The Goals of the International Network

To provide:

- Information about school social work around the world
- Links between school social work associations

Archive of the Electronic Newsletter

The newsletter of the International Network for School Social Work is sent electronically to an increasing number of school social workers and school social work associations around the world. The newsletter provides information about the progress of school social work around the world and publishes brief practice articles that illustrate current trends in school social work.

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Marion Huxtable
The International Network: Community for School Social Workers

The International Network is a web of connections for school social workers and their school social work professional associations. It provides international communication for individual school social workers and representatives of their professional associations. It encourages sharing of information, forming professional relationships and developing alliances between associations.

The Network is flexible and open, providing for connections that can be brief and superficial or ongoing and more substantial. For example a brief connection could involve a query from a school social worker requiring a single answer from an individual in another country. A stronger connection could involve frequent communication and extensive sharing of information between larger numbers of school social workers in several countries over an extended time.

The map on page 2 shows some of the different patterns of communication that occur in the International Network. Here are some examples:

- Some national school social work associations have a long-standing relationship with the International Network and share information through the Network and with other national associations
- School social workers request information from the International Network
- National associations receive information from the International Network and share it with their members
- School social workers use the Network to locate and communicate with school social workers in other countries
- National school social work associations form alliances with other national associations

The International Network makes it fast and easy for school social workers around the world to link up. Send an email to the International Network to be connected with a school social work association or school social worker who can answer your questions. When you participate by responding to queries from around the world, you help the Network become an even more effective way of sharing information. As in any social network, one connection can lead to many more, opening up a new avenue for improving your professional knowledge and skills.
The International Network provides easy communication and sharing of information between professional school social work associations and school social workers worldwide. The map shows some examples of routes.
The Conference
The Mongolian Association of Social Workers announces that the 6th International School Social work conference will be held June 10-12, 2015 in Ulaanbataar, Mongolia. Many Mongolian social workers and social work educators are working hard to bring this conference together. The hope is that it will benefit not only Mongolia, but also children around the world. Contact the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers for more information at [http://www.massw.org/?lang=en](http://www.massw.org/?lang=en).

School Social Work in Mongolia
Mongolia, in North-East Asia, is bordered on the south by China and on the North by the Russian Federation. Mongolia has approximately 2,736,764 people scattered over a territory of 1.5 million square km, making it the least densely populated country in the world. About 40% of the population, about a million people, lives in the capital city Ulaanbaatar, while many still follow a nomadic lifestyle with herds of livestock and horses.

The social work profession began in schools in Mongolia during the 1990’s. Social and economic turmoil following Mongolia’s transition from an authoritarian communist system to a parliamentary democracy contributed to increased stress on families and this was creating a negative impact on the school lives of children. The need to safeguard children’s rights, provide protection and welfare services and ensure educational development brought about creation of a school social work pilot program in Ulaanbaatar. In 1997, Save the Children (UK), in collaboration with the Mongolian Child Rights Centre (MCRC), established a model project, working to reduce the school drop out rate and provide social welfare services to children in need.
In the last decade school social work has been introduced throughout the country and it has been written into the law. Training materials, school social work standards and a job description have been produced. These activities have been organized and finance in a collaboration between the Mongolian State University of Education, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Norway, the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The job description that has been accepted by the Ministry of Education is significant. It outlined the four main purposes of providing a child friendly environment, ensuring child protection, promoting the full participation of the child in school life and networking with parents, teachers and other local organizations that work for children.

Along with training, various publications have contributed to the further development of the field. The first textbook on school social work was published in 1999. Currently, there are books, journals and research papers for school social workers. A handbook for school social workers was produced in 2009.

The Mongolian Association of School Social Workers
A professional association dedicated to school social work was started to support the newly trained workers, provide professional development and help them to lobby for their role in schools. In 2001 school social workers started the Mongolian Association of School Social Work, and since then it has played a central role in the development of school social work. The MASSW has worked steadily on the legislation, training, research and publications, always in collaboration with agencies such as Save the Children, plus the Ministry of Education and the University. The Association publishes the journal School Social Work Practice four times a year. Members have participated in international conferences and are active in both the International Network and the Asian School Social Work Network. Most of the school social workers currently employed are members of the Association.

Present challenges
In 2008, the age requirement for starting school in Mongolia was changed from 8 years old to 6 years old. Many children who live far from schools, including the 6 year-olds, must attend boarding schools. The Ministry of Education collaborated with MASSW to organize national training for dormitory teachers to help them understand the impact of this change. Seven school social workers also took part in train-the-trainer sessions. 1200 dormitory teachers attended the 2 training sessions. The challenge of training school social workers in Ulaanbaatar and all 21 provinces continues. Workshops, University courses and conferences are offered and the MASSW makes sure that participants enjoy the experience.
Electronic Newsletter March 2014  
Editor: Marion Huxtable

A Snapshot of School Social Work in 2014

In 1990 The World Conference on Education for All set goals and objectives for education around the world. There is progress in goals for primary education, gender equality and quality education, documented in annual Global Monitoring Reports prepared by UNESCO.

However, in many countries disadvantaged children lag behind because of the obstacles they face. In addition social change brings challenges even for those in the mainstream. Social workers are needed to help address these issues in the classroom, in the homes and in the community. They are ideally situated to address problems affecting marginalized children, especially if they work with a school team and with parents developing intervention plans.

School social work is established in about 50 countries. Schools welcome the support and the broad skills of the social worker because the social worker attends to all aspects of a child’s life. More countries are expressing interest and the last decade has seen several countries placing social workers in schools for the first time.

