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## What is Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ)?

The mission of Counselors for Social Justice is to work to promote social justice in our society through confronting oppressive systems of power and privilege that affect professional counselors and our clients and to assist in the positive change in our society through the professional development of counselors.

## Welcome Letter from our President:

### Fred Bemak



Dear CSJ Colleagues,

I am excited to share with you the first CSJ newsletter in quite some time. The newsletter will now become a regular part of our CSJ community. CSJ is moving forward with a number of ideas and projects, and the newsletter will be an important core for our Association and provide a chance to exchange information and ideas. The CSJ Board has been meeting monthly and we will be announcing some new initiatives in the next two months. In addition we are excited to hold a CSJ Business Town Hall Meeting at the ACA Convention in Orlando, which we are opening to all ACA members, to discuss critical issues regarding accreditation and licensure which will have significant bearing on the entire counseling field. We are also planning, in collaboration with AMCD, a Day of Giving Back to the Community. More information on this will be forthcoming. In addition I want to expressly thank the 5 George Mason University students, whose photos are below, who provided incredible assistance in helping to develop the final copy for this newsletter. I hope you enjoy the newsletter and welcome your contributions to the newsletter in future editions.



Best wishes,  
Fred Bemak  
President, Counselors  
for Social Justice

CSJ Newsletter Team: Sarah Clarius, Leeand Diggs, Marlena Hawkins, Deborah McGhee, and Yujing Li. George Mason University Counseling and Development Program graduate students.

Special thanks to: Taisha Chavez, Becky Pierce, Shaden Atamna, Stephanie Garcia, Rachel Lampert, Stephanie Sheehan and Erin Lutz. George Mason University Counseling and Development Program graduate students.

## Creating a Safe School Climate for LGBTQ Youth

### A Grad Student's Top 10 Principles for School Counselors to Achieve for LGBTQ Affirmative Schools

*-Build a reputation as an ally*

*-Advocate for LGBTQ*

*-Seek out training opportunities for yourself and others*

*-Network and collaborate to establish equitable school policies*

*-Act as a broker for community resources*

*-Ensure safety in potentially unsafe areas (locker rooms, bathrooms)*

*-Promote inclusive sports and clubs*

*-Host awareness weeks*

*-Help end LGBTQ bullying and name calling*

Teach! About me:

I am currently in graduate school studying Counseling and Development in the M.Ed. program at George Mason University (GMU). In my final semester, I have become passionate about how school counselors can make an impact in the lives of LGBTQ students. I chose to take an extra elective course on LGBTQ counseling and also attended a "Safe Zone" training hosted by the LGBTQ Resource Office on campus. Both of these experiential learning opportunities provided insight on the social justice needs of LGBTQ youth. Most importantly, I learned how to become a better ally to this student population

-Becky Pierce

# A Palestinian Activist in Action

An interview was completed with a Palestinian Academic Practitioner and activist who has been part of the Faculty at Birzeit University for over 35 years. Dr. Rita Giacaman established the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University in Palestine that integrates teaching, research and practice with a focus on the attainment of justice in health. Dr. Giacaman was also a member of the initiation group that established the Women's Studies Institute.

"We focus on the consequences of political and other forms of violence on health, and we develop metrics relevant to our context, and perhaps other war and conflict affected zones." Dr. Giacaman explained.

When asked to reflect on her accomplishments, Dr. Giacaman is proud to have supported and mentored young researchers "in asking the right questions for our context"; she was also proud to have seven PhD students at the moment from her institute completing their degrees abroad. She highly values focusing on the new generation.

