



18TH ANNUAL MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE **SOCIAL WORK** **CONFERENCE**

Sponsored by Medgar Evers College Transition Academy and the
Department of Social Work, in collaboration with
New York City Children's Center - NYS Office of Mental Health,
Bronx Psychiatric Center - NYS Office of Mental Health, and
NewYork- Presbyterian

March 20, 2025 8am-4pm
AB1 Dining Hall
1638 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn NY, 11225

SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE



PROGRAM

Roots of Resilience: Navigating Psychosocial and Political Challenges
Thursday, March 20, 2025
8:00AM - 4:00 PM

Welcome

Edward Hernandez, PhD., Chair | Social Work Department, Medgar Evers College, CUNY

Greetings

Patricia Ramsey, PhD., President | Medgar Evers College, CUNY

Conference Theme and Purpose

Allison Niles, LMSW, Social Worker | PS 116 Mary Lindley Murray

Ice Breaker

Rebecca Cenatus, PhD. Academic Student Support Specialist/ SEEK | Medgar Evers College, CUNY

Keynote Speaker

“Rest, Resilience, and Resist”

Melissa Elliott, LCSW-R, Founder/Chief Executive | AGAPE Family Therapy and Coaching

Workshop

"HerStory in Healing"

Melissa Elliott, LCSW-R, Founder/Chief Executive | AGAPE Family Therapy and Coaching
Camille Edwards, M.Ed., Executive Assistant | *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*

Panel Discussion

Strategies to Reduce Stigma and Promote Mental Health Awareness Among Young People

Facilitator: John McQueen, Ed.S, LCSW-R, CFLE, President | Psychotherapy PC. Brooklyn, NY

Panelists

Karina Siurano, Community School Director at an Elementary School in the Bronx

Barbara Derrick, Parents Rights Advocate, Community Engagement Specialist Center for Family Representation, New York, NY

Break

Keynote Speaker

“Promoting Resilience as Clinicians Amongst Today's Political Climate”

Stephanie Cherestal, PhD, Director | Health Justice in the Department of Psychiatry, Weill Cornell Medical College Director | Outpatient Dialectical Behavior Therapy Clinics, New York Presbyterian

Panel Discussion

Examine the Role of Social Media on Youth Mental Health

Facilitator: Allysha Bryant, MSW, Director | New York Connects Brooklyn

Panelists

Gloria Seay, LMSW, Clinical Manager | NYC Administration for Children’s Services

Gabrialle Taylor, LCSW, CEO/Founder | Gabrialle Taylor LCSW PLLC, Brooklyn, NY

Rai Camille Rance, DhA, LCSW, Senior Mental Health Officer | Montefiore Hospital Health System

Linda Batson, DSW, LMSW, Clinical Social Worker | Northshore Child and Family Guidance

Panel Discussion

Elections Have Consequences: The Impact on Social Work and Continued Service Provision

Facilitator: Dr. Joyce Roberson-Steele, PhD., LMSW, Doctoral Lecturer | Social Work Department, Medgar Evers College

Panelists

Nantasha Williams, PhD., NYC Council Member | Council District 27, South East Queens, NY
Phara Souffrant Forrest, NYC Assembly Member | Assembly District 57, Brooklyn, NY

Chanette Bovell, MSW, Child Protective Specialist II – Family Service | Administration For Children’s Service

Natasha Harding, LMSW, Administrative Director / Family Permanency Services/Office of Family Services, NYC Children’s Services

Barrington Atkins, LCSW, Assistant Principal | Newburgh City District

Student Awards Presentation

Vanessa Granobles • Dr. Eda Harris-Hastick Academic Achievement Award

Candy Bowes • Professor Elaine Reid Spirit Award

Award Presenter Dr. Edward Hernandez, Chair of Social Work Department, Medgar Evers College, CUNY

Closing Remarks and Pledge

Margaret Wang, LMSW, Student Life Coordinator | Transition Academy, Medgar Evers College, CUNY

WELCOME

Patricia Ramsey, President, Ph.D.



Dr. Patricia Ramsey was appointed the sixth president of Medgar Evers College by the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees. Dr. Ramsey, who officially took office on May 1, 2021, is the first woman and the first scientist to serve in the position of President of the College.

As the thought leader for a \$20 million grant award, just six weeks after Dr. Ramsey arrived, two new programs, Cultivating Holistic Academic Mindsets to Promote Student Success (CHAMPSS) and the Brooklyn Recovery Corps (BRC) programs were created. Both programs provide funding to assist participants in paying for their education.

