



School Social Work
Association of America



2024 National Conference Breakout Sessions March 12-15, 2024 Baltimore, MD

PLEASE NOTE: This listing is provided to aid individuals with registration. All session descriptions, titles, and sessions themselves are subject to change at any time and without notice.

****A Final Program, including learning goals and presenters, will be posted in January 2024***

****For information on Pre-Con Sessions and Keynotes, see SSWAA's Pre-Conference and Keynote Descriptions Document**

Wednesday, March 13th, 2024 (Sessions A & B)

A1 Yes, We're Going to Talk About Bruno (and the Red Panda): Culturally Relevant Therapeutic Interventions based on Encanto and Turning Red

Encanto and Turning Red took us all by storm with catchy music and strong characters, but these movies continue to resonate deeply with many clients of school-based clinicians both emotionally and culturally. In this session, participants will consider the many possible clinical applications of these movies for school-based work with children and adolescents. We will build from a shared foundation of research-based knowledge about intergenerational trauma and the immigrant experience, specifically discussing implications for communities of color in the school setting, and then explore creative interventions based on talk, art, song, and play which participants will be able to use with child and adolescent clients immediately. (Prior film viewing is not required but is highly recommended.)

Presenter: Allie Perez, MSW, LICSW, RPT



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A2 Creating Restorative Response Teams to Address Racial Harassment in Schools

We are ethically called to create and sustain equitable, inclusive, and brave spaces for our students to thrive. When harassment is initiated based on a person's race, color, national origin, ethnicity, or ancestry, it is our responsibility to respond, repair, and eliminate the conduct with healing-centered approaches. This session is designed to provide a strength-based and healing-centered approach to prevent, mitigate, respond, and recover from racial harassment incidents within the school community. This session will allow individuals to create a restorative response team structure designed to respond to, repair, and eliminate racial harassment.

Presenter: Jacqueline Pierce, MSW, LMSW, CSSW

A3 Applying Experiential Therapy Techniques for School Social Work

Prairie walks, feeding goats, weeding vegetable gardens, puppets... what do they have in common? This session will expand knowledge of experiential therapy approaches and apply them in the school setting. The presenter will provide background knowledge and real-life examples of these approaches, including animal, horticulture, drama, and nature-based therapies from her very own school setting. Hands-on experiences will engage learners in the session and provide a guide to the application to individual and small group sessions. Attendees will leave with a lesson plan for social work sessions and how to tie CASEL SEL Competencies/IEP Goal progress to their plan. This session will refresh your approach and tie in current research on Nature-Based Therapy and the Science of Play.

Presenter: Katie Szarzynski, MSW, LCSW

A4 Preparing for National Certification: Hands-on Workshop with Nationally Certified School Social Workers

Are you an active SSWAA member with four years of post-MSW experience who wants to become a Nationally Certified School Social Worker (NCSSW) candidate? Attend this hands-on session to learn about the certification process from application to competency statement submission and the submission rating process. This session will prompt you to examine how the SSWAA National Practice Model and your practice intersect, test your skills at writing a competency statement, and identify artifacts that you could use to support it. Participants will receive an update on school social workers who have received a pay increase upon earning national certification and any state legislative updates. This session will help you evaluate your readiness to invest time into the national certification process and develop a plan to successfully complete it.

Presenters: Lou Paschall, LAPSW, NCSSW
Michelle Alvarez, EdD, MSW &
Ken Rautiola, LCSW, NCSSW

A5 What do we know about McKinney-Vento? A Deep Dive into Our Knowledge

For over 35 years, The McKinney-Vento Act (MVA) has been the major federal policy that addresses educational needs for children experiencing homelessness in America. Despite the policy's importance, few examinations of what we know about the MVA have been conducted. This presentation will cover a comprehensive scoping review of everything we know about the MVA, condensing over 100 articles into a manageable and understandable



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presentation. This will provide attendees with a solid base of evidence-based information. Further, this session will be a space to further discuss the future directions of our knowledge on the MVA by leveraging both research and practice knowledge to improve and narrow any practice to research-to-practice gaps.

