



## Andrea Lang

HDFS B.S. (2004), M.S. (2009), Gero. Cert (2012)

### Current Position:

Special Projects/Program Coordinator,  
Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota



### **What about the HDFS program helped you achieve your current career?**

One of my greatest takeaways from my HDFS education is understanding the process of human development and aging. This knowledge has impacted how I engage with others both personally and professionally and helped me develop compassion for other people's circumstances; an important quality when working in a human services field. Also, I had the privilege of working as a research assistant for a professor within the HDFS department. A great opportunity! I was involved in many aspects of the research process including literature reviews, design, data collection and analysis, and report writing. These experiences enhanced my writing and critical thinking skills which I apply every day to my work.

### **What drew you to working in a career with older adults?**

At 15, I began work as a Dietary Assistant at Bethany Homes...I did this throughout my senior year at NDSU – 7 ½ years in total! What kept me there? The residents! The joys of interacting with them, hearing their life stories and absorbing the wisdom they shared over the years planted a seed in my heart that, ultimately, drew me to pursue a career in gerontology. Knowing that the work I'm involved in now has a positive impact on older adults in need reassures me that I'm working for the greater good and connected to something greater than myself. That is what

keeps me in this field.

### **What does an average workday look like for you?**

For me, a typical workday includes a little bit of everything! As Program Coordinator of the Senior and Volunteer Companion programs, much of my time is focused on volunteer recruitment and management...I also regularly update program materials and develop written correspondence that reaches clients, volunteers, volunteer stations and other supporters. My Special Projects Coordinator role involves finding innovative ways to help older North Dakotans live safely and independently in their homes and identifying potential funding sources to bring these ideas to fruition.

### **What is your favorite part about your current career?**

My favorite aspect of coordinating the programs is hearing stories about how the volunteers' in-home visits brighten the lives of the older adults they serve and listening to the volunteers gush about how their visits with older adults gives them a sense of purpose and fulfillment. A full circle process that is beautiful to witness and be a part of! ...I enjoy helping to develop new strategies that empower older adults to live happy, independent lives. Some projects flourish and some don't. Either way, I always learn something new and valuable that I can apply the next time around!

## Andrea Lang, LSS-ND

### **Andrea's Advice to Current HDFS Students**

College cannot prepare you for every work-related challenge you will be faced with, but it does give you a solid foundation to build from. My advice is to take advantage of as many learning opportunities as possible, now and throughout your career, and to embrace challenge. You know that uncomfortable feeling you get (and that I still get) when presented with a task you've never done before? That is when an opportunity for growth is upon you. Step outside your comfort zone, have faith in your ability to figure it out and, if you get stuck, ask for assistance. Soon, you will have a variety of skills to showcase on your resume to attract the kind of job and employer you want!

A specific example of how my gerontology coursework helped prepare me for my career came soon after accepting my Program Coordinator position with LSSND. An executive team member asked me and a colleague to explore ways the agency could support the changing needs of North Dakota's aging population. At that time, both of us had completed a graduate certificate in gerontology. Having knowledge about aging and experience working with older adults made us the right candidates for the job! After researching, developing and sharing our proposal, I was asked to continue my work by assisting with future senior independence project development as needed. I did this in combination with my Program Coordinator role for several years and accepted a permanent half-time Special Projects Coordinator position in 2019. This allows me to be more hands-on with senior independence program development and sustainability. A challenge that I very much enjoy!

It's been many years since I completed my schooling at NDSU and I can still say, without reservation, that HDFS was the right field of study for me. I encourage undergraduate students that may be interested in advancing their knowledge to visit with their academic advisor about the HDFS master's and graduate certificate programs. I also have a recent career highlight to share! I'm currently supervising an HDFS field experience student from NDSU! She is pursuing a career in gerontology and has worked alongside me and my Senior Independence colleagues doing a variety of career-building tasks. I remember my days as an HDFS field experience student and embrace the opportunity to give back by mentoring other students embarking on their professional journeys. Another "full circle" moment. Go Bison!