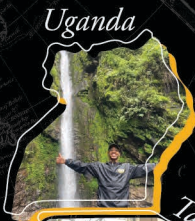




**VCU** School of Social Work



England



Uganda



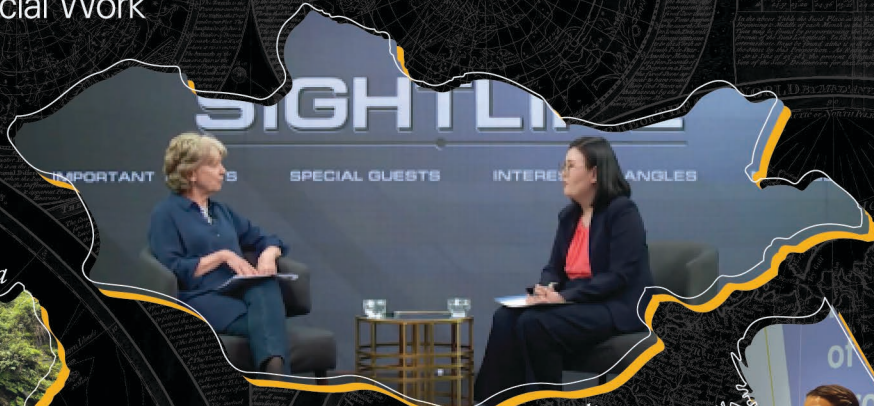
Tanzania



Ghana



South Africa



SIGHTLINE

IMPORTANT SPECIAL GUESTS INTERESTING ANGLES

Mongolia



South Korea

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

# UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES, UNCOMMON IMPACT

Working and studying abroad, we bridge borders and broaden our horizons

## FROM THE DEAN

# CELEBRATING AN UNCOMMON EXPERIENCE

The School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University recognized its 105th anniversary in 2022-2023. We celebrated our faculty, staff and students who won acclaim for excellence, innovation and passion – in the classroom, in research and in engagement, both at home and abroad.

We were excited to learn in January that **Anthony Estreet, Ph.D.**, was named chief executive officer of the National Association of Social Workers. The 2007 VCU M.S.W. graduate joined us in May as our Commencement speaker. “I can tell you without a doubt that in 2007, this was not even on my radar,” says Dr. Estreet, who credits VCU with equipping him with the skills to succeed. Please see Page 11 for a QR code to view a short video about his focus with NASW.

We are extremely proud of the global experiences that our faculty, students and a recent B.S.W. graduate participated in this year (pages 4-7), spanning three continents, seven countries and more than 45,000 miles. Bridging borders and building connections, these opportunities also showcase the unlimited possibilities, reach and impact the School of Social Work has. Just as importantly, these participants expressed the value of the cultural exchange and the idea of “cultural humility,” de-centering American and Western perspectives.

Closer to home, faculty-led projects are making an impact: a study to prevent adverse childhood experiences in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health and funded by the Centers for Disease Control; and a training program to better equip child welfare workers to help families impacted by substance use funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Combined with excellent enrollment and a steady increase in research proposals, the school continues to live into its mission of guiding the next generation of social workers while offering impactful research and scholarship.

Together, we’re building knowledge by listening, learning and leading through community-engaged research and scholarship. We are inspired by the diverse backgrounds of our students and the communities we serve. We collaborate across disciplines to innovate solutions to key challenges: disparities in health and behavioral health outcomes, housing access and social injustice. We embrace our Richmond roots and our important connections, as we increase opportunities and access to social work education through our online program formats.

Enjoy our Annual Report – and please see a more in-depth version at [annualreport.socialwork.vcu.edu/](https://annualreport.socialwork.vcu.edu/).



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary S. Cuddeback". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Gary S. Cuddeback, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.P.H.  
Interim Dean and Professor  
VCU School of Social Work



## STUDENT EXCELLENCE

# UNMATCHED POTENTIAL



### Overcoming refugee resettlement trauma

Living as Somali refugees in Minnesota, Ph.D. student **Muna Saleh** and her family experienced their community's resettlement trauma, even though "there's not a lot of talk about these collective traumas and their relationship with physical health." Drawing on personal experience and clinical social work skills, she is seeking to improve the health and well-being of refugees in the U.S. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation named Saleh one of 40 Health Policy Research Scholars; and she was one of 10 recipients of a doctoral student policy fellowship, jointly sponsored by the Council on Social Work Education, Society for Social Work and Research, and Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work.



