

## **From the Field: Kathleen Whalen**

March 10, 2023 12:00 PM



In celebration of National Social Worker Month and Women's History Month, we are featuring a few of the women social workers that support Tulane School of Social Work's Field Education program. Meet Kathleen Whalen, LCSW-BACS, MEd with the Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative.

## **After all of these years, why social work?**

With each passing year, I become more committed to the profession of social work. In high school (a very long time ago), I was a member of the Mental Health Club and the Future Teachers of America. I originally followed my passion for education and started my teaching career in New Orleans in 1976. I had no exposure to school social work until then and after 12 years of teaching and an MEd I became aware of the powerful role a school social worker can have in the trajectory of a child. It was only after enrolling in TSSW in 1987 that I began to truly understand the power of social work. Social workers have a unique perspective that allows them to consider the strengths and challenges of individuals, the characteristics and impacts of systems and the interconnectedness of the two. As a social worker, I have had the privilege to work alongside individuals, non-profits, and governmental agencies to create a safe and equitable world for all people.

## **What do you enjoy about teaching at TSSW?**

My career as a social worker has provided me with many rich experiences and meaningful interactions, and I feel honored to be able to guide the students just entering the field. Earning an MSW requires learning new theories, honing the attributes of a social worker, and developing the skills to work with individuals, agencies, and organizations. Drawing upon my 30+ years in the profession, I enjoy helping students apply classroom learning to real life situations and navigate the world of social work in whichever of the myriad arenas they pursue.

## **Why did you choose social work for your profession?**

Social work actually chose me with a little help from Cynthia Hedge-Morel, the principal at McDonogh 15 where I was teaching 1st grade in 1986. Seeing my desire

to try a new position in the field of education, my reluctance to move into an administrative role, and my strong relationships with students and families, she suggested I look into school social work. It was one of the best pieces of advice I ever received.

## **Who is a social work professional that you look up to in the field?**

I am inspired by social workers every day. Social workers are called upon to be compassionate and supportive, insightful and reflective, and creative, strategic thinkers, often all in the same day. Throughout my time as a student at Tulane School of Social Work and throughout my career, I have benefitted from the guidance, wisdom, and patience of some many instructors and mentors. Each day, I learn something new from a social work colleague, student, supervisee, or friend. I am deeply grateful to every social worker who is or has even done the important work of making the world a safe supportive world for all people.