

Area of Emphasis in Aging (AEA) aging and gero- social work

Academic Year 2025-2026



Welcome! From Tanya Rand, EdD MSW, LICSW

Hello, my name is Tanya Rand. I am the Director of our Area of Emphasis in Aging (AEA) Program. I'd like to welcome you to the 2025-2026 AEA newsletter. This academic year has been full of so many wonderful leadership, engagement, skill-building, and scholarship activities. Thank you for visiting our page, reading our end-of-year reflection, and learning more about our [AEA](#) program. A special shout-out to our current council members and scholars below for an amazing year! Your engagement this year was inspiring. Also, a very warm welcome to our incoming 26-27 Scholars: Minna Stillwell- Jardine, Jennifer Richardson, Amanda Naughton, Lillian Mason, Dylan Kassela, and Tamar Celis!



Carol Ashwood
AEA Alumni & Faculty
Advisory Council



Diane Bauer
Professor Emeritus
Advisory Council



Beth Brown
AEA Alumni
Advisory Council



Stephanie Larson
AEA Alumni
Advisory Council



Amanda Thoof
AEA Faculty
Advisory Council



Lisa Thomas
AEA Faculty
Advisory Council



Krystal Bickel
AEA Scholar



Grace Dejno
AEA Scholar



Victoria Keller
AEA Scholar



Sarah Frenz
AEA Scholar



Jenna Kress
AEA Scholar



Laurie McDowell
AEA Scholar

A YEAR IN REVIEW



Photo of AEA scholars past and present at the 2026 AEA Workshop event

25-26 AEA Summary

by Krystal Bickel, AEA Scholar

The past year has been a remarkable chapter of growth, enrichment, and professional discovery for our AEA scholars. Driven by a shared passion for gerontological practice, our scholars immersed themselves in an array of advanced learning experiences, expanding both their clinical knowledge and their professional networks.

We are profoundly grateful to our community of supporters. Your generous gifts directly fund these transformative opportunities and empower the next generation of leaders in aging services.

New This Year: The Diane Bauer AEA Lending Library

Thanks to Diane's generosity AEA now has a new resource featuring a dedicated collection of books featuring so many important topics relevant to working with older adults!

Academic & Professional Highlights

Our scholars represented AEA at many conferences and collaborative events this year. Highlights from the year included participation in the Minnesota Gerontological Society's Conference, the Geriatric Case Competition with the University of Minnesota's GWEP, the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging Summit, the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education Conference, the Minnesota Hospice and Palliative Care Conference, and of course the end-of-the-year AEA Workshop and Celebration!



Holiday Dinner



AEA Graduating Scholars
Grace, Victoria, and Krystal

AEA Workshop & Celebration

Whole Person Health at End of Life: A View from the Front Lines

Event Summary by Laurie McDowell, AEA Scholar

This year, we hosted The Area of Emphasis in Aging Workshop and Celebration on May 15, 2026 with current and alumni AEA scholars, Dr. Tanya Rand (our AEA advisor), and many community members. Thank you for the support from the wonderful staff in the Morrison Family College of Health for helping this event come to fruition!

This interactive workshop provided participants with an opportunity to hear from and engage with providers across interdisciplinary healthcare teams as they shared important whole-person health practice perspectives for older adults at end-of-life.



Ethics at End of Life

The ethics presentation, led by Dr. Melissa Lundquist and Dr. Peter Distelzwei, both faculty at the University of St. Thomas, addressed ethical issues at the end of life. They discussed dignity and dependence through this stage of life, while also discussing how it looks throughout the lifespan.

Palliative, Hospice, and Bereavement Care Provider Panels

Panelists were asked questions that explored how whole-person care is applied across palliative care, hospice, and bereavement services to support the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and cultural needs of patients and families. The discussion focused on person-centered care, dignity at the end of life, equitable access to services, cultural responsiveness, ethical considerations, and the value of interdisciplinary and holistic supports. Participants also reflected on lessons learned, ongoing challenges, and the future potential of whole-person approaches to improve care, well-being, and support through serious illness, end-of-life experiences, and grief.



