CSWE

Rooted *in* Resilience

HONORING THE PAST, GROUNDING THE PRESENT

CSWE ANNUAL CONFERENCE | ATLANTA, GA | OCTOBER 22–25, 2026

Resilience in Honoring the Past, Grounding the Present: A North American and Caribbean Perspective

A Partnership Session of the North American and Caribbean Association of Schools of Social Work (NACASSW)

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Overview of the Connect Session

This presentation highlights that resilience across North American and Caribbean communities is deeply intertwined with histories of colonization, enslavement, discrimination, migration, displacement, and resistance. The presentation concludes by outlining implications for ethnicity grounded, decolonial social work practice committed to building interconnected and just futures across North America and the Caribbean.

Resilience across North American and Caribbean Communities

From individual survival to collective strength

- Resilience is shaped by relationships, culture, history, and material conditions.
- Communities hold knowledge and resources that support healing.
- Strength should not be confused with the absence of distress.
- Resilience does not excuse institutions from addressing injustice.



Historical Context Matters

Resilience has a history

- Colonization and enslavement shaped social and economic structures.
- Displacement and migration reshaped families and communities.
- Racialization and exclusion continue to affect access to resources.
- Resistance, cultural continuity, and community-building are also part of this history.



Cultural Protective Factors

Where resilience takes root

- Kinship and extended family networks
- Spirituality, faith, and meaning-making
- Food, music, language, storytelling, and celebration
- Mutual aid, community organizations, and transnational ties



Intergenerational Trauma and Resilience

What is carried across generations?

- Family stories, silences, and memories
- Coping patterns and relationship expectations
- Experiences of loss, discrimination, and displacement
- Traditions, values, and strategies for survival



Diasporic Identity and Mental Health

Belonging across borders

- Identity may shift across generations and settings.
- Racism and discrimination can affect well-being, self worth and trust.
- Language, immigration experiences, and cultural expectations shape help-seeking.
- Transnational family relationships can offer support and create stress.



Culturally Grounded Healing

Connect memory with present-day safety

- Storytelling and life-history exploration
- Grounding through breath, senses, and the immediate environment
- Client-led acknowledgment of ancestors and family history
- Rituals, music, spirituality, or other practices chosen by the client



Applying a Decolonial Lens

Shift from assumptions to partnership

- Acknowledge and center different ways of knowing, learning and being Ask whose knowledge defines healing and resilience.
- Pivot away from Eurocentric notions of efficiency to allow slowness and reflection
- Recognize individual and community expertise alongside professional knowledge.
- Examine and deconstruct power, bias, and institutional barriers.
- Support client choice, self-determination, and collective agency.



Practice Example

From deficit-based assessment to collaborative inquiry

Illustrative composite scenario; not a report of an actual client.

An adult of Caribbean heritage describes family separation, discrimination, and pressure to remain strong while supporting relatives across borders.

- **Explore:** What feels most difficult now?
- **Recognize:** What has helped you and your family endure?
- **Collaborate:** Which supports and coping practices feel right to you?
- **Plan:** Identify one client-chosen step toward safety, connection, or well-being.



Learning Objectives in Practice

Three practice competencies

- **Contextualize:** Connect client experiences with sociohistorical and diasporic contexts.
- **Recognize:** Identify culturally embedded expressions of resilience.
- **Apply:** Use client-led grounding and strengths based narrative approaches to support safety and agency.



Conclusion and Discussion

- **Toward interconnected and just futures**
  - Honor historical memory without defining people by trauma.
  - Recognize culture and community as potential sources of strength.
  - Practice with humility, choice, and shared power.
  - Address structural barriers alongside individual needs.

- **Discussion question:** *What would change in our social work practice if resilience were understood as a collective and historical process, rather than solely an individual responsibility?*

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