

School Social Work Services



A Service of the
Area Education Agency

Iowa Department of Public Instruction

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Why School Social Work

"Schools stand as the chief expression of American tradition of fair play for everyone, and a fresh start for each generation. It is no longer thought proper to restrict educational programs to the skills of the mind, even though these skills remain of fundamental importance. Schools also attempt . . . to do anything else which will help bring a child up to the starting line of adult life, as even with his contemporaries as native differences in ability permit."¹

Receiving an education is recognized as the key to opportunities provided by our society. Therefore all children should have the opportunity for positive school experiences that will develop and enhance their individualities and offer them growth possibilities.

Federal and state law mandates that all Area Education Agencies (AEA's) and local school districts provide educational programs for handicapped students in Iowa. Within Iowa's AEA's school social work is a discipline in the special education division.

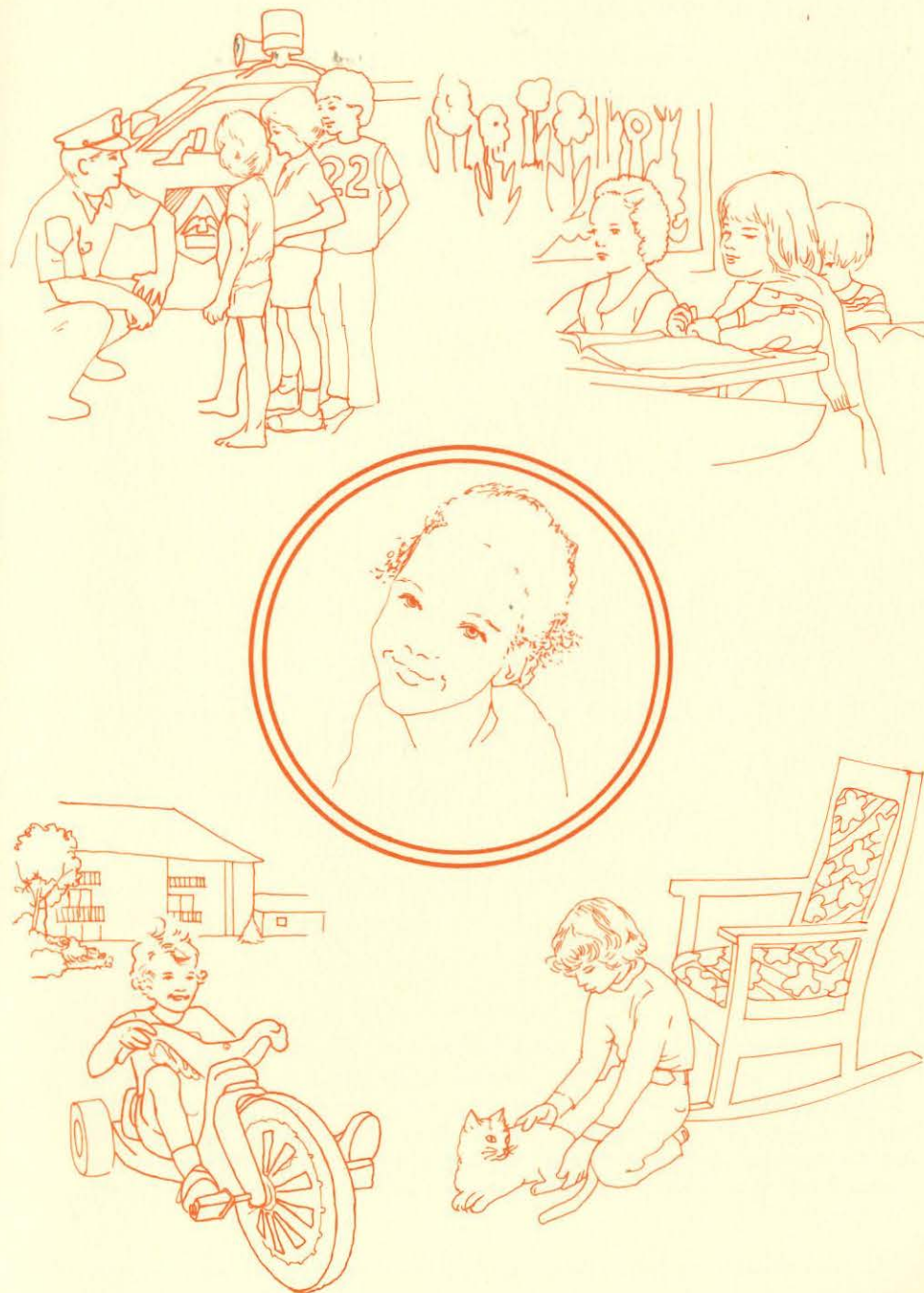
The goal of school social workers is to provide services and resources for handicapped students to help them achieve their maximum educational potential and an appropriate life adjustment. School social work services should be an integral part of the total professional team process in order to maximize the effectiveness of special education services and programs for children.

These professionals help students and schools cope with problems that are identified within the educational environment. Through the problem solving process, they assist individuals in developing their abilities to cope with life's tasks and/or conflicts. The school social worker is also essential in helping schools develop each student's physical, social, emotional and educational potentials.

The school social worker may be a coordinator between services in the school, community and the home. The worker brings to school a service based on particular areas of knowledge dealing with:

- an understanding of human behavior and the forces that shape personality
- an awareness of underlying motivations of behavior
- a knowledge of the dynamics that exist within the family atmosphere and environment that distract a child from using the school experience effectively
- an ability to assess the dynamic emotional and social factors that hinder learning

¹From the Report to the President by the Committee for the White House Conference on Education, 1955.



