



INDUSTRY OVERVIEW: SOCIAL WORK

What is Social Work?

Social workers assist people by helping them cope with issues in their everyday lives, deal with their relationships, and solve personal and family problems. They may help clients who face a disability, a life-threatening disease, or a social problem, such as inadequate housing, unemployment, or substance abuse. Social workers also assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, sometimes involving child or spousal abuse. Some social workers conduct research, advocate for improved services, manage nonprofit organizations, and fund-raise. Many social workers specialize in serving a particular population or working in a specific setting.

Career Tracks

Child and Family Social Workers: provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families and to maximize the well-being of families. They may assist single parents, arrange adoptions, or help find foster homes for neglected, abandoned, or abused children. Some specialize in services for senior citizens. These social workers may run support groups for the children of aging parents, advise elderly people or family members about housing, transportation, long-term care, and other services, and coordinate and monitor these services. They often work for individual and family service agencies or state or local governments.

School Social Workers: often serve as the link between students' families and the school, working with parents, guardians, teachers, and other school officials to ensure students reach their academic and personal potential. In addition, they address problems such as misbehavior, truancy, and teenage pregnancy and advise teachers on how to cope with difficult students. Increasingly, school social workers teach workshops to entire classes.

Medical and Public Health Social Workers: provide psychosocial support to people, families, or vulnerable populations so they can cope with chronic, acute, or terminal illnesses. They also advise family caregivers, counsel patients, and help plan for patients' needs after discharge from hospitals. Medical and public health social workers may work for hospitals, nursing and personal care facilities, individual and family services agencies, or local governments.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers: assess and treat individuals with mental illness or substance abuse problems. Such services include individual and group therapy, outreach, crisis intervention, social rehabilitation, and teaching skills needed for everyday living. They also may help plan for supportive services to ease clients' return to the community. Mental health and substance abuse social workers are likely to work in hospitals, substance abuse treatment centers, individual and family services agencies, or local governments.

Social Work Administrators, Planners, and Policymakers: develop and implement programs to address issues such as child abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and violence. These workers research and analyze policies, programs, and regulations. They identify social problems and suggest legislative and other solutions. They may help raise funds or write grants to support these programs.

Skills/Requirements

While a bachelor's degree in social work is sufficient for some entry level positions, most positions in social work require an MSW (Master of Social Work). Social work is generally a profession for those interested in helping people. Many social workers work individually with clients, others run groups, and still others are administrators in nonprofit organizations. Social workers should be emotionally mature, objective, and sensitive to people and their problems. They must be able to handle responsibility, work independently, and maintain good working relationships with clients and coworkers.

Salary

The field of social work is not extremely high-paying, though it is certainly possible to earn a reasonable living. The starting salary with a bachelor's degree is lower than that of someone with an MSW (Master of Social Work). Starting salary also takes into account years of experience and work environment. A social worker working for a government agency will earn less than one working for a school. A school social worker will earn less than the director of a nonprofit agency or a social worker in private practice.

The median annual wage of social workers was \$42,480 in May 2010. However, some Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Psychiatric Social Workers, and Medical Social Workers earn upwards of \$90,000.

Directories

Good Works

NY Public Library Listing of Social/Health Care Agencies in New York City

The SourceBook of Health Care & Social Service Agencies

Publications

The Non Profit Times, City Limits

Associations

National Association of Social Workers, www.helpstartshere.org

Council on Social Work Education, www.cswe.org

Websites

www.socialworker.com

www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main

www.idealists.org

www.guidestar.org

www.everettinternships.org

www.foundationcenter.org

www.goodworks.org

www.networkforgood.org

www.socialservice.com

www.jewishcareers.com

www.jpro.org

www.Iajvs.org

www.jewishjobs.com

www.ujc.org

www.interaction.org