

SOCIAL WORK MONTH MARCH

SJSU SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK March Newsletter

March invites us to reflect on the power of care, compassion, and connection. Social Work Month is a time to recognize those who dedicate their lives to supporting others and strengthening the fabric of our communities. Social workers walk alongside individuals and families through moments of uncertainty, offering not only services but also understanding, dignity, and hope.

The theme for 2026, "Social Workers: Uplift. Defend. Transform.", captures the essence of this work. Social workers uplift people by helping them rediscover strength within themselves. They defend by standing firm for justice, fairness, and human dignity. They transform lives by creating pathways toward healing, growth, and opportunity. Their impact is both deeply personal and deeply collective.

In a world facing growing challenges such as mental health struggles, inequality, and social division, social workers remain a steady and compassionate presence. They support individuals through difficult realities while also working to improve the systems that shape our daily lives. Their work reminds us that meaningful change begins with empathy and grows through action.

This month, we honor the dedication and quiet courage of social workers across the nation. Their work touches lives in ways that are often unseen but never unfelt. Every day, they continue to uplift, defend, and transform, helping build a more just, supportive, and hopeful future for all.



National Association of Social Workers (2026). Social Work Month Theme and Rationale.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/News/Social-Work-Month/Theme-and-Rationale-2026>

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Cohen Publishes New Book and Receives ERFA Grant

Dr. Cohen, along with co-authors Rosemary Tisch and Melissa Santos, who collaborate with him on the evaluation of family support programs, published a scholarly book in February, *Preventing Child Abuse: Family Based Programs to Improve Resiliencies and Address Substance Use* (Oxford University Press), highlighting research-driven strategies to enhance family resilience and prevent child maltreatment.



The book introduces the evidence, theories, concepts, essential components, and practice issues for family-based prevention programs (FBPs) for families dealing with substance use problems. FBPs are interventions that involve the family in trauma-informed, skills-oriented, and strengths-based practices to prevent or minimize future problems. Guided by multiple theoretical perspectives, FBPs assume that improving parenting capacity, reducing harmful substance use, and improving family relationships will lead to a reduction in both violence in the home and neglect of children's needs. The book is the culmination of years of work studying these programs.

One program Dr. Cohen has extensively studied is *Celebrating Families!*, a family group model that originated in Santa Clara County's Family Dependency Court. The program was specifically developed for caregivers with substance use challenges and has since expanded to multiple counties, states, and Native American tribal communities. Each year, Dr. Cohen engages graduate research assistants in projects connected to this initiative.

This year, Dr. Cohen was awarded a grant from the Emeritus and Retired Faculty Association (ERFA) to redesign and pilot updated assessment measures for adolescent participants and their families in the *Celebrating Families!* program. This collaborative project includes graduate student researchers Neomi Davis-Welch and Luz Torres Flores, and faculty partners Dr. Nadia Sorkhabi (Child and Adolescent Development) and Dr. Marie Haverfield (Communication Studies).

[Read the book here](#)

Faculty–Student Collaboration

Results in New Publication on Family Caregiving and Serious Mental Illness

Dr. Meekyung Han and Dr. Sadhna Diwan, in collaboration with two former graduate students from the Class of 2025, Christina Holland, MSW, and Allen Nguyen, MSW, have published a new article in *Social Work and Mental Health*. The study examines the evolving experiences of family caregivers supporting individuals living with serious mental illness. This project serves as a strong example of faculty student scholarship, with Christina and Allen contributing as research assistants and further developing the work through their SCWK 298 capstone projects.

Based on qualitative interviews with 16 experienced mental health providers in the San Francisco Bay Area, the study explores how caregiving challenges change over time. Early stages are often marked by stigma and uncertainty, while long term caregiving involves cumulative stress, burnout, and ongoing concerns about the future. The findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive services, psychoeducation, counseling, peer support, respite care, and stronger interagency collaboration, particularly as caregivers themselves age.

Drs. Han and Diwan commend Christina and Allen for their meaningful contributions to participant recruitment, initial data analysis, and the literature review. Their work demonstrated professionalism, intellectual rigor, and a strong commitment to practice informed research. Through close faculty mentorship and sustained collaboration, they engaged fully in the research process, strengthening their scholarly identities as emerging professionals.