Presenters: James Canfield, PhD, MSW, BSW, LMSW & Kennesha Smith, MSW, LMSW

A6 Neurodiversity Affirming Practice in the Classroom

Given the rise of the identification of neurodivergent (ND) profiles, it is crucial that school social workers enhance their understanding and skills in supporting ND students. Through interactive discussions and case studies, participants will gain valuable insights into neurodiversity and its implications for inclusive education. The workshop will explore a range of neurodivergent profiles as social workers learn evidence-based strategies for creating inclusive and supportive environments that cater to the diverse needs of ND students. We will explore sensory sensitivities, accommodations, communication, and social interactions, providing practical techniques to enhance student engagement and address common misconceptions and stigma related to neurodiversity. Comprehensive collaboration is emphasized.

Presenter: Sara Rodrigues, DSW, MSW

A7 Advocacy and Allyship for LGBTQ+ Youth: How School Social Workers Can Make a Difference

This workshop is intended to provide educators and youth-serving professionals with the competency and confidence to ensure LGBTQ+ youth are in spaces where they are supported, valued, and have the opportunity to learn and grow free from bullying, violence, and harassment. The workshop will provide foundational information and data to support youth-serving professional advocacy, dispel common misconceptions about including LGBTQ+ topics in schools, and increase confidence by role-playing common scenarios that require a response from students and families.

Presenters: Ted Lewis, M.Ed & Cheryl Green, M.Ed

B1 School-Based Mental Health: One Size Does Not Fit All

This session introduces participants to a school-based mental health framework specifically designed for Black students. During this session, participants will gain a heightened awareness of the importance of taking factors such as race, class, and culture into account when working with Black students on mental health-related issues. Participants will leave with practical measures to support the mental health of Black students that can be easily implemented within their school divisions.

Presenter: Shenita Williams, PhD, LCSW

B2 The MARVELous Summer Experience: A Unique Way to Connect Students with Socio-Emotional Learning

The Marvelous Summer Experience was developed for our district's most at-risk students. It is four weeks of summer learning where students build agency while learning Math, English



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Language Arts, and Social-Emotional Skills. The information provided during class is reinforced during practical activities, including creative and performing arts, including creative and performing arts, mindfulness, and outdoor education. Because the majority of the students that attend the camp have behavioral concerns, Restorative Justice is an integral framework used in our practice. Circles are strategically used throughout the day to maintain space as a community. All camp activities focus on the whole child as we incorporate parents/families in all experience elements.

Presenter: Stephanie Steward-Bridges, MSW

B3 7 Stages: Providing Treatment in a Mental Health Crisis

Middle School is a difficult developmental period for many adolescents. Many will encounter mental health needs that could lead them to cope by self-harming, experiencing suicidal or homicidal thoughts, or having a psychotic episode. Knowing how to provide treatment during a crisis can decrease the potential of the event becoming traumatic and increase the effectiveness of the intervention. In this session, participants will learn how to use Albert R. Robert's 7-Stage Crisis Intervention Model to intervene through assessment, provide the most effective and least restrictive disposition, and reintegrate the student back into school. Rules of confidentiality, duty to warn, and state laws will be taken into consideration.

Presenter: Lauren Reed, LCSW, LSSW, MPA

B4 Creating and Sustaining Social Work & Mental Health Programs in Challenging Times

This presentation will describe strategies for creating and sustaining social work and school-based mental health programs amidst challenges, including perceptions of social work, stigma, mental health staffing shortages, and COVID-19. The presentation will also describe how school systems can remove barriers to mental health services, create equitable access to services, and address the needs of ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student populations. Through receiving a description of a suburban school district's five-year journey in creating, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining a social work and school-based mental health program, attendees will be able to identify resources, potential partnerships, and strategies for enhancing support to students.

Presenters: Consuela Robinson, EdD, LCSW-C
Kami Wagner, MA, NCC &
Cynthia Schulmeyer, PhD, NCSP

B5 Best Practices in SSW Internships: Lessons from a District and University Collaboration

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) is an urban school district in New York state that serves over 23,000 students a year in grades k-12. Over 100 social workers are currently employed in various settings across the district, and those social workers provide internships for both BSW and MSW interns from five area colleges and universities. Nazareth University, one of these partners, has collaborated with RCSD to strengthen our relationship while assessing barriers to social workers taking interns. This session will outline the work Nazareth is doing to support RCSD social workers in taking students.

