

# CASE STUDY 2019-2020

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*The First Two Years of  
Development*

**shauntia white**

FOUNDER/MANAGING DIRECTOR

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

**kurt turnier**

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

THE MAKING OF

**Y SOCIALWORK**

# ABSTRACT

## Part 1

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Over the last two years, YSocialWork, Inc. sought out to become a pedagogical laboratory for youth and young adults to explore new experiential ways of learning social work competencies, skills, and values across disciplines. The initial design of its first project to advance social change across the human service sector posed various challenges for the founder, the board, and their stakeholders. Examples include board fragmentation and limited capacity to leverage stakeholder interest; and the misalignment of mission, vision, and values statements that were implemented by the founder but not agreed upon by the board. This case provides opportunities to explore various strategies for social change and methodologies on the scalability and scope of an organization's social impact.



# INTRODUCTION

## Part 2

The first two years of YSocialWork, Inc.'s development sheds light on board fragmentation, competition, and capacity (Carman, & Nesbit, 2013). Many of these issues originated before incorporation. Others originated as the organization began to reclaim its mission. One unique aspect of these issues is how to develop an organization from an advocacy-based hashtag, which quickly became a moment of public storytelling behind the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act. After two years of lobbying and building social media awareness, the bill remained bleak, still with fewer than a one-percent chance of enactment. To this day, the provisions in this bill are so overlooked to the larger society that the idea to employ strategies that force institutional change became Shauntia White's driving force to incorporate YSocialWork as a social movement organization (SMO), but how?

Throughout the entire stage of problem framing and ideation, YSocialWork, Inc. maintained its commitment to the safe passage of the Social Work Reinvestment Act by bringing significant challenges facing the profession of social work to the forefront of design thinking. Motivated by Kivel (2000), it was beyond time to rekindle hope and create new pedagogical structures and practice methodologies involving the 80% of the population that produces the social wealth of those who benefit from it. Historically, social work professionalization achieved legitimacy through research and industry-academia interactions, but its contributions to social change have been questionable. Thus, to say, the level at which 13-14 % of social workers who work in local or state government, excluding education and hospitals, are making social justice and equality to others, in its most authentic form, hard to measure.

As such, the vision to become a recruitment strategy for a new way of social work was visible; however, the problem lies in its planning: its mission and strategic goals and objectives were never truly defined until after its incorporation.

In March of 2019, YSocialWork, Inc. was incorporated and trademarked in the State of Maryland and established its 501(c)3 status as an "Educational Organization" under the classification of "Civil Rights, Advocacy for Specific Groups." The same year, the overall employment of social workers grew 13 percent, which was relatively low compared to other similar occupations, such as Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors (25%) and Marriage and Family Therapy (22%). By 2019, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement marked five years of action, and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter had been used nearly 30 million times on Twitter since the first instance in 2013. Two months into its incorporation, the impetus behind YSocialWork, Inc. had become clear: To position themselves as a solution to pressing social, economic, and political issues of our times, creating programs that advance racial and economic equity across human services.

Within the first six months of receiving articles of incorporation, the first goal was to create a more expansive Board of Directors, which included licensed and macro social workers and experts in finance. Once achieved, the steps following consisted of onboarding new members and planning the organizational structure and mission, but that was never achieved because its members were still learning amidst ongoing stakeholder engagements.

After one year of planning, YSocialWork, Inc. was prepared to launch an experiential classroom for high school students, until COVID-19 hit. But YSocialWork, Inc. recruited a high school leader and kept going with the plans, and remained very fastidious about the implementation of activities supporting YSocialWork, Inc.'s mission and building stakeholder relationships across institutions in Prince George's County. However, as COVID-19 worsened, it became very unpredictable how the programs with high school and community colleges will materialize, and if YSocialWork, Inc. is ready to take the risk regardless of new challenges of board governance, mission-driven strategic partnerships, and impact measurements.