We are proud to share that Christina and Allen are now MSW social workers making impactful contributions in their respective fields. Christina serves as a social worker at the VA, providing integrated clinical support and care coordination for veterans and their caregivers. Allen works in a macro practice setting, focusing on policy development, grant writing, and procedural communications. Their transition from student researchers to practicing professionals reflects the powerful integration of scholarship and practice.

For additional information on national mental health awareness observances and recognition of caregivers, please visit the 2026 [Mental Health America Awareness Calendar](#) and [National Caregivers Day](#), which honor and support the vital role of family caregivers

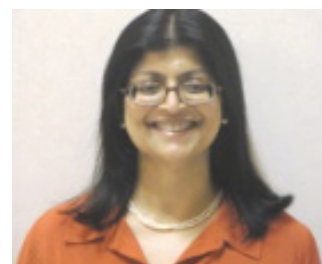


The caregiving journey: service provider reflections on the experiences of family caregivers supporting individuals with serious mental illness

Meekyung Han, Christina Holland, Allen Nguyen & Sadhna Diwan



Dr. Meekyung Han



Dr. Sadhna Diwan

Student Spotlight - Erika Bodoh

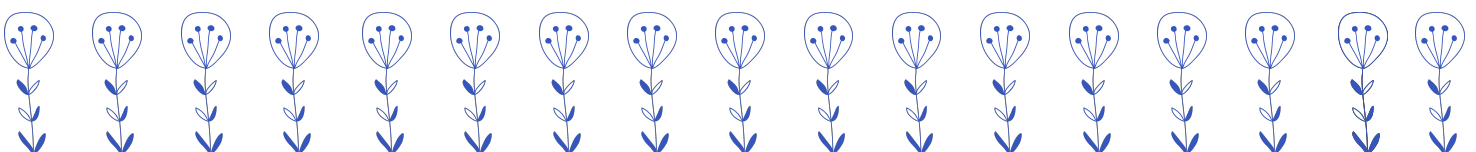
Erika Bodoh
Senior, BASW



Erika Bodoh is a senior in the BASW program and serves as President of the Undergraduate Social Work Association. In her role, she is committed to connecting students with their peers and creating events that strengthen the social work community. Erika was inspired to pursue social work because of personal experiences in high school, where she saw friends navigating difficult situations and wanted to be someone who could support others in similar circumstances. Alongside her passion for helping others, she has loved music since fourth grade and values the deep connections that can be formed through it.

Serving as President has been a meaningful leadership journey for Erika. She has learned how to manage responsibility, work through pressure, and balance a full academic workload while leading a team. She shares that one of the most rewarding parts of her role has been watching her team thrive and collaborate, especially alongside the Social Work Graduate Student Association in planning events and Convocation. She is proud of the strong partnership between the organizations and the sense of community they continue to build.

After graduation, Erika hopes to pursue a Master of Social Work degree and continue her path in higher education. As the first person in her immediate family to work toward a master's degree, she is motivated to set an example for future generations. SJSU is her top choice, and she hopes to continue her journey as a Spartan. She reminds students that USWA is always working to support and advocate for them.





Student Spotlight - Kari Derenzi



Kari Derenzi

You may have noticed Kari's name appearing frequently in your inbox lately as she continues to promote the upcoming NASW-CA Legislative Lobby Days 2026, taking place in and around Sacramento's State Capitol on April 12 and 13. Even this newsletter has become part of the outreach. If you are interested in attending, you can reach out to her at kari.derenzi@sjsu.edu

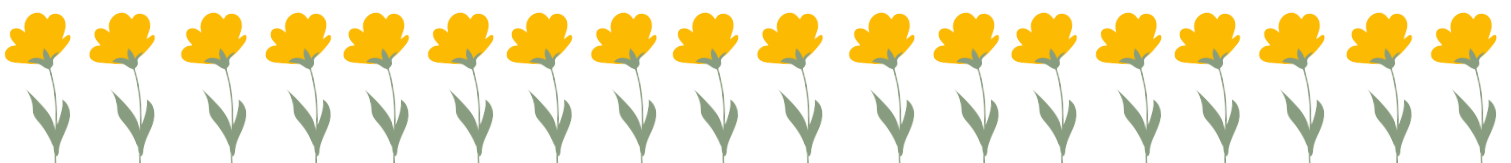
Kari's enthusiasm comes from her role as NASW Chair for SWGSA for the 2025 to 2026 academic year. She joined SJSU with the goal of serving the diverse working class and aging populations of the United States. Over time, she has become increasingly interested in social policy as a powerful way to create meaningful change in these communities.