When asked of a point in her life she could attribute to becoming a social justice activist and leader, Dr. Giacaman explained: "I think the issue of social and political justice was there all along. Being a Palestinian, I witnessed the 1967 war when I was a teenager. In Lebanon, as a student in the early 70's, I also witnessed societal fragmentation, conflicts and the effects on people. I also witnessed the stu-

**Dr. Rita Giacaman**  
Academic Practitioner:  
Birzeit University



dent revolts in the United States, and volunteered at the Haight Ashbury Free Medical and Detox clinics. I understood the need for justice there too, even though the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, so much injustice is negatively effecting people's lives. After completing my studies in the United States, I returned to Palestine and continued on the road of working for the common and public good. It was not a totally conscious decision; it just came because of life experiences. I have experienced injustices myself." In inquiring of the motives and inspirations that keep Dr. Giacaman going, she responded: "Life itself is motivating. In truth, I am very blessed by my being here in Ramallah, by the work and by the community around me. Work and life have meaning as a result. Of course, there are quite a few challenges we face daily and that can get you down sometimes. But the main impetus for going on is that struggle for justice for Palestinians, and a focus on addressing health issues that can be addressed and advocating for justice." Finally, in requesting suggestions for aspiring social justice change agents and leaders, Dr. Giacaman shared: "First and most

# 14 Characteristics of a Social Justice Leader

## Authentic Collaborator

Share the vision, ideas, power and decision making with clients, families, communities.

Let go of power and control over clients.

Give and receive.

## Genuine

Demonstrate authenticity to promote trust and support. Develop positive relationships with families, clients and communities.

## Motivating

Convince and persuade for change. Instill hope and a belief for a better future to produce change.

## Be Creative

Have flexibility: Thinking outside the box beyond what is presented.

## System Challenger

Question and challenge current rules and regulations in attempts to minimize injustices.

## Humble

Empower others and know when to step away. Partner in the process of change, but ensure clients to be self-reliant.

## Responsible

Model and accept ownership of mistakes and/or plans that may have failed. Systems, individuals, communities etc. cannot be scapegoats.

## Model for Others

While working as a change agent it is important to keep in mind that others are watching and may follow your lead.

## Courageous Risk Taker

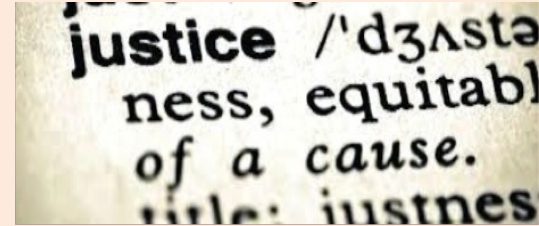
Creating change equals taking risks. Challenge inequities, unfair practices, treatment, and decisions. Staying silent maintains the status quo.

## Empowerment Generator

All individuals are empowered to make change, develop, and grow.

## User of Research and Data

Use data and research for direction: social change is not based on personal opinion.



## Understand Self

Self-reflect to acknowledge socio-political beliefs, values, attitudes, world views and privileges. This prevents biases from obstructing the process.

## Understanding

Ensure authentic understanding of clients. Become multiculturally competent and understand history and sociopolitical issues and their effects today.

## A Guide, Not An Expert

Facilitate the process of justice and change allow stakeholders and clients to be experts.

## Reference

Chung, R. C-Y., & Bemak, F. (2012). *Social Justice Counseling: The Next Steps Beyond Multiculturalism*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

importantly, be clear about values. It is values that can keep you going in hard times and can help you focus on achieving your aim in general. The main value to me is: your vested interest in life is people; not things.

Second, work with others, build teams, mentor people, help them recognize that public good is eventually in their personal interest. This is something that people do not quite understand, especially in contexts where there is so much injustice.

Third, work hard, do not give up and have perspective. Things do change.

Fourth, have what we call

Nafas, breath. Be patient, change

does not happen quickly. Sometimes it can take years for change. You have to persist and continue working towards your goal.

Finally, and I learned this from electrons, you feed them energy and they start moving faster, with more energy, they jump up one level, and more energy, leads to more levels until they split. In development work, this means that every small, quantitative action can lead to a major qualitative change one day. Just keep at it and strategize your steps."

-Shaden Atamna

George Mason University Counseling and Development Program graduate student

We must become the change we want to see in the world.  
-Mahatma Gandhi

Vision without action is a day-dream. Action without vision is a nightmare.  
-Japanese proverb

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.  
- Martin Luther King Jr.



“In the end we are all people, we are all hu-man and I believe that everyone deserves to have food in their mouths and clothes on their back. I believe that everyone deserves the opportunity for an education.”

