

# NPHF Monthly Newsletter



## GARDNERVILLE



Each month the main picture will feature a different city in Nevada. If you have a scenic picture of your county please email, [andrea@nphf.org](mailto:andrea@nphf.org)

## Social Work Scholarship Student Check-In

*Jared Russo is a MSW student at University of Reno working at DCFS in White Pine County. Jared has been with the scholarship program from the beginning, since Fall 2023.*



### Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I grew up in California and currently live in McGill. My journey toward social work began through personal experiences with adversity early in life, which helped me develop a deep empathy for others and a passion for helping people overcome their own barriers. I've always been drawn to understanding the "why" behind people's struggles, and social work offered the perfect blend of human connection, advocacy, and healing. Over time, I realized that social work wasn't just a career choice for me, it was a calling.

### Where do you currently work and what do you do (share any practicums)?

I currently work as a Family Support Worker with the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). In my role, I provide support services to families, helping them strengthen parenting skills, improve communication, and access resources to build stability. I've also completed a practicum at Rural Clinics, where I provided psychosocial rehabilitation, led queer support groups, and offered service coordination to individuals navigating mental health challenges.

I'm currently pursuing my Master of Social Work and will be starting my clinical internship next year, either with DCFS or Rural Clinics. I'm especially looking forward to gaining hands-on clinical experience that will prepare me for my future as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

### Can you share a challenging work/client situation that you encountered and how you worked through it?

One of the most challenging situations I've faced was when a mother I was working with asked if I could be a placement for her child. It was a difficult moment because I cared deeply about the family and wanted to support them, but ethically I couldn't accept that role. I had to navigate the situation carefully acknowledging her trust in me while gently explaining the professional boundaries I have to uphold. I reassured her that my commitment to helping her family hadn't changed and worked to connect her with appropriate placement resources. Maintaining that balance between empathy and ethics allowed me to preserve our rapport and continue supporting her in a meaningful way.

## Upcoming Webinars

### Working in Public and Private Practice

Join us to meet and talk with Jennifer Hawelu, LCSW, who works for DCFS and has her own private practice. Learn about the differences, similarities, benefits, and challenges between these two roles.

Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12:00 - 1:00pm

[Click to Register](#)

## Quote of the Month

**"No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another. Thank you."**

—Author Unknown

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**What would you say the benefits are to working in a rural area? What are the challenges?**

Working in a rural area offers a unique sense of community and the opportunity to build deep, lasting relationships with clients and colleagues. You truly get to see the difference your work makes in people's lives. However, there are challenges, including limited access to resources and specialized services. There is also the need to be extra mindful of boundaries since dual relationships are more likely in small communities. These challenges push you to be resourceful and creative in your problem-solving while reinforcing the importance of strong ethical practice. Additionally a small area can be very clique-ish and include gossip culture, that can be very disheartening.

**As one of the students who has been with the social work scholarship program the longest, how has the scholarship impacted you/your schooling?**

The scholarship has been incredibly meaningful both financially and personally. It has helped cover transportation costs when I've had to travel to Reno for my classes, about a five hour drive each way, which made it much more feasible to pursue my degree while continuing to work and live in a rural area. Beyond the financial support, the scholarship has given me a sense of encouragement and belief in my potential as a social worker. It's allowed me to stay focused on my academic goals, maintain a 4.0 GPA, and pursue opportunities that align with my long-term goal of becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker dedicated to serving marginalized communities.

## Social Work and the Legal System: Through the Lens of a Forensic Social Worker

*Cassandra Diaz, LCSW, currently works for the Las Vegas Municipal Court as a Program Manager and was previously a Forensic Social Worker working with Clark County Public Defender's Office in Las Vegas, Nevada.*

**Would you share about your background?**

I grew up in Southern California and I had the opportunity to attend some great public schools in that area. During my last year of high school I took the SATs with the intention of attending a 4-year university right out of high school, but when it came down to it I wasn't sure where I would want to go or what I wanted my academics to focus on. Ultimately, I decided to attend College of the Canyons, my local community college, to help gain exposure to a variety of subject matter to better plan for my future. It was while I was there I began to take classes in criminology and sociology that sparked my interest in working in the legal field.

When it came time to transfer to a university I looked for a program that could marry my interests of law and psychology. I ended up transferring to the University of California Irvine (UCI) where I double majored in Criminology/Law/Society, and Psychology/Social Behavior.

