

History of the Ohio School Social Work Association

The Ohio School Social Work Association's (OSSWA) first Annual Meeting was held at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University (MSASS) in Cleveland on December 5, 1997. The advocacy work of social workers across Ohio over many years contributed to the recognition of the need to form a state organization specific to the specialization of the School Social Work profession.

In the 1970's and 1980's, the Urban Education Committee of the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (OHNASW) worked diligently to advocate for the needs of inner city students and their families. The members of that committee were instrumental in providing guidance and easing the conflict in school districts and the communities that ensued around school desegregation and bussing issues.

In the early 1990's, social workers across the state worked on many fronts in Ohio to further the profession. OHNASW was instrumental in passing legislation that required completion of a social work program accredited through the Council for Social Work Education in order to apply for a social worker license from the Ohio Counselor and Social Worker Board.

Lois Stenger of OHNASW, Martin Oppenheimer of the Southwestern Special Education Regional Resource Center, and Amy Riemenschneider, Ph.D. of the College of Social Work at Ohio State University worked with the Ohio Department of Education, the State Board of Education and worked with the Ohio Department of Education to expand legislative language supporting the school social work profession.

At the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS) in Cleveland, Elizabeth Tracy, Ph.D., worked with Mrs. Stenger to develop an approved school social work program in partnership with the Department of Education at Baldwin-Wallace College. The first cohort of school social workers graduated in 1995. Mrs. Stenger came to speak to the MSASS cohort. She inspired the members and was the catalyst for the formal movement to establish a state organization to meet the needs of the school social work specialty.

In the late 1990's, Cincinnati Public Schools Department of School Social Workers met with school social workers from Cleveland at the first School Social Work of Association of America Conference, hosted in Louisville, Kentucky in October, 1996. The group discussed the need to form a state organization at the Midwest School Social Work Council meeting during that

conference. That group was told that Ohio had sent a representative and been accepted as a member state by the Council in 1993, but Ohio had not been active since that initial meeting.

With the encouragement of Dr. Elizabeth Tracy, Kathleen Usaj, a 1995 graduate of the MSASS school social work program and a school social worker in the South Euclid-Lyndhurst School District attended the Spring 1997 Midwest School Social Work Council

Meeting with MSASS graduate intern Karen Hunter to bring back information for consideration by Ohio school social workers. A meeting was held at MSASS in the summer of 1997 with 20+ social workers to discuss the information from the Midwest School Social Work Council meeting.

In the 1997 fall semester, Karen Hunter initiated a student advocacy project as part of her policy class to form a student organization, the School Social Work Advocacy Group (SSWAG). Mrs. Usaj contacted OHNASW President, Clara Simmons, to share the information of the support for school social work around the state and at the Midwest School Social Work Council.

Ms. Simmons appointed Ms. Usaj to the OHNASW School Social Work Steering Committee with co-chairs Theresa Day and Jacqueline Wright. Kathleen Usaj and Karen Hunter attended the October, 1997 meeting of the Midwest School Social Work Council Conference in Kansas City.

The Ohio School Social Workers Association hosted its first annual meeting on December 5, 1997. Those in attendance included Karen Hunter, Mary Tinsley, Kathleen Usaj, Julenne Landon, Denise McCarthy, Lenore Ivy, Sammisteon Harris, Caryl Alfred Yoo, Joanna Cox, Kimberly Succup, Molly Brudnik, Meighan Schreiber, Meredith Maranzano, Jacquie Wittenberg, Lisa Berkowitz, Layla Johnson, Aminah Brahim, Alissa Stinson, Juanita Dalton-Robinson and Dr. Elizabeth Tracy. The transitional board included Karen Hunter, President; Mary Tinsley and Kathleen Usaj; 1st Vice Presidents; Amy Riemenschneider, 2nd Vice President; Julenne Landon, Recording Secretary, Denise McCarthy, Treasurer, and Elizabeth Tracy, University Advisor.

There were two presentations about school social work at the March, 1998 OHNASW Conference. The Cleveland Social Work Urban Education Committee presented a panel on school social work and Donna Secor, President of the Michigan Association of School Social Workers and Midwest School Social Work Council member and Kathleen Usaj of OSSWA presented on the topic of school social work and the need for support from the state department of education.

The OHNASW School Social Work Steering Committee held a transition meeting in May with staffer Ann Riffle to discuss the charge of the committee and schedule meetings. A steering committee meeting was held on July 15, 1998 in Columbus. Those in attendance were

Jacqueline Wright, Theresa Day, Kathleen Usaj, Karen Hunter, Dr. Phillip Jackson (University of Cincinnati), Dr. Amy Riemenschneider and Dean Tony Tripodi (of Ohio State University) to further dialogue and determine the charge of the committee (Dr. Elizabeth Tracy of MSASS was unable to attend).

At the September 11, 1998 OHNASW School Social Work Steering committee meeting, the committee recommended that the structure of the OHNASW School Social Work Committee be abolished; an ad hoc advisory committee be established composed of the three accredited schools of social work (at that time it was OSU, MSASS and University of Cincinnati) and three ODE licensed school social workers; and that OSSWA appoint a member of their board to be the contact person for the OHNASW staff.

The transitional board was extremely busy the next two years. The Midwest School Social Work Council was instrumental supporting this fledgling organization until it had the infrastructure to sustain itself. The members engaged in board development training and identifying its' mission, vision, goals and objectives. School social workers volunteered to organize and serve on committees, wrote by-laws, offered professional development trainings, located school social workers to offer support and held meetings around the state in an effort to expand the membership and regional representation and established relationships with the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Department of Mental Health. OSSWA entered into a state partnership with the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) and expanded its' reach across the state to support school social workers.

The first elections for office were held in spring, 2000. The newly elected board took office in May, 2000 and in 2007 has grown to 25+ board members, including graduate students, representing all regions of the state.

OSSWA's most recent accomplishments include continued expansion of its membership, launching a professional website www.osswa.org, hosting the 2005 Spring Summit in partnership with the Ohio Association of School Based Health Centers and the Center for Learning Excellence at OSU, initiating and participating in the development of the Ohio Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations in 2005, representing the School Social Work Association of America on the 2006-2007 National Association of State Directors of Special Education Response to Intervention Workgroup and United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Leadership Conference and being chosen to host the 40th Annual Midwest School Social Work Council Conference in 2007.

The board has also renewed its partnership with the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. Several school social workers now serve as regional directors and on legislative committees bringing their unique perspective and collaborating with social workers from all areas of practice across the state to enhance professional development and legislative action for our profession and clients.