# BACKGROUND

## Part 3

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After years of market research and data collection at the community level, in 2018, the founder desperately wanted to keep the spirit of YSocialWork alive and evolve from its humble beginnings to an organization that uplifts communities through social change. With a history of sliding in and between different social work organizations with polar opposite charitable statuses and missions, the challenge of creating a new identity for the organization, including a new mission and vision statement, took nearly a year to articulate. For so long, the driving force behind YSocialWork was its commitment to continuing the purpose of the Social Work Reinvestment Act, which has been the establishment of increasing access to those choosing social work as a full-time career. But after three idle years, that reality was still far beyond reach, so now it was time to design the social change we desire to see in a society that is just and equitable across class structures.

In March of 2019, the founder used nearly \$5,000 of her personal funds to incorporate and trademark the term “Y-Social-Work” as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization-- YSocialWork Incorporation,” or simply, YSocialWork-- with a mission to create social change in the human services profession through advocacy, organizing, and fundraising among adolescents and young adults globally.

The development of YSocialWork began in the fall of 2019 where the founder had requested a meeting with the Chief of Staff from Prince George's County Department of Social Services, Mr. LC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss realities and challenges for providing access to the social work profession in Prince George's County, most specifically to adolescents aging out of the foster care system. In the meeting, the founder gave Mr. LC a brief overview of the organization's goals and objectives over the next year. He revealed that before development begins, YSocialWork would need to prioritize its activities in a comprehensive document, asking the following questions. How broad will the parameters of recruitment be? Will the programs be open to any high school senior interested in a career in social work? Or, will it be specific to at-risk populations, and if so, to what extent? He continued to question: What activities are feasible to accomplish now, with limited resources and capacity? And what does the body of literature about social empowerment or experiential learning look like and does it differ across populations? These weren't questions Shauntia was able to answer without further investigation and collaboration with key stakeholders.

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After about six months, the founder revisited the conversation with Mr. LC with a 20-page document in hand outlining a housing project, experiential classroom opportunities, and funding requirements for sustainability for such a program. To some, this was an indication of progress, but from the founder's perspective, the mission was not yet complete.

Even though the goals and objectives outlined in the business plan embedded unique aspects of the Social Work Reinvestment, it was not a group effort. Instead, it was completed solely by the founder, despite attempts to bring the board together without success. The initial board consisted of seven additional members - two business consultants, a legislative director, a school social worker, a translator, a researcher, and a practitioner and college professor. Before bringing them on, the founder consulted with a patent attorney to ensure the legitimacy of the by-laws, contractual agreements, and legal compliance. When the group formed, they all agreed to meet on a bi-weekly basis and to ensure YSocialWork reaches its fundraising and sustainability goals, but unknowingly, a disconnect formed between the idealized vision of the nonprofit board their actual function that highlighted different (often contradictory) levels of roles of the board and founder.

In June of 2020, YSocialWork began its implementation process of the experiential classroom for high school students with little support from its board of directors. While the founder had preferred increased participation from the board concerning YSocialWork activities, she also felt confident that she would be able to build capacity after recruiting a high school senior, Nina, who would help her evaluate whether the curriculum would be suitable for adolescence. For three months, Nina met with the founder for three hours a week to discuss programmatic goals, objectives, and experiential learning opportunities she felt high students would benefit from.

By August, there were still no funding opportunities available, and the founder had decided to pursue another opportunity with the University of Maryland College Park. In September of 2020, YSocialWork, Inc. eventually received a \$500 Mini-Grant from the University of Maryland to launch the virtual experiential learning, which was an aspect of the overall plan. The founder was still very apprehensive about its execution with very few resources allocated for the program and support from the board. Yet, the board kept the plan in motion because of the anticipated board contributions from each member. Each of the board members is required to contribute \$250 a year in board fees. These fees go towards marketing (website and email subscription, logo and flyers), programmatic expenses (Zoom and DocuHub subscription, webinar add-on, and web-based surveys), and other miscellaneous costs (color printing, paper, postage, etc). However, of the eight members on the board, only two have contributed before the annual deadline. Any funds that are available to the experiential classroom will be borrowed from the board contributions until further payments were received from members with outstanding balances. Even still, aside from financial resources, YSocialWork had less than three weeks to recruit students, fill instructor roles, and complete other tasks associated with the launch of the program she was pushing behind, including the recruitment of a high school student, Nina.

