

## Social Work Month Letter to the Editor

March is Social Work Month, and the 2023 theme is **Social Work Breaks Barriers**.

The theme “Social Work Breaks Barriers” resonates because social workers are on the frontlines helping our nation overcome myriad challenges, including economic inequality, reproductive rights, racism, and natural disasters worsened by global warming.

More than 700,000 social workers nationwide entered the profession because they have a strong desire to assist those in need and make our communities, our nation, and our world a better place for all.

For generations, social workers have broken barriers to help people live better lives, and they continue to break barriers by empowering people in tough situations. For example, social workers help:

- Those in mental crises when they call 988.
- Families overcoming cultural hurdles that keep them from accepting and supporting children who are LGBTQIA2S+.
- Remove obstacles that prevent people from exercising their right to vote.

For more than a century, they’ve helped break through barriers that have led to the creation of a minimum wage, a 40-hour work week, and the implementation of Social Security benefits.

They’ve transformed millions of lives. Chances are over the course of your lifetime, you, a family member, or a friend have been helped by a social worker. According to a new survey released this month by Ipsos, 80 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of social workers. And 81 percent of people who have interacted with a social worker say a member of the profession improved their situation or that of a family member.

These helping professionals work everywhere — hospitals, mental health care facilities, child welfare agencies, schools, veteran centers, and in local, state, and federal government.

Many are in Congress or state or local government, such as Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), who works to ensure our government uplifts the most vulnerable in our society. Or like, Kristina Whiton-O’Brien, director of partnerships at Vot-ER, an organization that helps remove obstacles that prevent people from exercising their right to vote. Or like Shannon Hagy, Southwest Division Chair for the NASW Pennsylvania Chapter, who now leads Veterans Place, which empowers veterans as they transition from experiencing homelessness to living in their own residences. It also helps all at-risk veterans to become engaged, valuable citizens who contribute positively to the communities in which they live.

[OPTIONAL: INSERT EXAMPLES OF LOCAL SOCIAL WORKERS YOU MAY KNOW HERE.]

Social workers have been at the forefront of the global Covid-19 pandemic. When most of us were quarantined at home, social workers were out in their communities—making sure children and at-risk youth were attending classes over Zoom, providing food and other resources to the elderly, helping those with substance-use disorder get the help they needed to stay sober, and helping tens of thousands of people stay connected to loved ones quarantined in nursing homes or at hospital.

They continue to break barriers by advocating for student-debt relief, equal rights for all, and improving delivery of health care and mental health care. The need for more social workers is reflected in data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which notes social work is one of the fastest growing professions in the United States. An expected 800,000 social workers will join the profession by 2030. Yet, social workers need your support. They deserve higher salaries and more programs, such as student loan forgiveness, that make it easier for people to enter, work, and remain in the field.

Consider contacting your lawmakers and urging them to support the Improving Access to Mental Health Act and the Social Work Reinvestment Act, legislation that would support the profession. [INCLUDE ANY LOCAL INITIATIVES THAT WOULD HELP SOCIAL WORKERS.]

And during Social Work Month and beyond we urge you to learn more about the profession and what you can do to help assist them in their positive, life-affirming work. Visit [socialworkmonth.org](http://socialworkmonth.org) for more information.