A biologist by training, Dr. Ramsey has a research interest in the biological activity of plants used in folklore, has collected 110 species of Agave in the Sonoran Desert, and traveled a 450-mile span of highway collecting Sapium sebiferum (popcorn tree) leaves in the southeastern United States. Dr. Ramsey earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology (Education) from Norfolk State University, a Master of Science in Botany from Howard University, a Master of Arts in Biology from Harvard University, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Biology from Georgetown University.

**Edward Hernandez,
Ph.D.**



Dr. Edward Hernandez is an Associate Professor at Medgar Evers College and serves as Chair of the Social Work Department. He also teaches online classes in Social Work, Human Services, and Sociology at several universities.

Prior to Medgar Evers College, Dr. Hernandez served as Deputy Commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Social Services from 2004 until 2012. His career includes over 30 years of government and not for profit agencies positions in largely administrative and management capacities. Dr. Hernandez received his MSW and Ph.D in Social Welfare from Stony Brook University.

**Allison Niles,
LMSW**



Allison Niles, LMSW, is a school social worker with the NYC Department of Education, where she supports students and families in temporary housing within the NYC public school system. Ms. Niles has been a proud member of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) since 2017. She currently serves as the Second Vice president and chair person of the Education Committee of the Association of Black Social Workers Inc. NYC Chapter, and is a member of both the Medgar Evers College Community Council and the Social Work Conference committee. Ms. Niles serves as Sunday School Superintendent and Sunday School teacher at her church. She is an alumna of the Medgar Evers College (BSSW) and the Adelphi University (MSW) Ms. Niles is deeply committed to social justice and advocating for marginalized and underserved communities. Voluntarism and traveling are her passion!

Rebecca Cenatus, Ph.D.



Dr. Rebecca Cenatus, Ph.D., LMSW, holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Medgar Evers College at the City University of New York (CUNY), a master's degree in Social Work from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College (CUNY), and a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare from the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University. She is licensed in her profession and SIFI certified, allowing her to provide professional mentorship and field supervision to graduate students from various social work programs

Dr. Cenatus is an Academic Support Specialist, Lecturer, and Counselor in the Percy E. Sutton SEEK program at Medgar Evers College (CUNY). In addition to providing academic and counseling support, she teaches group-counseling courses and facilitates psychoeducational workshops

with a holistic approach to enhancing the personal and psychosocial development of marginalized students through a social justice and anti-oppressive lens. She has also taught courses on community justice as an adjunct professor in the Department of Africana Studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY).

Her passion for serving underrepresented communities began during her internship at STEPS to End Family Violence, an Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) Program dedicated to providing counseling services and legal advocacy to women facing criminal charges related to domestic violence, abuse, and trauma. Dr. Cenatus' weekly visits to Rikers Island and close work with courts and attorneys opened her eyes to the discrimination and disproportionate representation of people of color in the Criminal Justice System.

As a servant leader, Dr. Cenatus hopes to inspire her students to overcome adversity and build resilience on their journey to academic success. Her mission is to "Educate, Elevate, and Empower" individuals to fulfill their highest potential in life.

Camille Edwards,
M.Ed



Camille Edwards, M.Ed., is a Brooklyn native with Trinidadian roots, currently an Executive Assistant at The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. Since 2020, she's managed internal projects and assisted with day-to-day operations on the production team. Camille also works closely with the music team to produce live performances for top artists like Doechii, Leon Thomas, and The War & Treaty. With a decade of experience across education, music, sports, and entertainment, Camille loves teaching storytelling and technical skills at the School of The NY Times, using experiential learning theory. Outside of work, she enjoys traveling, puppeteering, and planning wellness retreats & workshops for women to connect, heal, and play.

"The roots of resilience ... are to be found in the sense of being understood by and existing in the mind and heart of a loving, attuned, and self-possessed other."
Bessel van der Kolk

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Melissa Elliott,
LCSW-R



Melissa Elliott is the founder and CEO of AGAPE Family Therapy and Coaching, a group private practice serving New Yorkers in maternal mental health, family therapy, group counseling, and national and international coaching clients, provides consultation and training on corporate wellness, employee engagement, and leadership development to organizations, and provides clinical supervision to LMSW, LMHC, LMFT, LCAT, and LCSW in the state of New York.

Melissa is a Board Member of the Association for Nonprofit Specialists, and Adjunct Professor at NYU.

She is the former accomplished Not-for Profit Senior Director with 10+ years of success in education, workforce development, mental health, and child welfare. Creates and manages multiple high-quality, productive programs that meet agency policies and procedures, resulting in positive outcomes that achieve stakeholder goals. Melissa cultivates and fosters trusting relationships with staff, colleagues, community organizations, public/private educational institutions, K-12 schools, mental health and medical clinics, administrations, adults, families, and children. She is a dedicated and proactive change agent for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) professional recognized for leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills.