The idea was to invite high school students from Prince George's County, MD to a 6-week social work competency training, where, each week, students would explore one of the following areas: Competency 1: Demonstrating Professional and Ethical Behaviors; Competency 2: Diversity and Differences in Social Work; Competency 3: Advancing Human Rights; Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice; and Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice. Two of the strategic goals of the experiential classroom is to assist the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in recruiting more high school students into CSWE-accredited institutions, and to apply social work values and competencies across nontraditional spaces, such as alternative policing and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

As a high school senior interested in a career in social work, Nina spent the entire summer with the founder critiquing the curriculum and was very excited to experience the innovation process from ideation to prototyping, and all in a short period. However, some of its board members and instructors felt that, while they enjoyed the experience, there should have been more planning and development across the board, which has never been a strength of YSocialWork, Inc, collectively.

After six weeks of competency training, 90% of all students only missed one of the eight sessions, 80% of students completed assignments associated with training, and only one of eight instructors will return for the second stage of prototyping. 90% of high school students led webinars with industry leaders, namely the President and CEOs of leading social work organizations, to ask questions about becoming a social worker and the application of social work across interdisciplinary settings. By the end of the project, participating students earned up to 25 hours of community service towards graduation.

After just one week of prototyping the initial concept, three CSWE-accredited institutions were ready to learn more and expand the program to their respective state. Two universities in Pennsylvania and Texas met with the founder to explore opportunities for partnerships, while another university in Louisiana even offered to provide social work interns without the requirements or capacity to instruct social work students. Yet despite it all, the design process was far from done, the board slowly began demonstrating interest, and the founder became very concerned about the integrity and direction of the project; therefore, she met with the President of the CSWE to grapple with strategy intent, mission impact, and scalability.

One aspect of the project was a high school student-led webinar with industry leaders in social work. The goal of webinars was to invite decision-makers to the table to engage with high school students and begin a conversation about involving youth in social work reformation. The last webinar of two conversations included Dr. Darla Spence Coffey, President of CSWE, but little did the founder know that she would be interested in discussing more the project after the conclusion of the project, and they did weeks later.

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In the meeting, the founder also invited an entrepreneurship educator, Dr. Craig Watters, who teaches social entrepreneurship nationally and abroad and co-led the high school entrepreneurship magnet high school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. While this was supposed to be a debriefing it quickly became one of slighting competing yet valid interests: one focused on social work, while the other, social entrepreneurship. Both ideas were valid.

Amidst all the other challenges, YSocialWork stands at a critical crossroads, whether to broaden our focus to social sciences or keep our brand and focus on social work as a profession. After that meeting, Shauntia has been contemplating the direction of YSocialWork, including the launch of the second cohort.

# QUESTIONS

## Part 4

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- Where did the idea for YSocialWork stem from? What is the purpose of the organization, and does its mission, vision, and values, still align with its purpose?
- Does the board structure, type, and composition match the organizational and environmental needs of YSocialWork?
- What were three key resources (i.e., physical, human, intellectual, and financial) the founder used to aid in the incorporation of “YSocialWork”? What was the role of each of these resources to the development of the organization, and did they change over time?
- Where did the idea for YSocialWork stem from? What is the purpose of the organization, and does its mission, vision, and values, still align with its purpose?
- Does the board structure, type, and composition match the organizational and environmental needs of YSocialWork?
- What were three key resources (i.e., physical, human, intellectual, and financial) the founder used to aid in the incorporation of “YSocialWork”? What was the role of each of these resources to the development of the organization, and did they change over time?
- What individual, organizational, or environmental factors influence YSocialWork's efforts to launch YSocialWork's first design project? Of the factors identified, which seem to impact the organization the most?
- Based on the implementation of the initial design effort, what accomplishments do you feel the organization had made across the first two years?



DISCLAIMER: THIS CASE STUDY WAS WRITTEN BY YSOCIALWORK, INC. AND WITH PERMISSION FROM ALL PARTIES MENTIONED AS A LEARNING RESOURCE FOR HIGH SCHOOL, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS.