The Social Work Contribution in Inter-Professional Practice: Re-viewing the Social Work Skillset

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SWID CONFERENCE 2023- THE COMMUNITY OF CARING: THE CARER, THE SOCIAL WORKER AND THE SELF

INTRODUCTION & RELEVANT BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE

Social Work Education – Practice-based Learning

Social Work Practice in Inter-professional Contexts

PhD: 'Relationship-based Social Work - A Thirdspace in Responding to Bereavement & Trauma'

Social Work Practice as a Focus of Research

Experience with Disability

PAMELA TREVITHICK: A LEXICON OF 80 SOCIAL WORK SKILLS

Reference

Trevithick, P. (2012) **Social Work. Skills** and Knowledge: A Practice. Handbook, 3rd edn. Open Univ. Press. Practice knowledge.
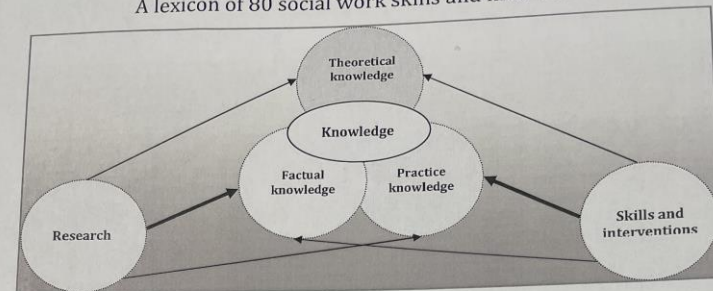
A lexicon of 80 social work skills and interventions

Diagram: A conceptual map of practice integrating theory and practice in social work

1. interpersonal skills/'use of self' (communicating an interest, warmth, care, concern for others)
2. verbal communication skills/language skills
3. non-verbal communication skills – taking account of body language in relation to self and others
4. observation skills
5. listening skills
6. memory skills: actively remembering/linking key facts/information
7. engagement skills/being open to engaging with others/the task/the point and purpose of the interaction/work at hand
8. problem-solving, decision making and action skills
9. creating a rapport
10. establishing a relationship that gives confidence
11. welcoming skills/offering helpful introductions and the rationale underpinning the work/encounter
12. demonstrating sympathy
13. demonstrating empathy
14. using intuition/intuitive reasoning
15. information gathering/baseline gathering skills
16. using open questions
17. using closed questions
18. using *what* questions
19. using *why* questions
20. using circular questions
21. hypothetical questions
22. paraphrasing
23. clarifying
24. summarising

25. active listening responses ('minimum encouragers')
26. giving feedback thoughtfully
27. inviting feedback openly
28. remaining focused/sticking to the point and purpose of the work with courage/diplomacy
29. prompting
30. probing
31. allowing/using silences
32. signalling the feelings and meanings being expressed
33. using self-disclosure
34. ending an interview
35. closing the case/ending the relationship
36. providing help
37. giving advice
38. providing information
39. providing explanations
40. offering encouragement/ validation
41. providing reassurance
42. using persuasion/being directive
43. providing practical/ material assistance
44. providing support
45. providing care
46. breaking 'bad news'
47. social skills training (modeling/demonstrating constructive responses)
48. reframing
49. offering interpretations
50. recognising & adapting to need
51. counselling skills
52. containing anxiety
53. enabling skills/'empowering'/ inspiring others
54. negotiating skills
55. contracting skills
56. networking skills

57. working in collaboration/ partnership with others
58. mediation skills
59. advocacy skills
60. assertiveness skills
61. being challenging
62. being confrontational
63. dealing with/managing hostility/aggression/violence
64. managing professional boundaries/confidentiality
65. recording/form filling skills
66. note taking/minute-taking skills
67. report writing skills
68. letter writing skills
69. computer/IT skills
70. telephone skills
71. skilled use of mobile phones/text messaging
72. presentation skills (presenting in court/giving a talk/address)
73. chairing skills/facilitating contributions from others
74. using supervision creatively
75. organizational/administrative skills - prioritising, planning and preparing the work at hand
76. reading/comprehension skills
77. thinking skills (critical thinking/critical reflection/ evaluating events/evidence)
78. skilled application and communication of knowledge and research
79. skilled identification and use of interventions targeted at wider structural, organisational and systemic barriers to progress
80. skilled use of humour