Countries have different models depending on culture, history and politics, and the school social work role is adaptable for culturally relevant interpretations. Methods are child-centered and involve the whole system, with teamwork a key. Groupwork, casework, attendance work, outreach to families, consultation and prevention are typically part of the school social work role.

History of School Social Work

When school became universal and compulsory, help was needed to enroll children. In the UK around 1900, attendance officers were hired. In the US visiting teachers went to the homes to encourage attending school. Gradually these roles evolved into school social work. Throughout the 20th century social work programs grew in schools around the world. Every continent has some school social work programs. They are strongest in North America and Europe. There are also some strong school social work programs in the Middle East – in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In Ghana there is a well-established program.

More recently several Asian countries have developed school social work. Mongolia has developed a very strong program within the last 15 years. Japan is now adding social workers to the schools after a slow start. New Zealand is bringing social workers into the schools rapidly. School social work is still needed in sub-Saharan Africa, central and southeast Asia where work to help schools meet educational goals.
Professional literature, school social work associations and standards

Literature on school social work is helpful in developing the field. Several countries, such as the US, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Germany and Sweden have school social work journals and/or textbooks. Newsletters and web sites provide information for practitioners.

Several countries, for example the US, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Ghana, Mongolia, Japan, Korea and Hungary have a school social work association. These associations usually offer conferences, newsletters and advocacy. The question of who helps the school social worker with salary, working conditions and grievances is a separate and important issue. In a few countries there are unions that take this role. For example in Norway there is a powerful union that represents all social workers and bargains for them. In the US, the teachers’ unions represent school social workers in many states.

According to the International School Social Work Survey done in 2012, almost all countries require their school social workers to have a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in social work. A few countries have a related degree, social pedagogy, that may be acceptable. Some countries have a set of standards for social workers who work in schools and some have a certification process that may require additional training. At present an international group of social work faculty members is working on international standards for school social workers. This may lead to international online courses that could be made available worldwide.

The International Network for School Social Work

All social work is local and for most social workers local professional contacts are all they desire. However international contact has proven to be helpful in developing this specialty of school social work. The Network has supported the development of school social work through direct international contacts, newsletters, web sites, conferences and email.

The International Network for School Social Work is a network open to all school social workers. Starting in 1990, it has collected and shared information about school social work around the world and links together the professional school social work associations. Many professional contacts are also made directly between people to share information about the work.

The International Network makes it possible to communicate with your peers in other countries. You can do this by sending information to share and articles to go in the newsletter. Send me any questions you have about school social work and I will try to answer them and connect you with people who can give you more information. Each month I send out a newsletter to about 80 countries with practice articles and information about school social work from all around the world.

Five conferences have been held, starting in 1999 in the US, then Sweden, Korea, New Zealand and Ghana. A major benefit of an international conference is that it gives the host country a boost. In the case of Ghana, the Ghana Association now has a web page and has raised its profile with the Ministry of Education and the University. In putting on a first class conference the association has raised its own self-esteem. This benefits the cause of education for all in Ghana. The next International Conference for School Social Work will be in Mongolia in June 2015.

School social work has a strong future. Society is changing rapidly and the schools need much help to cope with change and associated stress. Social workers have the right skills in problem solving, they know how to collaborate with teams and they focus on building resilience. Schools everywhere want this kind of support.
Mrs. Munkhjargal Bujgar, the Director of the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers, cordially invites all interested parties to nominate themselves as speakers and submit presentation proposals in line with the theme ‘Child Friendly Schools’ for the 6th International School Social Workers Conference happening in June 2015 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The topics the conference would like to focus on are as follows, but you are also welcome to propose a topic inline with the theme ‘Child Friendly Schools’:

- **Positive relationships**: Creating positive relationships in schools
- **Child protection**: Ensuring child protection for all children
- **Child participation**: Enabling children to participate and to develop at school
- **Cooperation**: Coordinating family involvement and support of their children

A variety of formats are available. The complete Call for Speakers with a Proposal Form was attached to this newsletter and can be found on the conference web site at [http://www.isswc.massw.org](http://www.isswc.massw.org). Proposals must be submitted by September 1, 2014.

**Have you ever watched American Football?**

Middle School Players Make a Life-Changing Play

[www.youtube.com/v/0Ejh_hb15Fg?version=3&hl=en_US&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/0Ejh_hb15Fg?version=3&hl=en_US&rel=0)

*A touchdown, worth 6 points, is scored by moving the ball into the opposing team’s end zone*
School Social Work in Canada

Canada is a federal parliamentary democracy. The 10 provinces and 3 territories are responsible for the administration and delivery of education. The population of 35 million is ethnically and culturally diverse with a high rate of immigration. The aboriginal population of First Nations, Inuit and Metis constitutes about 4% of the total population. English and French are the official languages. Social work in schools started over a hundred years ago with school attendance officers, but the title of school social work and a change in emphasis did not appear until the 1940’s, starting in Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan and gradually spreading to most of the Provinces. The Canadian Association of School Social Workers and Attendance Counsellors http://www.casswac.ca/ provides electronic newsletters and a conference every other year. School social work is especially strong in Ontario with over 400 school social workers. The Ontario Association of Social Workers includes a School Social Work Committee that provides support for school social workers with an annual symposium and newsletters. Despite the overall high quality of life and educational attainment, not all Canadians share this success and many school children need social work support to be able to participate fully.

