

The Urgent Need for Advocacy Work in Creating a “New Normal” for People and Planet

By: [Meredith C.F. Powers](#), Zulfiya Tursunova, Shantell Williams, and Zack Knowles

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Abstract:

Social workers are essential workers in all communities and across all levels of practice. Now, more than ever, we ALL need to urgently advocate as we create a “new normal” with justice for people and planet. In considering what our “new normal” should be, let us consider Sonya Renee Taylor’s poignant challenge, “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.”¹

Keywords: climate justice | social work | Climate Action Rebate Act | advocacy

Article:

*****Note: Full text of article below**

The Urgent Need for Advocacy Work in Creating a “New Normal” for People and Planet

By Meredith C.F. Powers, PhD, MSW
Dr. Zulfiya Tursunova
Shantell Williams, BSW Student
Zack Knowles, BSW Student

Social workers are essential workers in all communities and across all levels of practice. Now, more than ever, we ALL need to urgently advocate as we create a “new normal” with justice for people and planet. In considering what our “new normal” should be, let us consider Sonya Renee Taylor’s poignant challenge, “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.”¹

During the COVID-19 crisis, many social workers, including students and educators, are finding renewed hope and vigor through their continued action, be it as frontline workers or through their tireless efforts working remotely. These actions are actually a form of “[radical self-care](#)” ([bit.ly/2YnGGCE](#)), as they alleviate the very problems that create the stress in the first place.² Advocacy work may include voting, emailing, calling, and meeting virtually with leaders and political representatives to address issues which are critical for the profession, the vulnerable populations we serve alongside, and the planet.

Students and faculty from UNCG and Guilford College (including this article’s co-authors) joined virtually with about 500 others from across the country on March 29-31 for the FCNL Spring Lobby Weekend.³ At this virtual event, we learned advocacy skills that are useful for all topics, and honed specific knowledge on the topic of Climate Justice.⁴ We were then trained how to write and share our stories during virtual lobbying opportunities with NC representatives. Here are a few examples from NASW-NC social work student members:

“Growing up in rural North Carolina, agriculture has been a part of our everyday lives for many decades and plays a vital role in our state’s and nation’s economy. However, through poor waste management (which has caused devastating physical health issues for my neighbors), deforestation, and changing weather patterns (which has lowered agricultural productivity and food quality), I have witnessed the negative impact that environmental neglect has had on farmers and vulnerable people in my hometown of Willard, N.C. I have learned that agriculture and climate change are interrelated, with both contributing negatively to the other. It is important that we address this issue as soon as possible, to minimize the effects that it will have on the future of agricultural production within our state and on the health of our communities. That is why I am asking Sen. Burr to cosponsor the Climate Action Rebate Act. Thank you.” (By Shantell Williams, UNCG, BSW student, expected graduation May 2020.)

“Hello and thank you for your time, my name is Zack Knowles and I am from Raleigh, North Carolina. My most fond memories growing up are going on family trips where hiking and sight-seeing were the main attractions. That is why, as I grew older and was diagnosed with a substance use disorder, my parents and I looked towards eco-therapy treatment to help me overcome my struggles. I have always believed in the healing power of nature, which is one of the

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reasons I am passionate about preserving and restoring our climate. Mental health and substance use treatment in eco-therapy settings is what I aspire to do in my professional social work career. My hope is that others, long after me, can also enjoy the beauty of our great state, North Carolina. We are so lucky to live in a state with wondrous mountains, serene coastal plains, and gorgeous beaches - our visitors can testify to this! So, I am asking Congressman Price to co-sponsor the Climate Action Rebate Act, which I believe to be an indispensable step forward. Thank you!” (By Zack Knowles, UNCG, BSW student, expected graduation May 2021.)

Even in times of physical distancing and social solidarity, we can all learn and/or sharpen our advocacy skills. Such critical skills are urgently needed as we come alongside our communities and seek to create a better world with a “new normal” that promotes justice and peace for people and planet. For more on how you can advocate, see NASW-NC’s resources⁵ and for more on how you can become involved with other social workers around the world making an impact for Climate Justice, see the IFSW Climate Justice Program.⁴ ●

References/Resources:

¹ Sonya Renee Taylor. [@sonyareneetaylor]. (2020, April 2). We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was never normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, My friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. #radicalselflovelessons #Radicalselflove #coronavirus [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-fc3ejAlvd/>

² Powers, M. C. F., & Engstrom, S. (2020). Radical self-care for social workers in the global climate crisis. *Social Work*, 65(1), 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swz043>

³ Friends Committee on National Legislation. (2020). Spring lobby weekend. Retrieved from <https://www.fcnl.org/updates/spring-lobby-weekend-739>

⁴ International Federation of Social Workers. (n.d.). Climate Justice Program. Retrieved from <https://www.ifsw.org/social-work-action/climate-justice-program/>

⁵ National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter. (n.d.). NASW NC Advocacy. Retrieved from <https://www.naswnc.org/page/316>

