

Social Work and the Social Worker

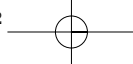
Social work is an indispensable profession in our complex and ever-changing society. But it is an often misunderstood profession, as well, in part because it cannot be easily described or explained. It is a profession characterized by diversity. Social workers engage in a broad range of activities within many types of settings and with many different people. Some work intensely with individuals and families, while others work with small groups, organizations, or whole communities. Some deal primarily with children, while others deal with older persons. Some are counselors and psychotherapists, while others are supervisors, administrators, program planners, or fund-raisers. Some focus on family violence and others on how to provide housing or medical care to the poor. This variety is what makes social work so challenging and stimulating. But it is because of this diversity of both clients and activities that it is so difficult to answer the simple question: What is social work?

The task of concisely defining social work in a manner that encompasses all of the activities in which social workers engage has challenged the profession throughout its history. At a very fundamental level, social work is a profession devoted to helping people function at their maximum levels within their social environments and, when necessary, to changing their environments to make that possible. This theme of person-in-environment is clarified and illustrated throughout this book.

The authors' perspective of social work is captured in the following three-part definition of a social worker. A social worker

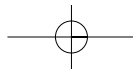
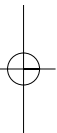
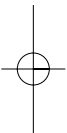
1. has recognized professional education (i.e., knowledge, ethics, and competencies) and the requisite skills needed to provide services sanctioned by society,
2. that engage vulnerable populations (e.g., children, older people, the poor, minorities, persons with disabling conditions) and others in efforts to bring about needed change in themselves, the people around them, or related social institutions,
3. so that these individuals and groups are able to meet their social needs, prevent or eliminate difficulties, make maximum use of their abilities and strengths, lead satisfying lives, and contribute fully to society.

In order to be a responsible professional, the social worker must understand and function within the profession's accepted areas of expertise. The primary resource the social worker brings to the helping process is his or her own capacity to develop positive helping relationships and assist clients to take actions that will improve the quality of their lives. Throughout its history, social work has been portrayed as both an art (one's personal characteristics) and a science (a base of knowledge required to be an effective professional). Part I, then, addresses the most



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fundamental elements of social work practice—the blending of the person and the profession—in order to most effectively assist individuals, families or other households, small groups, organizations, and communities as they work to prevent or resolve the complex social problems that arise in their daily lives.



The Domain of the Social Work Profession

When a person sets out to help others, especially those most vulnerable to social problems, he or she assumes a serious responsibility. The responsible professional must practice within his or her **professional domain** (i.e., the profession's area of expertise, or its "professional turf") if clients are to receive the services that the profession is sanctioned to provide. Indeed, professional helpers can harm clients if their activities extend beyond their professional boundaries because these boundaries establish the content of the profession's formal education and identify the services its members are best prepared to deliver.

This book is concerned with the profession of social work and how social workers assist people in addressing a variety of different issues that confront them. Social work is, indeed, a curious name for a profession. In times that emphasize image over substance, it is clearly a title that lacks pizzazz. In fact, the use of the word *work* makes it sound burdensome and boring. It is a title that many social workers have wished they could change, possibly without understanding where it came from in the first place.

The title is attributed to Jeffrey Brackett (1860–1949) who served for nearly 30 years on the Massachusetts Board of Charities and later became the first director of what is now the Simmons College School of Social Work. In the early 1900s, Brackett argued that the word *social* should be part of this developing profession's title because it depicts the focus on people's interactions with important forces that shape their lives, such as family members, friends, or a myriad of other factors, including their relevant cultural or ethnic group, school, job, neighborhood, community, and so on. He added the word *work* to differentiate professional practice from what he considered the often misguided and self-serving philanthropic activity of wealthy volunteers. He believed including the word *work* in the profession's title emphasized that its activities were to be orderly, responsible, and disciplined—not something to be engaged in by someone unprepared for these tasks.

Social work is an accurate title for a profession that applies helping techniques in a disciplined manner to address social problems. During the years since Brackett convinced early helping services providers to accept this title, the domain of social work has expanded and its approach has been reshaped by the increasing knowledge generated by the social and behavioral sciences. Yet the title continues to describe this profession's central focus today.

