



Heart of Social Work Award Winner: Illana Perlman

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This speech was delivered by Eileen McKee, Assistant Dean Field Education, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto at the 2014 CSWE APM in Tampa, Florida. In it, Ms. McKee honors Illana Perlman, MSW, field instructor, director of education and trauma social worker at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center in Toronto. Ms. Perlman is the recipient of NANFED'S 2014 Heart of Social Work Award. – Editor's Note

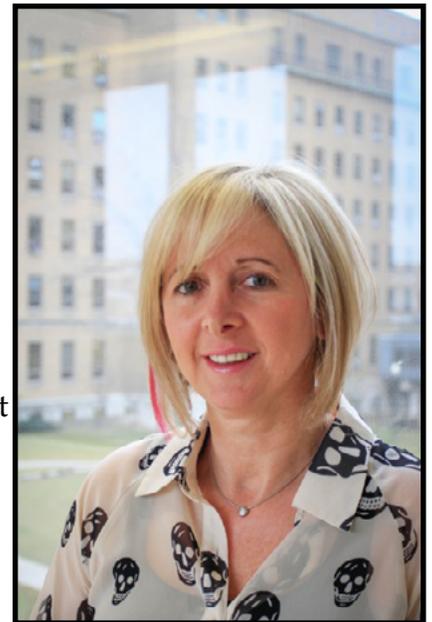
As the signature pedagogy of social work education, the Heart of Social Work Award is a meaningful way to recognize, not just the passion and experience that social workers share with their students, but also those field instructors who go beyond, who exemplify a theoretical basis and structure to their teaching, and who are capable of articulating their strategies while also meaningfully advocating for field education. The Heart of Social Work Award is an excellent forum to recognize these qualities, and I am delighted to speak about the 2014 recipient, Illana Perlman.

Modeling Exemplary Social Work

In her role as a social worker, Illana models exceptional social work skills to MSW students. Illana is a trauma social worker at a large urban teaching center and helps individuals cope with the ravages that traumatic injury brings.

One of Illana's clients shared his family's story: "...our lives changed dramatically back on Jan 25th 2003. Both of our daughters were involved in a very serious car crash and were taken to Sunnybrook

Hospital Trauma Unit - with life threatening injuries, traumatic brain injury, possible neck fracture and broken ribs. One daughter was in a coma for 6 weeks. We were asked to consider withdrawal of life support. My son was admitted when he collapsed in shock. At one point we had all three children admitted to Sunnybrook Hospital. Without Illana's support and strength my wife and [I] would not



have gotten through this trauma. She would always be there to listen and give us help in making those difficult choices. Even though it has been 11 years, Illana has become a family friend for life. [She] has given our daughter an opportunity to give back to injury survivors- Sunnybrook Hospitals PARTY Program. [We] have an incredible bond with Illana. She is truly an amazing social worker and an incredible human being.”

One student’s goodbye to Illana exemplifies her positive influence as a field instructor: “I just wanted to say what a great learning experience I have had this year in placement and I honestly believe that, as my supervisor, you have made the experience what it is. Not only have I learned so much from you, but also I greatly admire you and consider you a mentor. I brag to all my friends and family about you. Thank you so much for all your support through the entire year. [...] It’s been great working with you. I’ll miss it – maybe we will do it again some time.”

Coordinating Field Education

Ms. Perlman is the Education Coordinator at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, supporting up to 20 MSW field instructor/ social work student matches per year. As Education Coordinator, Ms. Perlman connects with each MSW student placed at Sunnybrook on a frequent and regular basis, facilitates a weekly educational session, includes students on hospital committees, assigns leadership roles, and encourages students to deliver case presentations at interprofessional “lunch and learn” initiatives. She stays very involved with all students.

Ms. Perlman administers weekly MSW student seminars. She generously invites MSW students from other practice settings that do not have the capacity to offer seminars to their students.

Feedback from students in 2014 included:

“As my practicum at Sunnybrook comes to an end I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all of your support throughout this final placement. The effort and energy that you put into each of our student practicum is truly amazing and the hard work that occurs behind the scenes of the Thursday morning Social Work Student Sessions is remarkable. You should know that your efforts to create for the students an array of learning opportunities does not go unnoticed and are in fact much appreciated. I can honestly say that I always looked forward to the Thursday sessions; and I’m sure that the rest of my student colleagues would also agree. Thank you for your continual encouragement and support. Sunnybrook is lucky to have such a wonderful educational coordinator who seeks to provide their students with the best possible practical educational experience.”

