



National Organization of Forensic Social Work in the 21st Century: A Historical Retrospective of the Last 10 Years

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The National Organization of Forensic Social Work (NOFSW) has a robust history of supporting professionals working with clients in legal systems. It was incorporated in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1983 with the objective of advancing the education and practice of forensic social work. Despite the expectations of clients and the community that social workers and lawyers collaborate on cases, due to their differing purposes and goals, this does not happen consistently. Even when social workers and lawyers do attempt to work together, the differences in their education and training often make it difficult for them to speak the same language. It is this disconnect between the two disciplines (social work and law) that NOFSW sought to ameliorate. NOFSW provides a home for forensic social work professionals to gain support, instruction, and validation for their work. This historical summary is a follow-up to the commentary published in the first issue of the *Journal of Forensic Social Work* (Chatfield et al., 2011).

NOFSW is a thriving membership organization celebrating four decades of leading the field. It successfully established a code of ethics in 1984, developed and delivered curricula in social work and the law, as well as advanced best practice guidelines. NOFSW triumphantly published the first journal dedicated to forensic social work research. The purpose of the journal is to improve and develop the capabilities of its membership, as well as inform the public on issues faced by forensic social work practitioners. The *Journal of Forensic Social Work* first launched in 2011 with the Taylor and Francis Publishing Group and after a six-year hiatus has relaunched as an open-access journal through the University of Oklahoma's Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work under the editorial leadership of Dr. David McLeod.

NOFSW continues to advance social justice through the interprofessional collaboration between human services and legal systems. In

2013, the organization performed an audit of its operation and management. The mission and vision were revised, and a strategic plan was developed to address ways of meeting the needs of members in the 21st century. NOFSW's mission is to support the professional development of its members by: 1) constructing and maintaining forensic standards and best practices; 2) producing quality materials for inter-professional forensic education and practice conducting and disseminating forensic research and scholarship; and 3) advocating for court-involved children, youth, adults, and families. NOFSW preserved its logo of the tree in a circle to symbolize its commitment to interprofessional collaboration. It continues to enhance the professional activities of forensic practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and advocates, in part, by providing an annual conference, virtual trainings, webinars, online discussion forums, newsletters, and the *Journal of Forensic Social Work*.

NOFSW has always upheld a code of ethics and in 2020, a taskforce revised its ethical standards. As forensic social work is a professional specialty, *Specialty Guidelines for Values and Ethics* (2020) were created. The *Guidelines* are enhanced by the 2018 National Association of Social Workers [NASW] Code of Ethics. As stated in the *Guidelines*, the goals “are to improve the quality of forensic social work services; enhance high-quality and effective practice; facilitate the systematic development of forensic social work; and encourage forensic social workers to acknowledge and respect all human rights,” in an effort to achieve NOFSW's mission.

For many years, NOFSW has had an international presence through its membership. In 2010, NOFSW hosted a delegation of academics and practitioners from the Japanese Society of Law and Forensic Social Services (JSLFSS). Over the years, this collaboration resulted in NOFSW board members serving as keynote speakers in Japan at the JSLFSS Congresses. Additionally, Japanese delegations have regularly attended the NOFSW Conference and during the era of COVID-19, maintained an ongoing virtual collaboration.

NOFSW engages members in a variety of ways. Most recently, several special initiatives were launched including subcommittees on education, training, advocacy, and research. It is an opportunity for members to participate and lend their voice to this ever-evolving field. As part of its continuing education program, NOFSW also developed a Forensic Social Work Certificate Program that is delivered both in-person and virtually throughout the year. This certificate program is open to anyone working in a forensic social work-related field, to current students, and to those with social work degrees. Participants receive training in topics foundational to sound forensic social work practice as well as advanced training through a separate certificate program. NOFSW

conferences offer a unique opportunity for social workers and allied professionals to learn from one another while enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the interconnectedness of the law, policy, and practice. Attendees include social workers, psychologists, attorneys, judges, law enforcement officers, physicians, nurses, child custody evaluators, and various other mental health, medical, and legal professionals. Additionally, NOFSW regularly invites leaders from partner organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Education, to participate.

In 2021, NOFSW established the Albert R. Roberts Student Presenter Scholarship. NOFSW acknowledged that supporting the professional development of students is a starting point for fostering career-long learning, practice proficiency, and leadership in the field. Scholarships are pathways for students to engage more meaningfully in the profession and with forensic social workers globally. The scholarship is named for Dr. Albert R. Roberts who was a professor, author, and ardent proponent of social work's role in forwarding justice.

Given the continued racial disparities and injustices throughout the United States, NOFSW acknowledges that silence is complicity. Therefore, NOFSW joined others across the country and world in speaking out to condemn the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others – and the United States' long history of racial terror and violence, structural racism, and white supremacy. NOFSW's commitment to social justice includes the explicit recognition of and work to dismantle systemic racism and white supremacy, with the goal of achieving racial equity in all facets of our profession. NOFSW recognizes that legal systems can help protect the vulnerable, care for the maltreated, and advocate for the voiceless. So, it is in this vein that we stand with those working towards promoting just, anti-racist, and empowering change as we continue to prepare social workers and allied professionals for the forensic area.

To acknowledge that some in NOFSW go above and beyond in support of the organization, Judge Sol Gothard, a former social worker and long-time judge on Louisiana's Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, was honored in 2011 at the 28th annual conference as the first recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award that bears his name. Judge Gothard devoted his entire career to protecting the abused and to improving the legal system to which they are entrusted. In his remarks, Judge Gothard reflected on his personal experience with forensic social work.

We would like to honor and acknowledge the leadership of NOFSW

including executive directors, board members, and presidents. Without their tireless commitment to improve and standardize forensic social work, the organization could not have thrived for four decades. In 2015, Paul Brady who began his work as the Executive Director of NOFSW in 2004, retired. We welcomed Dr. Jim Campbell and Jane Campbell in that role and NOFSW continues to make significant advancements under their leadership.

Without NOFSW and its membership, thousands of forensic practitioners would still be searching for a professional identity and patching together training and practice standards. In the interests of current and future forensic practitioners, and the clients they serve, we thank you.

PRESIDENTS OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK

1984–1985	1	Dane Hughes
1985–1986	2	Barbara C. O’Neal
1986–1987	3	Richard Suehrstedt
1987–1988	4	Janet Warren
1988–1989	5	Deborah C. Scott
1989–1990	6	Daniel Janey
1990–1991	7	Frederic L. Pavelka
1991–1992	8	Howard Sovronsky
1992–1993	9	Frances Agatino
1993–1994	10	Janet Ades
1994–1995	11	Guay Chatfield
1995–1996	12	Mark Delaney
1996–1997	13	Donald R. Rilla
1997–1998	14	Anne Chambers
1998–1999	15	Daniel Mosley
1999–2000	16	M. James Toner
2000–2001	17	Ira Neighbors
2001–2002	18	Marilyn Smith-Cotterell
2002–2003	19	Karen van Beyer
2003–2004	20	William A. Holt
2004–2005	21	Katie Heffernan
2005–2006	22	Lyndia Green-Faust
2006–2008	23	William A. Holt
2008–2010	24	Stacey Hardy-Desmond
2010–2011	25	Suzanne Dowling
2011–2012	26	Kathleen Carty
2012–2014	27	Tina Maschi
2014–2019	28	Viola Vaughan-Eden

This brief history of NOFSW is only the tip of an iceberg rooted in service and improving the wellbeing of society. For more information, please visit the NOFSW website at www.nofsw.org.

NOTE

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