# Featured Social Justice Agency: Los Ninos de Maria

What started from one suitcase in 1982 has now grown into a U.S. registered, non-profit humanitarian organization known as Los Niños de Maria Foundation Inc (Maria’s children). Founder and President of Los Niños de Maria, Rhadames Avila has spent the last 32 years finding ways to help children and their families of the Dominican Republic as well as other Latin American countries, and the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia metropolitan area all while never forgetting his roots and the reasons for his work.

Through donations, fundraisers, and events such as 5k marathons, pageants, and music festivals, Los Niños de Maria Inc is able to uphold their mission of providing clothing, school supplies, hygiene items, medicine, etc. to low-income/poverty stricken areas in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries. Every year Los Niños de Maria takes two trips specifically to the Dominican Republic. In August 2014, Los Niños de Maria sent 700 children of the Dominican Republic back to school. He also plans for Los Niños de Maria to visit areas in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Ecuador again distributing goods to children and their family this year.

With the organization’s home located in Columbia, Maryland, Mr. Avila has also found a way to give back to his community. Every year on the eve of Thanksgiving and Christmas, Los Niños de Maria along with the help of their sponsors, distribute hot meals, tea, coats, and blankets to the homeless of DC, Maryland, and Virginia until supplies run out.

It excites Mr. Avila to know that there are others, especially counselors who are involved in social justice work. He believes that it is important for counselors to know that these are the circumstances for many individuals; as many could potentially become clients. However, as Mr. Avila puts it, social

justice work shouldn’t just be important to counselors, it should be important to everyone, young and old. “Everyone can contribute somehow, everyone can help, even if it is just by spreading the word of these issues or where they can send and receive donations. These kids are next. They are the next ones to take over the country and run it.”

Rhadames Avila would like to thank everyone who has donated items and volunteered their time towards Los Niños de Maria’s cause. Additionally, he would like everyone to know that help is always needed and greatly appreciated. If anyone would like more know about donating, volunteering, the events, or general information on Los Niños de Maria please visit the website [www.losninosdemaria.org](http://www.losninosdemaria.org).

-Taisha Chavez

George Mason University Counseling and Development Program graduate student

“I encourage people to not be afraid and just start somewhere.”

-Los Ninos de Maria

# Reflections on Social Justice Work

Despite relative historical gains in racial equality, discrimination and prejudice continue to pervade the U.S. experience. This teaching newsletter is intended to provide you with a comprehensive overview of racial injustice: from grassroots to global advocacy, from popular to scholarly resources, and from a scattered to an organized clearinghouse for your work in this area.

## Fighting Against Racial Injustice

There are many barriers that prevent consumers of color from accessing or receiving mental health services (NAMI, 2013), one of which includes adequate funding and training resources for community mental health centers. With this in mind, Kent State University's Kappa Sigma Upsilon chapter of Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) intentionally committed to advocate for mental health services for all of those in need and provided awareness about the barriers of mental health care to the greater community. In conjunction with Portage County NAMI, CSI members linked with social justice advocates at the Portage County Mental Health and Recovery Board to advocate for the passing of a levy that would provide up to three million dollars in mental health services to our community. Members participated in two crucial events to get the word out about the injustice to accessing mental health services in Northeast Ohio. During the NAMI walk, members held signs displaying information about this important levy that, if passed, would provide precious revenue to mental health agencies helping to ensure all members of our community have equal access to mental health services. A second opportunity for grass roots advocacy allowed us to address the social and racial injustices in mental health service delivery in Portage County. In partnership with the Mental Health and Recovery Board, our group strengthened our alliance and support of obtaining funds for local mental health agencies. Kent State faculty and family, CSI members, community volunteers, and members of the Citizen's Committee for Good Mental Health connected at KSU's homecoming parade in order to capture an attentive audience to increase awareness of and support for the levy. The Portage County Mental Health and Recovery Board's own "Superheroes for Recovery" were also in attendance. Pamphlets, bracelets and salient information was provided to spectators along the parade route urging folks to "Be a Hero. Vote Yes for Issue 3!" This drew welcomed attention to the cause and provided a fun and unexpected way to promote equal access to mental health services for everyone in Portage County. Without this money, most of our local mental health agencies would go without funding and no longer be able to provide services to individuals from a variety of racially and economically diverse backgrounds. As future counselors and counselor educators, it is our responsibility to advocate for equal access to mental health services, starting with our own community.