THE SOCIAL WORK DOMAIN

It is important for the social worker to carefully examine the domain of social work (i.e., to understand its purpose, focus, scope, and sanction). This is especially important for students because educational programs divide the study of social work into units, or courses, and this can lead to familiarity with the parts without necessarily understanding the whole.

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One reason for understanding of the social work domain is to help guard against **professional drift**: the neglect of the profession's traditional purpose and functions in favor of activities associated with another professional discipline. This happens most often in clinical settings when social workers align themselves too closely with models and theories used in medicine, psychology, and other disciplines, which tend to minimize social policy and social justice issues. These practitioners may come to view themselves as psychotherapists first and social workers second—or perhaps not as social workers at all. Professional drift is also seen among administrators and managers who were trained as social workers but are identified primarily with their specific organizations rather than the social work profession. When professional drift occurs, it is a disservice to one's clients, employing social agency, and community for it diminishes the commitment, perspective, and competencies unique to social work.

A precise and generally agreed-upon understanding of the boundaries that mark the several helping professions does not exist. Different disciplines (e.g., social work, clinical psychology, school counseling, and marriage and family therapy) have claimed their domains without collaboration or mutual agreement about where one profession ends and another begins or where they appropriately overlap. This problem is further complicated by the fact that each state that chooses to license the practice of these professions is free to establish its own descriptions of professional boundaries. It is important, therefore, to approach learning about social work's domain with the recognition that boundaries between professions are sometimes blurred.

Social Work's Purpose

An understanding of the social work profession begins with a deep appreciation of humans as social beings. People are, indeed, social creatures. They depend on other people to help address many of their own needs. An individual's growth and development requires the guidance, nurturing, and protection provided by others. And that person's concept of self—and even his or her very survival, both physically and psychologically—is tied to the decisions and actions of other people. It is this interconnectedness and interdependence of people and the power of social relationships that underpins a profession devoted to helping people improve the quality and effectiveness of those interactions and relationships—in other words, to enhance their social functioning.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONING The concept of social functioning is a key to understanding the unique focus of social work and distinguishing social work from the other helping professions. *Positive social functioning* is a person's ability to accomplish those tasks and activities necessary to meet his or her basic needs and perform his or her major social roles in the society. Basic needs include such fundamental concerns as having food, shelter, and medical care, as well as being able to protect oneself from harm, finding acceptance and social support, having meaning and purpose in life, and so on. Major social roles include, for example, those of being a family member, a parent, a spouse, a student, a patient, an employee, a neighbor, and a citizen. A person's social roles change through his or her life, and expectations associated with these roles differ somewhat depending on the person's gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, occupation, and community. (See Item 11.8 for more description of social role performance.) In sum, the concept of social functioning focuses on the match or fit between an individual's capacities and actions and the demands, expectations, resources, and opportunities within his or her social and economic environment.

Although the social work profession is concerned with the social functioning of all people, it has traditionally prioritized the needs of the most vulnerable members of society and those who experience social injustice, discrimination, and oppression. The most vulnerable in a society are often young children, the frail elderly, persons living in poverty, persons with severe physical or mental disabilities, persons who are gay or lesbian, or persons of minority ethnic/racial backgrounds.

To carry out their commitment to improving people's social functioning, social workers are involved in the activities of social care, social treatment, and social enhancement. **Social care** refers to those actions and efforts designed to provide people in need with access to the basics of life (e.g., food, shelter, protection from harm) and opportunities to meet their psychosocial needs (e.g., belonging, acceptance, and comfort in times of distress). In social care, the focus is on providing needed resources and/or on helping the client be as comfortable as possible in a difficult situation that either cannot be changed or modified in the immediate future. Examples of social care would be efforts to address the needs and concerns of young children who must live in foster care, adults who have a serious and persistent mental illness, and persons who are dying.

Social treatment involves actions designed to modify or correct an individual's or a family's dysfunctional, problematic, or distressing patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior. In social treatment, the focus is primarily on facilitating individual or family change through education, counseling, or various forms of therapy. In many cases (e.g., work with children in foster care), the social worker may provide both social care and social treatment to the same client.

A third form of intervention seeks to enhance, expand, or further develop the abilities and performance of persons who are already functioning well. **Social enhancement** services emphasize growth and development of clients in a particular area of functioning without a "problem" having necessarily been identified. Some examples of enhancement-oriented services are youth and senior citizen recreation programs, well-baby clinics, marriage enrichment sessions, and job training programs.

