

Embracing the social work profession, not the over professionalization

BY SHANNON SINGLETON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Shannon Singleton

Shannon Singleton has worked in homeless services for over 12 years, the past 6 in Portland. Prior to that, she worked with social action groups in Philadelphia.

The goal of social work is to work yourself out of a job. A simple statement that I heard in my first social work class at Temple University from one of the leading anti-poverty advocates in the country. It is a statement that resonates with me and focuses my work. I spend the bulk of my time working to support people recovering from homelessness, poverty, mental health symptoms, addiction and trauma, while at the same time maintaining a vision of the bigger picture. From a human rights perspective, I advocate to end homelessness, give people housing, end untreated addiction and mental health symptoms, give people treatment to end poverty, give people the ability to fulfill their basic human needs. Simple, right?

Wrong. These "simple" solutions that would work me when out of a job are not easy in a society with differing viewpoints and opinions; ones based in values and principles like the Protestant work ethic and individualism. But, where does social work fit into this? Whatever happened to the kind of social work that built movements in

communities, the field that encouraged its workers to identify injustices and use their power to bring change? Granted, some of this still exists. Yet, the profession as a whole, in my opinion, has taken a road of professionalism that mirrors the medical model of Western medicine — we not only have to go to school, but we now have to register and pay to have the privilege of using the "social worker" title.

In 2011, Oregon changed its statutes for licensing social workers, prohibiting the use of the title without authorization and regulation from the state. Fees range from \$150 (for those who have an undergraduate degree) to \$460 (for those wanting the highest license of licensed clinical social worker). All fees are paid to the state board of social workers.

This effectively devalues and removes the natural helpers in our communities from being paid for the work they do, and creates a system where agencies only hire "social workers." I myself acquiesced and recently completed my master's program but have not yet paid the fee to use the title.

This professionalization of social work is leading us away from the roots of our work

and changing the profession as a whole.

The relationships that we historically had with people and communities is being replaced by a stale, clinical setting where people are easily mistaken for their diagnosis, their problems, and we lose the space to bear witness to people's stories. We lose the ability to learn from them and support them in ways that may at times mean a behavior change for them, but more frequently means challenging the oppressive systems that place barriers in the way of people moving from survival to thriving.

I wear my social work badge with pride. At the same time, I rail at the professionalization of the work that puts far too many labels and limitations on people — both the social workers and those we seek to serve. Over the next few months, we will explore and challenge some of the impacts, like sustainability, the loss of the use of self reflection, racial oppression within the field, and how the issue of homelessness is viewed, that this over-professionalization has had on a profession that I love and believe can find its roots once again.

Animals in conflict



REUTERS/JUDA NGWENYA

Rebel fighter patrols with a monkey in the back of a truck during a visit by an American convoy from the U.S. embassy in Monrovia, which rolled into rebel territory, Monrovia, Aug. 8, 2003.



REUTERS/ERIK DE CASTRO

U.S. Army soldier SPC Collin Pallesen of "Attack" Co, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment plays with an Afghanistan dog named "Tango" before heading out of Combat Outpost Kandalay to patrol in Zharay district, in Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan, October 27, 2012.

Olympics

by George Burdine

I am some of the few individuals who have no interest at all in the Olympics, summer or winter. However, I can't escape the anticipation of those around me.

The talk, i.e., the U.S. has 8 medals, the Russians 7.

It is in all media and social media outlets.

And in many ways, our political and corporate leaders present and make money and policies that to me are absurd.

But now I don't speak for everyone.

I can only imagine what it is like to over that giant hill, unable to see bottom until 3 feet of your skis are hanging out in mid-air.

150 yards straight down.

2 meters to the nearest tree.

The distant mountains.

And hoping the report that the man-made snow is really fast, but the breeze is coming from the east, so make sure you compensate or epic disaster will occur for the whole planet to witness.

How about that luge team hitting the big end of 100 MPH?

He's got to be thinking don't lean too far right and easily glide to the left,

Just like in practice and the simulator.

These world-class athletes practice ridiculously their whole life,

And many cram in 4 years.

Let us shine and everybody will shine with us.

The patriotism of it all.

Go USA, of course.



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