**Erin West, Courtney Noster, and Cassandra A. Storie**

**Kent State University**

## The Intersection of Race and Social Justice

During my doctoral training as a counselor educator the topic of social justice was a regular part of class readings, discussions, and projects. The idea of helping the oppressed and being a voice for those who felt less empowered quickly became intensely interesting to me. Like many, I read a great deal about social justice and becoming an agent for social change in textbooks and academic journals, however most of my involvement was structured around in-class activities. In a way reading about social justice in an idealistic way is non-threatening and comforting, as you can talk the talk without getting dirty.

### First Real Encounter With Social Injustice

It was not long before my encapsulation was a thing of the past. During my internship experience as a doctoral student I worked for a community agency that was contracted with an urban school district to provide counseling to students in the public school. I was assigned to several different campuses and had the opportunity to experience many real life problematic concerns. I will share a couple here and briefly note how school counselors can act as social agents in their roles.

During my first week of internship at my first school campus I had met with the onsite school counselor. I asked her, "Why am I here when you're here?" Her response was that she had too many 'other' things to do which did not permit her to provide counseling to the students and that she was happy to have me there. 'Interesting', I thought... I remained at that campus for approximately a year and maintain a regular student caseload.

At a different campus I was assigned to meet with students on my caseload once a week. One of the students on my caseload was an African American adolescent male. On my first day at this campus he was in the school office when I arrived and I was briefed on how disruptive and disrespectful he was in the classroom and needed counseling. From the first week at the school and many weeks to follow this student would be in the school office upon my arrival regularly, unless he was absent. It appeared as though every time the teacher encountered him she immediately sent him to the office with no attempt to redirect the unwanted behaviors.

While these are only two examples I have provided, they are not isolated incidents from my observation. However,

the commonalities among what I witnessed were race and environmental factors. All of the children on my caseload were minority students from mostly disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the teachers at my assigned campuses were not. There clearly were multicultural considerations to take into account with these children they may not have been addressed in the infrastructure of the schools.

### **How School Counselors Can Intervene and Advocate**

School counselors can play a vital role in addressing the issue of race and environmental factors that play a part in how these children are perceived and worked with at the district level. For example, the school counselor can be an advocate for these students by creating an awareness of specific cultural and racial dynamics common to these students to inform school administrators and teachers. The awareness may come in the form of handouts, presentations, and/or workshops. It should also be ongoing and not limited to “Multicultural Week” or “Black History Month.” While creating the awareness school counselors should also include possible solutions or community resources that can be brought in house to target specific races and environments (single parent homes, incarcerated parents, neighborhood violence).

At the individual level, the school counselor can have just as vital a role when working with students. This can be done by taking into account race and environment from the point of assessment to setting treatment goals and implementing interventions. For instance, in the example provided above of the African American boy sent to the school office almost daily, traditional case conceptualization would not take culture or race into account when developing treatment. However, school counselors can tailor their treatment approach in the context of racial-ethnic compositions. This would involve including issues of race, identity, religion, and environment.

**Tiffany Stewart**

**Midwestern State University**



## **Mary Smith Arnold Anti- Oppression Award:**

*Dr. Eric Green*

## **Ohana Honors:**

*Dr. Patricia Stewart*

*Dr. Tiffany Stewart*

*Dr. Yolanda Columbus*

## **UPCOMING CONFERENCES**

***American Counseling Association  
(ACA)***

*March 12-15, 2015, Orlando, FL*

***American School Counselor Association  
(ASCA)***

*June 28-July 1, 2015, Phoenix, AZ*

***Association for Counselor Education  
and Supervision (ACES)***

*October 7-11, 2015, Philadelphia, PA*

# Spotlight Students

## Reclaiming My Voice: A Journey Toward Advocacy

Entering my doctoral program, I was excited about starting a new chapter in my professional career. However, once my program started I felt isolated from family, friends, and my cultural identities. I started to question if the sacrifice of attaining a PhD was worth being pinned between two separate worlds. I grew up in a low socio-economic environment, and it seemed that this world clashed with academia. I felt that in order to succeed in graduate school, I had to leave my past behind. The issues of class are not regularly spoken of on a societal level or in higher education. I felt isolated in negotiating my identities around class. My family, friends, and members of my community are still struggling economically. However, I am moving up in economic status, and I am gaining power in society through my education.