© Pamela Trevithick 2012

From: Trevithick, P. (2012) *Social Work Skills and Knowledge: A Practice Handbook 3rd edn. Open Univ. Press*

THE SOCIAL WORK CONTRIBUTION IN INTER-PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: RE-VIEWING THE SOCIAL WORK SKILLSET

Themes:

Positioning Social Work

Social Work Practice: Micro, Mezzo & Macro Levels

Meta Competencies:

Relationship-based Practice

Person in Environment Perspective

Translating Social Work into Inter-professional Contexts – Boundary Spanning

Practitioner Research Findings on Social Work

Final Thoughts

SOCIAL WORK IDENTITY & POSITIONING

Social Work identity can be understood as an internalized, shared sense of social work's professional mission, values and norms

(adapted from Oliver 2013)

The nature of these values and norms is contested, but the definition of social work adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work (2014) reflects a widespread consensus that a **core commitment to social justice, human rights and the person-in-environment perspective distinguish the profession.**

Parton positions social work within 'the social', the space between the person and the state, between the family and society, the interface of private and public worlds (Parton 1994, 2007)

In health and social care, social work occupies spaces between the person and health and social care systems; the family and the health and social care services and the health and social care service and community.

FRAMING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

"We need a framework that unites the way we understand people with the way we work with them. Relationship based thinking provides that possibility"

(Howe 1998:55)

ENDURING FOCUS OF SOCIAL WORK

" ….the **person-situation perspective** and the **concept of relationship** have been enduring features of social work throughout its history."

(Simpson et al cited in Goldstein et al 2009:15)

"….the practitioner may draw on diverse technologies in the intervention process but must integrate these into an overall approach that has the client's relational world and the worker client relationship at its core."

(Goldstein, Miehls and Ringel 2009:16)

THEORETICAL BASE

The interactive relationship between people and their social contexts is integral to systemic thinking in social work (Pincus and Minahan 1973; Payne 2002) and social work's 'person-in-environment' perspective (Karls and Wandrei 1994; Gitterman and Germain 2008).

Social work, in seeking to understand individual and collective lived experiences, combines sociology's focus on social relationships, social processes and social structures with theories of human behaviour for example attachment theory and theories of grief and loss.

Social work is concerned with the interface of psychological and the social domains to the extent that '**psychosocial**' has become an established term to represent the orientation of the discipline.

BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL

The Biopsychosocial Model (Engel 1977) is an established approach in healthcare which considers the impact of biomedical, psychological and eco-social factors on experiences of health and disease

In the social work literature, Saleebey, underlines the recursive interrelationship between body, mind and environment in maintaining wellness and allowing regeneration

 "The ample literature exploring the relationship between body, mind, and environment and health and wellness suggests that this interaction is complex, recursive, and reticulate and always implicated in keeping people well, assisting individuals in regenerating after trauma, and helping individuals and communities survive the impact and aftermath of calamity and ordeal".

