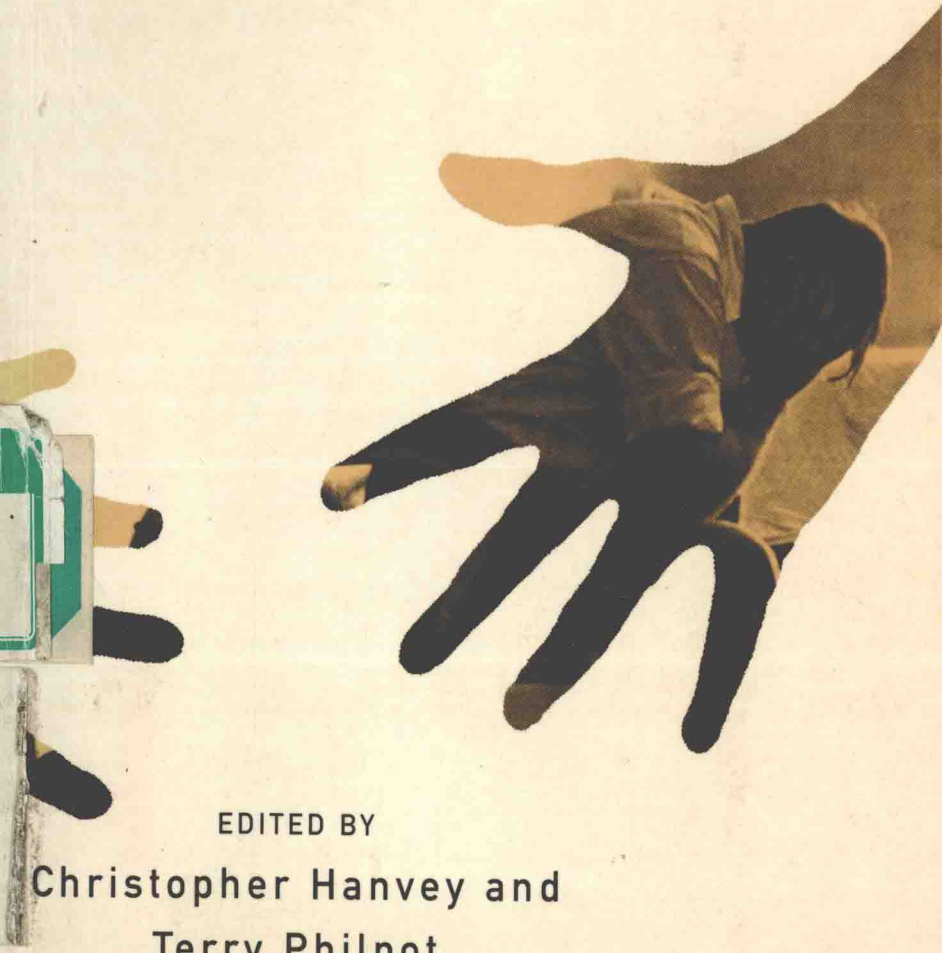
ROUTLEDGE

PRACTISING Social Work



EDITED BY
Christopher Hanvey and
Terry Philpot

Practising social work

Edited by Christopher Hanvey
and
Terry Philpot

London

First published 1994
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Typeset in Times by Michael Mepham, Frome, Somerset.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Practising social work/edited by Terry Philpot and Christopher Hanvey.
p.cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Social service – Great Britain. I. Philpot, Terry.
II. Hanvey, Christopher P.
HV245.P73 1994
361.3'2'0941–dc20 93–28946
CIP

ISBN 0–415–09236–1 (hbk)
ISBN 0–415–09237–X (pbk)

Practising social work

Social work in Britain today is currently being redefined in the face of new legislation on care in the community, the Criminal Justice Act and the Children Act. The wide range of methods of intervention now used by social workers means that the public at large expects clearer and more detailed explanation of social work approaches than ever before. Social workers will increasingly be called upon to explain to the public and users *what* they are doing and *how* they go about it.

Practising Social Work is a valuable contribution to the current debate on social work technique and method since it provides a systematic exploration of a range of social work approaches, with each chapter focusing on a single theme and explaining the practice implications of particular methods. Taking in a range of client groups, from young offenders to elderly people, the book includes chapters on anti-racist work, a feminist approach, and working with service users. Other chapters look at crisis intervention, alternatives to custody, family therapy, community work, systems theory, task-centred work, behaviourism, groupwork, casework, welfare rights, and contract work.

