

“It’s Not About You...”



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With her spunky, upbeat personality, it’s hard not to feel at ease around LaVerne Parker, LMSW. Her energy and enthusiasm is what draws people to her—an important asset to have as a social worker and family advocate.

Parker has taught child welfare courses, mostly Introduction to Child Welfare, at BMCC since 2001. “It’s a foundation-laying introduction to children and families,” says the Harlem native, who graduated from CUNY Baruch and received her Master’s in Social Work from Fordham University.

“Oftentimes, my students come in not really understanding child abuse or neglect, and we learn what the differences are. Nor do they understand the dynamic or importance of families, even when those families appear to be dysfunctional.” Parker works for [ACS](#), New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services, a welfare agency that protects children from abuse and neglect.

She assists parents who are seeking early education or early care placements for their children so they can support their families. “If mom and dad have to go to work, the children need to be somewhere safe. I work in a department that’s called Family Support and Parent Services. I talk to parents and resolve their problems of access to child care,” she says. Parker’s official title is Executive Director of Family Support/Client Services (Division of Child Care and [Head Start Administration](#) for Children’s Services) and she translates her real-life experiences as a social worker into the classroom.

“The mission of child welfare is to protect children and support families. We, as a society, did not always care about children in the way we do now. So hopefully, at the end of the course, students will come away with a renewed understanding about families and children,” she says.
Award Recognition

When she’s not teaching or working for ACS, Parker and her husband spend time at

the Moriah Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to designing and implementing learning experiences for adolescents and adults.

According to Parker, the concept of the Moriah Institute is to provide life skills to young people. This spring, the Moriah Institute honored Parker by nominating her for a Founder's Day award in recognition of her work: providing quality services as a social worker to families in Harlem.

Of course, being the humble, modest woman she is, Parker initially wanted to reject the award. "I was very, very surprised when I was nominated for a Founder's Day award. I asked Rev. Mariah Britton of the Moriah Institute, 'Why me?' She said many people know about the work I do for children and families," recalls Parker. "Rev. Britton called my work 'significant.' I kept saying, 'But this is my job, this is what I do...'"

Luckily, Rev. Britton convinced Parker to accept the award. "And I'm glad I did," she says.

Getting rid of stuff

Parker believes "if you support the families, the families will take care of their children. That's one thing I try to make sure students understand: it's not about them," she says. "The issues that come up when working with families, or the things they bring from their own experiences, has nothing to do with the families or the child they're trying to help. They have to learn, what I call, 'how to get rid of their own stuff,' in order for them to have any chance of being effective."

Parker's passion for helping families is indeed a personal one. "It stems from growing up poor in NYC and experiencing what I call 'poor treatment' of parents who were just trying to take care of their children," she says. "People were very judgmental about those who needed help. If people didn't have the help and their children weren't taken of, that meant you were a bad parent."

One of Parker's favorite expressions is: "It's not about me..." which is what she uses as her mantra on a daily basis, as an educator

and a social worker.

"It's not about me. It's about every single mom, dad, grandma and aunt I have ever come in contact with who sincerely was trying to provide for the children in their family, who couldn't navigate the system, who had been told 'no'," she says. "It's about listening to parents crying because they don't want their children to go into foster care just because they don't have a little bit of help."

Stepping in

Parker shares two dear-to-her-heart scenarios in which she aided NYC parents: A mom who worked herself off welfare started a new job. At the start of her new job and new life, her childcare provider said they couldn't watch her child anymore because they lacked the resources necessary to watch the child during the hours requested by the mom.]

With no one to watch her child, the mother asked her boss for a day off so she could figure out what to do.

And she was fired.

Frantically, the mom called Parker who helped her arrange childcare from another agency. Parker also placed a call to the mom's boss, explaining the situation. "I asked if the mom could be given any consideration. And the boss gave her back the job."

In another situation, a mother was about to lose custody of her children because she had mold covering the ceiling of her home. Upon further inspection, Parker learned the mom had a folder full of repair request tickets to the NYC Housing Authority dating back months.

"Child services told the mother her children would be removed from the home immediately if the mold wasn't removed. I spent a Friday night calling the New York City housing authority until I found a supervisor and told him what happened. I said the mold needed to be removed immediately," says Parker. "When child

services came back to the home on Monday, the mold was completely gone.”

Tough love

Parker says the hardest, but most rewarding part of her job as a professor is teaching her students objectivity and analytical thought “because everyone thinks they know everything! They’ll say, ‘that’s not what I do in my family, in my religion, in my culture...when you confront them with the beliefs of others, and they don’t agree with you, they’ll shut down,’” says Parker.

However, her “tough love” approaches inside and outside the classroom have been effective.

Case in point—one student recently sent her an email that said: “It was a pleasure being in your class this semester. Even though you yelled at me a few times I understand why. The frustration of trying to get your point across must be hard, especially when we are so naïve. I’m learning to see the bigger picture—which isn’t about me, but about those I will be expected to help. I got your message.”

Last year, a BMCC alum who currently works at Beth Israel Medical Center told Parker: “I’ll always remember you and hold you dear to my heart.”

When she attended BMCC, Parker suggested this particular student look into a career as a judge, lawyer or agency director. The alum eventually received a Master’s Degree in Public Policy thanks the words of wisdom from her former Child Welfare professor.

“Your advice greatly influenced my career,” she told Parker.

An asset to social sciences

“LaVerne is such an asset to the department because she brings an excellent mix of ‘practice wisdom’ and professional values combined with a high level of educational expertise,” says Dr. Emily Anderson, Chairperson, Department of Social Science and Human Services. “In addition, because Professor Parker works daily with clients,

she reminds our students that advocacy on behalf of vulnerable clients is an important part of the social work code of ethics.”

Even though she’s won praise both inside and outside BMCC for more than 30 years, Parker will continue to remain bashful and modest about her community service.

However, there is one compliment that makes her beam with pride: “Just hearing a ‘thank you,’ even when I can’t tell you what you want to hear, but was as sincere as I could be and told you the truth so you so can protect your children...” her voice trails off, her eyes sparkle and she smiles.

“Honestly, I just love being told ‘thanks.’ That’s it for me—that’s why I love what I do. Those ‘thank you’s’ make it all worth it.”

To see a video of LaVerne click here: <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=2676>