

## OFFICE OF CAREER & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

# Careers in Social Work

### **CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK**

**Clinical Social Workers help people make positive changes in their lives by finding solutions to problems ranging from coping with day-to-day stresses to dealing with severe mental illness.**

**Clinical Social workers works in many practice areas, often as part of a multi-disciplinary team:**

- Alcohol and other substance abuse treatment
- Individual, family, group counseling
- Grief counseling
- Victim services
- Corrections
- Aging
- Child welfare
- Development disabilities
- Health care

**Clinical Social Work positions are available in a variety of settings including:**

- Community mental health centers
- Psychiatric hospitals
- Residential treatment centers
- Partial (day treatment) hospitals
- Managed mental health programs
- Employee assistance programs (EAP)
- Schools
- Family service agencies

**All states and some territories license or certify social workers and specific requirements vary from state to state:**

- The term Clinical Social Worker is understood to mean the person has a Master's degree from a graduate school of social work accredited by the Council on Social Work Education
- For further information on state by state licensing and certification go to the American Social Work Boards (ASWB ) website <http://www.aswb.org>

### **PUBLIC POLICY**

**Social workers in public policy can work in local, state, or federal government and in the non-profit and private sectors, for example:**

- Social service agencies
- Public policy “think tanks”
- Advocacy organizations
- Research Organizations
- Foundations
- Legislative bodies such as committees, offices of elected officials  
(**TIP:** “Hot Spots”: are state capitals and states with progressive social welfare policies)

**Social workers in public policy should possess excellent written and verbal communications skills. In addition, most policy positions require:**

- Knowledge of and exposure to the legislative process
- Problem solving and analytical skills
- Political savvy, ability to think on your feet, and tenacity
- Computer skills
- Ability to connect the past (history) with the present
- Research/quantitative skills

**Social workers can gain valuable experience in public policy by:**

- Volunteering or completing a field assignment in public policy organizations
- Joining and being active in an organization such as NASW or Bertha Capen Reynolds Society
- Working as a legislative aide
- Reading (newspapers) voraciously and asking the right questions of the right people
- Speaking with clients from all walks of life (they’ve been there and done that)

**In addition to utilizing traditional job search techniques to prepare for a career in public policy, social workers should also:**

- Be up-to-date on policy issues
- Have a working knowledge of the legislative process on both the federal and state level
- Network extensively with those already established in the profession
- Complete a post-graduate degree training program such as: Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs, Presidential Management Intern Program, or the Social Work Congressional Fellows Program
- Work first in direct services in your area of interest  
(**TIP:** Nothing like doing it to know how to do it!)
- Study the history of social welfare policy in depth; read the works of social work pioneers  
(**TIP:** never stop learning!)
- Find mentors and absorb all you can
- Search for employment via state agency web pages, legislature web pages, state, federal government web pages.

### **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

Community organizing is the process of building consensus around community issues. It can involve raising the public consciousness about a matter of concern, gathering people together to work for a common goal or to receive specialized services. Community Organizers gather information, educate the public, introduce neighbors, train new leaders, and bring people together.

#### **Where do community organizers work?**

Generally they work in grassroots organizations such as community development agencies; community coalitions; advocacy, minority, and religious representation groups; or small business collaborations. Often these are community-located for example in senior communities (NORC: Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities) or empowerment areas.

#### **Social work community organizers should have a strong knowledge base in:**

- Psychology of individuals and groups
- Politics, government, law and the legislative process
- Policy analysis, development
- Economics and finance
- Housing and zoning
- Employment laws

#### **Social work community organizers should possess skills or experience in:**

- Advocacy
- Negotiation
- Conflict management
- Consensus building
- Fundraising
- Communications
  - Media relations
  - Group facilitation
  - Training or teaching

#### **Social Workers can gain valuable experience relevant to community organizing by:**

- Volunteering for grassroots neighborhood groups
- Joining political campaigns
- Interning with for community development groups

#### **What personal qualities a social worker in community organization have?**

- Commitment to social justice
- Curiosity about and caring for others
- Passion, enthusiasm, and energy

**What should you do to develop yourself once you have the job?**

- Develop a positive reputation by being visible and useful
- Volunteer for additional committees or projects
- Build your skills by attending workshops on advocacy, training, conflict management, or lobbying

**CORPORATE CAREERS**

**Social workers in corporate positions should possess:**

- The ability to communicate clearly and concisely orally and in writing.
- Excellent analytical, problem solving, strategic planning skills.
- Strong administrative management knowledge, including a well-developed financial foundation.
- Strong presentation skills, an ability to project confidence, and the ability to think on your feet.
- Well developed computer skills in Internet use, word processing, and data base, spreadsheet, scheduling, and fundraising programs.
- A thick skin. The supervision may be more direct and critical in nature than in typical social work settings. You are expected to contribute to the bottom line; you may have to sell.
- Tremendous endurance (the hours can be long).