School Social Work (Schulsozialarbeit) in Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal parliamentary republic of almost 82 million people. The 16 states (Länder) handle internal affairs including education. This includes the organization of school social work services, which started in some states around 1968 and have gradually spread throughout Germany. Although there is some similarity among the states in how school social work is provided, there are also differences in the extent and focus of the service and how it is administered. For example, in many places the service is provided through a youth welfare agency, but in others through the school itself. There is a strong emphasis on preventive activities, such as leisure education, including student clubs, and the transition from school to work. There is little data available to give a comprehensive picture for Germany, but the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft-GEW (Trade Union for Education and Science) is working with universities to gather statistical data on the status of school social work. Some states such as Berlin have large numbers of school social workers and North Rhine-Westphalen has 1350. Some states have started their own school social work professional association, e.g. Schulsozialarbeit Niedersachsen http://www.schulsozialarbeit-nds.de/index.php?lang=en and the Netzwerk Schulsozialarbeit Baden-Württemberg http://www.netzwerk-schulsozialarbeit.de/cms/. Although there is no national association for school social workers, there is a new cooperative network, Kooperationsverbund Schulsozialarbeit that is sharing information.

The web site http://www.schulsozialarbeit.net/index.html gives links for school social work practice around the country and for extensive literature about the practice, history, extent and studies of school social work in Germany.
Guyana, a Caribbean country of 795,369 people on the north coast of South America, is focused on improving education as an important part of upgrading the country’s well-being and economic competitiveness. Guyana is racially and ethnically diverse with about 9% of the population being indigenous peoples. English is the official language and most people speak Guyanese Creole. Indicators from UNICEF show that most children between 6 to 9 years attend school regularly. With this success in approaching universal access (including gender parity) to primary education, Guyana is focusing on universal secondary education, quality of education, improving access to education in the hinterland, training of teachers and improving attendance rates. http://www.unicef.org/guyana/children_5031.htm.

An estimated 33 per cent of children completing sixth grade have not acquired basic literacy skills. A sample survey done in 2002 of out-of-school youths aged 14-25 estimated that 20 percent was absolutely illiterate. Recognizing that multiple issues hinder children’s success in school, the Ministry of Education is promoting a Child Friendly Schools initiative that includes the services of School Welfare Officers. During the last ten years the Ministry has recruited school welfare officers and guidance counselors to provide wide-ranging social support services throughout the education system.

The Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Lesley University in the United States recently collaborated to provide 13 of the leading school welfare officers with training, culminating in a Master of Arts Degree at the Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Local instructors, sessions with Lesley faculty via Skype and residencies in Boston were used to provide a full array of training in social work topics such as domestic violence, child abuse, mental health, cultural sensitivity, fine arts therapy, interventions and consultation. http://www.lesley.edu/graduate-programs-guyana/?terms=guyana
Frequent absence from school and the need for children to work to supplement family income are some of the factors that undermine academic success in Guyana. Improving attendance and punctuality has been a recent focus for the school welfare officers, and a major effort has been made to locate children loitering in the street, send warning letters to employers of these children, advise the parents about assistance available to them and report results to schools, so they can monitor the attendance of these children.  http://www.guyanatimesgy.com/?p=49584

**Schools in Jamaica need social workers**

Jamaica is a large English-speaking Caribbean island of 2.8 million people. In response to the high crime rate, the Jamaica Constabulary Force conducted a study “Education and Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates in Jamaica”. The study linked adult criminal behavior with earlier school problems such as poor attendance, cognitive problems, anti-social behavior and poor family support.  http://www.scribd.com/doc/201548051/Education-and-Crime-Evidence-From-Prison-Inmates-in-Jamaica

Based on the findings of the study, the Minister of Education proposed a school-based solution to these problems involving identifying youth in targeted schools who need help, working to prevent them dropping out of school, providing preventative programs and involving the wider community in support for youth.  http://jis.gov.jm/media/MOECrimePreventionProg.pdf

The JCF study was criticized by academics, social workers and teachers, in part because it singles out specific schools as needing intervention and because it over-simplifies the problem. However, the Ministry’s paper that followed the study “A Preventative Initiative In Schools To Ameliorate Jamaica’s Crime Problem” does propose some of the measures that the Jamaica Association of Social Workers and the Jamaica Teachers Association have been long asking for, including more support for the schools and for inner city communities where troubled teens live.

Meanwhile social workers point out that much more needs to be done than is proposed by the Ministry. Eva Forde, president of the Jamaica Association of Social Workers, said a multifaceted approach is needed to assist schools, and the time for lip service has expired. "To be honest, this report, to me, is redundant. We already knew this," Forde stated, adding that for years, social workers and educators have been calling for intervention in these schools. She said the Government already has the solution, but whenever requests for assistance have been made for these schools, they have been told there are not enough funds to deal with these problems. Forde said the answer must start with social workers being placed in each of the schools identified as needing immediate attention.  http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140131/lead/lead5.html

The Jamaica Teachers’ Association has also been calling for social workers to be deployed to address students’ social and behavioral issues that teachers must deal with. Just this month, the Minister of Education together with the JTA announced that currently employed teachers already qualified in social work have been identified and will be placed in schools.  http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/EducationMinistry--JTA-welcome-social-workers-in-schools.
Sixty percent of the world’s population lives in Asia and its school-aged population is expected to grow for decades to come. In spite of strong performance in educational attainment in many Asian countries, the schools need support from various disciplines including social work to maintain their success, provide a child friendly environment for every child including those with disabilities, and help children overcome obstacles so they can reach their potential.

Some Asian countries started to provide school social work services decades ago. Singapore has had social workers in schools since 1965, employed both by schools and Voluntary Welfare Organizations. Hong Kong started a school social work program in the 1970’s in collaboration between government and private agencies. The program has continued since Hong Kong was restored to the People’s Republic of China and made a Special Administrative Region. The United Arab Emirates have implemented school social work since 1972, providing a comprehensive range of programs. In India large numbers of social workers are employed in schools for physically challenged people. The school system in Saudi Arabia has placed social workers in schools since 1980.

Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia and Sri Lanka initiated school social work in the 1990’s. Korea and Mongolia have specialty associations to provide advocacy and support for school social workers.

Most recently there has been a rapid introduction of school social work in Japan, Vietnam and China. The July newsletter article will report on the introduction of school social work into Japan and some of the issues involved in starting such a program with little preparation. In Vietnam social work and school social work are both being developed, and universities are training social workers. The growth of school social work in China is proceeding rapidly in a few regions and data is being gathered about the service and how it is implemented. In Central Asian (and some Southeast Asian) countries there is little data available about services for school children who face obstacles in their education. Social work is a fairly new profession in many Central Asian countries and initially is serving some outstanding special needs outside of the school system.

The 6th International School Social Work Conference to be held in June 2015 in Mongolia provides an opportunity for all school social workers to explore how to contribute to child friendly schools while helping to maintain high standards of attainment. The Call for Speakers is at http://isswc.massw.org/program-2/call-for-speakers/
Join us at the 6th International School Social Workers Conference!
10-12 June 2015 in Mongolia, a once in a lifetime adventure!

Mongolia
Situated between Russia and China, Mongolia has a cultural combination of Russian communism and Buddhist beliefs, with lots of unique customs mixed in.

Mongolia is one of the last places on the planet where nomadic life is still a tradition.
Gers, the traditional portable felt tent can be seen not only in the vast countryside but also on the outskirts of cosmopolitan Ulaanbaatar.

There are many differing landscapes to see from the sprawling dunes of the Gobi desert, to the pristine water of Lake Khovsgol, all the way to the snow-capped mountains of Bayan-Olgii in the West.

Experience this unique destination in June 2015!

Conference
The focus of the 6th International School Social Workers Conference will be promoting child friendly schools.

Check out our website for more details on applying to speak at the conference and sharing your experiences.

Register for the conference on our website and have a once in a lifetime adventure in Mongolia!

www.isswc.massw.org

If you have any questions please contact us at info@massw.org

Association
The Mongolian Association of School Social Workers (MASSW) launched in Mongolia in 2001 and currently has over 600 members. The mission of MASSW is to develop the profession of school social work in Mongolia.

MASSW provides a range of services for school social workers in Mongolia including training, advocacy, research and international collaboration.

Check out our website for more details:
www.massw.org

This conference is proudly sponsored by MASSW.
Trend of school social work in recent years

It was a sudden announcement when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Science & Technology (MEXT) decided in 2007 to initiate a school social work project in Japan. According to the MEXT, the project would start in April 2008 with a budget of approximately fifteen million US dollars and be implemented in 141 areas. The announcement surprised us social workers who had been trying to introduce school social work into schools in Japan for years, since it was scarcely known by people in the school settings and even among social work professionals. The MEXT expected school social workers to be knowledgeable both about social work and education and to have experience in either area. This presented a big question as to who would be the school social workers without any resource for providing the personnel.

Although there were some important issues unsolved, the project was initiated in April 2008. Two hundred ninety four school districts launched the project and 994 school social workers were employed on a part-time basis. Twenty four percent of the social workers had a national certificate of social work and the rest were individuals without knowledge and experience regarding social work. There were very few who knew about school social work even among personnel with a social work certificate. It meant there was little hope to expect good services. The second surprise in terms of the MEXT’s policy was reduction of the budget in the program’s second year down to the one third of the 2008 fiscal year budget, without reviewing the results of the project. The MEXT demanded that the local government bear the other two thirds of the budget. A significant number of local governments were obliged to discontinue the service in 2009, as they could not afford it.

Although the number decreased in the second year, it began to gradually increase from 2010 and recovered up to 784 school social workers by 2012. The MEXT planned to extend the number to as many as one thousand in 2014. The reason why the number has been growing despite the budget cut back seems to be the effect of the services delivered by school social workers in many places. It appeared that the service was highly valued.

Roles of the school social worker defined by the MEXT

According to the MEXT the goal of the school social worker is to help children with difficulties
solve their problems. The role of the school social worker is outlined in five categories, as follows:
1. Intervention into children’s environments such as families and local communities.
2. Networking, linking and coordinating with agencies.
3. Building and supporting a team with school staff.
4. Support, consultation and provision of information to parents and school staff.
5. Training school staff.
The MEXT does not refer to any philosophy or principle of social work, but just to roles and function. It allows any person to be a school social worker regardless of his/her background.
In 2012 school social workers dealt with cases involving non-attendance (24%), problems associated with family circumstances (24%), developmental disorders (13%), poor peer relationship (6%), child abuse (6%) and others.

**Unstable working conditions and services**
In spite of the unstable policy of the MEXT, school social work in Japan seems to keep developing. However, there are issues to be solved. The first concern is the instability of working conditions of the school social workers. The social workers work from one day to four days a week. No more than 1% of social workers are employed on a full time basis, which means they can hardly make a living. As a result, a lot of school social workers are obliged to have two jobs, causing social workers to leave the position and resulting in lack of continuity for children and families.
The second issue is the ambiguity in the standards of services. As mentioned earlier, 24% of the school social workers had the national certificate of social work in 2008. The ratio went up to 43% in 2012. Yet, the majority still does not have training in social work. Although there are some opportunities for training in each district, the content of the training is far from adequate.

**Future implications**
Demand is growing for effective counter measures against the problems of school children such as bullying, non-attendance, behavioral problems and abuse, and with this demand the need for school social work. However, there is a question about the competency of school social workers many of whom do not have a social work background. It is crucial to provide proper training for such workers and at the same time to arrange a systematic training program within a social work degree program. Another critical issue is working conditions. As stated before, the school social workers’ position is extremely unstable and is made light of although their job is demanding. It is crucial to improve their circumstances in order to secure stable services for children and their families. As there are other pressing issues, there is much for school social work advocates still to do.

