

2024-25

Impact Report

Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship Program

**“THE FELLOWSHIP CULTIVATED CONFIDENCE
AND REAFFIRMED MY COMMITMENT
TO SERVING POPULATIONS EXPERIENCING
PROFOUND CHALLENGES...”**

—Anjali Pinto, Schweitzer Fellow, Rush (Nursing)

**THE ALBERT
SCHWEITZER
FELLOWSHIP®**

Chicago Area

**HEALTH &
MEDICINE**
POLICY RESEARCH GROUP

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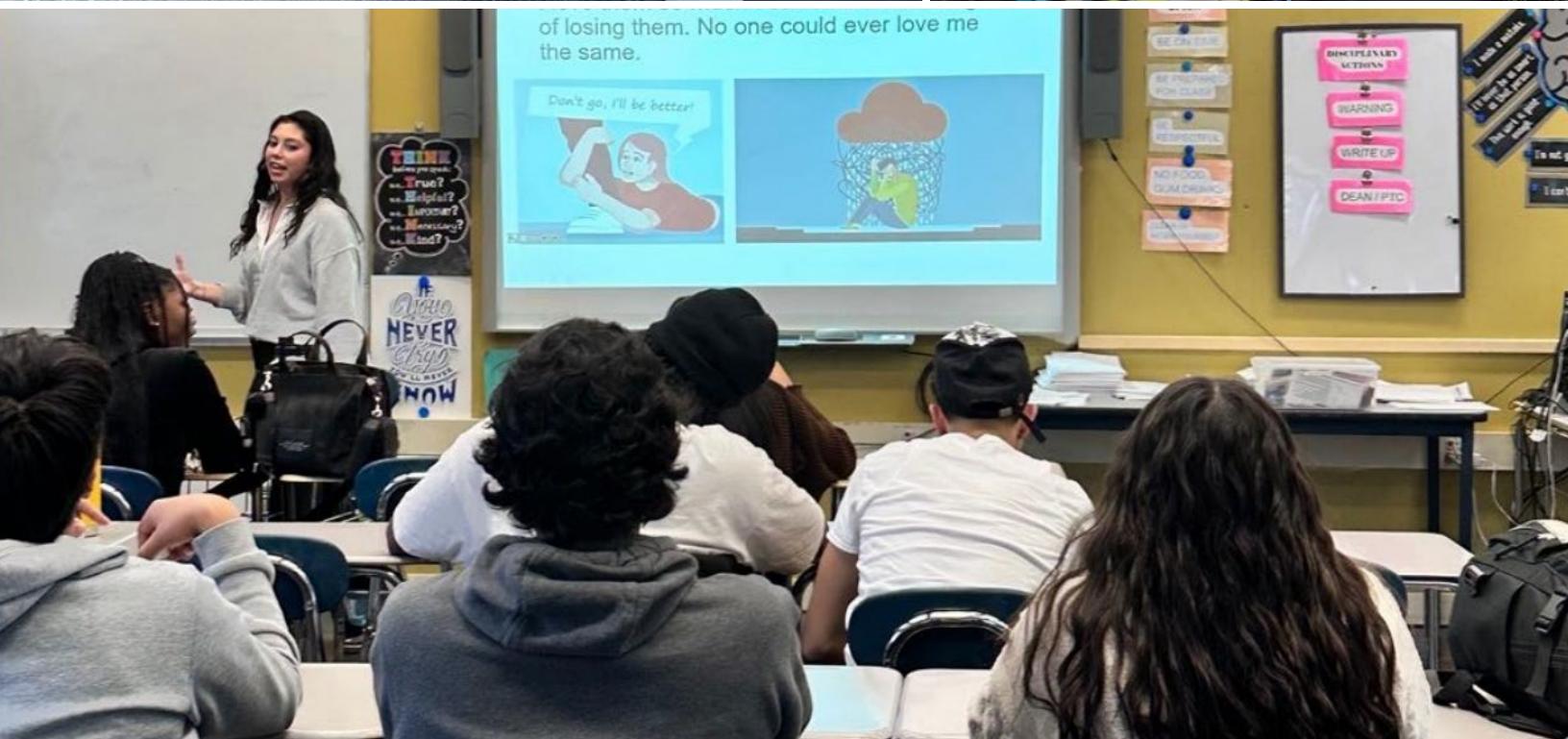
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Introduction to the Schweitzer Fellowship