 (Saleebey 1996:300)
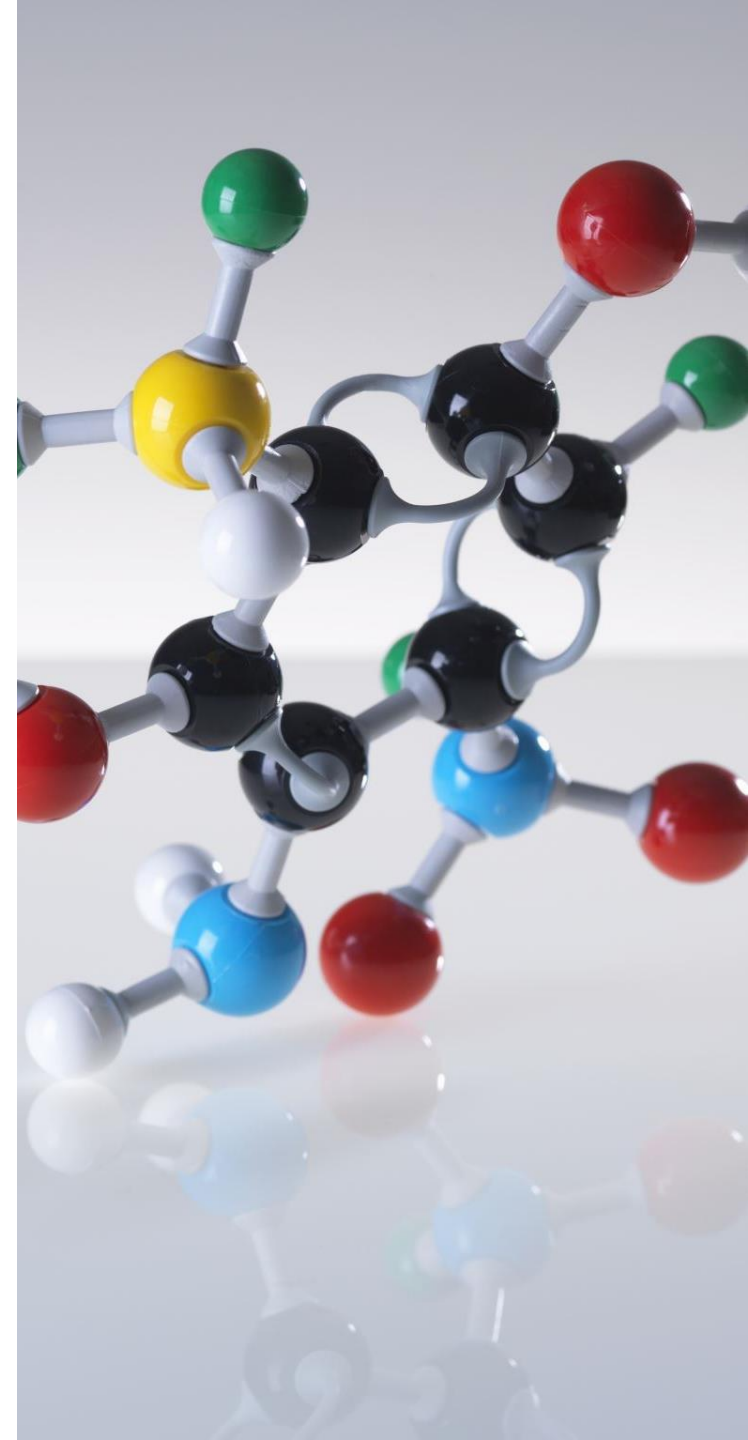
3 PRACTICE AREAS of Social Work

MICRO
Working directly with individuals or families on everything from access to housing, healthcare, and social services to treating mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders.

MEZZO
Working with groups and organizations such as schools, businesses, neighborhoods, hospitals, nonprofits, and other small-scale communities.

MACRO
Working towards large-scale systematic change by crafting laws, petitioning governments for community funds, organizing activist groups, and molding social policy.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

"You don't say much, but I'm told it's the therapeutic relationship that counts."

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE DEFINITIONS & KEY POINTS

- *"....relationship-based practice focuses on the connectedness of people's internal and external worlds"* (O'Connor, 2017)

- Wilson et al definition of relationship-based practice, emphasises dimensions of process and outcome

"The central characteristic of relationship-based practice is the emphasis it places on the professional relationship as the medium through which the practitioner **can engage with and intervene in the complexity of an individual's internal and external worlds.** The social worker and service user relationship is recognized to be an important **source of information for the worker to understand how best to help,** and simultaneously this **relationship is the means by which any help or intervention is offer**

(Wilson et al 2008:7)

"Relationships are complex, requiring an awareness of 'self' and the negotiation of inter-personal boundaries" (Ingram & Smith 2018)

KEY ELEMENTS

Relationship-based practice, brings together three aspects of human functioning that are often polarised namely

- **conscious and unconscious behaviours** (for example disruptive behaviour may be an unconscious effort to deflect emotional distress);

- **cognitive and affective responses** (recognising if service user's/professional behaviours is being overly cognitive/rational or overly emotional, there is need for balance and integration) and

- **personal and professional selves** (each social work encounter is unique to the individuals involved and relationship dynamics are the combined result of their individual characteristics within a professional context)

