

Dr. Scoop's Keynote was a Resounding Success!

~ Recap ~

Shirlene "Dr. Scoop" was the opening keynote of the **2026 International Social Work Research Conference**. The conference site was the Grand Resort & Residences in Belize City, Belize.

More than 100 traveled from the United States and elsewhere to convene for collaborative discussion on the conference theme: Rewriting Colonial Narratives for Mental Health Empowerment. Dr. Scoop's keynote, entitled "Decolonizing Belize: Culture, Racism, and the Societal, took the audience on a journey through her life as a native Belizean, and walked them through vices and visions of what could help or hinder future progress.

Among the attendees this year were several former Dr. Scoop students who studied under her during her early career in the country.

Quotes from Former Students of Dr. Scoop

"Driven by passion, grounded in purpose, Dr. Shirlene S. Ann Coopwood is a living testament to the power of service and transformation." – Shanda Caniquie

"One of the biggest highlights for me was reconnecting with the people who were there at the very beginning of my social work journey, especially the incredible Dr. Shirlene Coopwood. I am forever grateful for her guidance, support, and belief in my potential." - Cherene Rivero

2026 Conference Keynote Highlights:

- Dr. Vincent Palacio, president at the University of Belize, opened the conference with a reminder of the significance of the gathering.
- Minister Thea Garcia-Ramirez, minister of human development, family support, and gender affairs, provided a special address.
- Other remarks were shared by university officials,
 - Dr. Angela Flowers-Jones (Faculty and Health Sciences, University of Belize).
 - Dr. Kendra Flores-Carter (California Baptist University)
 - Sherry Gibbs (Galen University)
- A Cultural & Culinary Immersion took place on Day 2. Participants were transported to Palmento Grove, Kalipuna Island, in Hopkins Village. There, they explored the rich heritage and traditions of the Garifuna people and participated in hands-on cultural activities, such as handling artifacts and tasting herbs and spices used in Belizean cooking and healing practices.
- Judith M. Alpuche provided a closing keynote address, reminding attendees of their purpose and responsibility as care providers internationally.

This year's conference was supported by an increased number of sponsors and friends of the profession.

"The conference was especially meaningful because of the broad need for attention to mental health, but more so, the need for attention to the mental health care providers. And, of course, it was great to return home to share such an important topic with old friends." – Dr. S. Coopwood

The award below was presented to Dr. Scoop for her distinguished service to the field and the conference attendees.



Congratulations to Dr. Scoop!

See pictures and video clips of the 2026 conference.

Go to the Gallery section of our website!