

Social welfare policy essay sample

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Trattner (1999) describes the beginning of social work started with the hope to build a good economy as: the means of accomplishing this were by ‘ setting the poor to work’ and turning the country into ‘ a hive of industry,’ direct and active government intervention was required to overcome the threat of insecurity and the prevailing social disorder; hence, the Poor Law of 1601. (p. 10) The important aspect of studying the history of social work is to see how we got to where we are in today’s society. It is in reference to taking care of poor people and another phase for the modern day Social Security Act.

During the 1500s it was not safe to travel and for those people that did where homeless and therefore started begging to survive. The only people allowed to beg were not able-bodied men but only women, children, or the disabled. Parliament, the national government, wanted to control the free movement of people from begging. Today it changes to public assistance for the women, children, and disabled. Back then Parliament can take responsibility but leaves it up to locality to tax people and collect money to take care of its poor people. It seems as though TANF was already established in the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. There was also a residency requirement in 1601 in which the only obligation was to poor people within a specific area and it was acceptable to exclude outsiders such as immigrants.

In the early part of the 1800s, England starts to change and capitalism takes root. There was a change in the poor laws. Trattner (1999) states “ mercantilist philosophy underlying the Elizabethan Poor Law was being replaced by the idea of free and unlimited exchange – a self-regulating

market economy or laissez-faire” (p. 50). England and other parts of Europe depart from major principles of locality.

The first social reformer was Dorothea Dix. Trattner (1999) exemplifies she was “ a great figure in the field of social welfare, Dix’s career offers an excellent example of sustained constructive action for the downtrodden” (p. 63). She was a nurse and educator who desired to help large numbers of people who are mentally ill. Haynes (1998) mentioned in her debate that Dr. Harry Specht gives the example of Jane Addams and Mary Richmond with a “ desire for social justice” and “ their goal was to uplift the downtrodden” (p. 506). In Dix’s case, President Franklin Pierce vetoed her bill and this veto stays with the country.

His reasoning was “ If Congress has the power to make provision for the indigent insane... it has the same power for the indigent who are not insane” (Trattner, 1998, p. 66). Taking care of the mentally ill is the responsibility of the state. Pierce says the bill is inconsistent with the Constitution and because they can say ‘ no’ to everyone that comes to federal government for help. We see later that President Franklin D. Roosevelt does something to overcome the veto. Coming into the present, in Obamacare the federal government was sued by the states as healthcare was taken power away from the states. The Supreme Court finds that Obamacare’s major features are constitutional and that mandating to buy healthcare is constitutional.

Social work starts to develop in the 1870’s with the Charity Organization Society. Women were “ friendly visitors” who wanted to change poor people. Their motto was “ not alms but a friend” (Trattner, 1999, p. 96). In order to

help people they first collected information and facts, today considered assessment. Friendly visitors had to be sympathetic and kind, today also known as empathetic communication. They had to use their personal influence, such as building rapport and a relationship today. Finally they had to give suggestions and advice, which today is finding alternatives and a treatment plan as a social worker. Friendly visitors lived in the settlement houses and did case work that focused on the problem with the system.

There were apprenticeships that took place in U. S. history. Trattner (1999) explains “ destitute and neglected children, as we have seen, were placed in private families and put to work or bound out as apprentices...” (p. 112). The youth in apprenticeship would be feed and taken care of. With an emphasis on child welfare, today we have foster care in which the government can give family money to take care of the child.

When Roosevelt was governor of New York, he started to develop extensive public assistance programs. By the 1920s the Progressive Era has passed and the state develops a pension plan. This would be the modern day TANF program. Social security was experimented at the local level. FDR was able to push the Social Security Act. The federal Social Security Act of 1935 is imperative because it gives money to the elderly, disabled, and the poor under the same legislation. Trattner (1999) elaborates: Title IV of that act, Aid to Dependent Children, established a federal program of cash payments to mothers deprived of their husbands’ support. Known now as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFCD, it is the cornerstone of today’s welfare system. (p. 226) Not only did senior citizens get help, but the Social

Security Act also helped impoverished people. And when the war ends, everyone gives up their fear of federal government.

The public changes their view and thinks FDR and the government can do no wrong. In the 1940s there is now a positive view of the federal government and no one is afraid of central power anymore. The war was able to distract people's attention from unemployment as it produced jobs. But there was an unjust side to this because there was discrimination in the FDR's New Deal within the Social Security Act. Trattner (1999) elaborates " under FERA, the design of work projects and the allocation of funds were left to local officials, who often discriminated against blacks, especially in southern rural areas, but elsewhere as well" (p. 282). It was racist because blacks would have to apply for aid in the public assistance program. The black farmers and domestics were left out in FDR's legacy as racism continued in society. We see that every few years the Social Security Act of 1935 is amended.