### Flurry of awards

In a rush one week in spring, the awards ceremonies and notifications of new honors "overwhelmed" B.S.W. student **Austin Ezzard**. "I have yet to process it," he said at the time. Understandable. He earned a place as Virginia's sole representative in the 2023 College Student Congress, a national summer public policy program; was named a student appointee to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia; won student of the year and chapter president awards from two university organizations; and earned the school's David N. Saunders Legislative Internship Fund award.



### Rising to the challenge

Ph.D. candidate **Aaron Kemmerer** was emotional when he learned he had won a highly competitive national award on a subject that is deeply personal. "When I got the news, I cried," says Kemmerer, who was selected for one of 13 national Grand Challenges for Social Work doctoral dissertation/capstone project awards. His proposal, "Transgender and Gender Expansive Southerners' Experiences with Housing Instability," was awarded in the End Homelessness category. "I am seeking to shift the narrative, to weave a collective story about what is going on with the Southern TGE housing justice movement," he says.



### Fighting transgender discrimination

Ph.D. student **Paola Roldán** spent three intensive weeks in the 2023 ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods at the University of Michigan, thanks to a diversity scholarship. "Having this opportunity will be an unparalleled pedagogical experience that will prepare me to teach advanced statistical courses and research methods in the future," says Roldán, whose research focuses on mitigating transgender discrimination and stigmas. She was attracted to VCU and the School of Social Work because of the emphasis on diversity and multidisciplinary research. "That's crucial for me," she says.



### Finding her true direction

It took two undergraduate degrees from VCU and classes toward a nursing degree before **Brittany Watson** executed a course correction toward an M.S.W. degree. After graduating in December 2022, she planned to expand her birth doula business to offer more services to expecting parents and newborns. "It's been a lot of bouncing around," she says. "But I'm here now, and I realized this was where I belonged the whole time."

## SOCIAL WORK ABROAD

# UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES, UNCOMMON IMPACT

### Unafraid to explore, School of Social Work goes abroad in a big way

In a year of unprecedented travel in 2023, five faculty, eight students and a recent graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work renewed old connections, made new ones, fulfilled Covid-delayed plans and – most importantly – immersed themselves in local culture and knowledge.

Collectively, they traveled more than 45,000 miles to three continents and seven countries. Exploring and growing as educators, researchers and future social work practitioners, they embodied the unlimited opportunities and uncommon impact through the School of Social Work.

“I feel like the students who went on the trip can be described as unafraid,” says Associate Professor **Maurice Gattis, Ph.D.**, who led a weeklong study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, where he was stationed for eight months as a Fulbright Fellow. “They flew more than 14 hours to spend their spring break studying LGBTQIA+ issues at a time when there is backlash against the community. They engaged fully and very thoughtfully in a place that none of them had ever visited before.”

Here are the stories of our world travelers.



National Mongolian Broadcasting interviews Dr. Burnette.



### **Denise Burnette, Ph.D.**

*Samuel S. Wurtzel Endowed Chair  
in Social Work*

### **Mongolia: Fulbright Specialist**

Dr. Burnette worked this summer with social work faculty at Mongolia National University of Medical Sciences (MNUMS), located in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. She worked to develop and refine core competencies for its undergraduate program in health social work; to create a series of capacity-building workshops for academic and community stakeholders on health-related issues; and to mentor junior faculty and doctoral students.

The project renewed ties with colleagues in Mongolia dating to 2009 and represented her ninth visit there. “I was delighted when I discovered that they were seeking a Fulbright Specialist in health social work,” she says. “The experience reminded me, again, of how sustained relationships with people who share our concerns, goals and values help to shape individual character and collective responsibilities for our shared humanity.”

Dr. Burnette is exploring opportunities for a more formal connection between VCU and the MNUMS School of Public Health. “Exposure to non-Western settings and cultures affords us access to untapped storehouses of knowledge from which we can learn how to improve our research, education and practice at home,” she says.



**Nicole Corley,  
Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor*

**Ghana: Study abroad**

Dr. Corley led 10 VCU students, five from social

work, on a study of Ghana through the lens of art, culture and social justice. A visit to Ghana in 2021 sparked her interest, and the trip continued a school tradition of past study-abroad projects to the country.

