

THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK IMPROVING AND SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL WELLBEING



‘A hallmark of a maturing and self-confident profession is the ability to transcend a task-based approach to focus on broad themes and principles of professional practice’

This paper articulates the purpose of social work in improving people’s social wellbeing.

Purpose } (definition): the reason for which anything is done, created or exists

Role } (definition): usual or customary function

The purpose applies to all social workers irrespective of their job role or work context.



1 NISCC Register, January 2017

2 Includes Trusts, HSCB, RQIA, NISCC and NIGALA

3 Includes Probation and Youth Justice

Social Work: A Value-based Profession

Social workers work with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society, promoting their rights, challenging inequalities and improving the quality of their lives. While social workers work in different sectors and settings and in a variety of job roles, they share a common purpose which is to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Social workers do this by empowering people to manage their own lives; promoting people’s independence; supporting people’s social inclusion and participation in society; and helping people to keep safe and well.

Social work is underpinned by a core set of professional values. These include service to others, promoting social justice, respecting the dignity and worth of the individual, recognising the importance of human relationships and maintaining integrity and competence. These values help social workers make ethically informed decisions where there are conflicting interests and competing rights.

Social work values are embodied in the profession’s national and international Codes of Ethics. They are also reflected in the NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice.

SOCIAL WORK VALUES

Human Rights

We will uphold and promote individual’s dignity and wellbeing and respect and support their rights where this does not threaten the rights, safety or legitimate interests of others.

Social Justice

We will challenge discrimination, respect diversity, promote social inclusion and support fair and just policies, practice and decisions.

Professional Integrity

We will act in a reliable, honest and trustworthy manner and uphold the values and reputation of the profession.

Ethical Practice

We will act with integrity and treat people with respect, compassion and empathy and comply with regulatory, employer and professional requirements where these are consistent with professional values.

Social workers enable and help individuals, families and communities to:

- live safely, purposefully and well in their own homes
- play an active and productive part in society
- have better life chances and outcomes
- build social cohesion and capital

They also contribute to the protection of children and adults at risk of harm, to public protection and offender rehabilitation.

Central to the effectiveness of social work practice is the quality of relationship between the social worker and those they work with. Social workers need to know how to connect with and communicate with people, be able to listen and discover what's going on below the surface, show empathy, build trust and work creatively and flexibly with others to find solutions. They need to be able to balance managing risk alongside being supportive and enabling, to recognise and build on people's strengths, head problems off before they become crises, and advocate and mediate on people's behalf.



Key Characteristics of Effective Social Work Practice

Relationships - building person-centred relationships based on trust and respect that promote individual's rights to self-determination;

Systems thinking - a holistic approach to understanding individuals and the personal, family, social, economic and environmental factors influencing their life;

Strength based - building on people's strengths to manage their own lives and to bring about positive change for and by themselves;

Co-production - developing more equal partnerships with people who use services in order to shape services that meet individual needs and improve people's quality of life;

Rights based - promoting people's rights and standing up for the rights of those who are unable to do so on their own behalf;

Collaboration - collaborating with others to ensure a co-ordinated response in meeting people's needs and to improve their experience of services;

Evidence informed - continuous development, reflective practice and use of evidence, including research, in professional decision-making.

Social Work and Social Wellbeing

Social wellbeing is a broad concept and applies to many areas in a person's life. It is about the quality of people's relationships and their sense of belonging; the choice and control people have about decisions affecting them and their lives; being able to trust others; living purposefully and well; how safe and secure people feel. Social wellbeing affects how people feel about themselves, how well they function and the overall quality of their life.

The focus of social work intervention in improving people's social wellbeing depends on the individual, their unique circumstances, needs and priorities and on the social worker's specific job role. It also involves working collaboratively with a range of public services including police, education, local councils, housing, social security, health, the voluntary and independent sectors; and community and faith groups.



The quadrant summarises the key components of social wellbeing which should be adapted for use in different contexts and with different client groups across the life span.

