

Welcome to the Crossroads

By

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WELCOME TO THE CROSSROADS....

“Social work is not a profession for a recluse.”¹

“No longer can communities take refuge in blaming the victims and in depriving them of the status of honorable membership in the group.”²

“Heated as the controversy usually is when the subject of public versus private ownership of these common human services arises, it might puzzle an observer from another planet to know why, in one instance, public ownership is questioned and in another viewed with alarm as if the foundations of the state were crumbling.”³

“How shall clients and skilled counselors be sure of meeting, if not at the crossroads of life where ordinary traffic passes by”⁴

At the Registration Table, you will find copies of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) “Definition of Social Work”, and copies of the excerpts from the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics, circa 1994 and 1983, which delineate social workers’ responsibility to society. You will also find “*Some Definitions...*” of six major terms (like “social action”⁵), highly relevant to today’s proceedings.

- The IFSW “Definition of Social Work” is included in its entirety, because it represents the global agreement (Montreal, July 2000) of 1,500,000 professional social workers in over 80 nations, in concert with over 2,000 schools of social work, as to the purpose, domain, values, theory, and practice of social work. This is a singular achievement, carried out on Canadian ground, while reflecting 74 years of affiliation between the profession and its educators.
- The verdict is in: our profession “promotes social change... (and) intervenes at the points where people intersect with their environments.” More importantly, principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”
- In brief, we subscribe in our training, in our professional practice, and in our legal accountability to our client systems, to social work as human rights work, and to a social justice mission... and to doing this from a person-in-environment perspective. It is because of this perspective that we are a unique profession; our uniqueness does not come from our values, alone.
- There is no dichotomy between the demands of the IFSW global definition of social work and that embodied in the CASW Code of Ethics (3 June 1983), for 20 years the code that has guided Registered Social Workers in membership with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Its provisions are at the heart of our legislation and our Standards of Practice, and why the Government of Alberta has chosen to delegate to us the status and responsibilities of a self-governing profession. *This is an opportunity for me to publicly acknowledge the contribution of Dick Ramsay who, using his sabbatical time (1982-83), drafted this Code from a 10-point non-justiciable CASW values statement into one that, by 1984, had been adopted or approved by every provincial professional association in Canada. It must be noted, also, that he had gone through a similar exercise (Brighton 1982), in developing the first international IFSW “Definition of Social Work” document.*

- The CASW/ACSW *Code* states, simply, “I will act to effect social change for the overall benefit of humanity.” That simple statement is the law for Registered Social Workers in Alberta.
- “The law” prevents our discriminating against persons and groups on some approximately 15 enumerated items... but it also enjoins us “to prevent and eliminate discrimination” on the part of others.
- “The law” says that we will “make reasonable efforts to advocate for the equitable distribution of societal resources and act to ensure that all persons have reasonable access to the resources, services and opportunities which they require.”
- “The law” says we will “expand choice and opportunity for all persons, with special regard to disadvantaged or oppressed groups and persons”.
- “The law” says that professional social workers “must promote conditions that encourage respect for the diversity of cultures which constitute society.”
- “The law” says that we will “advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve conditions and to promote social justice.”
- “The law” says we will encourage informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.”

The means by which we manifest our professional privileges and responsibilities are the subject of today’s work. One of those means is “social action”, on behalf of client systems of all sizes. Social action is always a “means”...never an end in and of itself.

It is exceptionally hard work... as is all of our professional work. If you believe that only “leaders” in our profession do this, or are required to do this, you are dead wrong. The best lesson ever taught to me by my late Mother was, “You bloom where you are planted.” Every social worker has the opportunity to matter and, hopefully, the capacity to do so. If one lacks the motivation, I will heartlessly suggest that you are in the wrong pew, and lack the essential qualifications to be an ordinary member of a global profession.

FINALLY:

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE WORLD IS RUN BY THOSE WHO SHOW UP

Notes

1. Reynolds Bertha Capen (1934). *Between Client and Community*. MD, USA: NASW Classics Series, National Association of Social Workers (1982), p. 22
2. Ibid, p.23
3. Ibid, p. 24
4. bid, p. 13
5. Barker Robert L (1999). *The Social Work Dictionary*, 4 Ed. Washington, DC: NASW Press.