(Wilson et al 2008:8-11).
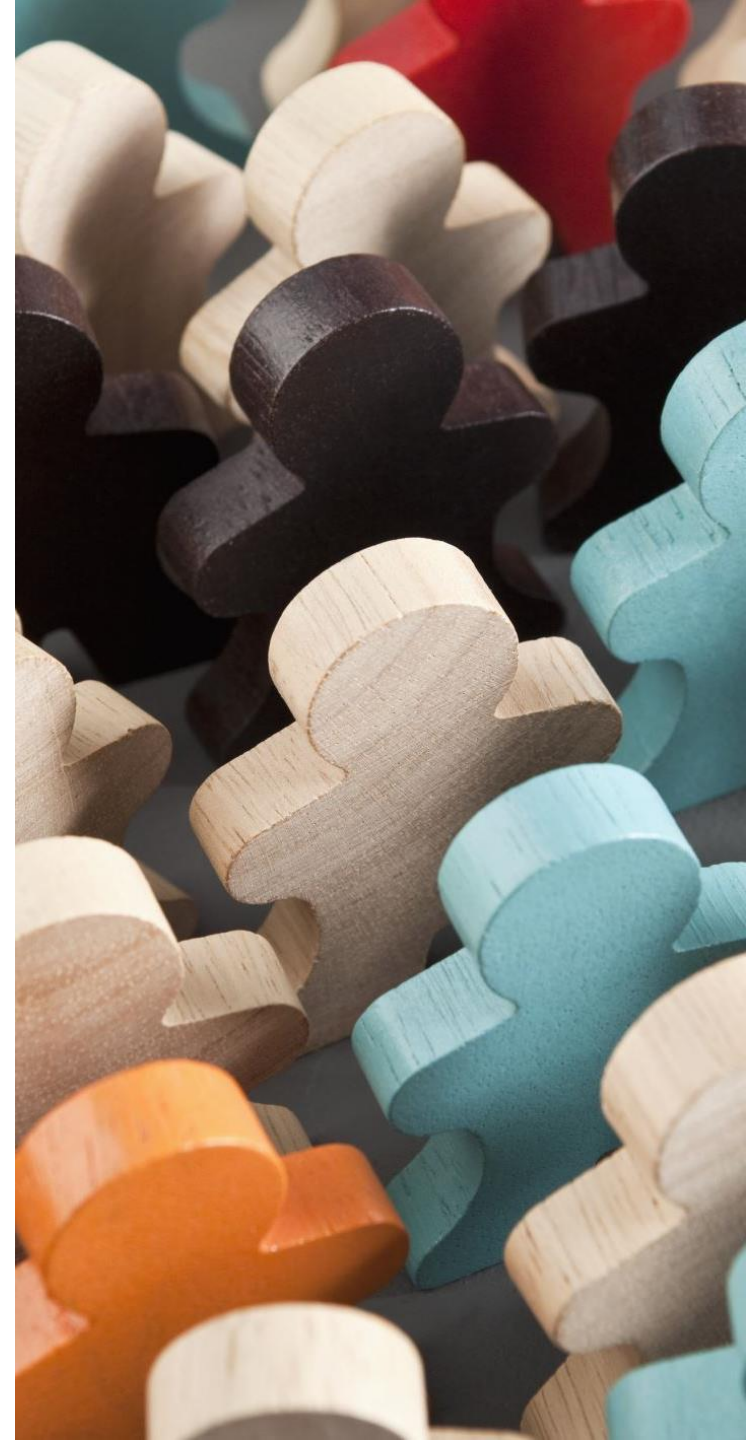
A HOLDING RELATIONSHIP

"A 'holding relationship' involved social workers being reliable, immersing themselves in the service user's day-to-day existence and developing their life-skills, getting physically and emotionally close to them, and practicing critically by taking account of power and inequalities. The concept of a 'holding relationship' draws on psycho-dynamic and sociological theory to provide new ways of thinking that can help make sense of the practical and emotional relating involved in social work and promote the development of such helpful relationships".