President Lyndon Johnson focused on ending poverty. Trattner (1999) described Johnson was " a Roosevelt protégé who wanted to start his own New Deal, called upon Congress to enact a thirteen-point program that would declare ' unconditional war on poverty'" (p. 322). Further in this paper, I describe my internship. The health center where I work grew out of the War on Poverty in the 1960s. Part of that was a major effort to address the health disparities in low-income communities, where a lot of people were (and still are) underserved and uninsured, in order to combat epidemic levels of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and the like. It is an important health resource in the Brooklyn community.

Social work is a “ social cause”:

Hayes (1998) states that “ the mission of the profession has never been very clear in this country” but I believe social work is a social cause (p. 506). With the evolving history of social work, we see that it started with helping poor people to better themselves in their own environment. In the long run helping one person affects their family and affects the community. Focusing on social issues such as believing that people have a right to certain resources can change the social order. To minimize social work to a set of knowledge, skills, techniques, and theories is forgetting the practice aspect of the profession which stems from altruism. Hayes (1998) says “ the mission of this profession is, and always has been, to heal individual pain and create or maintain a just society” (p. 509). It is the combination of both theory and practice that makes social work a movement.

Important issues in social work profession today:

Hayes (1998) points out “ One part of the problem is social work’s abandonment of its mission; the other part is the deep and sincere belief Americans have for the utility and efficacy of psychotherapy” (p. 504). My internship is at Brooklyn Plaza Medical Center. It is a model community health facility, with a stated mission to “ improve the physical, spiritual, psycho-social and psychological well-being of residents of North Central Brooklyn by providing the highest quality preventive comprehensive family health services with particular concern for lower-socio-economic groups” (Introduction section, para. 1). It is located at the corner of Fulton Street and Lafayette Avenue. The clinic is mandated to deliver quality healthcare to the

community. It is a federally qualified health center and focuses on the health disparities in low-income communities, where a lot of people are underserved and uninsured. I believe people have a right to healthcare which is an important issue today.

Health care is a major issue especially in regards to the baby-boomer generation. Dolgoff and Feldstein (2013) state “ A fragile, dependent population of aging baby boomers will place very heavy demand on Medicare” (p. 370). The fees and payment policies also accept Medicaid and Medicare or sliding fee scale/assistance based on need. What is also helpful is that undocumented immigrants are welcomed; we provide services to all individuals regardless of immigration status. A great strength of the clinic is that it is open 60 hours per week which is a lot more than the average health center. Brooklyn Plaza Medical Center has a holistic approach, and just as I believe, they endorse that quality health care is a right for everyone. A goal in my career is to serve the underserved in the healthcare setting despite their disparities. According to Waldegrave (2005) in “ Just Therapy” with Families on Low Incomes, it states “...family problems are located in events that are external to the family. These could be events such as unemployment; bad housing; homelessness; racist, sexist, or heterosexist experiences” (p. 268).

Likewise, Jacobson (2001) supports “ therapy is not a particularly useful intervention for alleviating poverty, building sustainable communities, or generally improving outcomes for disadvantaged people – goals at the core of the social work mission” (p. 53). In looking for solutions through a person-in-environment perspective, the Waldegrave article has influenced me to <https://assignbuster.com/social-welfare-policy-essay-sample/>

know that is it not solely my client's fault for their medical conditions and there are perhaps contextual barriers to their medical adherence. What was even more striking was the relationship that “ poorer people die earlier and consistently have the poorest health and the highest hospitalization rate” (Waldegrave, 2005, p. 269) which is so unjust.

At Brooklyn Plaza Medical Center our population of clients came from poverty and we address issues such as housing or a shortage of food for the family. Specifically in my Diabetes Collaborative team, we teach our clients the importance of healthy eating habits and food sources such as the food pantry and co-ops if they cannot afford or have transportation to let's say a Trader Joe's market. Or if our clients do not have a gym membership, a walk in the park is sufficient for exercise. The article makes me cognizant of factors affecting my clients within the macro and mezzo contexts, and not just the micro contexts of their family dynamics. What I must always remember is that when I treat and help one client, I am not only affecting that one person but their family and community as well.

Roles in social work:

In the coming decades, social work will have to play the role in globalization. In one respect it can help poorer nations. Dolgoff and Feldstein (2013) explain “ globalization brings free trade and global markets that help developing nations, make for increased communication and cooperation...” (p. 368). But at the same time it results in outsourcing. Dolgoff and Feldstein (2013) state “ there is a ‘ race to the bottom’ for workers’ salaries” (p. 368). In history during the Progressive Era, the government began to interfere with

the work place. There were minimum wage laws, child labor laws, and industrial safety laws. There is a right to get paid a certain amount. The foremost freedom is economic freedom. Everyone wants freedom and a person may just want a job to obtain freedom, so despite the wage they may just want to be hired.

