



Social Workers as Leaders Enhancing Humanity in Our Communities

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Abstract

The social work profession is evolving. Social workers advancing change promote human rights, provide knowledge of health and mental health prevention strategies, encourage advocacy, participate with community based organizations, and promote hope through innovative and creative approaches that build on consumer strengths, self reflection, community building, and the use of multicultural resources to advance justice. Social workers are established in places and ways we can promote and enhance humanity.

Keywords: Social Work Leadership, Human Rights, Multicultural Resources

Introduction

Growing up and maturing in today's world is challenging. Social media, artificial intelligence, and political divisions test our resolve to assist others as our hearts may desire. The social work profession is evolving. Social workers advancing change promote human rights, provide knowledge of health and mental health prevention strategies, encourage advocacy, participate with community based organizations, and promote hope through innovative and creative approaches that build on consumer strengths, self reflection, community building, and the use of multicultural resources to advance justice. Social workers are established in places and ways we can promote and enhance humanity.

Our world, our country, and many towns are comprised of people of different sizes, shapes, experiences, complexions, beliefs, and abilities. Some areas, of course, are more homogeneous than others. Some of us are able to navigate the governing and cultural systems to provide for ourselves. Some of us are not as able, may be excluded, or are oppressed by others and thus struggling to take care of ourselves and our families.

There is a long history of struggle for human rights recognized in 539 BC by Cyrus, the first king of Persia. From the Magna Carta in 1215 to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human rights there have

been continuous efforts to establish protected rights and liberties of citizens in various countries [1]. Human rights, seeking equal justice, opportunity and dignity without discrimination must be pursued in places close to home. Assisting families and their children is part of social work's commitment to working with the community. Getting to know the communities where work involves listening to consumer perspectives and identifying non-traditional and traditional resources to meet needs. Promoting social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people is part of the definition and mandates of social work [2].

Contemplating a social environment where we can communicate in ways to pursue resolutions that are helpful to all of us requires awareness, knowledge, high levels of empathy, compassion, and love. Many of us are unable to do that unconditional love thing. Why not? Some don't want to. Some may not know how. People who enter the social work profession enter a profession that is committed to address the needs of people in ways that other professions are not.

Resisting Complicity

In some ways social workers have followed the ways of social policy promoters who deny more effective services and resist more accountability by maintaining status quo behaviors. Inaction is tantamount to complicity. However, we have observed social work education progress from its oppressive history to establish more academic and clinical accreditation standards that encourage cultural inclusion in faculty hiring, research, intervention applications, and social welfare policy advocacy. Steps that challenge existing discriminatory practices and more recently unconstitutional executive mandates illustrate our efforts to resist being silent.

Ocean and Raucher [3] point to examples of social workers aligning with others in local situations to evaluate policy language and urge versions that prioritize clients. Similarly, a recent Brookings webinar [4] informed us that some of the current administration's rhetoric is bullying and the chaos is intentionally manufactured. Federal anti-discrimination law still holds and there are opportunities to work

with local civil rights, educational groups, and other human rights coalitions to uphold standards.

Strengths for Children and Youth

While mental health issues among vulnerable ethnic minority communities as well as employment obstacles have been connected to limited economic opportunities, improvements in communities are linked to social and economic advocacy often provided through the strengths of natural community relationships.

Teaching social workers to champion diversity and social justice is important in framing context. Knowledge of the cultural supports that individuals and communities can tap into is an important tool for supporting and encouraging strengths and enhancing humanity. Preventive programming to avert the development of mental or physical problems must be multilayered and include economic and social inequity considerations. More thought must be given to high risk situations members of minority groups may face [5] and interventions tailored to offer skill building.

All children and adolescents learn and develop within bounded cultural or social-class groups [6]. There is variation in children's local contexts and households among Asian, Black, Latino, and White subgroups. Parenting goals and practices in more traditional families reinforce social cohesion and support for children. There are pressures on children and adolescents to assimilate to different behavioral norms which offer developmental risks as well as some opportunities. Understanding the tension of these pressures and the need for parental participation in planning for family development urges our work with schools and community organizations to address cognitive demands and social expectations.

The Children's Defense Fund-Texas Youth Civic Education and Engagement Intern Alisha Tuff proposed this: "It is time to strengthen African American/Black, Latino, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous, women, and LGBTQ+ voices in the curriculum" [7]. It is important to honor the cultural contributions of all of our ancestors. These voices belong in history as part of our academic education and part of learning about how we operate in the social environment.

Williams -Tillery [8] presents the cultural heritage of grief issues as one example of information clinicians should be aware of in working with African American clients. We must be aware of individuals and community heritage factors in planning more effective interventions for diverse populations and not rely on traditional professional information that has been connected to Anglo Euro conceptions rather than more specific and unique multicultural cultural contexts.