(Ferguson et al 2022)

THE CONCEPT OF CONTAINMENT

Trevithick describes the containment process in the practice setting as

"….talking to someone who has **the ability to listen,** to **empathise, to take in and to bear the worries** being expressed, and **the ability to come alongside the individual in ways that communicate an understanding and give the sense that the person is not alone.**

The final stage of this process involves offering back the concerns to the anxious person but in a modified form-where the major anxieties are managed but are altered so that they no longer carry the same 'sting' or sense of turmoil or anguish. This enables 'natural' growth processes to reassert themselves….."

(Trevithick 2003:171)

C WRIGHT MILLS

Making connections: personal pain and public issues
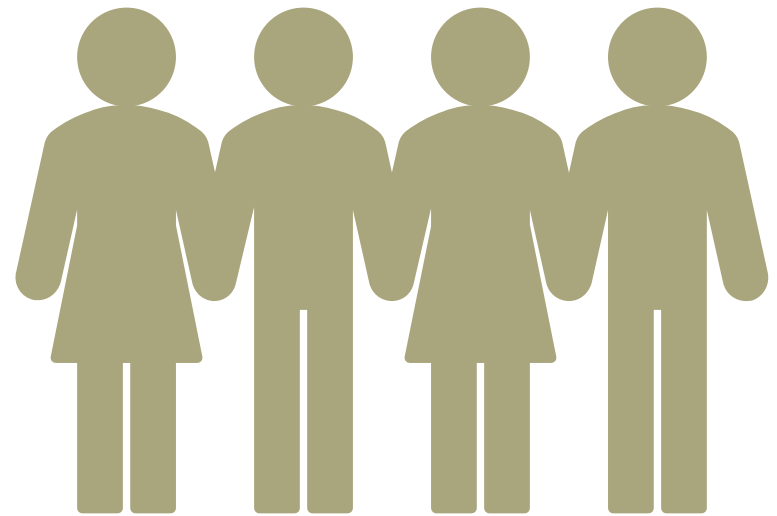
BOUNDARY SPANNING OLIVER 2013, NEEDHAM ET AL 2017

Multi-Systems Work

Within public services there is a widely recognised role for workers who operate across organisational and professional boundaries (Needham et al 2017)

How can social workers best translate their professional competence into the interprofessional arena?

Oliver advocates assuming a professional identity rooted in our core values. This becomes particularly important with the growth of interprofessional practice, as many social work graduates begin their careers in interprofessional teams in which they must negotiate what it means to be a social worker without social work colleagues close by to help

BOUNDARY SPANNERS OLIVER 2013

The term 'boundary spanners' was originally used in the organizational literature of the 1970s to describe people who operate at the boundaries of their organization, mediating between it and the wider environment (Aldrich and Herker, 1977).

They were distinguished by being able to operate competently in different contexts and with a variety of partners with whom they did not share an organizational or professional identity
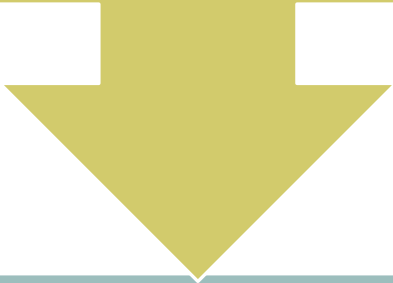
Oliver defines boundary spanners as those whose role is to 'work between systems whose goals, though superficially complementary, may carry inherent conflicts requiring mediation, negotiation and strategy'

She suggests this kind of advocacy with, and mediation between, organizations has long been recognized as an important social work task with the social worker as the go-between to link clients and services.

BOUNDARY SPANNING - OLIVER 2013

Boundary spanning becomes a way to articulate our position at the intersection of systems such as individual, family, community and society.

'Bar-On (1994, p. 53) argued that 'the uniqueness of social work lies in the very absence of defined boundaries'. As society's safety net, it fills the shifting spaces between social institutions. It operates across institutional boundaries and at a more abstract level, spans the boundaries between person and environment, micro and macro, private realm of the individual and public realm of the state (Dingwall et al., 1995).

HOW BOUNDARY SPANNING WORKS

OLIVER 2013

Boundary spanners rarely hold direct authority over stakeholders who bring to the table widely divergent organizational and professional loyalties (Nissen, 2010).

