



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

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A Snapshot of School Social Work in 2014

In 1990 The World Conference on Education for All set goals and objectives for education around the world. There is progress in goals for primary education, gender equality and quality education, documented in annual Global Monitoring Reports prepared by UNESCO.

However, in many countries disadvantaged children lag behind because of the obstacles they face. In addition social change brings challenges even for those in the mainstream. Social workers are needed to help address these issues in the classroom, in the homes and in the community. They are ideally situated to address problems affecting marginalized children, especially if they work with a school team and with parents developing intervention plans.

School social work is established in about 50 countries. Schools welcome the support and the broad skills of the social worker because the social worker attends to *all* aspects of a child's life. More countries are expressing interest and the last decade has seen several countries placing social workers in schools for the first time.

Countries have different models depending on culture, history and politics, and the school social work role is adaptable for culturally relevant interpretations. Methods are child-centered and involve the whole system, with teamwork a key. Groupwork, casework, attendance work, outreach to families, consultation and prevention are typically part of the school social work role.

History of School Social Work

When school became universal and compulsory, help was needed to enroll children. In the UK around 1900, attendance officers were hired. In the US visiting teachers went to the homes to encourage attending school. Gradually these roles evolved into school social work. Throughout the 20th century social work programs grew in schools around the world. Every continent has some school social work programs. They are strongest in North America and Europe. There are also some strong school social work programs in the Middle East – in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In Ghana there is a well-established program.

More recently several Asian countries have developed school social work. Mongolia has developed a very strong program within the last 15 years. Japan is now adding social workers to the schools after a slow start. New Zealand is bringing social workers into the schools rapidly. School social work is still needed in sub-Saharan Africa, central and southeast Asia where work to help schools meet educational goals.

Professional literature, school social work associations and standards

Literature on school social work is helpful in developing the field. Several countries, such as the US, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Germany and Sweden have school social work journals and/or textbooks. Newsletters and web sites provide information for practitioners.

Several countries, for example the US, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Ghana, Mongolia, Japan, Korea and Hungary have a school social work association. These associations usually offer conferences, newsletters and advocacy. The question of who helps the school social worker with salary, working conditions and grievances is a separate and important issue. In a few countries there are unions that take this role. For example in Norway there is a powerful union that represents all social workers and bargains for them. In the US, the teachers' unions represent school social workers in many states.

According to the International School Social Work Survey done in 2012, almost all countries require their school social workers to have a Bachelor's or Master's degree in social work. A few countries have a related degree, social pedagogy, that may be acceptable. Some countries have a set of standards for social workers who work in schools and some have a certification process that may require additional training. At present an international group of social work faculty members is working on international standards for school social workers. This may lead to international online courses that could be made available worldwide.

The International Network for School Social Work

All social work is local and for most social workers local professional contacts are all they desire. However international contact has proven to be helpful in developing this specialty of school social work. The Network has supported the development of school social work through direct international contacts, newsletters, web sites, conferences and email.

The International Network for School Social Work is a network open to all school social workers. Starting in 1990, it has collected and shared information about school social work around the world and links together the professional school social work associations. Many professional contacts are also made directly between people to share information about the work.

The International Network makes it possible to communicate with your peers in other countries. You can do this by sending information to share and articles to go in the newsletter. Send me any questions you have about school social work and I will try to answer them and connect you with people who can give you more information. Each month I send out a newsletter to about 80 countries with practice articles and information about school social work from all around the world.

Five conferences have been held, starting in 1999 in the US, then Sweden, Korea, New Zealand and Ghana. A major benefit of an international conference is that it gives the host country a boost. In the case of Ghana, the Ghana Association now has a web page and has raised its profile with the Ministry of Education and the University. In putting on a first class conference the association has raised its own self-esteem. This benefits the cause of education for all in Ghana. The next International Conference for School Social Work will be in Mongolia in June 2015.

School social work has a strong future. Society is changing rapidly and the schools need much help to cope with change and associated stress. Social workers have the right skills in problem solving, they know how to collaborate with teams and they focus on building resilience. Schools everywhere want this kind of support.