



Police Social Work

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Abstract

Forensic social work, working with individuals involved in the criminal justice system, has a highly specialized practice area of Police Social Work (PSW). Unfortunately, there is a lack of training and guidance for the development of PSW programs. This action research project compiled the experiences from a new PSW program, as students collect data, summarize benefits, identify resources and create documents and professional presentations to contribute to foundational knowledge for PSW programs. The students will report on their time developing a police social work program within a local police department. The students will share foundational training and contacts made with another police social worker to use her knowledge to help create release and consent forms. The students are keeping track of all interactions they have within the community and the data and statistics will be shared. The students have also created a community guide for officers to give to individuals they feel will benefit from outside services. Ultimately, students and faculty will share this project at a national conference. This project has the potential to make significant contributions to the field, including increasing the competence of two MSW students, assisting community residents in receiving valuable social work services, assisting others who wish to implement a PSW program and adding to the literature on PSW.

What is Forensic Social Work?

- ▶ The application of social work to questions and issues relating to law and legal systems (NOFSW, 2020).
- ▶ Based on advanced social work knowledge and skills working with individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Police Social Work

- ▶ Specialty forensic practice area is Police Social Work (PSW)
- ▶ Highly specialized field of clinical social work that provides services within law enforcement (APSS, 2020).
- ▶ Police social workers provide crisis counseling, information and referrals, de-escalation, follow up and training.

Officers

- ▶ Officers are constantly responding to calls within their communities involving substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, suicide, & homelessness.
- ▶ Officers are trained to handle the situation in that exact moment to the best of their ability, but often the issue(s) remain a challenge for the resident(s) without further assistance.
- ▶ *"Over 90% of officers on patrol have an average of 6 encounters with individuals in crisis each month, and 7 to 10% of all police encounters involve people affected by mental illness" (Wood et al, 2016).*

Social Workers

- ▶ Trained to handle crisis situations by being able to offer support and guidance by applying empathy and having emotional resilience, listening and analyzing social situations, and facilitating resolution.
- ▶ Social workers within police departments helps reduce the amount of non-criminal calls the officers are involved in.
- ▶ Social workers are trained and taught on how to find resources for the specific need.
- ▶ Developing community referrals is only a small part of the job, but helping the residents and community utilize the resources, while building a rapport with them is the biggest part.

Collaboration

- ▶ Collaboration between officers and social workers allows the officers to free up some of their time to really focus on criminal problems throughout the community while the social workers focus on individual needs of residents, whether that means treatment, counseling, crisis intervention, or more.

Training

- ▶ According to George Patterson (personal communication, September 25, 2020), who specializes in police social work, “Unfortunately, there is no training for police social workers”.
- ▶ With the lack of resources in police social work, those who are interested in a career in the field, can only gain knowledge by experience and other’s experience.

Proposed Project

- ▶ This proposed project will help encourage others in the helping profession by providing knowledge for improvement and expertise by analyzing and reflecting on a new Police Social Work (PSW) program, ultimately sharing this experience to advance the knowledge base of PSW.
- ▶ SRU's new MSW program with a specialization in Forensic Social Work has two students (Angela Kenbok & Kaylee Kihn) who are completing their in-person field placement with Hampton Police Department.

Research

- ▶ Professional, organizational action research is often used for direct practice where outcomes can be applied to developing programs and services (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005).
- ▶ Information gained from action research informs practice, assists in decision making, and contributes to positive change (Varcarcel Craig, 2009).
- ▶ This project has the potential to significantly impact the police social work field, residents receiving services and the expertise of the SRU students and faculty.

Goals

- ▶ Expand personal knowledge, skills, and expertise in Police Social Work (PSW).
 - ▶ *Objective: Students will collect and compile data from the PSW program, to include interventions, training experiences, and resources.*
 - ▶ *Objective: Students will attend the NOFSW (National Organization of Forensic Social Work) Annual conference.*
- ▶ Strengthen the understanding and foundational knowledge of Police Social Work by sharing experience and participation in the police department.
 - ▶ *Objective: Students will create a presentation sharing the PSW program.*
 - ▶ *Objective: Students will present at the SRU student symposium.*
 - ▶ *Objective: Students will present at the NOFSW national conference.*

Outcomes of Project

- ▶ The students will gain increased competence as police social workers.
- ▶ Presentation of this project will result in enhancing the knowledge base for PSW.
- ▶ Results will be compiled into a document to pursue publication.

References

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