They must instead exercise the kind of non-hierarchical, facilitative leadership for which highly developed communication and interpersonal skills are required (Steadman, 1992; Williams, 2002; Nissen, 2010).

It requires sophisticated **relational skills to establish relationships that are close enough to enable understanding of the often implicit concepts and meanings with** which different professions and disciplines may approach a shared task and **separate enough to maintain a systems perspective** (Bartel, 2001).

BOUNDARY SPANNING SKILLS OLIVER 2013

Maintaining this balance between empathy and enmeshment is part 'for social workers of an important and indeed fundamental resource: namely the capacity to stand both within and outside various systems' (Healy, 1998, p. 911) and of our power to construct supportive relationships that lead to change.

While relationship-building is a core skill in many professions, the added challenge for boundary spanners is that they must, by definition, build relationships with people who are different from themselves (Williams, 2002; Nissen, 2010). For this they need to be able 'to acknowledge and value difference in terms of culture, mind-set, profession, role and "gaze"' (Williams, 2002, p. 110)

It requires moving beyond superficial consensus to the honest interrogation of different perspectives. Boundary spanners need to know how to illuminate difference and how to manage the conflict that often results (Klein, 1990; Nissen, 2010).

BOUNDARY SPANNING QUALITIES OLIVER 2013

The ideal boundary spanner is 'an openminded person with the ability to take risks without being strident or careless; to have vision, but stay practical; to be courageous while attending to the politics; and to systematically create and nurture infrastructure for support and guidance' (Nissen, 2010, p. 381).

PHD RESEARCH

The 'what social work is' tends to be what is visible or evident. [Quantitative] research questions are descriptive and evaluative - how is the system working and what are the outcomes?

What we do not get is a response to the more open and searching question of **'what is going on here?''** (Trinder 1996: 236)

Taking a Closer Look at How It Works

PHD RESEARCH TOPIC

'Relationship–based Social Work a 'Thirdspace' in Responding to Trauma'

Aim to explore the lived experience of trauma & loss and the experience of a social work service in this context.

(based on practitioner research at Beaumont Hospital)

FINDINGS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA AND LOSS

A key finding of this research was **the inter-relatedness of three levels of experience** in the narration of trauma experiences:

- (i) feelings of trauma and loss;
- (ii) changed sense of and experience of self;
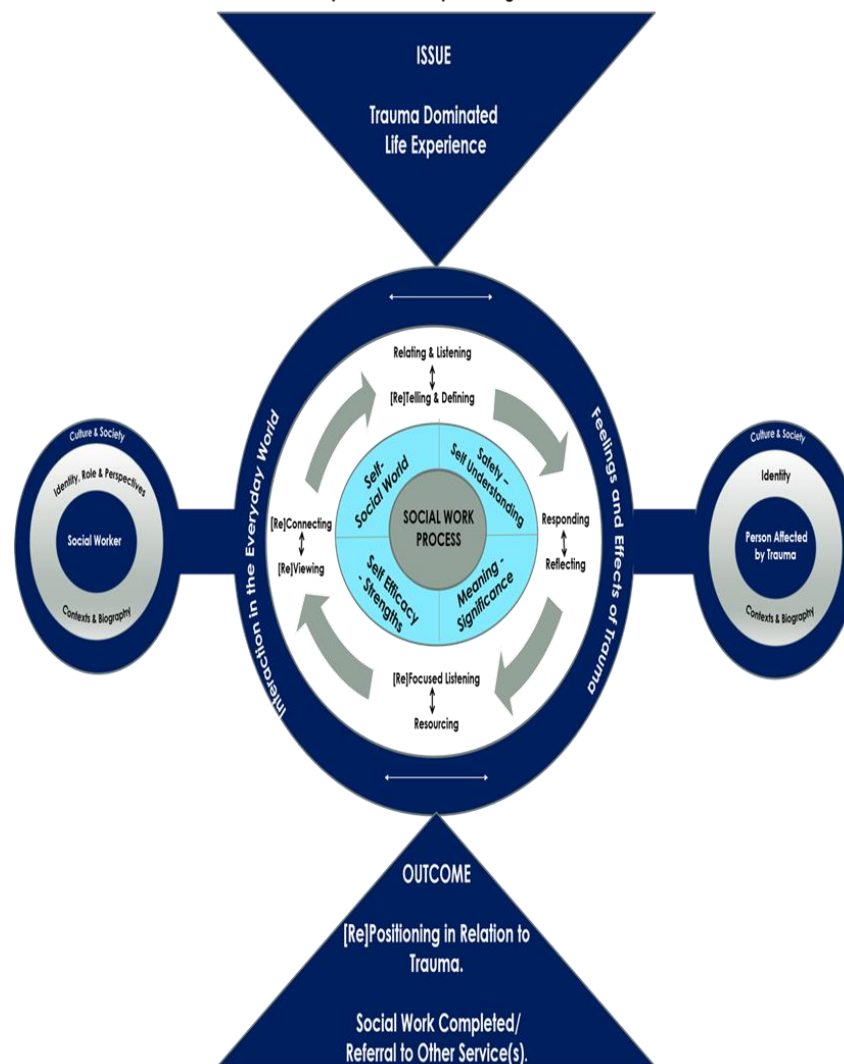- (iii) changed situation or circumstances

