

MSW alum supports traumatized youth in New Orleans

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Semaj Crumpton, LCSW

For Semaj Crumpton, LCSW, social work isn't just a career path – it's a legacy. As a child, she watched her mother embody social work, working directly with community members and designing programs to empower youth right here in New Orleans. Her mom's commitment to the work, she says, has always been a source of inspiration. So when it came time for grad school, Tulane's [Master of Social Work \(MSW\)](#) program was the logical option.

“I chose Tulane because, as a native New Orleanian, it was important to pursue my MSW education within the community I intended to serve,” Crumpton said. “What better way to do that than by attending a program already rooted in the community?”

When Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, Crumpton was in eighth grade. Witnessing the long-lasting impact the storm had on the communities of the Gulf Coast – particularly on children like herself – inspired her to work with young people experiencing trauma and loss.

In addition to environmental disasters, Crumpton says she witnessed the negative impact of community violence on her peers’ emotional well-being. At Tulane, she chose to pursue a focus area in Disaster and Collective Trauma (DaCT) to learn more about the ripple effect of traumatic events on her community and the evidence-backed interventions that can interrupt the cycle of trauma.

“Tulane School of Social Work prepared me for the work I’m doing today by creating an environment where challenging systems and questioning theories was welcomed,” Crumpton said. “It allowed for passionate, thought-provoking conversations among peers and served as an incubator where we could develop our own ideas, perspectives, and solutions to the issues we encountered in the field.”

Crumpton credits Tulane faculty for expanding her worldview and sharing the realities of activism and social work. Dr. Candice Beasley encouraged her to broaden her idea of what a career in social work looked like; Dr. Reginald Parquet showed her the importance of her voice in shaping the future she wanted to see; and Dr. Jane Parker reminded her to keep a sense of humor and build a sustainable self-care routine to prevent burnout.

“My Tulane community, professors, and practicum education all left an indelible mark on me and have helped to shape the social worker I am today.”

During her MSW program, Crumpton was a Student Government Association representative, Empowering Change Task Force member, Tulane 34 award winner, and class commencement speaker. Now, she’s returning to Tulane for her [Doctor of Social Work \(DSW\)](#), where she’ll hone her research and leadership skills.

In addition to pursuing her doctorate, Crumpton works as a clinical social worker for the Trauma and Grief Center at Manning Family Children's. At the children’s hospital,

she supports youth and their families as they navigate difficult diagnoses, loss, and hardship. Prior to her move to healthcare, she worked in the Jefferson Parish school system, providing individual and group counseling, responding to district-wide crises, and leading trainings on trauma-informed care for teachers and administrators.

Her work is important, personal, and sometimes heavy. Despite that, Crumpton strives to keep herself grounded, be a light in the darkness, and appreciate the beauty all around her.

“Joy is an act of resistance,” Crumpton said. “I intend to find joy in all things, even the seemingly mundane.”

Crumpton says she wouldn’t be able to show up for the children and families she serves if she didn’t feed her own joy. Things like compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma are draining. As Crumpton says, “You can’t pour from an empty cup.”

“As social workers, we often put our bodies, hearts, and minds on the frontline to fight for positive change for the communities we serve and the systems we work in,” Crumpton said. “I’ve reminded myself that in order to continue to show up and do work that matters, I must expand my beliefs about what advocating can be.”

Staying informed about policy, educating community members, and attending town hall meetings are all equally important forms of advocacy, Crumpton says – and sometimes, the most impactful actions are the ones that are sustainable. Her final piece of advice for social work students? Take the time to understand not just the course material but also yourself and your peers.

“Challenge yourself and others in engaging, thoughtful, respectful ways. Do not be afraid to be wrong,” Crumpton said. “Yes, graduate school is a time to learn about social work theories, systems, and practices, but it is also a time to learn about yourself. Take advantage of all the offerings Tulane has and use them to shape and guide you on your professional journey.”

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