Practical in its approach, *Practising Social Work* will appeal to practitioners and students alike. It is designed to help social workers acquire greater professional knowledge, and to enable them to fulfil their prescribed roles, sensitive to their limitations but appropriately active in the service of the client. It will be essential reading for students and lecturers in social work and social policy, as well as for all professionals in the social work field.

Christopher Hanvey is director of the Thomas Coram Foundation, London and **Terry Philpot** is the editor of *Community Care* magazine.

To Rosemary and Mary

Contributors

Shama Ahmed was formerly a senior lecturer at the Polytechnic of North London, and is now a social work education adviser with CCETSW. She has worked as a probation officer, social worker and as a trainer and race policy adviser in the West Midlands. She has published widely.

Lorraine Ayensu is a health centre-based social worker for Avon Social Services Department in the central area of Bristol. Her professional interests include the promotion of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory social work policy and practice, and the empowerment of service users.

Peter Beresford is a member of Survivors Speak Out, and senior lecturer in social policy at the West London Institute of Higher Education. Since 1987 he has worked with the Open Services Project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to help people gain more say in their lives and in the services they use.

Allan Brown is a senior lecturer in social work at Bristol University. He is the author of *Groupwork* (now in its third edition), and co-editor of the journal *Groupwork*, which he co-founded in 1988. His interests include anti-discrimination in relation to groupwork, and groupwork in the criminal justice system.

Paul Burgess is principal welfare rights officer for Lancashire County Council. Before training in the social sciences he worked in engineering from leaving school, and became active nationally in trade union affairs. As well as broadcasting on TV and radio, he has tutored welfare rights courses for many years, and written widely on the subject, including a column for the magazine *Community Care* since 1979.

Suzy Croft is a qualified and practising social worker. She has a long-standing involvement in issues of participation and empowerment as a researcher, service user and through her involvement in community action. With Peter Beresford, she has worked with the Open Services Project since 1987.

Mark Doel is a lecturer in social work at Sheffield University and a freelance trainer. During 1990–91 he directed a research project as part of the Families as Allies programme at Portland State University, Oregon. His book, *Task-Centred Social Work*, co-authored with Peter Marsh, is the most recent summary of task-centred practice in Britain.

Celia Doyle is a senior lecturer in social work and a freelance practitioner and consultant. For many years she has specialized in work with abused children and their families. She has published on a variety of issues relating to child protection and is involved in research on the emotional abuse of children.

Christopher Hanvey is director of the Thomas Coram Foundation. He has a career in social welfare, both in the statutory and voluntary sectors. He is author of a book on learning disabilities, has written for the Open University, and contributes regularly to a range of journals.

Annie Hudson is a team manager with Avon Social Services Department working in the central area of Bristol. She was formerly a lecturer in social work at Manchester University. Her research and professional interests have included social work with young women, child abuse, and social work management.

Marjorie Mayo is a tutor at Ruskin College, Oxford. Apart from teaching and research, she has previously worked on a women's employment and training project, and with community and trade union organizations. She has worked in local government, and was a research officer on the government's Community Development Project and the European Community's second anti-poverty programme. She has published widely.

Catherine Oadley qualified as a social worker in 1988 and now works with Avon Social Services Department in the central area of Bristol. Her professional interests include child protection work, and therapeutic and direct work with children and adult women.

Kieran O'Hagan is a lecturer in social work at The Queen's University, Belfast. He was a front line social work practitioner for fifteen years. He has worked in Mother Teresa's establishments in Calcutta and Los Angeles, and lectured on crisis intervention and child abuse in Australia. He has written numerous articles and books on crisis intervention and child abuse, and more recently, has concentrated on training and writing about the crises of child sexual abuse.

Matilde Patocchi qualified as a social worker in 1990, and now works with Avon Social Services Department in the central area of Bristol. Her professional interests have included child protection and family placement work.

Chris Payne is Consultant in Social Care at the National Institute for Social Work, and co-Director of the Centre for Practice and Staff Development based at the University of Warwick Science Park. Much of his earlier work was spent on examining the application of unitary perspective to UK social services and social work education. He has a particular interest in the application of general systems theory to residential care, reflected in his numerous publications.

Terry Philpot is Editor of *Community Care*. He has published work on several aspects of social work, and is currently writing a book about the National Children's Home. He is an honorary member of the council of the NSPCC, and formerly a member of the advisory council of the Centre for Policy on Ageing.

John Pierson worked as a social worker in both field and residential settings. He subsequently became Senior Training Officer and Training Manager with Cheshire Social Services and now teaches part-time at Staffordshire University. He is also a training consultant and is currently working on a dictionary of social care and social work.

Michael Preston-Shoot is Senior Lecturer in social work at the University of Manchester, School of Social Work. He is also a psychotherapist and family therapist.

