

Welcome to your first issue of NASW-TN's new e-newsletter. This is the pilot issue of a regular publication we will be sharing with our members. Each issue will include reflections on themes being celebrated during the month, the opportunity to meet some of our members, and tools and resources you can use in your practice. Please let us know your suggestions for helping improve this resource.

Our first issue celebrates Black History Month. This month provides an opportunity to purposely pause to honor the legacy of African Americans who have shaped the course of history in our country including shaping the social work profession. We are honored to be able to share with you reflections and reminders from just a few of our members.

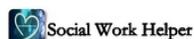
African American Pioneers In Social Services

Dorothy Height (1912 - 2010)



"The godmother of the civil rights movement," Dorothy Height was a women's rights and civil rights advocate. Height began her lifetime of advocacy by campaigning against lynching and as a social worker. She established the YWCA's Center for Racial Justice, was the founder of the National Women's Political Caucus, led the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years, and co-organized the famous 1963 March on Washington. Height received both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal.

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5 African American Pioneers Who Paved The Way for Social Work

March 18, 2015 by Christopher Ingrao

It is important to recognize the contributions of those who strove for societal progress before us. These extremely prolific civil rights advocates helped establish the necessary momentum for societal progress and have positively affected the lives of millions of people around the globe.

[Learn More](#)

Thank you to our interviewees, Karen Jointer Bryant, Bo Walker and Alexis Ridley, for taking time to answer our questions related to Black History Month.

Karen Jointer, LMSW has been a social worker for over 17 years. She earned a Master's of Science in Social Work, with an emphasis on Management and Community Practice from the University of Tennessee. She has served the field of social work in many capacities; beginning her career at Youth Villages serving youth in residential, group home and in home settings. She's worked as a Research Associate at Casey Family Services in New Haven, CT; spent five years as a Child Welfare Consultant at the Univ. of Tenn. Health Science Center; then ventured to Sunderland, England for almost a year to serve as a Principal Social Worker for the local Children's Services. Additionally, she has had the pleasure of serving as the Director of Social Work at LeBonheur Children's Hospital in Memphis, TN and finally, before being hired as Executive Director for the Tennessee Chapter of Children's Advocacy Centers, she worked for the Department of Children's Services as the Director of Community Partnerships for CPS Investigations. Karen currently serves on the Board of Directors for NASW-TN as the Professional Issues Representative.



Why is Black history month important to social work?

I think Black History period is important to social work not just the celebratory month. Our history is rich and defines the very core of who we are as Americans of African descent. How can we as social workers effectively bridge the gap between need and abundance, empower individuals through focused interventions and advocacy, and strengthen systems that serve them, if we don't prioritize understanding the history that both distinguishes and unites a people.

What influenced you to choose social work as a profession?

I'm sure most of my colleagues would say the same of their influences, I didn't choose social work, it chose me! From the moment, I set foot on one of YouthVillages' group homes for girls, as an intern, I knew my niche had found me! The joy of holding space with those girls in sadness, happiness, anger and sometimes rage, influenced me to continue on this path. The disappointment, abandonment and resilience of those youth aging out of care I had the privilege of caring for after graduating college, influenced me to continue on this path... Working within and supporting the perfectly imperfect child welfare system charged with caring and advocating for our most valuable yet vulnerable population, *influences* me to continue on this path.

Who is one of your favorite African American historical figures?

My heart swells with joy when I think of one of my favorite African American historical figures... Maya Angelou! I found comfort in her calm spirit and the penetrating words of wisdom spoken through the art of poetry and storytelling! The richness of her voice and the depth of her life's journey made me relentlessly pursue embracing my whole self, my whole being, unapologetically!

Bo Walker, LCSW, DCSW is a former member of the NASW National Ethics Committee and served on the NASW Code of Ethics Review Task Force. He currently serves as Director of Social Services at Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute in Chattanooga, TN. Walker has over 40 years of experience in a diverse variety of clinical, administrative and academic functions and has presented numerous workshops on social work ethics, cultural competence and other behavioral health topics. He has been recognized locally, statewide and nationally for leadership and outstanding practice in social work and mental health. Bo was Vice-President of NASW and received the Ruth P. Brudney Social Work Award and NASW-TN Lifetime Achievement Award. He received a BA degree in Sociology from Warren Wilson College and a Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.



Interview with Bo Walker

What influenced you to choose social work as a profession?

I always say that social work chose me. When I first went to college, my goal was to become a basketball coach and shop teacher. To fulfill a service project requirement, I developed an adaptive physical education program for children with physical and developmental disabilities, which struck a chord with me regarding meeting the needs of others. My advisor – who recognized in me “an inherent ability to connect with people” – further introduced me to the field of social work and helped me to receive a grant for graduate school. The grant required me to complete two years of work in the mental health field. My first job was as a social worker at Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute, where I returned five years ago as Director of Social Services. Having grown up in an impoverished environment in the “segregated South” gave me a sense of empathy and compassion for my clients, allowing me to instill a sense of hope.

What do you think about when you hear Black history Month?

I actually have mixed feelings about Black History Month. Although I have great pride in the many tremendous contributions of African-Americans to our society; limiting the recognition and celebration to one month actually diminishes and minimizes the magnitude of these contributions. Therefore, I celebrate Black History year-round. When Carter G. Woodson created “Black History Week” in 1926, he “contended that the teaching of black history was essential to ensure the physical and intellectual survival of the race within broader society.” In my humble opinion, this goal can only be accomplished by making this a routine part of our daily life and culture. Many of the lifestyle conveniences we take for granted were invented by African-Americans, not to mention the significant accomplishments in medicine, science, technology and other areas. Celebrating this should not be limited to one month.

Who is one of your favorite African American historical figures?

It is difficult for me to choose one favorite African American historical figure without diminishing the impact of so many. I would say Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because of his impact on civil rights and his commitment to social justice fits so well with key social work values. Growing up in Selma, Alabama allowed me to witness first-hand the powerful influence of Dr. King; but also to know the invaluable impact of the everyday “foot soldiers”, without whom he could not have succeeded. Many of these “foot soldiers” were my teachers, minister, classmates and neighbors.

Alexis Ridley, NASW-TN BSW Intern and future social work star. Alexis is currently a senior attending Tennessee State University, majoring in social work. Her interest is in policy and law. She desires to be a social worker involved with policy and lobbying, an entrepreneur, and an active woman in the beauty industry. Alexis is currently a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Inc.

Interview with Alexis Ridley

Why is Black history month important to social work?

Black history month is important to social workers because the Code of Ethics emphasizes social justice and the dignity and worth of a person. A human being should be given respect and love. Black people in the United States are not given the respect they deserve. This month appreciates and brings attention to the people of color that have been able to build this nation up, and make it beautiful in all shapes and form.

What influenced you to choose SW as a profession?

I was inspired to go into social work by my aunt. I heard stories of how people got to be where they were. I heard the unfortunate circumstances, mistakes, and bad decisions. I remember the tears of appreciation, and the gratitude that was expressed after someone completed their time at her agency. Even with the long hours that came with the job, my aunt pushed through to ensure that each person was able to succeed.

Who is one of your favorite African American historical figures?

One of my favorite black historical figures is Donyale Luna. She was considered one of the first black super models. She faced constant back lash due to her skin color from the white readers of magazines she graced the covers of. She did not let this stop her. Her beauty, grace, and personality broke the barriers for black models everywhere. Black women’s beauty is not held to the standard that it should be now, and certainly was not in the 1960s-1970s. Luna did not care. She became the first black woman to touch the cover of British Vogue. She’s a true definition of black beauty and care free attitude that has evolved black women into the figures they are today.



Resource Corner

HELP4TN

Do you have clients that can’t afford an attorney?

Free civil legal help is available through resources provided by Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services.

- Your clients can visit www.HELP4TN.org for free legal information, forms for court, self-help videos, and additional resources like the Legal Wellness Checkup.
- Or call **1-844-HELP4TN** to talk to an experienced Tennessee attorney for free legal advice and referrals.

NASW, Tennessee Chapter helps support the inclusion of information on social services through this website.

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