Graduate Spotlight: Victoria Keller

Victoria H. Keller received her Master of Social Work degree in May, 2026. Her journey began in the 2017 - 2018 academic year, when her coursework took her to both the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Upon returning to complete her degree in autumn of 2024, Victoria decided to become an Area of Emphasis on Aging scholar. Through her coursework, she has honed her critical thinking for the world of interdisciplinary care along with helping clients and families navigate the myriad of health challenges through mid-later adulthood. Throughout her practica, Victoria drew encouragement, feedback, and wisdom from her supervisors, peers and her advisor, Dr. Tanya Rand, to better serve her clients.

Victoria's interest in working with individuals in mid-later adulthood, especially those with health concerns, is borne out of personal experience. Recently she read an essay by Richard Rosenblatt where he describes his wife of 62 years. "She has a beauty born of episodes of sorrow intermingled with joy." (New York Time Opinion. April 19, 2026.) It is this inner beauty, the sorrow mixed with joy, the full life experience, that Victoria finds so very rewarding when working with mid-later adulthood individuals and their families.

BeechWood, Inc. was Victoria's foundation practicum, where she provided services as an Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) practitioner. It was here that Victoria witnessed the importance of wraparound care, often facilitated by the ARMHS practitioner with the client. Her time at BeechWood, Inc. has heightened her awareness for the need of increased state funding for late-in-life adults along with mental health support. The HealthPartners Cancer Center at Regions Hospital, Victoria's clinical practicum, gave her opportunities to work with the palliative care team in the outpatient clinic and within the hospital to assist patients with psychosocial support, developing a support group, and utilizing trauma-informed care along with culturally responsive models.

Working with individuals in mid-later adulthood is deeply fulfilling. Social workers know that histories and perspectives are key to understanding what makes a person so unique. What is unknown is how these pull together to impact an individual. For students interested in this program, Victoria strongly encourages them to speak with Tanya, social workers at assisted living or senior housing, and any older adults within the student's orbit. The need is great. The fulfillment is greater.



Graduate Spotlight: Grace Dejno



I had the honor to be part of the AEA program during my last year at St. Thomas. During this time as an AEA Scholar, I had the opportunity to grow in my knowledge and experience in working directly with older adults and the gerontological field as a whole. I first gained experience in working with older adults when I worked as a Nursing Assistant years ago, where I worked in a skilled nursing facility on the Alzheimer's and Dementia floor. It was here where I found my initial love and passion for working with older adults. From supporting them in their ability to complete their daily activities to learning about their lives and all the amazing things they did, I realized I loved to provide the hands-on care and support to the individuals I worked with. As I navigated my career path throughout the years working across the lifespan I am home now and in my niche with the support of the AEA program, which I'm so incredibly grateful for. I have found my calling and now will be joining the Hospice Social Work field!



During the AEA Program I was able to focus on older adults where I was able to learn and hone the skills I would need for working in the field. I was able to build in my knowledge in researching issues related to older adults. I also had the honor to go to many different types of conferences, workshops and webinars which allowed me to learn from those who have made great strides in the field. It also showed me how the things I'm passionate about are all interconnected to working with older adults. During the Minnesota Hospice and Palliative Care Conference I even saw how my love of Improv can be utilized in working in hospice!

Being part of AEA supported me in finding a community of people who are passionate like I am in supporting older adults and their families. I have found people in the community who are fellow social workers who have gone through the AEA program years ago as I looked for jobs, or at conferences and found connection in these shared experiences. It has fostered learning opportunities for me to grow and become the best social worker I can be, and I am looking forward to be able to continue to come back as an AEA alumni and continue to work with the future AEA scholars in whatever capacity I can.



Graduate Spotlight: Krystal Bickel

During my two years as an AEA Scholar at the University of St. Thomas, I developed a strong foundation in gerontological social work through coursework, field placements, leadership activities, and research focused on the needs, strengths, and dignity of older adults. My experience deepened my understanding of aging as a life stage shaped by health, family systems, culture, community, policy, inequities and more. AEA strengthened my commitment to person-centered, strengths-based practice with older adults and their families!

