

Met Council on Jewish Poverty Honors Crisis Worker

Social work requires not only academic training, hands-on experience, and dedication — it requires heart. With this passion for service, Elissa Smith came to the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty as a Columbia University graduate student intern in 1999. Since her internship, Elissa has become one of Met Council's most valued social workers. She has a strong commitment to the clients, an intuitive understanding of human struggle, and compassion coupled with sound academic and practical training. Elissa is also known for her great sense of humor, an indispensable quality in her field.

Elissa was born in New Jersey and raised in a family of caregivers; her mother was a nurse and her grandmother a nurse's aid. Her family exemplified the ideal of community service, which showed Elissa the importance of caring for others. She cites her mother and grandmother as the inspiration and impetus for her current calling to serve New York's needy.

Elissa received her bachelor's degree from the University of

Rhode Island in Human Development and Family Studies. Her first job was in Newport, R.I., where she worked as a court advocate for victims of domestic violence. There she learned how to advocate for clients and to empower those who felt they had nowhere to turn.

In 1998, Elissa went back to school to improve her skills to better serve those in need, earning her master's in social work from Columbia University. Her internship at Met Council enabled her to find her niche in the social service community. Working in the Crisis Unit with individuals and families facing eviction, homelessness, family violence and a range of other difficult life situations, Elissa knew that Met Council would be her next step after Columbia.

September 11, 2001, was Elissa's first day of work at Met Council. When she left the subway that morning, she experienced the horrific scenes that are now so famous. Located only four blocks from Ground Zero, Met Council's headquarter offices were at the heart of post-9/11 community

recovery efforts. Fresh out of school, Elissa spent much of her first year with Met Council working in the Crisis Intervention Program, serving hundreds of families affected by the horrendous attacks. Though this year was a challenge, Elissa rose to the occasion, and continues to do so with her clients on a daily basis.

In 2005, in recognition of her outstanding work and commitment, Elissa was promoted to Senior Social Worker. In addition to providing direct service to hundreds of crisis clients each year, Elissa now supervises seven crisis workers and coordinates the work of three interns in the Social Work Intern Program. This program provides master's-level social work students from several New York City schools with year-long internships in the Crisis unit. She also provides on-site social services at Met Council's senior residences on a weekly basis and is a favorite visitor of many of the older residents.

Elissa is proud to be part of an organization that stays true to its mission. We look forward to her continued exemplary work in the years ahead.