Vil**.

“It’s a public health crisis that’s not limited to homicides,” he says.

The study’s nationally representative sample of 3,015 Black adults showed that 40% personally knew a shooting victim, while nearly 60% had been exposed to gun violence in some way. Functional health measures covered four areas: concentration, difficulty with stairs, difficulty dressing or bathing, and difficulty with daily tasks.

“Men and women were both just as likely to know a victim or hear about a shooting, but for men, it was more likely a result of community exposure. In the case of women, it was more likely a result of intimate partner violence,” says St. Vil. “Women’s functional health was also negatively affected across all four measures, suggesting total disability.”

The findings, published in the *Journal of Urban Health*, show gun violence is a multifaceted issue that demands broader strategies to address the needs of those being disproportionately affected.



Christopher St. Vil

WHAT’S NEW

SUNY funding boosts UB mental health services

Amani Mathis, MSW '18, joined the School of Social Work this fall as our new “embedded” counselor, as part of \$1 million in new state funding for mental health support at UB.

The funding supported the hiring of seven counselors who will be embedded in various academic units, bringing the total number of counselors on campus to 31.

“The biggest thing is accessibility. It’s just more convenient if you don’t have to add travel time to get to and from your appointment,” says Sharon Mitchell, UB’s senior director of student wellness and director of Counseling Services. “Also, it reduces stigma because it normalizes seeking help.”



Amani Mathis



Ripple effects

From left: Jacqueline Hall,
Dixie Farr and Patrick
Rosenberger.

How an MSW student and his field agency are carving a new path for hands-on training BY CATHERINE DONNELLY



Patrick Rosenberger, MSW '25, completed the first social work field placement at the Buffalo Employment and Training Center (BETC) since the site refreshed its internship program under new leadership.

BETC is a comprehensive career center funded by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and managed by Workforce Buffalo. Dixie Farr, MSW '14, joined as deputy director in 2022 and was soon followed by the addition of Jacqueline Hall, DSW '24, MSW '05, as executive director. Farr and Hall worked together to develop a field experience that offers a structured and supportive learning environment for students.

"When I was contemplating my active-duty time in the military, I realized that the highlights of my career involved helping people," says Rosenberger. "I started job searching at the tail end of my most recent National Guard mobilization and discovered that there were several open social worker positions at the Buffalo VA. Social work appeared to offer a chance to not only help people in general, but especially my fellow veterans."

Rosenberger's timing was serendipitous. When he started classes at UB, the BETC had finally relaunched its internship program, and he was matched with the organization.

As part of his field experience, Rosenberger helped to expand BETC's services for individuals seeking to enter the workforce or advance in their career.

"The BETC specializes in providing innovative experiences, like virtual reality career exploration, ongoing employer engagement opportunities and access to grants," says Farr. "We are challenging the way workforce development has been done locally, with a goal to prepare the future workforce by building out programming that focuses on youth, justice-impacted individuals and veterans. Patrick has been especially helpful with his firsthand knowledge of serving in the military."

Farr specifically

encouraged Rosenberger

to focus on self-care activities with BETC staff.

Since the center is the linchpin between employers and job seekers, she says the team must maintain high energy to be the resource the region needs.

"When I was a student, my field experiences were more focused on clinical social work, and I graduated without a clear sense of the kind of social worker I would become. I didn't know workforce development was a lane, I didn't know that my strengths were in macro-level work and advocacy, and I didn't understand the importance of self-care," continues Farr. "I am dedicated to making sure the next generation of social work students are prepared for the real work world."

Hall agrees that a meaningful field experience for her students is a priority. Originally drawn to social work due to her passion for community involvement and belief in the power of systemic change, she continues to promote the importance of lifelong learning by completing her Doctor of Social Work degree at UB.

"I recognized that obtaining my DSW would not only deepen my understanding of the complexities within the field, but also equip me with the advanced knowledge and skills needed to drive innovation, lead initiatives and advocate for systemic change," says Hall. "Social workers are uniquely positioned to address systemic challenges by advocating for policy changes that promote equity, justice and inclusivity."