IMPROVED SOCIAL CONDITIONS Social work's second area of emphasis is on shaping and creating environments that will be supportive and empowering. Underpinning this goal is one of the most fundamental social work values: a strong belief in the importance of achieving and maintaining social justice. **Social justice** refers to fairness and moral rightness in how social institutions such as governments, corporations, and powerful groups recognize and support the basic human rights of all people. A closely related belief of social workers is that the society should strive for *economic justice* (sometimes called *distributive justice*), which refers to fairness in the apportioning and distribution of economic resources, opportunities, and burdens (e.g., taxes). In other words, the economic resources of a society should be distributed (and redistributed) through structures of taxation and other economic mechanisms so that all people have opportunities for economic advancement and can meet their basic needs.

Very often, political controversy has its origin in differing conceptions of what is truly fair and just and in differing beliefs on whether and how society should assume responsibility for addressing human needs and problems. Most social workers would argue that social and economic policies must recognize that all people have basic human rights—that is, claims on humanity at large, not because of individual achievement or by actions of government but simply by virtue of one's existence and one's inherent worth and dignity. Among those *basic human rights* are the following:

- The right to have the food, shelter, basic medical care, and essential social services necessary to maintain one's life
- The right to be protected from abuse, exploitation, and oppression
- The right to work and earn a sufficient wage to secure basic resources and live with dignity
- The right to marry, to have a family, and to be with one's family
- The right to a basic education
- The right to own property
- The right to be protected from avoidable harm and injury in the workplace
- The right to worship as one chooses—or not at all, if one chooses
- The right to privacy
- The right to associate with those one chooses
- The right to accurate information about one's community and government
- The right to participate in and influence the decisions of one's government

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Social workers would also agree that along with rights come responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities cannot exist without the other. Situations of injustice develop when people are concerned only about their own rights and no longer possess a sense of responsibility for others and society in general. To protect each right, there must be associated acts of responsibility. For example, in relation to the first three rights identified earlier:

- If a human has the right to be alive, then others have the responsibility to make sure that he or she has food, shelter, and essential medical care.
- If people have the right to be protected from abuse, exploitation, and oppression, then others have the responsibility to create social programs and take actions that will provide this protection when required.
- If a person has the right to work and earn a living, then others have the responsibility to make sure that employment opportunities exist and that those who work are paid a living wage.

Social workers sometimes perform services to help achieve people's rights; at other times, they serve as a voice for those whose rights are ignored or abused by calling on others to recognize the basic rights of all people and to act responsibly, with fairness and justice. When a social worker is providing services to individuals, families, or groups, these changes would be considered *environmental modifications*. An example would be efforts by a school social worker to prepare students for the return of a former classmate who was badly scarred in an automobile accident. Another example would be providing special training to a foster mother so that she can respond thoughtfully and constructively to a young foster child who exhibits inappropriate behaviors.

Even when working with an organization or a community, a social worker may seek to modify its wider environment. That may entail efforts to influence local decision-makers, businesses, political leaders, and governmental agencies so that they will be more supportive of the organization's mission or more responsive to a community's needs and problems. Such macro-level interventions may involve the worker in social research, social planning, and political action intended to develop and improve laws, social policies, institutions, and social systems so that they will promote social and economic justice, expand opportunities for people, and improve the everyday circumstances in which people live. Specific examples would be expanding the availability of safe and affordable housing, creating incentives for businesses to hire people with disabilities, amending laws so that they better prevent discrimination, and helping neighborhood and community organizations become politically active in addressing the issues they face.

Efforts to modify environments are sometimes labeled programs of prevention. **Prevention** consists of those actions taken to eliminate social, economic, psychological, and other conditions known to cause or contribute to the formation of human problems. To be effective in prevention, social workers must be able to identify the specific factors and situations that contribute to the development of social problems and then select actions and activities that will reduce or eliminate their impact (see Item 12.13). Borrowing from the public health model, three levels of prevention can be identified:

Level 1: Primary prevention. Actions intended to deter the problem from developing

Level 2: Secondary prevention. Actions intended to detect a problem at its early stages and address it while it is still relatively easy to change

Level 3: Tertiary prevention. Actions intended to address an already serious problem in ways that keep it from growing even worse, causing additional damage, or spreading to others

Social Work's Focus

Social work is certainly not the only profession concerned with how individuals and families function, nor is it the only profession interested in social conditions and social problems. However, it is social work's simultaneous focus on and attention to both the person and the person's environment that makes social work unique among the various helping professions.