News items from the Japan Broadcasting Corporation in July 2014 report that the government has compiled guidelines (to be approved this month by the Cabinet) for fighting poverty among children. A 2012 survey estimates that 16.3% of Japanese children under the age of 17 live in poverty. That's up 0.6 percentage points from the previous survey, and a record high since the survey began in 1985. The plan involves educational support measures including increasing the number of school social workers, who will work with both schools and local authorities. The goal is to provide equal opportunity to children who live in poverty.

*NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) 日本放送協会 Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai July 11 and July 16, 2014*
News from Iceland:
We need social workers in the school system for better services and policy making.

Gudrún Helga Sederholm

Iceland is a sparsely populated Nordic country of 340,000 people, of whom more than half live in the capital Reykjavik. The egalitarian social life, social welfare system with universal health care and education and a strong economy made for social stability until the financial crisis of 2008 hit the country hard. Families and individuals lost their savings and their overall financial status deteriorated. Little research has yet been made into the effect on children but it is an ongoing thing. It seems however that the financial effect is greater than the social effect. The population urgently demanded change and the result is an ongoing push for a new Constitution as the economy slowly recovers. Political discussion continues as to the future shape of Icelandic institutions including education.

The school system
Children in Iceland start kindergarten at the age of 2 and then go to elementary school from 6 to 16, followed by grammar school or high school for 4 years and then many continue at University for special fields. Some choose technical studies in a job related field after elementary school.

Children with special needs
If a child is in need of accommodations because of disability, a teacher, parent or counselor refers him or her to a psychologist who evaluates the need for support. If the child shows the need for academic help, it is provided in a regular classroom in the elementary school, with only a few pupils going to special schools. Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, dyslexia and physical disabilities, who are able to study with others but need special assistance, receive help in the regular classroom or sometimes go to special teachers for some of their lessons. Students with personal problems mostly receive help from the school social worker who sometimes works with the whole family. If the problems are more serious they may be referred to a psychologist or a doctor.
The options for students with special needs are few after elementary school and this can create a problem for these students who are then more likely to drop out. A new reform law came in 2008 with emphasis on children with special needs but the society and the University are slow adjusting so the reform can take place. The law is one thing but the practice is another. There is a lack of emphasis on special needs in the education of teachers at the University and that is a problem. They do not get the tools or the knowledge to meet children with special needs except up to a certain point. There is therefore no policy making concerning these children that is based on an overall view of the situation as it is. The 2008 law for educational reform focused on curriculum with specific targets for each year and evaluations. However the Ministry of Education and society in general have not given adequate consideration to those students who have learning problems or personal problems that interfere with their ability to benefit from the normal learning environment and to reach the targets. We need social workers in the school system to meet the needs of the children and for policy-making based on a holistic view. This goes for all children and students, both in elementary and secondary school.

Few of these students with learning problems further their education up to an A level degree. The A-level refers to an Icelandic student exam that gives the student the right to attend University. A wider array of choices and individualized opportunities are needed to retain students with learning problems past primary school with courses that keep them motivated to continue in school.

We are happy to announce that a social worker recently completed her doctoral research into how students that need special teaching are getting on in the educational system and the responsibility of the government and society in that matter. In June of this year Sigrún Hardardóttir was awarded the first Ph.D. in social work from the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. Sigrún’s work has provided the foundation to fight to obtain the help and services these students need, including the services of a school social worker. Her findings were that after elementary school there are little or no opportunities within the school system for students with special needs. It seems we concentrate on the “normal” student all the time, and this has to change because the law of 2008 requires equality for all students.

**School social work**

The school social workers are however in a fighting mood, so we are keeping at it until we secure the services the students need. At the moment only about 15 school social workers are stationed in schools in Iceland. Although we have the BA and MA in social work from the University of Iceland, all are working under the job title of study counselors, and that limits the scope of our work so that we are not able to provide the wide range of services that a social worker can offer, such as a holistic view of the students’ situation, learning difficulties and personal problems, plus parental guidance and policy making for the overall welfare of the students according to the law of 2008. Even though we are few we hold lectures and meetings and invite other groups that work in schools to have discussions with us about the school environment all in the name of better services.
School Social Workers Help Meet Students’ Basic Needs

In many countries the school year starts in September. Poor families are often unable to buy the school clothes, shoes and school supplies that children need for the start of school. Those children who are poorly equipped are more likely to be absent from school and to fall behind their peers. This problem is most likely in countries with high poverty rates among children and where a large difference in income between rich and poor leads to a lasting gap in educational opportunity.

Among developed countries the United States is the outstanding example of high poverty rates among children and a wide gap in income between rich and poor. The US Census shows that 20% of children live below poverty level [http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-01.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-01.pdf), the second highest relative child poverty rate in the developed world in 2013 according to UNICEF. A UNICEF study of material well being ranks the US as close to the bottom of 29 developed countries while the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are at the top [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/RC11-ENG-embargo.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/RC11-ENG-embargo.pdf). In addition the US Census shows that the gap between rich and poor continued to grow in 2013.

School social workers understand that children whose basic needs are inadequately met will be more likely to do badly in school. While poor children may possess the basic need for love, they are likely to lack adequate food, shelter, clothing, school supplies and access to cultural enrichment such as books. So when the school year starts many school social workers identify the children who need material help. A 2012 international study of school social work conducted by the International Network showed that school social workers supply material needs such as food and clothing. The Scandinavian countries were the exception to this.

