

Social Work Profession

- Professional social workers assist individuals, groups, or communities to restore or enhance their capacity for social functioning, while creating societal conditions favorable to their goals. The practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior, of social, economic and cultural institutions, and of the interaction of all these factors.
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), social work is one of the fastest growing careers in the United States. The profession is expected to grow by 30% by 2010; currently, nearly 600,000 people hold social work degrees.
- Social workers are highly trained and experienced professionals. Only those who have earned social work degrees at the bachelor's, master's or doctoral levels, and completed a minimum number of hours in supervised fieldwork, are "professional social workers."
- According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), 22,163 junior and senior students were enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs in 2000; there were also 20,369 full-time and 13,446 part-time students enrolled in master's degree programs. In the same year, 15,007 individuals graduated with MSW degrees and 11,773 graduated with BSW degrees. In addition, 229 doctoral degrees in social work were awarded in 2000. Currently there are over 8,000 social work professors teaching in the United States.
- Social workers help people overcome some of life's most difficult challenges: poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, physical illness, divorce, loss, unemployment, educational problems, disability, and mental illness. They help prevent crises and counsel individuals, families, and communities to cope more effectively with the stresses of everyday life.
- Professional social workers are found in every facet of community life—in schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, senior centers, elected office, private practices, prisons, military, corporations, and in numerous public and private agencies that serve individuals and families in need. They often specialize in one or more practice areas.
- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), professional social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health services providers. There are more clinically trained social workers—over 190,000 in 1998—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined. Federal law and the National Institutes of Health recognize social work as one of five core mental health professions.
- Over 40% of all disaster mental health volunteers trained by the American Red Cross are professional social workers.
- There are over 170 social workers in national, state and local elected office, including two U.S. Senators and four U.S. Representatives. These include: Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Rep. Ciro D. Rodriguez (D-TX), Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), Rep. Ed Towns (D-NY), and Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA).
- Today, 48 special interest social work organizations contribute to the vitality and credibility of the social work profession.

Resources:

Web: For additional information about social workers, search the 2002 Occupational Outlook Handbook on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website: www.bls.gov. Also visit www.socialworkers.org for more information about the profession.

Video: "Social Work: The Profession that Makes a Difference" produced in partnership with Tina Pederson and Documentary USA by the NASW California Chapter.