One's environment may be either a support or a barrier to his or her effective social functioning. Because both the person and the environment are constantly changing, adaptations and adjustments must be ongoing. Social workers, therefore, must be especially vigilant regarding those aspects of a person's environment that are shaped by the social policies and programs that make up the social welfare system.

The social work profession's unique focus on the **person-in-environment** requires that the social worker attend to several interrelated dimensions of the person: biological, intellectual, emotional, social, familial, spiritual, economic, communal, and so on. This concern for the **whole person** contributes to the breadth of concern by the social work profession—for example, the individual's capacity to meet basic physical needs (food, housing, health care, etc.), the person's levels of knowledge and skills needed to cope with life's demands and to earn a living, the person's thoughts about others and his or her own life, the individual's goals and aspirations, and the like. It is important to note the person-in-environment construct uses the word *person*, not *personality*. Personality is but one component of the whole person. A focus only on personality would be incongruous with the domain of social work and slant it toward psychology.

The term **environment** refers to one's surroundings—that multitude of physical and social structures, forces, and processes that affect humans and all other life forms. Of particular interest to social workers are those systems, structures, and conditions that most frequently and most directly affect a person's day-to-day social functioning (i.e., the person's *immediate environment*). One's immediate environment includes the person's family, close friends, neighborhood, workplace, and the services and programs he or she uses.

Social workers devote a major part of their attention to clients' efforts to improve interactions with their immediate environment. Social workers focus to a lesser extent on the broader environment, possibly because the impact of problems in the more *distant environment* is less evident and more difficult to change. In order to grow, develop, and survive, humans need clean air, drinkable water, shelter, and good soil to produce food. And because biological well-being is a prerequisite to positive social functioning, social workers must also be concerned with problems such as prevention of disease and pollution. In addition, they seek to change damaging societal values, correct human rights violations, and address unjust political and economic structures that may affect their clients. Concern over factors in both the immediate and distant environments is central to fulfilling social work's mission.

Because social relationships are of central concern to their profession, social workers must understand the power of a social environment—both its potentially helpful and harmful influences. Humans are social creatures and have a strong need to be accepted by others. Observing what others in our social environment are doing can be a powerful force for change—either positively or negatively. Social workers understand that if a person's environment changes and becomes more favorable for the client, that individual will be more likely to make positive changes in what he or she thinks and how he or she behaves.

Social Work's Scope

A profession's **scope** can be thought of as the range of activities and involvements appropriate to its mission. One way of describing social work's scope involves classifying the intervention by the size of the client system. Practice at the **micro level** focuses on the individual and his or her most intimate interactions, such as exchanges between husband and wife, parent and child, close friends, and family members. The terms *interpersonal helping*, *direct practice*, and *clinical practice* are often used interchangeably with micro-level practice.

At the other extreme, **macro-level** practice may involve work with an organization, a community, a state, or even a society as a whole. Obviously, macro-level practice also deals with interpersonal relations, but these are the interactions between people who represent organizations or who are members of a work group such as an agency committee or interagency task force. When engaged in macro-level practice, the social worker is frequently involved in activities such as administration, fund-raising, testifying on proposed legislation, policy analysis, class advocacy, and social resource development.

Between the micro and macro levels is **mezzo-level** (midlevel) practice. Practice at this level is concerned with interpersonal relations that are somewhat less intimate than those associated with family life but more personally meaningful than those that occur among organizational and institutional representatives. Included would be relationships among individuals in a self-help or therapy group, among peers at school or work, and among neighbors.

Some practice approaches address more than one intervention level. For example, social treatment, as defined by Kemp, Whittaker, and Tracy (1997), includes the micro and mezzo levels, and the generalist perspective (Schatz, Jenkins, and Sheafor, 1990) requires the social worker to be capable of practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Social Work's Sanction

The concept of **sanction** refers to the authorization, approval, or permission needed to perform certain professional tasks or activities. Sanction has the effect of defining the profession's domain. Four major sources provide sanction for social work activities. One source is government agencies—federal, state, and city—that authorize the actions of social workers through several means: legislation that creates social programs, the allocation of funds for social work activities, the licensing of organizations (e.g., licensed child-placing agencies) that employ social workers, and the licensing and regulation of individual social work practitioners.

