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Laurier-led conference to explore the history of social welfare work in Canada

WATERLOO – Social welfare work throughout Canada’s history has generally been intended to help the vulnerable. Sometimes, however, it has had the opposite effect. A conference being organized by Wilfrid Laurier University’s Faculty of Social Work will critically examine the legacies of that work.

The **Legacies of Social Welfare Work in Canada** conference, to be held Oct. 24-26, 2017, spans three locations in three days: Laurier’s **Brantford campus** on Oct. 24, Laurier’s **Faculty of Social Work in Kitchener** on Oct. 25 and **Renison University College**, which is federated with the University of Waterloo, on Oct. 26. All events are open to the public and include an arts evening as well as scholarly presentations.

The multidisciplinary conference is funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The grant is intended to critically analyze the 150th anniversary of Canada’s Confederation.

“I think it’s incumbent upon us as a school of social work to be honest with ourselves and look at power as a central determining factor with regards to how social welfare actors and institutions interact and impact vulnerable populations,” said [Ginette Lafrenière](#), Laurier associate professor of social work and the lead conference organizer.

The conference will look at histories of social welfare practices and the narratives of people impacted by institutionalization, (dis)ability, colonization, immigration, race, gender, poverty, child welfare and homophobia. It will also look to the future of activism, advocacy and social welfare work in Canada.

Speakers include:

- **Alvin Finkel**, a labour and social policy historian and professor emeritus of Athabasca University, who will talk about social workers as agents of the state and as radical critics of the state.
- **Colleen Lundy**, a social work professor from Carleton University, who will speak on 100 Years of social work in Canada and the challenges of a profession dedicated to social justice.
- **Tim Leduc**, an assistant professor at Laurier’s Faculty of Social Work, who will speak on reconciling social work education to Indigenous lands.
- **Geoffrey Reaume**, associate professor of health at York University, who will speak on the history of “mad” people since the 19th century.
- **Lori Oschefski**, founder and CEO of the British Home Children Advocacy and Research Association, who will speak on the history of British “Home Children” in Canada.

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The arts evening, on Tuesday, Oct. 24 at the Faculty of Social Work in Kitchener, will feature an Ojibwe theatre group from Sudbury, which will present excerpts of their work on truth and reconciliation; Cara Loft, the faculty's Indigenous Field of Study coordinator, who present a project on Indigenous activists over 300 years; and photography by Bill Ivy, co-founder of the [Nursing Moms Project](#), which aims to normalize breastfeeding. There will also be a panel discussion on arts-based social development with marginalized communities.

In addition to the conference, the Faculty of Social Work is using part of its Canada 150 funding to give small grants to local organizations for a series of community projects. For example, the YWCA will undertake a photography project on the history of bullying against women and girls. Other community events include speakers and symposia. For more information, contact Laura Coakley at lcoakley@wlu.ca.

Another product of the conference will be an online repository of historical materials about social work in Canada, which Lafrenière says is the first of its kind in the country. The conference itself will be live-streamed and parts of presentations will be available online after the event is over.

Learn More

- [Legacies of Social Welfare Work in Canada Conference Series](#) (Eventbrite registration page)
- [Legacies of Social Welfare Work in Canada](#) (Facebook event)
- [Laurier social work professor working to break down barriers between university and community](#) (Profile of Ginette Lafrenière)

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