

**Episode 182 - Megan Connelly, Elisabeth Preisinger, and Lidia Snyder:  
Community Revitalization: A Macro Field Education Experience**

[00:00:08] Welcome to IN SOCIAL WORK the podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.insocialwork.org](http://www.insocialwork.org). We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice research. We educate we connect. We care. We are in social work. Hello I'm Charles Syms a cohost at in social work. The field experience is a key component of Social Work Education. It provides social work students the opportunity to apply what they are learning in class to actual practice situations. Generally a field placement occurs in organizations one normally associates with a micro or mezo oriented work professional social workers. So often do today however it must be pointed out that social workers also work in organizations where the principle level of practice is primarily of a macro orientation or in organizations that have not traditionally had social workers as part of their staff. In either case these placements offer social work students rich and unique opportunities for learning. The field placement at the Buffalo New Yorks Partnership for Public good is an example of a nontraditional interprofessional experience. The partnership's mission is to build a more just sustainable and culturally vibrant community through research policy development and citizen engagement. In this podcast Dr. Laura Lewis director of field education at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work talks with a program director at the partnership.

[00:02:09] A second year MSW student placed at the organization and the field educator who supervised the placement their discussion centers on the experiences of the social work student as well as that of the organization Megan Connelly serves a dual role as director of policy advancement for the partnership and as Associate Director for the Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Highroad fellowship a graduate of the University at Buffalo Law School she is admitted to the bar to practice law in the state of New York. She has previously worked at Neighborhood Legal Services on the Buffalo Homeless Task Force at the Youth Justice Project in South Bend Indiana. And for the University at Buffalo office of civic engagement and the University's Regional Institute Ms. Connelly believes that her own service experiences as an undergraduate helped to shape her values interest and ultimately her career path. As a result she likes to provide similar transformative opportunities for students to engage with and learn from the community. Elisabeth Preisinger graduated from Saint of College in Northfield Minnesota with a bachelor's of social work. A recent graduate from the University of Buffalo School of Social Work Ms Preisinger now works as a program associate for open Buffaloe a Civic Engagement Initiative in Buffalo New York. Lydia Snyder received a Masters of Social Work from the University at Buffalo. She has worked in child welfare and juvenile justice over the past 20 years. Recognizing the injustice of children passing through the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system and onto Adult Corrections has inspired her to become involved with the prison Yoga Project and Liberation Prison yoga. She also teaches trauma sensitive yoga and is a board member of the Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition.

[00:04:21] Ms Snyder serves as a part time faculty member of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work where she supervises MSW students in nontraditional settings. This podcast was recorded in May of 2015. This is Laura Lewis. I'm the director of field education here at UC School of Social Work and I'm privileged this morning to be meeting with our team from partnership for the public good. I have here Megan Connelly who's the director of policy advancement at the Partnership for Public Good. Elisabeth Preisinger who had her placement Hirshfield placement at peachy this semester. She's a recent graduate as well as Lidia Snyder who is a field educator for Elisabeth while she was in field. So welcome. Thank you Laura. Happy to have you. Megan for the

benefit of our audience can you tell us a little bit about the work that partnership for the public good does it really some unique programs that you have here in the city. It's so hard for the public good. PBG we're a community based think and do tank so we provide research advocacy communications to a wide variety of community partners and community partners all kind of unite under this umbrella and this mission really of creating a just sustainable and culturally vibrant Buffalo or up to 188 community partners and they really run the gamut of Buffalo social economy. We have the smaller grassroots organizations like block clubs prisoner rights groups legal services cultural organizations and larger institutions like United Way and Catholic charities. So it's a really dynamic group of organizations that we try to provide backbone support for and kind of ascertaining identify and community needs and then providing the needed support to accomplish individual goals and then also do what's right for creating more equitable lawful.

[00:06:21] It really is a great place for social work to be because social work as a profession really needs to be connected to not only individual change efforts but community change efforts and societal change efforts. And that's really the work that you're doing here. So when you talk about research in Africa to making can you say a little bit about the role social work students have had here at PBG. Sure. So we had been extremely fortunate to partner with the school social work as a field. So we spent since 2010 providing applied learning opportunities for students in the master's program. And it's really been interesting to see kind of the students building the work that is in turn. We have had incredibly bright energetic enthusiastic dedicated young women working with us and they've done a wide range of tasks from some sort of capacity building for us and then also really some issue based work as well. So they have staff for instance the living wage commission. So they are doing compliance reporting and going and checking out contracts to make sure that certain contractors that fall under a living wage or his buffalo are filing all the necessary reports their quarterly reports and come out to meetings in private minutes kind of that back office support. The commission function and to do its job better. We've also had students who wrote policy briefs community health workers and the importance of single payer healthcare system. New York State which is exciting. That single payer healthcare recently passed. You're saying number yesterday probably will not pass the Senate. We're excited for that victory in hopes of moving this agenda item forward.