Presenters: Tamara Sheppard, LCSW, M.S.Ed &
Erin Cole, DSW, LCSW



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B6 Does Restorative Justice Improve School-Based Relationships in Three Rural High Schools Serving Native American Students?

Native students are disciplined at roughly two times the rate of their White peers and have a dropout/pushout rate twice the national average. Restorative justice (RJ) is a viable strategy for addressing these disparities by taking a relational versus a punitive approach to address the harm caused to others. Typically, student educational outcomes (GPA, attendance, and discipline reports) are used to measure the success of the RJ approach, but less understood is whether RJ creates a relational school culture and improves school-based relationships and a sense of belonging. Semi-structured interviews across three high schools were conducted with principals, assistant principals, school social workers, and students. Findings were mixed among Native and non-Native high school students.

Presenter: Tasha Seneca Keys, PhD

B7 Program Development Using an Anti-Oppressive Framework: Starting a Program from a Brand-New Perspective

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) and Dominican University (DU) are in the process of developing a certification for school personnel that provides training in Culturally Informed Responses to Grief and Loss. In this session, we're going to discuss what it actually takes to develop a culturally informed, equity-focused, inclusive program and what it takes to maintain a program with integrity. This session will critically look at program development and how to ensure that programs are equity-focused from the start and will be broken down into four sections that address the critical elements of program development.

Presenters: Susie Bohun, MSW, LCSW & Leticia Villarreal Sosa, PhD, LCSW

Thursday, March 14th, 2024 (Sessions C & D)

C1 Indigenous-Based Social-Emotional Learning: Bridging the Gap Between Indigenous Practices in Alaska and Social-Emotional Learning in Schools

The use of Indigenous Culture and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools works to support students in a holistic and traditional manner. Using the cultural knowledge of the 228 Federally recognized tribes within the state and the CASEL framework to build a Culturally responsive SEL Practice for the schools of the Interior of Alaska helps to combat trauma by focusing on traditions. This session will focus on how to bring cultural knowledge into everyday SEL at all school levels and promote culturally responsive practices within schools. It will talk about Alaska-specific practices, as well as how to adapt different practices to fit different school environments. Specific strategies and tools to create partnerships between indigenous communities and schools will be discussed.

Presenters: Melissa Zatica, MSW & Ashley Merriss, MSW



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C2 Educational Censorship: Implications for Justice-Oriented School Social Work

This workshop is focused on the scope and prevalence of education censorship, including curricula laws, media influence, school boards, and school social work. First, we review state policies enacted to showcase how censorship has evolved in scope. Second, we explore the reinforcing role of the media. Although censorship is driven by a network of elites, the media, at times, positions divisive narratives that may inflame political polarization. Third, we examine school boards as a place of both support for censorship and public resistance. We explore these complex interactions and discuss strategies of resistance, advocacy, and mechanisms of healing to support school social workers in their ongoing efforts toward justice-oriented practice in schools.

Presenters: Brandon Mitchell, MSW
Robert Lucio, PhD, LCSW &
Emilie Souhrada, MSW, LISW

C3 We Deserve Better: Exploring Radical Self-Care for School Social Workers Through the Lens of Human Rights

School social work is inarguably rife with significant challenges, including burnout and vicarious trauma. Burnout is often perpetuated by delegitimizing, abusive institutions and systems, with myriad negative consequences for practitioners and the profession in general. While individual self-care practices are an essential component of practitioners' longevity toolkits, this session will explore the concept of radical self-care, or the reprioritizing of personal well-being and the disruption of delegitimizing, draining systemic and institutional contexts. Specifically, this workshop will offer a critical appraisal of the policies and practices that imperil SSW well-being at the building and district levels and beyond.