FINDINGS: THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL WORK

"I had no-one only myself, you know, and I'd no purpose or any reason in my life at all… nothing meant anything to me…..it was just a very empty lonely time…. it takes time for to come to terms with your situation and it's good to have somebody to come and talk to that will listen and won't - **even though you're telling the same story over and over again, that they don't get fed up listening to you.**" (Eileen)

"… I kind of distanced it a bit away from them [family] because **I didn't really want them to be worrying about it…**but when I'd come to [social worker] then, it was great, because she was a stranger and she could understand you know, where the others were too close to me". (Anna)

"… talking to…. someone in your family or someone like that, whether they're taking it in properly or whether they have the time or whether they have problems themselves so you say to yourself well you just don't feel like talking to anybody then…. **where when you come to counselling then you know that they can deal with it an' they listen………**"(Michael)

Relationship-Based Social Work
A 'Thirdspace' in Responding to Trauma

ISSUE

Trauma Dominated
Life Experience

Culture & Society

Identity, Role & Perspectives

Social Worker

Contexts & Biography

Interaction in the Everyday World

Relating & Listening

[Re]Telling & Defining

Self - Social World

Safety - Self Understanding

[Re]Connecting

SOCIAL WORK PROCESS

Responding

[Re]Viewing

Self Efficacy - Strengths

Meaning - Significance

Reflecting

[Re]Focused Listening

Resourcing

Feelings and Effects of Trauma

Culture & Society

Identity

Person Affected by Trauma

Contexts & Biography

OUTCOME

[Re]Positioning in Relation to Trauma.

Social Work Completed/
Referral to Other Service(s).

HOW SOCIAL WORK RESPONDS -SERVICE USER PERSPECTIVES

Listening

"….an awful lot of people go along in life and when you're explaining yourself, people keep interrupting which can be very very frustrating….I felt you were a fantastic **listener** [social worker]…..you were absolutely brilliant in the way you listened to me and whereas, you know, down the line….**you picked up things, you knew there were things there, but yet you didn't jump in with both feet, you just went along and when I was finished, then you, then you approached them, which was very good…**"

(John)

Responding

There was **understanding, there was sympathy, there was a recognition of how you felt.** And you could say whatever you wanted to say, that there was nothing that couldn't be said.… you felt you could get what was on your chest off it, and you could say it **without being judged…..**"

(Therese)

HOW SOCIAL WORK RESPONDS-SERVICE USER PERSPECTIVES

Resourcing

"…**It was me explaining it, or me telling you what happened and you explaining it back to me, translating it for me,** basically, you know, and what emotions that were involved…..**that I would understand it, you know what I mean.** I mean, **not understanding it is frustrating, you know…and being able to understand it lifts that kind of frustration away…… I understand it a bit better. So I don't worry about it as much, you know."**

(Dave).

