

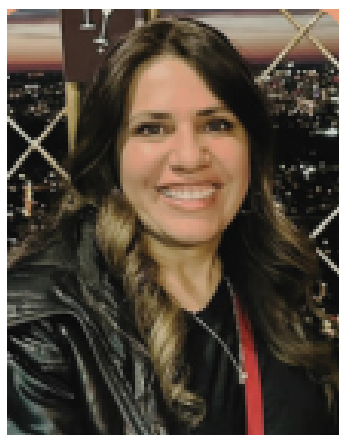
NPHF Monthly Newsletter



Picture from <https://nextdoor.com/city/mesquite-nv/>

When Support Is Built Into the School Day: School-Based Youth Mental Health Services

Christina Sapien is a LCSW with the the Carson City School District in Carson City, NV.



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am a proud UNR graduate and have been a clinical social worker for 18 years. I grew up in Rural Nevada, Lyon County. I completed my practicum in outpatient mental health and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. I then completed a clinical internship at a local hospital, training across inpatient and outpatient psychiatric settings and providing crisis services, including emergency department work with individuals in acute distress.

Throughout my career, I've enjoyed systems-level work—building programs new to Nevada, creating strong partnerships, and fostering community involvement. I've worked across inpatient psychiatric, outpatient, and crisis stabilization settings. Outside of my professional role, I'm also a volunteer USA Boxing Coach and Official, supporting a local youth nonprofit and staying connected to the diverse community I serve.

Can you describe where you work currently, your role and what skills you find are needed/important?

I currently work for the Carson City School District where I focus on building and strengthening school-based mental health services for students in need. This includes developing workforce capacity and creating a clinical pathway for interns to gain hands-on experience and hours toward licensure. This role also involves reviewing, updating, and developing policies and procedures that strengthen mental health supports and suicide prevention.

Why did you decide to work in the school system?

Previously most of my work was with adults, but I saw a significant need for youth mental health services in our region. Limited outpatient and inpatient options, long waitlists, transportation barriers, payor challenges, and language barriers make schools a critical and accessible place to provide support.

What challenges have you encountered in this role? Or what challenges are there when working with youth?

Sustainable funding continues to be a challenge. We are actively working to bill Medicaid since mental health billing codes have been added to Provider Type 60, as well as applying for grant funding to ensure long-term program sustainability and growth.

Can you share a success story or a story that was impactful to you?

There are many student success stories I could share; however, I will focus on system-level successes. The school district has updated job descriptions for school social workers and renewed our clinical program, strengthening service delivery across the district. We've also built strong partnerships with community providers who offer services directly on school campuses, along with bringing on three LCSW contractors to expand clinical support for students and families. Continued on Page 2...

Upcoming Webinars

TBA

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

Training in trauma-informed care has been essential including understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the importance of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). Crisis intervention skills—such as the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale and safety planning—are critical when supporting students in crisis. Certification in Crisis Intervention Training (often supported by local law enforcements and NAMI). The school district is also preparing for the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS) training to further strengthen our clinical assessment and intervention skills.

What advice would you give to students interested in pursuing work as a social worker in the school system?

A quote I reflect on by Frederick Douglass is, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” I don’t view people as broken, but I do believe we should be prioritizing children by investing early in connection, prevention, intervention and support. School social work allows us to strengthen skills, resilience, and relationships before challenges escalate, making a meaningful difference across the lifespan. Schools are another space where clinical social workers can make a meaningful impact on students, families, staff, and the broader community.

Social Work Scholarship Recipient Check-In



Mikaela Brenner is a MSW student at the University of Nevada, Reno working at the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in Washoe County. Mikaela has been with the scholarship program since Fall 2025.

What first sparked your interest in this field?

I have wanted to help children and families for as long as I can remember. When I was in elementary school, I remember reading an article in a magazine about a child advocate lawyer and I really admired how she helped children. I asked my mom to help me track her down, and we ended up becoming pen pals for a while. I really wish I had saved those letters.

I went back to school a little later in life and earned my bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and human services. I then took a position with DSS, working in the welfare office for about six months. When a position opened at my current job, I applied and was able to transfer to DCFS as a Psychiatric Caseworker in an incredible children’s mental health program called Wraparound in Nevada. In this role, I truly began to understand the helping profession and what social work actually is.

Admittedly, until just a few years ago, I thought social workers only worked in CPS. I had no idea how many doors an MSW could open. Case management exposes you to so many systems, policies, and programs, and you cannot do this kind of work without feeling the weight of injustice and the urge to advocate for change, especially when you are walking alongside families trying to navigate it all. I have always wanted to help people and becoming a social worker feels like I am finally walking in my calling.



What part of your work energizes you the most?

