



International Network for School Social Work

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A Timeline of School Social Work

School social work was introduced at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as part of the universal education movement in several countries. The initial role of attendance officer evolved into a social work role with varied interpretations over the last hundred years in about 40 countries. Roles and methods have been imported and shared. There are also various models based on national traditions and cultures. The following summary of the development of school social work around the world follows the approximate order in which the service first appeared.

In the United Kingdom, school attendance officers were recruited in the late nineteenth century as an enforcement service. The role developed into the present position of *education welfare officer* (also called *education social worker*) in which attendance work is still a major function.

In the United States, private agencies placed *visiting teachers* in schools in three East coast cities in the early part of the twentieth century. The goal was to provide contact between home and school to promote school attendance. Early on, *visiting teachers* started to use social work methods, using knowledge from the mental hygiene movement and also attending to the child's environment. The role has been transformed repeatedly, reflecting changing theories and needs. Most school social workers in the United States have a Master's degree in Social Work (MSW) and use the title *school social worker*, which was introduced in the 1930s. Frederick Streeck of the School Social Work Association of America estimates there are about 20,000 school social workers employed.

School social work started in the Nordic countries between the 1940s and 1970s. Eva-Mari Thomas reports that there are about 1,600 school social workers (*skolkuratorer*) in the Swedish school system. The role includes both social work and guidance/counseling, encompassing a broad range of prevention and intervention and emphasizing teamwork with other specialists. Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland have a lower social worker to student ratio than Sweden, but the services provided are similar. Hanna Gråston-Salonen reports that the new Finnish Child Welfare Act requires municipalities to provide services of school social workers and school psychologists. The Nordic countries require school social workers to have university training in social work.

School social work started in Canada in the 1940s, growing out of earlier truancy and school attendance work, but evolving into a complete social work service, in which improving school

attendance is still a major function. School social work services vary across the country both in extent and in the way they are organized, since each of the 10 provinces has autonomy in how education is administered. The greatest concentration is in Ontario, where there are 400 school social workers to serve a population of 10 million people. The majority of Canadian school social workers have the Master of Social Work degree.

School social work was started in the Netherlands in the 1940s. For about years, it provided services chiefly in the area of special education, but currently provides a comprehensive service as can be seen in numerous web sites on *schoolmaatschappelijk werk*.

There have been attendance officers in Malta since 1946. The Education Act of 1974 stimulated a movement to change attendance enforcement into education welfare, in which the workers could attend to the reasons for poor school attendance, and help families keep their children in school.

The Ghana Education Service started a school welfare program in the 1960s to provide help with school attendance and to ensure that children's needs are met so that they can benefit from school.

School social work started in Argentina in the 1960s in the Buenos Aires Province. Graciela Tonon wrote that rapid social change and economic fluctuations limited the development of the profession, which lacks the status and resources to fulfill its potential.

School social work (*Schulsocialarbeit*) originated in Germany in the 1970s as an extension of social pedagogy, a traditional profession in much of Europe. The number of school social workers varies greatly from state to state, with especially large numbers in the former West Berlin and the State of Nordrhein-Westfalen. However, the Child and Youth Welfare Law (1990) which supported the idea of providing services to youth in the natural environment has set the stage for greatly increased services in all German states, including the Eastern states, through collaboration between Youth Welfare agencies (*Jugendhilfe*) and schools.

Hong Kong started a school social work program in the 1970s in collaboration between government and private agencies. The program has continued since Hong Kong was restored to the People's Republic of China and made a Special Administrative Region. Currently about 800 school social workers are employed.

The United Arab Emirates have implemented a comprehensive program of social work in schools (تصاوي اجتماعي) since its introduction in 1972. The Ministry of Education and Youth has placed 419 male social workers in boys' schools and 575 female social workers in girls' schools. These figures imply a total of 994 social workers in 744 schools, with a ratio of 1.34 social workers per school. Mohamed Ibrahim El Walily reported school social workers must have a university degree in social work with four years of experience in an educational field.

The Ministry of Education in Poland established the profession of social pedagogy (*pedagog szkolny*) in 1975. Services offered are the typical social work services of assessment, material support, collaboration with agencies, casework, group work, and services to disabled students. Social pedagogs must have a master's degree in pedagogy, sociology or psychology.

Social work services have been introduced to schools within the last four decades in Australia, Korea, Japan, Austria, Switzerland, New Zealand, Russia, Latvia, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Saudi Arabia, Luxembourg, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Mongolia, China, India, Singapore, Pakistan, France and Liechtenstein. Social work students in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have recently piloted school social work as part of their social work training.

There is little information about services to children in schools in many other parts of the world, including much of Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Mediterranean.