

The Roles of a Social Worker*

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Enabler:

In the enabler role, a social worker helps a client become capable of coping with situations or transitional stress. A social worker conveys hope, reducing resistance and ambivalence, recognizing and managing feelings, identifying and supporting personal strengths and social assets, breaking down problems into parts that can be solved more readily, and maintaining a focus on goals and the means of achieving them (Barker, 1995).

Mediator:

The mediator role involves resolving arguments or conflicts micro, mezzo, or macro systems. At the macro level, the mediator helps various subsystems within a community, or a community and some other system, work out their differences. At the micro and mezzo levels, mediation is helps in such areas as resolving divorce and child custody cases. A mediator remains neutral and does not side with either party in the dispute (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Integrator/Coordinator:

Integration is the process of bringing together various parts to form a unified whole.

Coordination involves bringing components together in some kind of organized manner. A generalist social worker can function as an integrator/coordinator "in many ways, ranging from . . . advocacy and identification of coordination opportunities, to provision of technical assistance, to direct involvement in the development and implementations of service linkages" (Yessian and Broskowski, 1983, p. 184).

Manager:

Management in social work involves having some level of administrative responsibility for a social agency or other unit "to determine organizational goals' . . . acquire resources and allocate them to carry out programs; coordinate activities toward the achievement of selected goals; and monitor, assess, and make necessary changes in processes and structure to improve effectiveness and efficiency" (Barker, 1995, p.8).

Educator:

The educator role involves giving information and teaching skills to clients and other systems. To be an effective educator, the worker must first be knowledgeable. Additionally, the worker must be a good communicator so that information is conveyed clearly and is understood by the client or macro system (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Analyst/Evaluator:

Social workers with a broad knowledge base of how various systems function can analyze or evaluate how well programs and systems work. They can also evaluate the effectiveness of their own interventions (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Broker:

A broker helps link clients (individuals, groups, organizations, or communities) with community resources and services. A broker also helps put "various segments of the community in touch with one another "to enhance their mutual interests (Barker, 1995, p.43). In micro and mezzo systems, this requires that the worker be familiar with community services, have general knowledge about eligibility requirements, and be sensitive to client needs. A broker may help a client obtain emergency food or housing, legal aid, or other needed resources. (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Facilitator:

A facilitator is "one who serves as a leader for some group experience" (Barker, 1995, p. 129). The group may be a family therapy group, a task group, a sensitivity group, an educational group, a self-help group, or a group with some other focus. The facilitator role may also apply to macro practice. In this context, a facilitator assumes "the responsibility to expedite the change effort by bringing together people and lines of communication, channeling their activities and resources, and providing them with access to expertise" (p. 129).

Negotiator:

A negotiator represents an organization, a group, or an individual that is trying to gain something from another group or system. Somewhat like mediation, negotiation involves finding a middle ground that all sides can live with and achieving consensus whenever possible. However, unlike mediators, who play a neutral role, negotiators clearly ally themselves with one of the sides involved (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Advocate:

Advocacy involves "the act of directly representing a course of action on behalf of one or more individuals, groups, or communities, with the goal of securing or retaining social justice" (Mickelson, 1995, p. 95). The advocate role involves stepping forward and speaking on behalf of the client system. The advocate role is one of the most important roles a generalist social worker can assume, despite its potential difficulties (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

*References

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