“I just wanted to send a quick email to thank you for everything these past eight months. My experience as a student here has been really amazing. I appreciate you organizing all of the seminars. It’s so helpful to have a forum to discuss with other

students and get a sense of what the various roles for social workers are here at Sunnybrook. I also appreciate that we had the opportunity to get involved in many aspects of Sunnybrook and things going on within the Social Work department in addition to working with our supervisors. Finally, I appreciate your 'open door' and knowing that if there were any issues we had as students there was somewhere to go."

Ms. Perlman identifies those students requiring additional support and works closely with them as well as with their field instructor to ensure that every opportunity has been provided to the student to develop competencies. She attends all school-initiated meetings. I know this because I am involved in many of these meetings. In fact, Ms. Perlman's skillful engagement in challenging situations resolves most issues and diminishes the need for the school to intervene. In this manner, she captures the 'teaching moment' opportunity and has been a tremendous support to the school.

Promoting Field Education

Within her organization, Illana consistently seeks out ways to promote quality field instruction by providing leadership in the planning, development and coordination of the student education program, increasing the available MSW student field opportunities from 6 to 20, recognizing and celebrating these field instructors, and sharing her commitment to education as a member of the hospital's Interprofessional Education Committee.

In addition to receiving numerous teaching awards, Ms. Perlman has been instrumental in the development and implementation of her hospital's Social Work Student Education Standard (SSES). This document clearly articulates the minimum field placement expectations and the variety of teaching opportunities for social workers at her health care setting. Early indicators are that the SSES has enhanced field education commitment and participation. Ms. Perlman is now project lead to evaluate the impact of the SSES and to explore its application across other professions. Ms. Perlman has also implemented a requirement for new MSW practitioners at Sunnybrook to participate in field instruction and field education as a component of performance reviews.

Taking the lead from Ms. Perlman's impressive work, I've recommended that other institutes adopt similar strategies for promoting and standardizing social work field instruction.

Service to the Social Work Program at the University of Toronto

Because of her compelling presentation skills on subjects critical to field education, Ms. Perlman has taught a wide range of seminars and workshops for MSW students at the University of Toronto. For example, Ms. Perlman is a desirable contributor in a three-hour session offered to students in the foundation social work course. She is able to seamlessly integrate theory and practice of assessments in a medical setting such as the trauma unit. She articulates the value, knowledge and skill base underlying her analysis of trauma incidents, the people affected by them, and the ways in which she interacts with clients and their families. Ms. Perlman speaks passionately and perceptively about the

strengths and challenges in this evolving interprofessional context. Yearly, the students evaluate her session as one of the best they have experienced and are vocal in describing Ms. Perlman as an inspirational social worker.

On numerous occasions, including accreditations, Ms. Perlman participated in field consultations with the Dean of FIFSW by articulating challenges and sharing her responses to these challenges. Ms. Perlman collaborated with Professor Marion Bogo of the FIFSW and Dr. Barbara Muskat of the Hospital for Sick Children on a project and a peer-reviewed publication on rotational models in field education. Ms. Perlman was one of the first education coordinators to implement this new approach for social work field education. She is a highly conscientious individual who can anticipate difficulties and worked closely with Dr. Muskat to refine various aspects of the rotational model. Her contributions to the paper were based on her professional experience in working as a hospital social worker “on the ground.” This project provided additional evidence of her openness, foresight, and leadership. Other hospitals have adopted the approach as a result of her work and enthusiasm for finding and disseminating effective approaches.

In FIFSW’s 100th Anniversary celebrations, Ms. Perlman co-chairs a committee representing the field.

Conclusion

In addition to being an exemplary social work practitioner Ms. Perlman is a model advocate of social work field education within her organization and the larger community of field educators and MSW students. She is also an inspirational lecturer to MSW students at the University of Toronto, and has demonstrated creativity and innovation both within and outside of her organization.

In a challenging climate of reallocation of resources and evolving care structures, Ms. Perlman has demonstrated skill, creativity and innovation in field instruction and teaching in her health care setting. She continues strengthening the profile of field education in new circumstances while providing service to the social work program at the University of Toronto. The examples given above illustrate that, while dealing with her very demanding clinical practice, Ms. Perlman undertakes a vast array of teaching and education activities in social work ensuring the “torch is passed on” to the next generation. I have often stated that I could not ask for more from an Education Coordinator. Ms. Perlman exemplifies the heart of social work education – field education.