Preamble

The welfare sector consists of a core cadre of social service professionals including social workers, social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, community development practitioners, youth workers and probation officers. The generic nature of these occupational groupings, the main ethos of caring that underscores them, and their emphasis on the complex nature of society and human functioning means that all these groups must be informed by a holistic approach. It is therefore fully expected that there will be overlaps in their roles and functioning. If one transcends narrow disciplinary and professional divides one will see the strengths rather than the limitations of the role and function overlaps.

Social work is a dynamic profession that constantly needs to keep abreast of contemporary trends and developments in society. To this end policy is currently being developed for social workers to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Many social workers generally practice vis-à-vis other disciplines in multi-disciplinary teams, and social work operates within a welfare sector that needs to collaborate with other sectors such as health, education and housing.

Social work is practiced in a variety of settings such as a range of government departments, including the Offices of the Premiers; child welfare departments; family and marriage societies; hospitals; mental health settings; disability; the aged; early childhood development; youth services; correctional services; work with offenders outside of prison (e.g. NICRO); work with persons with epilepsy (e.g. SANEL); social work in schools and in corporate settings.
Social work is internationally entrenched having evolved into a profession over a period of about 100 years. The Alice Salomon School of Social Work in Germany reached 100 years in 2008 while the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Council on Social Welfare celebrate their 80th anniversaries this year (2008) – thus reflecting that social work education and practice has been internationally organized for many years.

South Africa was the first country to offer social work education in Africa with the 1920s and 1930s earmarking the beginnings of social work; the first National Conference on Social Work was held in 1936. The South African Inter-University Committee for Social Studies was formed in 1938, which after various name changes came to be known as the Joint Universities Committee on Social Work in the 1960s. In 1965 the National Welfare Act, which influenced social work education in two ways, came into effect. First the Act made provision for all social workers (including social work educators) to register in terms of the Act, thus making the title “registered social worker” a protected one. Secondly registration was contingent upon completion of approved educational courses. The Act represented the first legislative attempt to prescribe core curricula for social work education and training. In 1978 the Social and Associated Workers Act (Act 110 of 1978) (now the Social Service Professions Act) was introduced, and made provision for a statutory council (the South African Council for Social and Associated Workers that was established in 1980) to regulate the conduct, training and registration of social workers. The Council has been transformed into the current South African Council for Social Service Professions.

While social work is unique in some ways it does share much in common with other disciplines in the welfare sector. This document highlights the unique as well as common paradigms/approaches/roles/responsibilities.

DEFINITIONS
Social work

In our local context, Potgieter (1998, p. 35) defined social work as:

... a professional activity that utilises values, knowledge, skills and processes to focus on issues, needs and problems that arise from the interaction between individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities. It is a service sanctioned by society to improve the social functioning of people, to empower them and to promote a mutually beneficial interaction between individual and society in order to improve the quality of life of everyone.

Potgieter’s definition coheres with the international (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] and International Association of Schools of Social Work,[IASSW]) definition of social work which has been adopted as a point of departure both for the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005) and the South African Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme. In July 2001, both the IASSW and the IFSW reached agreement on adopting the following international definition of social work*:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW/IASSW, 2001)

The following commentary on the definition is offered (accessed from www.ifsw.org/en/p3800208.html 20 June 2008)

**COMMENTARY**

Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such,
social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice.

**Values**
Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are dis-advantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession’s national and international codes of ethics.

**Theory**
Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context. It recognises the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them including bio-psychosocial factors. The social work profession draws on theories of human development and behaviour and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organisational, social and cultural changes.

**Practice**
Social work addresses the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society. It responds to crises and emergencies as well as to everyday personal and social problems. Social work utilises a variety of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments. Social work interventions range from primarily person-focused psychosocial processes to involvement in social policy, planning and development. These include counselling, clinical social work, group work, social pedagogical work, and family treatment and therapy as well as efforts to help people obtain services and resources in the community. Interventions also include agency administration, community organisation and engaging in social and political action to impact social policy and economic development. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from country to country and from time to time depending on cultural, historical, and socio-economic conditions.

* This international definition of the social work profession replaces the IFSW definition adopted in 1982. It is understood that social work in the 21st century is dynamic and evolving, and therefore no definition should be regarded as exhaustive.

**Social worker**
The term “social worker” in the South African context is a protected title in that no person without the requisite qualification and registration with the South African Council for Social Service Professions may use the title or practice as a social worker; any person who violates this is liable to prosecution. The title is applied to graduates of schools/programmes of social work who are employed in the field of social welfare or who use their qualifications and social work expertise in related and other fields. In South Africa the prerequisite is a four year bachelor’s degree (BSW registered on the National Qualification Framework [level 7] of the South African Qualifications Authority), while some countries allow for a liberal arts under-graduate qualification, with a social work qualification at the Master’s level. Many countries have certification in place with a prerequisite being university level social work qualification.

