

Alumni Association presents 2024 awards to distinguished social workers

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From left to right: Tanya Pierre, Susan Robbins, Elizza LeJeune, Kathryn Katz, Michelle Hamrick, Dottie Reese, Susan Davies, Michael Spencer, Amy Sandridge, Allyson O'Connor, Almarie Ford.

Four Tulane School of Social Work alumni received awards at our Alumni Reception during Homecoming weekend for doing work that matters. Please join us in celebrating their achievements.

The Do Work That Matters - Recent Graduate Award





The Do Work that Matters – Recent Graduate Award recognizes the contributions and achievements of an alumnus who graduated within the last 10 years. Recipients of this award hit the ground running – if not doing a marathon sprint – since they graduated from TSSW. They are individuals who have been movers and shakers as social workers, making their mark quickly in this field.

Elizza is a 2013 MSW and Disaster Mental Health graduate. She currently serves as a director for Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in Michigan. She is also an Outpatient Clinical Therapist and the owner of The Wellness Gardener, where she provides gardening lessons to inner-city Detroit youth to help increase mental health and well-being through agriculture.

“Being able to attend Tulane School of Social Work has been one of the greatest highlights of my life,” said LeJeune. “Anyone who knows me personally has heard the countless experiences I had while at Tulane: stories full of joy, hard work, good food, lifelong friendships, and doing work that matters. TSSW has profoundly shaped my belief in the transformative power of change work within families as a catalyst for broader community improvement.”

“The program's curriculum and hands-on experiences through my field internship at Children’s Hospital New Orleans have equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to address pressing social issues and become a change agent in the medical field. Their emphasis on practical, community-oriented solutions allowed me to contribute to causes I am passionate about. It also expanded my perspective on global social challenges, enhancing my ability to advocate for and implement impactful reforms.

“I’ve seen firsthand how targeted interventions can ripple outward, fostering stronger, more resilient communities that, in turn, contribute to positive changes on a global scale. This understanding has deepened my commitment to effecting meaningful change.

“Tulane's influence has been instrumental in bridging my cultural experiences with my professional aspirations, reinforcing the university's role as a key player in both personal growth and community advancement. Tulane University is an important cornerstone of New Orleans but also my heart.”

Ellen Gates Starr Service Award





The Starr Service Award recognizes the contributions and achievements of an alumnus who has worked with the spirit of one of our social service pioneers, Ellen Gates Starr, in their careers as social workers. This award honors those TSSW graduates who have worked tirelessly in the field to better the lives of others, as an unsung hero, with little recognition and who share Miss Starr's unflagging spirit.

We are thrilled to award Michelle Gaiennie Hamrick, LCSW, of the MSW Class of 1993, the Ellen Gates Starr Service Award for 2024.

Michelle began her career at West Jefferson Medical Center's (WJMC) Behavioral Medicine Center (BMC) where she served as the Social Service Manager over 9 years. Michelle started working with Grace House residential substance abuse treatment program for homeless and indigent women in 2003 as the Executive Director.

Michelle joined the Louisiana State Opioid Response (LaSOR) Project which is part of the LSU Health Sciences Center Department of Psychiatry as Program Manager in 2017 and is still there. Michelle was an Albert Schweitzer Fellowship mentor from 2012 - 2016 and this work focused on developing a healthcare clinic at Grace House in collaboration with Tulane Medical School.

In addition to professional responsibilities, Michelle has served as a board member of Christopher Homes Inc., the Sugar Bowl Committee, the 2012 Super Bowl Host Committee and 2011 NCAA Final Four Local Organizing Committee.

"Tulane School of Social Work was the launching pad for my social work career that has spanned over 30 years," said Hamrick. "Attending Tulane was one of the best decisions I have made as it has led to a career that I could not have imagined and with so many opportunities. Tulane provided me with the knowledge and confidence to go out in the world as a young social worker to work with very challenging populations."

"The world is your oyster when you graduate from Tulane School of Social Work as the program prepares you for a variety of career paths. There are so many opportunities to work in the communities we serve.