Stephanie Cherestal,
Ph.D.



Dr. Stephanie Cherestal is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in Clinical Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine and an Assistant Attending Psychologist at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Westchester Behavioral Health Center. Dr. Cherestal earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Hofstra University, and completed her pre-doctoral training through her clinical internship with NYU/Bellevue Hospital Center. As a licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Cherestal specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) for adults and adolescents with anxiety, mood, and personality disorders. DBT

As director of the NYP-Westchester Behavioral Health Center's Outpatient Adult and Adolescent DBT programs, she provides individual and group treatment to patients, and conducts supervision and training to trainees in DBT. She also serves as Director of Health Justice in the Department of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine, a role that involves the promotion of educational initiatives surrounding diversity, equity, inclusion, as well as recruitment policies and efforts to increase diversity within the Psychiatry and Psychology departments at Weill Cornell Medicine. Dr. Cherestal's research interests include exploring and evaluating strategies for increasing dissemination of and access to evidence-based psychotherapies, particularly to marginalized communities.

SPEAKERS

John McQueen,
Ed.S, LCSW-R



John McQueen is a spiritual teacher, lecturer, ordained minister, leadership coach and author of *Father's Absence and Reality-Based Parenting*. He also co-authored four culturally competent articles published in different scientific peer review magazines.

Additionally, Mr. McQueen is the founder of Family Renaissance, Inc., a self-supporting not-for-profit agency. Currently, he is an Adjunct Professor at Medgar Evers College and the President/Owner of Center for Psychotherapy a private behavioral health organization in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

Through culturally responsive counseling, psychotherapeutic workshops, group (parenting, marital, bereavement, etc.) facilitation, conferences, and leadership trainings, he empowers families by helping to improve the knowledge,

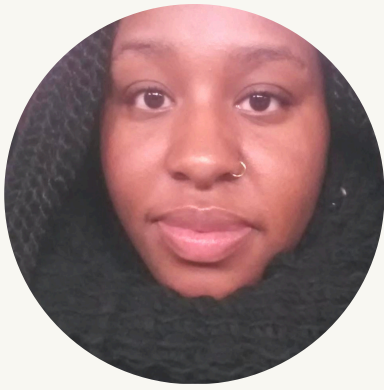
skills and capabilities of individuals within the family system. He also provides internship (clinical) opportunities for a number of affiliated colleges and universities for students living in the community as well as offering supervision to mental health practitioners who are committed to community and are seeking licensure to engage in professional endeavors. His passion is identifying the changing needs of families and designing instruments to meet and transcend those needs while at the same time remaining mindful of and committed to his own growth, healing, and transcendence. One of the highlights of his career is the development and implementation of his capstone project: Imani Rites of Passage (IROP), a cultural heritage and Mentorship Program (CHAMP). In essence, IROP is an innovative therapeutic, educational, and recreational out-of-school or extracurricular activity which addresses the interrelated academic and emotional needs of children.

Through this instrument, Mr. McQueen has helped thousands of young people in their quest for psychological,

emotional, social, and spiritual growth and development. Mr. McQueen has been a guest on WLIB's Tony Brown Show; WNWK's Howard Hughes Show; the Caribbean Classroom - Queens/Brooklyn Public Television and is the recipient of several awards, including Redemption Christian Center's Education Service Award; FSN Community Service Award, Brooklyn Borough President's Citation; The Washington Times Foundation American Century Award; Office of the Comptroller of New York City's Commendation, and Caribbean Life Impact Award.

His love for and commitment to community impelled him to continue working in the field of social work after adapting to the United States. As an influencer, however, Mr. McQueen is well known for the integration of spirituality and culture in clinical social work practice. His seminal idea that culture is a people's spiritual foundation emphasizes the importance of embracing heritage and history in their search for meaning, understanding, and purpose while navigating the process of human transformation.

Barbara Derrick



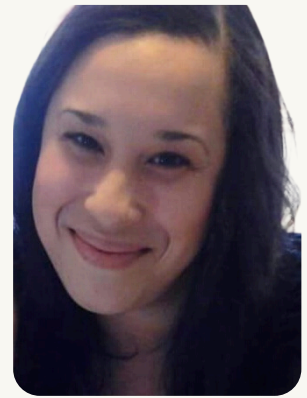
Born in Harlem, NY, Barbara Derrick's early life was shaped by hardship. Raised by parents battling addiction, she entered the foster care system at birth. A brief reunion with her family ended when her mother remarried an abusive man, leading to years of trauma and neglect. Enduring physical and emotional abuse, Barbara found solace in escaping to relatives' homes and, by age 12, was permanently removed from her mother's custody.

