



**National Association of Social Workers (NASW) -
New York State Chapter**

**Workforce Commission
Regional Roundtable Discussion**

March 2014

NASW-NYS Chapter Workforce Commission Members

Janna Heyman, PhD, Chair

Josephine Allen, DSW

Cassandra Bransford, PhD

Michael Cappiello, LCSW-R

Peter Chernack, DSW, LCSW-R

Diane Elze, PhD

Mary McCarthy, PhD, LMSW

Jed Metzger, PhD, LCSW-R

Nancy Nealon, LMSW

Debra Fromm Faria, LCSW, ACSW, NASW-NYS Chapter - President

Reinaldo Cardona, MSSW, LCSW, NASW-NYS Chapter - Executive Director

Karin Carreau, MSW, NASW-NYS Chapter – Director of Policy

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2012, the President of NASW-NYS, Debra Fromm Faria, appointed a NASW-NYS Workforce Commission Taskforce. The Commission was charged to:

- Identify and analyze workforce challenges and threats impacting BSW and MSW social workers in NYS
- Identify and detail emerging and strengthened workforce opportunities for NYS social workers
- Submit a written report to the NASW-NYS Board of Directors detailing taskforce findings and recommendations

In the Fall of 2012 the Workforce Commission members reviewed the proposed licensure changes and NASW-NYS' response to the licensure changes, including: clarification of definitions; opposition to broad-based permanent exemption, but recognition of the potential need for specific exemptions; potential support for grandparenting; mandatory continuing education; and opposition to adding diagnosis to other scopes of practice.

In addition, the Commission members reviewed the Chapters, Clinical Society and Dean Association's compromise position. Workforce members discussed the importance of this compromise and the impact on workforce. During the Fall 2012, Commission members also reviewed the Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT) recommendations and the system-wide changes impacting workforce development. We discussed the new Behavioral Health Organizations (BHOs) established throughout NYS and other system-wide initiatives.

The Commission also reviewed preliminary data from the NASW-NYS 2012 annual survey. The different practice settings in which members worked were examined. The preliminary results showed that over one-quarter of the respondents indicated that their jobs had been in jeopardy in the past year. Commission members underscored how important it was to be aware of cuts in federal, state and local funding as we address the challenges facing the profession. Issues of high client case loads, unsafe work environments and inadequate compensation were documented in the survey and are a significant concern to Commission members.

At the November 2012 meeting, Commission members discussed the need for regional insight about workforce initiatives. We decided to hold regional roundtables throughout New York State in order to provide the Commission with an understanding of the complex workforce issues,

including differences in geographic areas and differences among various practice settings. The Commission decided that public forums would be held using roundtable discussions. The Commission discussed possible questions to be formulated for these roundtable discussions. The Commission members worked during January-February 2013 to refine the questions and plan the Roundtable discussions.

In March 2013, the Commission members developed the final set of questions it would use in its Roundtable discussions. Below is the set of questions that were developed by the Commission:

1. In your community, what are some of the current and future workforce issues facing social workers?
2. According to national Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of social work positions may grow by 25% by the year 2020. How do you see social work jobs changing in your community? At the MSW level; at the BSW level?
3. What is your perception of social work job security in your region? What are growth areas? What areas have been descaled?
4. What new skills and technologies do social workers need to have to work in a changing environment? How should these be addressed through social work education? How should this be addressed through continuing education?
5. How have agencies responded to governmental or other changes?
6. What changes do you see with respect to independent practice?

Between April-June 2013, Commission members volunteered to hold the Workforce Commission Roundtable discussions in different geographic regions throughout New York State. The NASW-NYS Chapter developed a flyer that was emailed to all members in each region inviting them to participate in the Roundtable discussion. The flyer explained that NASW-NYS Workforce Commission was hosting a series of regional meetings throughout NYS with social work practitioners from all areas of practice in an effort to further understand the challenges shaping the social work workforce. The announcement encouraged members to attend and share their experiences. The flyer also explained that the Roundtable discussion would be audio-recorded to capture the experiences and issues across the different regions and that no names would be used in the report.

The roundtables were held in cooperation with the NASW-NYS Chapter Division Chairs. The following table presents a summary of the four Roundtables held throughout NYS.

| Roundtable | Date | Location |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Capital Region | May 22, 2013 | Sidney Albert Training and Research Institute, Albany NY |
| Genesee Valley Region | April 11, 2013 | ABVI-Vision Rehabilitation Center Rochester, NY |
| Hudson Valley & Westchester Region | June 3, 2013 | Fordham University Westchester Campus, West Harrison NY |
| Nassau/Suffolk Roundtable | May 13, 2013 | Adelphi University, Hauppauge Center, Hauppauge, NY |

Each of the Roundtables was attended by social workers ranging in experience from recent graduates to professionals that have been in the field with many years of experience. There were clinicians, advocates, researchers and practitioners in leadership and macro practice. Many of the participants represented diverse fields of practice, including, but not limited to, agency settings, private practitioners, mental health, health care, work with children and adolescents, work with older adults and families, school social work, and higher education.