At UCI, I worked in a research lab under some world renowned psychologists including Elizabeth Loftus, Jennifer Skeem, and Pete Ditto. My interest how a person's mental health or behavioral issues may impact how they end up in the legal system grew. I then decided that I wanted to obtain a higher degree and pursued my MSW at UNLV.

**How did you decide to become a LCSW?**

I chose to pursue my MSW in social work because I was looking for a degree that allowed me to be dynamic and had multiple uses. I chose to attend UNLV because at that time they had a forensic social work certificate program, however, this program ended the first year I was there. At that point I knew that I wanted to work in the legal realm in some capacity, and I also knew that I would have to build my career path and knowledge since the certificate program had been dissolved. I chose practicums where I was actively engaged in the legal field.

During my second year of graduate school, I decided to take up an independent study that culminated in a written thesis and presentation. This project focused on the conflation between adult sex work and forced prostitution (human trafficking). I also began my second practicum in an anti-human trafficking agency that ended up hiring me once I graduated.





During my MSW program I focused on macro level work and I had not foreseen that I would get my clinical license. I enjoyed working on program development and systematic change. Then, through my practicum, I gained my experience working 1:1 with victims on a case management level and felt a pull to work with them on a deeper level. It was at that time I decided to apply and get my hours for my clinical license.

### **Can you describe the type of work you do (forensic social work)?**

On a day to day basis my work focuses on managing staff in various departments within in a courthouse. I advise on many processes within the court systems including civil commitments, competency, as well as mental health or substance abuse evaluations. A big part of my job focuses on program development and staying within the parameters of grant funding. More specifically, I work on developing processes for how defendants can flow through the legal system or programming in a way that is supportive of their needs.

### **What skills and/or credentials are important to do this type of work?**

The biggest skill is being able to understand how the criminal justice system works on a justice court and district court level, as well as across jurisdiction. I have to stay up to date on the NRS and how those changes can impact the requirements a defendant may have to meet for their sentence and case closure.

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

Prior to working in court administration I worked as a social worker for the Clark County Public Defender. In that position I had an opportunity to work directly with defendants who were dealing with a major crisis in their lives. I was able to contribute to their legal case by working as an advocate, connecting them to resources, and in some cases being able to put mitigating information together for their sentencing. In this role I was able to see how social workers can directly impact a person's legal case.

### **What are the challenges in your work?**

The main challenge throughout my career as a LCSW in a legal setting is being able to understand that the legal goal and the mental health goal may not always align. As a clinical person in a legal realm I need to be cognizant that forcing treatment (whether it be therapy or medication management) can be in conflict with an individual's right to self-determination. In a legal setting it is always important to ask what the legal case is calling for and balance it with what a defendant is capable of.

### **What advice would you give to a BSW/MSW student thinking about becoming a LCSW focused on forensic social work?**

My biggest advice would be to try and get a placement at one of the forensic sites so that they can get a taste of it before looking for employment. The forensic sites include Juvenile Justice, The Office of the Public Defender, Clark County Detention Center, and the City of Las Vegas Municipal Court. I would also encourage students to ask more questions in class and encourage their program to highlight what kind of work is being done in the legal field.

## **RESOURCE CORNER**



Rural Health Information Hub is a great resource to learn about what is happening nationally in regard to rural health.

Sign up for their weekly newsletter to have access to webinars, articles, conferences, and funding opportunities.

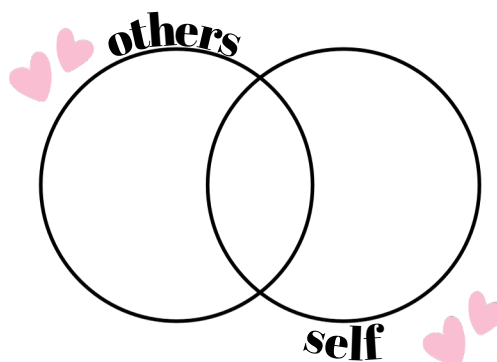
[www.ruralhealthinfo.org](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org)



# Growth & Gratitude

What **inspires** me:

Acts of **kindness** for:



I am **grateful** for



What I have accomplished:

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What I look forward to:

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How I will grow:

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The people that **support** me:

