



# UMB News

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## UMB Students Seize Opportunity to Help

**October 13, 2017** | *By [Office of Communications and Public Affairs](#)*

**Denise Chop, MSW, LCSW-C**, clinical instructor and coordinator for field education at the [University of Maryland School of Social Work \(SSW\)](#), sat at one of hundreds of tables in the cavernous Baltimore Convention Center on Oct. 12 with a young mother who had become homeless only a day earlier.

"The rent was due one day and I was paid the next, and I guess my landlord just didn't want to wait," said the woman, who wished to be identified only as "Brittnay."

The mother of an infant son, she now must navigate a path of services and resources that comes without instruction manuals or GPS directions.

"I will talk to her about her world, as it is now, and follow her path, because it's her path, not ours. We are here to help her, and I am thankful for the opportunity," Chop said when asked in what ways she would be assisting Brittnay now that the two met. "I will try to offer her as much information as I can about services she may not know about and what challenges she is facing with the services she does know about."

Chop was one of dozens of volunteers from the [University of Maryland, Baltimore \(UMB\)](#), assisting people experiencing homelessness or poverty at Project Homeless Connect. In its sixth year, Project Homeless Connect provides on-site, direct services such as medical and dental care as well as links to service providers such as legal professionals and recovery programs.

Volunteers from all UMB schools provided services throughout the two-day event.

Any graduate level of education should include a significant amount of classroom instruction combined with real-life learning experiences working with specific populations, said **Samuel B. Little, PhD**, assistant dean for field education at the SSW.

"In order to be great with skill sets, it's inevitable you'll have education outside of the classroom, and this is the way to do it," Little said.

"Social work students who have placements with homeless families are using this opportunity to reach beyond what agencies do," he continued. "And we are building a new cohort of employees to assist these families." **Sarah Christa Butts, MSW**, executive director of the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative at SSW, helped to coordinate SSW and other University volunteers.

**Meriah Weaver**, a first-year SSW student, said she volunteered at Project Homeless Connect "to make a difference and to be able to connect clients to resources."



*Denise Chop, left, clinical instructor and coordinator for field education at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, assists a client at Project Homeless Connect.*

“You can never have too much help,” she said. “And being hands-on always makes a difference. It gives you firsthand experience and gives you more of an insight into the population you’re working with.”

**Sheila Snowden, MSW, LCSW-C, LCADC**, clinical instructor and coordinator for field education at the SSW, was on hand to assist clients with mental health needs. “They’re people who come in with special needs or addiction, and we try to provide assistance,” she said. “Our school is involved with the Grand

Challenges (initiative), and one of them is ending homelessness.

“Being a resident of Baltimore City, I see so much homelessness,” Snowden continued. “I wanted to try to help in some way because there but for the grace of God go I. It could be me. And now I have an opportunity to help.”

[University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law](#) students were among the 2,000 community volunteers offering their services at Project Homeless Connect. The students provided a low-income taxpayer clinic to help individuals who might have a tax dispute with the IRS.

**Joe Brees**, a third-year law student, cited numerous reasons why attendees might seek tax advice, including wage garnishment or a revoked driver’s license. “We call the IRS. We call the comptroller. We speak on their behalf and we try to negotiate what’s called an offer in compromise, which is basically telling the IRS, ‘Look, this is how much this person makes. Let’s come to an agreement and see if we can get on some sort of payment plan,’ ” he said, noting the services the students provide.

While the students are fulfilling part of the Cardin requirement necessary for graduation, they also are happy to create goodwill in the community. Named for U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland, the requirement mandates first-year, full-time day students provide legal services to people who are poor or otherwise lack access to justice as a prerequisite for graduation.

“For most of us, it’s our first experience being able to actually put our legal education to work. so it’s pretty rewarding,” said **Gabrielle Phillips**, also a third-year law student.

**Beverly Winstead, JD**, director of the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, agreed. "We consider it an honor to be of service to the Baltimore community. Our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic continuously seeks opportunities to assist taxpayers who may not have filed tax returns or who may owe the IRS or state of Maryland taxes," she said. "Special thanks to United Way for having the vision to put together this event."

First-year [University of Maryland School of Nursing \(SON\)](#) students **Haley Witt, Rebecca Godfrey**, and **Sara Mast** listened to input from Clinical Instructor **Teryn Gist, BSN, RN**, before they began conducting screenings for blood pressure, Hepatitis C, HIV, and diabetes.

"I was really impressed by the amount of providers here," Witt said, expressing what motivated her to volunteer. "It seemed like a good way to help out in a bunch of different ways."

"It's a great opportunity to meet new people in the community and practice your skills," Mast said.

Added Godfrey, a new resident of Baltimore, "It's very rewarding to be helping our neighbors."

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