

# 2025-2026 *Strategic Plan*



## THE ALLIANCE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN SPORTS

Established in 2015, ASWIS raises awareness of how social work practice can partner with and contribute to all levels and all segments of sports. Indeed, the sport social work field has a long history. Starting in the late 1800s, Jane Addams and colleagues recognized that sport-based activities were an important intervention to preserve childhood, encourage physical activity and play, and promote cross-cultural interactions (Reynolds, 2017). Early sport social work education even offered elective courses that focused on training staff in recreation program planning, and field education opportunities and provided a certificate upon completion of the program.

In 1995, one of the most powerful social justice advocates of all time, Nelson Mandela, used the power of sport through rugby to unite individuals in the Apartheid era in South Africa. Mandela famously said, “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there was once only despair. It is more powerful than the government in breaking down racial barriers.” (Fraser, 2021, para. 4). As sport social workers, we follow in the footsteps of Jane Addams and Nelson Mandela, always reminded of the importance, power, and effectiveness of using sport as an intervention to improve the quality of life for the millions who participate in organized sports and recreational activities.

The early 2000s saw a resurgence of interest among social workers about their role in athletic spaces. Several gatherings occurred on college campuses that supported the growth of the discipline. Programs that integrated sports and social work emerged including LifeSports, students and faculty at the University of Michigan, and other colleges and universities across the US, hosted conferences dedicated to social work in sport. ASWIS grew out of a need to bring these many social work professionals together. As a result of these successful efforts to collaborate in raising awareness and providing education as to the effectiveness of using sports social work as an intervention, several schools of social work began to add sport social work training in the classroom and through sport-focused practicum opportunities.

ASWIS promotes social work from a sports perspective, grounded in social and economic justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), strengths-based approaches, and person-in-environment frameworks. ASWIS encourages the full range of social work practice in sports, from case management and clinical services to community outreach to advocacy and policy practice for every level and segment of sports. ASWIS finalized its incorporation in June 2016 and became an official 501(c)(3) in March 2017. The organization maintains an active and diverse membership of clinical professionals, community practitioners, researchers and scholars, students, and professionals from other disciplines equally committed to serving athletes and athletic communities. Members are primarily from the United States, yet increasingly from around the world. The organization is led by a membership-elected team and also maintains both a professional certificate program and advances scholarship through its academic journal, the *Sport Social Work Journal*.



## WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK IN SPORTS?

Sport Social Work is defined as the practice subfield of social work that promotes social justice and social change by focusing on the unique needs of athletes, their allies, and the communities where they live, at both the individual and environmental level, promoting human and community well-being (Kratz & Rosado, 2022). Sport social workers promote this area of health and well-being through direct practice, community organizing, advocacy, policy development, education, and research. Sport social workers use sports as an intervention to teach life skills to youth and seek to enhance the capabilities of athletes to address their behavioral health and psychosocial needs. They encourage athletes to be advocates for change and use sport as a platform to advance social change. Sport social workers encourage athletic organizations, communities, and other social institutions to recognize athletes at all levels as vulnerable populations and to join in the fight to reduce the challenges present in athletics. At the heart of these efforts there is a focus on athlete development and wellness. A social worker achieves this focus through the competencies of the social work profession and adherence to the values and ethics of the social work profession (Moore & Gummelt, 2018).



## » WHO WE ARE

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports is to promote individual and community well-being through partnerships between the profession of social work and the field of athletics. We focus on partnerships in practice, research, and policy, with involvement and awareness in all areas where social work and sports systems intersect.

### VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to lead the integration of social work practice into all realms of sports with the goals of individual and community well-being.

