



International Network for School Social Work

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

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School social work (skólafélagsráðgjöf) in Iceland

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The School Psychology Department in Reykjavík (the capital of Iceland) was founded in 1960. The department's role was to serve the schools and take on challenging tasks such as students' behavioral problems. At first there was one psychologist, soon after joined by two psychologists due to severe need for this service and difficulty meeting the demand. In 1962, soon after the psychological department was established, a social worker was employed to work for the department. That social worker was probably the first school social worker (skólafélagsráðgjafi) who worked within the education system in Iceland.

In 1974 laws regarding psychological service for compulsory school were enacted. Under the act, employees of psychological departments for each district should be psychologists, social workers and special education-teachers. However, few social workers were employed in Iceland and they received their social work education overseas, mostly in Scandinavian countries. As few social workers graduated in Iceland, there was a shortage of social workers to work for the School Psychology departments. Then in 1982, eight years after School Psychology was enacted certified social workers graduated from the Social Science Department and more recently from the Social Work Department of the University of Iceland (Félagsráðgjafadeild Háskóla Íslands). In addition to the BA, MA, MSW and Doctoral Degree, it is possible to receive a diploma in school social work. Yet, when the laws for compulsory schools were changed in 1989, employing a social worker was not a requirement in the school system. That has remained unchanged since then.

The Icelandic School Social Worker Association (Fagdeild fræðslu - og skólafélagsráðgjafa FFS) was established on June 2nd in 2004. It operates as a sister association under the Social work Association of Iceland (Félagsráðgjafafélag Íslands), which works both as a union and a professional association. The association intends to promote a professional debate among school social workers, strengthen their position

within the school system and raise awareness of school authorities, the State and members of the public on issues concerning students and their families. The association will also organize seminars and workshops and create a forum for dialogue on issues concerning students and their families.

The main tasks of social workers in schools in Iceland

- Personal counseling: Counseling students who have social, educational or emotional problems. The causes may be bullying, communication problems, conduct problems, anxiety, shyness, lack of self-esteem, violence and poverty.
- School Counseling: Counseling students with problems with attendance and other school related issues.
- Prevention: Specific preventive programs, for example projects on bullying prevention and drug abuse prevention.
- Interdisciplinary cooperation: Cooperation with institutions or specialists within and outside of the school environment.
- Design and development of resources: Social workers assess the need for resources and develop services to meet the need.
- Participation in councils and steering groups: Social workers in schools participate in or lead the work of various boards and steering groups.
- Counseling for parents: For parents who need parenting advice related to the interests and well being of students.

The need for social services within the education system in Iceland

It is estimated that 20 social workers work within all school levels in Iceland where there are 47,240 students. However they are usually employed as career and guidance counselors. In Iceland it is customary for these two professions to be combined into a single position. Therefore career and guidance counselors often carry out social counseling as well as their more typical work, and social workers do career and guidance counseling. Career and Guidance counselors are the majority of those providing counseling within schools and they have complained that too much time goes into the social and personal guidance in which they have no education or interest, since their professional training is primarily to provide advice concerning education and career matters.

Meanwhile, Iceland is facing a recession, as is the entire world. Cutbacks are being made within the school system and at the same time more families are faced with difficult situations. Increased unemployment, financial concerns and similar issues affect the children and the need for intervention increases to help them deal with the stresses facing them and their families. School employees also feel more pressure in their work and there is an increase in individual counseling with social workers.

The Icelandic School Social Worker Association has pointed out that there is a need in the school regulations and laws that a social worker be required in all schools. Both social workers and guidance counselors have shown interest that the two sectors be separated and social workers be employed on their own terms. The school social workers in Iceland are lobbying for this matter in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. We are optimistic that this will occur as we continue our efforts.

The 5th International School Social Work Conference
will be held April 10 - 13, 2012 in Accra, Ghana.
The theme for the conference is
"SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL THE WORLD'S CHILDREN".
Call for Abstracts/Proposals
The deadline for abstracts is August 15: Proposal form is at <http://www.sswaghana.org/>