As a first-generation college student, I had already struggled with finding my place on campus. Now as a doctoral student, I feel more disconnected from the culture of my upbringing. I am being perceived by people as coming from a privileged background. As

a result, I feel my voice being silenced. Even though I knew these experiences were not unique, I still felt isolated. Living in two separate worlds has been experienced by other first-generation college graduates who are now completing doctoral degrees (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

In the second semester of my doctoral program, I began finding my voice. In my advanced multicultural counseling class, I was assigned a project that displayed my cultural roots. Through the project, I was able to reflect on my experiences. As a Hispanic woman from a low socioeconomic background, I belong to historically marginalized groups. Both spoken and unspoken messages from society told me that I had no voice. After taking several courses as an undergraduate with a social justice perspective, I was inspired to advocate for people whose voices had been silenced. I specifically saw the world of academia as an avenue for advocacy, and this was my driving force for entering graduate school in the field of counseling. Even though I had this awareness as an undergraduate, the stressors of being in a doctoral program led me away from my focus on advocacy. I felt a need to conform to what I thought academia was all about

and advocacy was not included.

After completing my roots project, I feel empowered. I am reclaiming my voice and using advocacy to bridge my two worlds. I feel a calling to be involved with the emerging advocacy identity of the counseling profession. I am utilizing platforms that will allow me to use my voice, such as the CSJ Activist. For me, being a counselor means advocating for the populations we serve. My passion for advocacy is helping me to stay connected to my upbringing while guiding me in the world of academia. Through my voice, I am creating positive change for myself, my community, and the counseling profession.

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# Mentorship: An Avenue for the Promotion of Advocacy and Social Justice

Advocacy, simply defined, is the argument or plea for an individual, a group, or a cause (Lee, 1998). Taking many forms, advocacy, as done on behalf of clients and the profession, is an ethical obligation and moral responsibility that lies at the heart of counselor identity (Lee, 1998). Further, it has been framed as a professional imperative (see Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002). Advocacy for the profession is necessary for counselors to engage in acts that promote clients' development and growth; effective advocacy efforts, in turn, promote the profession (Chang, Barrio Minton, Dixon, Myers, & Sweeney, 2012; Myers & Sweeney, 2004).

Social justice also plays a role in the aforementioned reciprocal relationship. Serving as a current force in the counseling profession, social justice has been introduced to challenge broad based oppression and discrimination to promote equality and justice for all (Lee, 2012). For many, social justice and advocacy are thought of as theoretical concepts that are not easily put into practice. Mentorship is one avenue that can be taken to empower counselors, working at multiple levels, to transform these abstract concepts into meaningful and powerful acts.

It has been suggested that mentorship functions to prepare individuals for a career, as well as to provide emotional support during such preparation (Kram, 1985). As the counseling field continues to grow and place emphasis on the incorporation of advocacy and social justice tenets into practice, mentorship can be beneficial in aiding up and coming, as well as seasoned counseling professionals in gaining a working knowledge of these

concepts. Career preparation and emotional support potentially provided by mentorship can be found in the promotion of professional identity, the enhancement of counseling practice, and the nurturance of leadership and scholarship.