The BETC enrolls over 130 clients and supports over 500 visits each month. The team is dedicated to helping unique groups manage their own challenges.



A better view from Black perspectives

Novel class dives deep into essential topics

BY DEVON DAMS-O'CONNOR

A new elective, called Social Work in the Black Community, provides students with an understanding of the social challenges facing the Black community and strategies to help overcome these challenges.

The course is taught by Noelle M. St. Vil and Christopher St. Vil, associate professors in the School of Social Work and a husband-and-wife pair who have co-authored work on Black trauma but had never co-taught a class before. That changed when colleagues approached the St. Vils about developing a course that focused on Black perspectives, something that needed more representation in the school's curriculum.

"The school is moving toward racial justice as a core component of what we want to address strategically," explains Noelle. "Those conversations are what led to the development of this course and recognizing the need for it."

The St. Vils, who say they benefited from being taught a Black perspective framework at the historically Black Howard University School of Social Work, wanted the same experience for their students. They developed novel content and intentionally chose — in collaboration with Associate Professor Kelly Patterson — to hold the class at Belmont Housing Resources for WNY on Buffalo's East Side to add context to the syllabus.

“Many of our students have never been on the East Side,” says Chris. “These are communities that are experiencing violence and poverty — the communities we talk about in class.”

Another distinctive facet of the inaugural class was its size. With only five students representing different backgrounds, intimate discussions invited them to ask honest questions, challenge assumptions, share life experiences and learn from one another. Dialogue was often so intense it ran well over the class’s three-hour time slot.

The topics covered were deep. Central was the role of public policy and the legal system in marginalizing and disadvantaging people of color over time, contributing to persistent gaps in access to wealth, education, health care, food and housing. Readings and discussions also delved into mental health, substance use, family and relationships, immigration and child welfare.

“We really focused on providing the contextual narrative to the numbers,” summarizes Noelle St. Vil. “These statistics don’t exist in a vacuum; there’s a system behind the numbers and why Black people are disproportionately represented in almost every category.”

Vanity Jones, MSW ’24, who is pursuing her PhD with research focused on Black women and youth in healthy relationships, was especially surprised by the unit that discussed Black fatherhood.

“I didn’t realize Black men aren’t given as many resources to be good fathers, and the roots of that are in slavery when men weren’t given space in their family’s lives,” she explains. “But at the same time, the research shows that Black men are more involved in their children’s lives than the media and culture portray.”

Social work professionals from organizations working in Black communities in education, fatherhood, violence, health care and housing visited the class as guest speakers. Their stories and discussions provided real-world context and introduced students to community resources.

Students from various racial backgrounds enrolled in the class, including Black students from Rwanda, Nigeria and the United States, whose discussions illustrated better than any textbook just how different the Black immigrant experience and the Black American experience can be — a central lesson of the class and an important reminder for social workers doing work in communities of color.

“Blackness is not monolithic,” says Chris St. Vil. “It’s all these different experiences and cultural values. What do we need to think about as social workers when we look

••••• **“Everyone should be seeking the truth in this class.”**
••••• — Claudine Karambizi, MSW ’24

at statistics and they’re bunching up people as Black or African American? It’s not all-encompassing.”

That notion hit home with Claudine Karambizi, MSW ’24, a Rwandan who was born in the Ivory Coast and came to the U.S. when she was 5 years old.

“I grew up with African Americans more than Africans,” she explains. “So I wanted to see how the class addressed all the different kinds of Black. I never had a class that was willing to go in depth into all this stuff.”

As the Scholar Success Program manager at Buffalo Prep, Karambizi is already applying what she learned in this class to her work with students.

“I can relate to them as a student of color who entered a predominantly white school like I did, but now I have this education that allows me to incorporate a cultural understanding to their broader needs, strengthening them and their community,” she explains.