My AEA-related coursework helped me connect theory to practice across grief, trauma, clinical work, research, and policy. In Grief Counseling and Therapy, I developed a toolkit that brought together assessment tools, intervention models, cultural responsiveness, and practitioner self-care, reinforcing the importance of honoring each client's cultural context in grief work. In Clinical Practice with Older Adults and related electives, I explored issues such as older women in rural communities, chronic illness as complex trauma, and the role of meaning-centered and acceptance-based interventions. My social work practice research strengthened my ability to evaluate evidence, especially through my literature review on multigenerational living and my qualitative project on grief-focused interventions for dementia caregivers.



AEA also gave me opportunities to grow as a professional outside the classroom and practicum. I participated in conferences, webinars, workshops, committee work, newsletters, and Age-Friendly University initiatives, which helped me build a network of professionals committed to improving aging services and age equity. These experiences strengthened my leadership skills and helped me see how macro-level advocacy and community engagement is an important part of clinical work.

Overall, the AEA program helped me become a more confident and reflective social worker with specialized preparation in aging, grief, trauma-informed care, and systems navigation. I am leaving the program with a clearer sense of purpose and a strong commitment to continue hospice social work, pass the LICSW exam, stay involved in aging-focused organizations, and eventually move into a leadership role serving older adults.



Internship Spotlight

by Krystal Bickel, AEA Scholar

My clinical internship at Brighton Hospice was an amazing experience. It helped me to develop my skills in grief support, psychosocial assessment, interdisciplinary teamwork, and hospice social work. I supported adults over age 65 and their families through home visits, phone contacts, grief support, and co-facilitated groups, while learning how to document ethically and collaborate with nurses, chaplains, CNAs, physicians, and other team members.



by Grace Dejno, AEA Scholar

My clinical internship was spent with North Memorial Hospice. During my internship I was able to build a case load of hospice patients from the start of care through end of life. I was part of the admission process which included enrollment paperwork and psychosocial assessments, routine visits with the clients on my caseload, bereavement calls and participating in interdisciplinary team meetings. I was able to not only learn from the hospice team, but shadow people from the cancer center and the palliative team with North Memorial. This provided me an opportunity to see the different areas that medical social workers get to work in!



by Victoria Keller, AEA Scholar

I completed my clinical practicum at the HealthPartners Cancer Center at Regions Hospital, where I worked closely with interdisciplinary healthcare teams in both outpatient and inpatient settings. As part of the palliative care team, I provided psychosocial support to patients and families coping with cancer, helping them navigate emotional, social, and practical challenges throughout treatment and care. I also contributed to the development of a patient support group designed to foster connection, education, and peer support. Throughout my practicum, I applied trauma-informed care principles and culturally responsive practices to ensure care was respectful of each patient's unique experiences, values, and background, further strengthening my skills in whole-person, patient-centered care.



SIM Learning Experience

by Grace Dejno, AEA Scholar

Photo of AEA scholars with nursing students at first ever MFCOH Interdisciplinary SIM Lab



This year us AEA scholars, alongside the nursing students, had the honor of being a part of the Morrison Family College of Health's first ever Interdisciplinary SIM Lab Event. This provided us an opportunity to gain hands on experience working with an interdisciplinary team in a safe environment where we could learn with fellow nursing students and faculty how each discipline works together on a patient's care team. We also had simulation participants who took part in the event, bringing to life the family members of our patient and also a doctor to add to the interdisciplinary team learning!

During the simulation experience scholars are provided a case scenario that was broken down into three different scenes that were built off one another to create one case storyline. During each scene those who were involved at that time would have to use the skills they've learned and work together with the client, their family members, and the other medical disciplines involved. Those who are not involved in the scene are in a different room watching in on what is happening in the simulation. The simulation equipment created an environment that replicated a hospital room. After the scene was complete, we would all come back to together, and discuss what just happened. This would involve us reflecting on what went well, what didn't go well, what could be done differently, and learning about the experiences and approaches each discipline would take and why. Overall, it was an amazing learning experience!

Geriatric Case Competition

by Grace Dejno, AEA Scholar

The Minnesota NorthStar Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (MNGWEP), a grant-funded program that seeks to increase the quality of life for older adults in Minnesota, hosts an annual Interprofessional Geriatric Case Competition. Students from several schools enter the competition are put into interdisciplinary teams to collaborate on a plan of care for an older adult in a created case study. I was on a team with several students from U of M who represented the fields of occupational therapy, dentistry, nursing, physical therapy, and dietetics. As the social work representative, I was able to bring a bio-psycho-social lens to the case and help the team think about the older adult as a person-in-environment, including their family, community, living situation, finances, and the impact of their health. The competition was high-level, with each team working together to create a whole-person, client-centered care plan for the older adult in the case study using the 4Ms framework (What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility). It was a lot of fun and I learned so much about teamwork!

Alumni Spotlight

AEA Alumni Spotlight: Stephanie Larson, MSW, LICSW

by Laurie McDowell, AEA Scholar

Stephanie Grew up in a family where it was just natural to take care of your grandparents. Her maternal grandparents were like parents to her. She shared that her grandma was physically disabled with Rheumatoid arthritis that started in her 30s. Stephanie saw her mother, aunts, and uncles care for her grandma, as well as her grandfather who was the primary caregiver. She shared that she grew up where it was just a normal thing, and cultural to take care of older adults. As she got older, Stephanie shared that she realized it wasn't always something that families are able to do, but that out of that grew her compassion for adults as she saw a growing need grow.

In her undergrad she obtained a business and a dance degree. And that with her business degree, it took her into working into home health and hospice on the financial side. She states she saw what the hospice and care team were doing and knew she wanted to switch careers into social work and to work with older adults. Overall, it was the values and beliefs she grew up with, along with her work experience that really opened her eyes up for the large need to work with older adults and the joy that comes with it!



Stephanie talked about how many systemic challenges there are that are actually tied into ageism. She thinks it has been improving, but states that there isn't a structure or system built for the entire ageing population in our country. She says she also sees stigmas within some of her own clients with mental health and working through that. She also does trauma work, EMDR, and brain spotting. She has helped her clients become unconditioned from the talk therapy patterns in order to work through the interventions that she specializes in. She further went on to talk about some challenges with telehealth and where for a while it wasn't sure if it would be extended indefinitely. She shared that she works with and lives in a rural area, and that telehealth has made services accessible to people it wasn't accessible to before. She shared her frustrations with the idea of reversing it, and that telehealth has opened so many opportunities for older adults in rural areas. She also shared how there is a Medicare rule that is being proposed regarding Medicare eligible persons to have at least one visit in person face to face with the provider and how that too would cause barriers to mental health for those who live in rural areas. She stated she hopes there can be some accommodations made for those individuals.

One thing that excited Stephanie about working with older adults is that no matter what our age is, there is an opportunity for positive growth and change. When it came to her education, Stephanie shared that AEA gave her more confidence. It helped to reassure her and validate the things she already knew from her own lived experiences. AEA helped blend and affirm her desire to working with older adults and was a great opportunity for networking (an important tool in our careers, especially for consulting).

When asked what advice she would give future gerontological social workers, Stephanie shared that it's important to take advantage of getting as much practical, hands-on learning, and experiences as you can. That theory, book work, and research are all very important. However, to know that clients don't really care how many books we've read, they care about what we can do. She shared that it can be difficult to balance all the things, but that the hands on, experiential learning is the most valuable, especially given that social work is a human service job. She also advised to dig in where you have space. That simulations learning labs are a really good experience, especially if you've never been in that environment before. Stephanie Larson is an MSW, LCSW, LICSW, who graduated from St. Thomas as an AEA Scholar.

Lifetime Engagement Award

Presented to Ted Bowman

Every year, the AEA program honors a recipient with the Area of Emphasis in Aging's "Lifetime Engagement Award." This award is given annually to a person who has contributed to the field of gero-practice either through their teaching, research, or through their community engagement.