[00:08:04] Other students have staff like a language access working group for instance. So part of what PBG helps us is that our strategic plan every year as we go through an agenda setting process. So our partners come to the table and kind of bring all of the issues they're working on and what happens is we go through a very democratic process and they identified vote the top 10 public policy priorities for the coming year. And that's our community agenda and try to have a cohesive force of what are the most pressing items for our partners. And we bring that to elections and that's what our research and advocacy strategy for the year and for the past three years we have language access agenda which is your arching goal is to create limited English proficiency plans for Pablo Youri and Linda myself was our social work and turn in 2000 13 and 14 really was the term most initiative here and she helped convene this working group really of all the local refugee resettlement agencies legal services legal aid. It's possible that was represented just to try to bring all the actors and stakeholders to the table interested in this issue to come together and help craft solutions. So there has been public education pieces there's been outreach to certain communities making sure that immigrants refugees voices are being brought to the table as well. And then Elizabeth this here really has a period on that work in a very tangible way and productive manner and expanded the participants in that working group to make sure that we were getting more providers to have the mental health sector and so we can.

[00:09:38] People kind of pending some movement with certain sections or departments or divisions of city county government. And we wouldn't have been nearly as successful without having this capacity of heading offshore and during a to bring the social worker who's missing from

the table and also have the skills for the outrage that was necessary to bring other voices to the table that weren't being heard really in my mind. That is really the exciting element of the work he is doing in the community. We're doing research and advocacy. But you're very carefully reaching out to communities that wouldn't otherwise have a voice who might be marginalized. And so it's really a perfect place for social work to be. But tell our audience a little bit about the history of PBG. But Megan your background is. You're an attorney. I have a graduate 2009 school and so briefly we don't have any social workers although I feel that when we hover between Lady and Elizabeth we have an incredible resource with school social work. So PBG was actually founded back in 2007 as kind of after this conference put on by that law school the Coalition for Justice and a Cornell School industrial labor relations and it was this high rise through the city conference lifting up higher principles for focusing on economic development. So living wages green design local hiring practices most in minority women businesses. And so there just identified need of that is progressive voices cohesive progressive voices that's kind of where Biji came from. And so we hire a staff of attorneys and political and political scientist.

[00:11:20] And so I came out I was the first so I have to volunteer for director as an attorney and a political scientist and then meet an attorney as well. And so it's been an incredible asset to have. And like I said the social work plans help us translate a lot of like how the policy and the research work that we do in a way that makes sense to a greater community and a broader audience. And I think one of our goals and PBG is really to bridge this gap between community and academia. You know Sam McGovern is a contractor PBG he's black. James Loughran is emeritus faculty with Cornell labor relations and it's such a perfect fit with the goals of what the social work school is also kind of taking what's happening in the ivory tower and putting it into practice in the field and a really incredible manner. And that's so amazing for our small organization. I mean we were step three. We're up to 40 staff five now to have a student for a whole year. Basically part time I would say she's not just a she's a real member of the staff and that he is also on her staff. I think it's totally additive and I hope that we're providing opportunities for social work tells them to think on a more macro level and think about how the work that they're doing in their classroom can benefit such a greater broader audience as well. It really is a great example I think of a win win partnership as you're saying Megan students MSW students really build the capacity of the work that you're doing from our perspective.

[00:12:50] So it's a win win because students are getting the training they need to go out into the field and be able to undertake these kinds of objectives to conduct research and advocacy efforts. But let me know you were the field educator we needed a social work supervisor to come in to oversee the placement. From your perspective what were some of the challenges to having a student in a somewhat non-traditional setting. I think that we kind of struck out blindly in initiating the placement. We understood that PBG was prime landing spot for an MSW student to really bridge that gap between individual impact and greater community impact. To take the policy decisions and considerations and apply them to the individual basis to see how they impact people on an individual basis. So Megan and I have worked as a team from the beginning to really be very consistent in our supervision to make sure that the student gets a carved out private piece of time every week and the students that we've had here have all been incredibly diligent and being prepared for supervision and doing agendas and having questions discussing issues that they're experiencing in the field and also bridging that divide a little bit between social work language and lawyer. So we have social worker and lawyer ease that we kind of try and weave together somehow to make it work for the student and for the placement. And I think that there's also a piece for the student to have a sense of collegiality here at P.G. Meghan and the other staff have really integrated students as peers. It's a learning opportunity and a very educational environment. But students are also treated with respect and integrated into the work of the organization as a whole. Fantastic.

