

NPHF Monthly Newsletter



VIRGINA CITY



Picture from <https://nevadagram.com/nevadagram-197/>

Social Work Scholarship Student Check-In

Selina Ventura is a BSW student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas working at DSS in Clark County. Selina has been with the scholarship program since Fall 2024.



Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

My country of origin is Mexico, and I came to the United States when I was just three months old. I grew up in Las Vegas and have lived here ever since. From a young age, I was always drawn to the medical field and aspired to become either a nurse or a doctor. I went to a magnet high school for pre-med and then became a CNA and was going to another trade school for phlebotomy. Then I found a job during COVID at a pain management office and transferred over to a cardiologist office. Although I was involved in the medical field, I didn't feel fulfilled in my career path, so I decided to take a break from school. As a first-generation college student, I faced many barriers that made my journey even more challenging. On top of that, the chaos in my personal life at the time took a significant toll on my mental health. That period of reflection is when I decided to pursue a career that genuinely resonated with me—one centered on helping others, working with diverse populations from infants to older adults, and offering a variety of sectors to explore.

This realization gave me a renewed sense of purpose and clarified the direction I wanted to take. Social work stood out as the profession that embodied everything I was looking for. Once I recognized this, I returned to school with a clear sense of motivation and completed my Associate of Arts degree at my community college. Then transferred to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), where I will be entering my senior year of the undergraduate program as of January 2026.

Where do you currently work and what do you do? Share any practicum placements.

I currently work in the Investigations and Recovery unit. I began my career as an Administrative Assistant I (AA) in August 2022 and was promoted to AAIII in May 2023. In my role, I primarily work with clients who have Federal Public Assistance debts, helping them reach accommodations by establishing appropriate payment arrangements. As a bilingual English and Spanish speaker, I am able to communicate effectively with a wide range of clients each day. I assist in clarifying notices, demands, and payment reminders in both languages, ensuring clients fully understand the information provided to them. Through this work, I have learned the importance of remaining courteous, patient, and calm—even in situations involving customer frustration or dissatisfaction. As of now, I am close to selecting a practicum site for the upcoming spring semester. I am strongly considering a nonprofit organization that focuses on advocating for policy change within the community, or a placement in the adult protective services sector, where I can work directly with vulnerable older adults.

Upcoming Webinars

**What it's like to take the
Licensure Exam**

- Hear from past scholarship recipients 

January - TBD

Quote of the Month

**“To appreciate the beauty of a
snowflake, it is necessary to
stand out in the cold.”**



- Aristotle

Can you share a challenging work/client situation that you encountered and how you resolved it (or maybe it couldn't be resolved)?

During tax season, we often receive a high volume of calls regarding intercepted tax returns or Social Security benefits, which usually occurs when a client has defaulted on their payment arrangements. One call I received was from an older woman who was distressed because a portion of her Social Security benefits had been intercepted. After reviewing her case, I noticed she should have been removed from the Treasury Offset Program, as she had consistently made her monthly payments as agreed. I apologized for the oversight and assured her that we would issue a refund and remove her from the intercept system immediately. To support her moving forward, I provided her with my direct line so she could reach me quickly with any questions or concerns without waiting on the main line. It can be challenging for clients—especially older adults—to navigate our processes when they are unfamiliar with how the system works, so I strive to explain everything clearly and patiently. To this day, she calls me about once a month to confirm that her payments have been received and that she remains in good standing. I am glad she feels comfortable reaching out, and it reminds me of the impact compassionate and clear communication can have on those who depend on our support.

Can you share a success story (or impactful story) of something that you encountered at work?

Personally, I like to share my success story with the agency. Transferring from a community college to a university was an overwhelming experience for me—the campus was larger, tuition was higher, and I didn't know anyone, having returned to school several years after graduating from high school. I started as a part-time student and was stressed about how I would cover tuition alongside other expenses. Then, I received an email about a scholarship offered by the agency for employees pursuing a social work degree. I applied immediately, and the scholarship allowed me to transition to full-time status the following semester. While the amount may not seem significant to some, for someone who has been paying every dollar out of pocket toward their education, it made a tremendous difference and allowed me to focus more fully on my academic goals. With this weight lifted, I am now able to give my best effort and attention to the clients who need our assistance. I continue to support the AAls in my unit and provide resources to clients affected by EBT card skimming and cloning. This experience has strengthened my ability to assist clients effectively while balancing my academic and professional responsibilities.

As you look forward to your next steps after graduation, what are your future social work goals?

My future social work goals include pursuing graduate studies, either a Master of Social Work (MSW) or a Juris Doctorate. With a MSW, I hope to work closely with a nonprofit organization that advocates for social justice and/or climate and environmental justice. Another path I am considering is continuing my work with the agency in the Aging and Disability unit, supporting vulnerable populations. The pursuit of a Juris Doctorate is inspired by my personal and professional experiences; I am passionate about serving underserved communities, particularly immigrant populations. I strive to be a voice for those affected by discrimination and injustice, building meaningful connections with community members and elected leaders across the state to bridge gaps in an ever-changing world.

Advocating and Encouraging within the Medical System

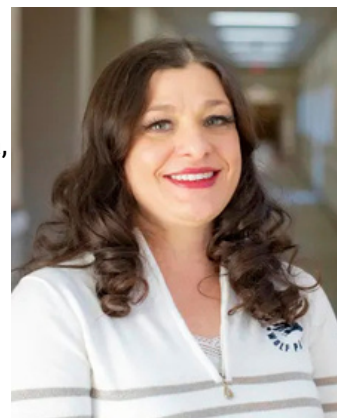
Dawn Swanson, LCSW, currently works as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for Humboldt General Hospital in Winnemucca.



Would you share about your background?

I moved to the Middle East at age 11 and spent approximately 7 years living overseas. The area I lived in was volatile due to unrest (the 1st Gulf War and associated terrorism), and I witnessed and experienced the associated trauma that accompanies living in a war zone. I moved back to the United States in 1995 at the age of 19, returning to Winnemucca, Nevada, where my family is from and my grandparents were living.

I initially pursued a nursing degree and completed almost all the prerequisites needed for nursing school. One of the final requirements prior to applying to the nursing program was the successful completion of a CNA course. While completing the CNA clinical rotation, I witnessed the mistreatment of a resident by several staff members. The resident requested to use the bathroom prior to taking a shower, and the staff refused to toilet the resident, telling them they could use the restroom at the time of their shower.



I offered to toilet the resident myself and was told not to question authority; I was reminded that I was there to just observe and learn. I went to the charge nurse, and I was again told that I was there to learn and not to question authority. That was one of the defining moments when I realized I wanted to be able to do more to prevent abuse and neglect. I recognized that social work was a good place to start, and I changed my major.

I was a participant for the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) pilot program between Great Basin College and the University of Nevada, Reno. I graduated in 2010 with my BSW. I was unable to find employment in rural Nevada and moved to Reno, where I started my career with the State of Nevada in 2011. I initially started with Adult Protective Services, then transferred over to the Community Based Care program for about a year.

Although I physically moved away from rural Nevada, I left a piece of my heart and my family in Winnemucca. A job opened up with Pershing General Hospital (PGH) and Nursing Home in Lovelock, Nevada and I was able to move back to Winnemucca. I commuted 140 miles per day (round trip) for about four years. The travelling became exhausting, and I decide the next best step was graduate school. I completed my Master of Social Work (MSW) online through the University of New England, while working full time for PGH.

After obtaining my graduate degree, I chose to secure an internship for my clinical social work licensure with the desire to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). I wanted to be a mental health therapist. This meant leaving PGH to pursue a new career path in mental health. I applied and was hired as a clinical mental health therapist intern in Battle Mountain, Nevada as a contracted clinical social work intern through the State of Nevada. While in this position, I again commuted daily between Winnemucca and Battle Mountain, for a daily round trip of about 110 miles.

The journey from BSW to MSW to LCSW took me 8 to 9 years total of schooling and internship hours. For most individuals, the journey takes approximately eight to ten years to complete.

You were able to receive loan repayment/forgiveness funds. Can you share which program that was and how you were able to qualify for it?

Upon completing my post-graduate clinical internship, I applied for and received loan forgiveness through the National Health Service Corp (NHSC) Rural Community Loan Repayment Program. At the time I applied for loan forgiveness, I had to be licensed as a LCSW and agree to complete a three-years service obligation at an approved site in a rural location. My employment site was through the State of Nevada Rural Clinics, Department of Public and Behavioral Health. (HRSA - <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment>)

There was also a loan repayment through the Nevada Health Service Corps with the University of Nevada, School of Medicine (NHSC SLRP - <https://med.unr.edu/community/office-statewide-initiatives/nevada-health-service-corps>).

Can you describe where you work and your role?

I am currently employed by Humboldt General Hospital (HGH) in the outpatient behavioral health clinic as a mental health therapist (LCSW). My role is to provide screenings for potential clinical therapy services and when appropriate, provide those services. The purpose of therapy is to help individuals cope with a wide range of issues, including behavioral, emotional, and mental health challenges. Not every individual seen may need or desire therapeutic interventions, and they may then be referred to community resources, support groups, or other services to help. At times, I am also asked to provide standard social work services for HGH. I have primarily focused on advocacy and ensuring that patient needs are met and their rights are protected within the healthcare system.

What are the diagnoses and populations of people you work with?

I work with the diagnoses found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual DSM-V-TR, a standard resource used to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The population I work with ranges from pediatric (about 11 years old) through geriatric. The diagnoses range from anxiety disorder to post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), as well as several other diagnoses from the DSM-V-TR.

Can you share a success story or a time where you were able to make an impact?

I do not feel there is a single success story. I would say anytime an individual goes from hopelessness to hopeful - from wanting to die to choosing to live - is a success. I worked with an individual who told me their goal was to graduate from high school and to take their own life. Through therapy, they were able to find hope and identify reasons for living. They have now successfully completed college, and they are happy with their life and career.

Are there areas of training that have become invaluable in your work?

I trained in trauma therapy, and working with survivors of trauma is my passion. I cannot credit a specific modality of therapy; however, I would advise finding an evidenced-based therapeutic modality that resonates with you and is something you believe in. When you see something work and watch an individual get better, that is one of the greatest feelings ever.

What advice would you give students interested in pursuing clinical work?

Clinical work is exceptionally rewarding and can also be extraordinarily challenging. A strong support system is crucial for success in both an academic and professional setting. Do not neglect self-care. Recognize overwhelm and give yourself permission to pause or rest. Identify and become very familiar with your own boundaries.

RESOURCE CORNER



Loan Repayment/Forgiveness Programs for LCSWs

Below are the two programs mentioned in the interview with Dawn Swanson



The purpose of the National Health Service Corps program is to encourage health practitioners to serve in Nevada's underserved areas where their expertise is most needed. Through this program, practitioners commit to full-time clinical practice in designated communities facing practitioner shortages, receiving loan repayment assistance in return for their service.

In exchange for loan repayment funds, each candidate agrees to serve in their assigned community for a contractually specified period of time. Typically, the length of time equals three years of full-time service. There is also an award enhancement for those that have a proficiency in Spanish.

<https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment/nhsc-rural-community-loan-repayment-program>



Nevada Health Service Corps State Loan Repayment Program

Administered by the Nevada State Office of Rural Health (SORH) at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine (UNR Med), the NHSC program provides educational loan repayment assistance to eligible health professionals in exchange for their service in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs).

<https://med.unr.edu/community/office-statewide-initiatives/nevada-health-service-corps>

Winter Bingo

Use this as a guide for self-care or...

Cross off each activity as you complete it!

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| Make/Buy a treat for yourself | Honor your cultural tradition | Have a spa day at home | Sit by a fireplace (videos count!) | Create something just for fun |
| Write down 3 goals | Journal or reflect on the year | Talk to a family member or friend | Spend 5 minutes in the sunlight | Read a short story |
| Take 3 deep breaths | Share a positive message | Free Space | Watch a cozy movie or show | Enjoy a comfort meal |
| Take a nature walk | Learn about a different tradition | Make a warm drink for yourself | Take a warm shower or bath | Write a nice note to someone |
| Take a day off | Volunteer in your community | Call a family member or friend | Listen to calming music | Check one thing off your "To-Do" list |