

## Skills Required to Work Effectively with Individuals

### Background Knowledge:

The worker must have a solid foundation in the theories of human development that utilizes traditional perspectives (Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg, etc...) and alternative perspectives (non-linear, personal context based). In addition, the worker should be able to apply this background to individual client situations so as to develop a case-specific understanding of the context from which each client's issues emerge. Only by having a solid background in various perspectives on human development can a worker hope to understand the personal context from which clients are seeking help.

### Environmental Factors:

The environments in which clients' lives are unfolding heavily influence how clients experience their particular problems. In truth, some of these environmental factors may actually *be* the problem. Poverty, lack of access to quality education, and the inaccessibility of ongoing health care can all contribute to or amplify the problems faced by the individuals seeking help from social workers. Specific individual work may be futile if chronic shortages exist in these areas, and the worker may need to address such shortages to truly serve the individual client.

### Paradigms of Client and Worker:

It is impossible to overstate the importance of understanding paradigms when seeking to provide meaningful service to clients. Cultural issues are extremely important and every worker and client sees the world through his or her own cultural lens. Identifying these perspectives will provide insight in to how the presented situation is understood from each side. Some areas to consider include:

- \* Religion – The spiritual practices and understandings of the universe provided by religious traditions often comprise the framework that contains an individual's perception of the problems they encounter, or of those encountered by their clients. The worker must take such frameworks into consideration.

- \* Social Construction – The perceived role of the individual and the individual's responsibility to the greater society, as well as the development of personal identity, are profoundly shaped by culture. The same can be said for the

organization of family units and the understanding of roles within the family. Social constructs and the perception of them will flavor any issue which an individual client may present the worker.

\* Values and convictions – Values and convictions are closely tied to and formulated with influence from the above two areas. Appreciating how a client assesses his or her own obligations to his or her own specific code of values is instrumental in perceiving the client's understanding of his or her issues and appropriate responses to them.

\* Experience in America – Whatever the cultural background of the client or the worker, how each respective group has fared in the United States, when each group arrived, and what each group's history has been prior to arrival in the United States will flavor the development of the client's issues of concern. Collective remembrance of trauma can create within a group a wariness of offers of help from the outside, and the worker must be able to bridge this chasm if she or he is to serve the client effectively.

#### Work with the Client:

It is important for the social worker to develop several qualities prior to working with individual clients. Some of the most important of these qualities are listed below.

\* Empathy – It is vital for the worker to develop a true sense of empathy, to feel the client's frustration, anger, fear, or sorrow. The worker's concern will not seem real, and service offered will not seem relevant, unless the worker is able to speak from a position of feeling.

\* Non-judgment – A worker must be able to hear and address a client's situation without applying his or her own personal judgments into the mix. This is not to say that one shouldn't point out areas of concern, but one should avoid making determinations about the individual's character or developing resentment toward the client.

\* Real listening – The social worker needs to be able to really listen the client. This requires being able keep ones attention on the client, as well as being aware that the most important clues to the source of the client's problem may only present themselves in an indirect fashion, through nonverbal communications.