Navigating foster care, Barbara faced misdiagnosis, instability, and a desperate search for belonging. Despite challenges, she fought to reclaim her identity, questioning her mental health labels and advocating for herself. Homeless at 21, she battled depression and struggled to build stability. The birth of her son, Justice, became a turning point—her reason to heal and move forward.

However, systemic challenges persisted. A single mistake led to Justice's removal, intensifying Barbara's fight against the system. With support from Brooklyn Defenders and dedicated therapists, she embraced therapy, confronting past traumas and learning to advocate for herself and her son. Reunification with Justice marked a milestone in her journey of resilience.

Today, Barbara is a survivor, a mother, and an advocate for parents rights. Her story is one of perseverance, breaking cycles of trauma, and redefining her future. Through therapy and self-discovery, she continues to build a life of healing, strength, and empowerment.

Karina Siurano



Karina Siurano was born in the Dominican Republic in 1978. She grew up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and is an alumni of Medgar Evers College. Karina has nearly 25 years of experience working to increase parent and student engagement within the NYC public school system. Karina is currently a Community School Director at an elementary school in the Bronx. In this position, she coordinates and integrates services, programs, partnerships and supports for students and their families. She is passionate about decreasing the stigma on mental health and promoting a healthy social/emotional wellbeing to the students and families she serves.

Allysha Bryant,
MSW



Allysha Bryant, a native New Yorker, is a passionate advocate for social justice, driven to address the structural inequities in her city. As the Associate Director of Community Social Work at Presbyterian Senior Services and Program Director for NY Connects – Brooklyn, she has spearheaded the development of a resource hub supporting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their families. Her leadership has significantly enhanced service delivery, connecting over 4,700 community members with vital resources in the program's first year.

With a Master of Social Work from Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work and currently pursuing a PhD in Social Welfare, Allysha's research

focuses on increasing political participation among marginalized groups through culturally responsive interventions. Allysha's work bridges community engagement and political advocacy, empowering residents to collaborate with local officials to address community needs. Her expertise encompasses program development, community assessments, and qualitative evaluation, aimed at fostering sustainable community solutions. As a CSWE Minority Fellow Mentor and board member of Influencing Social Policy, she continues to contribute to advancing policy and practice within social work, reflecting her deep commitment to creating equitable and empowered communities.

Gabrielle Taylor,
LCSW



Gabrielle Taylor is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Clinical Alcohol Drug Counselor specializing in restoring hope by promoting purposeful learning for intentional healing. Gabrielle has over 25 years of experience working in the Behavioral Healthcare field as an executive, administrator, and therapist. She currently works in the private sector and moonlights as an adjunct professor in the Yeshiva University's MSW program. Throughout her career, she has worked in various mental health and substance use treatment centers throughout New York City, New Jersey, and South Carolina. Her work has focused on addressing an array of concerns that included stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, women's issues, failure to thrive, incarceration related trauma and depression, reintegration, and family and relationship discord.

Gloria Seay, LMSW, CASAC-t



Gloria Seay is a Brooklyn native. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Clinical Psychology from the nation's premier black institution, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania. It was there that she joined one of the most prestigious organizations, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. Upon graduation, Gloria began her career in child welfare within private nonprofit organizations as a Case Planner and Sociotherapist for Preventive and Foster Care Programs, respectively. Engaging in this work helped her discover her true passion for the helping profession. She went on to earn a master's degree through Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Service with a concentration in Clinical Social Work. Gloria has earned additional certification from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College-CUNY.

Gloria possesses 14 years of Child Welfare experience working in public and private sectors.

For the last 10 years, she has remained a civil servant committed to helping build a New York City that is safer, more just, and more equitable for children and families, working for the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Gloria began her career at ACS as a Child Protective Specialist for the Protective Diagnostic Unit but quickly moved on to the ACS Child Advocacy Center as part of the Instant Response Work Group. Gloria spent the last 5 ½ years as a Child and Family Specialist, remaining committed to strengthening and stabilizing families in crisis by facilitating emergency conferences for the boroughs of Staten Island, Manhattan, and the Office of Special Investigation. While there, she participated in the Family Team Conference Advisory Board.

She currently assumes the role as the Clinical Manager of Social Work at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center. Her newer responsibilities include providing enduring solutions that lead to timely permanency, safe

stable placements, and quality trauma-informed care for children with complex needs.

Throughout her career, Gloria has provided compassionate and evidence-based interventions to individuals, families, and groups. This allowed her to also pursue a more therapeutic approach grounded in evidence-based practices and integrating psychodynamic principles. As a Psychotherapist for NYC's seasoned citizens, Gloria maintains a safe and empathetic space where her clients can explore their unique narratives, unravel challenges, and cultivate resilience.

Gloria continues to support the field of Social Work and Social Work education as a Field Instructor and Mentor. She currently supports interns from Medgar Evers College and Hunter College. She is also an active member of the ACS Professional Development Program's Scholarship Selection Committee.

In all her roles, Gloria maintains a commitment to the values and ethics of the social work profession. She understands the vital and multifaceted role the profession plays in society by contributing significantly to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. She endeavors to remain an agent of change.

Rai Camille Rance,
DhA, LCSW



Dr. Rai Camille Rance obtained both her Bachelor's and Masters degree in Social Work from New York University's Silver School of Social Work and a Doctorate degree in Healthcare Administration from the Virginia University of Lynchburg. Rai Camille is clinically licensed in multiple to states to diagnose and provide psychotherapeutic services and is also a certified crisis and disaster responder clinician.

Rai Camille has over 15 years experience as community behavioral health leader having worked in large urban hospitals and institutions, serving diverse populations, specifically those who are severely mentally ill and mandated to ACT/AOT or other court supervised mandated treatment services.

Rai Camille is currently employed as a Senior Mental Health Specialist for a large hospital system within the five boroughs, while running her own private practice Savvy Social Work LCSW, PLLC where she treats adults with a wide range of mental health challenges.

Rai Camille offers a confidential, safe holding space and culturally responsive care to those grappling to meet their needs in the midst of harsh real world pressures life demands from us.

In her spare time Rai Camille enjoys spending time with family, closest friends and Sorority sisters whom she mentors teen age girls with. In addition, she performs a host of public service and volunteer activities throughout New York.

Linda Thomas Batson,
DSW, LMSW



Dr. Linda Thomas-Batson is a highly experienced clinical social worker with over 30 years of dedicated work with children in various capacities, including foster care, prevention, and support for preschool to high school children. She specializes in working with children diagnosed with ADHD, PTSD, and trauma, with a strong focus on family therapy. She retired from working as a school social worker to complete her Doctorate in Social Work and currently works as a part time home finder for the department of social services in Nassau County, New York.

Linda's educational background also extends to school administration, with a certificate in School Administration from CW Post/ Long Island University. She holds a master's degree in education from Touro University, contributing to her ability to work with children in educational settings

Linda is committed to research, particularly in trauma and family systems and their implications for social work practice. As a teaching fellow at Tulane University School of Social Work, she has demonstrated her passion for education and sharing her expertise with future social workers

In addition to her impressive education and experience, Linda is pursuing a graduate degree in social work at Tulane University. She earned her Doctor of Social Work degree in December 2023. Pursuing a doctoral degree indicates her dedication to advancing her knowledge and skills in social work. It suggests a desire to contribute to the profession through research or teaching.

Linda's experience in grant writing reflects her ability to secure funding for crucial social work initiatives, which is vital for organizations focused on helping vulnerable populations. She currently sits on the board of the Alpha Phi Alpha Senior Citizens center in Queens, NY and is a new appointment member of the Because We Care advisory board also in Queens, NY

In summary, Linda Thomas-Batson's extensive experience, diverse educational background, dedication to research, and ongoing pursuit of advanced degrees highlight her significant contributions to clinical social work, particularly in child and family therapy. Her impressive credentials and commitment to education and research make her an asset in the social work community.

Joyce Roberson-Steele,
Ph.D.



Dr. Joyce Roberson- Steele is a doctoral graduate from Wurzweiler School of Social Work's PhD in Social Welfare program at Yeshiva University. Her research interest focuses on the use of spirituality during the recovery process for older African Americans. Through this research, Dr. Roberson- Steele has authored several peer-reviewed journal publications and conference presentations both nationally and internationally addressing, institutional racism, barriers to mental health services and practical recovery practices found successful for substance use treatment amongst older adults.

Dr. Roberson-Steele is currently a member of the Social Work faculty team at CUNY's Medgar Evers College's BSW program. There she teaches Substance use treatment and Community Organizing Macro level courses.

Dr. Roberson-Steele also works as an adjunct at Wurzweiler School of Social Work teaching courses such as Cultural Diversity, Substance use Treatment, Interpersonal Partner Violence (IPV) Trauma and Community Organizing and MSW Practicum planning.