Presenters: Stephanie Carnes, PhD, LLM, LCSW &
Robin DeLuca-Acconi, PhD, LCSW

C4 Getting Off of the Social Work Island: Finding Your People Through Collaboration and Transformational Leadership

Are you the sole social worker in your district? Are you the first social worker hired by your district? If so, this session is for you. This session will give you the tools to create a collaboration of support as you navigate through servicing students in a host setting. It will guide you through building a network to support both your macro and micro-level practices in your building or district. Through self-efficacy and transformational leadership, this session will empower you to be the leader your community, schools, families, and students need you to be.

Presenters: Christina Harper, MA/LSW, LPCC-S, LPSC &
Rebekah Hrcka, MSW, LISW

C5 Rural School Social Work: Resources for Practicing School Social Workers

Rural communities and schools are individually unique, having their own strengths and challenges. They also share similar traits that serve to unify social work practice in these rural areas. A foundational knowledge of rural school social work practice will be shared. Then, drawing on information from local and national perspectives, this workshop will identify strengths and barriers faced by staff, families, and students in rural school settings



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and provide a framework for addressing the barriers found. Focusing on the change process and utilizing social work competencies and ethical practices throughout the process of change, specific strategies and skills for working with rural students and their families at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels will be addressed.

Presenters: Laura Ainsworth, PhD, LCSW
Kenneshia Smith, MSW, LMSW, PhD Student &
Kimberly Allen, LPC-S, LMFT

C6 A Comprehensive Approach to Address the Fentanyl Crisis in Schools

In the current crisis of fentanyl poisoning, school-based interventions, and overdose prevention strategies must be adapted to the context of fentanyl, and innovative approaches must be deployed. This presentation will describe a comprehensive, multi-tiered, research-based approach to addressing the fourth wave of the opioid epidemic. Current literature describes a continuum of school-based prevention and intervention activities— opioid misuse educational programs, linkages to opioid treatments, Narcan/naloxone distribution, and fentanyl testing programs. This presentation provides a continuum of overdose prevention and intervention strategies and activities practiced in educational settings, challenges for addressing the fentanyl public health crisis in youth, and future directions.

Presenters: Phillip Breitenbucher, EdD, MSW
Ana Gamez, PhD, MBA &
Mikaila Pidgeon, MSW

C7 Restraint and Seclusion: Calling School Social Workers to Action

Restraint and seclusion are noneducational, reactive strategies utilized to mitigate the risk of substantial physical harm or bodily injury when other less restrictive interventions have failed to control the situation. Nationally, CRDC data show how these practices are disproportionately implemented with historically marginalized groups and school's use of restraints or use of seclusion in response to student behaviors can deny the student FAPE or constitute disability discrimination. School social workers can and should be leading our schools away from using these harmful practices. Gaining a firm understanding of the law, reporting requirements, and implementation of best practices for prevention, intervention, and de-escalation can limit the use of these reactive and harmful practices.

Presenter: Lee Collyer, MSW

D1 Encouraging Latinx Students to Pursue Higher Education with the Support of School Personnel

There is a discrepancy between White and Latinx students in obtaining a high school (HS) diploma in the United States (US). Systematic barriers such as segregation, minimal diversity in school personnel, inconsistent retention of teachers in at-risk schools (not meeting state standards), and inadequate school resources have been used to oppress and marginalize Latinx students through the achievement gap (McCormack, 2022; Milner & Howard, 2013). According to the Pew Research Center (2022), the US Hispanic population reached 62.5 million in 2021, an increase of 50.5 million from 2010. This presentation aims to share the results of a scoping review of Latinx HS students' structural risk and protective factors.



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Presenters: Maria Sinkule, DSW, MSW, LCSW & Marjorie Colindres, MSW, LCSW, PhD Student

D2 Here We Go with This Sh*t! Advocating for Equity in Schools

Navigating an educational system is hard. Especially when the only time you're invited to have a seat at the table is during parent-teacher conferences. Partnerships between caregivers and the educational institution are invaluable to their success. But for reasons such as lack of communication, lack of knowledge regarding policies and procedures, lack of relationships with school personnel, trauma exposure and experiences (inside and outside the school), and historical, secondary, and generational, parents do not feel empowered to advocate for the best interest of their child, even within those brief 15 minutes. The disconnect between the educational and the family system fosters an academic and social divide. The divide is often exacerbated among marginalized students of color.

