

Climate Justice and Social Work

By: [Meredith C.F. Powers](#)

Powers, M.C.F. (2019). Climate Justice and Social Work. NASW-NC Newsletter, Winter 2019, 13.

Made available courtesy of Meredith C.F. Powers and the National Association of Social Workers North Carolina Chapter: <https://www.naswnc.org/page/Newsletter>

Abstract:

While the global climate crisis impacts all of us, those who are marginalized or oppressed experience it to an even greater extent. Much of the burden of unsustainable consumption patterns has fallen on the most vulnerable people in the world, who typically have the smallest consumption patterns. These individuals also receive fewer of the benefits of environmental resources. These collective patterns of unsustainable consumption contribute to the climate crisis, making it a global justice issue not only for people, but for the entire planet. This is known as climate justice.

Keywords: climate justice | social work | advocacy | climate change | environment

Article:

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

Climate Justice and Social Work

By Meredith C.F. Powers, PhD, MSW
Assistant Professor and Sustainability Fellow at
UNC-Greensboro



While the global climate crisis impacts all of us, those who are marginalized or oppressed experience it to an even greater extent. Much of the burden of unsustainable consumption patterns has fallen on the most vulnerable people in the world, who typically have the smallest consumption patterns. These individuals also receive fewer of the benefits of environmental resources. These collective patterns of unsustainable consumption contribute to the climate crisis, making it a global justice issue not only for people, but for the entire planet. This is known as climate justice.

The National Association of Social Workers is working to enhance offerings related to environmental justice and climate change. Among other [resources \(bit.ly/2PzZ51b\)](https://bit.ly/2PzZ51b), NASW circulated a practice resource, [Climate Change and Health: A Call to Social Workers \(bit.ly/2WsyQoe\)](https://bit.ly/2WsyQoe); NASW also hosted a recent webinar with Dr. Anna Hayward and Dr. Jerome Paulson on [Climate, Health, & SW Practice \(bit.ly/34mQxZj\)](https://bit.ly/34mQxZj).

IFSW Climate Justice Program

In June of 2019, the International Federations of Social Workers launched the [IFSW Climate Justice Program \(bit.ly/325NB1w\)](https://bit.ly/325NB1w). This program is a way for us to take action to redress the injustices we contribute to with our personal and professional consumption patterns. The website has resources to help you learn more about climate justice, tips to shrink your ecological footprint, ways to join with advocacy efforts (such as establishing ethical travel policies for your organization) and an opportunity to [contribute \(bit.ly/33fxNKQ\)](https://bit.ly/33fxNKQ) where you can invest in and support climate justice projects around the world.

Local Action for Climate Justice: Greensboro, NC

One way that social workers are active in promoting climate justice is by participating in local [Climate Strike \(bit.ly/326uxjz\)](https://bit.ly/326uxjz) events in their communities. The Climate Strike movement is an intergenerational, intersectional effort which has resulted in a range of ongoing events taking place around the world. Led by the youth climate strikers, people walk out of school and work to join mass marches and rallies, to music concerts, sit-ins and nonviolent direct action,

connecting the climate movement to civic engagement. At the Department of Social Work at UNCG, we offer a class on environmental and climate justice. Some of my students joined me at our local Climate Strike event on September 20th and were even featured in the local news about our collective demand for transformative action. On a more personal note, I was

proud to participate as a social worker and as a social work educator, but also as a mother, as I was able to accompany my 7-year-old daughter, who was a guest speaker. While this was exciting, I also realized the profound sadness that children have to fight for their lives, with no power but the “awe-factor” to persuade adults to take action. My daughter won’t be able to vote for 11 more years... what will the leaders do between now and then??? How can we not only help their voices to be heard, but make radical changes so they have hope of a future.

When I was helping my daughter prepare and write her speech, I explained that we would also participate in the peaceful protest called a “die-in” to demonstrate how we may all die if we don’t take the climate crisis seriously. She freaked out and asked, “What!?! We are all going to die?” Fighting tears from my eyes, I tried to gently respond, “Well, some people have already died or are going to die very soon as they are more vulnerable to climate change and environmental problems. These are the climate injustices we are fighting against. And while we have privilege that so far has kept us insulated from feeling the effects of it so harshly, that will not always be true.” Despite writing on and teaching about this topic every week, it hit me differently when I had to explain the seriousness to my own child. At that moment, I realized many have already lost their own children and loved ones due to climate injustices. Since then, my eco-grief has been more severe, but as a way to combat it, I carry on with radical self-care to stay active with solutions to fix the very things causing this eco-grief in the first place. I am thankful to join with students and social workers, in NC and around the world, as we join our local communities, demanding climate action for ourselves, our children, and our beautiful Mother Earth. ●

HRSA continued from Page 11

This grant will also be used to create local and state systems to offer trainings, job postings, continuing education activities for current social workers and other health care providers who work with individuals with OUD.

Western Carolina University

Western Carolina University Department of Social Work received \$1.35 million. WCU intends to utilize the grant as a way to focus on increasing the understanding of substance use disorders and training future providers in seven counties in western North Carolina. They plan to train a diverse cohort of students to provide holistic services that encompass substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery aspects for rural and medically underserved communities in western North Carolina. Additionally, the grant aims to increase community partnerships to provide students with internship opportunities as well as provide

training opportunities for community partners, community members, first responders, healthcare professionals, and the faculty, staff, and students of WCU. A primary goal of the grant is to decrease the stigma surrounding substance misuse, increase the number of providers who understand the intricacies of substance use, and provide community members with the means to shift their thinking about substance misuse and people who use substances.

We applaud the aforementioned universities for taking steps to ensure a more informed practice for future healthcare professionals and we congratulate them on their accomplishments! ●

Source: <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/grants/behavioral-health/opioid-workforce-expansion-professionals#nc>