This year, the award goes to Ted Bowman. Ted Bowman is a grief and family educator. He specializes in changes and transitions. For over 40 years, he has been a frequent trainer, consultant, and speaker with many groups throughout Minnesota, the United States, and other countries. Ted was an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota (Family Education) 1981-2012; at the University of St. Thomas (Social Work) 2006 until 2019; and 1989 to 1996 at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

Ted is the author of over 125 articles and chapters appearing in books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. His booklets, *Loss of Dreams: A Special Kind of Grief*, and *Finding Hope When Dreams Have Shattered* are widely used in grief care. He and Elizabeth Johnson co-edited *The Wind Blows, the Ice Breaks*, a volume of poems by MN poets addressing themes of loss and renewal. His newest book, *Ambiguous Parables: Poem and Prose of Loss and Renewal*, was published in November 2021.



In recognition of your many contributions over the years, teaching us about the journey through loss, grief, hope, and resilience. It has had a significant impact on the lives of older adults and their families.

Conferences & Workshops

Minnesota Hospice and Palliative Care Conference

by Laurie McDowell, AEA Scholar

Thanks to the generosity of donors, we were all able to attend the Minnesota Network of Hospice & Palliative Care Conference. The conference was filled with practitioners, breakout sessions, providers, and phenomenal speakers. It provided opportunities to see the professional side of hospice and palliative care, meet service providers and vendors, and network with other professionals.



Dr. Ira Byock, this year's keynote speaker kicked off the conference with a presentation on how to Lead with courage and love. He spoke about intentionally fostering joy and wellbeing throughout the end of life as we care for those at one of the most vulnerable stages in life.

One of the breakout sessions I attended was "Behind the Science: Understanding the Inner Worlds of Grief, Depression, and Suicidality by Sara Lassig, LICSW, PhD. She discussed disenfranchised grief, ambiguous loss, and the difference between grief and depression.

Another session that was attended was called "You are Not Powerless: Proven Paths Away from Burnout Toward Stamina" by Rosie Gaston, LICSW, APHSW-C and Zac Willette MDIV BCC. This session discussed burnout and ways to grow in stamina. They talked about completing the stress cycle and not letting what we can't do get in the way of what we can do. They gave tips and tools on how to regulate the nervous system and having intentional pauses to manage stress when the work we do becomes too much. And the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to have self compassion.

The second day opened with Tane Danger from Danger Boat Productions and how Improve-Based Tools can be used in our practice for Empathy and Emotional Resilience. He shared how caregiving requires a different way of communicating and that it is connection and working together that allows for us to provide effective care. He stated "Both improve and medicine can teach us that it is often essential to create space for others to share their stories."

Another breakout session that stood out to me was by Rosie Gaston, LICSW, APHSW-C as well called "Courageous Conversations: The Art & Science of Saying Hard Things Well. She shared that the reason we struggle with having difficult conversations is because we care deeply. Preparing for these conversations helps not only us be better clinicians, but also gives the clients better care.

Overall, this convention was amazing to be able to attend. As the first year going, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow in my knowledge and practice from others within the hospice and palliative care field. Thank you to our wonderful donors for giving me this opportunity.



Minnesota Gerontological Society Conference

by Krystal Bickel, AEA Scholar

The MGS conference this year was a wonderful celebration of the organization's 50th anniversary. One of the highlights was the guest speaker, Marilyn Gugliucci, former president of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) and former chair for the Gerontological Society of America (GSA). I loved hearing about her Nursing Home Immersion program that "admits" medical students into nursing homes to live the life of a resident for 2-weeks and The 48 Hour Hospice Home Immersion where pairs of medical students live in an 18-bed in-patient acute care hospice home to conduct patient care, family support, and post-mortem care. Both programs help students to better understand the point of view of those they serve and help to develop compassion and empathy.