The course’s subject matter reaches beyond the social work profession, too. Joyce Adeola Jekayinoluwa is a PhD student in global gender and sexuality studies whose research focuses on gender-based violence against Black women. A recent arrival from Nigeria, she was surprised at how the Black experience in America differs from what the rest of the world sees on the news.

“I thought the U.S. was into family, but then learning about the policies and laws to take kids away from families was shocking,” says Jekayinoluwa. “Also, Black grandparents as caregivers in the U.S. — I didn’t think that happened here to the extent that they get social services to support it.”

She says this class made her want to be more attuned in her professional work and will help her better understand the trauma and loss she hears in conversations with victims of gender-based violence. It’s a perspective she thinks anyone working to earn the trust of Black people should learn, regardless of race or profession.

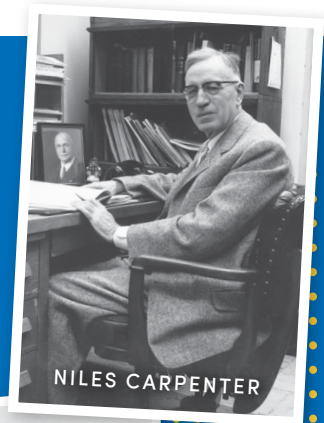
“This class isn’t meant for just Black people,” says Karambizi. “Everyone should be seeking the truth in this class — social work has a deep history that has harmed people in this community in the past, and by knowing it, we’ll provide the help people need from us.” ●

Celebrating 90 years

Since 1934, the UB School of Social Work has been advancing the dignity and worth of humankind. Through our research, academics and service, we've challenged injustice, enhanced social work practice and trained countless social workers who've made a positive difference. In this commemorative issue of Mosaics, we invite you to read stories of alumni through the years – and explore how we're celebrating our 90th anniversary through service.

Key moments in our history

- 1924** Niles Carpenter joins UB's Sociology Department and is tasked with forming a school for social work. Within two years, UB begins offering evening classes in social work.
- 1934** The American Association of Schools of Social Work approves our first certificate program, marking the beginning of what we now know as the UB School of Social Work.
- 1936** With the launch of our first master's degree in social services, UB formally establishes the School of Social Work as a separate academic unit, with Carpenter as dean.
- 1945** After World War II, the GI Bill sends enrollment soaring and boosts the local social work field.
- 1960s** Vietnam War protests ignite on campus, with School of Social Work students and faculty on the front lines.
- 1974** Construction ends on Baldy Hall, our current home on North Campus.
- 1994** The school launches our PhD in Social Welfare program.
- 2009** The school officially adopts trauma-informed and human rights perspectives in all aspects of our education and work.
- 2013** Our MSW program welcomes its first all-online cohort, empowering more students to access a UB education.
- 2019** The school admits the first cohort for our Doctor of Social Work program, which remains one of only 40 DSW programs nationwide.



NILES CARPENTER



First social work classes held in Townsend Hall.



Faculty and staff, 1961.

Photos courtesy of University Archives

Still a social worker

BY CATHERINE DONNELLY

Sylvia Gold, MSW '81, always knew she wanted to be a social worker. "My Aunt Anne was a social worker. I was enthralled with how she cared about how people felt as opposed to telling them what to do," says Gold. "But it took me almost 20 years after finishing my first degree to start the next."

Gold graduated from UB in 1958 with an associate's degree, married, had two children and volunteered in a myriad of activities before she recommitted to her own education. She returned to UB and completed her bachelor's in psychology because she thought it would lead to clinical counseling.

"I am so thankful to my advisor, who explained how my degree would translate to the real world," she continues. "I didn't want to conduct testing – I wanted to help people."

She enrolled in the UB School of Social Work, where Gold found several nontraditional students and formed a tight study group to survive the rigors of the program.