Kari enjoys learning about the different paths that bring people to social work and believes that everyone's story is unique. She loves hearing about how classmates and colleagues found their way into the field, so feel free to share your social work journey with her sometime.

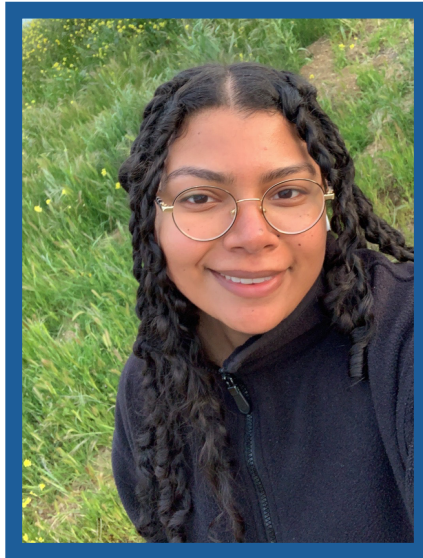
Originally from the Bay Area, Kari graduated from UC Santa Cruz before spending time living in Italy and Vietnam while exploring Europe and Southeast Asia. She later worked for seven years at Kiva.org, a microfinance organization focused on financial inclusion for small businesses around the world. Through her work, she traveled across Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan.

Along the way she picked up bits of different languages and developed a strong appreciation for homemade noodles. If you have recommendations for a great noodle spot in San Jose or want to talk about travel and social work, Kari would love to connect.

One thing Kari feels strongly about is that people around the world have far more in common than differences. She hopes to continue bringing people together to advocate for a better and more equitable future.



Student Spotlight - Britt Moll



Britt Moll



Britt is a first year MSW student in the two year on campus program. She came to social work with a background in education, social justice work, and human resources. Her goal is to become an LCSW working with Black, disabled, queer, and other disenfranchised groups.

She joined the podcast because she strongly believes community engagement and coalition building to be a vital part of social work and social justice practice. The podcast has been a great opportunity for her to build relationships not just with her co hosts and committee members, but also with the guest speakers they have had on. The previous co hosts established a strong foundation for the podcast, which gave Britt and the team the freedom to think outside the box and choose a specific vision for this year.

Their “north star” for the season has been to highlight systems, fields, and populations within social work that do not often get visibility. Each episode is grounded in one group, system, or setting such as the political system, nonprofit sector, inpatient facilities, or academia that they feel has not received the attention it deserves. They have also approached the podcast from an anti racist lens and are committed to putting their words into action while encouraging listeners to do the same.



Student Spotlight

Nicole Williams, a student in San José State University's MSW program, was recently recognized with the 2025 Human Services Department Team Award for Outstanding Service to the Community through the County of Santa Cruz. Nicole currently works as an Employment and Training Specialist II, where she supports families receiving CalWORKs assistance. In this role, she helps families build pathways toward stability by connecting them with community resources, education opportunities, job training programs, and financial support services that promote long term self sufficiency.



Nicole Williams

Recently, Nicole and her team piloted an innovative program designed to help families experiencing homelessness move more quickly through the housing referral process. By bringing a system that previously happened outside the department into an internal process, Nicole and a colleague were able to directly support families facing urgent housing needs. Over the past six months, they have connected 23 families to housing programs and are continuing to assist many more who remain on waiting lists. Their work has provided hope and tangible support to families navigating extremely difficult circumstances.

