



International Network for School Social Work

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The 5th International School Social Work Conference

Will be held in Ghana at the Ghana International Conference Centre in Accra during the 2nd week of April 2012. The theme for the conference is: 'SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL THE WORLD'S CHILDREN'. Details of this conference will be announced later.

The School Social Work Association of Ghana is looking forward to hosting the conference. It is hoped that the conference will offer the opportunity for participants to brainstorm ways in which to improve the role of school social workers worldwide and develop a framework for mainstreaming the profession in developing countries.

School Social Work in Ghana

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The Department of Social Work, at the University of Ghana, is at the forefront of training social workers at different levels to contribute to the growing sectors of the economy, and to help deal with the increasing adjustment problems that plague most developing economies. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has also recently joined in the training of social workers. A school social worker in Ghana is referred to as a 'welfare officer'. Attempts are being made by school social workers to change the name to 'School Social Worker', but the former name is still deeply ingrained.

The Need for School Social Work

The author's recent research indicates that there is a growing need for social workers in Ghana's basic schools to assist in minimizing the individual, family, socio-cultural and school-related barriers that block children's ability to complete basic education. There is the need for Government to partner with professionally trained school social workers to achieve the United Nation's goal of Education for All (EFA) by 2015, and move beyond educational access to achieve *sustained access*.

Education in Ghana

In 1996 the Government of Ghana launched the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) under which the first nine years of education was made tuition free and compulsory. The aim

was to extend universal access to quality basic education to every school-age child in Ghana by the year 2005. FCUBE was also intended to promote efficient teaching and learning, prompt and adequate supply of teaching and learning materials to schools, and improve teacher morale and motivation. Towards the end of the 10 year period however, the expected progress in terms of increased enrolment had not been achieved. The reason was that despite free education, schools were charging levies that poor parents could not afford. This necessitated additional efforts to ensure EFA's 2015 goals were met.

In 2004, the School Capitation Grant was launched in 40 districts and extended to cover all public schools in 2005. Under the SCG, school levies were removed and the schools were given 3 Ghana Cedis (GH¢3) per child per year to decrease the financial burden on families, and compensate schools for any revenue lost due to the removal of levies. Additionally, in recognition of the fact that poverty results in parents' inability to provide adequate nutrition for their children and serves as a barrier for them to send their children to school, the Ghana School Feeding Program was launched in 2005. This was to provide at least one nutritious meal a day for each child in primary school to improve nutrition, encourage enrolment, and improve attendance and retention at the primary level of education. These initiatives saw a 16.6% rise in national enrolment from the first to the ninth grade. The challenge now is to sustain the enrolment. This is where the need for school social workers is crucial.

Barriers to Keeping Children in School and the Role of School Social Work

Many children from poor families work to supplement meager family incomes. A range of family and community problems reduces the support children need to stay in school, leading to high dropout rates. The Ghana School Feeding Program and the School Capitation Grant cannot sustain enrolment without the professional input of school social workers to work with students and establish links between the school and the home. There is an increasing need to recruit and train additional professional social workers to work in schools and to offer assistance to parents to support their children's education.

The Ghana Education Service has one school social worker assigned to each of the 170 districts. Additionally, there is one social worker in each of the 10 regions of Ghana who is in charge of school social work services in that region. School social work activities are coordinated by a national head and a deputy. The Ministry of Education reported that there are between 58 and 727 public schools (kindergarten to Junior High School) in each district. The highest number is in the Accra district (within the Greater Accra region). This implies that one social worker is responsible for 58 to 727 schools.

The primary role of the school social worker within the Ghana Education Service is early identification and prevention of any problem that may interfere with pupils' attendance, academic achievement and completion of basic education. School social workers handle problem behaviors, issues to do with material or social deprivation, and form a link between the school and the home. In addition, they work with teachers to prevent non-performance and advocate on behalf of aggrieved teachers. They identify teachers with various personal challenges and refer them to appropriate agencies for support. Whenever a court action is necessary, school social workers provide evidence and assist in the preparation of a case. Moreover, they collaborate with other social service units at the regional level to ensure coordination of services. Furthermore, school social workers organize sensitization programs on topics such as HIV and AIDS, drug abuse, stress management and teenage pregnancy for students in schools.

Due to the daunting workload and the number of social workers they can only attend to emergency cases, handle welfare issues and organize workshops on social issues concerning pupils and teachers. There are teachers trained as social workers, however, they have been allocated full time teaching duties and thus do not practice social work.

Currently there is a nascent School Social Work Association of Ghana. The association has been pivotal in raising public awareness of school social work in Ghana and continues to work tirelessly towards increasing social work services in schools. In future, there is the need for the association and academic institutions to collaborate in shaping social policy in Ghana. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the Ghana Education Service to take seriously the issue of professional social workers in schools.