"Each week was three days of internship with two days of classes. There was no internet, so we had to do research at the library and keep up with all the homework," she says. "It was quite a culture shock for my family when I wasn't home making dinner every night! My internships at the Lockport Senior Citizen's Centre (now The Dale Association) and doing structural family therapy in St. Catharines, Ontario, allowed me to focus on the topics I wanted to learn: geriatrics and family counseling. Every place I worked at was innovative."

Gold worked in Lockport for 12 years and became the clinical director for several outpatient mental health services, including art therapy, elder abuse, grief and loss, and domestic violence support, while also gaining experience in program evaluation, budgeting and grant writing.

"Eventually I tired of being in management. I missed working directly with clients," she says. "I moved to Buffalo General as part of a team that conducted outpatient mental health groups to support a diverse client base. It was an amazing place to work and I remained there until I retired at 72."

Today, at 85, Gold is still involved in social work. She has volunteered as a School of Social Work alumni mentor and has been an active member of the state and local National Association of Social Workers (NASW) since 1981. She was recently honored with the NASW-NYS 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award.

"I am still a social worker. It is ingrained in my psyche," says Gold. "If someone wants this career they will find it to be fulfilling. It is never stagnant. However, new graduates need to understand that we cannot change anyone. Social workers need to be good listeners and help people identify their strengths, evaluate their options and accept outcomes. I carry a little bit of every client with me and cherish mementos, like beautiful artwork, shared with me." ●



Photo: Stephen Gabris



Showing up for the City of Good Neighbors

PHOTOS BY MEREDITH FORREST KULWICKI

In honor of our 90th anniversary, the School of Social Work hosted a day of service last spring in partnership with the City of Buffalo's Operation Clean Sweep initiative. About 50 students, faculty, staff, alumni and field education partners came together to serve the neighborhood around Masten Park.

The school dedicated its efforts to the lives lost during the Tops massacre in May 2022. Volunteers assembled on Jefferson Avenue and eventually passed the supermarket on their route up the block.

"There's something really powerful about being here in the community as a school community," says Katie McClain-Meeder, MSW '12, clinical associate professor and MSW program director.

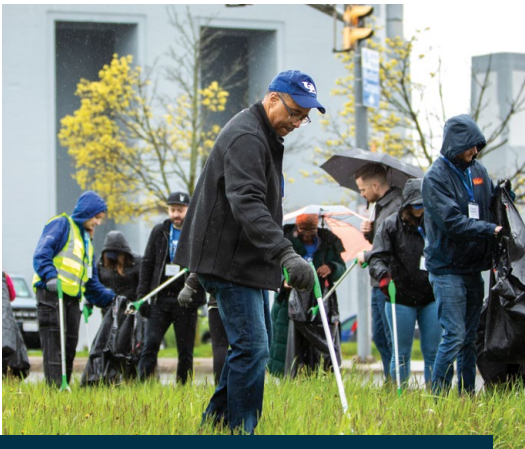
"We owe a lot to the City of Buffalo, and it matters that we show up."



Kathryn Griswold, administrative field coordinator, leads a group of volunteers.



Volunteers filled countless bags as they collected trash along Jefferson Avenue and Best Street.



For Dean Keith A. Alford, celebrating the school's 90th anniversary through service was a perfect fit with the values of the school and profession.



"I was honored to work alongside such passionate changemakers," says Jess Williams, an undergrad in the school's community organizing and development minor. Williams is pictured at right with MSW student Anita Baar and political science major Natalie Wechter.



Volunteers — including Kristina Lazarro, student services advisor, and Ronald Dixon, special project manager for crime prevention, City of Buffalo — also cleaned up several vacant lots.



The day was also about camaraderie. Here, Kathryn Franco, MPH/MSW '18, director of alumni engagement and community relations, connects with Robert Chapman, MSW '03, executive director of the Stutzman Addiction Treatment Center.