**Social auxiliary worker**

Social auxiliary work is a supportive service to social work, rendered by a social auxiliary worker under the supervision of a social worker to further the aims of social work. The qualification in social auxiliary work is currently registered as an NQF level 4 qualification, namely the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) in Social Auxiliary Work. The tasks of the social auxiliary worker and the social worker are similar but differentiated in terms of range, intensity and the levels of sophistication and responsibility involved in the work. A social auxiliary worker is more likely to engage in more routine tasks compared with social workers and provide assistance to social workers in the management of complex processes and tasks.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL WORK**

Social work is concerned with the interactions between people and their socio-political, economic and cultural environments which affect the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, to alleviate distress and to realize their aspirations. Social work recognizes the reciprocal and dialectical relationship between the micro and the macro i.e. the impact of macro factors on the lived experiences and functioning of individuals,
groups, organizations and communities and the power of micro and mezzo level factors to, in turn, shape the macro environment, and the power of the relationship between the personal and the political.

Social work is characterized by both system stabilizing and system de-stabilizing functions. As much as social work aims to challenge and change socio-political, economic and cultural systems that disadvantage people, through advocacy, social action and policy engagement, there is also an emphasis on maintaining and promoting peaceful and harmonious relationships and social stability. Social work thus embraces ameliorative, therapeutic, promotive, preventative and developmental functions which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. E.g. sound therapeutic services through secondary or tertiary preventive efforts to a youth sexual offender can contribute to the primary prevention\(^1\) of sexual violations of other people, and an HIV+ person or a woman subjected to rape can, with effective therapeutic intervention, become “wounded healers”, where the empathy and healing derived from their own life experiences can contribute to the healing of others in similar situations, and to their engagement in policy and advocacy issues around HIV and AIDS and sexual violence – the foundation of self-help and outreach in social work.

A simultaneous focus on both the individual and the socio-political, cultural, economic environment is one of the key characteristics of social work. Social work is never preoccupied with only the individual or only the environment – the concern is the reciprocal relationships between individuals and their environments, and the historical context within which individuals are located. Thus, social work education in South Africa is based on a four year eclectic\(^2\) and generalist practice model\(^3\). Field theory

---

\(^1\) **Primary prevention** is directed toward enhancing well-being and to preventing the occurrence of a problem, e.g. primary preventive educational & outreach efforts in HIV and AIDS, child abuse or domestic violence. **Secondary prevention** aims to limit the severity of a problem already in existence through early assessment and intervention while **tertiary prevention** refers to intervention directed at the control of an existing problem and the rehabilitation of the person experiencing the problem e.g. providing case management, AA group programmes and medical treatment for a chronic alcoholic (Norlin & Chess, 1997).

\(^2\) A collection of various theories and practice methods that are differentially employed by a social worker in response to the needs of a client –system (Norlin & Chess, 1997)

\(^3\) Generalist practice is a form of professional social work practice that can be competently conducted in a variety of settings with client systems of varying size at several levels of prevention and one that utilizes a transferable body of knowledge, values and skills (Norlin and Chess, 1997)
(developed by Kurt Lewin) which was a precursor to general systems theory holds that the individual and other social units cannot be conceived apart from the environment. The field and life –space⁴ may be considered synonymous (Norlin & Chess, 1997).

A distinguishing feature of social work is its emphasis on knowledge, skills, values and processes, with one of the most dominant values deriving from person-centred principles of unconditional positive regard, validation and affirmation of all human beings that rest on a sophisticated ability to be non-judgemental insofar as personhood is concerned – i.e. on the ability to separate the person from the behaviour – to put it simply to follow the Biblical injunction to: “Love the sinner and not the sin”. Social workers who do develop this remarkable ability, do render themselves - in all their authenticity and genuineness - fully accessible to people during every moment of the human encounter where every activity, every word and every touch is seen to be an opportunity for profound growth and development – whether one works with children, adolescents, young and middle adults and older persons. This is clearly an ethic that should underscore not only all human service providers/professionals, but all of humanity.