Philippa Seligman is a family therapist in private practice as a clinician and trainer in Cardiff, where she lives, and in London. She was a member of the internationally recognized team at the Family Institute in Cardiff and has numerous publications to her credit. In 1991 she was elected chairperson of the Association for Family Therapy in the UK for a three-year term of office.

Norman Tutt originally trained as a clinical psychologist and has direct experience of working in the N. H. S. During the 1970s he was responsible for the planning of children's services for the 33 London Boroughs. From 1975 – 79 he was adviser to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security. In 1979 he became Professor of Applied Social Studies at the University of Lancaster and from 1988 to 1992 was Director of Social Services, Leeds City Council. In 1992 he left Leeds to return to Social Information Systems Ltd, a consultancy he had founded ten years previously. He is the author of a number of books and articles on social policy.

Acknowledgements

An edited collection must, by definition, be more of a collective effort than a book by one author. As editors we would like to thank the contributors for their hard work, achieved by all of them while undertaking demanding professional responsibilities; for meeting their various deadlines, and for responding, without quarrel, to our suggestions for changes, both large and small.

We should like to thank especially Martin Davies, director of the social work programme, University of East Anglia, whose original suggestions, longer ago than we care to remember, helped shape the book and brought to our attention some of the contributors. We should also like to thank Linda Ward of the Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol, and John Pierson for their helpful comments on our introduction. Last, and by no means because tradition dictates, any errors and omissions must reside with us.

Christopher Hanvey and
Terry Philpot

Contents

Introduction

Terry Philpot and Christopher Hanvey

Social work is what social workers do. The old humorous definition contains more than an element of truth. It might be reworked to explain that social work is often what others – nurses, doctors, the police, and so on – don't do. Just as social work often picks up the casualties where society – in its housing, employment, anti-poverty policies – has failed, so often it assumes the tasks arising where other agencies – medical and nursing services, the police – do not tread. But social work may be defined in other ways. Social work is casework, declared Robert Pinker in his dissenting note to the Barclay report (Pinker 1982). Or social work may be defined by its legislative responsibilities. This latter, though, is less a definition of what social workers do, other than in a very functional sense, than drawing the boundaries at their legal obligations. The burden of legislation does, indeed, lie heavily on social work, and increasingly so, yet there are numerous tasks which social workers undertake for which there is no specific legislative remit.

This book is not an explicit attempt to define social work, but rather to explain the theory and practice of a number of social work methods. Social work has always adopted a range of methods of work or approaches. Some of these have been generated by the organizational structures within which social work is situated, some by sociological theory which has emerged alongside day-to-day practice. The approach, for example, described in George Konrad's novel *The Caseworker* (Konrad 1987), whereby 'one of us will talk, the other will listen', has a growing literature and, despite its obvious affiliation with counselling (Halmos 1965), can encompass a multitude of methods of working in which the exploration of problems at a one-to-one level hopefully engenders new insight and a way through what may seem like intractable problems. Celia Doyle, one of the contributors to this book, describes the honourable history of casework and stresses the consistent value placed on the individual as being basic to any kind of practice.

Yet, the language with which social work seeks even to describe the jobs

which its members undertake is often obfuscatory. In 1978 Barbara Wootton drew attention to this fact by considering recruitment advertisements for social workers. She wrote:

> ... one such [advertisement] asks for qualified applicants who are used to 'statutory duties' and have the ability to 'act independently and take appropriate decisions' (about what?). Another mentions that the successful applicant will be expected to 'work with families and children' (on what?); and yet another asks for an 'intake social worker' to 'join a team' which is 'developing systems and methods useful to clients and staff'.
>
> (Wootton 1978).

She went on: 'The layman may well be puzzled to visualise how the holders of these posts will spend their working hours.' That was then. What would she say now, given the frequent replacement of the title 'social worker' by 'project leader', 'key worker', 'care manager' and a dozen other not very self-explanatory variants?

In fairness, many professional self-descriptions may be criticized in this way, containing a salad of esoteric language and jargon. Social work, however, labours under a particular challenge since, as a discipline, it has absorbed the professional language of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, politics and medicine. This creates a particular responsibility to define terms carefully, a discipline imposed on all the authors of the present volume.

Martin Davies (1985) has also drawn attention to another problem for social work. He was at first (1981) taken with Olive Stevenson's belief that social workers are 'brokers in shades of grey', when she wrote:

> Those who commit themselves to social work contribute, in my view, to the sensitisation of our society. In doing so, they will not be popular.... They must seek to hold, and to mediate in, the multiplicity of conflict in interpersonal relationships. They deal in shades of grey where the public looks for black and white. And they are bitterly resented for it. They are brokers in lesser evils, frequently faced with the need for choice followed by action whose outcome is unpredictable. In the precise sense of the word, society is deeply ambivalent about social work, asking it more and more to combat the alienation of a technological age, yet resenting its growing power and quick to point harshly to its failures, especially those in relation to functions of social control.
>
> (Stevenson 1974)

For Davies that statement nearly ten years ago

> ... so nearly hits the nail on the head in its attempt to identify the reason for the public's disaffection with social work; it so nearly scores a

> bull's-eye in its assessment of the role of social work in society, and the function which social work fulfils as society's insurance against alienation; and it does succeed in its account of the way in which the social work process is a dynamic one, always moving, never finished, operating constantly against a back cloth of uncertainty and external influence.
>
> (Davies 1981)

Yet when Davies came to revise his book four years later he regarded Stevenson's 'brokers in shades of grey' as 'a seductive phrase' and dispensed entirely with his chapter on the subject. Recanting his past attraction, he wrote:

> Social workers have no monopoly of such a role, and too often the idea can be misconstrued and used self-indulgently to justify indecision, buck-passing and theoretical squeamishness. The truth is that social workers are employed to do a wide-ranging but quite specific job, which necessarily involves them in risk-taking, decision making and the exercise of judgement. They cannot expect always to be right or regularly to receive public plaudits. But they should nonetheless determine to be knowledgeable in relevant spheres, adept at fulfilling their ascribed roles, sensitive to personal and occupation limitations, and appropriately active in service of the client.
>
> (Davies 1985)

Davies is, we believe, right to suggest that Stevenson's view has sometimes acted as a camouflage for the shortcomings he lists. However, we do not believe that there is a conflict between the situation she so eloquently describes and the need to see social workers as having a 'wide-ranging but quite specific job'. Being 'brokers in shades of grey' is, arguably, a consequence of having to deal with the rough and unpredictable material of humanity. Martin Davies himself has written of

> ... the frailties of human genetics and the ageing body... the aberrations of human behaviour... plans [that] go wrong and people die... all political and economic systems... produce victims and label deviants... human nature and human life are occasionally vicious, and... people – especially in families – sometimes fight and hurt each other.
>
> (Davies 1981)

The problems social workers face are not so neatly dealt with as are problems faced by professionals who have to hand the arrest, the fire hose or the scalpel. The material clues, the heart beat, and the pulse, are, whatever the problems faced by others, more specific and scientific than what is often available to social workers.

This book is very much about assisting the acquisition of professional knowledge, and helping practitioners to fulfil their prescribed roles, to help them to be 'sensitive to personal and professional limitations, and [to be] appropriately active in the services of the client', as Davies counsels. But in deciding which methods to include we came upon problems of definition. Some readers may dispute whether the areas of practice we have included here are, indeed, social work at all: welfare rights and community work among them. Yet these two fields are so inextricably involved with contemporary social work that no damage is done to them, nor to social work, we believe, by making our definition broad enough to include them.

Marjorie Mayo shows that community work is subject to varied definitions. It is also practised within other local authority departments, like housing, as well as outside local government altogether. With regard to welfare rights, Paul Burgess believes that it is not strictly social work and that there are many reasons why social workers cannot undertake it. His view is that in twenty years it has grown to a specialism of its own, sometimes organizationally placed within social services and social work departments, and sometimes not, assisting social workers in their rightful concern with clients' welfare rights. Norman Tutt asks if alternatives to custody as an approach is social work, while John Pierson says of behaviourism that what suits the clinician does not necessarily suit the social worker.

We have not seen social work as a vertical activity. Chris Payne's chapter on a systems approach, for example, argues for less reliance on casework and a one-to-one approach, opting instead for working through teams, groups, and, if necessary, communities. Similarly, other approaches have cut across traditional divisions and operate in a variety of ways, as Annie Hudson, Lorraine Ayensu, Catherine Oadley and Matilde Patocchi, and Shama Ahmed show with regard to feminism and anti-racism, respectively. (However, Hudson, Ayensu, Oadley and Patocchi, in particular, are careful to emphasize the dangers of a narrow, exclusive definition of a feminist approach, which may too rigidly define the root of the problems faced by a client.) Likewise, crisis intervention may be just as useful with groups as with individuals. It recognizes that the twin natures of crisis are danger and opportunity, which provide the most profitable time to intervene in situations. In his exploration of crisis intervention, Kieran O'Hagan is careful to emphasize that no method of social work can be divorced from its ethical context, and while crisis may provide the most fruitful time for intervention, consideration needs to be given to whether this is ethically justified. For Philippa Seligman family therapy embraces both the personal and the collective. Allan Brown has sought to demystify the idea of groupwork by a comprehensive definition, embracing community groups, as well as personal

therapy groups of half a dozen or so members. Thus, he not only marries the various strands of groupwork but the diverse traditions of social work itself.