Prior to her faculty and practicum education career, Dr. Roberson-Steele has served for 30 years in different capacities within the Human Resources Administration (HRA) with 16 of those years serving in a managerial position for underserved populations such as with the Elderly/ Differently-abled homecare program, HIV-diagnosed clients, Domestic violence victims, NYC Department of Probation, and Administration Children Services (ACS) families

More recently Dr. Roberson-Steele has engaged in the development of an Anti-racist coalition, where she is honored to be the Coalition Co Chair. She has also mentored Medgar Evers students these past two years in a successful voter's registration drive on campus.

She is a member of numerous social associations such as the Association for Multidisciplinary Education and Research in Substance use and Addiction (AMERSA) Climate Task Force, the CSWE DEI Committee,

the Parental Advisory Board of Fresh Air Fund and serves on the Board of Directors for The International Association of Social Work with Groups (IASWG). She is honored to support the community and the educational journey of her students, ensuring they are learning the significance of equity, diversity, and inclusion as the new social justice advocates of the social work field. She understands and appreciates the role of group social work as a cornerstone of pedagogy skills needed to work with students, encourage organizational and community change, as well provide a voice for those often unseen and unheard. It is with this passion that she dedicates her career to teaching and engaging new social work practitioners with her expertise to elevate them as change agents.

Nantasha Williams, Ph.D., Council Member



New York City Council Member Dr. Nantasha Williams is the representative for Council District 27 in Southeast Queens, NY and its communities of Cambria Heights, Hollis, Jamaica, St. Albans, Queens Village, Addisleigh Park, and Springfield Gardens.

Dr. Williams is a community leader and social justice advocate committed to affecting real change in her community. Creating new economic opportunities, youth development, housing, and protecting our seniors are her top priorities. It is her mission to serve the residents of her hometown, Southeast Queens, New York and continue its rich legacy into the future.

Raised by a single mother who worked as a social worker for the city, Dr. Williams learned at an early age the importance of hard work and the demands and rewards of

fighting for our most vulnerable community members. Nationally recognized as a political strategist, she dedicates her life in service to marginalized communities throughout the country. Before her election, Dr. Williams was an activist, particularly focused on issues affecting women and girls, a cause close to her heart. To further engage women in politics, Dr. Williams founded the New York City Black Women's Political Club, an avenue to build political power for Black women across New York City in 2019.

Dr. Williams's champion spirit for human rights, women's rights, and racial equality extends beyond the borders of her home state. She helped lead operations and organizing efforts for one of the largest demonstrations in American history, the Women's March on Washington, D.C.

Dr. Williams has also shown unwavering dedication to criminal justice reform, combating gun violence, and addressing economic and racial disparities. By volunteering as an advisor to "Until Freedom," aiding in various justice campaigns nationwide, she has notably contributed to the proceedings in the Breonna Taylor case.

Additionally, she served on the board of Life Camp Inc., a program dedicated to curbing gang-related crime and gun violence in the community.

Now, with the launch of the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan, in partnership with New York City Department of City Planning, Queens Borough President Donovan Richards and Speaker Adrienne Adams, Dr. Williams has been able to create a grassroots vision for the future of the Downtown Jamaica and Hollis area that includes more affordable housing and investments to improve the quality of life.

Dr. Williams is a distinguished scholar in Social Welfare, possessing a PhD from the CUNY Graduate Center. Her research meticulously examines Social Movements, Public Policy, and Racial Justice. She obtained her undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Virginia Commonwealth University and holds a Master's in Public Administration from Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy.

Phara Souffrant Forrest, Assembly Member



Phara Souffrant Forrest represents the 57th Assembly District in Brooklyn, which consists of the neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Clinton Hill as well as parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights. She was first elected in 2020.

Phara is the daughter of Haitian immigrants and a lifelong resident of the 57th District. She is a proud product of Brooklyn's public school system, attending Philippa Schuyler Middle School and Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community Development. She then went on to attend SUNY Geneseo, where she majored in international relations, before obtaining an associate's nursing degree at CUNY City Tech and a BSN at CUNY School of Professional Studies.

She has held a variety of jobs that help her connect with her constituents, working in New York City

public schools, as an Uber driver, and doing youth advocacy work at Global Kids. Before being elected to the Assembly, Phara worked as a maternal child field nurse, caring for new mothers after they gave birth.

In addition to her work as a nurse, Phara was president of her building's tenant association before running for office. Tenant organizing, in particular the fight to pass the Housing Stability & Tenant Protection Act of 2019, was a major motivating force in her decision to run for office and stand up for tenants like her across the state.

