


Philosophy Statement

History

My initial interest in the social work field came from receiving mental health services during adolescence. I became interested in the different kinds of therapeutic services, discovered a passion for helping others, and wanted to use my lived experience to inform my practice. I went on to complete my undergraduate degree in psychology and human services. My plan was to attend a graduate counseling program and obtain my professional counseling licensure in order to provide therapeutic services, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). However, several factors shifted my interest from professional counseling to clinical social work and pushed me to apply to Mizzou's MSW program. One factor was working as a personal care attendant for two years during college. While in this position, I was able to see several aspects of consumers' care needs and their interactions with social services. This experience highlighted some significant disparities as well as gaps in home health services. My undergraduate internship at North Star Advocacy Center, a domestic and sexual violence service program, opened my eyes to the many unjust policies that contribute to this issue and the need for trauma-informed services. These experiences led me to feel unsatisfied with only practicing on a micro level. Pursuing a career in social work satisfies my goal of addressing unequal access to services, while giving me the opportunity to provide the clinical services that sparked my initial interest in this field.

MSW Learning Experiences

My practicum placement at True North of Columbia helped me put my classroom learning into practice. In a case management role at True North, I was able to demonstrate and improve my micro social work skills, including reflective listening, boundary setting, unconditional positive regard, and defining goals. I applied the knowledge I learned in Foundations of Human Behavior Theory in order to understand clients, improve service delivery, and make programs more accessible. My social and economic justice project involved creating a resource packet with comprehensive information about housing options in Columbia and advocating for True North's clients' housing needs by creating a flier to encourage rental groups' participation in the transitional living program. This project allowed me to apply concepts that I learned in Social Policy and Service Delivery to my advocacy efforts. In this class, we discussed how policies can have unintended consequences on the target population(s) and the importance of involving relevant population(s) in policy development, implementation, and evaluation. For this reason, I



created and distributed a survey assessing the housing experiences, barriers, and needs of our shelter residents. Their answers helped inform my understanding of what they require from their next home and what factors could make it harder for them to access safe and affordable housing. These learning experiences have taught me the importance of career-long learning, especially when it comes to social advocacy efforts.


Theoretical Perspectives

I have been able to apply many of the social work concepts and theories from this program to my field experiences. In accordance with empowerment theory, course work and material have reinforced my understanding of how important it is to engage clients as the expert on their own experience and goals. Empowerment theory resonates with me because it puts the client in the driver's seat. A social worker's job involves providing clients with education, resources, and interventions. However, clients have the right to choose what they do with what they have available to them. I think that within empowerment theory, it is essential to promote self-determination and reject oppressive or paternalistic approaches. One way I can apply empowerment theory to my work with clients is by creating a safe and judgment free zone for them to share their story and communicate any goals and needs. One way I can do this is by maintaining unconditional positive regard and highlighting client strengths during clinical practice.

I have applied my knowledge of the ecological systems theory to my practicum experiences. Learning about this theory helped me understand the importance of addressing the causes of social problems, rather than just treating the symptoms. During my practicum placement at The Bluffs, a non-profit skilled nursing home, I have been able to identify gaps in service access that hinder residents' ability to live in their environment of choice. Understanding that resident outcomes are influenced by multiple factors, including informal support and service availability, has helped to inform my advocacy efforts. While at The Bluffs, I have advocated for residents' discharge goals by educating them about various services, coordinating with other members of their interdisciplinary team, and informing legislatures of areas where policy is needed to address disparities. In accordance with ecological systems theory, this approach intervenes on a micro, mezzo, and macro level.

Moving Forward

Due to the rapidly changing environments that we practice in and the emphasis on career-long learning, graduating with my MSW marks the beginning of my social work education, not the end. I plan to gain specialized training in various clinical models, such as DBT, crisis intervention, and family systems therapy. Throughout my practice, I want to stay



up-to-date with current strengths-based language and best practices regarding suicide prevention. On an organizational level, I plan to apply the skills I learned in Fundamentals of Social Work Administration to create a business plan to address gaps in services available to a particular community. Unlike the business plan my group created for class, I am excited to implement and evaluate future business plans based on client feedback and comparing data from before and after the program.

Short-Term Goals

My first short-term career goal is to pass the Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) exam. After licensure, my goal is to work with the older adult population in a variety of settings and on multiple social work practice levels. This includes working on hospice, nursing home, and geropsych interdisciplinary care teams. One of my main practice goals is to identify any barriers to older adults' ability to age in place in order to create programs and advocate for policies to address those barriers.