In the US, while school social workers are central to this effort, the scope of the problem is such that the school system itself is significantly involved in working with voluntary organizations, Parent Teacher Associations, businesses, churches and others to provide families with school clothing and supplies. Clothing banks are typically run by volunteers. The school social workers may be heavily involved with organizing the effort or act primarily as referral agents. At the beginning of the school year, schools all around the US are involved with making sure that poor
children have clothes and a backpack with the school supplies they need. Shoes, hygiene supplies, detergent and haircuts are other basics that children need and are often supplied by school systems in order to have children ready for school. School social workers in the US are involved especially with the material needs of homeless children, families affected by local disasters and teens who are emancipated by court order from the age of 16 and must then meet their own material needs. In some places working with these special groups is an assigned priority for school social workers.

News items in local and national newspapers highlight the effort to get poor children ready for the start of school. For example in Broward County, Florida, more than 4,000 children came for an annual event to receive school uniforms, gently used shoes, backpacks with school supplies and even haircuts. The children were pre-registered with school social workers before the end of the previous school year. This year’s drive collected 5,500 backpacks, so even those who were not pre-registered will be able to receive help later. http://thewestsidegazette.com/broward-back-to-school-extravaganza-at-bbt-center-this-saturday/

Poor Hillsborough students get more help with clothing, hygiene items
By Erin Kourkounis | Tribune Staff

TAMPA — When Ken Gaughan began his career in Hillsborough County as a school social worker in the 1980s, he collected clothing and other necessities for students who came from poor families.
He stored the supplies in the trunk of his car and sometimes spent his own money.
“I’d have to wash them, and I never had the right size,” said Gaughan, now the district’s supervisor of school social work services.
Today, school social workers still gather these things — along with hygiene basics such as toothbrushes and laundry detergent.
But they have help from the Outreach Assisting Students in Schools Network, a nonprofit organization that has helped school social workers for 13 years.
OASIS is on track to open a fourth center in Seffner this fall, a request from social workers in eastern and southern Hillsborough schools. http://tbo.com/news/education/poor-hillsborough-students-get-more-help-with-clothing-hygiene-items-20140707/

You can read about how these Clothing Banks are organized in the US on web sites of school districts across the country. Here are some examples:

• In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a town of half a million, the school system’s Community Clothing Bank estimates it will provide 5,000 children with three outfits this school year. http://www.aps.edu/community/clothing-bank

• In Evansville, Indiana, a town of 120,000, the Clothing Closet (called Hangers) has moved to a 7,000 square foot space that is set up like a Department Store. The PTA and local Painters and Carpenters Unions have been involved in the refurbishment. In the winter, supplying winter coats will be a priority as it is in many parts of the US. They expect to serve 2,500 students this year. http://www.courierpress.com/news/education/making-the-grade/pta-clothing-bank-moves-to-a-new-home-at-ais-diamond_45371693
School Social Workers and Hungry Students

School social workers in the US deal with the full range of problems that affect children and interfere with their success in school. Children who are hungry or who lack food security are more likely to be sick, miss school, underperform and show signs of maladjustment, and so school social workers throughout the US treat hunger as one of their most basic concerns. Several years after the economic crisis of 2008, 14.5% of families in the US still have poor food security, meaning that they lack access to enough food for a healthy life. (*Household Food Security in the United States in 2012, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Report No. ERR-155*).

In addition to helping enroll students in free school lunch and summer feeding programs, coordinating with food banks and supplying food baskets during holiday seasons, school social workers in the US are starting to become involved with the problem of school children who are hungry on weekends. Two recent newspaper articles (from North Carolina and North Dakota) feature school social workers who have made this a priority.

**Local social worker founds program to feed kids on the weekends**

Kristin Seaks is a school social worker in a growing town of 30,000 people on the plains of North Dakota who noticed that students came to school hungry especially on Mondays. Many families survive on minimum wage jobs and spend so much of the wages on rent and day care that not enough is left for food. Kristin started the Dickinson Backpack Program and raised money through donations from local organizations and individuals to buy backpacks and food for the weekends. So far this year over 3,000 backpacks of food have been sent home with school children.

**Backpack Buddies helps keep hungry elementary school students fed**

Hilton Head Island is a resort on the east coast popular with tourists for golfing, tennis and sun. Low-paid service jobs contribute to the same problem that exists in North Dakota: wages are too low to support a family and children are often hungry when not in school. School social worker Denise Friday joined efforts with 3 elementary schools, and in 2010 the Backpack Buddies program was started to provide lunches on weekends for children who qualify for free or reduced
price school lunch (from families with earnings below 185% of poverty level). The work is a partnership between schools, civic organizations and churches. School social workers identify the children, contact parents, organize the teams who pack the backpacks, distribute the backpacks, collect the returned backpacks and keep records. Many retirees are also involved in the effort.

**Viewlands students assemble holiday food boxes to support classmates**


During the holiday season, many schools in the US provide festive holiday food to last over Thanksgiving and Christmas. In Washington State in the Pacific Northwest where 16% of children live below the federal poverty level, a non-profit corporation partners with schools during the holidays to provide holiday food boxes. Parent, staff and children work together to pack holiday food boxes and distribute them to elementary school children’s families at Viewlands Elementary School in Seattle.

**More School Social workers in the News**

**In Rochester, New York social workers a staple of local education**


A century ago school social workers were hired to help school children in Rochester, New York. This informative and inspiring article describes the wide range of problems the school social workers deal with today and the many types of interventions they use.