Social work profession deals with social justice:

My own personal thoughts on social justice stem from the Acts of Mercy, one of my favorite teachings from my Catholic faith that has been a guiding force behind my choice of career in social work. I have never been one to follow dogma, but listening to the gospel in church one day, I was truly inspired by the simple but profound gestures of kindness and compassion: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, comfort the sick, and bury the dead. I decided that my career and life would revolve around these kind acts to benefit those in need. In addition to going to church to hear services, I was also involved in acts of altruism through the Feed the Hungry program. As a teenager, volunteering within my Saint Cyprian parish touched my heart.

Working alongside fellow church members, we made simple bag lunches containing sandwiches, fruit, cookies, or chips. We then drove to downtown Long Beach in California and passed out the food to the homeless people in the parks. Simply putting a smile on a homeless person's face really impacted me as a youth, and I wanted to get that same type of reward in my career path. I began to ask myself who can or is responsible to help disadvantaged, underrepresented, and marginalized people. I realized that

the answer was me. When I think about social justice, the image of the Black Panthers crosses my mind. During college, my ethnic studies courses in college kept me grounded, so I decided to pursue it as a minor, to continue to feed my hunger for self-awareness. My education was a mixture of Filipino-American Studies and Chicano Studies courses, and was the catalyst that fueled my passion in social work.

I was engrossed in the stories of the civil rights movement in the 1960's, and took a particular interest and liking to the Black Panther Party movement. The resilience of the African American community, to have endured so many struggles in this country, is inspiring. I was especially fond of the program of providing breakfast for children in schools. Part of the Black Panther Party Movement was the Free Breakfast for School Children Program was a simple concept, yet so beneficial to its community. Haynes (1998) argued “ my vision of good social work practice has always been, and I do not doubt, will always be, one of advocacy with, and on behalf of, our clients toward the enhancement of individual social functioning and community empowerment” (p. 505).

And I agree with her. I have a strong desire to help improve people's lives. I want to work in a community for the common good. Being raised in an ethnicity that is relationship-based (Filipino American) has instilled a desire for my career to serve a broader purpose than the advancement of self-interest. In dealing with social justice, the social work profession needs to go back to “ community-based social care”. Jacobson states “ its leadership role in innovative systems reform and social change work has virtually disappeared” (p. 51). My volunteer work has helped me understand the <https://assignbuster.com/social-welfare-policy-essay-sample/>

meaning of community. I believe this understanding and connection to my community will not only make me a vital member of the social work community, but also serve me in my planned life-long career in social work.

Jacobson (2001) points out that it is imperative to comprehend “ structural barriers” (p. 53). In dealing with social justice, as a social worker I must dispel the myths about racism and classism in practicing mindfulness. In class my Diversity class, we watched the film Color of Fear (1991) directed by Mun Wah Lee. What was interesting to me was that although the film was made over 20 years ago, the issue of racism still persists. We have made strides to combat racism, but we cannot just sweep it under the rug and pretend it is not there so as to live in a colorblind society. I used to think that racism was ‘ a thing of the past’, but after reading the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander, I then realized that just because we have an African American president does not mean racism was all of a sudden erased.

The meritocracy myth entails believing that if one person of color can make it, then we all can despite our race/ethnicity as people use Obama as a primary example. I liked how, an African American, expressed his anger about racism to a Caucasian in the film. The Caucasian is so oblivious to his white privilege and he innocently believes that there is something wrong with people of color who are poor or down and out. He blames people of color for their own status in their conversation. And when another man pointed out the Caucasian saying ‘ you people’ was derogatory as to say you are not like me and why can’t you be more like me, why can’t you be more white/Western to make me feel more comfortable. I have learned from the <https://assignbuster.com/social-welfare-policy-essay-sample/>

film that although the Caucasian states and believes ‘ we are all human’, we are not all treated human through different forms of racism.

When he cries and explains he could not believe how cruel humans can be to each other, he does not want to believe it but soon comes to understand what the African American man is talking about. Recognizing the myths I used to believe about meritocracy and changing my beliefs based on facts will make me a better social worker. Strier (2009) talks about: Class-competent social work also implies a sense of critical self-awareness. Social workers should be aware of their own class biases and assumptions, and they must be open to critical debate on how these biases and assumptions may affect the cross-class nature of worker-client relationships. (p. 237) Self-reflection allows social workers to look into our thoughts about the population we work with and make a reciprocal relationship (Jacobson, 2001). I am practicing how to become more self-aware in my career.