Re-connecting

"You know, you couldn't go on the way you were like, you know, because you feel like dying yourself, you just, you didn't want to die…but you wanted to get rid of the pain, you know, it wasn't that you wanted to die because really life is good, I suppose, it's just that you couldn't live with your situation……. it takes you know, it seemed to take forever like. I never thought I'd get anywhere beyond a certain point, you know. But I have got on much better than I had, you know……..as I say, the loss is still there…….**I'm glad now to be alive today…I know that I'm happy in myself and I know I can help people……"**

(Eileen)

CONNECTING INDIVIDUAL, RELATIONAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL & POLITICAL DOMAINS

The social work relationship exists among multiple other relationships and intersections where people live their lives, negotiate meaning and take action.

It can support people to explore connections between inner feelings, external frames of reference and lived experience in multiple social contexts.

CHOICEandTRUTH

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

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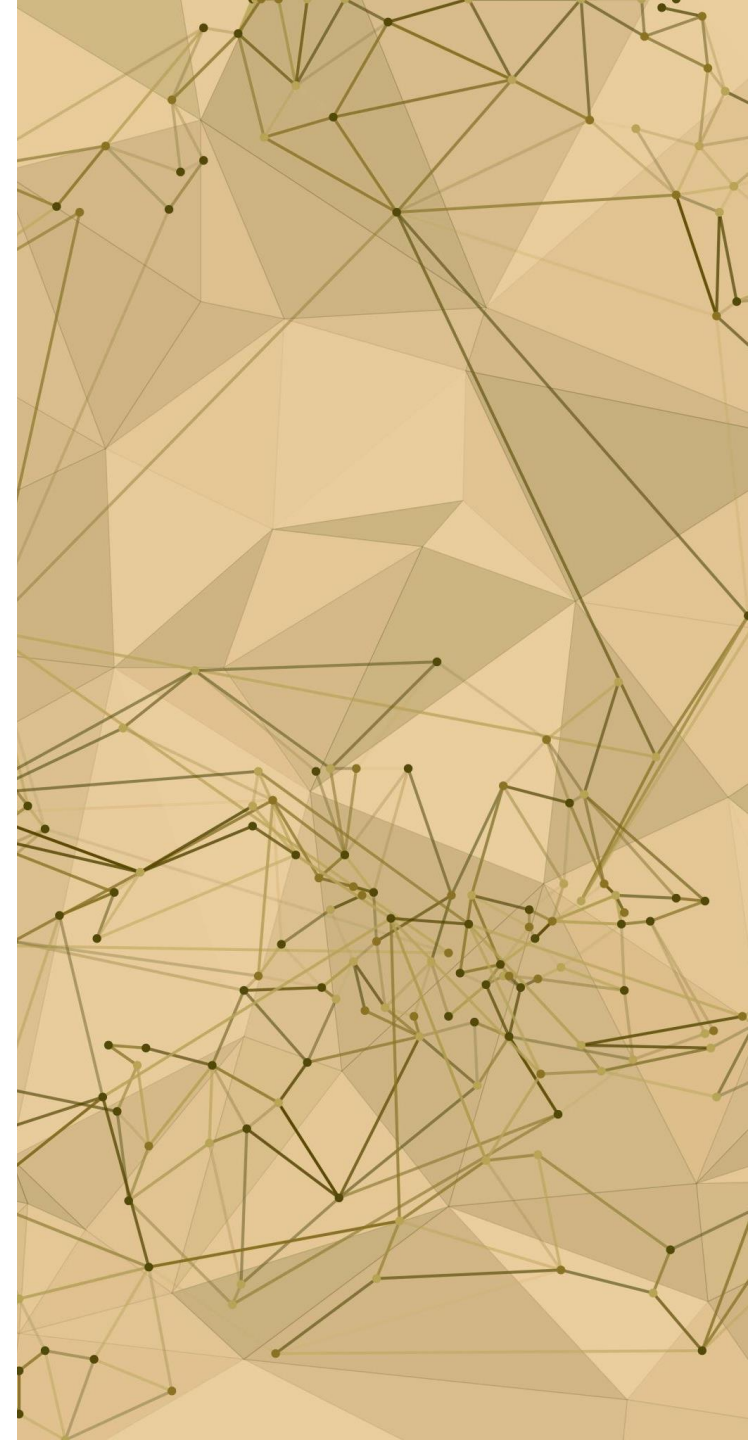
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QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Thank You