

SO...WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A SOCIAL WORKER?

Social Workers are **helping professionals**. They use their knowledge, skills, training and life experience to promote: social change, problem solving in human relationships, and engage in activities that enhance personal and community well being.

Social Workers are employed in:

Public Agencies such as: schools, hospitals, community clinics, drug & alcohol treatment facilities, child welfare & financial assistance services, prisons, courts, group homes, and programs for families, youth, seniors and the physically & mentally challenged.

Non-Governmental Agencies such as: family & youth service agencies, social planning councils, human rights organizations, drop-in centres, inner city programs, food banks, trade unions, and personal care facilities.

Industry such as: employee assistance programs, staff training, organizational development and personnel administration.

Independent Practice such as: clinical assessment and counseling, mental health counseling, social policy and program consulting.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SOCIAL WORKER...

It takes a genuine desire to help others **plus** intelligence, creativity, self-awareness, personal maturity & stability, a belief in human rights and social justice, professional training, as well as a desire for life-long learning.

WORKING IN THE PROFESSION

Many social workers spend much of their time in an office setting. Travelling is not uncommon; neither is working some overtime. Paper work such as reports, letters and memos are an important part of the job. The telephone is used a great deal as are computers.

Most social workers are employed in multi-staff environments and report to a supervisor. Staff development and continued competence help them remain current in practice methods.

Salaries vary according to training, experience and employer. Most social workers belong to a union or staff association.

LOOKING BACK...

Social Work in Canada began in the mid Nineteenth Century as society came to terms with the Industrial Revolution's negative effects, such as urban slums and poverty.

By the turn of the Century, charity was replaced by more scientific methods of understanding these social problems and in ways of assisting victims of the post-industrial upheaval.

Following the Great Depression and World War II, the profession expanded to meet the needs of our rapidly changing society. By drawing on and contributing to advances in the social sciences, the profession supported the development of universal and specialized social programs that set out the foundation of our modern welfare state, which peaked by the 1980's.

Since that time, the profession has faced many challenges in a globalizing world. This has required a greater focus on making links between practicing with individuals, families, communities and influencing social policies.

WHAT DOES A SOCIAL WORKER DO?

Social Workers often use the following skills:

- a) **Counseling** individuals, couples, families and groups
- b) **Training/Teaching** clients to develop new life skills and educating groups on various social issues
- c) **Advocating** for clients who are unable to represent their interests to the public institutions they may interact with
- d) **Mediating** disputes involving custody, property or other issues
- e) **Organizing** communities to improve their physical/economic/social environment
- f) **Investigating** allegations of abuse or neglect, and violations of civil rights
- g) **Developing and Coordinating** community services
- h) **Dispensing** needed practical assistance such as food/clothing/shelter
- i) **Planning** social policy and programs
- j) **Researching** the causes of social problems and evaluating the effectiveness of applied solutions
- k) **Managing** social service personnel, programs and budgets

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

Social Workers in Alberta are regulated professionals, adhering to a specific **Code of Ethics** and Provincial legislation.

Regardless of job title, every individual with a diploma or degree in Social Work is required to be **registered**, have a **yearly practice permit** from the Alberta College of Social Workers and maintain certain **standards of practice** when working in all areas of social work practice.

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Click on Occupational Information for
Social Worker

THE UNIQUENESS OF SOCIAL WORK

Social Work is unique from the other helping professions in the following ways:

- a) **Holistic Perspective** Clients are understood and helped within the context of their environment, which includes personal, cultural, political and economic interactions
- b) **Social Change** Along with client intervention, social workers strive to promote and affect meaningful social change for the overall benefit of humanity

REWARDS AND CHALLENGES

Social Workers are rewarded by knowing that they are contributing to a better society through the practice of their chosen profession. By helping others, social workers understand that they are often helping themselves.

Social Work is both personally and professionally demanding. Social Workers need to be mindful of maintaining a balance in their personal and professional lives by practicing self-care and keeping up healthy personal relationships and interests outside of work.

Change is slow, but nothing we do is unimportant.

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Career Information