**Social Workers can gain valuable experience relevant to consulting by:**

- Identifying and accessing internship opportunities in corporate settings.
- Accessing field placements working in or with private for-profit companies.
- Volunteering to secure training, build special skills, and broaden background.

**Search for work suggestions:**

- Networking and reputation are key to your job search.
- Concentrate on using the web for information. Do not expect a tremendous response to e-mail or web applications alone. Follow up with personal contacts.
- Become involved in professional organizations and activities that expose you to the corporate community or non profit consulting. (**TIP:** Go to special interest events and business card exchanges at the Chamber of Commerce and other member organizations.)
- Develop a thorough rationale why a social worker with a Master's degree is a good choice for a consulting position. Emphasize the transferability of social work skills, for example:
  - interpersonal skills --> relationship-/team-building
  - individual/group/system assessment --> strategic planning
  - problem solving --> negotiating/mediation
  - social administration --> budgeting/development
- Plan to describe concisely the breadth of the social work field, your concentration, and to dispel common myths.
- Explain why you would be a good match for the position available by utilizing examples of your relevant accomplishments. Understand and practice communicating why you should be hired.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Social workers in community development roles often engage in economic development activities.

#### **Where might a social worker work who is interested in economic development?**

- Economic development councils, departments, corporations
- Government or politics
- Extension services
- Banking, financial institutions
- Foundations
- Micro-enterprise development programs
- Redevelopment corporations
- Housing organizations

#### **What might the job title be?**

- Director of economic development
- Project manager/officer/Project associate
- Project administrator
- Executive officer
- Community development specialist
- Director of special projects

#### **What are some of the job functions of a social worker in economic development?**

- Prepare economic development plans for and market underinvested neighborhoods
- Recruit business and industry, address tourism, and work on retention of business and industry
- Oversee preparation of abandoned sites: clear titles, deal with environmental issues
- Promote and provide technical assistance on micro enterprise
- Advocate and facilitate home ownership and insurance coverage
- Teaching economic and business skills including money management
- Staff public/private partnerships, facilitate groups
- Write grants
- Manage public relations

#### **Social workers in economic development should possess skills in:**

- Evaluation of community assets and barriers to improvement including formal and informal systems
- Management and finance relative to land use, home ownership, small business development, banking, and loans
- Consensus-building with community coalitions, grassroots groups, public/private collaborations
- Counseling, consultation, and technical assistance
- Group facilitation and training/Leadership development
- Policy development that integrates social and economic development efforts
- Communication, information, and referral/Media relations.

## **INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK**

### [International Federation of Social Workers](#)

**Social workers can work internationally, abroad or in one's country of origin. Look for entities that have international concerns. For example, there are international opportunities in:**

- United Nations and other international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including social service agencies, foundations, and educational institutions
- Government and governmental agencies
- Corporations
- Banks
- the Media

**Strong social work experience/education grounded in an understanding of human behavior in the social environment are first steps in launching a career in international social work. You must develop an area of expertise and also acquire knowledge and understanding of:**

- World history
- World geography
- Economics
- Politics
- Culture [Language (your own and at least one other); Literature; The arts; Social behavior/customs]
- Social welfare policy
- Program development and evaluation

**It is important to have lived and/or worked abroad even if you seek an international job in your country of origin. You can gain international experience abroad through:**

- Internship
- Volunteerism
- Travel
- Language or other study

**Living and working abroad is exciting and challenging.**

**To succeed in international work abroad you must:**

- Be flexible, adaptable to change and difference
- Love to travel, despite discomfort
- Enjoy meeting people, making strong ties even though they may be short-term
- Like being alone, for at times you will be or simply will feel so

**In seeking international work, employ traditional job-search techniques. Expect to fill out complicated application forms. Be sure to check with the embassy of any country where you intend to work to find out about legal and medical requirements/restrictions for doing so. Once you are on-the-job:**

- Scope out the formal and informal ways of getting things done
- Find a mentor
- Create learning opportunities for yourself (join local organizations)
- Document your experiences

### **MACRO SOCIAL WORK**

Macro Social Work is significantly expanding in three areas. These are:

#### **Community Organization**

A return to the need for community-driven processes in a time of has enhanced the field of rebirth and rediscovery of "community" has fed the demand for social workers skilled in Macro Social Work practice. There are probably more jobs for community organizers today than there were in the 1960s.

