



UMB News

Social Work Students To Serve in City Libraries

October 5, 2017 | By [Mary T. Phelan](#)

Shlomo Goldberger and **Sara Haile**, both students at the [University of Maryland School of Social Work \(UMSSW\)](#), have a new classroom in which to hone their skills as they seek to become professionals in their field: the Pennsylvania Avenue Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library.

The students are part of the new Social Worker in the Library program, launched in partnership between the Enoch Pratt Free Library System and the UMSSW, which places social work students in four pilot branches, Brooklyn, Hamilton, Pennsylvania Avenue, and Southeast Anchor. Twice a week, for eight months, Goldberger and Haile will provide social services such as one-on-one counseling, assistance with online job applications and government-related forms, and offering references to homeless shelters and substance abuse resources to library patrons. (**See video below.**)

"A client came in to the library and, not aware that there are now social workers in the library, approached a librarian asking for assistance with a job application, and the librarian introduced her to me," Goldberger recalled of his first experience helping a library patron, also known as clients.

He explained the Social Worker in the Library program to the woman and helped her with her job application, which was quite involved and overwhelming to her, Goldberger said.

"By the time we were done, she left with a real smile on her face," Goldberger recalled. "It was very gratifying. To do that for the first time, to work with a client, somebody who was in need of services, was a very special experience. I look forward to having many more special encounters here at the library."

The program, which has been in place for a few weeks, was officially launched at a Sept. 27 news conference hosted by Baltimore Mayor Catherine C. Pugh at City Hall.

"We believe that this will help to cut down on some of the issues that we are facing in the city, whether it's addiction, poverty, homelessness, and so many other social issues," Pugh said. "I think this is a great way to address some of the ills of our community in such a public setting."

Speaking at the news conference, [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) President **Jay A. Perman, MD**, acknowledged several faculty members from the UMSSW and from the school's [Social Work Community Outreach Services \(SWCOS\)](#) for bringing the program to fruition, including UMSSW Dean **Richard P. Barth, PhD, MSW**, SWCOS Executive Director **Wendy Shaia, EdD, MSW**, SWCOS Assistant Director **Becky Davis, MSW**, and SWCOS Clinical Field Instructor **Lane Victorson, MSW**.



University of Maryland School of Social Work students Shlomo Goldberger (left) and Sara Haile (center) give faculty clinical instructor Kimberly Street an update on their participation in the new Social Worker in the Library program, which places social work students in Baltimore libraries to provide social services to patrons.

“Our School of Social Work knows how powerful this kind of model is – where you have students and faculty and services in the very places where our neighbors already are, in schools and clinics and community centers and, yes, libraries,” Perman said. “This is our mission in action – to shrink the distance between our University and the people we serve, to be proactive in identifying those who need resources and interventions and to be fully accessible and present for our neighbors. This is

us casting a wider net.”

The partnership also gives students and faculty a chance to provide training to library staff so that they can better meet the needs of their clients, Perman noted.

“And of course, it’s essential field training for our students, whose skills are shaped by hands-on experience,” he added.

That kind of hands-on experience has a tremendous benefit to students, said **Kimberly Street, LGSW, LPN, CCM**, faculty clinical instructor with SWCOS, who is the project manager for the program.

“It gives them an opportunity to take the theory that they learn in the classroom and put the theory into practice,” she said.

At the Brooklyn library branch, social work student **Raina Wilson** noticed a group of teenage girls who were being “teenage loud” in the library after school one afternoon. “From there, we just started talking,” Wilson said. “I asked if they would want to start a teen program at the library. They said yes, and that is what we are going to do. It will be guided by them and facilitated by us and we’re excited.”

Pratt Library President and CEO Heidi Daniel noted that the social work students also will conduct programs to serve the community and will train library staff on topics such as crisis management and public engagement.

“Every single day, in all 21 of our branches and our central library, we see people walk through the doors who need to be connected to vital services,” Daniel said. “Our librarians are often on the front lines directing people to those services to help them tackle those issues, like homelessness, poverty, food insecurity and addiction. As we look to better service those customers, we turned to another major anchor institution in the city, the University of Maryland, and that is how this amazing partnership was formed.”

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