### VALUE STATEMENTS

1. To raise awareness for the needs of athletes and enhance the well-being and effective functioning of athletes through advocacy, research, case coordination, counseling, and policy change.
2. To provide knowledge on how athletic competition influences an athlete across the lifespan.
3. To identify the strengths of athletes and how these strengths can help promote an athlete's safety and well-being.
4. To promote awareness of the significant challenges that are placed on athletes.
5. To help athletes recognize how athletic competition can expose life skills that will promote their success outside of sport.
6. To give athletes a voice so they can lead destigmatization efforts and advocate for athletes as true global citizens

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

ASWIS understands that a precise and critically developed strategic plan provides the blueprint for our collective growth. Having clearly stated mission, vision, and value statements provide the overarching objective of ASWIS. However, the specific goals outlined in this strategic plan give us precise tasks for achieving our prominent objective. We will use this strategic plan to guide our work for the upcoming two years (2025 - 2026). In the end, maintaining integrity towards this plan will gain our members access to new resources, continue to inspire a subfield of social workers, as well as draw local, state, national, and global attention to the well-being and functioning of athletes.

### GOAL ONE: MEMBERSHIP EDUCATION

Recognizing the value our membership brings to ASWIS, we would like to return their investment through educational opportunities and growing their professional network. In particular, we seek to do the following:

1. Develop a minimum of four Continuing Education Units (CEUs) (one per quarter) on an annual basis. These will be on topics of importance to our members and further enhance their understanding, application, and evaluation of sport social work concepts.
2. Provide CEUs at our annual Sport Social Work Symposium at a reduced rate to our membership and attendees. We will offer a minimum of ten CEUs at the symposium.
3. Organize a semi-annual ASWIS listening session for our membership to discuss feedback on what we do to support members.
4. Host two one-day training and educational opportunities for ASWIS members and the community in key regional locations, promoting equitable access to high-quality, evidenced-based learning opportunities. These trainings should have a synchronous option and could be hosted with other partners.

### GOAL TWO: COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT

The Executive Committee created a list of standing committees and subgroups to help ASWIS achieve established goals. The success of ASWIS is only as great as the success of each individual committee and subgroup. To promote the success of each committee and subgroup, we seek to do the following:

1. Fully staff each committee of ASWIS. This includes identifying a committee chair based on the policies and procedures established in the ASWIS bylaws or by the Executive Committee. The active committees of ASWIS include the Executive Committee, Clinicians Committee, Field Education Committee, Conference Planning Committee, and Research Committee.
2. Establish a working agenda for each standing committee. These agendas should help ASWIS meet the goals set forth in this strategic plan. Furthermore, the agendas should establish a framework for enhancing the quality of ASWIS membership and the impact ASWIS has on the sport social work profession.
3. Promote committee transparency by providing clear objectives created by the committee chair and the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee and committee chair will review the progress of these objectives during monthly Executive Committee meetings. This can be done through attendance at the meeting or with a written report for Executive Committee review.

### GOAL THREE: MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

The growth of ASWIS depends heavily on the recruitment of new members and renewal of existing memberships. It is our collective voice as a mounting group that positions ASWIS, the social work profession, and our members to better serve the athlete population. We aim to achieve the following as it relates to growing our membership base:

1. Increase visibility and awareness by leveraging social media and digital content. This includes the growth of followers on ASWIS social media accounts and maintaining a regular cadence for sharing stories, promoting members, and marketing events.
2. Collaborate with educational institutions with social work or sport programs to establish partnerships, offer student discounts or memberships, and create internship opportunities (see ASWIS Field Education Manual).
3. Engage current members in recruitment through a referral program that can reduce their individual cost of membership.
4. Actualize all the benefits and features of the Join It Membership Software.

## GOAL FOUR: INFRASTRUCTURE

It is the goal of ASWIS to serve as a model non-profit organization. To achieve this goal the following are necessary:

1. Maintain non-profit status and transition the non-profit status to the Commonwealth of Kentucky.
2. Maintain a current Employer Identification Number (EIN) with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).
3. Establish and maintain bylaws that provide policies and procedures for the mission of ASWIS. This includes details for hosting annual leadership elections.
4. Hire and sustain a full-time staff member (Program Coordinator) to help with day-to-day operations of ASWIS.