[00:14:49] We haven't heard from Elizabeth and Elizabeth as recently and someone who has had

their placement here at PTG. I would imagine that one of the things you have to learn was how to navigate some pretty complex social and political environments. Can you tell me a little bit about your role here and what you learned. Sure. So I was with PPD as a social worker intern for the duration of the school year 15 hours a week. And I expressed to Megan in the beginning that I was interested in community organizing and so I worked on several different issues. But all of those opportunities provided skill building for community organizing working with partners communicating with partner organizations helping plan Community Agenda and the Community Agenda rollout. Those were all really bridging what I was learning in my social work classes and how to apply that on the macro level with a lot of different voices and a lot of different perspectives all coming together and through this democratic process of the Community Agenda. More specifically it works on the language access advocates peace which Melinda Zell the former intern had begun during her time here. So that was we're sitting on a coalition bringing together voices from very different perspectives all equally important and advocating for language access issues for the immigrant and refugee community here in Buffalo. And as I sat on that throughout the year I began to would come up in conversations outside of work and I can see where other groups were doing similar work how we could bridge those voices together and bring them all to table for a more comprehensive addressing of the issue in Buffalo.

[00:16:33] This is Lydia I just wanted to jump in for a moment and just tie up a little bit relative to the work of social work and the multiplicity of roles that social workers play in practice and at the placement at PPTA Elizabeth was able to really flex those muscles and various social work roles. She served as an advocate. She served as an educator not only with the partner agencies that PPTA joined with but also some of the people behind those partnering agencies so as she mentioned giving voice to the voiceless. She was able to advocate for what people truly want to see in their community and she served as a conduit in their capacity. Peachy did you want to say anything more about that Latino or Morgan. Well I would let Elizabeth answer this even more fully but I think that one of the areas that at first was maybe a little intimidating Elizabeth in her work. She was navigating the political landscape and understanding how important it is to know who the elected are to understand what their position is on different issues to realize what's my best way of approaching someone on a given issue. And even though Buffalo is a small place there are lots of complexities in the political landscape and I think that Elizabeth was able to really connect the dots on how a political decision that's made perhaps in Albany or in Buffalo is really impacting that person who is living at a house on the Lower West Side of Buffalo. So something that's happening very far away from them is intimately shaping their life experience. Yeah this is Elizabeth and I'm just going to add to what I was saying in regard to my placement and CPG this year.

[00:18:16] PBG really served as a bridge for me from what I was learning in my social work classes. I was a person and environment perspective and then taking that to my placement at PBG learning about the policies through my co-workers and supervisors who are all attorneys and have that lens. And just seeing how the policy is affecting the person and the environment on the micro level and PPD really helped me to bridge that I was fairly new to Buffalo when I moved here and so I had a lot of learning to do just about the specific politics within Buffalo and I feel like I've come a long way in just a really solid understanding of that. Throughout my time here more specifically with the language access advocates and the community agenda after the agenda rollout. We met with partners and I specifically worked with the language access advocates is that is who I have been working with throughout the year to really prepared for these partners for our conversations with political leaders in our community. And that requires doing background research knowing what the issues and concerns were of the politicians and preparing ourselves as to how to have those conversations where we can really collaborate and work together in order to really help the people in their individual settings with the policies that were in place and this is not going to jump in here just from my honner social worker hat because he knows that the previous entrants introduced to me like meeting people where they're at. So much of Elizabeth's work and in some ways was you know

creating materials about vaccines about how different refugee groups that are arriving now.

[00:19:56] And so those were using different organizations that were set to medical providers so that cultural norms were identified and shared. And so she was having an individual one on ones with different members of these refugee and cultural groups to make sure that they were accurate. You know that she's meeting was elected and kind of framing the issue in a way that is meaningful and impactful to them. So anything for this last project with us you cohosted a radio show with journeys and refugee services and was focusing on issues that non-native speakers face when trying to access medical services. So she an incredible amount of research on this kind of reporting. The law is being able to make that readily available to her community. So they know their rights and the rights of their individual clients. But then she was also and most communicated in a way to much broader audience that wasn't familiar with this issue and be able to convey the importance of it. So it's just very different audiences very different ways of communicating and she outstanding job. That's fantastic. Before I move to kind of closure and congratulating you on your graduation. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you would like our audience to know about the work that you're doing here. Well I think one thing that I would like perhaps future or current MSW students to consider is that a nontraditional social work placement in an organization that may not even have social workers on staff can provide such a fabulous opportunity.

