Student Spotlight: Irene Bonsu Ackerson

Irene Bonsu Ackerson is a native of Ghana in West Africa. She will graduate with her MSW in May, 2020.

Background, interests and career:

I started MSW program in August 2017. I am a Micro student about to graduate in May 2020.

I grew up within a strict Christian and African culture. I had my bachelor's degree in French and Political Science from the University of Ghana, Legon.

I am fluent in French and I love to read, spend time with family and God. I want to pursue Clinical Social Work as a career.

What drew you to social work as a major?

I took Social Work as a major due to my love for people. I love to help and restore hope to people. I would love to reach out to the homeless children back home in Ghana and provide a haven for them as I put smiles on their faces.

What are your plans for after graduation?

I plan to work as a social worker in a children's hospital. Children are my target population to work with. I love kids.

How do you manage balancing your time with schoolwork, field, and job and/or home life?

It's not been easy balancing school, field, job, plus a husband and three kids. It has been tough. But I always draw strength from my faith.

I love God and I am a serious Christian who draws strength from the Bible. Words of hope and encouragement from the Bible keeps me going. I don't joke with my faith as a Christian.

Secondly, I believe in diligence and determination, not giving up. Self motivation and support from my husband is how I am able to balance all the multiple task coupled with grad school.

What social issues are you most passionate about and have you done any advocacy for that issue?

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Any advice for incoming students?

I would advise incoming students to be focused and determined in life and towards their studies. They should have a vision and work towards that vision with a sense of focus, hard work, self-motivation and determination.

Graduate school is not that easy. One needs to be determined and not give up no matter the odds. Push towards the goal. Take it easy, one step at a time. Don’t give in to self pity or discouragement when grades and things do not go the way you want.

Five words friends would use to describe you?

Godfearing, selfless, caring, hardworking and a very determined person.

Favorite quote or phrase?

My favorite quote is from the Bible. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” Philippians 4:13. This is why I don’t give up in life. I keep moving despite the storms of life.

Would you like to be the next Spotlight Student? To be featured in a future newsletter, contact Barbara Ferrell at bf2@uakron.edu

As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt here in the U.S. and abroad, social workers have a unique opportunity to advocate for the health and safety of their clients. Social workers are mandated to ensure their clients have access to accurate and timely information. The Centers for Disease Control has provided this free fact sheet that can be posted or emailed (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/share-facts-h.pdf). The National Association of Social Work also has an on-demand webinar “What Clinicians Need to Know to Prepare for COVID-19 in the United States” available at https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus.

Staying Safe and Informed

Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity. Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 can cause people to avoid or reject others even though they are not at risk for spreading the virus.

For most people, the immediate risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to be low. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

Someone who has completed quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people. For up-to-date information, visit CDC’s coronavirus disease 2019 web page.

There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

You can help stop COVID-19 by knowing the signs and symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
Seek medical advice if you develop symptoms AND
- Have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.
Although eager and well-trained, MSW students nearing graduation often feel like they still have so much to learn about the field of social work. Just as common is the belief that you’re the only one feeling a little unprepared!

So it may be helpful to know that even your faculty discovered things they wish they had known. Three of them shared their insights about what they learned as new professionals.

FACULTY INSIGHTS

Gail Weisend, MSW, LISW-S

“My experience has helped me to fill the gaps in my knowledge, and I learned that I had to have an open and teachable spirit”

I felt that I was well prepared in many ways for working in the field when I graduated with my masters in social work from the University of Akron in 2008. I felt well grounded in theory, and I was able to pass the licensing exam.

I wish that I had known more actual interventions to use with clients. When I first faced my counseling clients, I felt woefully inadequate. I feel confused about the proper intervention for their diagnosis, and I wished that I had more information about approaches to use with reluctant clients.

I found some books written by Leana Lowenstein, a social worker who specializes in creative interventions. I bought the books and begin to use the interventions she suggested, and it was very helpful.

My experience has helped me to fill the gaps in my knowledge, and I learned that I had to have an open and teachable spirit in order to learn in the areas where I was weakest.

As a new social worker in the field of developmental disabilities, I learned a great deal from the people I supported.

My training helped me to identify resources and specific strategies to assist individuals with disabilities and their families.

This is the part of the job that I anticipated.

However, what was unexpected was how much this work enriched my life.

These experiences inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. and teach students majoring in social work.

I encourage current students to notice how their relationships, with people they support, enhance their lives.

Mark McManus, Ph.D, MSSW

I was naive about some of the difficulties of working with an agency. I expected that the staff members would automatically support me, and that we would be more of a team. I was unprepared for the competition between my colleagues.

I begin to realize that I had to enhance the amount of cooperation between all of us, that it would not naturally occur unless I contributed some energy toward building the relationships. On the other side of the coin, I also realize that some of my best teachers were my colleagues.

My experience has helped me to fill the gaps in my knowledge, and I learned that I had to have an open and teachable spirit in order to learn in the areas where I was weakest.
My first job after graduating with my MSW, I wish I had known the importance of connecting my successes and failures with client and organizational systems with a specific skill set, specifically attach words to my behaviors.

I use the words engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation quite often now, many years later, in order to provide a structural framework for an action that is based on skills.

It may have helped me to have more clarity on my development, early in my career, by learning where to target the help needed, identify who or what could help me minimize my areas of needs, and more clearly understand why my strengths were my strengths.

I believe this process may have assisted me in becoming more confident earlier in my career and realizing the importance of intellectual curiosity as a necessary, ongoing, developmental block toward excellence.

Naomi White, Doctoral Candidate, MSW

MSWSA EVENT RECAP

Fall 2019 Project GRAD Tabling

Project GRAD Akron provides a system of programs, scholarships and supports for underrepresented students. The MSWSA and SSWL hosted a table at Project Grad’s 15th Annual Breakfast and Education Fun Day with Santa. Area children and their families had a fun breakfast with Santa Claus and enjoyed games, coloring and music. A special THANK YOU to everyone who helped make this event a success!

Fall Toiletries Drive

Thank you to everyone who donated to the Fall 2019 toiletries drive. The MSWSA was able to collect two large boxes of new toiletries to benefit the Battered Women’s Shelter.