## GOAL FIVE: POLICY

Influencing policy supports the advocacy arm of ASWIS and shines a local, state, national, and global spotlight on our grassroots efforts. To achieve this goal the following are necessary:

1. Maintain a policy platform that provides strong sport social work position statements on matters pertaining to well-being and functioning. Utilize this policy platform as a springboard for legislative tracking and lobbying (See Policy Platform).
2. Respond to requests from national governing bodies, local sport organizations, and other outlets by sharing the expertise of our membership.
3. Raise public awareness of policies and legislation impacting sport social work and develop policy recommendations and toolkits to support sport social work professionals.

## GOAL SIX: RESEARCH

Research is necessary to raise awareness for the needs of athletes and to provide knowledge on how athletic competition influences an athlete across their lifespan. ASWIS sees research as a unifier between members who could work collaboratively on projects. Furthermore, having members present their research at local, state, national, and international conferences provides necessary publicity for ASWIS and a needed voice for athletes. In particular, ASWIS seeks to do the following:

1. Provide a source of ongoing support for early career scholars who are engaged in scholarly activities (e.g., course work, dissertation, job market) that examine the intersection of social work and sport. ASWIS research grants can support these efforts.
2. Members of the Alliance will present at local, state, national, and international conferences throughout the calendar year.
3. Submit grant applications to fund ASWIS projects and initiatives.
4. Support the efforts of the *Sport Social Work Journal*, the Sport Social Work Research Lab, and the International Institute for Sport and Behavioral Health.

## GOAL SEVEN: SPORT SOCIAL WORK SYMPOSIUM

ASWIS is committed to hosting an annual symposium on the integration, application, and evaluation of social work in sports. The symposium provides a peer-reviewed format for disseminating research, practice knowledge, and advocacy for the sport social work movement. The symposium also serves as an excellent networking opportunity. The goals for upcoming conferences include:

1. Hosting the 2025 symposium in New Orleans, LA and the 2026 symposium in a location TBD.
2. Offer a variety of peer-reviewed presentation styles at the symposium and invite prominent keynote and featured speakers to the conference that highlight the diversity of athletics.
3. Offer pre-conference training institutes based on topics identified by membership.





### **GOAL EIGHT: FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

The financial state of ASWIS is essential to achieving the goals established in this strategic plan. Having disposable resources provides ASWIS the ability to lead the integration of social work into all realms of sports. We aim to achieve the following as it relates to fiscal management:

1. Establish specific financial goals for an investment account (e.g., brokerage account, mutual fund, or other investment vehicle).
2. Determine the desired annual return on investments and how funds will be accessed (e.g., for specific initiatives, events, or member services).
3. Seek professional financial advisors or investment consultants with expertise in nonprofit financial planning to ensure that investment strategies align with goals and that ASWIS remains in compliance with tax laws and regulations.

### **GOAL NINE: WEBSITE AND COMMUNICATION**

All organizations need a central hub where members can access and share information. Our website serves as the primary source for information about ASWIS. We also seek to offer additional modes of communication to our members and to the larger community. This is done through dissemination of a quarterly digital newsletter and use of various social media accounts. Knowing the value our website and these other forms of communication have in educating a worldwide audience, we aim to:

1. Re-brand the website with resources for the general public, our membership, and those looking to join us in our efforts to promote the well-being and functioning of athletes.
2. Utilize social media to expand ASWIS presence.

### **GOAL TEN: FORMAL EDUCATION**

Recognizing the need to position social workers for careers in athletics, the ASWIS believes a Sport Social Work Certificate Program or specialized courses at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels could provide the excellence in education, research, practice, and service necessary for social workers to play a large role in promoting the social justice of athletes. To maintain the Sport Social Work Certificate Program and to create special topics college courses, ASWIS must:

1. Working with a university partner to maintain a platform for hosting the certificate program.
2. Work with institutes of higher education to promote sport social work courses and formal degree pathways.
3. Building out practicum (field) education programs for sport social work placements.