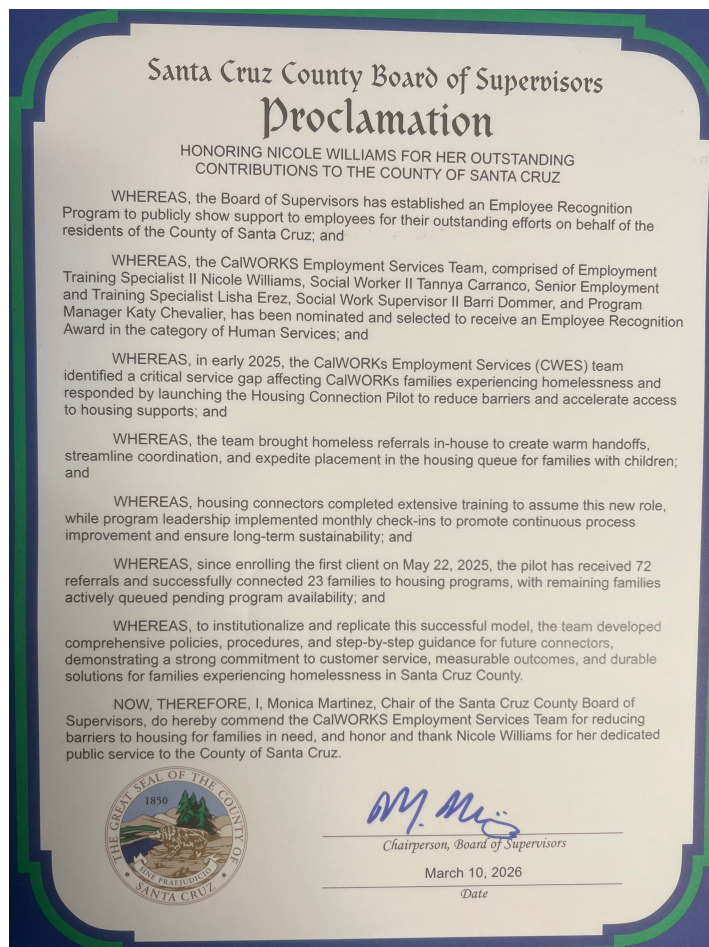


For Nicole, receiving this award was both an honor and a meaningful acknowledgment of the work she and her team do every day. She shares that the knowledge and skills she has gained through her education have directly supported her ability to serve families more effectively. Seeing the impact of her work in real time has reinforced her commitment to the field of social work and to supporting families as they work toward brighter futures.

Nicole's path to social work has been shaped by her own life experiences. After overcoming personal challenges and beginning a journey of recovery, she found purpose in helping others who were seeking change in their lives. Today she proudly shares that she has been 12 years clean and sober. During her recovery journey, she was given an opportunity to work with families in recovery court, an experience that inspired her to pursue a career dedicated to helping others rebuild their lives.

She first earned an associate degree in Criminal Justice and Behavioral Sciences from West Valley College before transferring to San José State University to complete a BS in Justice Studies. She then continued directly into the MSW program, where she has found strong support from faculty, field instructors, and her peers. Nicole shares that the MSW and Title IV E programs have helped provide a solid professional foundation and that the encouragement from her cohort has been an important part of her journey.

Looking ahead, Nicole hopes to continue working in child welfare, earn her LCSW, and eventually open a private practice serving youth in her community. She is passionate about increasing access to mental health resources for children and families and hopes to help fill the gaps in services that many communities face. Nicole encourages fellow MSW students to stay connected to their purpose and reminds them that every step forward matters. Her journey is a powerful reminder that lived experiences, resilience, and compassion can create meaningful change in the lives of others.



Honoring Innovation, Impact, and Leadership

As we celebrate Social Work Month, we honor the wide range of contributions made by individuals across research, education, leadership, and community service. These efforts, spanning diverse areas and innovative approaches, continue to shape and strengthen the field of social work. From advancing knowledge and empowering communities to integrating emerging technologies like AI for social good, their work reflects a deep commitment to progress and impact. While there are many deserving voices and countless meaningful contributions, here we feature a few individuals who exemplify excellence and inspire continued innovation, compassion, and change.