Since 1996, Health & Medicine's Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship has trained graduate and professional students to advance health equity and diversify the workforce. Each year, 26 Fellows design and deliver critical service-learning projects that address the social and structural determinants of health. Fellows' projects improve access to health services, promote preventive care, and provide essential social support while addressing root causes of persistent health disparities.

The Schweitzer Fellowship Program's interdisciplinary approach exposes students to real-world collaborative problem-solving and care. Fellows are selected annually from the fields of medicine, nursing, public health, pharmacy, social work, psychology, and other health-related disciplines. They are united in their pursuit of health equity in the Chicago area.

Guided by our curriculum in asset-based community development, Fellows learn to build on community strengths and collaborate in ways that ensure projects can be sustained long after the Fellowship year. The program unites students, faculty, and community partners in a shared commitment to service and lasting impact.

→ [Watch this video](#) to learn more about the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship.



Raising Voices, Strengthening Communities

Schweitzer Fellows are not only making an impact in their communities through direct service projects—they are also shaping the public conversation on health equity. From local newspapers to national outlets, Fellows and alumni are raising their voices to highlight urgent issues in health care access, policy, and justice.

→ Visit In the News: [Schweitzer Fellows' Op-Eds](#) for more info.

In the 2024–25 cohort, Fellows worked alongside migrants, people who are unhoused or in transitional housing, those experiencing interpersonal violence, underserved youth, and other communities. Their projects drew on education, art, and community resources to foster healing, growth, and stronger connections. By learning with and from community members, Fellows built relationships that support a collective approach to strengthening community health.

Wound Care Belongs in Opioid Use Harm Reduction Efforts

Nicole Walkowiak
2024-2025 Schweitzer Fellow
Rush University, Nursing

Project Focus: Wound care education for pts w/ wounds
Project Site: The Night Ministry

More than a Meal: Why Food Insecurity is a Mental Health Issue

Saranya Menon
2024-2025 Schweitzer Fellow
University of Illinois at Chicago, Medicine

Project Focus: Build upon the healthy eating habits of women who have previously faced homelessness
Project Site: Deborah's Place



Each Fellow undertakes a 13-month project in partnership with a community organization, grounded in a critical service-learning model. Rather than attempting to “fix” problems, Fellows center community priorities and recognize the lived expertise of those closest to the issues. Through this work, they practice combining action with reflection—serving an ideal of health equity and challenging inequities in current systems. When they complete the program, Fellows leave not only with new skills but also with a lasting commitment to act as agents of change, applying their passion and training to advance healthier, more just communities.

The 2024–25 Fellowship Projects

Mohammad Abdallah, University of Illinois at Chicago, Pharmacy

Mohammad collaborated with UI Health to enhance access to smoking cessation services for underserved patients in Cook County.

Kavya Anjur, University of Illinois Chicago, Medicine

Kavya created a series of wellness classes for women and children in domestic violence shelters through the Connections for Abused Women and Their Children Program.

Rachel Barnett, Loyola University, Medicine

Rachel collaborated with Maywood Fine Arts to create sustainable mental health and wellness programming for students ages 6–18.

Daniel Benedum, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Art Therapy

Daniel designed a creative zine and character art workshop aimed at reducing stressors affecting LGBTQ+ youth while increasing positive resiliency factors.



Schweitzer Fellows gather to learn from one another and deepen their shared commitment to improving the health and well-being of Chicago's underserved communities.

Brian Carter, Northwestern University, Medicine

Brian partnered with Legal Council for Health Justice to train community members to advocate for solutions to legal barriers to accessing quality health care services in their communities.

Kevin Chen, University of Chicago, Medicine

Kevin partnered with the Chinese American Service League to provide educational lessons and group exercise sessions to address the increasing burden of musculoskeletal problems in the senior Chinese population.

