

Conference Summary:

On Thursday September 18th, 2008 the Arthur C. Helton Institute for the Study of International Social Service began the first day of a three day conference entitled: Crossing Borders, Connecting Families: International Social Service in the 21st Century. This first-of-its-kind conference was based on the tripartite definition of international social work developed by ISS-USA: social work being done in the United States with individuals and families from overseas (refugees, asylees, immigrants), social work being done in the United States with individuals and families with transnational issues, international adoption, abduction and placement options) and finally Social work being done outside of the U.S.(e.g. Peace Corp, ICRC). After introductory comments by the Dean of the School of Social Work, Mr. Richard Barth, Ms. Kelly Ryan, Deputy Secretary of State for Population, Migration and Refugees gave the opening keynote speech. The first three panels focused on one aspect each of this definition and included representatives from governmental, community and faith based organizations and faculty from the University of Maryland School of Social Work. The first day concluded with a reception at the Museum of Dentistry with a keynote speech by Jody Olsen, Deputy Director of

The second day focused on specific topics encountered in international social work in the United States. The final half day concluded with presentations by representatives from government agencies (including the Director of Department of State's Overseas Citizens Services and Acting Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement). The session concluded with three representatives from non-governmental agencies that perform international humanitarian work overseas. The last panel provided information to social workers about how to pursue an international social work career overseas

The conference attracted over 70 registrants from 9 states and three countries. In addition, there were 31 presenters over the three days, including the two keynote speakers. We were also fortunate to include two University of Maryland School of Social Work student volunteers, one alumni volunteer and two UMBSSW interns. Three ISS-USA staff attended major portions of the conference and three staff presented at, or moderated panels. The entire ISS-USA staff attended the evening reception.

The conference was an overwhelming success on many levels.

First, the planning and implementation of the conference solidified the growing relationship between ISS-USA and the University of Maryland School of Social Work. The Dean of the School attended several sessions in addition to his financial and logistical support. Five faculty members presented at, or moderated a panel and one has expressed interest in working with the Institute's Director on developing the international social work curriculum at the school. Second, the participants were extremely interested in being informed about, and participating in additional trainings by ISS-USA, including the possibility to pursue a Certification in International Social Work. The Director has created a list serve of all the participants and presenters and will provide information about the Institute's activities and an opportunity for networking among interested faculty and professionals. Third, the conference firmly placed ISS-USA at the center of discussions about the future of International Social Work in America. We

have no doubt that we will develop our reputation for being a resource for technical support, training and information on a variety of topics related to this growing field.

Finally, in addition to the written feedback on the evaluation forms for the conference we have received a number of e mails from presenters thanking us for including them in the conference. Please see a select few of those comments below:

“I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to present at the conference. I enjoyed it thoroughly. It was great to meet you and I hope we can stay in touch. The work your organization does is essential and I commend you for hosting this event.” (NCMEC)

“Just a quick note to say that I enjoyed delivering my paper at the Conference and from my perspective, thought the Conference was a success. Thanks for inviting me.” (UMBSSW)

“I just wanted to extend my thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak at the ISS conference this past weekend. I feel like I was really able to learn a great deal and network with people doing incredible work in the field.” (UNHCR)