

The Many Facets of Social Work



The scope of social work practice is remarkably wide. Social workers practice not only in the traditional social service agency, but also in elementary schools; in the military; in business, factories, and offices, in federal, state, and local government agencies and legislative bodies; in private practice as individual, family, and marriage therapists; in hospitals and in mental health facilities; in courts and correctional settings; in home health care; and in services to the elderly. In fact social workers can be found anywhere and everywhere there are people who need the help of a professional to alleviate personal or social problems. (Senator Daniel Inouye, D-HI, April 1986)

Now that you are in the School of Social Work, you are probably wondering which area of social work practice to choose. These words of Senator Daniel Inouye still ring true. Almost twenty years later, the scope of social work is vast and affects the lives of thousands of individuals daily. In order to assist you in choosing what area of social work to explore as a field placement, we have identified several social work fields of practice and some of the responsibilities and duties needed to work in each. First you will learn that there are common skills and responsibilities that all social workers have that enable us to work with all populations.

These common skills and responsibilities are to

- Advocate for individual clients or the community on identified problems.
- Serve as a broker by connecting individual with resources.
- Create and maintain professional helping relationships.
- Improve problem-solving, coping, and development capacities of all people.
- Be able to engage and communicate with diverse population and groups of all sizes.
- Have a knowledge and understanding of human relationships.
- Provide services to not only support change in the individual but also in his/her environment as well.



What Do Social Workers Do?

MEDICAL SOCIAL WORK

Provide assistance to patients and their families who are coping with the many problems that accompany illness or inhibit recovery and rehabilitation, such as economic need, disability, and lack of resources after discharge to home.

Collect and analyze patient information to help other health professions understand the needs of patients and their families.

Coordinate services for home care and equipment following discharge.

Make referrals to rehabilitation and long term care facilities.

In outpatient settings – medical social workers provide referral services, supportive counseling, and coordinate after care and follow up services.

Provide crisis intervention.

Function as part of an interdisciplinary team.

Demystify healthcare terminology, personnel and procedures.

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

Provide help to students and families to overcome the social, behavioral, emotional, or economic problems that prevent learning.

Interview students and families to assess problems.

Make appropriate referrals for professional and community services.

Follow up to assure that services provided and that conditions improve.

Work closely with teachers and school administrators.

Provide crisis intervention for such problems as teen suicides, drug/alcohol-related issues and school violence.

CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

Provide a full range of mental health services, including assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

Provide services to individuals, couples, families and groups.

Utilize a variety of psychotherapeutic theories and tools to guide treatment.

Provide referrals to appropriate agencies for case management services.

Assist clients in adjusting to major life style changes due to death of a loved one, disability, divorce, or loss of a job.

Interface with healthcare insurers to authorize care.

SOCIAL WORK-ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Plan, develop, and evaluate programs.

Fundraise and write grants.

Budget and manage finances to assure that the agency is in good financial standing.

Monitor, analyze, and evaluate public and social policy.

Coordinate activities to achieve the agency's goals.

Hire and supervise staff.

SOCIAL WORK- CASE MANAGER

Involved in all stages of client intervention.

Provide access, allocate, monitor, and evaluate services and fiscal resources for clients.

Reduce fragmentation of services.

Engages in a range of tasks that support and enhance the systems working with the client.

Meet with client on regular basis to assure a continuum of services and to judge the effectiveness of services.

Enhance the development, problem solving, and coping capacities of clients.

Contribute to the development of social policy.

Complete all paperwork and accountability reports according to established deadlines.

Function as part of a treatment team.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Counsel and aid refugees to ensure a smooth transition into a new environment.

Facilitate international adoptions.

Provide disaster relief in time of crisis.

Develop, manage, and staff international service delivery programs.

Provide advocacy on international issues to improve people's quality of life and addressing injustices.

SOCIAL WORK – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Counsel families to find better solutions to their problems.

Remove children from abusive situations and place in caring homes.

Find employment and housing for homeless families.

Assist pregnant women, adoptive parents, and adopted children to navigate the adoption system.

Provide assessment, support, counseling, resource coordination, and advocacy.

Evaluate potential foster homes; monitor the foster home during placement.

Provide assistance to women and their children who are victims of domestic violence.

SOCIAL WORK IN NURSING HOMES

Facilitate the admission process.

Develop an individualized plan of care.

Facilitate the social and psychological well being of nursing home residents and their families.

Encourage all staff to respect and assist in meeting the needs of residents and their families.

Plan discharges to ensure appropriateness and continuity of care for transfer within and discharge from the nursing home.

Complete all paperwork and accountability reports according to established deadlines.

SOCIAL WORK IN AN ACUTE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Complete intake and admission screenings.

Perform a thorough psychosocial assessment.

Participate in the development of a treatment plan.

Work closely with multi-disciplinary team to ensure continuity of care.

Provide patient and family education, support, and advocacy.

Provide individual treatment, family therapy, group therapy, parental and marriage counseling.

Provide discharge and aftercare planning.

Make referrals for case management services as needed.

Complete documentation according to standards and within time limits.

Assist with commitment hearing as needed.

FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK

Plays a formidable role in providing risk assessments, expert testimony, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and other timely best practices to both victims and offenders.

Utilize evidence-based practices in child maltreatment and domestic violence assessment and treatment.

Provide assessment and treatment of juvenile offenders.

Provide mental health, drug and alcohol, medical, and aftercare treatment for adult offenders.

Get involved in trauma survivor assistance, victim-offender mediation and batterers' intervention programs.

Are skilled in restorative justice, giving expert testimony in child welfare and woman battering cases, as well as social worker mitigation testimony in death penalty cases.

Deal with the critical issues of punishment versus rehabilitation, deterrence, and determination of whether individual offenders are capable of change.

Are change agents, legislative advocates, policymakers and program administrators for both victims and offenders.

EMPLOYMENT/OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Help workers with problems that affect their job performance and satisfaction.

Assist corporations reengineer their structure and methods to improve efficiency, creativity, productivity and morale.

Work for a union and be involved in job counseling or organizing.

Be an employee assistance counselor to counsel individuals, lead groups and run workshops.

Deal with substance abuse, domestic violence, single parenting and vocational rehabilitation.

Work with foundations, as well as utility companies and bank trust departments.

SOCIAL WORK – COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

Assist the community in defining a social problem.

Be an effective communicator to help build coalitions in the community.

Provide direction and guidance to the community in order to mobilize for an identified cause.

Assist in establishing new programs to meet the needs of individuals, groups, and the community.

Provide advocacy for the needs of the community

Engage in fundraising and grant writing.

The above list is just a small sample of the responsibilities of social workers in different fields of practice. But as the list below indicates, social workers are in every aspects of the community.

Addictions Treatment
Adoptions & Foster Care
Advocacy
Child Abuse
Child Welfare
Chronic Pain

**Community Mental health
Consulting
Criminal Justice
Crisis Intervention
Developmental Disabilities
Disaster Relief
Domestic Violence
Eating Disorders
Employee Assistance
Family Planning
Family Preservation Services
Genetics
Gerontology Services
HIV/AIDS
Homeless Family Assistance
Hospice and Palliative care
Hospital /Medical Social Work
Housing Assistance
In -Home Services
Mental Health Therapy
Military Social Work
Parent Education
Political Development
Private Practice
Public Welfare
Rural Social Work
School Social Work
Veterans' Services**

If you have any questions about the above list please ask your field advisor who will be able to answer your questions and discuss the responsibilities of each practice area.

References:

National Association of Social Workers (2004) www.naswdc.org/practice/

Gibelman, M. (1995). What Social Workers Do. Washington, DC: NASW Press