CORE PURPOSES OF SOCIAL WORK

The purpose of the four year BSW professional qualification that serves as the drivers of the cores purposes of social work in South Africa, is to equip social workers with –

* Skills to challenge structural sources of poverty, inequality, oppression, discrimination and exclusion

* Knowledge and understanding of human behaviour and social systems and the skills to intervene at the points where people interact with their environments in order to promote social well-being

* The ability and competence to assist and empower individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their social functioning and their problem-solving capacities

---

⁴ Life-space is a concept in field theory that consists of the person and his or her environment – with the focus being on current circumstances, the “here and now” rather than the past as in Freud’s search for past behavioural or genetic determinants (Norlin & Chess, 1997).
* The ability to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities by enabling them to accomplish tasks, prevent and alleviate distress and use resources effectively

* An understanding of and the ability to demonstrate social work values and the principles of human rights and social justice while interacting with and assisting the range of human diversity

* The understanding and ability to provide social work services towards protecting people who are vulnerable, at-risk and unable to protect themselves

* Knowledge and understanding of both the South African and the global welfare context and the ability to implement the social development approach in social work services

* Understanding of the major social needs, issues, policies and legislation in the South African social welfare context and the social worker's role and contribution

* The skills to work effectively within teams, including social work teams, multi- and inter-disciplinary teams as well as multi-sectoral teams.

The above purposes are consistent with the core purposes of social work as identified in the Global Standards for the Education and Training of Social Work (adopted by the IASSW and IFSW in 2004 - see Sewpaul & Jones, 2005) as reflected below:

- Facilitate the inclusion of marginalized, socially excluded, dispossessed, vulnerable and at-risk groups of people.
- Address and challenge barriers, inequalities and injustices that exist in society.
- Form short and longer-term working relationships with and mobilize individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their well being and their problem-solving capacities.
- Assist and educate people to obtain services and resources in their communities.
- Formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance people’s well being, promote development and human rights, and promote collective social harmony and social stability, insofar as such stability does not violate human rights.
- Encourage people to engage in advocacy with regard to pertinent local, national, regional and/or international concerns.
• Advocate for, and/or with people, the formulation and targeted implementation of policies that are consistent with the ethical principles of the profession.

• Advocate for, and/or with people, changes in those policies and structural conditions that maintain people in marginalized, dispossessed and vulnerable positions, and those that infringe the collective social harmony and stability of various ethnic groups, insofar as such stability does not violate human rights.

• Work towards the protection of people who are not in a position to do so themselves, for example children and youth in need of care and persons experiencing mental illness or mental retardation within the parameters of accepted and ethically sound legislation.

• Engage in social and political action to impact social policy and economic development, and to effect change by critiquing and eliminating inequalities.

• Enhance stable, harmonious and mutually respectful societies that do not violate people’s human rights.

• Promote respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions amongst different ethnic groups and societies, insofar as these do not conflict with the fundamental human rights of people.

• Plan, organize, administer and manage programmes and organizations dedicated to any of the purposes delineated above.

The above mentioned core purposes are inclusive of service users/clients\(^5\) of all age groups

**SPECIALIZATION**

\(^5\) The Global standards document acknowledges the limitations of the concepts “service user” and “client”. These concepts reflect the traditional bio-medical model, which supports the notion of the service user as a passive recipient of social work services with the social worker as “expert” who knows best, and an implication of a hierarchical worker-client relationship, characterized by a so-called neutrality. It is antithetical to the holistic biopsychosocial, spiritual model which views people as active agents in change processes and structures, and to empowerment based practice, which calls for active involvement, rather than a detached neutrality, on the part of practitioners. A suggestion has been made for the use of “participants in social services.” However, this alludes to an ideological position that is inconsistent with current realities of practice, which is indeed based on skewed power relationships, where service users are not fully integrated as equal participants in social work processes, delivery mechanisms and structures. Given the contemporary ethos of practice it is perhaps more ethical and realistic to retain the concepts “service users” or “clients”, despite their limitations. As far as possible this document refers to “people who we/social workers engage with”.
One of the strengths and distinguishing feature of the profession, on a global level, is its embracing various areas of specialization such as (which might be variously termed in different contexts) Adoption Work, Clinical Social Work (Medical & Psychiatric Social Work are often used synonymously with Clinical Social Work), Forensic Social Work, Management and Supervision, Occupational Social Work, Probation Services, School Social Work, Social Policy and Planning, Social Work Education and Social Work in Health Care.

**Adoption Work**

Adoption work means an all-inclusive professional service to the biological parents, the child and the prospective adoptive parents, which forms an integral part of the adoption process during the pre-adoption, adoption and post adoption phases and consists of the following services:

(a) Counselling of the biological parents;
(b) assessment and, where applicable, counselling of the child;
(c) recruitment, assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive parents, and after-care services;
(d) origin inquiries and tracing of the parties involved in the adoption; and
(e) preparation of reports pertaining to a proposed adoption under the Child Care Act.

