

National Association of Social Workers Iowa Chapter Announces Award Winners

The National Association of Social Workers Iowa Chapter announced their award winners during their annual Symposium held April 14 & 15 at the Holiday Inn Merle Hay.

2016 Public Citizen of Excellence – Reverend Barb Dinnen

Since 2002, Rev. Barb Dinnen has served as a pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church/Las Americas Comunidad de Fe, located in the River Bend neighborhood north of downtown Des Moines. During those years, Rev. Dinnen has helped this “church with the big red door” become a home for people who need one and a loudspeaker calling on community leaders to do their part to help. Rev. Dinnen has been particularly touched by her work with Latinos from many countries who have passed through the church’s doors. She states that “Their personal stories, the stories of their arrival to the U.S. and their struggle to find a place to provide a better life for themselves and their children have changed the course and passions of my life.”

In her role as a pastor, Barb has become a leader in multiple social justice issues, but particularly for immigrants’ rights and immigration reform. This work occurs from an individual level, serving as an advocate and interpreter for her parishioners, to the national level, where she has shared a platform with Senators and presidential candidates, while calling for federal immigration reform. Beyond immigration, Rev. Dinnen helps coordinate and support programs and advocacy efforts at Trinity/Las Americas that address issues ranging from neighborhood safety and world hunger to transgender rights and criminal justice reform.

2016 Catherine G. Williams Lifetime Diversity Award - Natalie Anderson

Natalie Anderson works for Des Moines Public Schools as a school social worker. For the last 14 years, Natalie has been an advocate for students labeled “at risk” and deemed by the system as “unable to be successful in the normal school setting.” In the school setting, Ms. Anderson is particularly recognized for her ability as a behavior interventionist, responding to students in distress in a caring and competent way that allows the students, and their classmates, to feel calmed and secure so that they can continue their learning. Natalie is often called upon to help educators, community members, and other professionals understand how trauma impacts a student’s learning abilities. Ms. Anderson also demonstrates expertise in cultural competence. She is one of the team members within the Des Moines Public Schools’ efforts to diversify its workforce and she openly shares her knowledge about disproportionality issues for students of color.

As a community member, Ms. Anderson was instrumental in the development of a program for young African American men called Encouraging Males to Build Opportunities for Developing Independence, or EMBODI. This group offers young males

the opportunity to receive support, education and mentoring, utilizing a culturally specific approach. She is also involved in a grassroots initiative called Investing in my Future, which introduces African American high school students to college, and a new effort assisting young girls victimized by human trafficking.

2016 Social Worker of Excellence – Mark Hillenbrand

Mark Hillenbrand is the founder of Authentic Freedom Counseling Center in Des Moines. A graduate of the University of Iowa Master in Social Work program, he has also completed an additional two years of post-graduate training in psychotherapy and pastoral counseling. Mr. Hillenbrand has special expertise in assisting individuals and families to overcome the challenges associated with the diagnosis of traumatic illness, particularly HIV/AIDS, Huntington's Disease and Hepatitis. In addition to his counseling work, Mr. Hillenbrand facilitates support groups, provides advocacy, and acts as a supervisor for the U of I's MSW program.

Most recently, in his work with clients dealing with the debilitating effects of Huntington's Disease, Mark conceptualized and completed a research project to evaluate the use of live theatre as a tool for improving provider care of those living with the disease. Working with a student, Mark designed and secured funding for the project, mobilized community partners, presented the live theatre events, collected and analyzed the data, and subsequently presented the results at both state and national conferences.