A second source of sanction includes the many private human services organizations (both non-profit and profit-making agencies) that endorse social work by recruiting and hiring social workers to provide services or by purchasing services from those who are in private practice or employed by other agencies. Indirectly, then, the community sanctions and pays social workers to provide specific services. In return for this sanction to practice, social workers are obliged to provide high-quality services and to take reasonable steps to make sure that social work practitioners are competent and ethical.

Third, the profession, acting through the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), sets standards for appropriate and ethical practice. By requiring adherence to its *Code of Ethics*, offering certification (see <http://www.socialworkers.org/credentials/default.asp>), and providing education to its membership through publications and conferences, the NASW serves as a vehicle for protecting the public trust.

Finally, the true test of public sanction for practice is the willingness of clients to seek out and use services offered by social workers. In order to win the trust of clients, social workers must demonstrate on a daily basis that they are capable of providing effective services and are committed to conducting their practice in a responsible and an ethical manner.

AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Figure 1.1 presents a model of the key factors that influence social work practice. It shows the client (or client system) and the social worker joined in an effort to bring about a desired change in the client's functioning or situation, while both are being influenced by the social agency (e.g., its policies and programs) and by the wider social environment. This **planned change process** involves several phases during which the client and social worker move from their decision to initiate a course of action, through assessment and action phases and on to an evaluation of its success and a decision to terminate the helping activity (see Chapter 7). Although the social worker is expected to guide this process, the client must ultimately decide to commit to the change process and utilize the helping resources identified by or provided by the worker.

The Client side of Figure 1.1 indicates that the problem or situation the client seeks to change is, most likely, the product of a combination of personal and environmental factors. Each client has a unique set of *personal characteristics* (e.g., life experiences, goals, beliefs, perceptions, strengths, limitations, needs) that may have contributed in some way to the situation or problem being addressed and that might also be a resource that helps to bring about the desired change.

Clients do not exist in isolation. Their *immediate environment* might include friends, family, school personnel, employers, natural helpers, neighborhood or community groups, or even