Ateh Fonteh, Northwestern University, Medicine

Ateh worked with Chicago Help Initiative to increase community understanding of chronic health conditions and healthy lifestyle behaviors among unhoused adults in Near North.

Jesse Gamoran, DePaul University, Clinical-Community Psychology

Jesse collaborated with The Boulevard, a medical respite shelter for unhoused individuals, to enhance the sense of community among residents and staff and reduce staff burnout.

Axel Garcia, Roosevelt University, Pharmacy

Axel partnered with Rush Medical Center through the Rush Generations program to provide the Latino immigrant population of Chicago's South and Southwest sides with Spanish education on medications and affordable health care.

Ivory Griffin, Northeastern Illinois University, Public Health

Ivory led the Academic Connection Experience (ACE) program, which helped adolescents receiving mental health care at Hartgrove Behavioral Health System address academic and environmental stressors.

Sayyida Hasan, Rush University, Medicine

Sayyida partnered with the Salvation Army and Box United to increase movement and health literacy in adolescent girls in the Humboldt Park neighborhood.

Grace Keegan, University of Chicago, School of Medicine

Grace partnered with Firebird Community Arts to implement an emergency preparedness and empowerment program for people affected by or at risk of community violence.

Saranya Menon, University of Illinois at Chicago, Medicine

Saranya worked with Deborah's Place on the West and North sides of Chicago to improve knowledge about nutrition and its relation to mental health.

Erika Meraz, Roosevelt University, Biomedical Science

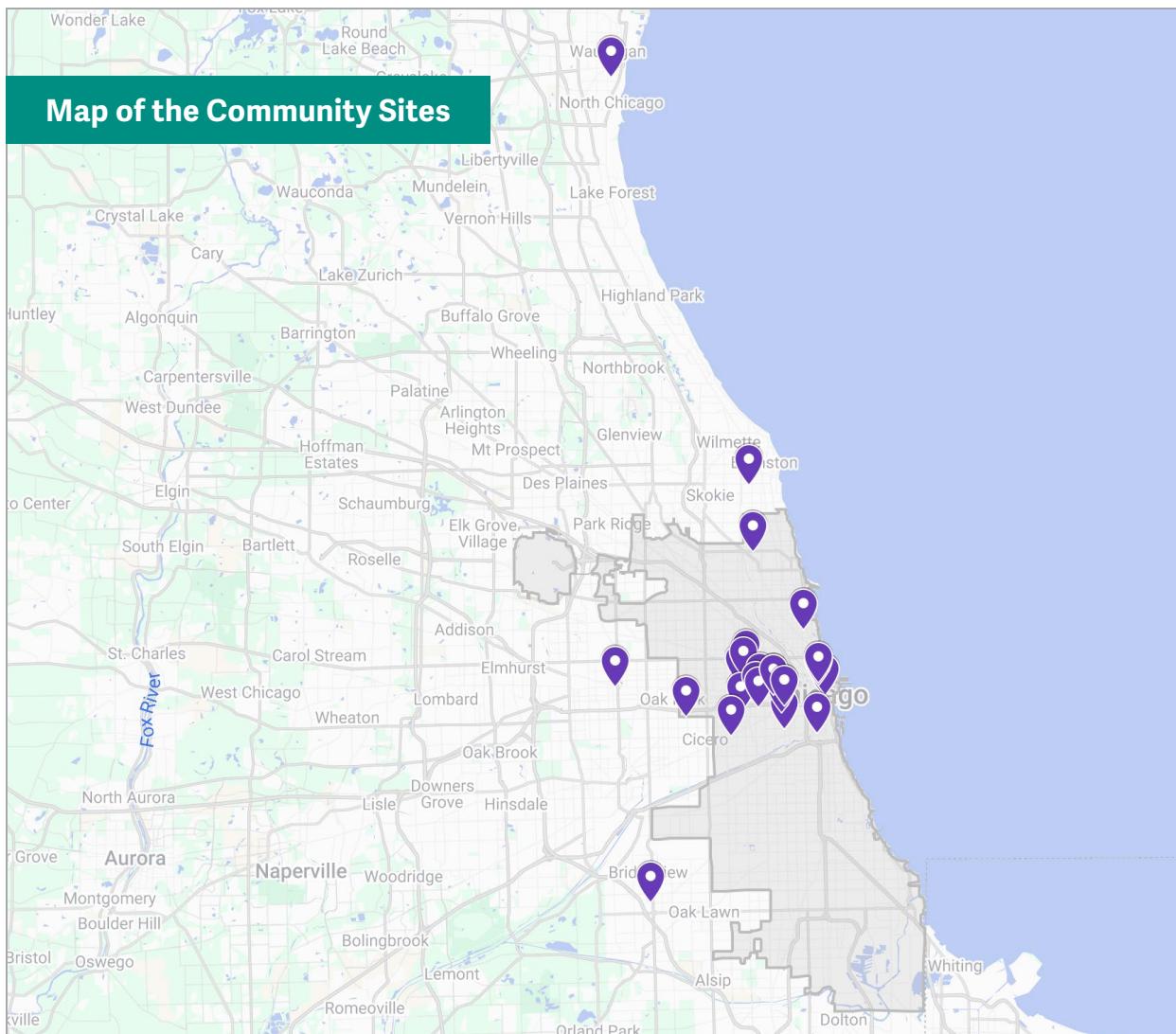
Erika partnered with The Resurrection Project and IWS Family Health Center to increase health insurance literacy among the Latine community in Chicago.