Since being elected, she has continued to champion the rights of tenants, as well as expanding access to healthcare and reforms to the carceral system. In her first term, she passed the Less Is More Act, which made the state's supervision system more just and equitable. She believes that working-class New Yorkers deserve stable housing, affordable healthcare, and the resources to pursue a good life.

Phara lives in Crown Heights with her husband and son

Natasha M. Harding, LMSW



Natasha M. Harding is a Licensed Master Social Worker. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Fairleigh Dickinson University and a Master of Social Work with a Specialization in Student Community Development from Stony Brook University.

Natasha has over twenty years of experience in the field of social work and is a philanthropist who has committed her life to enriching the lives of children and families that are often underserved and marginalized. Natasha comes from a long line of social workers perhaps untraditional in the sense however; doing their part to effectuate change in their communities from the Caribbean to the United States. It's in her DNA.

Natasha's professional career has been spent working with the NYC Children's Services for the last 24 years. She is currently an Administrative Director of Social Services where she manages the daily operations of licensed social workers. Natasha is a passionate advocate, counselor, and broker. She is also a certified facilitator.

Natasha's commitment to community service is unwavering. Some of her endeavors include ongoing collaborations with organizations whose goal is to address persons experiencing food and housing insecurity, a Valentine's weekend feeding and gift giveaway at a women's shelter and hosting birthday parties for deserving children at family shelters.

Natasha is a member of the National Association of Social Workers, president of the Caribbean American Social Workers Association, Inc., and president of The McGowan Foundation, Inc. Natasha is a firm believer that "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men". Frederick Douglass

Barrington Atkins, LCSW



Barrington Randall Atkins is a passionate leader, advocate, and lifelong champion for community empowerment in the City of Poughkeepsie. His journey in social work and public service has been defined by bold action, fearless advocacy, and an unwavering commitment to justice. A proud graduate of Clark Atlanta University (B.A. in Psychology) and Howard University (M.S.W.), Barrington's passion for social justice was ignited during a cultural immersion project in Cape Town, South Africa, where he witnessed firsthand the power of resilience and community-driven change. That experience solidified his mission: to break barriers, uplift marginalized voices, and fight for a more just and equitable society.

Currently, Barrington serves as an Assistant Principal in the Newburgh Enlarged City School District and an Adjunct Professor of Sociology at Marist College.

His work in education reflects his deep-rooted belief that knowledge is power, and empowerment begins with access.

Beyond education, Barrington is a key voice in local government, serving as the Assistant Minority Leader for the Democratic Caucus in the Dutchess County Legislature. In this role, he champions policies that protect social services, expand access to mental health care, and fight for housing justice—because elections aren't just about politics; they determine the resources and protections available to our communities.

A dedicated leader and advocate, Barrington serves as the Polemarch of the Poughkeepsie Alumni Chapter, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and President of the Northern Dutchess Branch of the NAACP. He is an unwavering force for change in Dutchess County and beyond.

His impact has been recognized through numerous awards, including the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce Forty Under 40 Mover and Shaker Award, the Howard University School of Social Work Eva M. Stewart Award, and the National Association for Social Workers Progressive Public Servant Award.

Barrington's vision extends beyond policy and leadership. A firm believer in the power of storytelling, he aspires to write inspirational children's books, investing in the next generation by fostering self-worth, representation, and hope.

Through it all, he credits his faith in God, the unwavering support of his family and friends, and the lessons learned from those who came before him. As Whitney M. Young Jr. once said, "It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have an opportunity and not be prepared." Barrington is always prepared—to lead, to serve, and to inspire

Chanette Bovell,
MSW



Chanette Bovell, MSW, is a dedicated social worker and researcher based in Brooklyn, New York. She is pursuing her PhD in Social Welfare at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, where her dissertation focuses on Black women living with lupus. She holds a Master of Social Work from Yeshiva University and a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services from SUNY Empire State College. Chanette has diverse experience in social work, currently serving as a Research Assistant for the ASRT Immigration Research Project, where she conducts literature reviews and collaborates with community organizations to support immigrant populations.

Her current role as a child protective specialist II with the Administration for Children's Services, where she focuses on child welfare and family engagement. A recognized leader, Chanette serves as the Student Government's Student Advocate at Yeshiva University and has received the Yeshiva Wurzweiler School of Social Work Community Service Award. She is firmly committed to social justice and aims to empower underserved communities and address health disparities in her research and practice.

Margaret Wang,
LMSW



Margaret Wang, LMSW, is a passionate Social Worker. She is the Student Life Coordinator at Transition Academy, Medgar Evers College, City University of New York. Her work focuses on direct service, connecting students to food and housing resources.