“I thought it would be important to have students experience Ghana to help them connect their role as a social worker within a greater global context,” she says. “This trip allowed us to see and experience the impact of colonialism and how it restrains and obstructs traditional knowledge systems, values and practices. The journey of being culturally responsive and respectful requires that you engage in cultures different than your own.”

Highlights included a talk on social and environmental justice with advocates Nadia and Priscilla Owusu and a social/environmental enterprise called Mckingtorch Africa; a visit to the Kakum National Park and its dramatic 1,000-foot-long canopy suspension bridge; and participating in a traditional ceremony with the Queen Mothers (women leaders who play a powerful community and political role) in Adanwomase.

“Honestly, every day was memorable,” Dr. Corley says.



**Maurice Gattis,  
Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor*

**South Africa: Fulbright  
Scholar**

Covid-19 canceled a

trip to South Africa in 2021, but Dr. Gattis earned a Fulbright, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. He partnered with the University of Western Cape Department of Social Work and the local Pride Shelter Trust. “South Africa is the first country in the world to have protections for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in its constitution,” he says. “I thought it would be an interesting place to conduct research on how practice and lived experience work in a nation with protective policies.”

Dr. Gattis also led a study abroad trip for six VCU students, three from social work, along with Western Cape students. They explored LGBTQIA+ issues in post-colonial South Africa. Social work Ph.D. candidate **Aaron Kemmerer** worked on the project from Richmond and presented preliminary findings at the Social Work and Sexuality Conference in Scotland in July. Two manuscripts have been accepted for publication in peer-reviewed South African journals

“Having an expanded worldview allows for a fusion of ideas that lead to innovation,” Dr. Gattis says. “I feel like every minute was memorable and stimulating.”



**Hyojin Im, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor*

**England: Harris  
Manchester Summer  
Research Institute,  
University of Oxford**

Dr. Im’s ties to Oxford’s Refugee Studies Centre date back to 2011, when she met its founder at a conference in Uganda. This summer she reconnected with the Centre, meeting new scholars.

“I was particularly inspired by active scholarship and multinational research projects by the refugee-led research hub, with whom I’m exploring potential collaborations,” Dr. Im says. “We aim to examine the nexus between racial marginalization and the social integration of refugees/migrants, particularly through the lens of social capital.”

Dr. Im has previously engaged with refugee communities and refugee-serving agencies at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, as well as in urban refugee settlements in Nairobi and Kuala Lumpur. “As an international scholar and a ‘legal alien’ myself, I’ve always approached my work with a cross-cultural and multicultural lens,” she says. “For me, the allure of going abroad isn’t just about gaining new experiences; it’s about my responsibility to understand the intricate stories of the communities facing forced migration.”



**Oscar Kemp**  
*2023 B.S.W. graduate*

**Tanzania: Critical Language Scholarship**  
**Uganda: Fulbright Student English Teaching Assistant**

Kemp’s interest in going abroad was sparked by a connection with a college roommate and his family who are Ghanaian. “I became interested in cultures that fixated on social harmony and respect,” Kemp says. “I realized language would prove useful in connecting with cultures where conversation is important.”

He won a prestigious national award, the Critical Language Scholarship, to learn Swahili in Tanzania from June-August 2023. “Tanzania treasures their land because it provides food, jobs and ways of life to the people,” he says. “My host father was a farmer who taught me about farming methods used to facilitate the land’s harvest and benefit the environment.”

From September through June 2024, Kemp’s Fulbright appointment – like the CLS, awarded by the U.S. Department of State – will immerse him in another culture while improving his proficiency in Swahili. “I envision myself one day combining my social work and global citizenship experiences to pursue a law degree and public office,” Kemp says of his future.



**Holley McGinnis, Ph.D.**

*Assistant Professor*

**South Korea: International Korean Adoptee Associations Korea Gathering**

Twenty-four years after attending the first national gathering of first-generation Korean adoptees, Dr. McGinnis traveled to her birth country to participate in what has become a large international event. She presented research findings and led a workshop at the Sixth International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium in Seoul.

The International Korean Adoptee Associations, which represents a global community of an estimated 230,000 overseas adopted Koreans, sponsored the event. Dr. McGinnis’ research project, “Mapping the Life Course of Adoption,” is a VCU-funded, community-embedded study focused on adult outcomes and adoptee-led groups.

