

Horizon Career Centre

Here at the AASW Horizon Career Centre we want to encourage you to develop clarity around your purpose in social work. 'Plan Your Career' was developed to help you articulate your values and needs, and proactively plan the career you want. This process includes reflecting on why you are a Social Worker, gaining insight into your particular strengths, identifying where in Social Work your purpose best fits, and identifying what you need to stay nourished throughout your career. Begin your journey today!



PLAN YOUR CAREER

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PHASE 1: CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE

Gaining insight into WHO you are, and WHY you are a Social Worker, is the foundation step in purposefully planning your Social Work career. When you know yourself well, you will be equipped to reach out for experiences that resonate with your unique purpose. A fantastic way to begin this process is to clarify and articulate your strengths. Through committing to this process you are beginning a journey that will take you to where YOU need to go.

EXERCISE 1

Begin by thinking through the following reflective questions. These will help you focus in and gain insight into who you are and what motivates you.

- What do I value?
- What qualities in people do I admire and why?
- What challenges me?
- What makes me laugh?
- What am I passionate about?
- What would I like to contribute?
- What would I like to learn?
- What sparks my interest?
- What life experiences do I want to have?
- What is my life purpose?

EXERCISE 2

Understanding your key strengths will be incredibly useful in planning your career. Knowing your strengths and feeling confident helps in finding your passion at work, and to find work that best suits you. Start by listing your top-five strengths. Be honest and direct when determining your strengths, then you will be able to look for jobs that are in line with them.

EXERCISE 3

Building upon the insights you've now gained you can begin to focus in on your purpose in Social Work. Through reflecting on the questions below and asking them of Social Workers you admire, you will be able to grow your vision of what your Social Work career can look like.

- Why did I choose to study Social Work?
- Why do I want to be a Social Worker?

EXERCISE 4

Consider an experience of 'thriving' in Social Work (an experience that left you thinking, "Now that's why I'm a Social Worker!").

- what happened?
- why was it so powerful?
- what did I learn from it?
- how has it influenced me?

Now that you've thought about your own experience of thriving, ask a colleague. If you're not yet a Social Worker, ask one!



PHASE 2: UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK

Now that you have more clarity on your own purpose, the next step is to revisit the purpose of Social Work. Although you would have come across this during your studies, reflecting on it after you have completed Phase 1 will enable you to put the two together and uncover how to use your purpose to contribute to the purpose of Social Work.

There are a multitude of Social Work definitions around the globe. Whilst many differ in their wording, commonalities exist in the commitment to the five values of: human dignity and worth, social justice, service to humanity, integrity and competence.

The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1999: 5) states:

The Social Work profession is committed to the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being. Social Work aims to maximize the development of human potential and the fulfillment of human needs, through an equal commitment to:

- *Working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being*
- *Working to achieve social justice through social development and social change.*

This involves:

- *Upholding people's interests and rights*
- *Working with individuals, groups and communities in the pursuit and achievement of equitable access to social, economic and political resources*
- *Providing assistance to improve the well-being of clients. (Clients are individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or have exceptional needs)*
- *Raising awareness of structural inequities*
- *Promoting policies and practices that achieve a fair allocation of social resources*
- *Acting to bring about social change to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice.*



PHASE 2: UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK

Continued...

EXERCISE 1

Read the AASW Code of Ethics (you can download a free copy at <http://www.aasw.asn.au> - you may like to save it to your hard drive for future reference!). Even if you've read it before, take some time now to re-read it. This is a critical step in the 'Plan Your Career' journey.

EXERCISE 2

The next step is to take your answers to the questions and your Signature Strengths identified in Phase 1 and apply them to the above dot points (refer to the six final dot points on page 6), to develop some ideas about how to use your particular values, beliefs and strengths within your profession.