Presenter: Alicia Smith, LMSW

D3 Fostering Belonging in Special Education

Special education in the U.S. aims to help students with disabilities become productive citizens. Special education has increasingly adopted the concept of including individuals with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, believing that doing so counters the inherent othering of exclusion. But special education tacitly continues a mission of assimilating students with disabilities, revealing an ableist bias and perpetuating othering attitudes toward those on its roles. This session summarizes research and wrestles with the question: How can school social workers facilitate belonging for students with disabilities within a structure that is inherently othering?

Presenter: Christopher Gackenheimer, MSW

D4 12 Criteria for Selecting Strengths-Based Screeners in Schools.

The use of a screener in the school setting is an essential component in identifying which students may be considered "at-risk" for targeted interventions. While understanding a student's strengths and weaknesses is an important part of the process, many screeners place high priority on identifying student deficits and may not be inclusive of the population being screened. Using an appropriate screener provides information that informs the need for further assessment and interventions and contributes to improving student outcomes. In this workshop, attendees will examine three strengths-based screeners using twelve criteria to rate the rating scales as well as discuss ways to advocate for the use of appropriate screeners in schools.

Presenters: Tiffany Nelson, DSW, LCSW, PEL:SSW & Jim Raines, PhD, LCSW

D5 Proactive and Practical: Building Actionable MTSS Anchored in Student Voice

Strong relationships and a sense of belonging form the backbone of whole-student learning. This well-researched principle guides Bigelow Middle School's (Newton, MA) student support work. Our session will explore a simple, scalable practice of student reflection and how reflection data informs a proactive approach to identifying and supporting student needs. We'll unpack how incorporating student voice into MTSS, PBIS, RTI, and COST processes



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can mitigate bias, increase student connectedness to school, and more proactively identify students who are struggling. Bigelow Middle School will share their journey, and a combination of activities and discussion will support school social work leaders in understanding practical ways to apply this approach to their context.

Presenters: LaKisha Hoffman, MSW & Courtney Rau Rogers, MEd, EdD Student

D6 Using Restorative Practices to Empower Student Collaboration in Traditional School Discipline

The Alternative Step to Expulsion Program (ASTEP) serves students recommended for expulsion for the first time. The ASTEP Social Work Team works with students and schools to empower accountability resiliency, and repair the relationship between school, student, and family. Young people who successfully complete the program are more confident, have stronger relationships with faculty, and display responsible decision-making skills. School social workers leading this program will share their experiences on how they use Restorative Practices to build community and make the schools a better and safer place for everyone.

Presenters: Elaine Swain, DSW, LMSW
Savannah Santis, LMSW & Sharana Sloss, LMSW

D7 Effective Human Trafficking Prevention Education, Not a Number, In DeKalb County Public Schools

Love146 will provide information on how to effectively reach youth through a case review of human trafficking (HT) prevention education (preved) in DeKalb County Public Schools (90% minority enrollment; 51% economically disadvantaged). This session will detail how to successfully integrate research-based HT preved into existing structures, generate youth engagement, and sustain within a district. The presentation will highlight prevention strategies to protect against HT by identifying resources to reduce victimization and reviewing how trauma increases vulnerabilities. Through guided discussion group/individual activities, this interactive forum will provide participants the opportunity to identify characteristics of effective preved and how to implement them in their own districts.

Presenters: Sarah Mouser, MS & Erin Glaccum, BS

Friday, March 15th, 2024 (Sessions E)

E1 Affirm to Action: Disrupting the Disparate Impact of Disproportionate Education Policies

This session will focus on the role of School Social Worker(s) in disrupting the disproportionate outcomes of education policies being implemented in the academic setting heavily focused within urban school districts. School Social Workers practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels; School Social Workers are the connectors to home, school, and communities, all to support education rights and promote advocacy. This session will briefly address the dismantling of Affirmative Action and the impact it has on School Social Workers



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to ensure ethical guidelines and educational policies are practiced within the academic setting.