(Regulations relating to the registration of a speciality in adoption work in terms of the Social Service Professions Act, published as Government Notice R 449 in Government Gazette 19930 of 16 April 1999)

**Clinical Social Work**

Clinical social work shares with all social work practice the goal of enhancement and maintenance of psychosocial functioning of individuals, families, and small groups. Clinical social work practice is the professional application of social work theory and methods to the treatment and prevention of psychosocial dysfunction, disability, or
impairment, including emotional and mental disorders. It is based on knowledge of one or more theories of human development within a psychosocial context (NASW, USA).

**Forensic Social Work**

Forensic social work is a professional speciality that focuses on the interface between society’s legal and human systems. It includes such activities as providing expert testimonies in courts of law, investigating cases of possible criminal conduct and assisting the legal system in such issues as child custody disputes, divorce, non support delinquency, spouse or child abuse, mental hospital commitment and relatives’ responsibility (Barker and Branson, 2000).

According to Carstens (2006, p. 191) “The concept ‘forensic’ can be defined as the application of scientific principles and methods to a legal problem with the primary function of providing expert testimony in a court of law.”

**Management and Supervision**

Effective management involves the co-ordination of various simultaneous processes and functions, namely planning, organizing, developing human resources, budgeting, supervising, evaluating and performance appraisals. (See Lewis 1991).

Supervision on the other hand refers to the intervention provided by a senior member of the profession to members of the same profession with the intention of augmenting, monitoring the professional rendering of services to recipients of the service-delivery and serving as a gatekeeper to those who enter the particular profession. (Dunbar-Krige and Fritz, 2006:xvi). It is a process whereby the supervisor performs educational, supportive and administrative functions in order to promote efficient and professional rendering of services. (See Terminology Committee for Social Work)

Social Work management and supervision will entail mainly certain direct functions, such as
• Direct supervision – largely to junior social workers, including the supervision of social auxiliary workers and student social workers.
• Consultative supervision to senior and experienced social workers, but not limited in this regard.
• Professional development of social workers
• Oversight and fostering of direct service delivery
• Internal focus on service delivery
• Undertaking and endorsement of performance appraisals of subordinates
• Direct involvement in the recruitment and selection process of new incumbents in the social work component
• Job allocation in accordance with benchmarked procedures; work delegation
• Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating work
• Co-ordinating work-flow
• Advocates for human resources and program planning
• Administrative functions, where required, within the confines of the position as Professional Social Work Manager
• Administrative buffer as well as a change-agent
• Monitoring of service delivery based on theoretical foundations
• Inducting and appropriate placement of social workers
• Work planning

**Occupational Social Work**

“Occupational social work” means a specialised field of social work practice which addresses the human and social needs of the work community through a variety of interventions which aim to foster optimal adaptation between individuals and their environment and focuses on the following:

(a) Both a systemic approach in that the employees, the organisation and the broader environment receive equal attention in the planning for any intervention whether at a micro, meso or macro level for which an understanding of the impact of fluctuations in the market economy,
political or social changes and international events on the social worker’s employing organisation and all its stakeholders from the lowest level worker to the shareholders is required; and
(b) a binocular vision in which individuals and the employing organisation, as well as the broader community together with their reciprocal relationship and impact on one another, are seen as the client systems. This could include the interface between the organisation and the broader community.

“occupational social work services” are services pertaining to-

- work-focussed assessment, assessing needs or problems of various client systems in the workplace and the reciprocal relationship between them;
- work-focussed interventions
- work-focussed policy and programme development
- concurrent multi level practice

(Proposed definition in the draft Regulations relating to the registration of occupational social work as a speciality in Social Work in terms of the Social Service Professions Act)

**Probation Services**
The purpose of probation practice is to strive for the effective administration of youth justice and criminal justice, to strive for the prevention of crime, victim empowerment and generally to fulfil its functions as outlined in the Probation Services Act, 1991, as amended in 2002. As such programmes and services are directed at the following:

- The prevention and combating of crime
- The performance of community service
- Information to and the treatment of offenders and other persons
- The assessment, care and treatment, support, referral for and provision of mediation in respect of victims of crime
- The observation, treatment and supervision of persons who have been released from a prison or a reformed school and who are probationers or have been placed in the custody of any person in terms of the law
The rendering of assistance to the families of persons detained in a prison or reformed school and the families of persons referred to in the paragraph above

The establishment, financing and establishment of shelters

The compensation of victims of crime

The adaptation of persons released from prison or reformed schools to the community and their families

The reception, assessment and referral of an accused and the rendering of early intervention services and programmes, including mediation and family group conferencing

The investigation of the circumstances of an accused and the provision of a pre-trial report recommending the desirability or otherwise of prosecutions

The investigation of the circumstances of a convicted person, the compiling of a presentencing report, the recommendation of an appropriate sentence and the giving of evidence before the court

Restorative justice as part of appropriate sentencing and diversion programmes

School Social Work

School social work is a discipline that differs from generic or clinical social work. The overall aim is to provide social work services to learners, parents and educators who experience social barriers within the context or the learning site in order to prevent and overcome barriers which inhibit learners to reach their full potential..

In other words, school social work seeks to enable learners to make maximum use of the academic, developmental and social opportunities afford them in the school setting. School social work therefore promotes-

(a) a culture of learning, and

(b) developing human potential to cater for the needs of all learners.
The school social worker forms part of the multi disciplinary support team that renders support services to schools within the framework of inclusive education.

**Social Policy and Planning**

The Terminology Committee for Social Work (1995) refer to social policy as the accepted guideline for the changing, maintenance or creation of living conditions conducive to human welfare, while social planning refers to the process in social work aimed at the coordination and change of existing services as well as the identification and development of resources.

Social policies are guiding principles for ways of life, motivated by basic and perceived human needs. They are derived by people from the strictures, dynamics and values of their ways of life and they serve to maintain or change these ways. (Gil.1990 in *Social Policy* in Reader for MWT 853, University of Pretoria). Gil explains further that social policies operate through the following essential institutional processes and their manifold interactions:

- Development, management and conservation of natural and human created resources
- Organisation of work and production of life-sustaining and life-enhancing, concrete and non-concrete, goods and services
- Exchange and distribution of life-sustaining and life-enhancing goods and services, and of social, civil, and political rights and responsibilities
- Governance and legitimisation

**Social Work Education**

Education refers to the systemic study of the methods and theories of teaching and learning. (See Guralnik, 1984, p 444). This would include processes of training and obtaining knowledge, skills (competencies) and attributes. These processes could entail formal or informal learning, which may also refer to experiential learning.
In relation to social work, this area of specialisation refers to those social workers that practice within the field of education, training and development of learners and that have expert knowledge regarding educational policies, methods of learning and assessment of learners, as well as theories related to the education and development of social work and social auxiliary work learners. (Kemp. 2007)

**Social Work in Health Care**

Social Work in health care can be defined as a specialised field in social work that focuses on the complete person, i.e. as a bio-psychosocial being, and the person’s family, immediate environments and larger social context, in trying to improve the interaction with the environment as a source of resources to address the imbalances that might have occurred due to illness or disability. The social workers in this field have to be skilled to assist persons to deal with their social, emotional and environmental problems associated with illness and disability.

Medical social workers assess the psychosocial functioning of patients and families and intervene as necessary. Interventions may include connecting patients and families to necessary resources and supports in the community; providing psychotherapy, supportive counseling, or grief counseling; or helping a patient to expand and strengthen their network of social supports. Medical social workers typically work on an interdisciplinary team with professionals of other disciplines (such as medicine, nursing, physical, occupational, speech and recreational therapy, etc). (See Wikipedia Encyclopedia, www.en.wikipedia.org)

**ROLES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER**

Given the breadth and depth of social work and its generic and well as specialist offerings, social workers fulfill a range of roles including, but not limited to, and more often than not occupying more than one role simultaneously: advocate, broker, counsellor/enabler, catalyst, change agent, facilitator, mediator, social activist and social planner.
Definitions of roles:

Advocate:
In the advocacy role the social worker may act as an advocate for individuals (referred to as case advocacy) or for large groups of people (group or case advocacy). The advocate identifies with the plight of the disadvantaged and pleads the cause of individuals and/or an aggrieved class of individuals in an effort to further the cause of social justice and to obtain resources that might otherwise not be provided. This is done by collecting information, arguing, debating, negotiating and challenging systems and policies that deny people services. It often includes organizing people who are affected and attempting to influence political processes and outcomes (Zastrow, 1992; Potgieter, 1998). Where people are too vulnerable to advocate for themselves (e.g. minor children or people with severe intellectual disabilities) the social worker may advocate on their behalf.

Broker:
In the broker role the social worker acts to link people with resources that they might be unaware or be too afraid to use.

Counsellor/Enabler: In this role the social worker helps people to articulate their needs, to clarify and identify their problems, to explore alternatives, to select and apply certain alternatives and to develop the capacity to deal with their own issues more effectively. While this role is most common in one to one counselling and therapeutic relationships, it might be used at other levels of practice as well.

Catalyst:
A catalyst is a person acting as the stimulus in bringing about or hastening a result (Guralnik, 1984, p.222). The social worker through the utilization of various skills and techniques acts as the stimulus to empower client systems to effect change.

Change agent:
A change agent is a helper who is specifically employed for the purpose of creating planned change (Pincus & Minahan, 1973: 54)

**Facilitator:**
In the role of facilitator the social worker serves to expedite the process of social change by bringing together people and communication structures, stimulating activities, developing and channeling resources and ensuring access to expertise” (Terminology Committee for Social Work, 1995: 24). “After pinpointing factors that impede service delivery, social workers have a responsibility to plan and implement ways of enhancing service delivery “(Hepworth *et al.* 2006: 29).

**Mediator:**
A mediator is a person that provides a neutral forum in which disputants are encouraged to find a mutually satisfactory resolution to their problems (Chandler,1985:346).

**Social Activist:** The activist is concerned with social justice, inequality and deprivation and the aim is to challenge and change fundamental socio-political, cultural and economic structures that maintain people in marginalized, excluded and poor positions. Strategies might involve conflict, confrontation and negotiation and might occur at the local, national and/or global level (Zastrow, 1992).

**Social Planner:**
This role comes into play when the issue, need or concern affects a number of people. The social planner many undertake a situational analysis or research into existing conditions in order to create and/or modify services and policies (Lombard, 1992; The main concern is to align local needs with national plans or to stimulate the creation of a national plan based on widespread local needs that affect various communities (Cox cited in Potgieter 1998).

**ROLES OF THE SOCIAL AUXILIARY WORKER**
The concept “social auxiliary work” is defined in the Regulations relating to the registration of social auxiliary workers in terms of the Social Service Professions Act, 1978, as amended, as “an act or activity practiced by a social auxiliary worker under the guidance and control of a social worker and as a supporting service to a social worker to achieve the aims of social work”.

In practicing social auxiliary work, the following roles are performed:

**Supporter:** The social auxiliary worker supports the social worker in the roles that the social worker has to perform as defined. In essence the supportive role relates to the following:

- **Prevention, education and development programmes:** Such programmes are applicable and appropriate in all focus areas, whether it is family life, mental health, crime or substance abuse. The social auxiliary worker’s core business is to assist the social worker in implementing and running these programmes whether the empowerment is directed towards individuals, families, groups or communities. Examples of programmes are life skills education, the development of skills in parenting, problem solving, decision making, managing stress and conflict, economic empowerment, strengthening family units, preparation for the different stages of the life cycle and recreation programmes for specific people at risk.

- **Community based care:** With the focus moving away from residential care of children, the elderly, people with disabilities and substance abusers to community based care, the social auxiliary worker delivers a supportive services to these families in the community. These services may be of a direct nature, for example to visit the homes of elderly people to address basic needs (food, clothing, transport, finances) or to support a family when one of the family members is chronically ill with HIV and AIDS, but may also be of an indirect nature, for example, establishing community based care facilities such as day-care facilities for families with a child who is mentally challenged. The education and training of social auxiliary workers equip these practitioners with competencies to work within a team context with other social service practitioners who are also involved with community
based care, such as ancillary health care and child and youth care practitioners.

- **The establishment and utilisation of resources:** The social auxiliary worker informs and educates communities on and enables them to access and utilise resources, whether the resources be physical or human. Where appropriate resources are lacking, the social auxiliary worker may support initiatives to develop them.

- **Practical support:** The social auxiliary worker provides a supportive service for the social worker to the individuals, families, groups and communities with whom the social worker is involved. As such, the social auxiliary worker performs the following practical support services:
  
  *Material support* – arranging for financial aid, social grants, bursaries, food parcels
  
  *Practical support* – arranging accommodation, employment, transport or completing documents where people do not have the skills to do so, or making arrangements when a family member has died.
  
  *Emotional support* – when a person has for example lost his/her job or when a family member has died or when a person experiences stress.
  
  *Practical arrangements* – with regard to meetings or groups (for example venues).
  
  *Recruitment of volunteers and assisting in their training.*
  
  *After care services*

**Administrator:** With regard to office administration there is a variety of tasks that the social auxiliary worker undertakes, for example the opening of index cards, keeping records of the programmes of social workers, keeping minutes of meetings/workshops – handling the secretariat work of committees, keeping statistics, support regarding the completing of research questionnaires, the processing of research data and implementing of research findings.
Observer: The social auxiliary worker can be the eyes and ears of the social worker with regard to the social needs, social problems and social opportunities within a specific family or community.

In performing these tasks it should be kept in mind that the social auxiliary worker’s education and training provide them with competencies to provide services to individuals, families, groups and communities on a primary or basic level.

Acts that do not fall within the scope of practice of the Social Auxiliary Worker:

In view of the education and training of the social auxiliary worker being limited to one year and therefore not equipping the social auxiliary worker with competencies to undertake in-depth interventions, the following acts are not regarded as falling within the scope of the social auxiliary worker:

- The social auxiliary worker is not capable of functioning without the guidance of a social worker and is seen as part of the social worker’s functions and supports the social worker in performing his/her duties.
- The social worker is, therefore, the person responsible for assisting the social auxiliary worker in planning his/her services, as well as supervising them.
- This implies that the social auxiliary worker is responsible for the tasks entrusted to him/her by the social worker during the service delivery process and is not trained to conduct the process on his/her own.
- The social auxiliary worker is not empowered to handle a case load, or conduct a group or undertake community work on the same basis as the social worker and therefore does not provide therapeutic services, but provides supportive services.
- The social auxiliary worker is not allowed to take full responsibility for statutory services in terms of the Children’s Act, 2005. However support may be rendered to the social workers for example with reunification services to families.
- The nature of written reports by social auxiliary workers is informative and they are addressed to the social work team. The writing of reports regarding statutory or therapeutic interventions is the task of the social worker. The
social auxiliary worker may, therefore, not sign reports of a social work nature addressed to stakeholders not employed within the organisation.

- The social auxiliary worker may not be appointed to do the work of a social worker.

THE UNIQUENESS OF SOCIAL WORK

The following functions and methods are unique to social work.

Social work is the only professional group with the mandate to undertake statutory functions including adoption and foster care. It is further uniquely mandated to do the following:

- **Undertake ecometric testing and assessments**
  
  *Ecometric testing* involves the use of a range of different structured assessment technologies, such as scales, questionnaires, protocols, classification systems and procedures, that are designed to promote the accuracy, precision and consistency with which client assessments are done. Overall, ecometrics promotes accountability specifically during the assessment phase, but also generally regarding the entire helping process in social work (SACSSP, ecometrics policy document).

- **Case management**
  
  *Case management* refers to a method of professional practice conducted by a specific individual or team characterized by an on-going responsibility to help people 1) by helping them to develop goals and to make informed choices about opportunities; 2) by helping access and effectively use services; 3) by developing services needed but not otherwise available; and 4) by advocating for and in other ways acting in a manner that promotes people’s own efforts in the pursuit of goals that increases their sense of well-being (Norlin & Chess, 1997)
• **Casework, group work, community work, social work supervision, social work administration and research** are entrenched as domains of social work. Initial and on-going supervision is a prerequisite especially in view of the demands of ethical practice, the ethical dilemmas faced by social workers in day to day practice, the need to act in the best interests of clients and in recognition of the complexities of statutory practice.

• **Casework:** A method of direct practice in social work typically conducted on a face-to-face basis with individuals, couples and/or families; it often involves case advocacy in that the social worker seeks to secure resources in the best interests of people that they are engaged with.

• **Group work** is a method used in social work practice that involves a small group of people with common interests or concerns who meet on a regular basis to work toward their common goals. In contrast to casework and group therapy, group work is not primarily therapeutic. Different types of groups have different objectives e.g. socialization, information exchange and education, minimizing destructive behaviour e.g. delinquency; prevention of social problems, advocacy, lobbying, recreation and facilitating harmonious relationships among people.

• **Community work** – used sometimes synonymously with community organisation and community development – is a broad concept that embraces a range of approaches, strategies and paradigms that do not fall solely within the domain of a specific discipline. Community work is used by social workers as well as a range of other practitioners including community development workers, adult education teachers, health care workers and development economists (Lombard, 1991).

• **Social work supervision** Supervision within social work organisations forms an essential mechanism of quality assurance for services rendered and it is therefore an imperative that sound, good quality, facilitative and growth promoting supervision is provided.

• **Social work administration:** A method of indirect practice that is employed to efficiently achieve organizational goals and objectives in a manner that also advances the well-being of members of the organisation (Norlin & Chess, 1997)
• **Social work research** is defined by Grinnell (1993: 4) as a scientific inquiry about a social work problem that provides an answer contributing to an increase in the body of generalizable knowledge about social work concerns.

**MAIN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Within its generic approach, social work intervention is guided by the following dominant theoretical frameworks:

**Developmental life – span theories** that consider individuals and families as they evolve over time – from conception and birth to old age and death; central to this framework is that life tasks are generally fulfilled within specified time frames e.g, Erickson’s epigenetic theory, Freud’s theory of psycho-sexual development; various theories of family evolution and development; Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory; Piaget’s theory of cognitive development; theories of moral development – most of these theories have been widely critiqued in relation to developing contexts where the two parent, nuclear family is often not the norm, where some forms of “parentified roles” among children might be deemed to be functional; and where households are variously constituted and defined. These have also generally been criticized for their use of “whiteness” and masculinity (e.g use of Western white men in research studies from which large scale generalizations are made) as the norms against which all else is measured, and for their reinforcement of patriarchy, gender and racial stereotypes.