“Adoptees are not always thought of as a historically oppressed group, but when we think that the dominant norm of family is based on blood and genetics, you can understand how adopted people have to navigate these assumptions and are often left explicitly and implicitly as outsiders,” she says. “This is why I think connections and networks with peers who share a common lived experience or social group identity are so important: Being in community with others like you makes you feel less like an outsider.”



**A**

**A:** Associate Professor Maurice Gattis, Ph.D., during his Fulbright appointment in Cape Town, South Africa.

**B:** Oscar Kemp, 2023 B.S.W. graduate, celebrates his birthday in Tanzania during his Critical Language Scholarship appointment.

**C:** Associate Professor Nicole Corley, Ph.D., second from left, led a study abroad trip to Ghana with 10 VCU students.

**D:** Associate Professor Hyojin Im, Ph.D., (seventh from right in blue jacket), during her appointment at the University of Oxford.

**E:** Assistant Professor Hollee McGinnis, Ph.D., makes a presentation at the International Korean Adoptee Associations Korea Gathering in Seoul.



## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

# UNCOVERING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

## RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS 2022-23



### Publications

- Published, in press or accepted: **87**
- Revisions and resubmissions: **12**
- Manuscripts submitted for peer review: **42**



### Presentations

- At national conferences: **72**
- Invited presentations/local engagements: **21**



### Projects

- Active: **42**
- Proposals submitted: **34**
- Internal/external funding (FY23): **\$3 million**



### Preventing adverse childhood experiences

Professor **Sunny Shin, Ph.D.**, leads a project training pediatricians

to provide parents with education and resources to reduce the risk of traumatic events, abuse or neglect. The Virginia Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control are funding the project, with the goal of mitigating health risks in childhood and later in life.

“The occurrence of adverse childhood experiences is not a social worker’s problem. It’s not a medical doctor’s problem. It’s a social problem that has a very close and strong influence on public health,” Shin says. “The hope and premise of this project is to let us see if we can prevent adverse childhood experiences in Virginia using this evidence-based model.”



## CONGRATULATIONS!

To former Professor **Sarah K. Price, Ph.D.**, who retired in the spring and was named the school’s second distinguished career professor... to Associate Professor **Youngmi Kim, Ph.D.**, the school’s Social Justice Award recipient. ... and to Senior Development Specialist **Anna Givens, M.P.A.**, the school’s Outstanding Staff Award recipient.



### ‘Housing is essential’

Associate professors **M. Alex Wagaman, Ph.D.**, and **Maurice Gattis, Ph.D.**, were awarded



a continuation grant for an ongoing youth-shared housing program for LGBTQ+ youth, pregnant/parenting youth and those at the intersection who are

experiencing homelessness. The project, Marsha & Marian’s Neighbors, received \$805,875 from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

The program partners with youth leaders with lived experience and expertise as well as local organizations. In its first year of implementation, the program served 56 people (young adults and their children) and housed 20 households.

“It is truly remarkable to see in action what we know to be true – housing is essential to young people’s well-being,” Wagaman says.



# FACULTY EXCELLENCE

## UNSURPASSED EXPERTISE



### Making hard questions easier

A mobile app developed and released by Assistant Professor **Adrienne Baldwin-White, Ph.D.**,

is making it easier for health care providers to ask trauma-informed questions about their patients' safety and well-being. T.I.M.E. (Trauma Informed Medicine Education) includes sections on the impact of trauma, best practices for providing trauma-informed care and forensic exams, how to set up an exam space that is trauma-informed and self-care tips for providers.

"Medical students understand the importance of trauma-informed care in medicine," Baldwin-White says. "Having a trauma-informed approach means you can actually do your job better as a doctor."



### Turning 'Rage' into verse

The fatal shootings in Monterey Park, California, during the Lunar New Year in January 2022 brought back painful memories for Assistant Professor **Hollee McGinnis, Ph.D.** To help process her emotions, she shared a poem with her M.S.W. social policy class, written in the aftermath of the 2021 killings in Atlanta that targeted victims of Asian descent.

"Rage" was presented at the Utah Women's Narratives performance and subsequently published in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. "As is typical, when it is your in-group that is being hurt, you hurt that much more," McGinnis told her students. Read the poem at [go.vcu.edu/rage](https://go.vcu.edu/rage).



