

The Important of Social Work Values

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Introduction

Social work has developed as a profession since the 19th century and first started mainly in England and the United States. Despite many achievements and contributions of social workers to the development of welfare programs and the establishment of many non-profit organizations to serve the poor and people in need, social work is still not fully understood and properly recognized. In addition, given the emerging of social work education in many developing countries in South Asia and Africa, social work becomes even more complicated and sometimes misinterpreted. This article attempts to give an introduction about social work profession, its approach and the values it is based on. Social work is defined as a “profession to promote social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being” (International Federation of Social Work, 2000).

The main purposes of social work profession are to solve problems in human relationship, support individuals or communities to seek social reform at different levels so that everyone can enjoy a better life. Supporting and empowering people, particularly the poor, disadvantaged, oppressed, and vulnerable people to achieve their basic needs is also the mission of social workers (National Association of Social Workers, 2006). For many people, image for social workers is mainly attached to child protection workers. However, this is not a proper image.

Social work profession is much broader than that. When students come to the social work program, they can choose from a variety of concentrations from direct practice such as services for children and family, mental health, child welfare, school social work, to community practice such as human service management, community organizing and advocacy. Social workers work and promote changes at different levels, from changes in individual, community; to society. The direct practice and community practice make the social work approach become comprehensive. Without either one of those, change would be difficult to achieve and might not be sustainable. The approach in social work practice is based on human interaction with its environment, which is rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory.

The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that behaviors of individuals are influenced by different levels of their surrounding social systems such as family, friends, and other people who are closest to them (micro system); the relationship between individuals in the micro system (ecosystem); social policies, social structures, and social norms (ecosystem) (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Social work profession has a distinct set of values and social workers also value what clients want.

The core values of social work profession include: “service, social justice, dignity and worth of person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence,” (National

Association of Social Workers, 2006, p.1). The primary goal of social worker is to use their knowledge and skills to provide the best services for their clients. Social workers seek social change to address the issue of poverty, unemployment, discrimination with and on behalf of their clients. Social workers believe that each human being deserves to be treated with dignity and respect and should have equal opportunity in life regardless of their economic, educational, or social status.

Human relationship is considered as an essential vehicle to make change happen and social workers strive to strengthen these relationships to promote the well-being of individuals, families, organizations and communities. In summary, social work is a distinct profession which possesses a unique approach in their practice with clearly defined values and code of ethics. Social workers were and are providing a majority of services in mental health, family and children's services. Social workers have also been very active in community organizing and policy advocacy to seek social reform at macro level. However, social workers need to inform public better about those works so that more people can relate and engage into those causes better.

Social Work Values

There are more than five core social work values that encompass everything from integrity to individual dignity to compassionate service to social justice to human relationships. These core values are inherent to the effectiveness of social work activities and programs. These core codes serve certain purposes. For example, they establish the moral foundation of the social worker's organization and they summarize the ethical principles used to set professional standards and guide social work practices. These codes help social workers identify professional obligations and legal conflicts of interest. The codes are public standards that the public can use to hold social workers accountable.

Service

The primary goal of social workers is exemplary public service through helping needy people address, manage and resolve various social problems. Social workers must always elevate public service above self-interest and personal gain. Social workers use their skills and knowledge to help their clients through serious social problems, such as drug dependency, child abuse, residential instability and criminal behaviors. Social workers often volunteer their professional skills through community organizations free of charge.

Social Justice

Social workers advocate for social justice and fight against social injustice. They offer social support and resources for vulnerable individuals and oppressed groups. Their social change efforts are primarily focused on poverty, education, housing, unemployment and discrimination. They promote public sensitivity to social justice issues and encourage the public to embrace cultural respect and genetic diversity. Social workers ensure that their clients have access to basic services, resources and information. They promote the equality of opportunity and wholesome engagement with clients.

Values

Social workers value the dignity and worth of each person. They treat each client in a compassionate and respectful way that is mindful of individual differences, cultural norms and ethnic diversity. They promote clients' socially responsible self-determination based on their individual values. Social workers strive to increase their clients' capability to change, address their own needs and become self-reliant. Social workers are always aware that they are simultaneously responsible to their clients, the law and their organization. They resolve conflicts between clients and society in ways that are respectful and socially responsible.

Human Relationships

Social workers recognize the primary importance of human relationships. They understand that relationships between people are important vehicles for change, advocacy and equity. Social workers engage clients, other professionals and community program staff as partners in the healing and helping process. They improve relationships among people in order to restore and promote the functionality of clients, their families and communities. Because social work depends on the ability to maintain positive relationships with individuals who may be hostile and unreliable, social workers must be patient and communicative.

Integrity

Social workers must always act in trustworthy ways. They must maintain a continual awareness of their organization's mission, their profession's values and their individual ethical standards. Social workers must honestly and responsibly conduct themselves in public to encourage their coworkers and support their organization. In order to maintain their integrity, social workers improve their work expertise through continually increasing their career competency.

The core social work values ensure that those in need receive appropriate support and services. Anyone who wants to become a licensed social worker will need a master's degree that is approved by the NASW. They maintain a registry of approved bachelor and master degree programs. They also offer a helpful list of unique social work career and certification specializations.

Conclusion

Reference

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