Social Work Provides Research, Expertise as New York Continues Sept. 11 Recovery Effort

BY JAMES DEVITT

While financial contributions made in response to the terrorist attacks are beginning to be distributed to victims' families, often overlooked are Social Work programs in place prior to the attacks that assist those who lost loved ones to a tragedy or catastrophe.

"In September, a husband in Philadelphia thought his wife had been killed at the World Trade Center was ready to sell his home because he, as a stay-at-home father, could not afford to keep it," said Larry Masanari, acting commissioner for Social Security, during his Nov. 1 testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means. "He was able to take advantage of the Social Security representa- tive who contacted him to let him know he and his family were eligible for survivor benefits." In an effort to increase public awareness of such benefits, the Clearinghouse on Social Security Benefits, a project of Columbia University's National Osteoporosis Risk Assessment and Monitoring Project, is offering hands-on expertise to assist in the Sept. 11 recovery effort. With funding to cover 400 social service agencies, hospitals and schools in the New York metropolitan area, the school's students, faculty and alumni were well-prepared to respond to New York City's needs. "We will not permit the hatred or the immediate shock of the catastrophe stemming from the paralyz- ing tragedies, or interfere with our mis- sion, even under the most trying circumstances," said Interim Dean Sheila B. Kamerman.

The school's contributions to the recovery efforts, which have centered on grief counseling and training sessions across the city, have gone beyond days immedi- ately following the attacks.

Faculty and field instruc- tors continue to offer trauma and stress reduction training sessions for administrators and staff in several public and private service organizations, including the Salvation Army, Manhattan Cooperative Hispanic High School and Manhattan Night High School, New York City's Administration for Children's Services and Family Services agency. With existing ties to several Japanese Employ- ers, or interfere with our mis- sion, even under the most trying circumstances," said Interim Dean Sheila B. Kamerman.

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In addition, the U.S. also trails most other industrial- ized nations in the duration of the family leave that is eligible to receive. In the United States, unmarried children under the age of 18 can receive a maximum of only 12 weeks of parent leave until age 18 or up to age 19, if the parents are attending sec- ondary school full-time. In many industrial countries, survivor benefits to children generally extend through the completion of mandatory or formal education, includ- ing university education, which varies from age 18 to 27.

The Clearinghouse is a web-based databank that provides comparative, cross-national, cross-cultural information about the policies, programs, benefits, and eligibility available in the advanced indus- trialized countries to address child, youth and family needs. Funded by the W.T. Grant Foundation, the Clear- inghouse is designed to serve the news media, public officials and their staffs, publishers and private agency administrators and their board members, scholars and students.

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