NASW-USC UNIT CONFERENCE

Social Workers for Social Justice: A Toolkit for Community Organizing and Advocacy in a Changing Political Landscape

Los Angeles, Calif. — February 14, 2017 — The National Association of Social Workers (NASW)-USC Unit held their inaugural conference, Social Workers for Social Justice: A Toolkit for Community Organizing and Advocacy in a Changing Political Landscape, on Saturday, February 4, 2017 at the University of Southern California (USC) Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. The event, co-sponsored by NASW-CA and the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Alumni Association, was attended by 185 guests, including USC alumni, students, faculty and staff, along with local community organizers, social policy advocates and members of the social work community across Southern California. The day offered participants a unique opportunity to engage in action-oriented learning and dialogue with community advocates about strategies to influence social change. CEUs were offered for licensed social workers.

The conference encouraged social workers to stand up for social justice and advocate for issues related to their personal and professional interests. The day focused on increasing knowledge and awareness, developing additional tools and skills, and directly connecting attendees to opportunities for social action. Morning plenary sessions featured interdisciplinary panels of lawyers, social workers, policy advocates and other change makers examining the legislative and organizational landscape of our nation’s changing socio-political climate. Afternoon sessions consisted of skills-based workshops designed to equip social workers with the necessary tools for effective, social justice-oriented advocacy.
Keynote speaker Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr., a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, gave a call-to-action speech about nonviolent resistance and social movements. Dean Mari-lynn Flynn of the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work responded with her own call to action, a six-point framework tailored to social workers and rooted in the NASW Code of Ethics. USC alumnus Bobby Arias, president of Communities in Schools, also spoke about why social workers must be involved in social and political action.

Carlos Amador, lead organizer for the California Immigrant Policy Center, moderated a panel on the challenges and opportunities of current organizational landscape, featuring representatives from the ACLU of Southern California, Black Lives Matter-LA, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Los Angeles LGBT Center and the National Lawyers Guild-LA. The final morning panel, led by Rebecca Gonzales, NASW-CA Director of Governmental Relations and Political Affairs, and Martha Guerrero, the Los Angeles County Legislative Representative, focused on the state policy landscape and legislative advocacy.

The conference incorporated a lunchtime Relational Fair, which allowed attendees to network with 17 organizations seeking volunteers. Among the participating organizations were the ACLU of Southern California, API Equality, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, the Capital Fellowship Program, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Campaign on Measure H, Movement Strategy Center, Restorative Justice, SCOPE LA and the Trauma Informed Task Force of Greater LA. Several student groups and caucuses also hosted tables to discuss opportunities for involvement.

The afternoon consisted of two 70-minute breakout sessions, with a total of 13 workshops offered. Presenters provided skills-based trainings addressing topics such as the fundamentals of community organizing, social media strategies for organizing, mindfulness and self-care for activists, lobbying elected officials, non-violent resistance as a tool for social action, justice-based practices in psychotherapy, advocacy for the LGBTQ+ population, and understanding your legal rights in a protest and when interacting with law enforcement agencies.

The conference was a collaborative effort of several partners, including the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work’s COBI Leadership Council, Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Caucus, Black Social Work Caucus, Christian Social Work Caucus, Clinical Social Work Caucus, Latino(a) Caucus, Part-Time Caucus, Rainbow Alliance Caucus and Student Org. Additionally, NASW Chief Executive Officer, Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW, though unable to attend the conference due to work obligations, provided a personalized letter to participants welcoming them to the conference and thanking them for their commitment to social work and social action.

Due to overwhelming interest, a livestream option was made available for the morning portion of the conference. Recordings of the morning session and select afternoon workshops will be available on the NASW-USC Facebook page and the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work YouTube page in the coming days.

“The purpose of this conference was to connect social workers committed to social action with community organizers engaged in social action, thereby increasing the strength of our community movements,” said Shantel Vachani, Senior Lecturer at USC’s Suzanne Dworak-Peck
School of Social Work and the NASW-USC Unit Chair. “The hope is that through increased knowledge, awareness and tools, social workers will be more confident to translate their passion for service and social justice into strategic social action. This conference was intended to be a starting point rather than an endpoint. The current socio-political landscape indicates that this will be a marathon rather than a sprint. NASW-USC Unit hopes to be a source of support as we, as a social work community, move forward together.”

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About NASW-USC Unit
The NASW-USC Unit is a chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and a sub-unit of NASW-CA Region I-Los Angeles. The NASW-USC Unit’s primary goal is to advance and enhance the professional development of its members, which include USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work students, alumni, faculty and staff, through networking, advocacy, knowledge, and resource sharing opportunity.

NASW-USC invites those interested in getting further involved to join their listserv where they disseminate information about upcoming NASW-USC and other community events. For additional information about this event, to collaborate on future events or to join the listserv, please send an email to info@naswusc.org.

About USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work
The mission of the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work is to improve the well-being of vulnerable individuals and communities, advance social and economic justice, and eradicate pressing societal problems in complex and culturally diverse urban environments throughout Southern California, the nation and the world. This mission is achieved through value-driven, scholarly and creative social work education, research, and professional leadership.