Relationships and Belonging

Promoting people's social inclusion and participation in society. This happens when people:

- Have stable, supportive and trusting relationships with others, including family and friends
- Have their own home or a place that feels like home
- Participate in social and community life and have positive life experiences
- Feel a sense of belonging

Purpose and Meaning

Enabling people to engage in meaningful and fulfilling activities. This happens when people:

- Access opportunities to pursue activities, including leisure, sport, educational, volunteering or paid work
- Feel valued and respected
- Have a sense of achievement, fulfilment and enjoyment
- Live purposefully and well
- Improve their life chances and outcomes

Independence and Responsibility

Empowering people to be in control of their own lives. This happens when people:

- Make informed choices about their life and how they are supported by others to live it
- Have, or develop, the confidence and life skills to take responsibility for themselves, and others as appropriate
- Have access to resources, services and opportunities that support their independence and inclusion in society
- Live as independent and fulfilling a life as possible

Safe and Well

Supporting people to keep safe and well. This happens when people:

- Feel cared for, secure and protected by those close to them
- Are able to keep themselves and those they care for safe, well and healthy
- Feel safe in their own home and community
- Respect diversity and difference
- Are safe from harm, abuse and exploitation

Quality of Life

Self Worth

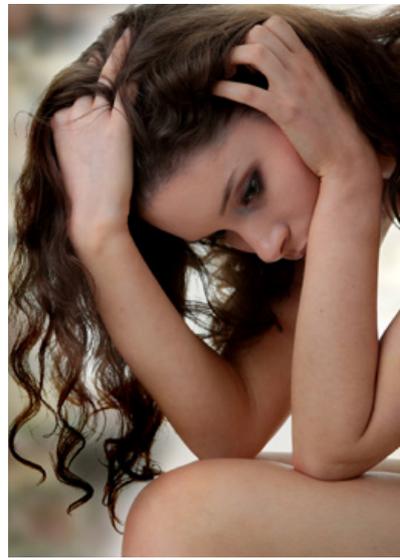
A Framework for Social Work Practice

This framework outlines the continuum of social work practice approaches used by social workers. It reflects the diversity of circumstances, life situations and needs of individuals, families and communities and the broad scope of social work in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing as it is practised across a wide range of settings and sectors.

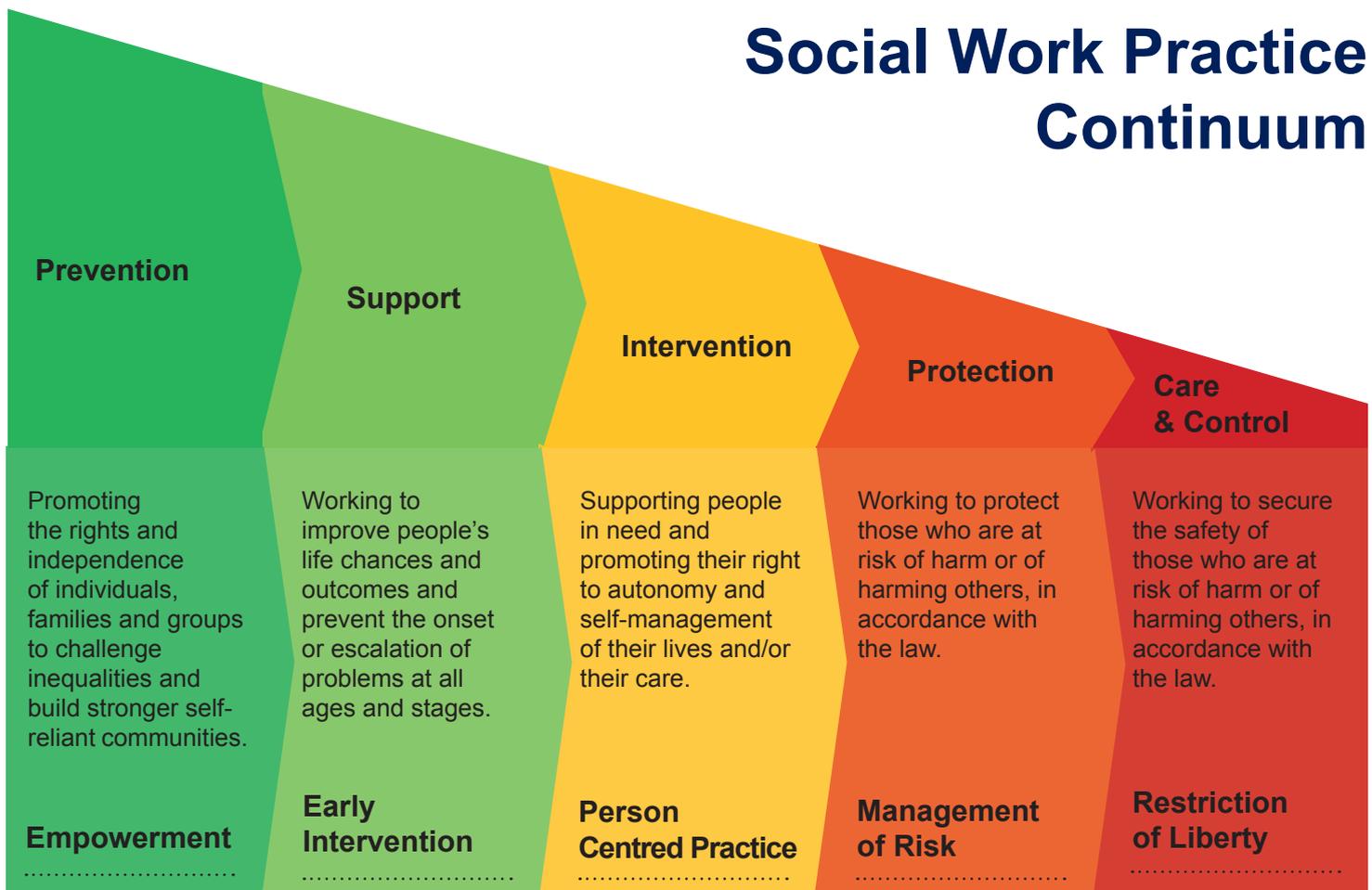
Social workers may adopt elements of each approach in their day to day practice, reflecting their dual role of empowering and promoting the rights and self-determination of those they work with alongside their responsibility to protect those at risk of harm or of harming others. The ability of social workers to both empower and protect is intrinsic to good social work practice.