Healthy Brain & Aging Policy Event Strengthening Minnesota Rural & Tribal Community Infrastructure

by Sarah Frenz, AEA Scholar

The Healthy Brain & Aging Policy Event: Strengthening Minnesota Rural & Tribal Community Infrastructure, was hosted at the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul on August 13, 2025. A first-of-its kind in the nation, the event was sponsored by the Memory Keepers Medical Discovery Team at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine Duluth and the Alzheimer's Association – Minnesota/North Dakota Chapter in collaboration with the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program at the University of Minnesota and the Amherst-Wilder Foundation. It was a great day where those working with rural and tribal communities were able to present findings on both disparities and efforts communities have had regarding aging and various chronic conditions. Topics covered at the conference were the Age Friendly Health Systems 4M's Framework (Mobility, Mentation, Medication, and What Matters), personal stories caring for a loved one, warning signs of Alzheimer's Disease, pharmaceutical treatments, and more. This event offered an enriching perspective on the importance of affordability of care and the current disparities in health outcomes for demographics and rural areas. Some of these disparities that were noteworthy are the significantly higher rates of Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias in women, African Americans, and American Indian communities. Statistics were shared for the state of Minnesota from the Department of Health. The Health Administration's data underscores the critical need for targeted infrastructure and support. Community building efforts were highlighted as key steps moving forward in supporting those affected by dementia, especially in rural areas and vulnerable populations. If you are interested in aging policy and what communities are doing about it, please look forward to this event in the future.



Minnesota Social Services Association 2026 Conference



Pet session put on by Animal Humane Society by Sarah Frenz, AEA Scholar

This year I attended an educational session at Minnesota Social Services Association (MSSA) put on by the Animal Humane Society. This session talked about resources for pets and resources to keep pets with loved ones who are low income or who may not be able to provide a caring home for a short period of time. Animal Humane Society is offering multiple services such as pop-up clinics, reduced cost or free vaccines, surgeries, as well as food banks for owners to get pet food for their pets. This is beneficial for older adults who are often living on a fixed income alone or with minimal income and who count on their pets as companions day to day. The Animal Humane society is also offering a Temporary Pet Housing program which is part of their Community Outreach program in the Twin Cities Metro Area. This is a program meant to keep people and their pets together. Pets can be enrolled in the program for up to 60 days if the owner(s) are dealing with medical issues, housing crises, or are getting out of an abusive situation. Their pet will be cared for by a foster family within sixty miles of the Animal Humane Society's locations in Coon Rapids, Golden Valley or Woodbury. The foster program is completely volunteer based. Animal Humane society also provided training on questions for social workers to have for clients to fill out in advance in the event of an emergency with directions of who to contact, where to have their pet(s) go, and how to care for their pet(s). This can be especially beneficial to older adults who often face a need to be hospitalized or spend time in rehab due to their health. This program among others associated with Animal Humane Society allows older adults to keep their pets which helps support their long term health and wellbeing. To learn more go to the Animal Humane website to see resources available in your area.

Finding Power in the Voice: Reclaiming Softness and Strength beyond Trauma with Somatic Tools by Ani Djirdjirian MSW by Grace Dejno, AEA Scholar

The Healthy Brain & Aging Policy Event: Strengthening Minnesota Rural & Tribal Community Infrastructure, was hosted at the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul on August 13, 2025. A first-of-its kind in the nation, the event was sponsored by the Memory Keepers Medical Discovery Team at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine Duluth and the Alzheimer's Association – Minnesota/North Dakota Chapter in collaboration with the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program at the University of Minnesota and the Amherst-Wilder Foundation. It was a great day where those working with rural and tribal communities were able to present findings on both disparities and efforts communities have had regarding aging and various chronic conditions. Topics covered at the conference were the Age Friendly Health Systems 4M's Framework (Mobility, Mentation, Medication, and What Matters), personal stories caring for a loved one, warning signs of Alzheimer's Disease, pharmaceutical treatments, and more. This event offered an enriching perspective on the importance of affordability of care and the current disparities in health outcomes for demographics and rural areas. Some of these disparities that were noteworthy are the significantly higher rates of Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias in women, African Americans, and American Indian communities. Statistics were shared for the state of Minnesota from the Department of Health. The Health Administration's data underscores the critical need for targeted infrastructure and support. Community building efforts were highlighted as key steps moving forward in supporting those affected by dementia, especially in rural areas and vulnerable populations. If you are interested in aging policy and what communities are doing about it, please look forward to this event in the future.

Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support

by Grace Dejno, AEA Scholar

AEA scholars had the opportunity to go to one or both of the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 Minnesota Coalition of Death Education and Support MCDES conferences. I was lucky to be able to attend both and learn from those amazing speakers.



The fall conference was “Navigating the Continuing Bond in Grief Therapy: Therapeutic Indications & Approaches for Addressing the Relationship between the Griever & the Deceased” with Dr. Evgenia “Jane” Milman. During this talk, we learned about the history of grief, starting off on Freud’s definition of grief to what we know of it today. We took a look at how grief and loss are something that will continuously impact us as time goes by. However, there are ways that we can work through our grief and support the bond that is still there with the ones we lost. And as people who might work with those who are being impacted by grief, it was good to gain insight on ways to support them. Being able to provide people with opportunities to engage in various symbolic interactions, one way that was talked about was having an individual note the similarities they share with the one they lost. Being able to find your loved one within you is one way to support the shared bond. Another way that was talked about was writing a letter to you deceased. Both writing what she called a “hello again” letter, updating them on all that’s happened to then also writing a response letter, speaking as the one who has passed. The last part of the conference highlighted how to work with individuals who are experiencing Post Lost PTSD, navigating ways to support them while providing exposure based therapeutic treatments.

The Spring conference was “Embracing Wholeness: How Do We Accept Loss and Find Joy in a Fractured World?” with Henry Emmons. Henry Emmons is the author of the Chemistry of Joy and podcast runner of Joy Lab. Where he talks about how we can all find joy in times of darkness. He talked about how we can still find and feel joy even when we are going through loss. Throughout the conference the highlighted different activities to support finding the joy. One of the activities he went over were the three kindnesses and challenged us to all find them in our life. The first one was someone being kind to another, meaning when looking out in your world, what kindness are you seeing others do for those around them. This could be like noticing someone hold the door open for someone else or picking up something someone dropped and handing it back to them. The second one was noting when someone is kind to you, what kind acts have those around you done towards you. This could be making you dinner, helping you clean or simply complimenting you. The last one was noting when you were kind to someone else. Being able to look out for these three kindnesses is just one way to support finding the joy in your life.

Area Emphasis in Aging Program Support

The Area of Emphasis in Aging Program is grateful for donor funding which supports student training and program development. These funds help support building a workforce prepared to walk alongside older adults and their families!

To learn more about how you can support the AEA program, please
Kristin Locketz- Assistant Director of Development
Morrison Family College of Health
Kristin.locketz@stthomas.edu



CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT



The St. Thomas Whole-Person Healthy Aging (WPHA) Microcredential is designed to provide professionals (e.g., social workers, public health professionals, nurses, chaplains, OT/PTs, and other related interdisciplinary team members) with a basic understanding of important elements when working with older adults from a whole person health lens. WPHA is also designed for students in the Morrison Family College of Health who plan to pursue a career working with older adults. The WPHA series is comprised of 5 courses (Aging from a Whole Person Health Lens, Health Equity and Ethics in Older Adulthood, Interprofessional Geriatric Team Based Care, Whole Person Health Interventions in Older Adulthood, and End of Life Care).

Each course is delivered fully online and includes short lectures, articles to read, videos to watch, and interactive activities such as case study application scenarios, reflection opportunities, and knowledge checks. Please email HealthyAging@stthomas.edu for further information regarding the microcredential.

Age-Friendly University Designation

Shout out to our broader St. Thomas Community for supporting St. Thomas in becoming the first Minnesota Private College to become an Age-Friendly University. St. Thomas is now part of the Age-Friendly University Global Network which is a consortium of higher education institutions committed to promoting positive and healthy aging and enhancing the lives of older members of the global community.



Area of Emphasis in Aging Scholars Program

To develop specialized knowledge and skills to work with older adults and their families click above to learn more about the AEA Program. As a scholar you'll get to build relationships with classmates, faculty, alumni, and community members who are passionate about the field of aging!