- One boy can't sleep because he's afraid his stepfather will come through the window and kill his mother.
- Another hoards food from the cafeteria.
- A young girl has a special place at home to hide when she hears gunfire: under the bed, in the corner farthest from the window.
- Erica Vera, a social worker at School 12 on South Avenue in Rochester, helps them.

**Life for a homeless student: Transitional housing, changing schools**


In Mobile, Alabama the county school system needs 7 school social workers to handle the needs of homeless students. The 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless children as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are living with relatives or friends; living in motels, hotels or camping grounds; or living in emergency shelters. This article describes the trauma and stress of being a homeless child and how schools and school social workers help.

**Guǎngzhōu School Social Work Survey**

http://mp.weixin.qq.com/mp/appmsg/show?_biz=MjM5ODI4ODE2MQ==&appmsgid=10018455&itemidx=1&sign=9ab4af22a67ebb19e76f25560764572c&from=timeline&isappinstalled=0

Use Google Translate to read about how school social work is coming to be accepted and in demand in Guǎngzhōu, China. Since the concept of school social work is so new in China, the social workers first worked to become a part of the school and to explain their role. After initial surprise that the social workers are so young, the schools and parents are starting to value their work. The article shows how the new school social workers have interpreted their role to the schools and built relationships with students, parents, teachers and the community. School social work has been growing since about 2008, especially in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.
School social work was represented at the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development in July 2014, through a paper prepared by four members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (Victorian Branch) School Social Work Practice Group, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The writers have been school social work practitioners for between 5 and 25 years, in city, regional and rural areas of Victoria, the second most populous state in Australia.

School social work has an unbroken 65-year history in Victoria, mostly in multidisciplinary visiting teams in the government school system, but also in individual government and non-government schools. The conference paper drew on research, practice wisdom and communal knowledge to demonstrate school social work as specialist practice. It is uniquely defined by its particular approach to the pursuit of social justice for children and young people, through the removal of barriers to their education, and the facilitation of personal potential and best learning outcomes. Victorian state education policy over three decades has increasingly recognised that social inclusion and school engagement are impacted by personal, family, cultural and socio-economic factors. School social workers provide programmes in the school environment in order to help achieve student wellbeing, and access and equity in terms of learning outcomes.

The Australian practice standards were drafted by the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group, ratified by the AASW after nation-wide consultation with members via the web site and published in 2011. The standards specify the essential nature of school social work, with its: focus on the student in the school environment in order to facilitate successful learning outcomes through the relief of distress and removal of barriers or inequities. Students within schools have diverse abilities and needs. All students are entitled to a quality educational environment which:

- promotes the total development of the child - intellectual, physical, social, creative, emotional; and
- creates learning outcomes which enable the young adult to take a satisfying role in this society and to have fair access to its resources. (AASW, 2011)

With access to students, their families, schools and neighbourhoods, school social workers are able to develop creative and responsive practices for prevention, early intervention and intervention.

Prevention. Most school social workers devote the majority of their time to intervention, but the lesser time spent on prevention has high impact. School social workers are often members of the school Welfare Committee, where welfare policy, programmes and referral practices are developed and evaluated so that
they remain responsive to student wellbeing and learning needs. In consultancy roles, school social workers support the development of school cultures and specific programmes inclusive of the rich student diversity in Victorian schools, including gender, sexuality, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) background, migrant, refugee or asylum-seeker status, religious and cultural backgrounds, poverty and social marginalisation. School social workers provide whole school, class and group programs in health and wellbeing, social and emotional literacy, personal safety and programs to combat sexism, racism and bullying, parenting information and education, consultation with principals and school leaders on student and staff welfare provision, and school and community collaboration and networking. School social workers provide professional supervision for social workers and others in student welfare roles, and teacher professional development on topics including the educational needs of vulnerable or traumatised children, the impacts of poverty and family background on learning, and responding to challenging student behaviours. School social workers support teaching staff personally and professionally as needed. Some school social workers conduct research into student, school climate and engagement issues, and others would like to do more research and evaluation than workloads and service management currently allow.

**Early intervention and Intervention.** Visiting school social workers in the course of their work will at times make recommendations, but in most cases it is teachers and welfare staff who are in a position to identify students for targeted **Early Intervention**, hopefully providing skills and supports, and reducing the need for more complex **Intervention** at a later stage. Schools, school social workers, child protection and family support agencies are increasingly collaborating early by way of “care teams” to support children and young people in out-of-home care, or who have suffered family and relationship trauma, abuse or neglect.

School social workers are called upon where students’ ability to learn is impacted by family transience, health and mental health issues, changing circumstances, grief and loss, financial hardship, housing difficulties and social marginalisation. Personal factors such as social, emotional and problem-solving skills, severe behavioural issues, peer and sub-cultural pressures are also focal points for school social worker attention. Non-attendance is often the first sign of poor school engagement and increasing student distress. School social workers identify possible learning difficulties, advocate for curriculum or program modification, consult with teachers about classroom organisation and behaviour management plans, and promote positive home-school-community links. School-based Student Support Groups bring together school staff, the school social worker and other professionals, the parents, sometimes the child, and often the older student, to construct curriculum, learning and behaviour management plans.

**Early Intervention** and **Intervention** typically include classroom observations, bio-psycho-social educational assessment, behavioural and risk assessments, group work, development of innovative programs, teacher consultation, parent/carer consultation and support and establishing and maintaining student supports. These may include adult mentors, older buddies, friendship groups, breakfast programs and homework clubs, counselling, casework, referral, liaison, mediation and advocacy. School social workers are increasingly involved in critical incident management, which might be related to bush-fires or floods, serious accidents, conflict or deaths within the school community.