The discussion was guided by the questions prepared by the Workforce Commission. The following results are first discussed around responses that were central to all four Roundtables. If there were unique issues that arose from different regions of the state, the regional differences are then highlighted.

DISCUSSION

Question #1: In your community, what are some of the current and future workforce issues facing social workers?

All Roundtable discussion groups raised the challenges of a changing workforce. Four of the common issues include:

- ✚ Loss of jobs and salaries cuts, tied to cuts in governmental budgets, grants, and foundation funding. Specific examples were highlighted in different geographic regions
 - “Outsourcing and privatizing.”
 - “Hospital social workers’ roles taken over by nurses.”
 - “Elimination of social workers in school district budget cuts.”
 - “Direct cuts translate to reduced services, e.g. afterschool programs in Nassau youth agencies.”
 - “Social workers have a tough time getting hired and getting adequate salaries. We have done a poor job indicating how precious, valuable, skillful we are.”
 - “Restructuring youth services by eliminating all contract employees.”
 - “Social workers who haven’t had a raise in five years... and that is sending a real message to the not-for-profits.”
 - “Contracts with behavioral health providers have also been cut with reduced funding for addiction and mental health agency settings.”
 - “Social workers have a tough time getting hired and getting an adequate salary because [the profession] has done a poor job indicating how precious, valuable...”

- ✚ Higher caseloads
 - “We need more face-to-face time even for brief intervention”
 - “Having large caseload, 80 clients to help.”
 - “High caseload and what is case management.”

- ✚ Increasing amounts of paperwork
 - “The LCSW’s main role in order to meet all the Medicaid requirement for billing.”
 - “Insurance requirements.”

- ✚ Increase in needs of different population groups, including, veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, persons with alcohol and substance abuse, needs of older adults and their families, recent immigrants, needs of victims of trauma, needs of disabled population. In addition, participants spoke about the changing health and behavioral health care system.
 - “A high number of veterans returning from service without supports.”
 - “Lack of accessibility of building to disabled individuals”

- “Need for understanding sexual abuse and trauma. I still see young social workers come into the field and they don’t understand how to work with people who have been traumatized in different ways.”

For the downstate regions, both Hudson Valley & Westchester and Nassau/Suffolk spoke of the difficulties in addressing disaster relief following Hurricane Sandy, as well as the opiate pandemic.

- “People have lost their homes in Rockaway and Long Island City and they are still waiting for money.”
- “The main problem coming across our desks is alcohol and drugs. The opiate pandemic is out there right now with Vicodin and other drugs.”

Both the Capital Region and the Genesee Valley Region participants spoke about licensing and the changing scope of practice. In addition, there were discussions about the closure of businesses impacting jobs in their communities. The Capital Region also discussed the importance of addressing the changing fiscal landscape and recognizing that agencies respond differently.

Question #2: According to national Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of social work positions may grow by 25% by the year 2020. How do you see social work jobs changing in your community? At the MSW level; at the BSW level?¹

Many of the participants described a slowing down in the job market. Some attributed this to the downturn in the economy over the past several years. All regions discussed the fact that there has been little to no growth in MSW jobs. In fact, some MSW positions have been redefined.

 Employment

- When reflecting on the anticipated growth, some regions’ participants stated,
 - “I don’t see it here.”
 - “I’m not feeling it here.”
 - “Haven’t seen growth in available jobs.”
 - “We are seeing things scaled back, not grow.”
 - “Even with the hospital-based positions...I don’t think we have seen a growth in the number of positions.”
- Some MSW jobs are redefined:
 - “Ended up being a manager of a group home.”
 - “Changing focus on advocacy to promote client’s needs.”

¹ The revised Bureau of Labor Statistics projection for for social work job growth is 19% between 2012 and 2022. See: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-6>

- “It’s usually robbing Peter to pay Paul rather than say let’s create a position.”
- “In child welfare we have seen programs closed..5 of the 7 group homes and cottages too.”
- Some MSW program representatives said that there has not been significant job market increases. There use to be a “flood of emails about so and so took this job – congratulations to the graduate...in the last two years the difference is after graduation you could hear a pin drop.”