Roberto Mizhquiri, DePaul University, Nursing

Roberto worked side by side with The Peace Exchange to enhance mental health literacy, self-management skills, and advocacy among youth in North Lawndale.

Deniz Namik, University of Illinois at Chicago, Dentistry

Deniz collaborated with RefugeeOne to decrease oral healthcare disparities among refugee, asylum-seeking, and immigrant populations in the Chicagoland area.



"The 2024–25 cohort of Schweitzer Fellows showed extraordinary creativity, resilience, and compassion. Each Fellow not only designed and implemented a project that met urgent community needs, but also built lasting relationships rooted in trust and respect. From addressing mental health and housing to expanding access to dental care and violence prevention, their work reflects the full spectrum of what health equity requires."

Karol Dean, Program Director, Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship

Katie Owens, Northwestern University, Medicine
In partnership with Chicago Help Initiative, Katie facilitated health education sessions on diabetes and heart health for people experiencing homelessness in downtown Chicago.

Binita Pandya, Rosalind Franklin University, Medicine
Binita coordinated efforts with Roberti Community House to increase health agency and help community members make positive everyday health decisions and navigate health systems.

Anjali Pinto, University of Illinois at Chicago, Nursing
Anjali partnered with Lawndale Christian Health Center to support new migrant families living in shelters, focusing on parents of newborns.

Trevor Poulson, Rush University, Medicine

Trevor worked with the CURE clinic to integrate ophthalmology services and address a critical gap in vision care for homeless and migrant populations on Chicago's west side.

Sara Ruiz, Loyola University, Public Health

Sara collaborated with Erie Family Health Centers to increase awareness of intimate partner violence and teen dating violence.

Nicole Safran, Rush University, Nursing

Nicole partnered with Saint Leonard's Ministries to provide weekly programming for justice-involved men, focusing on health topics of interest to residents.

Hussein Salem, University of Illinois at Chicago, Dentistry

Hussein partnered with the Aden Center, a Yemeni American community center, to promote oral health and nutrition among underserved Middle Eastern communities in Bridgeview and the north side of Chicago.

Ismihan Uddin, Midwestern University, Medicine

Through Chi-Care, Ismihan launched the Mobile Care Medical Van to provide essential health care services to the unhoused community in Chicago.

Suvitha Viswanathan, Loyola University, Medicine

Suvitha worked with Gilda's Club to offer patient-centered educational workshops on sexual health, pleasure, and intimacy for women and people affected by cancer.