The social work values of respect for diversity, inclusion and equity are particularly relevant to practice with children and young people who are often society’s least empowered, especially at a time of rapidly increasing Victorian youth unemployment. While upholding the best interests of the student, school social workers navigate competing interests, and need to be willing to challenge school structures and practices and to examine the management, delivery and effectiveness of their own school social work services.

Australian Association of Social Workers (2011). **AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers**  
Barrett, C.A. (2014). **School social work in the state of Victoria, Australia: 65 years of student wellbeing and learning support** (PhD thesis), University of Melbourne  
https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/42062. Contact: chrisbarrett50@bigpond.com
Laos, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, bordered by Burma and China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, and Thailand to the west. The ancient Lao kingdom became part of French Indo-China in the 19th Century, achieved independence in 1953 and for the next 25 years was torn by civil strife between the communist Pathet Lao movement and government supporters. From 1964 to 1973 Laos was heavily bombed as part of the U.S. Secret War in Laos to support the Royal Lao Government against the Pathet Lao and to interdict traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In 1975, The Pathet Lao achieved control, and a communist republic was established.

The population of around 6.5 million is mostly rural. There are several dozen ethnic groups each with their own language, culture, traditions, music and art. Theravada Buddhism has a prevailing influence on most aspects of the Lao culture, including the art, architecture, performing arts and literature. Lao classical music, Lao classical dance and drama owe their origins to the ceremonial performances for the former Laotian Royal Courts and are often based on the Lao poem, Ramayana, however Lao folk music (lam) and folk dance have traditionally been more popular among the general population. The national instrument is a wind instrument made of bamboo known as the khaen, which is believed to have prehistoric origins and is still commonly used in folk music and even in Laotian pop music today.

Lao people are renowned for their easygoing nature and generally live a slower paced way of life than those in surrounding countries. This aspect of Lao culture that influences every day life can be summarized as “baw pen nyang” – “No problems - it’ll be OK”. Family and religion are of utmost importance to Lao people, with social activities traditionally centering on the extended family and the temple. The majority of Lao citizens lives in villages or rural areas, and between 70 to 80% of the population still rely on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods, with rice the main crop. As a result rice is the staple food and also has religious and cultural significance amongst the different ethnic groups, including some traditions and rituals related to its cultivation and its consumption. http://www.destination-asia.com/laos/about/culture/

Social work, dance, music and art change my life
I was born in Donkoi village, near the capital, Vientiane, and attended Donkoi primary school, near my house. When I was very little I was always interested in Lao classical dance from watching television. I was inspired by my older brother who studied Lao traditional music and my father who worked at the National Dance and Music school, but I did not have opportunity to practice a lot until I finished grade 4. When I went to Mr. Khamvanh’s house at ”Donkoi Children’s Development Center (DCDC)” to play with other children, I listened to Lao traditional music and started showing other children Lao classical dance.
Donkoi Children Development Center (DCDC) was founded that same year (1998) by social worker Mme Xuyen Dangers as a pilot project of after school activities for a public primary school. DCDC’s philosophy is to provide children opportunities and empowerment through traditional games and activities such as farming, gardening, carpentry, weaving and basket making. Lao culture including traditional music and dance is a central part of the program. The goals are to prevent children from dropping out of school, abusing drugs, delinquency, and being trafficked. The focus is on developing children’s potential, interests, talents, responsibilities and leadership skills. DCDC pays attention of the poorest and most disadvantaged. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVK7bq7IVLE

When I finished grade 5, I took an entrance exam for the National School of Art, Music and Dance, which is close to Donkoi village. I studied there for 7 years. Each day when I came back from the school around 3 pm I stopped at Donkoi school, parked my bike, took off my hat and sweat shirt. I would teach the children how to dance from what I had learned in school and slowly I began to choreograph. I also learned a little bit of music and began to play the Lao xylophone, drum, piano by ear and also by learning with my older brother.

In 2006, I graduated from the National Dance and Music and then I worked full time with DCDC. When I finished my study I just wanted to continue to study Master of dance and music. One day Mme Xuyen asked me “What is your dream and what subjects do you like to study?” At that time I did not know. Seeing my interest in music, and art, she took me to Thailand to see many places to explore possibilities for my further study in traditional expressive arts. The visits included the Patravadi Theater, the National Dance and Music School in Bangkok and Chulalongkorn University. I also visited Mahasarakham University to learn about storytelling with Dr. Wajuppa Tossa, the Thai storyteller. Later that summer 2006, Mme Xuyen took me to Manila, the Philippines.

**Becoming a social worker**

I enjoyed traveling and gaining new experience in the Philippines. On the plane flying home, Mme Xuyen asked me the same question and by then I knew what my dream for the future was, I wanted to be a social worker like Mme Xuyen. In 2007 I began 5 years of study at the National University of Laos in the Faculty of Sociology and Social Development, while working full time with DCDC as Director of Children in the after school program, teaching Lao Traditional Dance and Music to teachers, volunteers and students and also teaching about drama, storytelling, painting and other activities. That is how I became a social worker.

I help children and youth develop their talent and potential using the dance, music and drama that I am so familiar with. While having fun with dance the children also develop creativity and improve in physical development, body movement and meditation. The children are more involved with the traditional dance and drama that are part of their culture than with modern styles. Using the traditional dance, music and drama as tools we can approach issues in society, and help children and youth understand their problems, learn to transform problems in positive ways and build peace and strong relationships with others.

With the perspective of a professional dancer, musical artist and social worker I realize that multiple intelligence is very important for those who work in groups, organizations and community, especially the leaders, teachers, volunteers and social workers. I use dance, music and art related to the social work perspective to help children and youth develop their abilities because I believe all children and youth have potential. If we give them opportunities they will develop their potential to the fullest.