[00:21:25] And it's with the support from the school that I'm able to come in as an outside field educator and work in an environment that is not a traditional social work setting but use the supervision time to continually come back to the shared perspectives that might be available in a given placement reminding the students that communities can be your clients. Social change is out there happening and the skills that are being acquired in an MSW program can be applied in such a wide variety of settings that are possible learning opportunities. So even if there is work being done out there and it's not identified as a human service or social work organization that doesn't mean that it isn't a possible learning opportunity. And we're really grateful to you Lidia as a social work colleague for helping to make this possible and as you are speaking it struck me that there's another social work principle here. The idea of parallel process that you're coming into the organization and creating common language that allows a student to be able to bring a social work perspective in the same way that our students are going out and bridging gaps between individuals segments of the community. So it's pretty cool. It is Laura. Good point. The second I emphasize the value that this program has in its mission. I think you know service learning programs. There are a number of around and there's varying degrees of impact that they have on nomination and you should never take on an internship to get more work done. Mean insurance are a lot of work.

[00:23:02] And the partnership that we've had with whole social work it's been totally only added unhandsome into our organization having a licensed social worker come in and also you know be an additional supervisor and to tell us her or not but also just to have another view on her organization has been really beneficial to people. I think that these types of programs are critical to actions and ages. Kudos to Innisfil social work for providing us which has an incredibly talented hardworking students and also kind of the administration and the oversight and allow us to maximize this time and serve his nation well. I'll go back to what I said at the start of conversation together really is a win and we're so grateful to you Megan and to PTG for the work that you do and for allowing us to partner with you. We're grateful again to Lydia for providing the supervision that you do. I just wanna and by congratulating Elizabeth heard her graduation. Thank you and tell us a little bit about what you're doing now. Well I actually just accepted a job with open Buffaloe which is a partner organization of partnership for the public good. And my new title is program associate which is a position that the skills of community organizing and working with partners and community leaders that I really built up while I PBG will be very helpful in the program associate roll up in Buffalo. Well congratulations again thank you. Megan do you want to say a little bit. About open buffalo. Sure. That's exciting. So Buffalo is a new collaboration focused on building a civic capacity in the

city of Buffalo.

[00:24:47] So about two years ago the partnership with PBG along with the Coalition for Justice the voice of Buffalo and push Buffalo in stable housing three mainly merchandising organizations received an interesting e-mail unsolicited opportunity to apply through for grants through the open society foundations new program the open places initiative of 16 cities 16 sites I should say and so were charged with coming up with a plan of how we would build civic capacity for our entire community and also really address the systemic issues of injustice and create new systems. Making sure that all voices of the community work for a given an opportunity to participate in this process and then also on a larger scale to participate more in our local democracy and also have greater access to the opportunities that Buffalo has can provide folks now because their revitalization is going through. So these four groups we were successful and kind of winning a planning grant. So from 16 we were down to eight and we were successful along with two other sites San Diego and Puerto Rico as part of the three initial community based places of investment for George Soros Open Society Foundation so open Buffalo is just hard enough right now. They a great new staff with Elizabeth leading among Muslims and so they've got these kind of issue areas of justice and opportunity worker equity and heritage development of what they're focusing their campaigns on and that when it comes to building civic capacity there's a whole program about leadership development making sure that implementing principles of restorative justice conflict resolution and just people's interactions and interactions as well. So it's exciting it's a multiyear multimillion dollar investment which is a lot of money.

[00:26:51] And at the same time but it's really exciting to see this type of investment in Buffalo kind of to complement a lot of other funding streams are coming in to help continue and further this revitalization of Buffalo and Buffalo is really to make sure that it reaches all corners of the city and all members of our community. I think it's a great example of incorporating a human rights perspective into practice. So we'll have to have a part to our conversation and come back together around that. But I just want to end by saying I think that Elizabeth's role now as associate open Buffalo I think is the best evidence for our success here. You know I think the argument for having students in non-traditional settings and making it possible to have students in these kinds of practice settings can lead to students having key roles in initiatives like this like you will Elizabeth in your new role. So congratulations to you. Thank you again to each of you. Thank you Laura. And we'll talk again soon. You have been listening to Megan Connelly Elizabeth Preisinger and Lidia Snyder shared their experience with a macro oriented nontraditional field placement. We hope you found their experience instructive. I'm Charles Syms your cohost. Please join us again at in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth Professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our website at [ww.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://ww.socialwork.buffalo.edu) and while you're there check out our technology and social work research center you'll find it under the Community Resources menu.