

NEW INTERAGENCY PROGRAM IS HELPING PROFESSIONALS BECOME LICENSED SOCIAL WORK CLINICIANS



Here are some of the faces of R.I.'s future social work clinicians who are earning their M.S.W. degree at Rhode Island College.

Across the country there is an ever-increasing demand for social work clinicians, particularly clinicians who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).

To expand the number, diversity and educational level of these professionals, Rhode Island College, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC) have created a unique program.

Launched in 2022, this program removes barriers so that working professionals in the home and community-based services sector can earn their M.S.W. degree and become licensed clinicians. Classes are held in the evening and students receive funding for tuition, fees, books and other aid necessary to complete their degree.

“EOHHS’ innovative partnership with Rhode Island College and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is currently funded by the federal American Rescue Plan Act,” said Acting Health and Human Services Secretary Ana Novais. “The goal of the program is to increase the number and diversity of licensed health professionals in Rhode Island by providing support to health and human services workers from diverse backgrounds. So far, we are pleased to support the approximately 19 individuals enrolled in this program – which we hope will become a model for expansion. Overall, our Health Professional Equity Initiative has enrolled 130 participants.”

“As an institution that is highly recognized for its excellence in social work education, Rhode Island College is uniquely positioned to assist in this initiative,” said RIC President Jack Warner. “We are fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and the only college in Rhode Island offering an M.S.W. degree program. Moreover, Rhode Island College is noted for its commitment to increasing BIPOC representation within the field of social work.”

“We want Rhode Islanders, especially those in the BIPOC community, to enjoy increased job satisfaction and stability in their professions as they advance to higher-wage, higher-credentialed positions,” added Shannon Gilkey, Rhode Island’s Postsecondary Commissioner. “Our RI Reconnect Program aims to do that. Simultaneously, local employers benefit from a highly skilled, upwardly mobile and invested workforce that reflects their client base.”

“What’s critical is that the individuals in this program have been working in the home and community-based services sector for a long time,” said RIC Interim Dean of the School of Social Work Jayashree Nimmagadda. “Forty percent are BIPOC and all of them have wanted to earn a graduate degree. Once they graduate in 2025, the agencies they work for will have employees who are qualified to take on the role of a fully licensed social work clinician.”

Cooperating agencies include Community Care Alliance, Providence Center, Family Service of Rhode Island, Gateway, Blackstone Valley Community Health Care and the Groden Center.

Silvia Adames is a community health worker and employee of Blackstone Valley Community Health Care. She is one of 19 students enrolled in RIC’s M.S.W. program. At age 51 and bilingual, she said it was hard returning to school, yet already she’s earned straight A’s in her first two courses. Her message to other professionals looking to advance their careers: “If I can do it – and in English – you can do it, too!”