These recognitions highlight the contributions of faculty, students, and alumni whose work advances research, education, and practice in social work. Their efforts underscore the importance of collaboration and innovation in addressing evolving societal needs and strengthening community outcomes.

CHHS AI DEVELOPMENT AWARD 2026

Congratulations to our Social Work Faculty Awardees!

Learning Together with AI: An Interprofessional Sandbox

Sarah Accomazzo & Nicole Dubus

School of Social Work

These proposals demonstrate creativity, scholarly rigor, and deep commitment to responsible, human-centered AI integration across the College of Health and Human Sciences. The selected projects reflect the breadth of expertise within CHHS — spanning clinical simulation, workforce alignment, culturally responsive health education, inclusion, interprofessional collaboration, curriculum redesign, and faculty capacity building.



We are excited to learn from each of these initiatives through their individual Small Byte Lunch-and-Learn sessions this spring and at the Fall CHHS Welcome, where awardees will share their outcomes and insights.

Please join me in congratulating our colleagues. This is inspiring work that reflects the very best of our college.

◆ CELEBRATING OUR STARS! ◆

Two incredible honors recognizing excellence in social work education and leadership. Our community shines bright!

🏆 **Jennifer Tai**

Emerging Leader Alumni Award

Our alum Jennifer Tai is being honored with the 2025-2026 SJSU College of Health and Human Sciences Emerging Leader Alumni Award. Her outstanding contributions to the social work profession continue to inspire our community.

🏆 **Dr. Asha Thomas**

Outstanding Adviser Award

Dr. Asha Thomas receives the 2025-2026 SJSU College of Health and Human Sciences Outstanding Adviser Award. Her exceptional guidance and dedication have made a lasting impact on our students and the School of Social Work.

Upcoming Events & Highlights

The Power and Pitfalls of Self-Disclosure in Behavioral Healthcare: Intent versus Impact

March 31, 2026 | 1:00–2:00 PM (ET)

This upcoming webinar, hosted by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), explores the complex role of self-disclosure in clinical practice. Participants will examine how intentional self-disclosure can strengthen therapeutic relationships while also navigating important ethical considerations, boundaries, and potential risks. The session brings together research, ethical frameworks, and real-world examples to support informed decision-making in behavioral healthcare settings.

[Register and Learn More here](#)

New Podcast Episode: Trauma, Veterans, and Healing: How SHEEPDOG and Social Work Tell the Real Story

NASW Social Work Talks – Episode 137

In this powerful episode, filmmaker Steven Grayhm discusses SHEEPDOG and its exploration of the mental health challenges faced by veterans. The conversation highlights the importance of connection, care, and community, while shedding light on the reality that many veterans do not access available support services. This episode offers valuable insights into trauma, healing, and the critical role of social work in supporting veteran populations.

[Podcast Link](#)

2026 NASW-CA Legislative Lobby Days

April 12–13, 2026

Lobby Days is a two-day event that educates more than 1,200 students and professionals about important legislation affecting clients and the social work profession. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the legislative process and gain hands-on lobbying experience by engaging with state legislators and/or their staff about key policy issues. The event also highlights applications of Macro Social Work and related career paths.



Career Center Resources and Updates

The SJSU Career Center continues to offer valuable resources to support students in preparing for internships and future careers. The Career Closet is a great option for students looking to build a professional wardrobe. Students can select one free outfit per semester to keep, perfect for interviews or job fairs. The Career Closet is now located in Clark Hall, Suite 140, and is available by walk in with no appointment required.

In addition, free professional headshots are available through the Career Center's Iris Photo Booth. All current SJSU students, staff, and faculty can receive one professional headshot per semester, also available on a walk in basis. These services are designed to help students present themselves confidently in professional settings.

For career guidance, undergraduate CHHS students can connect with Kristin Keller, while graduate CHHS students can work with Carrie McKnight for career counseling and workshops. All students can schedule one on one appointments through Spartan Connect. For more information about the Career Closet, visit the SJSU Career Center website or email careercloset@sjsu.edu

Apply for Scholarships

The deadline to apply for the School of Social Work scholarships and awards is April 10th. Please email socialworkfieldeducation@sjsu.edu for the applications and details.

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