

Perhaps more than ever, Kentucky needs social workers to help the most vulnerable among us

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Since the 1960s, March has been marked as a time to celebrate the significant work of social work practitioners, educators, researchers and students.

Social work has a rich and storied history. The foundational impact of Jane Adams' Hull House and Mary Richmond's Charity Organization Societies has reverberated through the decades. The pioneering legacies of social workers like Dorothy Height and Kentucky native Whitney Young, Jr. continue to positively shape people's lives.

These early influences engendered a profession committed to ethical standards and competent practice, with a vision of a just world for all persons.

Today, as has been the case historically, social workers provide services germane to healthy, safe and well-functioning communities. Whilst mostly unheralded and sometimes misunderstood, social workers are a central component of societal well-being. In countless ways, social workers activate our primary mission "to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty."

In fulfilling our mission, social workers are at the forefront of addressing many of the inimical social ills plaguing society. Whether dealing with the substance misuse epidemic plaguing parts of northern and eastern Kentucky, the effects of the tragic school shooting in Marshall County, or the deleterious violence plaguing Kentucky cities, social workers are educated and trained to adeptly respond to and assuage the impact of these problematic circumstances. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a professional human service not impacted by social work.

Social workers use a broad range of skills, consistent core values and systemic knowledge to fulfill varied roles, including advocacy, therapy and administration. Moreover, social workers are at the helm of some of Kentucky's venerable service institutions, such as the Center for Women and Families, Volunteers of America-Mid-States, and Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Lexington, to name a few.

Today, social work, as a profession, remains steadfastly committed to its mission. And perhaps now, more than ever, our society needs this commitment. In an era of divisiveness and uncertainty, people can find solace in the fact that social workers continue to advocate, broker and serve the most vulnerable among us. Assuredly, the resolve of social work endures.

So now, we issue a clarion call to all Kentuckians: Take time to celebrate and honor the work and contributions of social workers — not just this month, but every month. Because, although the months may change, social workers will continue to steadfastly answer the call to meet the needs of Kentuckians, strengthen our communities and “enhance human well-being.”

Jay Miller is an assistant professor and Ann Vail is interim dean with the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky.

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