### Complementary fashion

A business partnership formed with a couple in Ghana helped Associate Professor **Maurice Gattis, Ph.D.**,

create a fashion line, Fort Mosé 1738, that carries a line of contemporary West African fashions. Fort Mosé 1738 refers to the first free Black community in the U.S., founded in 1738 for formerly enslaved people from West Africa. The company's designs, created by his Ghanaian partners, are sold in-store and online via custom order and have been featured in fashion shows in Richmond and Washington, D.C.

"I think it complements working with LGBTQ youth and homelessness," Gattis says. "It complements my discipline of macro social work and community development because this was a family (in Ghana) looking to expand their financial abilities."



### Sharing her distinguished experience

Three-time VCU alum **Shenita Williams, Ph.D.**,

brought 25 years of experience as a school social worker when she joined the School of Social Work in 2022 as director of field education. She also brought honors with the VCU Distinguished Dissertation Award and the School of Education Distinguished Dissertation Award as she completed her doctoral degree.

Her dissertation identified the necessary components for school-based mental health systems to successfully address mental health needs of Black students. "I want the next generation of social workers to know they have the opportunity to effect change at a micro level, macro level and everything in between by collaborating with professionals in other fields of study," Williams says.

# ALUMNI AND DONOR EXCELLENCE

## UNSTOPPABLE DRIVE



### Most ‘outstanding’ social work academic

Alum **Viola Vaughan-Eden (Ph.D.’03)** keeps a busy schedule but made

time to travel to Washington, D.C., this spring and pick up a major award – Outstanding Individual in Academia for 2023 – from the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy.

Vaughan-Eden directs the social work doctoral program at Norfolk State University and also serves as president and CEO of UP for Champions, a nonprofit in partnership with The UP Institute, a think tank for upstream child abuse solutions. She is president emerita of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children and the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence. “I continue to work toward ending racism and implicit bias in the field of child maltreatment,” she says.

### Stepping up

The School of Social Work thanks our donors who lifted us up for VCU Giving Day this spring. Our final totals: 60 donors and \$6,905 raised, with successful giving challenges for our Pay It Forward Fund and Field Fund.



### Congratulations!

To two alumni honored during the Office of Field Education’s 2023 Community Partnership Awards Ceremony: **Patrick Link (M.S.W.’19)** of Assisting Families of Inmates, Outstanding Field Instructor Award; and Amy Webb (M.S.W.’18) of Thrive Virginia, Amy Rosenblum Field Instructor Award.



### A heart for VCU

Alum **Marjorie Stuckle (M.S.W.’73)**, Ph.D., is practically a lifelong resident of NYC – except for a brief and dear

detour to RVA in the early 1970s. The experience of earning her master’s in Richmond at VCU stuck with her in a big way.

A former clinician, educator and administrator focused on mental health, she is giving back through the Dr. Marjorie A. Stuckle Endowed Scholarship to support out-of-state M.S.W. students.

“It’s been 50 years since graduation, and this is a time of reflection for me,” she says. “I’m looking back and considering what were the most important, impactful moments in my life. And I must say VCU because it provided a gateway to an enriching career. That is why I endowed a scholarship.”

### A legacy of love

**Chuck Cartledge** was smitten the moment he met his future wife, **Mary Hugh Dotson Cartledge (M.S.W.’78)**. They were married in less than a year in 1976.

With her passing in 2022, Chuck Cartledge has memorialized her legacy as a social worker and his love for her and their son, **Lane**. The Mary Hugh Dotson and Charles Lane Cartledge IV Endowed Scholarship will aid underserved and first-generation M.S.W. students.

“The School of Social Work was number one,” Chuck says of their priority to give back. “This is for her and Lane. The scholarship is a way to keep her alive.”



# UNLIMITED REACH

## Alum Anthony Estreet, (M.S.W.'07), Ph.D.

- CEO, National Association of Social Workers
- Former board member, NASW
- Former chair of M.S.W. program, Morgan State University
- Founder and CEO, Next Step Treatment Center, Baltimore

“When I’m out and about in the social work profession, I can always find somebody else who’s a VCU alumni, and we can actually connect on the different experiences that we had at VCU. We can always connect back to classrooms, to professors, to different experiences, to Richmond. **We are global, we’re everywhere.**”



 [vcussw.info/DrEstreet](https://vcussw.info/DrEstreet)

# UNSTOPPABLE

Scenes from May 2023 Commencement