## Promoting Professional Identity

Professional identity, the understanding of one's occupation as it relates to the understanding of one's self (Healey & Hays, 2012), serves as an important framework from which advocacy and social justice can be understood and ultimately applied. Advocacy and social justice efforts differ depending on a counselor's professional specialty, her or his work setting, the population of interest being served, and the sociopolitical and historical context of the broader community. Mentorship can serve as a valuable platform for the increased awareness and understanding of professional identity. Below are considerations for mentors:

*-Engage in discussions within an affirmative, safe environment about the history of the counseling profession, current advocacy and social justice issues, and the ways in which your mentee envisions her or his professional contribution*

*-Work with your mentee to identify and solidify potential collaborators across multiple counseling specialties and disciplines*

*-Familiarize yourself with your mentee's field experience and discuss any social justice concerns and initial ideas for advocacy/social justice*

*-Encourage and provide support to your mentee as she or he takes the initial steps to engage in advocacy/social justice within the field*

## Enhancing Counseling Practice

In addressing advocacy and social justice across multiple levels, Lewis and

colleagues developed advocacy competencies for professional counselors (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002) that were later endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA) in 2003 (see also Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). These competencies serve as a guide for professional counselors working in a variety of settings such as local agencies, schools, hospitals, and colleges and universities. As a mentor, serving in roles such as a supervisor and/or instructor, there are numerous ways you can integrate these competencies:

*-Provide your mentee with an overview of the competencies*

*-Draw from your mentee's clinical experience to identify ways that these competencies can be put into practice*

*-Codevelop advocacy and social justice plans that meet the unique needs of the client(s) being served on the micro, meso, and macro levels (as necessary)*

*-Celebrate accomplishments and reframe "let downs" as opportunities to reorganize efforts*

## Nurturing Leadership and Scholarship

One of the most challenging issues facing the profession today falls within the realm of leadership and scholarship surrounding advocacy and social justice. Currently, there is a great need to develop and nurture leaders and scholars at various levels (professionals, students, and educators) who will continue to advance advocacy and social justice efforts. This challenge has been the impetus for works by notable scholars who point to promising movement related to leadership and advocacy development that is arguably slower than warranted (see Chang et al., 2012; Myers & Sweeney, 2004; West, Osborn, & Bubenzer, 2003).



To promote leadership and scholarship:

*-Discuss the importance of research and leadership, and their various forms, in the counseling profession with your mentee*

*-Utilize available mentorship strategies and guidelines with your mentee to promote leadership and scholarship practices such as presenting, publishing, and assuming professional leadership positions (see Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004; Borders et al., 2012)*

*-Encourage your mentee to engage in current mentorship programs at the local, state, and national level (e.g., ACA, 2013)*

*-Celebrate your mentee's efforts*

*-Encourage your mentee to be a mentor for others!*

Mentorship has many potential benefits for the counseling profession at all levels. For those who have a desire and passion for social justice and advocacy, sharing knowledge in this area can contribute its growth and a more consistent integration into the field. Regardless of the area of interest within social justice and advocacy, sharing expertise can have lasting implications for mentees. Whether the benefits pertain to professional identity, counseling practice,

leadership and scholarship, or any/all of the above, those in the counseling field have much to offer one another.

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Jessica Headley  
University of Akron  
Cassandra G. Pusateri  
Youngstown State University  
Candace N. Park  
University of New Orleans

#### Thank You

Special thank you to everyone who helped put this together, and all those who contributed. We would also like to thank President-Elect, Dr. Rita Chi-Ying Chung and President, Dr. Fred Bemak for their support and contributions.

**About CSJ:** is committed to

- Implementing social action strategies including the Advocacy Competencies through collaborative alliances with other entities both within and outside of ACA, counseling and counselor education programs, pre-K-16 schools and community organizations.
- Disseminating social justice scholarship about sociopolitical and economic inequities facing counselors and clients/students in schools and communities.
- Challenging oppressive systems of power and privilege.
- Maintaining an active support network online and in person for engaging in social justice activities in schools and communities.
- Providing lively professional development to enhance counselor, counselor educator, and graduate student competency in social justice advocacy via ACA annual conference programs (Day of Learning), branches, regions, counselor education programs, pre-K-16 schools, and community agencies.
- Maintaining social justice advocacy resources online

**To Become a Member:** The benefits of joining Counselors for Social Justice include:

- Staying current on social justice oriented trends and policy issues in the field
- Subscription on the Journal of Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, access to the Activist news letter and CSJ listserv
- Networking opportunities with social justice minded graduate students, faculty, and professionals
- Opportunities to engage in social justice leadership skills