Nicole Walkowiak, Rush University, Nursing

Nicole partnered with The Night Ministry to work with people who inject drugs in Chicago, primarily on the city's west side.

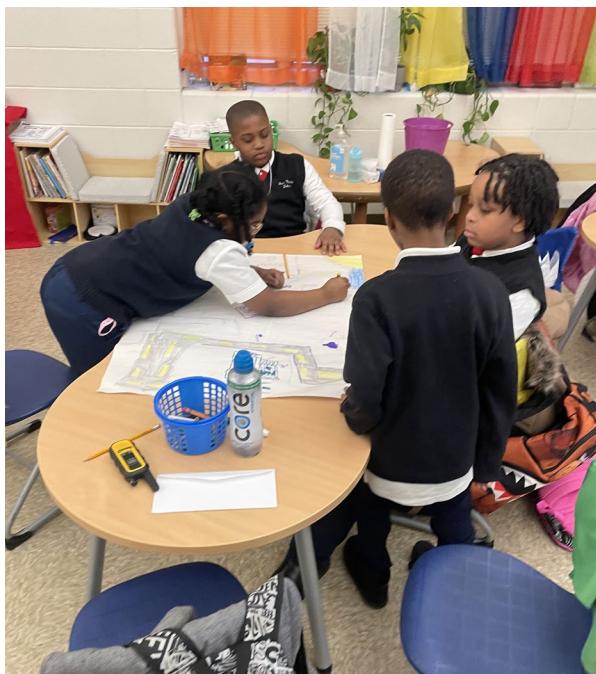
Building Solutions Together: Fellows' Policy and Action Ideas

Every year, Schweitzer Fellows work in interprofessional teams to examine pressing issues affecting the health of Chicago-area communities. Through dialogue, collaboration, and research, Fellows not only deepen their understanding of health equity challenges—they also generate ideas for meaningful change.

The following summaries highlight what each group explored and the recommendations they developed. These are not meant as formal policy platforms, but as a window into how tomorrow's health leaders are thinking about systemic barriers and imagining solutions.

Build "Third Spaces" to Support Immigrant Integration

Fellows **Kevin Chen, Deniz Namik, Binita Pandya, Anjali Pinto, and Ismihan Uddin** examined how immigrant and refugee communities in Chicago often face isolation, reduced access to services, and limited cultural representation. They recommended the intentional creation of "third spaces"—such as cultural centers, libraries, or multipurpose hubs—that foster connection and support. By partnering with immigrant-led organizations, they envision neighborhoods where newcomers feel welcomed and empowered.



Strengthen Social Emotional Learning in Chicago Public Schools

Fellows **Rachel Bartnett, Daniel Benedum, Brian Carter, Ivory Griffin, Grace Keegan, and Roberto Mizhquiri** examined the uneven adoption of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards in Chicago Public Schools. They noted that nearly 70% of CPS schools report no SEL curriculum, despite research showing its importance for mental health, empathy, and decision-making. Their recommendations call for broader implementation of SEL resources, tailored to diverse school contexts, and an expansion of the interdisciplinary professionals allowed to provide mental health support in schools.



Increase and Improve Transitional Housing

Fellows **Jesse Gamoran, Erika Meraz, Trevor Poulson, Nicole Safran, and Katie Owens** examined the shortage of transitional and affordable housing in Chicago. They noted that current funding models often prioritize short-term shelter beds rather than long-term stability. Their recommendations call for increased investment in supportive housing paired with health and social services, with an emphasis on giving residents agency in shaping the programs meant to serve them.

Challenge the Dissolution of the Department of Education

Fellows **Mohammad Abdallah, Kavya Anjur, Sayyida Hasan, Sara Ruiz, and Suvitha Viswanathan** considered the national debate about dissolving the U.S. Department of Education and its potential impact on vulnerable students. They highlighted the Department's role in ensuring equitable access to meals, disability services, financial aid, and Title IX protections. Their group emphasized the connection between educational equity and health outcomes, stressing the need to protect existing safeguards and strengthen state-level policies that reduce barriers for low-income students.