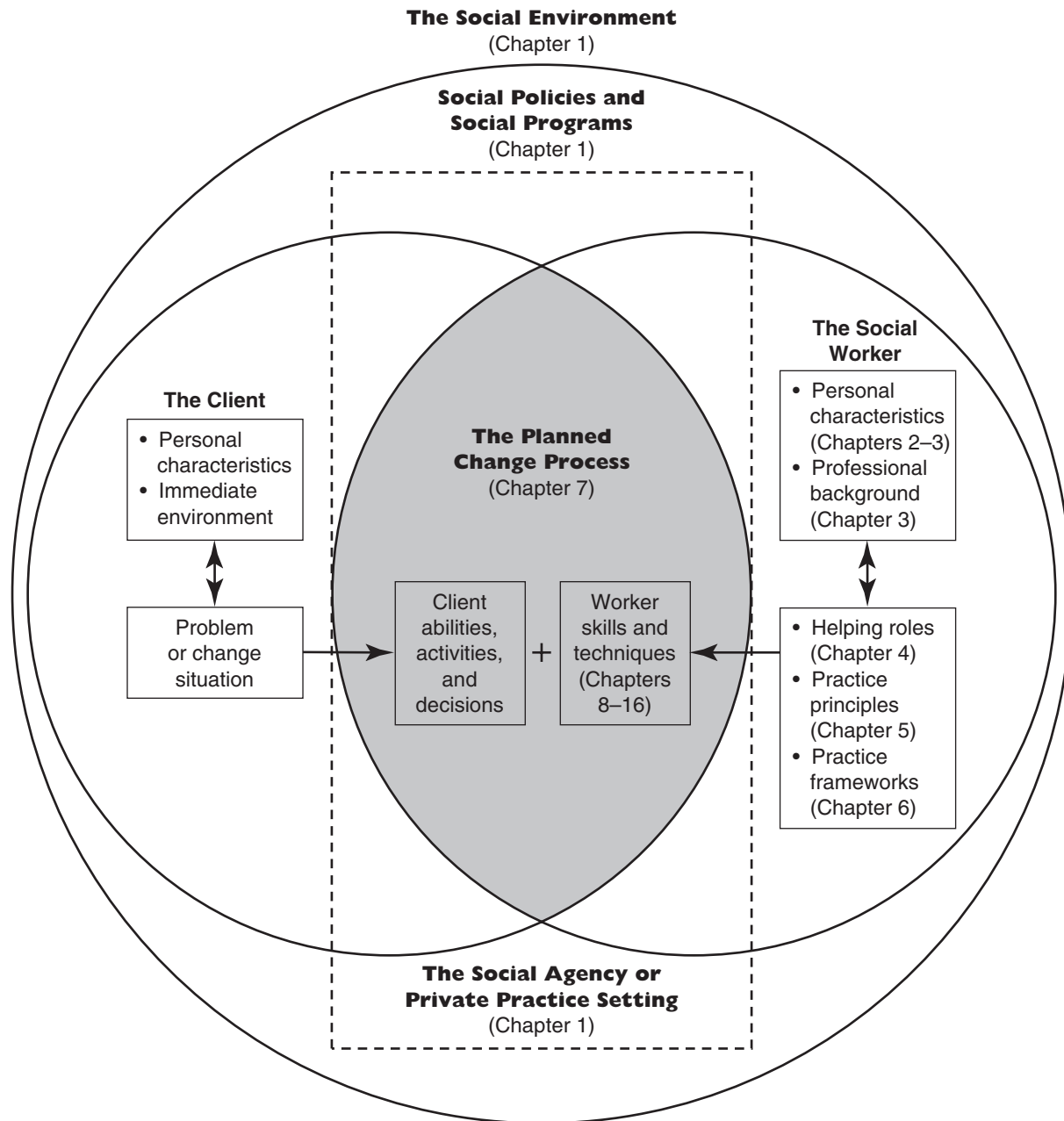


FIGURE 1.1 An Integrative View of Social Work Practice

other professional helpers, to mention just a few. These individuals and environmental influences are also possible resources in the helping process. And in some cases they have contributed to the client's problem and will need to become a target for change.

The Social Worker side of Figure 1.1 suggests that the worker brings unique personal characteristics and a professional background to the change process. These are experienced by the client through what the social worker actually does (i.e., the worker's activities and application of skills and techniques). What the worker does is a function of the specific professional role he or she has assumed and the conceptual framework he or she has selected to guide practice. The social worker's *personal characteristics* encompass such factors as life experience, talents, training, and commitment to serving others. (Chapter 2 offers an in-depth discussion of these

characteristics.) The social worker's unique perspectives on the human condition, as well as his or her particular values, are inevitably introduced into the change process. Those perspectives will have been shaped by his or her unique life experiences and his or her socioeconomic background, gender, age, sexual orientation, and the like. All of these characteristics affect the social worker–client relationship.

At the same time, the practitioner brings the special contribution of a *professional background* to social work, which differentiates the social worker from the client's friends, family, natural helpers, and the professionals representing other disciplines who may also be working with the client or who attempted to help in the past. What is this professional background? First and foremost, the social worker brings the belief system, values, ethical principles, and focus on social functioning that are common to the domain of social work. Through education and experience, the social worker develops practice wisdom and an ability to use his or her personal characteristics, special talents, and unique style to help clients. In addition, the social worker brings a knowledge base, much of it derived from the social and behavioral sciences. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the necessary artistic abilities, knowledge base, and value positions relevant to practice.

As social workers carry out their responsibilities, they perform various *helping roles*. As Chapter 4 describes more fully, social workers must be prepared to perform a wide variety of roles and functions, ranging from linking clients to appropriate resources, to assessing case situations and providing direct services, to planning and conducting social action.

The social work profession has informally tested the applicability of its approach to providing human services, largely through trial and error. Some of these tried-and-true guidelines for practice have been reduced to *practice principles* that serve as the most fundamental directives to practice (see Chapter 5).

