



## Dr. Karen A. Polonko

August 22, 2016

Dr. Karen A. Polonko passed away on August 22, 2016, at her home in Norfolk, Virginia. Karen's passing followed a nearly year long battle with pancreatic cancer. Karen is survived by the family she dearly loved: Her sister Isle and niece Sasha of Hardwick, NJ; her sister Jacqueline of Brooklyn, NY; and her twin brother Dennis and nieces Christine and Cara of East Brunswick NJ.

Karen received her BA in Sociology from Manhattanville College and her MA and PhD in Sociology from Indiana University.

Karen joined the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Old Dominion University in 1983 and achieved the rank of University Professor in 1991. During her time at ODU, Karen gave much to the University, her College of Arts and Letters, her beloved department and to the thousands of students she challenged and mentored as they developed knowledge, skills and a desire to make the world around them a better place.

Above all, Karen was a scholar who challenged and an activist who sought to bring about social change. Karen was active in the early days of the ODU Women's Caucus and helped to develop the early forward-looking policy on sexual harassment and policies on gender equity in the workplace! She was also a leader in curriculum development having spearheaded the

development and implementation of the Interdisciplinary Minor in Children's Rights.

Karen also left a mark on thousands of students when she and her students developed the student organization, IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN in 1990. With Karen's leadership as faculty advisor, this organization has lead the way in advocating for children in the Hampton Roads community and beyond with chapters in several colleges around the country and a high school in New Jersey. Through its educational programming that brought world leaders from many fields relating to child maltreatment and its effects, its community-wide child abuse prevention fairs, its annual vigils for children who have died as a result of abuse, this group of activists has supported the now global effort to end corporal punishment of children. Their motto "It's NEVER ok to HIT A CHILD!" has spread worldwide. Karen was also instrumental in advocating and helping many national organizations develop policy statements advocating for an end to corporal punishment, and in advocating and supporting the work of many institutions in developing NO HIT ZONES to help change the social norms! The effect of her work in this area will be felt for generations to come and the ripple effect of her extraordinary contributions has impacted and made better the lives of countless thousands of children.

Early in her career Karen's scholarship focused on analyzing new developments in the changing nature of families, and culminated with the publishing of an article "Law Reform, Child Maltreatment and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" in the International Journal of Children's Rights early in 2016. This article is currently being studied by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. For Karen this article was a 'labor of love', something she had to complete. Though it took over 10 years to finish this article, the struggles to understand law, international law, legal change, and the implementation processes associated with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the completion of it brought the satisfaction of knowing

she made this contribution before she passed. With this article, Karen's 15 years of scholarly efforts to educate scholars, practitioners, and the general public through her many publications and presentations about the effects and need to end child maltreatment was achieved.

Karen saw the world as her home and sought to instill that sense of belonging in everyone she could. To that end she travelled the world taking students and loved ones with her, and presenting her life's work at conferences and to NGO and world leaders. Her international conference leadership culminated with a presentation reviewing and re-conceptualizing the international literature on child sexual abuse at the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect meetings in Indonesia in November 2015. This she did while suffering the effects of her illness.

Finally, Karen truly loved her students. Though she always demanded of them the highest quality work, she was truly loved by them. She always gave the time and effort necessary to help them learn new ways of understanding the world and its problems. She would spend time, energy and her own resources to help students with personal problems and conflicts, maintaining close connections over decades.

Many recognized the high esteem with which Karen Polonko was held. Karen was recognized as Virginia Professor of the Year by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE); she received Outstanding Advocate award from Virginia Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect. She also received a Life Time Achievement Award from The Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University of Chicago. Karen also received numerous teaching and research awards at the University.

In addition to her extraordinary achievements in her academic work was the

love she sought to bring to her family and friends. She was a student of Healing Touch and worked with the GISA sanctuaries in Virginia bringing light, love and healing to all who attended. She helped bring Healing Touch to NJ and helped found the Roach/Glemboski Sanctuary of New Jersey. Karen was loved by her Manhattanville sisters, her Star sisters and deeply loved by her family, colleagues and countless long-time friends. Her generosity knew no bounds and her determination and will to bring light and love to every corner of the earth made her an exceptional person. She was a source of light to so many people. And she was deeply and truly loved.

Funeral services for Dr. Karen Polonko were held at Galloway and Crane Funeral Home, 101 S. Finley Avenue, Basking Ridge, NJ on Friday, August 26, 2016.

Karen's passing will indeed be felt and marked by generations of students, faculty and friends and her family. But the world is and will continue to be a kinder, more loving place for all of her efforts. We have all lost a true friend! And while we mourn the loss of her, we celebrate her truly extraordinary life.

In lieu of flowers, Karen has requested that donations be made in her name to Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children. Anyone wishing to donate to the Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children can do so by check, made payable to "APPROACH LTD" .

Checks should be mailed to:

Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR, United Kingdom. A Paypal account is also available: <http://endcorporalpunishment.org/about/donate/>.

Karen was a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice for 33 years until her passing last month. She was the first ODU faculty member to win the Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council

of Higher Education and was named Virginia Professor of the Year.

Through her work with the University Women's Caucus, her teaching, mentoring, curricular innovations, and her work with In Support of Children, the student group she loved, Karen had a lasting impact on the campus, her students, and the Hampton Roads community. Karen spent the last 25 years of her career teaching, publishing and advocating nationally and internationally for ending child maltreatment, the creation of positive worlds for children, children's rights, and the abolishment of corporal punishment. Just after her passing it was learned that her most article on international law reform published just few months ago is being studied by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

A memorial and tribute for Dr. Karen Polonko, will be held on Saturday, October 1st at 4 PM at the Canterbury Center, 1526 W. 49th Street, Norfolk, VA, on the ODU Campus. Please join her family, friends, students and colleagues in honoring and remembering the life of Dr. Karen Polonko.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

OCT 1. 4:00 PM (ET)

Canterbury Center  
1526 W. 49th Street  
on the ODU Campus  
Norfolk, VA 23508  
(757) 489-9096

# Tribute Wall



PS

“Karen had a spark of life rarely seen among academics. She brought the same infectious passion to her teaching, her research and her institutional service. She was simultaneously one of the most rigorous and demanding of faculty while also being one of the most encouraging and understanding of challenges faced by her students. She pushed hard on her colleagues and administrators to move the university in progressive directions. Her work in support of children's rights was remarkable; she continually raised issues that put out treatment of the youngest in the spotlight. This is a voice that will be missed.

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**Paul Schollaert** - September 22, 2016 at 11:01 AM



“Dr. Polonko was one of the best professors I had at ODU. I use the knowledge gained from her classes every single day in my work in Child Advocacy. Rest in power and peace, Freedom Fighter. The world is forever changed by your work and it lives on through your students.

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**Amy Twisdale** - August 25, 2016 at 05:46 PM

SG

“ Dr. Polonko was truly the most amazing and inspirational person I have ever had the pleasure to know. She was a brilliant and dedicated professor, researcher, and advocate and she quite literally changed my life. She taught me everything I know about inequality, children's rights, and how to interpret data. She was, and still is, my model for what a woman and an advocate and a scholar should be.

*Goodbye, my dearest Professor. thank you for everything. I love you and I miss you already.*

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**Shari Grimes** - August 25, 2016 at 07:21 AM

JN

“ Dr. Polonko was the best professor I have EVER had, and she encouraged me to go on and pursue and achieve my Masters degree. She was tough but challenged everyone to see the world through a wider, more open lens. I will never forget her and her impact on my personal/professional growth.

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**JNR** - August 24, 2016 at 03:36 PM