

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF CHANGE

Everyone in the field of aging services has been affected by the current fiscal crisis. For those of us who have been around for several decades it is “*déjà vu* all over again.” So it was with great pleasure that SBW Partner Ann Burack-Weiss accepted the invitation of the Jarvie Commonwealth Service 14th Annual Colloquium planning committee - to organize a panel of NASW Foundation Pioneers to discuss the opportunities that change represents in the lives of older people and those who serve them. The panel presented at the June 12th colloquium shared three inspiring perspectives.

Dr. James Donnelly, LCSW is now a private practitioner, following many years of professional practice in health care. He reminded us of the essential, enduring values of our profession: “Social work was a response not only to the material lacks and hardships people were experiencing, but more fundamentally, to the challenge these disruptions posed to a sense of meaning in their lives...not primarily about doing things or providing things for people. Social work was about being with people in this awful place of challenge; the challenge to recover what it means to be a significant human being.”

Dr. Patricia Brownell, LMSW, Associate Professor at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service and President of the NYC Chapter of NASW spoke to policy changes. She discussed the changes in professional views of aging. When many of us entered the field, older people were considered primarily as a group in need of care and protection. Today they are seen as a societal resource as well as successful advocates on their own behalf. She shared Policy Statements from the NASW Social Work Delegate Assembly of 2007 that illustrated the change to a strengths-based perspective - with features such as health promotion, wellness, civic engagement, and diversity overlooked in previous decades.

Helen Hamlin, LMSW, a social worker for over 60 years, now represents the International Federation on Aging (IFA) at the United Nations. In discussing “empowerment” she began with a successful community organization effort from the 1974 SSI controversy. She concluded “...working with people at the United Nations is not so different from working with clients and with large organizations. Using the social work training of starting where the client is, to understand what people are after, and then working out methods that will begin the process of trying to resolve issues. The process is complicated when dealing with the diplomatic bureaucracy that is the UN, but it is doable.”

What better message from those of us who have lived through change to those who are experiencing change for the first time. **It is doable.**

We Look forward to your comments and experiences. Enjoy the rest of your summer!