



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

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Editor: Marion Huxtable

School Social Workers Celebrate 60 Years of Service in Victoria, Australia Chris Barrett, Lecturer, Deakin University

In 2008, the state of Victoria, Australia, celebrates 60 years of school social work. In 1947-8, the Health Department fought to reserve the right to employ the small number of university trained social workers. The determination of the Education Department resulted in a legal court judgment in 1948 that allowed the integration of the first school social workers into the school and student support service.

To this day Victoria has the biggest contingent of school social workers of any state in Australia. Traditionally, state government employees deliver social work services in networks of schools. Over the years there have been various organizational structures, including the regional office, district office and school cluster models. Also, for more than 25 years, secondary schools (years 7-12) have had the option to appoint a student welfare coordinator from the teaching staff. Sometimes this person happened to have social work or student welfare qualifications as well as a teaching degree. Depending on their staffing allowance, budget and priorities, a small percentage of secondary schools have decided to select from outside the current teacher group to employ a social worker or other support person.

Under a new program implemented by the state a few years ago, high needs primary schools have been allocated an extra amount to employ a student support worker. Some select one of their teaching staff, but many are choosing social workers or other welfare staff.

For the past 60 years, through changing social and political environments, school social workers have continued to bring their unique perspectives to the support of children and young people in schools. School social workers engage in casework, group work and community development, with a focus on students in their learning environments. Interventions for change are made at personal, family, school, neighborhood and policy levels, according to systems, ecological, structural or critical theories. From its earliest days, school social workers in Victoria have understood the need for social and institutional change in order to achieve the goal of social justice through education.

Secondary School Social Work in New Zealand

Nicki Weld, Acting Senior Advisor for Social Work in Schools

Along with Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) for primary and intermediate schools, the New Zealand Government through its Ministry of Social Development (MSD) is now funding a social service initiative to put social workers into secondary schools. This is only for schools that have been classified as having the highest level of social deprivation. The initiative is called Multi Agency Support Services in Secondary Schools (MASSISS). The social workers involved are employed by community based social service provider employers (funded by MSD) and go into the schools as a site of intervention. Some workers are employed directly by the school. The social workers' professional practice is supported by their employers and by a commitment from MSD to provide ongoing training and development.

Currently MASSISS is in 16 schools, 13 in the suburbs of South Auckland and 3 in the suburbs of Porirua. These schools are in multicultural areas that include Pacific Island, Maori, Asian, and European cultures. Families in these areas are more likely to be experiencing poverty and social challenges for a range of reasons including living within a different culture, experiencing higher rates of unemployment, and being accommodated in high density housing. If the children have grown up in New Zealand but their parents have not, then as young people they can get caught in a struggle between the culture of their parents and the culture of their peers. This, along with other social reasons, can cause some young people to get into youth gangs and crime, have drug and alcohol issues, and experience mental health issues. MASSISS currently employs 20 social workers to help in schools around these social challenges and also to build on young people and their family's strengths to help prevent these types of issues.

The social workers also provide a crucial link between home, family, and the school. Language differences such as having little or no English, the main language of New Zealand, can create barriers for parents in understanding the norms and expectations of a New Zealand school. Social workers can help find ways to overcome these barriers and encourage parental involvement in schools. Group programmes are also organised by the social workers to promote relationship-building, communication and self esteem for young people and any student within a school is eligible for these. It is exciting to have MASSISS in place alongside the SWiS service for the younger age group. It is providing great opportunities to help transition children and young people into secondary school which overall assists them to remain in school and have better life outcomes.

For more information about social work in schools in New Zealand, please see <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/3629.htm> or contact cyf_swis@cyf.govt.nz

For links to national school social work professional associations, see
<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com/Links.html>

Send short articles about school social work activities for the newsletter of the International Network to: mhuxtable@olympus.net