For example, let's say you discovered in Phase 1 that you value fairness and believe that all individuals deserve the right to freedom; and you additionally identified that one of your Signature Strengths is Leadership. Reading over the above list, let's imagine that the final point, acting to bring about social change, really resonated with you. By putting these together, you might articulate that organising an event to advocate for and promote change for a marginalized group would tap into your purpose.

There are lots of really creative ways to do the above. You might like to think broadly, and consider using the media, theatre, social entrepreneurship, politics, art or the Internet within your Social Work career. As long as you know your WHY (to maximize human potential), the HOW could be anything that draws not only on your fundamental Social Work skills, knowledge and values, but the strengths, passions and interests you bring to Social Work!

EXERCISE 3

The final step in this phase is to articulate your statement of purpose. We like to call it our 'career objective' or 'tagline'. This statement will be useful to you throughout your career as it will guide your path and provide you with a way to check in every now and then to see if you're still on track. It can be as simple and broad, grand and dramatic or detailed and specific as you want. You may find that it sums up way more than your career aspirations, but also captures your life 'mission'. This can be used as an introduction to your resume or you may just want to stick it to your wall to remind you of your bigger picture purpose - it's powerful stuff!

Example Career Objective

My intention in all areas of my life is to commit to building connections with others that promote relationships of integrity. This approach to living and working enables me to join with others in a journey towards reaching our full potential as individuals and as a human collective.

Example Tagline

"Assisting Social Workers to fulfill their potential"

Now that you've completed Phase 1 and 2, it's time to review.



REVIEW PHASE 1 AND 2

Pause awhile to take stock of your responses. This is an INCREDIBLY important moment. This will ensure that you move far beyond a reactive, quick fix (I need a job TODAY and I'll take anything!!) mentality, and instead equip yourself with the tools to proactively create a sustainable, meaningful and purposeful career.

Review...

- What are my five Signature Strengths? (from VIA Strengths Survey)
- How might I use these in my career?
- What would I like to learn?
- What do I want to contribute?
- Where do my interests lie?
- What stood out when I recalled a moment of thriving?
- What do I value?
- Did a particular way of working, client group, core value, colleague or field of practice stand out?
- Can I articulate a particular way of working that I'm interested in exploring?

If you're excited about progressing your ideas, move on to Phase 3! If you're finding it challenging to answer these questions, keep trying...you will get there! Alternatively please call us on 1300 731 314 as we will be more than happy to assist.



PHASE 3: CREATE YOUR PURPOSE

Now it's time to use your newly gained insights to proactively develop career possibilities that will allow you to work with your strengths and purpose. Get ready for action!

EXERCISE 1 – Map Your Interest

Map your interest, and chances are you'll do more than find a job, you'll create a dynamic, holistic, long-term career full of amazing experiences! Seek out information, resources, organisations, ideas, inspiration and most importantly interesting and uplifting people. During this process, going beyond the traditional realm of Social Work will ensure that you develop as wide a pool of resources as possible – think big!

Use the following suggestions to build your map.

Peak Websites

There are many local, national and international organisations that are valuable hubs of information. Use these websites as a launch pad to find people, organisations, articles, events, job listings, discussion forums, and blogs.

Professional Organisations

Look for communities that you can tap into (e.g. AASW, IFSW, Alumni networks, business groups). Find out what they do, who's involved, how they meet, and if they hold regular events. Think about how you might also contribute to those groups. Being involved in active committees is a fantastic way to meet with well-connected people and start your own supportive professional network. Seek out people who are generous, experienced and warm.

Events, Training, Conferences

Find past and/or future events (seminars, workshops, conference, meetings) and read the biographies of the presenters. If their details aren't on the event listing, search their name on the Internet and you'll probably come across them. This is also a great way to find fascinating people from other countries.

Magazines, Journals, Online Publications

Search for publications and take note of any interesting people, research or projects. If contact details aren't included in the publications, do an Internet search as previously mentioned.

EXERCISE 2 – Build Relationships

Now that you've mapped out people and organisations that interest you, the next exercise involves reaching out to build positive connections. Rather than making connections aimed at meeting your immediate needs, approach people solely because you're sincerely and genuinely INTERESTED IN THEM. Below is an example of how to connect by e-mail, over the phone or in person.