More detail about the framework can be found in the Strategy for Social Work:

www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/social-work-strategy.pdf



Social Work Practice Continuum



The Difference Social Work Makes

‘They helped me get my family back’

‘They helped me regain confidence in myself not only as a parent but also as a person’

‘They helped me realise my children deserved better’

‘They let you do it yourself and build up your confidence’

‘He made me feel I was worth something’

‘They believed in me and saw the strengths’

‘Social workers saved my life’

‘They helped reduce my son’s isolation’



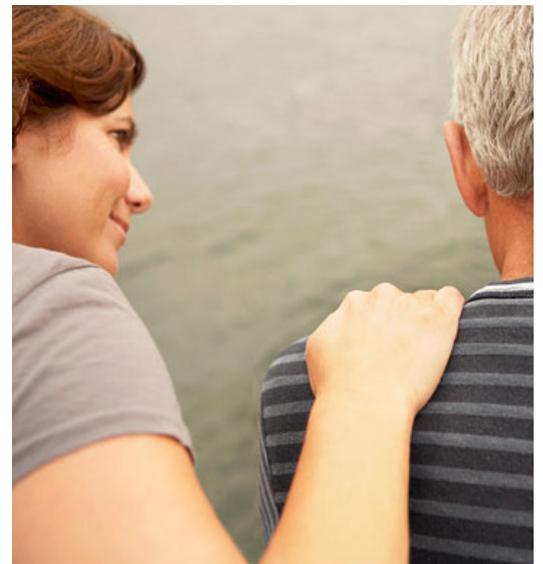
What Service Users Expect

‘Social workers must do the job with dignity, a sense of humour, courtesy, respect, tolerance, expertise, restraint, commitment, efficiency, honesty, concern, compassion, openness, patience, clear communication, good preparation, common sense, integrity, a positive attitude, professionalism, confidentiality, graciousness, enthusiasm, pride and an acknowledgement of expertise of experience’

(Co-Chair, Citizen’s Forum for Social Work Strategy, 2014).

Service users are positive about social workers who:

- develop a meaningful relationship with them based on empathy
- can be trusted and treat them with respect and honesty
- put them at the centre
- focus on their abilities and strengths
- support them to make informed choices and decisions
- are dependable and don’t give up on them
- help them get the help and support they need



This leaflet sets out the overarching purpose of social work in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing. It is based on 'A Vision for Social Work' and 'A Framework for Social Work Practice' as set out in **Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing: A Strategy for Social Work 2012 - 2022**, the content of which was widely consulted on with social workers, service users and carers. www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/social-work-strategy.pdf

The leaflet provides a succinct and inclusive summary about social work and social wellbeing which applies to all social workers, irrespective of where they work, who they work with or their specific job role and responsibilities. Over 120 social workers representing the diversity of social work quality assured this edited version.

The leaflet is designed to help social workers explain to others, including service users, carers and the wider public, what they do in a clear and consistent way.

Quotes from social workers:

'Excellent tool to strengthen understanding of the profession.'

'Very useful, capturing the complexities of social work and the value we add to people's lives.'

'This is very exciting - to define social wellbeing and how we promote it.'

'I like the short, holistic approach. It explains all areas of social work.'

'It puts in context what we do on a day to day basis.'

'This is why people took up social work in the first place.'

'This promotes a positive understanding of social work.'