

INTRODUCTION TO

# SOCIAL WORK

The People's Profession

Ira Colby

Sophia Dziegielewski

Second Edition

INTRODUCTION TO  
**SOCIAL WORK**  
The People's Profession  
Second Edition

Ira Colby  
*University of Houston*

Sophia Dziegielewska  
*University of Central Florida*

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# Preface

Your career should be personally rewarding. Feeling a sense of accomplishment when you make a difference in someone else's life provides a natural high that is both uplifting and fulfilling. Social work is a profession that provides ample opportunities to make positive differences in others' lives and to help make our communities better and safer for all people.

In the pages that follow, you will be introduced to the social work profession—its obvious strengths as well as its limitations. You will see how social work started and how the field has grown from those humble beginnings working with poor and underserved populations to the worldwide profession of today. Each chapter introduces the beginning professional to what social work involves and the roles social workers perform. Although social work is an old profession, rich in tradition, it remains dynamic, flexible, and open to change. Indeed, with the field's focus on the "person-in-situation," the need to address continuous and repeated change is ongoing. To facilitate this process, in addition to examining the field of social work in its present form, we make suggestions for future exploration and expansion. Taking into account the past, the present, and the future provides fertile ground for social workers to develop new services, allowing the best possible care for the client.

By presenting the many different facets of social work, we attempt to provide a realistic and varied presentation that will help you develop a more authentic understanding and appreciation of the profession. At a minimum you will be exposed to what social workers do and the importance of considering the environmental context that surrounds all decisions. Social workers believe strongly in allowing ethical principles and a respect for cultural diversity to guide all practice decisions. Differences in individuals are acknowledged, and concepts such as dignity, worth, and respect, along with a nonjudgmental attitude, provide the cornerstone on which all intervention is built. In part, it is our hope that the success of this book will be measured by whether it can help the beginning social work professional answer the following question: Is social work really the profession for me? If so, let the book introduce you to the field and what rewards and challenges lie ahead. If not, may you gain an understanding of and respect for the field, an awareness of the needs and struggles that people face, and the knowledge that most of these problems and issues are not self-perpetuated.

Part 1 provides an overview of the profession, in which we introduce professional terminology and acronyms. This is followed by a discussion of social workers' typical employment settings, responsibilities, and salaries. After that we explore, albeit briefly, the rich traditions within the field of social work, highlight-

ing how the past clearly relates to the present, making predictions about what the future has in store.

In part 2, the reader is introduced to the practice of social work at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. We discuss concepts such as the client system and the notion that this system almost always involves more than one person. Although it is possible to view clients as individuals, they are most often addressed in terms of context or systems. This can involve individuals, families, groups, communities, or policies that either directly or indirectly affect client system well-being.

In the chapters in part 3, several examples of the various practice settings where social workers are employed are presented, along with suggestions for expanding current activities and exploring further development of new areas.

This book is unique in that it will challenge you to synthesize information about successes and events in the field. Activities are included to give the beginning professional a sense of hands-on learning. These activities will help you develop a more in-depth understanding of the profession. There is also an emphasis on the use of the Internet, a tool that is now part of all of our lives. Case examples are used throughout to help you see the interface between what is written in the text and actual practice.

On a personal note, we would like to say that putting together this second edition, selecting and updating the topics most germane to the social work field, was not an easy task—nor should it have been. This book represents more than forty-seven years of combined direct practice and teaching experience. We are both committed to using our passion for the profession to introduce others to this exciting and challenging field. As practitioners, we believe that much can be learned from the clients we serve. In fact, many of the examples we present have been drawn from our own practical, administrative, or academic experience. Using our actual experiences in direct practice and as educators helped us to decide how best to present information in a practical and informative way, one that is sensitive to students' interests and concerns while taking into account the expectations that social work programs have been for a beginning social work course.

This book would not be complete if we did not acknowledge the individuals in our own support systems who have made this effort possible. Ira Colby thanks his wife and best friend, Deborah, who for thirty years has honestly critiqued his teaching, writing, and thinking. Sophia Dziegielewski thanks her husband, family, friends, and colleagues, who respect and support her passion for the field and tolerate her workaholic ways.

Foremost, however, we would like to thank all the social workers who graciously allowed us to use their biographical sketches. We are also grateful for the editorial assistance of Hope Steele, Amber Neff, and Jenni Fry, all of whom take such great pride in the quality of their work. We continue to appreciate and admire the work of our photographer, Mary Whalen. We would also like to thank all those who kindly took time to review our work: Steve Anderson, Julie Richards, Thomas Broffman, Milo Jennings, Sandra Fogel, Margaret Jane Allen, Vijayan Pillai, Gaston Cummings, and Denise Chaisson-Breaux. Special thanks go to those who helped us



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Now, with all of that said, we invite you to begin this adventure in learning about one of the oldest helping professions ever developed. May this book and its description of the social work profession ignite a fire in you, as our careers in social work have done for us.



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## About the Authors

**Ira Colby** is Dean of the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Houston; prior to this position he developed and directed the baccalaureate social work program at Ferrum College, taught at the University of Texas at Arlington, and directed a new school of social work at the University of Central Florida. He received his MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University and his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. He is widely published and has presented papers at state, national, and international meetings and forums. His passions are golf and family, not necessarily in that order.

**Sophia F. Dziegielewski** is professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Central Florida. Previously, she taught in the School of Social Work at the University of Alabama, the Departments of Family and Preventive Medicine and Psychiatry at Meharry Medical College, the School of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, and in the U.S. Army Military College at Fort Benning, GA. She received her MSW and her PhD from Florida State University. In 2003 Professor Dziegielewski was noted in *Social Worker Today* for her work in the field of social work. She has over 70 publications and lectures widely across the United States.

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# Part **I**

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## **The Context of Social Work**