

The University of Texas at Austin

Field Tested

Jane Addams Field Education Development Endowment



Bonnie Bain (left) and Jean Avera (right) know the value of field education from their time as clinical faculty at UT Austin's School of Social Work. Their endowment helps support the social workers who supervise students.

For Jean Avera and Bonnie Bain, there is no better teacher than experience, and that is why they are passionate about field education at The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work.

While working in the field, social work students are placed in agencies throughout the community. They acquire hands-on experience while receiving close supervision and support from both a field instructor and a faculty liaison. It's a win-win for everyone: Students hone their social work skills while community agencies receive an injection of youthful energy, enthusiasm, and human resources.

Avera and Bain witnessed the value of field education during their many years as clinical faculty at the School of Social Work. In 2007, wanting to give back, they created the Jane Addams Field Education Development Endowment. It is named after the Progressive Era reformer and social activist who lived from 1860 to 1935 and is considered the mother of social work in the United States.

"Field education is transformational for social work students," Avera says. "Studying from a book and taking a test are necessary, but getting out into the community and working with people — those are the kinds of experiences that fundamentally change students as they go through the social work program."

"Students' self-awareness and confidence just explode," Bain says. "As field liaisons, we had the joy of watching them

pulling everything together, integrating their experience and blossoming as social workers. Our school has one of the best field programs in the country, and we wanted to support it."

The Addams endowment helps support the agency-based social workers who supervise students. The School of Social Work currently has more than 200 field placements throughout Austin, across the nation, and in countries such as South Africa, Costa Rica, and India.

Social work graduate student **Alejandra Spector (seated)** interacts with a staff member at El Buen Samaritano in Austin. Spector helps patients of the organization's health clinic maintain their emotional and physical well-being.

Photos by Miguel Gutierrez Jr.



Avera and Bain created their endowment anonymously while Bain was still teaching. Naming it for Addams, whose life serves as a shining example for social workers, just seemed right.

"She was an amazing woman," Avera says. "She worked in all areas: for peace, for women's rights, for children, for education, against sex trafficking. At Hull House in Chicago she offered night classes for adults — the forerunner for the continuing education programs that every university offers now. She truly represents the broadness of the social work profession."

In 2010, after Bain retired, she and Avera agreed to reveal their connection to the endowment in the hopes of inspiring others to support the School of Social Work. For them, that's one way of keeping Addams' legacy alive.

"Social work trains professionals to work with people at the individual, group, and community level," Bain says. "But more important for us, and this was one of Jane Addams' biggest contributions, social work is about social justice, about making this world a better place for everyone."