



Letter From the Editor: Taking a Step Forward

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In 2011, members of the forensic social work community welcomed the first publication of the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*. Long before the inaugural issue, however, work on the journal creation had begun. From the leadership of our dear friend and founding editor, Dr. Ira Neighbors, the journal commenced its inception well in advance of the first articles. Since then, many steps have been taken, and challenges addressed. Largely due to economic pressures and restrictions of traditional scholarly publication, the *Journal of Forensic Social Work* became dormant after the release of its fifth volume in 2015. At that time, the board members of the *National Organization of Forensic Social Work* (NOFSW) made the choice to invest in the publishing rights of back issues as work was done behind the scenes to find a new outlet for these important contributions to the field.

Now, in March 2022, during Social Work Month, we are excited to announce our next step forward and transition to an Open Access journal format, available freely to scholars, attorneys, legislators, advocates and activists, and social work practitioners, across the globe. As the scope of science has evolved, technology has afforded us new opportunities in the ways we share information and join as a community. The *Journal of Forensic Social Work* will no longer be out of the hands of the general population, and many of the nonprofit and government organizations which employ and support forensic social workers. The paywalls associated with scholarly publication, in years past, are no longer the only route to dissemination and this new technological landscape allows the journal to be relaunched, in ways not possible before.

It's important to note, how we would not be here without the tireless work of our NOFSW colleagues who have provided their time and intellectual resources to create, implement, and support this journal across the years. In memoriam, we acknowledge and celebrate the life and contributions of Dr. Rob Butters, one of our three founding editors who was crucial in bringing the *Journal of Forensic Social Work* to existence and shepherding it through the first several years in publication. Dr. Butters was a well-regarded forensic social work

educator, researcher, practitioner, and contributor to the profession. For many of us, however, he will forever be remembered more for his friendship, mentorship, enduring support of those around him, and the pride he took in his children.

We are also fortunate to have in this new evolution of the journal, the continued support of our founding editor, Dr. Viola Vaughan-Eden. Her guidance with both the journal and with *NOFSW*, has allowed both to grow substantially over time. The entire forensic social work community thanks Dr. Vaughan-Eden for her lifelong contributions and leadership in our profession.

The *Journal of Forensic Social Work* will now be hosted as an Open Access peer-reviewed scholarly journal, supported by *NOFSW* in partnership with the *University of Oklahoma Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work*, the *Ruth Kneel Institute for Transformative Scholarship*, and the *University of Oklahoma Libraries*. We are currently assembling an invigorated editorial board to assist in the journal's operations, maintain the integrity of publication ethics, and develop the social capital for a robust pool of reviewers. We welcome anyone interested in serving in this way to reach out directly to the managing editor.

Initially, this journal explicitly emphasized guiding practitioners by offering a clear identity and knowledge base to help them in the ever-evolving forensic social work landscape. The desire to be a premier resource for forensic practitioners and an outlet for significant scientific contribution remains. Just as the *NOFSW* retains a broad and inclusive focus of forensic social work, so too will the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*. The journal will continue to draw on the principles of our past while taking advantage of the opportunities afforded in the future of publication and dissemination.

Also, important to note, is the history and timeline of journal production. The journal was published through Taylor & Francis Group in its first five years. Like most other respected peer-reviewed journals of the time, this was an important partnership to distinguish the journal as legitimate. It ensured fidelity and integrity in the publication process and maintained rigor in the evaluation and peer-review of associated articles. Yet, one of the downfalls of this traditional type of publication model is cost and a lack of sustainability, especially throughout challenging times. The need for information, evidence-based practices, advocacy, and community remains ever-important, but economic restrictions prohibited the *NOFSW* from continuing with a major publishing house. Additional considerations around access drove the decision to suspend publication until alternative pathways could be developed. Further, the ways educational institutions and government systems might have contracts to support access to journals continued to grow to a price point that limited opportunity for people to access the research this journal supports. Thus, the *NOFSW* board made the difficult choice to suspend publication, and the process of finding an alternative route began.

Approximately three years ago, the recognition of the burgeoning and robust market for credible Open Access peer-reviewed publication outlets caught

the attention of the *NOFSW* board members. Work began to develop mechanisms needed to support the Open Access publication of the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*. This was no easy task, mainly because of the emerging technological and market issues associated with Open Access publication. Furthermore, the dual pandemics of structural racism and COVID-19 affected this work as well. At the same time, labor shortages have created global supply chain issues and access to intellectual capital became more restricted while we all navigated the uncertain waters. Through the diligent work of the *NOFSW* board, a progressive partnership was developed, to help us meet our goals both past and present for the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*. Fidelity to our original mission was of tremendous importance. As mentioned above, the *Journal of Forensic Social Work* aims to serve as a premier resource of guiding information for social work practice in forensic settings. The goals of Open Access and availability are also of paramount importance. Thus, we are excited to launch our new evolution of the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*.

In this issue of the relaunched journal, we revisit the *JoFSW's* inaugural issue from 2011. The goal will be to update readers on how things have progressed for the *NOFSW* and the evolution of forensic social work in the United States and worldwide. Our organization, once local, then national, has become a global partnership of practitioners and scholars coming together to advance the profession. We have developed new recommendations for ethical standards in forensic social work practice as we have grown. We have worked together to seek justice, eliminate disparities, and address current challenges in our modern society. We welcome several of our inaugural authors to return, along with a host of new contributors, to help us all transition as a community into a new era of knowledge sharing.

As the journal continues forward, we will adopt a rolling publication schedule. With the journal's Open Access and digital nature, the *JoFSW* will publish articles as soon as they are reviewed, accepted, and copy-edited. Though this is often a lengthy process, technology has allowed us to bypass the traditional printing press and share this information as soon as it becomes available. We welcome a diversity of authors, perspectives, and contributions. Notes for authors are available on our website as well as our previous issues – all in Open Access and available online. We welcome you to distribute any information related to forensic social work and join us in expanding the knowledge and community base as we move forward to address some of the most complicated problems of our day. Most social workers are not full-time forensic practitioners, but all engage in forensic practice – the intersection of their social work practice and the law - at some point throughout their careers. The *JoFSW* also contributes to building related professional disciplines such as the law, medicine, education, health, etc.

Thank you for being on this journey with us, and please join me in welcoming the new and expanded version of the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*. We remain grateful and are excited about taking these next steps forward together!