Improve Health Literacy Through Education

Fellows **Ateh Fonteh, Axel Garcia, Saranya Menon, Hussein Salem, and Nicole Walkowiak** focused on the link between health literacy, education, and health disparities in Chicago. They pointed to geographic divides in life expectancy and school completion rates, recommending support for funding models that strengthen under-resourced schools and expanded roles for social workers in medical settings. Their vision centers on giving all Chicagoans the knowledge and tools needed to navigate health systems and live healthier lives.

Partners Who Make Our Work Possible

We would like to thank the following Academic Partners and Community Organization Partners for their support of the 2024–25 Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows cohort.

Academic Partners

	<i>Number of Fellows</i>
DePaul University	2
Loyola University	3
Midwestern University	1
Northeastern Illinois University	1
Northwestern University	3
Roosevelt University	2
Rosalind Franklin University	1
Rush University	4
School of the Art Institute of Chicago	1
University of Chicago	2
University of Illinois Chicago	6

Community Partners

Aden Center
Chi-Care
Chicago Help Initiative
Chicago Public Schools
Chinese American Service League (CASL)
Connections for Abused Women and Their Children
Deborah's Place
Erie Family Health Centers Evanston/Skokie
Firebird Community Arts
Franciscan Outreach
Gilda's Club Chicago
Hartgrove Behavioral Health Facility
Holy Family Ministries
Lawndale Christian Health Center
Legal Council for Health Justice
Maywood Fine Arts Association
RefugeeOne
Roberti Community House
RUSH Social Work & Community Health
Salvation Army
St. Leonard's Ministries
The Boulevard
The Night Ministry
The Resurrection Project
University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System

"I'm far more optimistic about the future than I was a year ago. Knowing that my project was only one of 26 in the cohort, that our cohort was one of many across the nation, and that countless people around the world unaffiliated with the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship in any way are doing their own part to advance health equity gives me hope. With the strength of the people in the fight and with justice on our side I truly believe we will be closer to health equity tomorrow than we were yesterday."

Brian Carter, Schweitzer Fellow, Northwestern University (Medicine)

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"The Schweitzer fellowship and project experience furthered my understanding that oral health is deeply influenced by social and environmental determinants such as language, trauma, socio-economic status, and immigration. I anticipate applying the tools I practiced (i.e., trauma-informed and culturally sensitive education) in my dental career. Service will continue to be a cornerstone of my work, and I hope to lead others in creating compassionate, community-rooted practices. We cannot help and empower communities if we do not have a community ourselves, which is something that being a Schweitzer fellow taught me.

Deniz Namik, Schweitzer Fellow, University of Illinois Chicago (Dentistry)

Thank You

We are grateful to our partners, funders, and community collaborators who make this work possible. Your support ensures that Fellows can learn, serve, and lead in advancing health equity across Chicago.

Foundations

Anonymous
Blowitz-Ridgeway Foundation
Delta Dental of Illinois
Michael Reese Health Trust
Polk Bros. Foundation
VNA Foundation

Universities

DePaul University Master of Public Health Program
Midwestern University Chicago College of
Osteopathic Medicine
Northwestern University
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine
and Science
Rush University Medical Center
UIC College of Dentistry
UIC College of Medicine
University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine

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MD, Fellowship)
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Perlman Named Fellowship)

And we thank our many individual and monthly donors.

Support a Fellow!

Supporting a Schweitzer Fellow costs approximately \$16,000 each year and directly benefits hundreds of community members across Chicago. With your partnership, we can continue to train and inspire a new generation of health professionals who are committed to advancing equity and building healthier communities.

We invite universities, foundations, and private donors to consider sponsoring a Named Fellow, supporting the program as a whole, or partnering with us to strengthen Chicago's health workforce. Every investment ensures that Fellows have the mentorship, training, and resources they need to carry forward projects that make a lasting difference.

*For information about supporting a fellow,
reach out to Shannon Sweetnam, Director
of Development and Communications
at ssweetnam@hmprg.org.*

Get in Touch

*For information about the program, reach out to
Karol Dean, Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship
Program Director, kdean@hmprg.org.*

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