Educational Changes and Growth

- Some participants said that they felt there is a “steady rate’ in applications for MSW degrees. In addition, most of the regions also acknowledged that BSW students are also pursuing their Advanced Standing MSW degree rather than working at the bachelor’s level.
- Two regions also discussed the importance of case management in the educational setting.
- One participant asked, “ So...graduating, I ask myself what are the areas of social work that are advantageous, and all of them are important.”
- Another participant spoke about the importance of community and human rights – “we need to analyze the macro and micro.” She underscored the importance that education is not just about being global, but we also need to focus locally on the important issues.

In the Westchester region there was extensive discussion about the importance of mobilizing to affect change in policies – “grassroots,” “organizing,” and “developing partnerships.”

In the Nassau/Suffolk region, it was mentioned that sometimes students in Human Service majors (Associate Degree programs) have no status in the profession. They asked if there is a category for students in AA/AS programs?

Role of Case Management in the Social Work Profession

- Some of the regions’ participants discussed the important recognition of the role of case management in the field of social work, including health and mental health. Often participants discussed the licensing laws and how case management is not recognized as a social work skill but it is an essential role that social workers play.
 - “The way the licensing laws are written excluding case management.”
 - “Case management is really our roots.”
 - “We need to prove that [case management] is what we do very well.”
 - “I see case management as the role of a social worker.”

MSW and BSW Positions

- “There is no real career ladder.”
- “BSW positions are out there, but they are primarily filled by non-social workers.”

- “MSW middle managers have been cut as agencies try to manage operating expenses and keep programs going for clients.”
- Some regions discussed that often BSW positions are available, but the positions are often being filled by MSW or individuals other than social workers
 - Case management positions in child welfare, developmental disabilities, and mental health
 - Some participants raised the concern about BSW positions and the lack of “title protection” for the positions.

Question #3: What is your perception of social work job security in your region? What are growth areas? What areas have been descaled?

Throughout the various regions participants felt that “job security” has eroded over time. Some jobs that were once considered “safe” jobs have changed.

- In all regions, participants spoke about the loss of jobs in the public sector.
 - The public sector has “slowly but surely gotten out of the business...employing fewer and fewer social workers”
 - “Suffolk has downsized in departments where social work numbers have declined, e.g. probation, mental hygiene.”
 - “Nassau has responded to fiscal climate with restructuring and reducing workforce in various human service departments.”
 - “Loss of my job because of budget cuts.”
 - “Hard to find a job in the public sector...kind of disheartening.”
 - The public sector has “slowly gotten out of the business... employing fewer and fewer social workers.”
- Some regions spoke how job opportunities are mostly at the entry level, with many job-seekers MSWs having two or three years’ experience
 - It was identified that there are challenges for new MSWs to jump start their career and accumulate early career experience
 - Participants identified “a need for mentorship and networking to support new social workers entering the job market.”
- Some of the regions again spoke about job growth in health, mental health and behavioral health, with anticipated growth in aging, immigrant services, veterans services, and substance abuse. Some regions spoke about the decline in school social work positions.
- There was concern raised about decline in agencies using full-time staff in mental health. Concern was raised about contracting for services.
- There was also concern raised about the increased need for private practice “coinciding with poor reimbursement rates and difficulty getting on provider panels.”
- For some social work jobs, individuals are working long hours.
- Participants also spoke about the importance of case management and care coordination and that social workers are skilled for positions in the new health and behavioral health area.

Each region spoke about differences within their communities, including differences in cities, suburban and rural areas. In the Hudson Valley/Westchester region, participants spoke about the need to address human rights and focus on community organizing to strengthen communities. In the Genesee Valley region some participants spoke about how social workers are pursuing other jobs (e.g. insurance). In the Nassau/Suffolk region, participants spoke about differences between the counties.

Question 4: What new skills and technologies do social workers need to have to work in a changing environment? How should these be addressed through social work education? How should this be addressed through continuing education?

- ✚ Importance of new federal and state policies and the need for social workers to be knowledgeable and prepared for their implementation (e.g. health homes)
 - Participants stated that social workers “need to know more about key policy initiatives and how these will impact social work services and client systems.”
 - Participants also stated that social workers also should “position the profession” to play a lead role in new service delivery structures.
 - Need for leadership to keep social work at the table

- ✚ Importance of identified innovations in practice and areas of “new knowledge” that will drive “new approaches to practice.”
 - Social workers need “at least a basic understanding of neurobiology” to inform understanding and practice in such areas as addiction, trauma informed treatment, various forms of mental illness and psychiatric disorders
 - Social workers need to have specialized knowledge for behavioral health that support service models that integrate mental health and substance abuse, health and mental health care. Participants cited that evidenced-based practice is important.
 - Several participants emphasized the value of group work skills.