The use of strengths based perspectives and approaches fosters change and promotes resilience. The presence of violence in some communities and homes influences the development of children. Parents', mothers', and children's observations of violence influences their perspectives of their environment and their behaviors [9]. Knowledge of areas that may create vulnerability in families and knowledge of what can offer support under challenging circumstances helps people recognize their capacity to recover, to develop hope, and move forward. Snyder [10] reminds us that therapeutic relationships can help build hope through the experience of being seen, heard and valued.

Social Workers as Leaders

The social work profession has evolved from discriminatory paternalistic structures [11] to ones that encourage anti-oppressive frameworks [12], cultural humility [13], promote multicultural and community led strengths based models [14], and advocate for transformative justice approaches. Recent scholarship acknowledges "dissenting social work" [15] that approaches our work using critical questioning. Our leadership assists clients in developing agency over their own circumstances and participating as citizens in efforts to dismantle systemic oppression [16].

Our advocacy work is long standing in the continuing efforts to advance social justice. Social workers advocate for policies that address poverty, discrimination, health disparities, and barriers to education and housing [17]. As we present ourselves in this arena, we offer leadership for ourselves and our associates to align with others who appreciate the need to stand with others for human and civil rights and effective service interventions.

Economic injustice is central to the inequalities that people face. Examples of community organizing exist through books about social justice movements. Michael Ansara's memoir, *The hard work of hope*, describes the social environment of the 60s and 70s that led to students organizing to protest the ongoing work of corporations under Republicans and Democrats that led to slashing regulations and weakening unions [18]. Ansara emphasizes neighborhood economic issues such as utility rates, tenant struggles, and jobs as options for social change [18].

Martin L. King, Jr's *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* described similar issues working and middle class folks faced. King identified the need for full employment and living wages as remedies for poverty (kinginstitute.stanford.edu). Social workers have participated in major movements over the years to help address social inequities. These goals are fundamental to assisting populations that social workers serve. Social workers participate in local activities in their communities to address these kinds of needs. Many are actively leading projects that demonstrate social work's creative efforts to assist people. Smartbrief.com presents ongoing examples of innovative ways social workers are assisting clients in various situations.

Listening and Planning with Our Communities

Being able to listen and tolerate different points of view is not something many people have learned to do. And being able to resolve the different viewpoints for decision making is sometimes ominous. However, it is this potential for a higher level of deeper moral immigrants, [19] that we can strive for. Instead of being complicit in the implementation of behaviors and policy development that excludes and demeans others, we can work on demonstrating the virtues of democratic pluralism. Social workers may align with one another in organizations and with local and national organizations to support administrative and legislative actions that create opportunities for working class families.

Young people are speaking up, and their voices are yet another reminder that all children need to be taught the full truth about their own and others' history in our increasingly multicultural nation and world; that Black, Native American, Latino, Asian American, LGBTQ, immigrant, and women's history are all American history; and that none of our children can afford miseducation and ignorance about the rainbow of others around them [7, 20].

Social workers work with human service organizations, service programs in school and community organizations, and some faith establishments to share resources, organize coalitions, raise funds, and promote advocacy. We build on past associations developed through community organizing, group work, and services to individuals.

Information Sharing

Social workers have opportunities to share information along a range of service areas. Resources regarding specific service needs related to agencies of choice to information that may assist individuals and families to develop individual and family care plans for present and future issues. Intellectual freedom is the right to seek and receive information from all points of view [21]. Sharing information can occur in individual or group sessions with clients, in supervision sessions, and in local group meetings in community based organizations with consumers.

Social workers are central to behavioral–physical health integration and trauma informed healing in community clinics, schools, and emergency settings. They provide key roles in coordinated care, brief interventions, and linkage to SUD treatment through federal initiatives and grant programs [22]. Social workers through their individual service planning and in collaboration with consumers and service peers may offer additional suggestions that may be appropriate based on assessment data.

Micro work:

- Encourage and provide multicultural reading resources to learn skills, develop awareness, address spiritual and cultural knowledge
- Encourage family meetings and help design strategies for family development for academic capacity, self discipline and love, positive communication, financial literacy, civic engagement, voting, and other issues as needed
- Encourage exercise, nutrition, use of plant care, meditation, puzzles, games, Zentangle as ways to engage in calming behaviors
- Review safe use of AI and social media, digital safety, and preventing scam interactions

Macro work:

- Identify local community based organizations, recreation centers, and church groups that offer activities for children, youth, and adults
- Identify resources for health, housing, human rights, and economic progression
- Promote advocacy for women's health and reproductive care and social welfare policy supports
- Collaborate with local libraries to present mental health and policy advocacy information
- Collaborate with schools to implement restorative justice approaches
- Engage with human rights oriented organizations to create innovative opportunities for community citizens
- Help identify volunteer activities for community engagement

As social workers continue to critically analyze and pose essential questions about how we do things and how we might improve the state of our environments, we can impact our service users through our self reflection, self-care, shared concerns, innovative service development, and policy advocacy. Let's applaud the work social workers do everyday and encourage one another as our work continues.

Conflicts of interest: I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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