BRIEFLY Introduce yourself

Connect through COMPLIMENT

If you've read about the person and were impressed with what they've done, or perhaps heard someone else talk about them positively, start off the contact by letting them know.



PHASE 3: CREATE YOUR PURPOSE

Continued...

ADD VALUE

Approach with the purpose of adding value to them, rather than asking for something for yourself. If you come across someone doing research or working on a project that you're interested in, look for ways to add value. For example, you may have books, articles or contacts that could be useful to the other person. If you offer something that adds value to the other person they are much more likely to respond.

Be SPECIFIC

Make it easy for people to respond by being clear and specific about what you would like to happen next. This is particularly important when connecting via e-mail (the aim is for the person to be able to reply without having to leave their computer!). If they don't reply, that's ok! You only need a small number to reach back for things to snowball.

Meeting In Person

Meet with people in person and focus completely on them. The purpose of the meeting is to learn more about the other person - ask questions, be genuinely interested, and hear for ways to add value. When you know what someone is doing, what their interests and passions are, you can identify ways to contribute. If it fits with the flow of the conversation (i.e. If they ask you what you do) bring up that you're looking for new opportunities, but keep it brief. When you've genuinely focused on them for the majority of the interaction they will hold you in high regard and be more inclined to share information and contacts that might add value to you. After the meeting send an e-mail or card in the post letting them know how much you enjoyed meeting them and WHY.

Networks

The connections you have developed will begin to grow supportive networks that can be personally and professionally enriching. From this solid foundation, you will ensure that your long-term career experiences are as positive as they can be.

Work

By building positive relationships you will develop a more meaningful understanding of current and future career opportunities. By staying connected you will not only become more aware of jobs being advertised, but also those that are less visible. Additionally, you will have gained new insights into particular organisations and/or people you would like to associate with – make informed decisions!

Inspiration

Through connecting, you will be perfectly situated to ensure a steady stream of inspiring and motivating experiences that will contribute to sustaining your professional and personal growth. These might include collaborating with colleagues to present papers, develop a project or write a book. You may be inspired to undertake further training, travel or even start your own business!



PHASE 4: CULTIVATE YOUR PURPOSE

From time to time we all get off track - that's ok! The key is to continually ensure that you remain connected to WHY you are a Social Worker and be proactive and intentional about HOW you do this. There are many ways to cultivate your purpose. Below are tips to feed your passion, nurture your interests and inspire you to fulfill your potential!

Power of Association

Seek out and associate with inspiring, uplifting and encouraging people. Join with other Social Workers, celebrate and be proud of who you are.

Lifelong Learning

Your AASW Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy and Logbook are foundation documents that you can continually refer to, throughout your Social Work journey. Read the policy document in full (it's a user-friendly document so it's a quick read!) and then check out the Logbook. The Logbook has an excellent introduction and visual diagram that will help you analyse, reflect, formulate, determine, record and evaluate to ensure that you engage in meaningful CPD activities. Both documents can be found on the main AASW website <http://www.aasw.asn.au> as PDF downloads – you may like to download and then save them to your hard drive for easy future reference!

Seek out and proactively engage in professional supervision as this will ensure you continue to grow and develop as a Social Worker. Read and engage with materials that inspire you. Develop your skills and knowledge through seminars, lectures, workshops and/or enroll in further study. Challenge yourself by learning something new!

Attitude

Your thoughts create your reality. If your attitude is not leading to the experiences you want, be proactive and change it! Rather than get stuck in a negative thought pattern, think about how can change it. As Maya Angelou wrote, "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

'Plan Your Career' is a tool that you will use over and over again to reconnect with and build upon your bigger picture purpose. Be proactive, take control and create the life you really want. Dream big and believe in yourself!

Horizon Career Centre Contact Information

Horizon Career Centre is a national program of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd.

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