#### **Community Development**

Social workers can find rewarding work in developing community in the literal sense through building houses, renovating abandoned buildings, and finding affordable housing in communities and by developing community capacity through social infrastructure as organizers, planners, managers, and program developers.

#### **Public Health**

Health promotion and disease prevention activities can be effectively promoted by social workers.

#### **Macro practice social workers should possess knowledge in:**

- Community Organizing - Community organizing has a value base of participation in community-driven processes. The focus of community organizing is on involving the community by taking a strengths assessment, doing strategic planning, developing skills for implementing and evaluating efforts.
- Planning and Program Development - Social planning draws on both analytical and political skills in attempting to remedy the multiple social problems affecting the community. Such a focus utilizes a generic set of planning theories and principles and concentrates on developing a problem-solving framework out of which one can work with communities, agencies.
- Human Services Management - All social workers need to have basic administrative and management knowledge and skills regardless of their primary work. Macro practitioners should have basic competencies in proposal writing, budgeting, supervision, evaluation research, program development, and financial management and planning.

#### **What experience is needed for macro practice and how does one get it?**

There is a growing trend for students to enter graduate social work degree programs with shorter and shorter intervals between their undergraduate and graduate studies. New Master's-prepared social workers are entering the workforce with little volunteer or prior work experience. Training in macro practice social work training and jobs in this area allow one to get broad hands-on experience.

#### **What personal qualities should a macro practice social worker?**

- Commitment to working with the community driven process and basic respect for people
- High energy, strong motivation
- Flexibility and patience, ability to live with ambivalence
- Analytical thinking
- Sense of humor, perspective and vision
- Persistence, focus, and follow through

**What should you do to develop yourself once you have the job?**

- Find good supervision and mentorship
- Develop and maintain good support systems off the job with colleagues, former supervisors/field advisors and faculty members
- Keep reading in the field/Attend conferences and in-service trainings

**PRIVATE PRACTICE**

**The primary focus of private practice is the direct delivery of clinical social work services. Barker named ten criteria to identify a social worker in a private practice.\***

*The private practitioner...*

1. has the client as the primary obligation
2. determines who the client will be
3. determines the techniques to be used in services to this client
4. determines practice professionally, not bureaucratically
5. receives a fee for services directly from or on behalf of the client
6. is educated as a social worker
7. is a sufficiently experienced social worker
8. adheres to social work values, standards, and ethics
9. is licensed, certified, and registered, where applicable, to engage in private practice
10. is professional responsible

**Specific Knowledge Base**

- Assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychopathology
- Crisis Intervention/Suicide Assessment
- Psychotropic medications
- Referral sources for psychopharmacological intervention/hospitalization

**Qualifications & Standards**

NASW established minimum standards in 1962, including a master's degree from an accepted school of social work and five years of acceptable, full-time supervised agency employment. Also, some post-master's programs for additional training and enhanced personal insight are highly desirable.

**Licensing**

All 50 states as well as Washington, D.C.; Puerto Rico; and the Virgin Islands have licensing laws and regulations relative to private practice.

**Marketing**

You can promote your practice and secure clients through distribution of business cards and flyers, ads in professional and community publications, outreach by giving lectures or conducting workshops.

**Office Space and Setup**

You may choose to establish a solo practice or join a group. Overhead expenses may include but not be limited to supplies, furniture, rent/mortgage, taxes, utilities, administration, personnel, and health, malpractice and liability insurance.



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**Fees and Billing**

You and/or the payor will set flat or sliding, global or fee-for-service charges according to market rates. You will have to set up a system for billing, payment, and recovery of unpaid bills.

**Personal Considerations**

You may choose to secure individual or peer supervision. Some advantages of a private practice are independence and additional income. Disadvantages include professional and social isolation, fiscal insecurity.

For information about obtaining your LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker in NY State go to: <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/sw>