An important element of professional background is that portion of the social worker's knowledge base consisting of various *practice frameworks* that guide one's work (e.g., practice perspectives, theories, and models) and provide direction to the change process. The ways in which these frameworks might be selected and utilized are discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, the social worker's *skills* and mastery of *techniques* are his or her most evident and tangible contribution to the change process (Chapters 8–16). The skills or techniques selected by the social worker will depend, of course, on the nature of the client's problem or concern, the expectations of the practice setting, and the worker's own competence in using them.

Returning again to Figure 1.1, it is important to recognize that social work practice takes place within a **social environment** (sometimes called a *distant environment*) and, more specifically, usually within the context of a social agency. Typically, the agency has been shaped by local, state, and/or national social policies and its programs are a reflection of society's values and beliefs. Commitment to the social welfare of its members varies among societies; within the United States, it even varies among regions, states, and communities. We know that having sound social programs supports quality living for all people—the more secure as well as the most vulnerable members of that society. Yet every social worker knows that our social policies and programs leave much to be desired. Moreover, U.S. society has demonstrated an ambivalent and transient commitment to people whose needs are not adequately met. Therefore, social workers, who serve as agents of society must frequently work with fewer than the desired tools for assisting their clients.

Through its legislative and other decision-making bodies, society creates **social programs** intended to help certain people. These programs take three forms:

- *Social provisions* involve giving tangible goods (e.g., money, food, clothing, and housing) to persons in need.
- *Social services* include intangible services (e.g., counseling, therapy, and learning experiences) intended to help people resolve and/or prevent problems.
- *Social action* programs are concerned with changing aspects of the social environment to make it more responsive to people's needs and wants.

The particular philosophy on which social programs are built has a significant bearing on how they operate, how effective they are, and how they affect both the client and the social worker.

The dominant social welfare philosophy in the United States contends that social programs should be a *safety net* that is available only to people who can demonstrate “real need.” In other words, social programs should exist only to help people solve already serious problems and be available only to those who are deemed needy. A second philosophy, the *social utilities* conception, considers social programs to be first-line functions of society (similar to education and law enforcement). This approach places greater emphasis on prevention and avoids forcing the client to identify a problem or admit to some personal failure in order to benefit from human services.

The benefits and services associated with a particular social program are typically offered through a **social agency**. Thus, for the most part, social work is an agency-based profession and most social workers are agency employees. A social agency might be a public welfare department, mental health center, school, hospital, neighborhood center, or any of a number of differing organizational structures. It may be a public agency supported by tax funds and governed by elected officials or a private agency operating under the auspices of a volunteer board and supported primarily by fees and voluntary donations. The basic functions of the agency are to administer social programs and to monitor the quality of the helping process.

To perform these functions, the agency must secure money, staff, and other resources; determine which people are eligible for its services; and maintain an administrative structure that will meet targeted social needs in an efficient and effective manner. The most important ingredient of a social agency is its people. Receptionists, custodians, administrators, and service providers all must work together to deliver successful programs. Often, several helping professions are employed in the same agency. In such interdisciplinary programs, each profession brings its own perspective on helping—as well as the special competencies appropriate to the domain of that profession.

Increasingly, social workers are providing services through **private practice**. In this setting, social workers and other professionals maintain an independent practice, as is typical in medicine and law, and contract directly with their clients to provide services.

Conclusion

Social work is one of several human services professions that have been sanctioned by society to help improve the quality of life for its people. Other such helping professions include clinical psychology, drug and alcohol counseling, marriage and family counseling, school psychology, medicine, rehabilitation counseling, nursing, and so on. The uniqueness of social work among these professions is its focus on the social functioning of people and helping people interact more effectively with their environments—both their immediate and distant environments. Social workers perform this role by assisting people to address issues in their social functioning and working to prevent social problems from emerging or, if they already exist, from getting worse.

Increasingly, conflict and competition arise among the various human services professions over issues of

the domain (or turf) of each. These conflicts tend to center around competition for jobs, salary, status, and control, as well as disagreements over which profession is most qualified to perform certain tasks. To minimize the effect of these problems on clients, it is important for the members of these professions to engage in **interprofessional collaboration** as they provide their services. However, each discipline must avoid letting its practice activities drift into the areas of expertise of the other professions.

Social workers have historically claimed they represent the profession best prepared to help people resolve problems in social functioning and to guide social change efforts to prevent problems from occurring or becoming worse. It is important that social workers maintain their focus on these central features of their domain.

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