Margaret is a graduate of Silberman School of Social Work. She has dedicated years of service in the Social Service sector in New York City. She worked as the College Aide in the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) in youth drowning prevention, where she led Mental Wellness Trainings for aquatic directors and instructors.

Her passion for social work was sparked during her time as the Housing Specialist and COVID Prevention Personnel at Hong Ning Senior Housing located in the Lower East Side. She saw first hand the importance of mutual aid and the transformative power of culturally informed care.

As the Student Life Coordinator, she is creating opportunities for students to sharpen their work skills and to realize their potentials.

Awardees

Dr. Eda Harris-Hastick Academic Achievement Award

Vanessa Granobles



Vanessa Granobles is a senior at Medgar Evers College specializing in Child Welfare. A proud Latinx immigrant, mother, artist, and non-traditional student, she is deeply committed to social justice and advocates for marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ youth, migrants, and individuals with disabilities.

With a background in the business sector, Vanessa transitioned to social work to pursue meaningful change and address systemic inequalities. She serves as President of Crystal Queer, is an active member of the Social Work Club, and interns at TRIO, where she provides critical support to first-generation, low-income, and disabled college students by assisting them with financial aid, academic resources, and campus navigation.

As a future social worker, Vanessa envisions using art as a tool for healing and empowerment, integrating creative expression into trauma-informed care. She is passionate about increasing access to mental health resources, dismantling systemic barriers, and fostering inclusive, supportive spaces where individuals feel valued and heard. With a holistic, person-centered approach, she hopes to bridge advocacy and direct services, ensuring that policies reflect the lived experiences of the communities she serves. Through her leadership, mentorship, and dedication, Vanessa strives to create lasting social change and contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Awardees

The Professor Elaine Reid Spirit Award

Candy Bowes



Candy Bowes is a senior at Medgar Evers College, majoring in Social Work, with a concentration in Child Welfare. She is from the beautiful island of Jamaica. She immigrated to the U.S.A to complete her degree in Social Work, with the goal of returning back home to help the youth.

As a social work student, she is passionate about advocating for marginalized communities. She found an academic home where she could thrive and grow, at Medgar Evers College. The support of faculty, peers, and her own determination, allowed her to engage deeply with social justice issues and develop the skills necessary to make meaningful impact. She has now gained a sense of family with colleagues and professors that she will carry in her heart forever.

For the past two years, Candy credits being resilient as her most important strength to get her through the day. It has helped her push forward, without placing too much focus on failures that can't be fixed. She plays a fundamental role in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for fellow social work students. With a passion for support and community giveback, her leadership in the social work club reflects commitment to uplifting others. She strives to inspire fellow members to use social work as a tool for positive change. With a strong belief in the importance of community building, she engages with her peers to encourage participation and foster a collective spirit of giving back.

Her motto is "It's not how you start that matters, it's when you finish that really counts". Medgar Evers College has not only been a landmark for her education, it has now become a landmark to an unpredictable journey. This recognition serves as both an encouragement and a call to continue striving for meaningful change. This award is not just a recognition of her past efforts, but a motivation to keep pushing her forward, as she progresses toward graduate school.

**City University of New York
Medgar Evers College
2025 18th Annual Social Work Conference Pledge**

“Rooted in R.E.S.I.L.I.E.N.C.E.”

by Dr. Kimberly Moore

We pray for resilience, our ability to bounce back,

Strengthening our capacity for elasticity while keeping our minds intact.

We are rooted in resilience, holding the sanctity of our communities up high,

*Promoting **R**estoration and **E**valuation to enhance the **S**ervices we provide.*

*Calling for comprehensive fiscal **I**nvestments during these challenging times,*

***L**everaging our collective power to soften the heart's cry.*

*Engagement and **I**nvolvement with each other's hands tightly held,*

*Expanding the reach of our institutions, as Social Work **E**ducation is unveiled.*

*With the skillful **N**avigation of knowledge, skills, and abilities - we thrive,*

***C**onceptualizing the “big picture” to **E**levate our lives.*

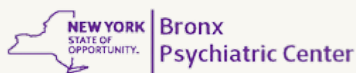
Together, we pledge to be resilient, our ability to bounce back,

With an attitude of gratitude, we are doing just that!

Happy Social Work Month!

SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Waleek Boone	DSW, MSW, MEd- HEA
Merville Antoine	LCSW-R, SIFI, IMHATT
Allison Niles	LMSW
Sherry Baird	LCSW-R, CASAC
Rebecca Cenatus	Ph.D, LMSW
Shari Richardson	DSW, LCSW
Shaleisha Heath	LMSW
Jenea Roberts	LMSW
Margaret Wang	LMSW



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