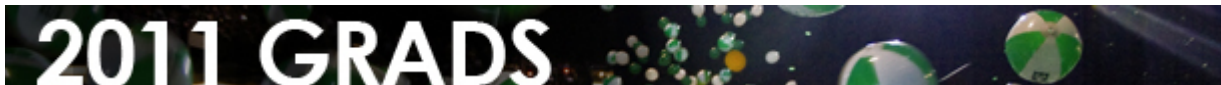


Social Work Graduate Fulfills Dream

May 09, 2011 1:45 AM Joseph Halm
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When social work student Tonia Tillman graduates with her eight fellow part-time students, it will be the end of a journey she calls one of the most important of her life.



A single mother, Tonia Tillman has commuted two nights a week for three years from Plaquemine, La., in Iberville Parish to Tulane to pursue her master's of social work degree. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Tillman commuted two nights a week for three years from Plaquemine, La., to attend night classes while working a full-time job as a paraprofessional with Ascension Parish. She also completed a field internship on Monday evenings and Saturdays, in pursuit of a master's degree in [social work](#). So what would inspire a person to create such a schedule?

"It has been a lifelong dream of mine to become a social worker," she says. "I needed to do something that at the end of the day I felt truly satisfied that I had

helped somebody along the way.”

Before attending Tulane, Tillman was a security officer for the Louisiana Department of Corrections, but she says she felt devalued at that job. So she switched to the more flexible hours of a paraprofessional and enrolled at Tulane.

“Choosing to come to Tulane has been one of the best things I've done in my life,” she says. “It has given me a different perspective on what social work should and can be. It's given me a sense of pride.”

Tillman now is employed with Spectrum Rehabilitation Services in Denham Springs, La., where she performs mental health consulting with children ages six to 17. Spectrum offers an intensive outpatient program in each client's school and home to teach coping and anger management skills, to identify signs of mental illness and to recognize a crisis from a non-crisis. Tillman also teaches parents how to recognize the different types of mental illnesses a child may have.

“It has been a long, enduring experience because of my travel distance, but it gave me the drive to keep going until I completed the program,” Tillman says. “It was worth it.”

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.