

Connecting Voices

Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers



Photo Submitted by Tina Coombs BSW, RSW. Coastangs Trail, Codroy Valley

Feature

Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Considerations in Social Work Practice

**BY SHERRI TILLER-PARK
MSW, RSW & ANNETTE
JOHNS MSW, RSW,
NLCSW ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2024) defines Artificial Intelligence (AI) as "the capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior". This includes the ability to reason, analyze data, apply meaning, and make predictions.

When it comes to AI, you may have heard of ChatGPT or used an AI Chatbot. However, did you know that AI is also growing in popularity and use amongst professionals?

Reamer (2023) notes that,

AI has the potential to transform social work and enhance the profession's ability to serve clients, organizations, and communities.

AI can be used in clinical, administrative, advocacy, and policy contexts in social work. It can enable social workers to analyze data quickly in ways that lead to meaningful services and interventions, risk assessment, outcomes forecasting, and efforts to address systemic bias in the delivery of social services.

Ethical Considerations

As with any form of technology use in social work practice, AI must be considered within the context of ethical practice and in keeping with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) (2024) **Code of Ethics** and the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) (2024) **Standards of Practice**. The following are important ethical considerations.

Competence in Technology Use

The NLCSW (2021) **Technology Use in Social Work Practice Explanatory Document** affirms that "Social workers ensure proficiency in the use of technology in the workplace and practice within their competency,

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Vision Statement

- Excellence in Social Work

NLCSW Goals:

- Regulatory Leadership
- Practice Excellence
- Stakeholder Engagement

Editorial Policy

Connecting Voices is a publication of the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers that facilitates information sharing among the membership. It is published two times a year (January and July).

The NLCSW Editorial Committee accepts articles throughout the year. However, the deadline for article submissions for the January edition is November 1 and for the July edition the deadline is May 1.

The Editorial Committee is interested in articles, commentaries and book reviews that address some of the following areas:

- social work practice and promotion
- professional issues
- social and legislative issues
- social work research, theory, practice and education
- ethics
- community development
- social work leadership

The editorial committee reserves the right to reject any article or return it to the author for revision prior to publication, as well as to edit submitted material for clarity and conciseness.

Article submissions and photographs must be submitted electronically.

Advertising space by organizations, groups or businesses is available in the **Connecting Voices** publication.

Publication of articles and advertisements does not imply endorsement by the NLCSW.

A complete copy of **Connecting Voices Editorial Policies** are available on the NLCSW website
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Editorial

Embracing Change

BY ANNETTE JOHNS MSW, RSW

Like a flowing river, nothing stays the same. Our lives are filled with ebbs and flows, we face adversity and rough waters, and we experience great joy and calmness, sometimes all at the same time. One thing is for certain though, we are in a constant state of change. And just like the season has changed from spring to summer, we know that change is around the corner, so, take time this summer to pause and take stock of your own personal and professional well-being and consider how you will continue to embrace change.

The profession of social work continues to grow and advance. With over 1800 social workers in the province, I marvel at all the profession has done, and continues to do, to promote the health and well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities: provincially, nationally and internationally. Connecting Voices gives us a glimpse of all the wonderful work that is being done by social workers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We continue to advance the profession, engage in forward thinking, and celebrate past and new achievements.

In this edition of Connecting Voices, Julia Rose writes about Medical Assistance in Dying and raises the importance of death and grief literacy, and Shari Fitzgerald highlights what is needed to enhance support for foster caregivers. Jill Williams provides information on a new mental health and addictions diploma program offered through the College of the North Atlantic that will add to the continuum of services in the province, and Laura Tarrant discusses the decriminalization of substance use and the impact this could have in reducing risk and harm



Photo submitted by Annette Johns MSW, RSW.

for individuals. The use of artificial intelligence is on the rise, and in an article, I co-wrote with Sherri Tiller-Park from the NLCSW Ethics Committee, we explore the use of artificial intelligence through the framework of social work ethics. You will also find a book review written by Nicole Browne that focuses on indigenous wisdom and the teachings we can learn from nature in our journey towards decolonization.

In this edition of Connecting Voices, we also highlight and celebrate our 2024 Award Recipients. Kim Kelly MEd, BSW, RSW is the recipient of the Canadian Association of Social Workers Distinguished Service Award, and Deanne O'Brien MSW, RSW is the recipient of the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers Pride in the Profession Award. Their words are motivational and inspiring. We extend a huge congratulations to Kim and Deanne and celebrate this wonderful achievement with them.

Our editorial team continues to do an outstanding job in planning for each edition of Connecting Voices, and graphic designer Jena Mitchell brings it all together to produce a stellar publication. Planning has already begun for the next edition in January, as we embrace another season of change, and we look forward to receiving article submissions from social workers across Newfoundland and Labrador. Scenic pictures of our beautiful province and landscapes are also always welcomed.

More information regarding Connecting Voices including the Editorial Policies can be accessed at [Connecting Voices | NLCSW](#). If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at ajohns@nlcsw.ca.

On behalf of the NLCSW Editorial Committee, I hope you enjoy reading this online summer publication of **Connecting Voices**.



Executive Director

Reflecting on the Past, Engaged in the Present, Embracing the Future

BY PHIL O'NEIL MSW, RSW

As most of you are aware, Lisa Crockwell retired in April 2024 following an incredible career that included 25 years as the Executive Director and Registrar with the NLCSW. Lisa is well known across Canada and internationally as a progressive leader and a champion for social work and social work regulation. Lisa touched the lives of many people early in her career in her clinical work and later as the Executive Director with the NLCSW/NLASW, and she will forever be remembered for her leadership, fairness, respect, and integrity.

As the NLCSW enters a new era and adjusts to life after Lisa, it is a good time to remind ourselves that while some things have changed, our mandate of public protection remains the same. As health professionals, we are always accountable to the public and with that we are responsible for ensuring public confidence through our conduct and behavior, to ensure that it is in keeping with the [CASW Code of Ethics \(2024\)](#) and the [NLCSW Standards of Practice \(2024\)](#).

As detailed in [NLCSW's 2023-24 Annual Report](#), the number of registrants with the NLCSW has steadily increased each year. New graduates are entering the workforce at a time when many organizations are challenged by high vacancy rates and increased complexity of work. The NLCSW congratulates all new graduates, welcomes you to the profession and wishes you well as you begin your work in a challenging and rewarding career. It is quite an



achievement to now be able to refer to yourselves as registered social workers! As you embark on your social work career, take some time to review the wealth of practice resources and continuing education opportunities offered by the NLCSW, all of which are easily accessible online at nlcsw.ca.

Licensing exists to protect the public and when registrants pay their professional fees, they are contributing to the privilege of self-regulation of the profession as those fees are used to develop, maintain, and enhance the resources for applicants and license holders. Registration fees go towards robust promotion and protection of the public interest and the value for the NLCSW is defined in terms of the public benefit outcomes. Licensed professional social workers who are part of the regulatory body are fulfilling a commitment to society to maintain high standards of practice that ensure we have qualified and competent social workers to help keep the public safe.

With challenge comes opportunity and the NLCSW is excited regarding partnerships with government and within the community that have been established to respond to the increased challenges and ever-

changing trends within the workforce, and to further the College's vision. For example, the NLCSW continues to advocate for clinical regulation in Newfoundland and Labrador for social workers engaged in private practice clinical service delivery. This is intended to be proactive and in the best interest of the public, to elevate the profile of private practice in Newfoundland and Labrador and provide a heightened level of oversight in an area of practice that is expanding rapidly. As well, the NLCSW follows the provincial government's Fair Registration Practices Act and is working extremely hard to ensure transparent, timely and fair registration processes related to qualification recognition and registration for both international and Canadian educated applicants. The NLCSW continues to monitor emerging trends in social work regulation and remains engaged with various partners regarding the role of paraprofessionals in supporting the important and critical work performed by registered social workers.

The NLCSW announced its 2024-26 Board of Directors in July 2024. The board will establish a new strategic plan for the NLCSW for the years 2025-2028 that focusses on the College's strategic direction in its regulatory role and to further embedding social justice values including fairness, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our organization. The NLCSW staff look forward to working with the board and all partners in the coming year and to the further development of collaborative relationships.



Cover Story continued

while continuing to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities" (p. 4). Therefore, prior to using AI, ask yourself if you fully understand the AI technology (risks and benefits), have competence in using it, and can access necessary continuing education.

It is important to engage in critical reflection, consultation, and supervision to assess how AI may support evidence-based decision-making.

Integrity

The CASW (2024) **Code of Ethics** states, "Social workers maintain high standards of professional conduct and are honest, responsible, trustworthy and accountable to service users and to colleagues in their own and other professions" (p. 16). It is imperative that social workers who use AI, do so in a manner with full transparency to clients, colleagues, and one's employer on how AI may impact client service delivery. Social workers demonstrate accountability and document in a client's record if AI is used to inform practice and professional decision-making.

Informed Consent

It is important that clients are fully informed on any technology used as part of service delivery, including all the risks and benefits. Ask yourself, how am I discussing AI with clients and what information do they need to make a fully informed decision on whether to engage with AI as part of the service delivery. Social workers respect client autonomy and self-determination in this regard.

Client Confidentiality and Privacy

AI requires the inputting of data and information. When using AI to inform service delivery, it is important for social workers to ensure that client confidentiality and privacy are upheld. Sharing client information through AI should only happen with the informed consent of the client or the clients' legal representative, and in keeping with legislative requirements pertaining to personal health information.

Research

The NLCSW (2021) **Technology Use in Social Work Practice Explanatory Document** notes: "Social workers who use technology to conduct social work research or to gather information/research to inform practice do so in a manner that ensures ethical credibility" (p. 11). When using AI to compile research to inform practice, ask yourself if the information is credible, reliable, and valid and in keeping with the ethics and values of the social work profession. It is important to continuously review and assess AI generated information in the best interest of clients.

Questions for Reflection

- How do I prepare for the use of an AI solution in my practice?
- For what purpose would I like to use AI? Am I using AI as a complement to my own professional decision-making?
- What are the impacts of AI use for my clients, co-workers, and myself?
- What data will be collected and used by the AI solution? Will this data include personal health information? How do I ensure compliance with the Personal Health Information Act for NL regarding the collection, use and disclosure of personal health information?
- Would a privacy or legal consultation be helpful?
- Is there specific training or policies that I would need to consider and implement?
- How do I ensure that I am being transparent with clients that AI is, or will be used, and how it is used to inform service delivery?
- Do I have the information I need, including a clear idea of the risks/benefits of the technology, to obtain informed consent?
- How do I document the use of AI in practice with clients?

Conclusion

There is still much to be learned about the impact of AI on social work practice. Social workers have a responsibility to practice due diligence and take the time to critically analyze the use of AI in practice, with the client's interests remaining primary, to ensure adherence to the code of ethics and standards of practice and legislative requirements. Using NLCSW's **Ethical Decision-Making in Social Work Practice** framework is also recommended.

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Practice

Medical Assistance in Dying & Social Work

BY JULIA ROSE BSW, RSW

As a social worker providing clinical counselling and therapy services in mental health and addictions, I had not entirely anticipated what it would mean to encounter medical assistance in dying (MAiD) – that is, until last year when I first encountered a patient pursuing MAiD. As soon as I realized the significance of supporting someone along this journey, I felt a rush of emotions and wondered if I was prepared to navigate what lay ahead of me. Who do I call? What is the 'right' thing to say? What is the legislation governing MAiD, and what can I do to help? While MAiD is not currently available to people with a mental illness as their sole diagnosis, this is an area that continues to be reviewed and discussed. Naturally, many people who are enduring intolerable suffering or have been given the news that their diagnosis is irremediable may experience shifts in emotion, and social workers will be called on to help. Social workers work with people across their lifespans and have the privilege of being a part of their life experiences at all stages. Fulton (2012) highlights that "although your interest may lie in other areas, it is important to acknowledge that even if you do not specialize or focus your work on gerontology, you will likely enter into some patients' lives when they are about to end" (p.72). This was a turning point for me in my career as much of my focus had been on supporting people to feel better, but never in the context of a medically assisted death.

MAiD became legal in Canada in 2016. According to the Fourth Annual Report on Medical Assistance in Dying Canada (2023), there have been "44,958 MAiD deaths since the legislation was introduced" (Health Canada, p.5). MAiD is becoming prevalent, as Health Canada (2023) found that "MAiD accounts for 4.1% of deaths in

Canada, and the number of cases of MAiD in 2022 represents a growth rate of 31.2% over 2021" (p.5). I believe the involvement of social workers will be valued as knowledge and cases of MAiD continue to rise. This may involve providing therapeutic services from a mental health perspective, providing end-of-life support through palliative care, or connecting people to appropriate resources. It may also include supporting the families and friends of the person who has chosen MAiD or being a care team member and ensuring a person's needs and wishes are met. Therefore, understanding how to support clients who may consider MAiD and their family members and friends who are grieving the person who has had MAiD is vital to the field of social work.

MAiD Specific Support

My experience entering this 'new' territory last year led me to explore this topic further when I entered graduate-level studies. Currently, I am completing my master's placement with an organization called Bridge C-14. As noted on their website, "Bridge C-14 is a non-profit organization that works to help improve the lives of individuals and their loved ones throughout all stages of the assisted death process across Canada" ([Bridgedc14.org](https://www.bridgedc14.org)).

The organization is a phenomenal resource as it is a safe space for people to come together and be understood through meaningful connections. Bridge C-14 offers one-to-one peer support, drop-in group sessions, structured grief groups, and more. Bridge C-14 provides much of their support virtually, which helps bridge a gap for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who may not have connections to other people going through the MAiD process. Many communities in the province of NL are vastly spread out geographically,

requiring those in rural areas to travel to larger centers for services. With Bridge C-14's virtual services, barriers are reduced as people can receive immense support from the comfort of their homes. The opportunity for individuals and families to obtain mutual support and understanding beyond the logistical and medical components of MAiD is critical. Bridge C-14 strives to approach MAiD holistically, considering how it influences a person or family in many aspects, such as emotionally, psychologically, culturally, spiritually, socially, etc. Bridge C-14 also provides educational opportunities to organizations seeking to better understand the MAiD process and the resources available. These opportunities help to improve knowledge, access and reduce stigma.

Death & Grief Literacy

From a clinical perspective, understanding MAiD and openly speaking about death and dying improves interaction and relationship building. According to Breen et al. (2022), "Grief literacy is not an intervention, per se; rather, it is a paradigm shift that addresses explicitly the social contexts influencing how we grieve" (p.430). Many people view discussing death as 'taboo'; however, this can lead to disenfranchised grief and further stigma around choices such as a medically assisted death. Although it can be an uncomfortable topic for some, social workers have an ethical responsibility to set aside their values and beliefs to support the client. It is also essential that the dignity and autonomy of the person considering MAiD are at the forefront. I encourage social workers to explore death and grief literacy to enhance their interactions in practice and lastly, Bridge C-14 is an excellent place for both clients and professionals to go to improve their knowledge of MAiD.

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Did you know?..

NLCSW's YouTube channel is a valuable source of continuing professional education (CPE).

Any webinars viewed through the channel can be claimed as required credits under the workshop category.



Deadline for submission for the next edition of Connecting Voices is November 1 • 2024

NLCSW's Voluntary Private Practice Roster

The following social workers have opted to be included on NLCSW's voluntary roster for private practitioners. Contact information for these social workers is available on NLCSW's website – <https://nlcsw.ca/nlcsws-private-practice-roster/>.

Melinda Aspell MSW, RSW
 Kayla Baker MSW, RSW
 Nicole Baker MSW, RSW
 Elizabeth Belbin MSW, RSW
 Mona Budden MSW, RSW
 Angel Compton MSW, RSW
 Agatha Corcoran MSW, RSW
 Edwina (Wendy) Cranford MSW, RSW
 Debbie Dale MSW, RSW
 Amanda Devlin MSW, RSW
 Nicole Furey MSW, RSW
 Shannon Furey MSW, RSW
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 Jamille James MSW, RSW
 Rosemary Lahey MSW, RSW
 Barbara Lambe BSW, RSW
 Denise Lawlor MSW, RSW
 Sheri McConnell PhD, RSW
 Cyril McLaughlin MSW, RSW
 Georgina Mercer MSW, RSW
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 Maxine Paul MSW, RSW
 Michelle Power Freake MSW, RSW
 Trudy Smith MSW, RSW



Issues

Canvassing the Landscape of Support Needs Among Foster Caregivers

BY SHARI FITZGERALD MASP,
MSW, RSW, CE

The proportion of children and youth in need of protective intervention has been on the rise over the last decade. According to Saint-Girons and colleagues (2020), more than 59,000 children were in out-of-home care in Canada in 2019. As the need for out-of-home placement resources continues to grow nation-wide, reliance on foster placement options for children and youth in care is mounting.

Despite increasing reliance on the foster parent community to help promote safety and wellness of children and youth in care, recruitment and retention issues persistently challenge placement stability and permanency. Research suggests that targeted enhancements to overall foster carer support systems are necessary not only for placement stability and retention, but for optimizing outcomes for children and youth (Malette et al., 2020; Sinclair et al., 2004).

The idea of 'support' as it relates to the needs of foster parents is a multi-faceted concept that must be unpacked to be understood. Review of the literature on foster care and caregivers' support needs elucidates a number of factors across tiered systems that influence the resilience of foster parents and long-term retention. Firstly, it has been reported that foster caregivers highly regard the influence of familial and peer support systems on their ability to fulfill their caregiving role(s) (Sinclair et al., 2004). For married or partnered foster carers, one source of informal support is the couple's relationship as co-parenting assists caregivers with meeting



fluctuating physical, emotional, and financial demands of fostering (Cooley & Petren, 2020).

Secondly, inter-agency collaboration, including relationship-building and collaborative partnership between government and community organizations is a valued form of support. Involvement in external informal support networks such as community organizations and foster parent support groups are linked to better outcomes for foster families. Particularly, foster caregivers with more established external social support networks report higher levels of relationship efficacy with the children and youth in their care (Malette et al., 2020).

Thirdly, the availability of tangible, practical supports is paramount. Foster parents' sense of satisfaction and likelihood of continuing fostering in the future is related to the training they receive and the degree of preparedness they have in providing adequate care (Malette et al., 2020). Further, financial support such as foster care allowances is a significant factor in foster carers' ability to continue fostering as caregivers must be financially equipped to meet basic needs, purchase personal items, and gain access to other resources required by children and youth in their care (Brown, 2008). Additional practical support provisions

such as personal breaks and childcare made available through child welfare agencies are also essential to increasing foster caregivers' satisfaction with fostering and reducing caregiver strain. Respite care in particular can be an instrumental form of support for foster caregivers navigating concurrent demands under the constraints of limited time and resources (Sinclair et al., 2004).

With ongoing issues of foster parent recruitment and retention impacting stability and sustainability of foster care supports for children and youth in care in the province, it is critical that foster parents be afforded the opportunity to share their insights and experiences. Purposeful engagement with the foster parent community is required to mobilize change that is responsive to the community's shared interests and goals. While enhanced recruitment strategies such as improved social media presence and social activist community-building events can be utilized to encourage initial recruitment, strategies aimed at reducing the degree of turnover among current carers must be prioritized. Foster care agencies and affiliated stakeholders have the opportunity to explore what 'support' means to foster carers and responsively incorporate collaborative processes that promote foster family resilience.

Formalizing continuous quality improvement activities that monitor carers' satisfaction and prioritize support needs may provide policymakers and agency staff with the insight necessary to offer timely and effective support to foster parents in our community. Implementing seemingly small but powerful actions

such as creating opportunities to: (i) explore social worker compliancy with foster family case management standards; (ii) regularly solicit feedback from foster caregivers; (iii) develop specialized training resources that promote knowledge exchange; and, (iv) support research and evaluative processes that assess foster parents' support needs all have the cumulative potential to help catalyze intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of fostering among current and emerging caregivers, and further contribute to federal, provincial, and territorial government commitments to supporting the best interests of children, youth, and families.

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Reflections

Marking the End of an Era

NLCSW's long term Executive Director/Registrar, Lisa Crockwell, officially retired in April 2024. Over the past 25 years, Lisa worked diligently to advance social work regulation and NLCSW's vision of Excellence in Social Work. Her outstanding service was recognized prior to her retirement with the renaming of the NLCSW boardroom in her honor. The following Q&A was designed to provide Lisa with an opportunity to share, in her own words, some of her proudest moments, advice, and retirement plans.

Proudest moment(s) from your career at NLCSW

It has been a privilege to contribute to the growth and advancement of this profession and this organization over the past 25 years. At this point in my career, I find myself reflecting



on how our board, committees and staff approached our work daily with a sense of purpose and collegiality. We worked to advance the vision and mission of NLCSW in the best interest of social work and the people of the province.

Best part of the job

The opportunity to collaborate with so many interesting, dedicated and intelligent people - provincially, nationally and internationally.

Best advice you ever received

When I was in high school, someone told me that I should consider social work as a career!

Advice to current and future social workers

I wrote an edition of Practice Matters titled **When in Doubt...Consult**, the intent was to highlight the need for all of us to build strong professional networks. Collegial relationships are a key to practicing well. Social work is a great profession, and it helps to appreciate that everyday there is something to learn and something to celebrate.

Most looking forward to in retirement

A wise social worker once told me that retirement is a journey not a destination. Therefore, I am looking forward to new adventures, finding new ways to contribute and enjoying a leisurely cup of morning coffee!

Sum up last 25 years in 3 words

Rewarding. Challenging. Interesting.



Topics

Pursuit of Social Justice Requires Decriminalization of Substance Use

BY LAURA TARRANT BSW, RSW

With the release of the updated CASW **Code of Ethics, Values, and Guiding Principles** (2024), it is the perfect time for social workers to reevaluate our commitments and actions towards social justice within our practice. Meaningful pursuit of social justice requires us to move beyond just individual-level interventions and also address the structural causes of oppression, injustice, and inequality – in other words, it is an ethical responsibility for us to advocate for changes to oppressive systems.

The range of harms caused by the ongoing criminalization of substance use is a social justice issue that requires our attention. Substance use can be associated with a range of harms, but many of these harms are caused or exacerbated by the criminalization of many forms of substance use (CDPC, 2021).

The criminalization of substance use creates barriers to access for necessary healthcare and social services. Service providers often refuse to serve individuals who use substances, especially if under the influence. Individuals may also avoid necessary services due to fear of discrimination or criminal punishment. Further, the unregulated drug trade has contributed to the drug toxicity epidemic, causing thousands of deaths and innumerable harms to our communities (CASW, 2018; CDPC, 2021).

Under conditions of criminalization, people who use substances are subject to disproportionately high rates of surveillance, policing, arrest and incarceration – forms of institutional violence which can cause significant harm and trauma for individuals (CDPC, 2021; Levy, 2014). The level of institutional intrusion into the lives of

individuals who use substances is vastly disproportionate to the inherent harm of substance use among individuals. Criminalization of substance use also restricts the operation of life-saving services such as supervised consumption sites and other harm reduction initiatives (CPDC, 2021).

The so-called “war on drugs” is waged unequally against members of certain social groups. Criminalization of substance use is rooted in discriminatory practices targeting racialized groups, which continues to influence the inequitable policing of Black, Indigenous, racialized and low-income community members (CDPC; CDPC, 2021; Levy, 2014).

The disproportionate harms caused by the criminalization of substance use present a clear case for social justice advocacy. The Code of Ethics outlines the responsibility of social workers to promote self-determination and autonomy, uphold human rights, and uphold the right of all people and communities to be free from violence (CASW, 2024). These basic rights are continuously denied to people who use substances based on a moral assessment of their behaviour and persistent stigmatization, rather than any inherent risk posed to the public (CDPC, 2021).

It is clear that the oppression and discrimination faced by people who use substances is largely systemic in nature; individual-level forms of intervention and support can do little to improve the social wellbeing of people who continue to be marginalized by our very society. With this in mind, we must expand our efforts in pursuit of social justice to acknowledge the oppression inherent in the social order.

Guideline 1.7.2 of the **Code of Ethics, Values, and Guiding Principles** states

that social workers must “...advocat[e] for changes in society, systems, communities, and organizations to prevent violence” (CASW, 2024, p. 9). In the context of the ongoing drug toxicity crisis and the unjust harm perpetuated against our community members who use substances, I call for social workers to recognize our responsibility to advocate against social structures which cause disproportionate harm and violence in our communities.

Decriminalization of substance use is essential to the pursuit of social justice for all.

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Regulation

Private Practice: Professional Liability Insurance Audits

BY ANNETTE JOHNS MSW, RSW & DEANNE O'BRIEN BA, MSW, RSW

Private Practice is defined by the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) as the provision of social work services, on a full time or part time basis, by a registered social worker who is self-employed, a member of a partnership/group practice, or independent contractor. Social workers in private practice are autonomous and responsible for the quality of social work services and ensuring compliance with the legislation, code of ethics and standards of practice. Services in private practice are provided on a fee for service model that is mutually agreed to by a client or third party (i.e., insurance company, employee assistance program, organization) or as set out in a contract (**NLCSW Private Practice Resource Guide**, 2024, p. 3). Currently, in Newfoundland and Labrador approximately two-hundred and sixty social workers are engaged in private practice.

Social workers in private practice must have adequate malpractice, defamation, and liability insurance. This requirement is outlined in section 18.2 of the **Social Workers Act** (2010), section 5.4.1 of the **CASW (2024) Code of Ethics**, and standard 21 (Private Practice) of the **NLCSW (2024) Standards of Practice**:

'Where required by the board, maintains professional liability insurance of a type and in an amount acceptable to the board'

– **Social Workers Act**

'Social workers maintain honest business practices by securing adequate malpractice, defamation, and liability insurance and maintaining registration with the profession's regulatory body where legislation allows'

– **CASW Code of Ethics**



'Social workers engaged in private practice maintain professional liability insurance'

– **NLCSW Standards of Practice**.

The Quality Assurance Committee of the NLCSW is a committee appointed by the Board of Directors to oversee the Quality Assurance Program. One of the quality assurance initiatives of the committee, which began in November of 2023, is to complete random audits of social workers engaged in private practice to ensure that the requirement for having professional liability insurance (PLI) is being met.

In May and November of each registration year, 5% of registered social workers engaged in private practice are randomly selected for the audit. At the time of this article, 2 random audits have been completed.

Social workers engaged in private practice who are randomly selected for the audit, are emailed a letter which outlines the purpose and process of the audit and are required to email their PLI documents to the NLCSW within 5 business days. These insurance documents must show current proof of their PLI.

To date, 24 social workers in private practice have been randomly selected for the PLI audit. While staff follow-up was needed on several occasions, we are pleased to report that compliance in meeting the PLI requirement is 100% for those selected for the audit and actively engaged in private practice.

As part of the private practice PLI audit process, the Quality Assurance Committee believes it is important to enhance communication regarding the audit as a quality assurance activity. The Quality Assurance Committee will continue to communicate the requirement for social workers engaged in private practice to have professional liability insurance as outlined in legislation, the code of ethics and standards of practice.

Professional liability insurance is available through many providers, and social workers engaged in private practice can choose one that best fits their needs. However, it is important to note that the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) has a Professional Liability Insurance Program. For information on this program, please visit <http://www.casw.bmsgroup.com/>.

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School

News from Memorial University's School of Social Work

The School of Social Work was pleased to hold its annual scholarships, awards and celebration of student success event on May 28, 2024. The evening was a great success, with over 100 attendees and \$33,327 given out in awards, bursaries and scholarships. As actor and writer Sheilagh Guy Murphy remarked while presenting the John J. Murphy Scholarship in Social Work to student Hannah Drover, this event is particularly meaningful to donors who have established awards in honor of a loved one. The School of Social Work is grateful for the support of our donors, whose continued support and generosity plays a significant role in helping our students meet their educational goals. This year's event was hosted by Kim Kelly, RSW. As many readers will know, Kim retired from the School of Social Work at the beginning of 2024, after a 30+ year career at Memorial University. We were grateful that Kim was able to take time from her (busier than ever) retirement schedule to join us, and her enthusiasm for and commitment to social work education is much appreciated.

Spring convocation was another a special event for our students. A total of 76 students graduated with their Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degrees and 10 students completed their Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees this spring; two doctoral students, Dr. Andrea Murray-Lichtman and Dr. Julie Furj, graduated with PhDs in Social Work. Congratulations to all of our graduates!

In March, to mark Social Work Month, Drs. Donna Hardy Cox and Michelle Sullivan launched "From Charity Model to Social Enterprise: The History of the Social Work Profession and Education in Newfoundland and Labrador," an exhibit to complement

a newly established history of social work digital archive collection at Memorial University's QE II Library. The exhibit consists of 14 panels that highlight key points in the development of social work education and practice across the province and showcase photos and artifacts from the digital archive collection. Events to showcase the exhibit and introduce the digital archive were held at Memorial University and The Rooms in St. John's, at Admiralty House Communications Museum in Mount Pearl and at Gallery '59, in Gander Airport. Further events are in the works for Corner Brook and Happy Valley Goose Bay in the fall. For more information on the exhibit, please contact [Dr. Donna Hardy Cox](#) or [Dr. Michelle Sullivan](#). For information on the history of social work digital archive collection, or if you have materials you'd like to contribute to it, please contact archives@mun.ca.

Our annual Pledge of Professionalism ceremony took place on March 20, 2024, for students in the BSW first and second degree programs, St. John's campus, and on May 23, 2024, for students in the BSW Nunavut Cohort, Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. A signature event for our school, the Pledge of Professionalism marks the transition from academic learning to field work as our students prepare to embark on their first field practicums. At this year's ceremony, students affirmed the recently revised Canadian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics and took a pledge of professionalism. They also received name badges which identify them as Memorial University Social Work Interns. Over 90 students from the Memorial University St. John's campus BSW program (first and second degree) will begin field placements this fall, and six students

from the BSW Nunavut Cohort will start their field placements this summer.

In February 2024, BSW-Nunavut student Pauline Pauloosie was awarded a \$10,000 Rebekah Uqi Williams Scholarship by the Government of Nunavut. Bravo, Pauline! The BSW Nunavut Cohort is part of a broader partnership between the Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) and Memorial University. Through this partnership, the School of Social Work offers graduates of the NAC social service worker diploma program the opportunity to complete a Memorial University Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree in Nunavut.

The School of Social Work welcomed its first Banting Postdoctoral Fellow this past fall. As one of Memorial University's newest Banting fellows, Dr. Nicole Schott has been funded \$140,000 over two years by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for her research project, "'Eating Disorder' Treatment, Recovery and Survival: Sharing, Gathering and Co-creating Research-informed Mad Art." Dr. Schott is being supervised by School of Social Work faculty members Drs. Bren LeFrançois and Julia Janes.

The School of Social Work also completed a faculty candidate search this past fall. Three excellent candidates visited the school and presented their research. As a result of this search, Memorial University has successfully recruited Dr. Tsering Watermeyer as the newest faculty member at the School of Social Work. Dr. Watermeyer will begin her tenure here later this summer.

For more information and regular updates about what is happening at the School of Social Work, please visit our website at www.mun.ca/socialwork.





Students in the BSW Nunavut Cohort take their Pledge of Professionalism in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.



From L-R the students are: Kendall Aknavigak, Eliz Issakiark, Chanese Nakoyak, Pauline Pauloosie, Presley Taylor, and Clarissa (Hatka) Vandenbrink



Cheryl Mallard (right), RSW, Manager of Field Education, Memorial University School of Social Work, presents the NLCSW Student Award to award winner Rachel Vey.



Dr. Donna Hardy Cox (left) and Dr. Michelle Sullivan at the launch of the history of social work digital archive collection, QE II Library, Memorial University St. John's campus, March 2024.

Distinguished Service

CASW Distinguished Service Award Recipient 2024: Kimberley (Kim) Kelly MEd, BSW, RSW

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Distinguished Service Awards are presented annually to remarkable social workers selected from the membership of CASW Partner organizations. The 2024 award recipient for Newfoundland and Labrador, Kim Kelly, received this award in honour of her significant contributions to the social work profession. This award was presented during a virtual awards celebration held during Social Work Month 2024. The following are excerpts from Kim's acceptance speech which has been printed with permission.

I am truly honoured to receive the 2024 CASW Distinguished Service Award. Thank you to social worker Nikki Browne for recognizing my contributions and submitting the nomination as well as the NLCSW Board and CASW for selecting me. When I received the phone call from Lisa Crockwell to inform me of the award, I was at a loss for words and this is a rare occasion. Lisa – thank you for your contributions to social workers and to the profession - you will be missed as Executive Director!

I accept this award on behalf of the exceptional social workers, students, faculty, staff, and community members with whom I have worked. Thanks to Marilyn Downey, Nora English and Joe Coombs, who hired me as a young professional and to Brian Johnston and Donna Hardy Cox who hired me at Memorial University (MUN). I am ever grateful to Brian, Donna, Wayne Ludlow and others who fostered unimaginable opportunities that empowered me to develop an expertise in student life.

I have been influenced and inspired by colleagues, and students at MUN



Kimberley Kelly MEd, BSW, RSW
(School of Social Work, Residence Life, Answers/Leadership Programs, Career Development, MUNSU, Student Volunteer Bureau, Campus Enforcement and Patrol, Facilities Management); NLCSW Promotion of the Profession Committee; Ruah Counselling Centre; Suicide Loss Vigil planning team/ attendees; and Presentation Sisters and Associates. I extend a bouquet of gratitude to mentors Sr. Lois Greene, Sr. Ruth O'Reilly, Sr. Betty Morrissey, Pauline Lake, Rick Singleton and Lorraine Morgan. Finally, thank you to my husband Mike for supporting my many involvements and absences from home.

As the daughter of Bill and Sheila and sister of Scott and Brendan, I am privileged to have grown up in a house filled with love, laughter, faith, song, dance, recitations and enjoyed gatherings with the Kelly and O'Brien families to celebrate our Irish heritage. I am blessed to have married into the Maher and Byrne families and am especially proud of our niece Alyssa Maher Penney, MSW, RSW whom I believe followed in my footsteps to join this wonderful profession.

You might not imagine that I questioned social work as a career choice. In August of 2000 when my brother Brendan died by suicide, I took a leave of absence from the BSW program and at the end of the leave period, I questioned a return to the program. It was my mom who encouraged my return to the BSW program. This was one time I am glad I took the advice of my wise mother!

Upon graduation from the BSW program, I was eager to register as a social worker and join a regulated profession with a code of ethics and a continuing education requirement. These ethical guidelines and practice standards unite all social workers regardless of position title or area of practice. For me, social work has been much more than a job – it has been and continues to be a vocation. I cannot imagine being a part of any other profession. I first learned about promoting social justice and service to humanity from my dad and later was inspired by the work of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters. I have taken pride in providing competent and professional services while respecting the dignity and worth of persons, and valuing human relationships. These values kept me grounded and focused when working in the practice area of education and my continuing work with survivors of suicide loss.

After 21 years of social work over my 30+ years at MUN, I am proud to have left a social work footprint as I strived to carry out the university mission of service to the people of NL and beyond. Social workers are invited to be part of peoples lives in their most vulnerable moments. People trust us with their stories, challenges, issues and successes. I was privileged to be

Continued on page 17

Promotion

NLCSW Pride in the Profession Award Recipient 2024: Deanne O'Brien BA, MSW, RSW

The Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) Pride in the Profession Award is presented annually to a registered social worker who promotes the advancement of social work in Newfoundland and Labrador and demonstrates outstanding pride in the profession. This award was presented during a virtual awards celebration held during Social Work Month 2024. The following are excerpts from Deanne's acceptance speech which has been printed with permission.

I would like to thank the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) Promotion of the Profession Committee for selecting me as this year's Pride in the Profession Award Recipient, as I know there are so many social workers equally deserving of this award.

Thank you all for attending today, especially my family and friends, who are always my biggest supporters!

I am so grateful to have been nominated and supported for this award by my colleagues Jill Morgan and Darlene Wareham. It's such an honor to be nominated by such skilled, hardworking, competent social workers, who over the past decade I have had the privilege of working with them both.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague Kim Kelly, as this year's recipient of the CASW Distinguished Service Award. I am so very happy for you Kim!

The majority of my career has been with the Department of Children Seniors and Social Development (CSSD), and I have had the privilege of working in many roles starting as a front-line child protection worker then as a Trainer, Supervisor, Manager of Information



Deanne O'Brien BA, MSW, RSW

Services, Change Management Lead and I am currently in the role of Policy and Program Development Specialist within the Quality Management Division.

Working within CSSD, while it has its share of challenges, has been such rewarding work. Getting to work with families through some of the most difficult times in their lives and witnessing their perseverance to overcome obstacles and achieve success has left a lasting impression, which makes me so proud of the work that we do as social workers.

While I have learned so much over the past 23 years, the importance of teamwork, mentorship and continued education are some of my highlights.

Through all of my roles within the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (GNL), I have been fortunate to be a part of highly skilled and talented teams. One of the most amazing things that makes me so proud about this profession is the colleagues we get to work alongside and learn from every day. Many of my current and former team members are here today, and you

are all deserving of this award as well, and I am so proud of the professionalism, focus on quality practice and excellence that I witness every day in the work that you do.

Throughout my career I have had visionary and motivating leaders as my mentors. I feel like this award is also a reflection of many people who have mentored me over the years. Mentorship is essential when it comes to quality practice, some of my previous leaders are also here today and I would also like to thank you for your guidance, leadership, encouragement, and support.

Continued education and professional development has always been part of my practice and is an important component of advancing the practice of social work. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to mentor and provide field instruction to Masters students as well as to provide professional education to new social workers within my roles in GNL. It is very inspiring and makes me so proud to witness the professional growth and passion of emerging social workers.

As social workers, it is critical to continue learning as our profession is one of the most versatile and diverse.

While I accept this award today, I also share this award, with my Quality Management team and all my colleagues who are here today as you all show such pride in our profession and are some of the most skilled, dedicated and passionate.

I am so proud to have worked with so many amazing social workers. We are so blessed to be able to do this work, I am truly humbled and honored to accept an award that means so much to me.

Thank you so very much!



Book Review

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

BY NICOLE BROWNE MSW, RSW

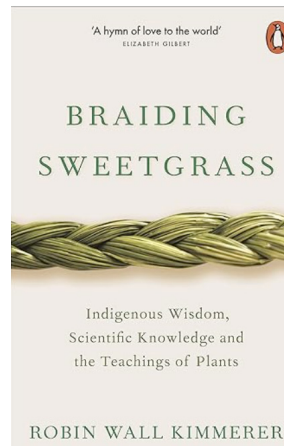
'Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants' is a 2013 nonfiction book by Potawatomi scientist and professor Robin Wall Kimmerer. I chose this book to expand my reading list and to help incorporate ways of knowing outside of my own. During a time in human history when extreme weather events and environmental disasters are making daily news headlines, I realized I experience climate anxiety (Ogunbode et al., 2022). I reflected on the way witnessing last year's Canadian wildfire season has increased my distress. I was seeking some further understanding and hoping to find comfort.

The approach of Wall Kimmerer's work aligns with a lesson I learned in my MSW course on research methods. I actually started the course by questioning my professor. As the class discussed the value of scientific methods and the gold standard for research, I decided to ask: what about Indigenous ways of knowing? What about knowledge that is not necessarily regarded as "scientific?" How do we meaningfully include and value this knowledge as we pursue truth and reconciliation? Apparently, my professor was prepared for my question. She introduced me to the concept of "two-eyed seeing," which in research, is the weaving of traditional Indigenous knowledge and wisdom with the benefits of scientific methods (Kutz and Tomaselli, 2019; Wieman and Malhotra, 2023).

Wall Kimmerer consistently unpacks the challenges she faces in academia as an Indigenous scientist and shares captivating stories of the ways she incorporates traditional knowledge

into her studies, her teachings, and her field work with students. One account includes the way she approached teaching a group of American university students in the Deep South, predominately identified as Christian. She tells the story of trying to explain her passion for and perspective on plants, and as the group concluded their fieldwork trip, she felt defeated. It appeared as though the students had not been inspired by the fieldwork or by her passionate teaching. As the sun was setting and the group trekked back toward the bus, they began to sing together, "Amazing Grace", remarking on the beauty of nature. Wall Kimmerer (2013) suddenly recognized that in her determined focus on her own teaching, she had forgotten - nature is the greatest teacher.

Another great highlight from the book is the discussion of overconsumption as an environmental issue. When examining the historical and contemporary realities of the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), it is clear that overfishing has impacted local communities and wildlife for decades. Ironically, the cod moratorium also led to the rise of NL's workforce shifting toward other natural resource extraction work as a means to provide for their families. Wall Kimmerer discusses overconsumption and offers a solution. The honourable harvest is a set of Indigenous principles which guide human beings in their relationships with nature. Among others, some guidelines include: asking permission, taking only enough for what is needed to preserve the resource, expressing



gratitude, and respecting nature as something to care for and about, rather than something to use (Wall Kimmerer, 2013).

All throughout the book, Wall Kimmerer utilizes her personal experiences and knowledge as a botanist, along with beautiful storytelling. She explains teachings from the natural world, highlighting the way plants have their own

ways of communicating with us (Wall Kimmerer, 2013). The most significant lesson for me was challenging my own colonial beliefs about human relationships with the land, waters, and animals. Wall Kimmerer (2013) discusses the reciprocal nature of this relationship from an Indigenous perspective - highlighting that what is provided for human beings by nature is enough, and that our care and gratitude is what we can provide in return. Through considering this important perspective, I recognized the value of slowing down. The inclusion of Guiding Principle 2.4 in the new Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) **Code of Ethics, Values, and Guiding Principles** is timely. Social workers are called to advocate for stewardship of natural resources and the protection of the environment (CASW, 2024). Further, Guiding Principle 3.2 calls for social workers to acknowledge Indigenous world views in their practice (CASW, 2024).

I was seeking answers and logic, however, in true fashion, reading Braiding Sweetgrass ended up providing me with much more. Wall Kimmerer's writing grounded me. It

reminded me of the hope and beauty present in the natural world. She also provided a great foundation for thinking about how human beings can think and act differently for the benefit of all, including generations to come. I began reading this book to aid in the ongoing process of decolonizing my thinking. For any registered social worker who may be seeking similar learning, I strongly encourage this read. Braiding Sweetgrass has been published for over ten years, and still, the lessons ring true today. There is an audiobook available online, read by the author herself. In addition, there is an adaptation of the book for young readers developed by Monique Gray Smith. Monique is Cree, Lakota, and Scottish.

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CASW Award Continued

invited to help students and staff reflect on their strengths, develop leadership skills; to navigate systems and resources and to provide person centered support to students experiencing academic challenges.

Whether it was fostering opportunities for students to connect with community, or collaborating with colleagues at the School of Social Work, I am proud to have contributed to the development of programs and polices that have enhanced lives and helped to advance social work education and the profession.

The seven mottos that guided my journey of possibility are:

7 – Do what you can when you can. I am the first to remind social workers to own our role and title; however, some situations require unique approaches - I once did laundry for an international student when they were hospitalised as they had no one else to rely on for support.

#6 - You attract more bees with honey than you do with vinegar. Whether it is giving feedback, challenging policy, or advocating for justice, you can accomplish more with compassion and kindness.

#5 – Be authentic and network with social workers and others within and outside your organization. No social worker is an island and it takes a village to co-create change. Having worked at a university with thousands of students and employees, I seized opportunities to develop relationships and learn the resources people can contribute.

#4 – Demonstrate pride in being a social worker and seize every opportunity to identify as a social worker. We have a great example of that today in Deanne O'Brien winner of the NLCSW Pride in the Profession Award. Congratulations Deanne – you are a stellar role model and ambassador

for pride in the profession. I am honoured to celebrate with you today.

#3 – Appreciate strengths and express gratitude. Possibilities are enhanced when team members recognize their strengths and feel valued for their contributions.

#2 - Be creative, innovative and resourceful. I spent much of my career developing programs and services to build capacity of students and communities and was often required to seek creative, innovative solutions and connect with networks to offer programs. I am grateful to Liz King who arranged free lunches/snacks and to the many donors who supported opportunities for hundreds of students to serve their community and impact lives.

1 – Sometimes it is better to ask forgiveness rather than seek permission. When developing programs and services, I encountered situations whereby I navigated systems and regulations to make confident, competent decisions that I believed were in the best interest of people while not comprising social work or organizational values.

My social work journey is but one social work narrative. Guided by the CASW Code of Ethics, imagine the possibilities that the 1800 social workers in NL can contribute when we collectively honour our seven points of unity to build a more inclusive and compassionate world!

To my fellow social workers, I offer this blessing: Wherever you go and whatever you do, may pride in the profession be always with you! To my supporters and friends, I offer this Irish Blessing: May love and laughter light your days and warm your heart and home. May good and faithful friends be yours wherever you may roam.

Thank you for this amazing honour! My name is Kim Kelly and I remain honoured, proud and privileged to be a registered social worker.



Initiatives

Building the Continuum: Mental Health and Addictions Diploma Program

BY JILL WILLIAMS MSW, RSW

As a practicing social worker for 19 years, I am thrilled to introduce the College of the North Atlantic's (CNA's) 2-year diploma program in Mental Health and Addictions. We welcomed the first cohort of students in September 2023. This program is offered in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Grand Falls-Windsor, and online. One of the exciting aspects of this program is that while many post-secondary opportunities are centralized in larger regions, this one is accessible to Labradorians throughout the Big Land, as well as Newfoundlanders in rural and remote communities. It covers a wide range of topics, including pharmacology and dependency, addictions, mental health services, interviewing and helping skills, cultural competence, assessment and case management, psychology, health promotion and prevention, recovery skills and prevention, and trauma-informed practices.

The nature of social work exposes us to the impacts of addictions and poor mental health. We see firsthand how more people seem to be struggling, especially with issues related to socioeconomic pressures and status. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2024), 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental illness, mental illness and substance use disorders are the leading causes of disability in Canada, and over half of Canadians say mental health stigma is a major barrier to their well-being.

Within our profession we understand that social workers have unique insights into the many ways things are slowly improving, but we also know that we can do even better. The systems and supports we rely on comprise a continuum of services which are vital for our clients and their families. Until now, we have not fully developed supportive roles with training in mental health and addictions. If we are to respond to the demand for 'more mental health supports', it is important to recognize that support roles require specialized training. Such recognition can create roles which complement social workers both within clinical mental health and addictions roles, and those working across services.

The Mental Health and Addictions diploma program is truly a community-driven program; the first of its kind in this province. This program recognizes that we all need to focus on mental health and addictions services. It teaches students how to recognize mental health and addictions issues, and how to talk to people, and their families. They're learning how to provide hands-on help in areas such as peer support, outreach, and supportive services. It goes beyond theory to focus on skill development.

Our inaugural class just completed their first year and are now out in their communities on work placements. They're working with health authorities, Indigenous governments, women's shelters, friendship centers, and more. The feedback thus far from placements highlights the profound

and positive impacts being made by students which is already being felt. In working with one of our local Indigenous governments, they have already told us they plan to hire many of the first cohort of graduates next spring. That will be a perfect fit for future graduates of this program.

It's a credit to the students, and to CNA, that they are already gaining recognition as trained paraprofessionals who can help our communities, province, and country respond to the acute and increasing demand for mental health and addictions support. Another exciting aspect of this program is the instructors who have signed on to help teach our students. We have a team of 5 highly skilled social workers, who have brought so much passion, experience, and genuine interest in seeing not only our students, but this overall program succeed.

I never could have imagined my career taking me to a teaching position where I get to help students work towards their life dreams and goals. I can see the direct impact that the work is having on supporting the social work profession. As for our expected graduates in 2025, I believe they will make a difference in the field of mental health and addictions. It is an exciting time to be working in this area.

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Annual Report 2023-24

A Strong Foundation for a Bright Future

NLCSW's 2023-24 Annual Report covers the period from March 1, 2023 to February 29, 2024.

2023-24 Snapshot:

- Number of Registered Social Workers in NL reached 1790
- Upward growth trend in the number of registrants continued
- 18 hours of Continuing Professional Education offered
- 4 new Practice Resources released
- New NLCSW website launched
- Professional Liability Insurance Audits for social workers in private practice implemented

Access the full report online to learn more – <https://nlcsw.ca/annual-reports/>