All in the family

After 90 years, many families have multiple generations of UB School of Social Work alumni

BY MATTHEW BIDDLE

Our alumni understand the value of a UB education better than anyone else. Many can point to particular classes, professors or experiences that set them on their career path and continue to positively influence them today. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that among the school's 8,000-plus alumni, you'll find many families with multiple School of Social Work grads. Here are just a few of their stories.

Walking through solutions

Having her first child, Deja, inspired La Shawn Davis, MSW '02, to go back to school to earn her master's degree. Davis wanted to demonstrate what was possible for Deja's future and to pursue her own career ambitions in the mental health space.

After graduation, Davis worked for an assertive community treatment program and as a chemical abuse addiction counselor before joining the City of Buffalo, where she's been a youth counselor for the past 14 years.

"I love working all over the city with Buffalo Public Schools, charter schools and directly with families," Davis says. "Every summer, we can get up to 100 kids for our leadership program, and during the school year, I work with kids in the juvenile justice system, kids who may have lost a parent."

And what about the little girl Davis occasionally brought with her to class at UB? She's an alumna now, too: Deja Middlebrook, JD '21, MSW '20, BA '17.

"Her career journey definitely impacted me and motivated me to pursue social work," Middlebrook says of her mom.

With three UB degrees in hand, Middlebrook joined Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown's Office in 2022 as inclusionary compliance officer, charged with developing and enforcing diversity and inclusion policies to create opportunities for women- and minority-owned business enterprises.

"I didn't expect to work with small businesses," Middlebrook says, "but I love doing it because it's this great intersection of race, class and gender, and brings together my social work and law hats in a cool way."

Deja Middlebrook
JD '21, MSW '20, BA '17
+
La Shawn Davis
MSW '02

If working together at City Hall wasn't enough, Davis and Middlebrook are also business partners. Davis founded Walking Through Solutions in 2022 to work with parents and families. After the racist attack at Tops, Davis sprang into action, providing free counseling support in East Buffalo. When she saw the community outcry for clinicians of color, Middlebrook came on board to help fill the gap.

Today, they offer one-on-one counseling, couples and family therapy, and group training for organizations. Middlebrook created a relationship boot camp that introduces clients to the idea of therapy and covers such topics as vulnerability, intimacy, conflict resolution and childhood trauma. In addition, Walking Through Solutions is part of the BestSelf Black Mental Health Response Team serving East Buffalo.

The School of Social Work has recognized both Davis and Middlebrook with Distinguished Alumni Awards for their contributions to the field.

"Black clinicians have value in these spaces that was not always recognized," Middlebrook says. "Through our business, we have the autonomy to create programs and respond as needs in the community arise."

Davis agrees: "We want to change people's mindset around mental health, especially people of color, and help build stronger families and communities. We're a really good team."





Joanne Wilton
MSW '90
+
Andrew Wilton
MSW '12, BA '10

Pursuing a vocation

Joanne Wilton, MSW '90, credits her cousin with inspiring her to pursue social work: the late Don Schoenl, who earned a BA from UB in 1967 and worked for the Erie County Department of Social Services.

"He did home visits and often came to my house for lunch," she remembers. "He would talk to my mother about issues he dealt with, and it always sounded like he was really making a difference for people. I knew from the time I was young that I wanted to do something like that."

As an adult, Wilton worked in the field for a decade before joining UB's part-time MSW program. She recalls being pushed out of her comfort zone with a field placement at Gowanda State Hospital and learning solution-focused therapy from her Interventions instructor, Margaret Manzella.

Later, Wilton employed the solution-focused model as a social worker at Cheektowaga-Sloan schools, where she created the Family Solutions Center. The center, which helps families recognize and use their strengths to overcome obstacles, saw its first client 20 years ago and is still going strong today.

"When I retired, we'd had about 125 UB interns," says Wilton, who retired in 2021 but still consults for the center. "I love mentoring young social workers; it truly became one of my favorite parts of the job. It was a way to help them get started, while also keeping me on my toes. The first time I heard anything about trauma-informed practice was from a UB intern."