Presenter: Ashley Johnson, EdD, LSSW

E2 Suicide Prevention and Postvention: The Time is Now to Evaluate How Well our Systems Are (or Are Not) Protecting Student Lives

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth in the United States. It is imperative that school systems understand the need to support and evaluate suicide. In this presentation, the focus will include basic information on assessing youth for suicide and the power dynamics at play when assessing and determining supports for diverse youth. Parental engagement will be explored from the lens of understanding systems of power and how to foster relationships with parents and students during a mental health crisis. Also addressed will be an exploration of policy, staff bias, and systemic racism impacting student interventions with regard to suicide. Finally, an overview of Postvention will be included to prepare learners with tools to implement following the death of a student by suicide.

Presenter: Sheri Koller, LCSW, LCSW-C, PPSC, NCSSW

E3 System vs. Symptom? A Beginning Conversation on Restoring Wellbeing with Students and Staff

This interactive and experiential presentation seeks to move social work forward by focusing on what matters most, which is humans and healing. Social Workers must adopt critical consciousness to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems, especially those that result in societal inequalities. Using a critical consciousness that is culturally competent and aligned with interpersonal neurobiology principles has the opportunity to create optimal learning environments for students and staff. In this presentation we will explore and experience meditation, three key brain regions conducive to addressing trauma and restoring wellbeing, and analyze a culturally relevant case study—all to promote positive social change and restore healing and well-being.

Presenter: Kenneth Bourne, MSW, LSW

E4 Research Informed School-Based Mental Health Practice

This session introduces participants to a research design using a conventional Delphi approach that centers the expertise of Black scholars and researchers in the production of knowledge that informs the practice of school-based mental health practitioners. The use of the Delphi method amplifies the belief that Black researchers and Black scholars exist. The Delphi method further validates Black people as expert participants who are significant contributors to research-informed practice and practice-informed research focused on providing adequate and appropriate school-based mental health support to Black students.

Presenter: Shenita Williams, PhD, LCSW

E5 Playful Techniques to Build Bridges with Black Families and Communities

Black children, families, and communities are dealing with high rates of racial and intergenerational trauma that may impact the school social worker's ability to build strong therapeutic relationships. This workshop will explore the complexities of trauma in the Black community and how it may be showing up in the interactions and parenting practices of



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Black caregivers. Time will be spent discussing the use of play therapy, such as filial therapy and Child-Parent Relationship Therapy, to help engage Black caregivers in the mental health treatment of their children. Participants will also explore the use of play-based interventions to implement in their schools and communities to build stronger relationships with their students and the caregivers in their villages.

Presenter: April Duncan, DSW, LCSW, RPT-S

E6 Eating Disorders in the School Setting: What School Professionals Should Know

Eating Disorder diagnoses are on the rise in pre-teen and adolescent populations across the US. Contributing factors are the Covid-19 pandemic, social media, and the co-occurrence of other mental health conditions. The significant increase in diagnoses, the mortality rate associated with these disorders, and the severe physical and emotional health risks all contribute to the importance of early intervention and treatment. Students spend a significant amount of time with school professionals, and therefore, it's imperative that these staff members know and understand warning signs and how to respond if concerns arise. School social workers should feel empowered and confident in their ability to support their students in their journey of healing and recovery from eating disorders.

Presenters: Chantelle McCormick, MSW, LCSW, DSW Student & Melissa Webster, MSW, LCSW

E7 Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Schools and Communities

This program will focus on what all educators can do to create the most inclusive and affirming spaces in their schools and communities. We will address common behaviors, best practices, and important terminology with the focus of having participants leave feeling prepared to be the best upstander possible and embracing allyship. The program packet will have a variety of resources in it that are relevant to various topics and concerns that arise when working and advocating for this population. Participants who complete the program will leave with an action plan on how to make affirming and impactful changes back at their schools and communities. While no student voice will be present at this event, this program has been developed in union with LGBTQ+ youth.

Presenter: Peter Hutcheon, MSW, LCSW

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