



S O C I A L   W O R K

# FORGING SOLUTIONS OUT OF CHALLENGES

## 2016 SOCIAL WORK MONTH THEME & RATIONALE

Social Work Pioneer Frances Perkins in 1911 witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, the deadliest industrial disaster in New York City's history. Most of the 146 people who died were young women who were immigrants or the children of immigrants.

"I can't begin to tell you how disturbed the people were everywhere," said Perkins, who saw people jump to their deaths from the upper stories of the factory to escape flames and smoke. "It was as though we had all done something wrong. It shouldn't have been. We were sorry."

Like many, Perkins mourned the victims. However, the tragedy also inspired her to use the social work skills she honed working at Chicago's famous Hull House to prevent future Triangle Shirtwaist Factory tragedies.

Perkins went on to become the first female secretary of labor and cabinet member in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. She used that position to improve conditions for working Americans. Thanks to Perkins and early social work pioneers, we now enjoy safer workplaces, a minimum wage, Social Security benefits and unemployment benefits.

This year's Social Work Month theme — **Forging Solutions out of Challenges** — celebrates the work done by Perkins and countless other social workers to improve lives and communities.

Today, social work is one of the fastest growing professions in the United States, with more than 600,000 people employed in the field. Professional social workers tackle some of the toughest challenges facing our society. In every city and every community they develop solutions to make mental health and health care more available, to reduce poverty, to eliminate injustice and discrimination, and to protect vulnerable children and adults from harm.

Social workers contribute at all levels of society, working with individuals, families, schools, universities, non-profit agencies, corporations, hospitals, and government offices to mediate conflict, foster positive relationships and create hope and opportunity for people in need.

### Here are some of their contributions:

- » Social workers are the largest group of mental health care providers in the United States, helping people overcome depression, anxiety, substance abuse and other disorders so they can lead more fulfilling lives.
- » The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs employs more than 12,000 professional social workers. Social workers provide support to active duty military personnel, veterans and their families, helping them get financial and housing assistance, apply for benefits, get the best possible health care, or resolve marital or family issues.

- » Child, family and school social workers provide assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families. They may provide assistance to single parents, help children find new families through adoption, or find foster homes for children who have been neglected, abandoned or abused. Social workers in schools also work with families and the schools to ensure students reach their full academic and personal potential.
- » After earthquakes, floods and other disasters social workers are on the front lines, helping survivors get needed services and handle stress and anxiety. In fact, more than 40 percent of mental health volunteers trained by the Red Cross are social workers. Social workers are also active in organizations such as Doctors Without Borders that address disasters that occur abroad.
- » Social workers work with community organizations, legislators, the public and others to ensure equal rights for all, including women, people of different races and cultures and people who are LGBTQ.
- » Medical and public health social workers provide psychosocial support to individuals, families and vulnerable populations, helping them cope with chronic, acute or terminal illnesses. They advise family caregivers and patients, helping them plan for their needs after a person comes home from the hospital.
- » America's population is aging. Social workers help older Americans get the health care and mental health care they need. They also work with older people and their families to improve their quality of life and ability to live independently as long as possible.
- » Social workers are active in national, state and local politics, working to pass legislation that benefits some of our most vulnerable, including older Americans and children, and alleviate poverty and hunger. Social work champions in Congress include Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, and Rep. Barbara Lee of California.

As we continue moving into the 21st century our nation still grapples with complex challenges, including immigration reform, racial strife, and ensuring all citizens have access to vital services.

***Social workers will be in the fray, helping our nation forge a path to a better future.***

## 2016 CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

NASW will celebrate Social Work Month in March 2016 with several activities designed to raise public awareness of how social workers are leading change in their communities and creating opportunity for all. The campaign will engage NASW members and social

workers across the country to educate national leaders and the general public about social work values, strengths and issues.

**VIDEO, POSTER AND PHOTO CONTEST:** NASW uses different media to tell the story of how social workers help make our society a better place. Beginning in January 2016, social workers and their supporters will be asked to submit brief videos, posters and photos that show how social workers have forged solutions out of challenges faced by the people and communities they serve. Entries will be distributed through NASW and partner websites and social media channels. A winner in each category – video, poster and photo – will be announced at the end of Social Work Month.

**PASS THE IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH ACT:** Want to support the social work profession and vulnerable populations that social workers serve? Legislation from Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Sen. Barbara Mikulski and Rep. Barbara Lee would expand social workers' ability to provide services under Medicare. Be part of the campaign to get Congress to pass this crucial legislation.

**ETHICS MATTER:** The NASW *Code of Ethics* is celebrating its 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. The *Code* guides the ethical conduct of social workers and is being used around the world. During Social Work Month submit a brief essay explaining how the NASW *Code of Ethics* informs social work practice.

**FILM SCREENINGS:** Films are an excellent way to engage the public and start conversations. NASW can help you organize screenings in your area in partnership with GATHR Films. You can use screenings during Social Work Month to energize your local social work community and educate the public about the role of social workers and issues important to the profession.

**LETTER WRITING/OP-ED CAMPAIGN:** Imagine hundreds of letters about social work published on blogs, in newspapers and on social media websites in March. Use draft letters and op-eds provided by NASW or write your own to show the public how social workers benefit society. Our goal? Reach the editorial boards at top news outlets in every state, and interest national media organizations in telling more social work stories.

**2016 NASW MEDIA AWARDS:** Honor news and magazine reporters, TV shows and films that showcase social work and portray the positive contributions of social workers. Anyone can participate in online nominations and voting for NASW Media Awards.

***For more information on the 2016 Social Work Month campaign contact NASW Public Relations Manager Greg Wright at [gwright@naswdc.org](mailto:gwright@naswdc.org).***