

BOOK REVIEW

Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand: Exploring Fields of Practice

Kathryn Hay, Michael Dale and Lareen Cooper
Massey University Press, Auckland 2016
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It can be difficult to sufficiently prepare students for their first practicum or employment experience in social work with “on the ground” knowledge. This book introduces the social work student or beginning practitioner to different areas of social work practice from an Aotearoa New Zealand perspective. From the title, it is clear how the book aims to aid the novice social worker with a deeper understanding of several fields of practice. The authors have constructed the content of this book in an absorbing, easy-to-read manner that connects social work practice to theory. For each area of practice, in-depth interviews with practitioners can be followed by reading the text boxes or following on-line links. There is a range of colourful photographs identifying the practitioner and the service they represent. Important links to key websites for readers are highlighted throughout the book regarding organisations, legislation and policy for additional information. Helpful diagrams illustrate how theoretical approaches are used in the practice context.

The introduction clearly positions the purpose of the book and identifies the five fields of practice addressed through the perspective of five different social workers: youth, residential youth justice, community faith-based, mental health and women’s health social work. Each field of practice can be read sequentially or as separate chapters, depending on the reader’s interests. For each chapter, six aspects related to the field of practice are considered. These facets provide the understandings, insights and motivations of the practitioners working within the current social work climate from an Aotearoa New Zealand perspective. Inclusive to these are the bi-cultural considerations for the social worker within each area of practice that clearly demonstrate how this commitment sits at the heart of practice. At the close of each chapter, the authors pose several reflective questions related to the field of social work discussed for the reader to ponder. The authors conclude the book with a final reflections chapter related to the practice of social work and the development of a professional identity.

Youth social work is the first field of practice explored. Sarah introduces her role at the Youth One Stop Shop (YOSS) and describes important topical issues for young people such as legal highs and bullying. The HEADDs assessment and innovative tools such as “well sheets” are described alongside theoretical influences on practice. Bi-cultural considerations specific to YOSS are described by Sarah including the increased importance of te reo, building rapport with other cultures and challenges working with whānau.

Ruby, a social worker at Te Au Rere a te Tonga provides a different perspective—working in a statutory Youth Justice Residential facility. Ruby explains the specific legislation for working with young people and the role for social workers in her workplace. Recidivism is a key challenge that is discussed in relation to the current environment. Important links are made to indigenous practice frameworks, Te Whare Tapa Whā assessment model and the significance of particular ethnic teams and cultural advisors in this area of social work.

The significant contribution of faith-based services in Aotearoa New Zealand is discussed by Kevin from the Salvation Army. The reader quickly gathers an impression of a range of services offered, from foodbanks to family assistance, and the multiple issues that clients present with in this context. An interesting section regarding the background to Community Ministries and the value of the social worker’s interpersonal qualities required to support clients are well linked. Specific assessment tools such as Safe from the Start and the Positive Lifestyle Programme are introduced by Kevin and the authors make a helpful connection to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to describe the range of services offered.

Matt describes his mental health social work role working with adults in an acute inpatient environment at a District Health Board. The authors provide a good overview of Health and Disability services, relevant legislation and the structure of mental health services in Aotearoa New Zealand. Matt refers to the value of working in a multi-disciplinary environment and the importance of developing an integrative framework for practice that connects the individual’s worldview with their environment.

Women’s health social work is the final field of practice introduced in the book. Jean, at the Women’s Health Collective, defines the collective model of the organisation and the importance of a range of services offered for women. An excellent historical overview of women’s services is provided by the authors and how mainstream thinking and policy have been challenged. Feminist theory, Te Wheke, the commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and the connection between social work and community work are particular theoretical concepts and areas highlighted in the discussion.

The book provides an important contribution towards assisting students and beginning social work practitioners to understand what the day-to-day role of a social worker is within different fields of practice. This is an enjoyable and inspiring journey where the reader is able to personally connect with each social worker from the sharing of their experiences in the chapters and the interactive web links. The book provides a positive contribution towards understanding the uniqueness of social work activity within an Aotearoa New Zealand context and the current challenges of practice. In addition, the authors’ intention of exploring further fields of practice in future texts that reflect the diversity and uniqueness of local social work is

commendable. This text is strongly recommended for every social work student considering practicum or employment options in practice within Aotearoa New Zealand.

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