Just as social work draws on the language of other professions, so too do its methods of intervention sometimes owe a debt to other professions. A contract approach to social work, for example, described by Michael Preston-Shoot, attempts to break down barriers between the power of the 'expert' and the feelings of powerlessness experienced by those seeking help. The contract, it is argued, allows for a more equal relationship between helper and helped. Here, there are similarities and overlap with task-centred work, which Mark Doel characterizes as being based on partnership and empowerment for the mutual definition of problems.

Our intention, then, has been to provide an inclusive systematic exploration of the range of social work approaches. Each chapter provides a basic description and discussion of the approach, exploring the implications, with examples from practice, as well as offering a critique. Social work is perhaps less prone these days to make too many immodest claims about its ability to cure all the world's ills, but we have thought it important that a critical edge be given to each chapter.

This book is aimed at practitioners as much as students. It is not envisaged that any worker would adopt one approach exclusively. We hope it develops a catholic approach which, in its totality, recognizes the contribution that a wide range of approaches have made to practice. This latter point should be emphasized. Social work's roots are, as we have said, diverse. But there can be a danger, as well as a strength in eclecticism where a method is adopted for work with an individual or family because the worker has a penchant for it rather than because it has been shown to provide better results. Evidence for this has come in Kathryn Ellis's study of assessment (Ellis 1993). Observing assessors and disabled users during assessments, she found that some social workers, attached to psychological explanations and counselling techniques, would diagnose users' needs not on the basis of how the user perceived them – for example, for equipment or practical assistance – but on the basis of their own professional predilections. For example, some social workers tended to see physical impairment in terms of loss and bereavement. People who became disabled were thought to be going through a grieving process for which the practitioner required special skills. In one case sight loss had radically altered the life of an older woman. Having had an active social life and having never felt lonely, she now lacked the self-confidence to go out alone. Afraid that her sight would further deteriorate and depressed at her situation, she lost weight which meant that her clothes no longer fitted. Once proud of her smart and youthful appearance, she would no longer visit friends, thus compounding her isolation. The social worker believed that her case constituted a 'hierarchy of losses' in which, as Ellis explains, 'the

traumatic loss of a parent was the most fundamental and unresolved issue. The practitioner theorised that, although the loss of sight had become the focus for other losses, it was actually the least significant'. The rehabilitation officer, unencumbered by all this theory, believed that mobility training – for which the woman lacked confidence – would assist her, diagnosing that the lack of social contact was the main issue. The social worker, however, thought that she was 'emotionally housebound', believing her to be more capable than she claimed, and thus doubting the usefulness of mobility training. The woman (we might think surprisingly) was appreciative of all these efforts, but what she really wanted was someone to take her out occasionally, especially for shopping. She, too, had not read the right books on social work theory! Eclecticism in that context debilitates any usefulness it might have, is unhealthy and becomes a dog's dinner – and a pretty inedible one at that.

It is arguable that there is a certain luxury in offering such descriptions as does this book in the light of the current changes facing social work, particularly the advent of community care. Allan Brown is not the only contributor to find the thrust of social services and social work departments and the climate within which they operate to be unsympathetic to his subject, groupwork. To take another area, community work ought to be coming into its own with its long-standing and inherent emphasis on user involvement. But cuts in voluntary sector funding and the feared trend that some voluntary agencies may become little more than arms of statutory services may work against this.

Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford argue that the new role of care manager and the creation of a care market run the risk of combining the shortcomings of both the state and market systems, with services provided for cash, not need, and needs being defined by professionals, rather than by service users themselves. Under the new arrangements, the central figure will be the care manager. The consumer in this arrangement is not the purchaser: the purchaser is the social services or health authority. The new mixed economy of care, with its purchaser/provider split, contracting, packages of care and care management has been ushered in ostensibly because it was believed that social services and social work departments were monolithic providers, whose services did not meet individual needs. The reforms have allegedly been posited on the needs of the user. 'The rationale for these reforms is the empowerment of users and carers', declared the government (Social Services Inspectorate 1991), drawing on the example of the commercial market place as a means of meeting individual need and ensuring choice. But there is no certainty that the objectives of greater choice for users will be met (Common and Flynn 1992); in care managers, users may well meet (to pursue the market analogy) not an assistant who helps them to purchase the goods they want,