

Farewell Thoughts from Former Chapter President, Lisa Whelan

As my term as president of the Iowa Chapter comes to a close, I find myself looking back on my two years in office with introspection. What I've enjoyed most has been working with talented, passionate social workers, watching our members step into different roles, volunteering their time, advocating for social change and speaking out for what's right. Our chapter has stood up for people who have had their mental health services taken away because the overall costs were considered too high. It has stood up for the rights of people who want to live without fear of being attacked for who they love, the color of their skin, the shape of their body, their lack of financial resources, their physical differences or their mental health struggles. Our field calls on the "powers that be" to act on behalf of the greater good, not to succumb to big-money interests and greed.

At the national level, NASW is making some operational development shifts and advancing the modernization process in order to build and strengthen the organization. While change can be challenging, this process has become an opportunity for the Iowa chapter to stand in solidarity with the other NASW chapters and the national organization as a whole. Our membership is strong in Iowa. We haven't missed a beat. This speaks volumes about our members and our leaders in this chapter.

Social work is an amazing field. We have the ability to seize the multitudinous opportunities to make a change in so many different sectors: hospitals, schools, child welfare, mental health – the list goes on. Social workers have a passion for people, a robust skill set and a vision for how change happens. Wherever we work and serve, there is a core of beliefs that drives each of us: respecting the dignity and worth in all people in at the core and believing that as a community, we all do better when we all do better.

What can be difficult is seeing systems fail the people we work with and empower. As social workers, we are on the front lines, and that means we see the direct results of systemic injustices. While these realities can be discouraging, somewhere there is hope in it. What makes us sad and what makes us angry drives us to be a part of something bigger, to work toward social justice. I truly believe in the power of everyday people coming together to create positive change; that when we get together as a community – whether that be a neighborhood association, church group, workforce, parent/teacher association, or political movement – we have more influence to make positive change happen.

As my term ends, I am incredibly proud of the hard work our members do every day, the challenges tackled, and the opportunities seized. Moving forward, there is great potential chapter growth as the need for more social workers in Iowa continues to increase, which is critical as we continue to strive to protect and lift up our field. The more members we have, the greater our ability to have a positive impact on the people we work with and the profession as a whole.

Thank you for allowing me to be your president for the past two years. I am honored to serve in any capacity in a field I am so passionate about. Let us continue to elevate each other, those we serve, and the community as a whole.