

Professional Integrative Paper

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SOCW 441

February 12, 2008

I began my journey into social work in 2002 at Dalton State College. I enrolled at the age of 40 as a first generation college student in my family. The decision to pursue higher education was initiated by a personal experience that required me to help support my family. The community resources I utilized in trying to fund my education made it clear to me that an education and career in social work was what I wanted to pursue. Before this time, I was not aware of the resources in my community for assistance. This motivated me to become a professional social worker.

Early in my education I was required to interview various social workers for course work. The information I received during these interviews helped me confirm my decision to pursue social work. I attended college for two years and then accepted a job at a local elementary school as a family advocate. During my two years employment I partnered with a school social worker, working and experiencing much of what school social work entails. My duties included home visits and frequent contact with families. I was able to observe how important the relationship between me and the family was in helping resolve issues. It was rewarding for me to watch families take advantage of new opportunities once we were able to inform them of the community resources available. Now, not only was I determined to become a social worker, but I had a growing passion for school social work.

In 2006, I transferred to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to complete my Bachelor's degree. During my work with the professors and social workers at UTC, I have realized the importance of obtaining a Master's degree.

The additional training received through Master's level course work, I believe, will enable me to help clients by utilizing a broader knowledge base. The field experiences gained during a graduate program will expose me to more opportunities and enable me to practice my social work skills while still receiving knowledgeable supervision and support. The education I receive from a graduate program will allow me to engage families and individuals in changing their situations and empower them to break generational cycles of illiteracy, poverty and school drop out. I believe there is a difference that can be made in the life of a child by a school and the collaborative efforts of all the staff. While working with a school social worker as a family advocate, I was able to see this type of collaborative effort in action and found it very rewarding. Furthermore, I believe a graduate program will give me the tools to effectively communicate with school administrators to facilitate their understanding of the role the school can play in reducing barriers that prevent a successful school career.

This time in my life is a true turning point for me and my family. My family's support of my decision to pursue my MSSW has been phenomenal and I am assured of their continued support during the program. I have been fortunate to establish several professional relationships with social workers who offer me constant support and encouragement as well. As an adult student, it is very important to me to remain successful throughout graduate school and as I embark on my professional career. I believe that learning is a lifelong process and my participation in continuing education will be crucial to my success. The example I am setting for my children by stressing the importance of education is

important to me, but the lessons they are learning from me concerning rights of individuals and the oppression of populations is something they will be able to apply in their own lives as well.

A major social concern for me is the effects of poverty on children. This is an area I have researched during course work. The effect of poverty on children is inclusive to almost every aspect of their lives as children and shapes the life they will lead as adults. In a country that is as affluent as the United States, it is almost unfathomable that so many of our children live in such extreme poverty. I would like to educate the general public about childhood poverty and initiate a move towards prevention in the future. I believe that a sound and reputable educational background in social work will make me a trusted professional when pursuing my goals in this arena.

In conclusion, I would like to voice my concerns about social work and the stress often associated with this type profession. I believe it is important to take care of myself in order to avoid burnout. I have joined a health club where I can go and work out on the treadmill, swim, sit in the sauna and other relaxing, stress relieving activities. I am also an avid sewer, crafter, puzzle-worker and reader. All these things along with good nutrition and ample rest are necessary for physical and emotional health. I am also committed to maintaining a healthy marriage and family life. I feel my family has been very supportive and patient while I have been attending school and now it is time to have some quality time once again with them.