The Role of the School Social Worker

The school social worker's role is to help identify, assess, plan, implement and evaluate programs for children experiencing problems with the school setting and for handicapped preschool children. Through a planned problem-solving approach, the school social worker provides direct services of counseling and consultation with the child, parents or family. In particular situations, the school social worker may refer the child or family to an appropriate referral agency.



An annual clarification of expectations and priorities for school social workers is as essential as the initial planning of the school social work program. Because school social workers may perform many functions, their responsibilities should be clearly delineated. However these functions will vary depending on the program, each professional's training and the needs of each school and community. The worker may quite reasonably change emphasis from one year to the next.

The following is a list of these functions. However, this list is neither comprehensive nor restrictive for the professional must first work to achieve the objectives of the particular program in the school.

- Provides individual and group counseling to students, parents, and families.
- Consults with the classroom teacher to provide additional insights and understandings regarding a particular child's (or group of children's) classroom needs or behavior.
- Provides a diagnostic assessment of the child's social and intrapersonal relationships within the school, home and community.
- Participates in staffing with local school personnel, other AEA staff members, parents and non-educational specialists (physicians, community agency personnel, etc.) to provide coordinated evaluation and programming for the student.
- Serves as a child advocate to insure that the child's educational and child protection rights are observed.
- Serves as a liaison between the school, the family, and community agencies.
- Participates in and provides in-service training programs.
- Coordinates services with other local, state, and federal social agencies to develop a coordinated service delivery system and participates in planning and programming for the needs and services of the community.
- Consults with administrators, teachers, and students regarding broad areas of social, emotional, and educational well-being.
- Participates in the development of services which are needed for children, schools and communities.
- Participates in professional social work organizations and community organizations.
- Contributes research and literature to the field of school social work.

Who the School Social Worker Helps

The school social worker serves the school system and the people who are a part of the system which includes administrators, teachers, students and parents. Social workers also work with other professionals serving the schools and in community and state agencies.

The School System

The satisfactory adjustment of each child contributes to the harmony and functioning of each school. School social workers are prepared to act as consultants to the principal, counselors, teachers, or other school personnel on problems related to the adjustment of a child or a group of children to school. The social worker is also specifically trained to help the school find solutions to social and emotional problems that interfere with the educational progress of the student.

The Principal

The principal, as administrator of the school, is aware of many children in the school who have problems adversely affecting themselves, other pupils, and/or the entire classroom. Together the principal or his representative (e.g. counselor or assistant principal) and the school social worker determine ways in which the social worker may be helpful. They decide which situations should have priority. The effectiveness of school social work is clearly related to the principal's acceptance and interpretation of the social worker's services to the child, the parents, the teacher, and other school personnel.

The Teacher

The teacher is one of the most important persons in a child's life and usually spends more time with the child than any other individual except his parents. Responsibility for the education of the child inevitably rests with the teacher, even though some children exhibit behavioral problems which make teaching difficult. The school social worker assists the teacher in understanding and identifying the problems of the handicapped child, the disturbed child and the child exhibiting behavioral problems. With increased understanding, the social worker and teacher are able to develop appropriate plans and actions for helping problem children. The school social worker is particularly dependent upon the teacher for early identification of children with potentially serious problems.

The Student

The student brings to school a pattern of behavior learned in the home and community or a specific handicap which may be causing the child difficulty in adjusting to the school program. A school social worker may learn more about the student and the student's background to understand the reasons for the behavior or the extent of the handicapping condition. The professional may also

assist in developing programs and services to help the student have a better school adjustment and complete the educational program. School social workers deal with children, from birth through age 24.

The Parent

Since parents are an integral part of a child's life and success, communication between school and home is essential. The school social worker helps parents understand the school's position as well as the child's attitudes, behavior, capacities, and adjustment in school. This may involve helping parents to learn more about themselves, their own needs, and the extent to which they may be contributing to the child's problems in or out of school. If the parents understand the school and communicate with the school, they are better able to contribute to their child's positive school adjustment.



How and When to Refer

The classroom teacher will generally be the first to recognize a troubled child and thus is a primary source of referral. However, concerns may also be reported by the nurse, special educators, guidance counselors, and the child's parents. The referral should state the concern and observations in writing.

The referral process should be developed within each school, and should stress early identification and prompt service to children having difficulty. Minor adjustment problems might be handled on a consultative basis with the social worker while major problems are handled through the official referral process. In addition, the social worker responds appropriately to emergency situations by using crisis intervention and mobilizing community resources to meet the identified need.

Legal Sanctions for School Social Work

School social work is defined under the rules of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Special Education, 1977, as individual, group, and family case work and consultation with school personnel. That brief descriptive statement alludes to a wide variety of tasks which are delineated in the first section of this booklet. Rules and regulations of the DPI specify support personnel in the various disciplines, including school social work, and require that the social workers employed by Area Education Agencies (AEA's) hold master degrees in social work from accredited graduate schools of social work and hold teaching certificates or letters of professional recognition issued by the DPI.

Chapter 273 of the 1975 Iowa Legislature created the AEA's and it refers to support services in general for handicapped students. Although this law does not specify social work or any other of the disciplines which provide support services, the majority of the AEA's in Iowa have elected to include school social work as one support service discipline.



Public Law 94-142 mandates a free, appropriate, public, and least-restrictive educational program for all handicapped students from three years of age to 21 years. Public Law 94-142 also stipulates that there be an individualized educational plan for each student, designed to meet the unique needs of that student, and using services related to the educational component of the program. In arriving at these plans, each student must be evaluated by more than one special educational support discipline and social work is one discipline available in such evaluations.

Section 2, 281.2 of the Code of Iowa relates to special education and it requires that support services, such as school social work, be available to students in classrooms, homes, hospitals, institutions, etc. This section of the Code of Iowa can be interpreted to specify that, wherever possible, the full range of services will be used to insure appropriate educational programs in the least restrictive environment.



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