



KARINA LOPEZ

The College of New Jersey '14

An Aspiring Clinical Social Worker
Whose Work Feeds Her Soul



A Journey to Bridge Collaborating with Individuals While Opposing Systemic Forces Through Social Work

An activist, healer, social justice warrior, deep thinker, and scholar, Karina Lopez is on a path that connects her experiences with her sense of self. Though Karina is still in the midst of completing her Master of Social Work (M.S.W.), she can strongly articulate the relationship she found between this line of work and her personal values. As a Bonner alum, Karina believes Bonner walked her down this path.

Serendipitous Beginnings

Karina is currently attending Smith College for her Master of Social Work. Prior to Smith, she studied at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) where she pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Women's and Gender studies. A Bonner alumna of TCNJ, Karina decided to remain there as the Juvenile Justice and Prisoner Reentry Division Manager for the Bonner Program. Through this work managing sites, Karina discovered a passion that would eventually lead to her role today in balancing the macro and micro work in opposing systemic forces.

"Being division manager really showed me 'oh wow' I really care about structural oppression and the impact that has on people. I care about macro work like organizing, activism, and politically engaging with systems to cause change. But, I also love micro work. I love working with individuals and giving them back some power and agency. I believe in using education to bolster them to get them where they want to be."

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I feel more peaceful in the fight, and finding my place in the struggle and struggling than if I wasn't.

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Journey into Public Health

When Karina felt her time at the TCNJ Bonner program had come to an end, she began to pursue social work. An unexpected and difficult loss of a colleague guided her away from studying for the LSAT and preparing for law school. Overcoming this hardship led to Karina graduating into a new life. She realized that going through the healing process made her

deeply aware of the lack of resources available to help people through challenging times like these.

That realization, in combination with her background, made social work a good option. She noted, "I had been thinking about social work for a while [having grown up in the foster care system]. There is a skill set and need which is absent in communities of oppression. That's why I liked the clinical social work psychotherapy aspect of it, but I needed the macro lens too, which made it ideal."

Karina described social work in terms of being both micro and macro focused. The micro level can be compared to clinical social work, where the discipline is based on interpersonal relationships. The macro side focuses on policy, looking at organizations to try to come up with solutions to bigger problems. Social work programs are very different, so researching multiple institutions is also essential to the process.

Next Steps

The balance of practicing micro social work while still being able to think through a macro lens is a place where Karina thrives. Hoping to provide healing to people in whatever capacity they need it, Karina is a dedicated life long learner who plans to continue down this path. She will be at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia next year, providing counseling for college students as she nears the completion of her M.S.W. degree in 2019. After that, the possibilities are limitless as Karina makes her mark in the world.

*Written by Kai Mangino
Bonner Leader at The College of New Jersey '19*



To learn more about Karina, check out some of her favorite music genres:

- Neo-soul, R&B
- Salsa, Reggeaton