

# AEA/AEGSW NEWSLETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS - SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

## 2019-20 Area of Emphasis in Aging Scholars



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Master of Social Work  UNIVERSITY OF St. Thomas

## YEAR IN REVIEW

By Stephanie Larson, AEA Scholar Co-Leader

The 2019-2020 academic year brought about great change for the School of Social Work, the scholars, and the older adults with whom we work alongside. This was a busy year! At the University of St. Thomas, the Morrison Family College of Health, under the direction of Dr. MayKao Hang was formed to educate future healthcare providers and leaders from a variety of disciplines, including social work ([click here](#) for the full story). Additionally, the University of St. Thomas received CSWE accreditation as an independent program ([click here](#) to read about this update). AEA welcomed four new scholars (Brittney Lieb, Alexis Lauj-Loving, Annie Myers, and Molly Stimpert) and had two returning scholar co-leaders (Stephanie Larson and Jessica Miller who graduated this year). The scholars hosted a Careers in Aging CEU event in March, which was an enormous success! Several conferences were attended by scholars and three scholars became dementia champions. Finally, due to the nation's response to COVID-19, many of our in-person activities were moved online. In response to COVID-19, prior AEA alumni (Carol Ashwood, Donna Enfield, Lindsay Walker, Beth Turbak, Judy Johnson, Rachelle Henkel, Kassara Kneeland, Sunghwan Cho, and Emma Schedler) met up with us online for a Zoom video meeting in April to support and exchange resources with one another. Overall, although this year was challenging at times, we had the privilege to observe the hope, dedication, and creativity of those who work with our older adult population.



## SAVE THE DATE

Walk to  
End Alzheimer's

Saturday  
September 26, 2020

The Walk to End Alzheimer's is currently moving forward as planned. Please click [this link](#) for the most up to date information.

Watch for emails about additional news and events. Please contact **Tanya Rand**, Coordinator of Aging Services to learn more about AEA (how to become involved, or stay involved). Tanya can be reached at **651-962-5817** or via email [tjrand@stthomas.edu](mailto:tjrand@stthomas.edu).

*A special thank you to Laura Rydberg, AEA 19-20 Research Assistant for taking on the task of being the primary editor for this year's AEA/AEGSW newsletter!*

# AEA CAREERS IN AGING EVENT

By Molly Stimpert, AEA Scholar

This year, scholars brought awareness and education to nearly 100 members of our community by hosting a Careers in Aging continuing education event. The event took place on March 5th in McNeely Hall at the University of St. Thomas.

To start out our event, we welcomed AEA alumni- Beth Turbak, LICSW, Emily Rodgers, LICSW, and Angela Mueller, LGSW. These presenters spoke about the spectrum of grief experienced by older adults in hospice. The presenters focused on helping participants increase their understanding of the spectrum of grief experienced by older adults, knowing the difference between situational grief and depression, and learning the difference between readiness to die versus suicidality in the hospice population.

Our second group of presenters included Amanda Thooft, LICSW (adjunct faculty at the SSW in the AEA Program) as well as Rebekah Elling, LICSW, and Rachel Potter, LGSW (both AEA alumni). Their presentation focused on older adults and working with challenging behaviors. These presenters provided education around skills to maintain rapport and sustain an effective working relationship with older adults, discussed the importance of understanding the life experience and unique needs of older adults, and spoke about how to design and implement effective service plans to help older adults and their families manage cognitive and physical functioning.

In closing, we invited panel members from various sectors of the community to speak about their work with older adults: Dede Armstrong, LADC (The Retreat), Carol Ashwood, LICSW (Open Circle Adult Day and adjunct faculty at the SSW in the AEA Program), Jayne Conley Braun, LICSW (MHealth Fair-



**Rebekah Elling, MSW, LICSW, Rachel Potter, MSW, LGSW, and Amanda Thooft, MSW, LICSW, speak at the Careers in Aging Event.**

view), Meghan Constantini, LICSW (Presbyterian Homes and Services), Rebekah Elling, LICSW (Associated Clinic of Psychology), Lori Halbur, LICSW (Catholic Charities), Katie Marx, LICSW (CommonBond), and Rachel Potter, LGSW (Eucumen Hospice). This amazing panel provided a better view of what it is like to work at different agencies serving older adults. The goal of the panel was to educate the audience about the unique strengths, challenges and needs of the older adult population. Overall, the event was well received. Many remarked that they appreciated the knowledge, interaction with other professionals, and, as one attendee noted, "the affirmation of approaches and information and varying perspectives." Others described the panel discussion as "very poignant."

## MINNESOTA BECOMES AN AGE-FRIENDLY STATE



By Stephanie Larson, AEA Scholar Co-Leader

On December 11, 2019, Tanya Rand, Clinical Faculty and Coordinator of Aging Services, and Stephanie Larson, AEA Scholar, had the wonderful opportunity to attend the 2019 MN Leadership Council on Aging. During this summit, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz signed Executive Order 19-38 which established the "Governor's Council on an Age-Friendly Minnesota". The Council has two mandates:

The Council will submit a preliminary action plan and legislative recommendations to the Governor by August 15, 2020 and the

Beyond learning about the unique needs of older adults, the panel was able to provide education about different career opportunities in social work that focus on aging.

THANK YOU to all of our presenters and panel members who helped us create an extraordinary educational event!

**To attend one of our future presentations watch our events page [here](#). You**



**AEA scholars Annie Myers and Jessica Miller introduce the Panel Discussion at the CEU event on Careers in Aging.**



**Amanda Thooft, LICSW, adjunct faculty at UST shared insight from her direct practice experience at Associated Clinic of Psychology in their Geriatric Division.**



**AEA Alumni Beth Turbak, LICSW, Angela Mueller, LGSW, and Emily Rodgers, LICSW, pose for a picture!**

Council will submit a report to the Governor with its final action plan and recommendations for implementation of any enacted legislation related to age friendly policies by December 31, 2021. This decree allows Minnesota to focus on the Eight Domains of Healthy Aging, as defined by the World Health Organization. These eight domains are meant to guide leaders and engage stakeholders and communities in creating an age-friendly Minnesota. The domains are: Outdoor Spaces and Public Places, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Work and Civic Engagement, Communication and Information, and Community and Health Services. When implemented properly, these eight domains allow older adult Minnesotans to interact more fully in their communities; it also recognizes that the number of older adult Minnesotans currently exceeds the number of Minnesotans under age 18. Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan stated that “when we promote healthy aging and engage with older adults as essential to the social, economic, and civic fabric of our state, we pursue better . . . social services for all of Minnesota.” The summit was a terrific gathering of constituents invested in creating healthy, accessible, and supportive communities where aging people can experience their own best quality of life.



# Conference Attendance

## Minnesota Gerontological Society

**By: Alexis Lauj-Loving, AEA Scholar**

The Minnesota Gerontological Society (MGS) Conference was held virtually this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social distancing orders. This was the 44th annual conference for the organization titled “AGE-FRIENDLY MINNESOTA. AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES. AGE-FRIENDLY-YOU.” Although it was held virtually, 1557 people participated in the conference. Well-known and celebrated researchers, policy advocates, and practitioners attended, including Dr. Rajean Moone from the Governor’s Council on Aging as well as Dan Pollock, JD, the Assistant Commissioner from the Minnesota Department of Health. The highlight from the conference was a discussion on ways to make Minnesota a more age-friendly state for older adults in our communities. As it was pointed out, doing so requires more than simply

adding park benches for sitting. Instead, communities should also incorporate other components such as ramps and handrails to make spaces more age-friendly and should work to improve internet access for all older adults.

The mission of MGS is to bring like-minded individuals together to bridge the gap between research and aging with an emphasis on developing and supporting tomorrow’s leaders. The MGS committee’s plan for this year’s conference was to hold a round table talk on ways that researchers and practitioners can share information on best practices. This round table discussion also hoped to collaborate on research projects. Due to the pandemic, this round table discussion has been postponed until the next conference, April 29-30, 2021.

Also at the conference, Annie Myers, a fellow AEA scholar, was awarded the Gerald Bloedow scholarship. Annie’s passion for working with older adults includes honoring their choices, preserving their wisdom and dignity, and ensuring that older adults are not forgotten. Congratulations, Annie!



**Annie Myers, an AEA Scholar, was awarded the Gerald Bloedow Scholarship at this year’s MGS Conference.**

## SUICIDE ASSESSMENT TRAINING

**By: Stephanie Larson, AEA Scholar Co-Leader**

I greatly benefitted from the suicide prevention training and awareness efforts at my place of internship, which is partnered with the county’s Zero Suicide Task Force. The training was very practical in the context of the inpatient/outpatient behavioral setting I was interning in. It was also very poignant for me, as at my place of employment we experienced a tragic loss of a hospice patient from a death by suicide: a first for me in 16 years of hospice work. Studies show that there is an increase in suicide attempts and in deaths by suicide in older adults: knowing this, I tailored my outreach efforts towards sharing resources with all I met. As we support our clients through our work and advocacy efforts, I hope these tools are helpful for you too!

More information can be found on the websites for Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([sprc.org](http://sprc.org)), the CALMS training website ([training.sprc.org](http://training.sprc.org)) and on the Columbia Lighthouse Project website ([csrss.columbia.edu](http://csrss.columbia.edu)).

## POSITIVE APPROACH TRAINING TO NEURODEGENERATIVE CHANGE

**By: Jessica Miller, AEA Scholar Co-Leader**

I was honored to attend the Teepa Snow conference this past fall on behalf of the AEA scholars at the Minnesota History Center. This training was led by a remarkable aging advocate named Teepa Snow. Ms. Snow is revolutionizing the way that we communicate with people living with neurodegenerative change (a name she advocates we use instead of “dementia”). Ms. Snow trains caregivers, advocates, and practitioners how to appropriately and effectively communicate with people living with dementia, in a way that is both interactive and exciting. Several times during the training we were asked to stand up and practice our skills with the person next to us. She also utilized tools which helped us step into the body of a person with dementia visually and interactively. Her approach helped me to grow in my empathy and patience. Ms. Snow also strengthened my non-verbal and body-language communication skills. Her unique training capitalizes on the ability of gestures to communicate what words may not, so as to aid an individual living with dementia more fully. It was a wonderful and thought-provoking training and I will remember her approaches when working with this population. More information on Ms. Snow and her work can be found on her website, at [www.teepasnow.com](http://www.teepasnow.com).

## WALK TO END ALZHEIMER’S

**By: Annie Myers, AEA Scholar**

This past fall, I attended my first Walk to End Alzheimer’s with several of my AEA classmates. This event was a spectacular display of solidarity and a wonderful way to honor our loved ones and clients affected by Alzheimer’s Disease. My favorite part was when the crowd was asked to raise their flowers that represented different stories of affected loved ones followed by a moment of silence for everyone who has passed from the disease. This moment made me realize how impactful a group of people with a shared goal can be in advocating for the older adult population.

The power of us coming together allows us to work together to raise awareness and fight for a cure to this disease was demonstrated in the sheer number of people who came. According to KARE-11, this was a record-breaking year for the event, as more than 10,000 people came to demonstrate solidarity and hope for a cure. It was just one of 600 walks across the country. Furthermore, a over \$1.44 million was raised at this location alone. The money raised will be donated to organizations that help fund research and treatment of those living with Alzheimer’s and Alzheimer’s-related dementias.



**Annie Myers, Stephanie Larson, and Jessica Miller at the Walk to End Alzheimer’s in September.**



**Stephanie Larson, Jessica Miller, Tanya Rand, Cindy Lorah, and Annie Myers, from the St. Thomas School of Social Work, pose for a picture at the walk.**

# GRADUATING SCHOLARS



**Stephanie Larson, AEA Scholar Co-Leader**

I was so grateful to have my clinical internship with Amery Behavioral Health (ABH) in rural Wisconsin. ABH showed me the diverse range of mental health services available to individuals experiencing mental health challenges. This experience deepened my clinical experience and confidence and impels me to continue working with and advocating for rural health care. Following graduation, I hope to work in hospice, palliative care, or healthcare while I work towards my independent clinical licensure. I am thankful for all the experience I have gained as an AEA scholar and for the amazing people I have been able to work with.



**Jessica Miller, AEA Scholar Co-Leader**

I have always had a passion for working with older adults, and so becoming an AEA scholar was an enriching experience for me. In my social work career, I have worked as a nursing home social worker, an assisted living director, and a county case manager. Becoming an AEA scholar was another way to serve this population and deepen my knowledge and expertise. This past year I completed my clinical internship with the Associated Clinic of Psychology where I provided in-home therapy and mental health skills work for older adults living with mental health needs. After graduation, I will continue working at this agency in their geriatric division providing therapy services while I work towards my independent clinical licensure.

## LEADING AGE CONFERENCE

**By: Brittney Lieb, AEA Scholar**

I had the opportunity to attend the Minnesota Leading Age Conference at the Xcel Energy Center on Thursday, February 6, 2020 through my place of employment. Although I was fortunate enough to attend several presentations, I was most struck by the one on older adults living with a hoarding disorder.

These older adults often struggle with day-to-day activities in, cluttered and unsafe living environments and face increasing isolation. They also experience increased risks such as fire hazards, increased risk of falls, eviction, impaired access for first responders, poor sanitation, increased risk for pests, and family conflicts. The best aid that can be offered these individuals are in regard to helping older adults with hoarding disorder. The speaker brought up many resources such as family support, personal care attendants, peer support groups, and cognitive behavioral therapy. One piece of information that was very interesting to me was the level of cleaning support that could be utilized; for instance, the crime scene cleanup resources such as Scene Clean or Biotech could help with cleaning out the house where the older adult lives and that some medical insurance companies may pay for it as a one-time cleaning fee.

# COVID-19 TIME CAPSULE

*This was an unprecedented year for all, but especially for students and those working in the healthcare field. Sadly, many of those most affected by COVID-19 are the elderly. We asked our AEA scholars to reflect on what it means to work with older adults, especially during these trying times, and how it has impacted their work and their development as practitioners.*

**Molly Stimpert:** I currently work for Oak Hills Living Center in New Ulm, Minnesota. The last two months have proven difficult for my residents due to the COVID-19 restrictions. They have been isolated from loved ones and many do not understand why. As a staff, we are doing the best we can to support each of them through this unprecedented time. In order to help our residents cope, we have been offering more one-on-one activities. For instance, I have been playing games with my residents and doing sitting dance exercises with them. I anticipate that these exercises will keep their cognitive capacities sharp and decrease the loss of muscle mass and joint problems that could result from too-long confinement in one space. I have also been focusing on talking with my residents, since they miss those little interactions that they had with family members and other residents. I try to stay upbeat for them and remind them to take things day by day. We are in this fight together.

**Stephanie Larson:** I served my clinical internship at a rural, hospital-based, outpatient behavioral health clinic. This allowed me to witness first-hand the rapid response needed to COVID-19, both in physical and mental health care. I have been impressed by the leadership within the department in which I intern since, despite the continuous change due to the pandemic, patient care and risk reduction were *always* on the forefront of conversation. The behavioral health department shifted, within a two-week time frame, from face-to-face visits to telehealth visits, and then to a video platform. This was done while also creating internal policies and consent forms that were created or renewed to be consistent with regulatory requirements. When clients did not have the means to participate in videoconferencing, the department advocated for ways in which their needs could be met safely. I am proud to say that I work with a group of social workers who honor the Social Work Code of Ethics, and who, while under a great deal of stress, continue to keep the client's best interest at the front of their work! A positive outcome of this time is that I anticipate that we will be able to better serve older adults who live in remote areas and experience transportation barriers and/or struggle with isolation.

**Brittney Lieb:** As a therapeutic recreation coordinator at a long-term care facility in South Minneapolis, COVID-19 has impacted how I implement and facilitate the day to day programs for my residents. Skype and facetime visits have been very popular at our facility, for they allow family members to stay connected to their loved one. Due to restrictions, we have adapted to facilitating "hallway programs" and 1-1 room visits to help maintain the senior's quality of life and try to keep things as normal as we can. In order to lift the spirits of our residents and staff, our therapeutic recreation team have promoted spirit weeks where employees dress up (pajama day, superhero day, etc.), passed out leisure packets daily with positive quotes and devotions, and coordinated outside events in front of the building for residents to watch from their windows such as a stilt walker and having around 20 employees do the chicken dance. One major thing I have learned from all of this is that a simple act of kindness can go a long way when working with an older adult.

# Thank you for a growth promoting year!