The program I work for is very strengths based, so I am always helping families find their silver lining and encouraging them to keep working toward better days. What energizes me most is when I see a family truly “get it”, when the light comes back into their eyes after achieving a goal they never thought was possible. The human connection and seeing people finally believe in themselves reminds me why I do this work, especially on the hard days.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

In school, my biggest challenge has been staying on top of all the reading assignments. At work, my biggest challenge is when I want change more than a client does. Sometimes people are so beaten down by life and the systems they are involved in that they lose hope. My challenge is helping them find it again.

What is one thing you wish more people understood about social work?

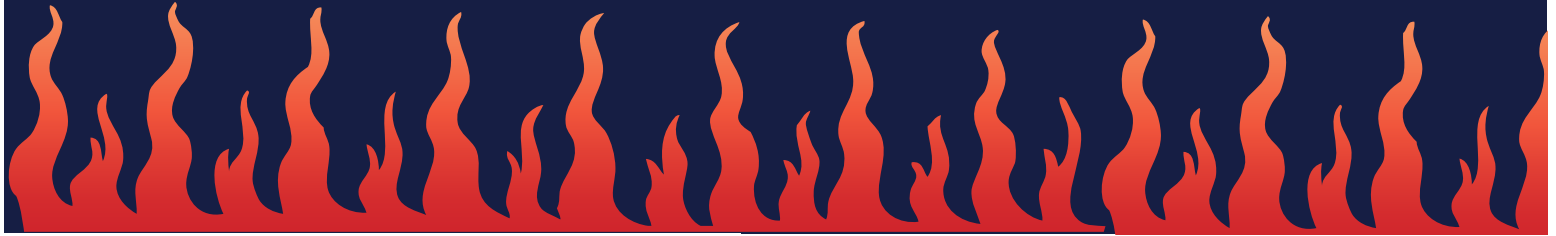
I wish more people seeking services understood that we truly want to help, empower, and see them succeed. We are not magicians, we cannot wave a magic wand and fix every problem, even though we would love nothing more. I also wish people remembered that while we are helping them navigate a difficult season in their lives, our own lives are still “life-ing”. We are human too. Continued on Page 3...

Mikaela's

Rapid Fire

Questions

- Favorite productivity tool? *Outlook Calendar*
- Something you're learning right now? *Grace, Giving, and Receiving*
- Optimist or realist? *Hope Core Realist*
- Go-to comfort food? *My Mom's Cooking*
- Most used phrase? *We Got This*



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For those entering social work or any helping profession, I hope they understand how powerful genuine human connection really is. Above all else, that connection is your greatest superpower.

What are your plans after graduate with your MSW?

Before starting my MSW program, I was certain I wanted to become a school social worker. Now that I see how many doors an MSW can open, I am no longer entirely sure. I love the hands-on fieldwork I do now, but my long term goal is to work at the macro level, focusing on policy reform and lasting systemic change. Decisions made at the top directly impact those at the bottom, and I believe my years of boots on the ground work, and the privilege of walking alongside families, have given me a perspective and voice that speaks for them. I am excited to see where life takes me.

RESOURCE CORNER

NASW Social Work Blog

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has a blog with regularly updated articles.

Social Work Blog: <https://www.socialworkblog.org/>



Some of their most recent article titles are:

- Rent Childcare Updates - Issues surrounding childcare in the news.
- Stop Spiraling Out of Control
- Breaking the Silence: Supporting Male Survivors During Domestic Violence Awareness Month
- Social Work: Your Digital Footprint, Your Professional Reputation

NASW also has a Nevada Chapter. If you are interested, go to <https://naswnv.socialworkers.org/>



PREP SERIES: CAREER PATHWAYS

For the next few months this newsletter will share tips and techniques for resumes, interviewing, and overall career planning.

Writing Your Resume for a State Job

I reached out to the State of Nevada's Division of Human Resource Management to ask what tips they would recommend when writing a resume or filling out a profile for a state job.

These tips are specifically focused on the resume that you will attach to that profile.

Resumes for a state job will have different formatting and content than a resume for a private/nonprofit organization. The State of Nevada offers a template they prefer be used which is available at nvjobs.nv.gov.

Tips

- Typically the resume will be multiple pages. Because the full responsibilities are needed for each job, it can make the resume lengthy.
- The format of resume is very simple and usually starts with the work history first and then followed by education, technology, and skills.
- For each job list whether it was full time or part time. If part time, provide the number of hours worked in a week.
- Each job will need 3-8 bullet pointed responsibilities depending on the length of the job, the responsibilities, and if the job was more recent or not. Do not create a Functional Resume which is a type of format that has one section for all your skills/job responsibilities and just a listing of your jobs.
- Be detailed in your descriptions and try to list everything necessary the first time. When applying to jobs in the private sector or at a non profit, it is expected that you alter your resume according to each job. For a state job, they suggest not altering your profile or resume because it could raise questions about why things were changed.
- Include credits completed if you have not graduated with a degree.
- Add certificates, licenses, or additional trainings.