"My social work career has shaped me into the person I am today, allowing me to continue to grow as an individual and a social worker. Attending Tulane School of Social Work was one of the best decisions I have made.

“Tulane School of Social Work led me to a career focused on the diverse needs of underserved populations, addressing gaps in the service system by expanding and developing programs to meet the needs of the community.”

1914 Distinguished Alumni Award for Community Service





Tulane School of Social Work recognizes an alumnus whose achievements exemplify the values of TSSW and has consistently demonstrated exceptional contributions to community engagement and social work service.

We are excited to honor Dorothy "Dottie" Reese, 1979 MSW and Master of Public Health (MPH) alumna.

Dottie spent 20 years in different leadership capacities at Methodist Hospital and was faculty at Cornell University's Executive Diversity Management program.

After Hurricane Katrina, Dottie co-founded DMM & Associates LLC, a Performance Management and Community Engagement consulting firm.

Reese serves on the board of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce and is a past member of the LSU Board of Supervisors.

Included among her long list of awards are:

- the New Orleans Medical Association's Excellence in Healthcare award,
- the New Orleans Activist of the Year Award,
- the Dorothy Schenthal Leadership Award from the New Orleans Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers,
- Grace House's Women of Substance Award,
- New Orleans Jack and Jill of America Leadership and Community Service award, and
- the WEISS Award from the New Orleans Council on Community and Justice.

"I am filled with gratitude for this recognition from the School of Social Work, a school that has inspired me, guided me, and shaped the values that drive my work," said Reese. "Professionally, I am the person I am because of Tulane."

"Community service is not a solo journey; it is a collective effort built on the hard work, persistence, resilience, and compassion of innumerable individuals working towards a common goal.

"As social workers, we face complex realities, but we also see and know first-hand the power of resilience, the strength of unity, and the impact that the smallest gesture of kindness can have. Through community service, we advocate for those who may not realize they have a voice. Through community service, we help to create access to essential resources; through community service, we contribute to

building communities with a vision where everyone has an opportunity to thrive."

The Inaugural 1914 Distinguished Alumni Award for Academic/Research





Tulane School of Social Work recognizes an alumnus whose achievements exemplify the values of TSSW and has consistently demonstrated exceptional contributions to social work research, the social work profession, and who has had distinguished careers in social work as outstanding teachers, researchers, and mentors.

We proudly recognize Susan P. Robbins, the Cele S. and Samuel D. Keeper Endowed Professor in Social Justice and former Associate Dean for Doctoral Education at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. Susan graduated from the PhD class of 1979.

Susan has been recognized for her leadership and scholarship through her appointments to the Executive Board of the American Board of Forensic Social Workers and the American College of Forensic Examiners. She has served on review committees for national and international universities for candidates for tenure and promotion.

She is renowned for her authored textbook *Comparative Human Behavior Theory: A Critical Perspective for Social Work Practice* and for critically examining the now discredited recovered memory movement. As Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Social Work Education In addition, Robbins has been recognized for her excellence in teaching and has repeatedly received the Outstanding Faculty Award at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work.

She has received many other recognitions and awards over the course of her career, including the National Faculty Excellence Award for Outstanding Contribution to Distance Education from the University Continuing Education Association, the Sol Gothard Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Organization of Forensic Social Work, and the Making the World a Better Place Alumni Award from Hamline University.

She was listed in:

- Notable Women of Texas,
- Who's Who in the South and Southwest,
- the World's Who's Who of Women,
- Who's Who in American Education, and
- Who's Who in Social Sciences Higher Education.

Further, Robbins has repeatedly received Mentor Recognition from the Council on Social Work Education. Her most recent award was the NASW Social Work Pioneer Award, by the NASW Foundation, this year.

“It was my dissertation chair, the late Dr. Esther McBride, who made my education here extremely special! Perhaps the most important skill that my education at Tulane provided me is the development and application of critical analyses. While the focus is singular, I have applied it across a broad range of areas in my scholarship including theories of human behavior, practice methods, pedagogical issues in social work education, and epistemological methodologies,” said Robbins. “In addition to informing my scholarship, this focus has informed my teaching, service, and the work I've done over many years as a dissertation chair for my doctoral students.”