- ✚ Importance of social workers becoming increasingly competent in the use of technology
 - “Electronic medical records are here to stay.”
 - ““When you’re getting out of graduate school you really have to know how to use the new technology because all the agencies are using it.”
 - “The ethical considerations of social networking and Skyping.”
 - “Cell and texting”
 - The immediate future will be characterized by “fully integrated communication systems”
 - Social workers raised concern about the “use computer-based assessment tools.”
 - The value and challenges of concurrent recording was discussed.
 - Some participants saying it gets in the way of therapeutic transaction.
 - Others making the case for concurrent recording as “a vehicle for client empowerment and participation in the treatment process.”

- ✚ Importance of a culturally diverse workforce.
 - “Changing demographics”
 - “Recent, new, and settled immigrants with diverse needs.”
 - “Lack of linguistic and cultural competence in serving Latino communities across the Island.”

- ✚ Education
 - Schools of Social Work need to continue to educate professionals and promote “an ethics of lifelong learning on the part of students entering the field.”
 - “We have to I prepare graduates to be able to navigate in a world that can be completely foreign if you’re not used to it or could be second nature if you’ve grown up with it.”
 - Participants discussed the mandatory continuing education for licensed social workers. Several participants noted that agencies do not support staff attending continuing education programming and see this as a critical issue in the coming years.
 - Continuing education is critical. Many participants referred to preparing professionals for “new system-wide changes,” leadership positions, and education around technology.
 - Social workers need to “be ready to advocate.”

Question 5: How have agencies responded to governmental or other changes?

Most of the participants stated that this was discussed in earlier sections. They also stated sometimes agencies also have to respond to governmental changes to sustain services and focus on core programs. Some of these areas include:

- Reducing staff hours
- Shedding underperforming programs
- Developing Strategic alliances, including co-locating, shared administrative resources, mergers
- Developing entrepreneurial initiatives

Three of the four regions spoke about alliances and collaborative – “building new and different relationships”. Three of the four regions discussed private business and entrepreneurial endeavors. Two of the four regions participants spoke about how social workers need to be more proactive. Both the Hudson Valley/Westchester and Genesee Valley participants discussed how changes are helping agencies to think and reexamine outcomes.

Question 6: What changes do you see with respect to independent practice?

Participants spoke about the challenges imposed by managed care over the past decade and the anticipation of challenges among providers under the new Affordable Care Act.

- Concern was raised about panels not accepting new providers.
- “Insurance companies hold all the power and it is going to get worse, not better.”
- Some participants suggested that NASW should work and advocate with the different groups (e.g. Clinical Society) to help to identify ways to hold insurance companies accountable. Below are some quotes from participants:
 - “...my colleagues and friends that are private practitioners. The rates have been cut over the last couple of years by the major insurers for social workers, like 5-6 dollars in an hour.”
 - “The cost to become a CSW or to get even your ARB, which I know doesn’t exist, has gone up in the state. The education department is charging more for these people to even get a license, to take the exams, sit for it...”
 - “And you’re renting space. All the other costs have gone up so it’s its curious that the reimbursement has gone down..”
 - “... many private practitioners joined NASW so that they would be able to purchase the liability insurance.”
- “Private practitioners need to consider starting groups”
- Some participants also wanted NASW-NYS to realize that agency providers are forming alliances to strengthen bargaining power with managed care entities – need for similar strategies for private providers

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NASW – NYS chapter should:

- Develop and implement strategies to capitalize on growth areas for social work employment, including
 - Health
 - Behavioral health
 - Aging
 - Services to veterans, service members and their families
- Work with the Chapter's Divisions to further understand regional needs with respect to social work jobs and how the association can promote employment opportunities unique to different geographical communities.
- Continue to advocate for title protection for BSW and MSW positions for State agencies and their contract agencies.
- Promote and affirm the primary role of social work at the BSW and MSW level in care coordination and case management across the spectrum of problem areas and practice settings.
- Provide continuing education and professional development opportunities for NASW members on topics that emphasize
 - Evidence-based practices
 - Use of new technology, including electronic media
 - Changing workforce challenges and opportunities (e.g. health homes, affordable care act).
- Encourage social work practitioners and scholars to evaluate the impact of technology in social work practice on the social work relationship and client outcomes (e.g. concurrent recording in health and behavioral health).
- Encourage social work programs to promote student competence in knowledge, values, skills and integrating technology in practice.
- Continue to promote the role of BSW social work employment in key fields (e.g. child welfare, mental health).
- Foster interprofessional communication and promote opportunities for working across disciplines in both practice and advocacy context.