**Ecological-systems theory** that essentially adopts the “person-in-environment” approach that calls for assessment and intervention at various system levels – i.e. the micro, mezzo, exo, macro and chrono system levels. While providing an excellent framework for holistic assessment, and thus allowing for the possibility of holistic intervention, the key limitation is that - all too often - policy makers and practitioners use the approach to justify adaptation of the individual to the social context. It does not specifically call for structural changes of systems that oppress and exclude people; it does not require that the social worker interrogate the relationship between the personal and the political and the relationship between criteria such as race, class and
gender and other social factors such as sexual orientation, disability, language, geographic location, age and so on.

**Structural theory** is derived from critical/radical/feminist perspectives that reflect a dramatic shift from any “victim-blaming”, pathology based approach to social work. While the approach does not negate micro and mezzo level interventions, it recognizes the impact of structural factors on the lives of people and aims to challenge and change those structures. The major emphasis is on the pursuit of social justice and enhancement of human rights. It calls for reflexivity, the ability to critically understand sources of both oppression and of privilege; and the need to develop a critical awareness of hegemonic discourses and the insidious, incessant control of consciousness as entrenched in the media, economics, politics, culture and religion.

Social work has adopted the *developmental approach* to social welfare policy and practice. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997) sees social welfare as an integrated and comprehensive system of social services, facilities and programmes and social security to promote social development, social justice and social functioning of people. Developmental social welfare integrates social and economic development and is underscored by the following principles (Potgieter, 1998, pp 69-70) embedded in a human rights approach as endorsed in the Constitution of South Africa:

- The creation of conditions favourable for growth and development to facilitate every person’s right to social security and social welfare through the maintenance of public and private welfare services.
- Equitable distribution of services and resources that address racial, gender, geographic, as well as rural/urban disparities.
- Service to all groups and sections of society and respect for the diversity of populations - in particular women, children, the disabled, the elderly, people with HIV and AIDS, offenders, and people with homosexual or bisexual orientations.
- Promotion of the participation of all people in planning, policy formulation and programme development.
• The implementation of effective, efficient and financially viable intervention strategies.
• Striving for excellence and the provision of quality social welfare services.
• Ensuring transparency and accountability in both private and public services.
• Ensuring accessibility to services and programmes.
• Ensuring that services are appropriate and acceptable to those whom they are supposed to serve.
• Fostering mutual support and recognition of the uniqueness and interdependence of all people in the spirit of *uBuntu* which balances individual rights with responsibility towards self and others.

## CODE OF ETHICS

Social work has an internationally and nationally developed Code of Ethics. Clearly in developing any Code of Ethics the challenge is between balancing prescription and flexibility – the need to be specific enough to provide guidance, while recognizing that in the real world practitioners will, of necessity, experience various ethical dilemmas which no Code of Ethic might provide any resolution for. Codes of ethics might serve as deterrents to criminal and/or unprofessional conduct insofar as external negative sanctions are imposed when one violates the Code, and thus help to protect the interests of service users. Ultimately, a Code will only be useful insofar the practitioner’s “moral impulse” – the need to “be for the other” – connects with the provisions of the Code.

## LEGISLATION

This following examples of legislation that influence and impact social work practice should be noted:

Advisory Board on Social Development Act, 2001, Act 3 of 2001  
Criminal procedure Act, Act 51 of 1977  
Constitution of RSA, Act 108 of 1996
Children's Act 2005, Act 38 of 2005  
Children's Amendment Act, 2006, Act 19 of 2006  
Child Care Act, Act 74 of 1983  
Domestic Violence Act, Act 116 of 1998  
Mental Health Act, Act No. 17 of 2005  
Older Persons Act, Act 13 of 2006  
Prevention and Treatment of Drug Dependency Act 20 of 1992  
Social Assistance Act, 2004, Act 30 of 2004  
Social Service Professions Act, Act 110 of 1978, as amended  

International legislative agreements e.g. UN Declaration of Human  
African Charters on human rights; rights of the child  

**ACCOUNTABILITY**  

Mandated by various constituencies and by legislation to act in the best interests of individuals, families, organizations and communities social work is thus accountable to various stakeholders – employers, courts and client systems at various levels. As social work is regulated it is directly accountable to the Ministry and the Department of Social Development. Supervision and consultation are strategies used to ensure accountability.
References


