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Professional Identification Paper

Two main documents that I have chosen to commit to uphold; the Bible, and the NASW code of ethics guide my ethical responsibility in any social work setting. As a Christian, I am to love the people around me while the six categories of a social worker's ethical responsibility are what enable me to love people specifically through social work. Although I feel that all the categories in the code of ethics are important and relevant in my field placement, for the purpose of this assignment I will point out three that I have seen to be crucial when working with the clientele at The Caring Place.

Our clients are not always treated in a way that shows they matter to the world. Many times the people we see have been belittled by their government, their communities, and even their families. For this reason, preserving the dignity and worth of the person is an important aspect of my ethical responsibility to our clients. In the first years of the Caring Place, it was not as able to meet this responsibility as it is today. It went through several changes to make the agency a more dignified place for clients to be served. By changing buildings, making the waiting areas and offices neater in appearance, making two separate rooms for the clients to disclose information, and always presenting the food and clothing that does not disrespect the client it has become better equipped to preserve the dignity of those it serves.

Working in an agency with only one or two social workers brings a new set of challenges when providing social services to clients. Volunteers cannot have the same knowledge base as a BSW or an MSW therefore, keeping the agency, as a whole competent about the role of the social worker can be a constant struggle. To some degree, the volunteers are the “front runners” for the social services we offer, because they are the first ones to hear about a need. We have found some ways to make our volunteers at the Caring Place more knowledgeable about areas of social work such as respecting diversity in our client group or how to protect the privacy of the clients by doing training sessions with them every couple months to address some of these issues, but there is no way to mandate some of these regulations without losing many of our volunteers.

As a Christian organization, our staff and volunteers are well versed in the topic of integrity. Although it is not always as easy as it sounds, integrity is an important aspect in a Christian agency because of the way we strive to present ourselves to clients. They need to know that we are trustworthy people and that we want to do what we can to make their situations better. Christian organizations are sometimes perceived as only out to get church membership or converts, however, our goal is to change that perception by using non-exploitive methods of acquiring information and helping clients. When a client comes into the social worker’s office, religion is usually the farthest thing from the client’s mind, and therefore is unacknowledged by the social worker as well. The social worker does everything possible to find the answers to the client’s questions and present possible solutions to situations. The biggest struggle I see to integrity at the Caring Place is to suppress the urge to promise more than I can reasonably do. The client needs to

know that there are limitations to what I can do as they first enter the office, so they do not have unrealistic expectations of me, and they do not become angry if I am unable to solve every dilemma.

Volunteers primarily fill the positions at The Caring place with supervision from three hired staff members. Although I do not have long periods of time with the volunteers, they know who I am, and we get along well on a professional level. The staff members are also very easy to be comfortable around. I try to maintain a professional manner within meetings and other functions around the Caring Place remembering my role there, and holding myself to a higher standard than the volunteers. Although I have not been there long, I feel that I need to be knowledgeable about the operations of the agency and be ready to answer questions from clients or volunteers. Keeping professional boundaries with peers has been a new learning experience for me because I generally do not mind sharing information about myself with others. However, I believe I have done well at learning to keep most of my conversation focused on school or social work. Getting questions or concerns addressed in the proper order is important in a professional setting, it would be unacceptable in a work environment to skip the chain of command and the same is true in my field placement. I feel that the biggest areas I need to focus on to bring myself further in my professional development this semester are to continue to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients and colleagues, keeping myself better prepared for meetings, and always being early rather than late.

My field placement has altered the way I see myself and the way I want others to perceive me. Going into the Caring Place, I was unsure about what my role was going to be in that setting and how I was going to be able to contribute. I was very nervous the

first few weeks about the feedback I was being asked to give because although I had my opinions, I was afraid of having the wrong answers. However, I have since become more confident in sharing my insights about client situations and recognize that I have a valuable perspective to bring to the field of social work. As I have been spending more time at my agency I have found that I am feeling more competent as a social worker and more ready to work as a colleague rather than an intern.

I think of my practicum experience as a very long job training that will eventually allow me to have the freedom to work as an equal. Therefore, I am always looking for new responsibilities that I can take over or what I need to learn so when the time comes I feel competent to do the tasks I am asked to complete. Taking the initiative with clients and not always referring them to Heather for the answers is another way that I can begin to assert myself as a social worker. I need to carry myself in a manner that will let the volunteers know that I am no longer just the learning intern, but someone who knows the answers and can help. And with my supervisors it is important to show that I can present myself well in professional settings, always be prepared for meetings, and to speak confidently when I am asked to.

In general I feel that I have come a long way in my professional development during this semester because of my field experience. I have been able to see how I fit into the work environment and my level of competence in certain areas of social work. I have also seen how the theoretical information that I have learned in my social work classes has come together in my field experience. I hope to continue to see personal growth in these areas, and recognize how my competence can grow as a result of my broadened understanding and experience.