Andrew Wilton, MSW '12, BA '10, was about 2 years old when his mom graduated from UB.

"I remember going with her to the therapeutic preschool she worked at and experiencing that environment. She also brought a lot of influential people into my life, and I'd hear all these stories around the kitchen table about change that was happening and important work people were doing," he says.

He, too, pursued an MSW at UB, where he met his wife, Amanda Wilton, MSW '12, during their foundation year. The couple now have a 5-year-old daughter and run separate clinical practices: Amanda is a wellness and life coach, and Andrew is an integrative psychotherapist. He started his business while teaching at Daemen University and went full time last year with the increased demand for telehealth.

"It's important in therapy to view the people we meet as whole people, not a set of problems that we contextualize within a rigid model," Andrew says of his practice focus. "It's about understanding people holistically and understanding where the evidence points, both in terms of recent research and time-tested wisdom in our field."

The Wiltons agree that working in the same field adds an extra dimension to their relationship.

"What we do is more of a vocation than a profession, and it reflects our beliefs and values," Joanne says. "I've always had this sense — but even more so as Andrew's gotten older — that he gets me and I get him. It's a point of pride to me that he decided to pursue this field."

Working for justice

MSW student Kathleen Riley had been teaching for 17 years when she took a leave of absence to help care for her father, Robert J. Riley, MSW '68, BS '55, as he approached the end of his life. When he passed in November 2021, she was able to take the time she needed, both to grieve and to take stock of her own journey.

"Grief can often invite us to do that self-work," Riley says. "I am a huge proponent of bringing to light what healing can look like, and how that can mean different things for different people."

The experience inspired her to pivot in her career and pursue social work like her father, who worked for the Erie County Department of Social Services for 28 years, serving those struggling with homelessness, mental illness and addiction.

"He was very justice-minded, and his Roman Catholic faith was core to who he was, so he was always welcoming and lived with compassion," Riley says. "He would advocate for clients to the point where it put him in danger of losing his job on several occasions."

Active in the Civil Rights Movement and the Peace Movement during the Vietnam War, Robert was a member of the Congress of Racial Equality and the WNY Peace Center. He dove headlong into causes he cared about, no matter how sweeping or minor the issue. A lifelong resident of Buffalo's Lovejoy neighborhood, he fought to have curbs and stop signs installed, pavement fixed and to keep the local fire station open.

"When he retired, he didn't stop any of his advocacy or community organizing," Riley says. "He would pack a lunch and go with someone to their court date or accompany someone to an appointment. Five months before he died, he had me calling housing advocacy for a neighbor because of lead paint."

Clearly, Robert's commitment to justice has rubbed off on his daughter. When the COVID-19 vaccine came out and shots were scarce, Riley helped over 100 elderly neighbors find appointments. Right now, she's organizing her community to "contest and make noise" about dynamic staffing in the Buffalo Fire Department, a model that allows the city to close firehouses temporarily due to staff shortages, thereby increasing emergency response times.

Toward the end of last year, one of her instructors, Elaine Hammond, MSW '02, even asked her, "Is there anything you're not passionate about?"

After graduation next year, Riley envisions herself working in a clinical setting, but is open to whatever path her career takes.

"The arc of my father's whole life was an invitation toward social work," she says. "It's helped me understand that, even now with all the demands of my life, there are always ways we can be advocating for others. We all have the capacity to ask hard questions of ourselves and to contribute to the arc of justice in this world." ●

Kathleen Riley
MSW STUDENT
+
Robert J. Riley
MSW '68, BS '55



TAKE CARE

Welcome to our new Take Care section, where we will share self-care resources — starting with this coloring page, designed by Front Porch Collaborative, depicting Baird Point and Lake LaSalle on UB North Campus. Take a break, get creative and share your work with us [@ubssw](https://www.instagram.com/ubssw) on social media. For more resources, check out our Self-Care Starter Kit at socialwork.buffalo.edu/self-care-kit.



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