BOOK REVIEW

Helen Donnellan and Gordon Jack. (2013). The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers; Hitting the Ground Running. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London. ISBN 978-1-84905-533-8

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Introduction

Final year students spend a significant proportion of their education and training on placement, in a variety of workplaces, so it is helpful to know how organisations operate and what to expect in looking forward to their first social work post after qualifying. This book provides a helpful overview of the rewards and pitfalls of the all-important transition from student to employee. The book aims primarily to provide advice and guidance for new entrants to the social work profession taking up their first post in any setting in the UK. It is designed to ease the transition from student social worker to qualified professional by providing the practical guidance and support needed in the first year or two in post. It also addresses the needs of the managers and supervisors in training and staff development providing programmes of early support for trainee social workers in England, UK.

Organisation of the book

The book has four parts which mark out the progressive milestones of social workers along the route from the initial "thud" of professional status, then their warming to the task, jumping hurdles and making their way safely to the finishing line at the end of the first year or two in practice, better prepared for the next lap. The chapters in each part gather together topics relevant to that particular staging post of professional development. Some issues, for example, *orientation*, are relevant at one specific point in time and are covered in depth in one part only. Others, such as *provision, coping* and *support*, have been integrated into more than one part, to reflect changing needs and thinking as social workers move through induction and beyond. Each part concludes with an additional resources section, signposting readers to useful sources of the most up-to-date tools and guidance for practice in each of the four UK countries. Throughout Part One, Chapters 1-3 focus on the first few weeks of welcome, introduction and orientation to Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW's) and aim to ease their transition into the workplace. In these very early stages the change from student to employee, the development of a professional orientation, workplace motivators, continuing professional development frameworks and formal NQSW programs are primary considerations at this time.

In Part Two, the text moves on from early orientation to consider some of the priority issues which present themselves during the next few months. The focus here is on the more formal induction processes used by employing agencies, including time management and planning for continuing professional development. Chapter 4 begins by considering preparations for Day One, as well as the programme of basic introduction or an orientation to the workplace and concludes with some consideration of learning and reflection to anchor these two themes firmly at the beginning of professional development.

Chapter 5 suggests drawing on the capabilities and standards set out in the relevant UK Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework, at a level that is relevant to employment as well as the requirements to be met within any formal NQSW program, new learning needs and self-confidence. A model for self-assessment is suggested that will help readers to identify their strengths and turn any gaps into a range of learning objectives, helping them to create an initial professional development plan which can be used to inform decisions about the training and development needs planned to attend over the coming months, as well as forming the basis for discussion with the supervisor about the types of work that needed to be built into individual caseloads.

Chapter 6 helps in managing initial expectations about roles and tasks and some of the agency demands and bureaucratic burden, by focusing attention on a 'hierarchy of needs', with good induction, providing the foundation on which to build future development. Chapters 7, 8 & 9, focus on the period social workers experience after induction, as NQSW's take on an increasing workload and begin to deal with some of the stresses as well as the satisfactions of the job itself. This includes exploring the

ways of finding support from a wide range of sources.

Part Three begins with Chapter 7 which carefully examines time management and the work/life balance, while also considering organisational demands. The pressures which have led the demands that social work organisations now place on their staff and some of the tensions that exist between the agency's expectations are acknowledged. The authors encourage readers to examine how well they are using their time to meet the organisational demands placed upon them. There is a need to identify some practical strategies which might help individuals to feel more in control of their workload. It is acknowledged that many social workers feel that the normal working day is just not long enough to meet all the deadlines necessary which puts pressure on establishing and maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

As the work becomes more streamlined and practitioners deal more confidently with the range of tasks allocated to them, the final part of the book considers the influence of their employing organisation on them and how they can begin to have some influence on the organisation. This part aims to help the social worker develop a better understanding of their own position, practice and role 'fit' within the overall organisation, taking account of three primary aspects - structure, culture and climate - which together are likely to have a significant impact on their experience of the organisation and the quality of their working life.

Chapter 8 examines how to find support from personal resources, from others and the organisation. Chapter 9 examines the practitioner's role in supervision. Given the complex and often ambiguous nature of social work, in a context of almost endemic change, the challenge lies in recognising and working with all of the tensions and how they are managed within the organisation.

The last three chapters in Part Four consists of positive coping strategies for working with increasingly complex and stressful situations, as well as the influence of the organisation on individual practitioners and, conversely, how they can begin to have an influence on the organisation. Having considered the pressures on social workers, it is very appropriate that Chapter 10 explores a range of demands, constraints and personal traits affecting workplace stress and job satisfaction, as well as identifying helpful strategies and positive coping mechanisms. Chapter 11 identifies what is needed to maintain personal morale and job satisfaction through the first year and beyond as a qualified social worker in a satisfying organisational climate and workplace culture. Chapter 12 explores some of the links between critical reflection, reflective practice and learning organisations. It concludes with key considerations in managing increasing complexity.

Support for new staff

During their first year of employment in social work, new social workers should share access to regular and focused support. A NQSW may be starting work with a completely new employer or be familiar with the employer or

workplace, either having been squandered through their qualifying education and training or having undertaken their final placement there. If starting work following secondment, having previously worked in the organisation in an unqualified capacity, it is almost more important for the professional to be able to establish him/herself in the new qualified social worker role.

Thinking of a situation of being a new worker, perhaps the first day in the final placement of qualifying training, four questions are raised to evaluate the welcome arrangements. These include: How the trainee was greeted and by whom? What equipment was ready for their arrival? What was particularly welcoming? Finally, what was missing that would have approved the experience?

There are suggestions of what is best practice in a good introduction for a new employee and would be included on the first day of employment. The whole team, including reception, clerical and administrative staff, should have made some preparation for the arrival of the new staff member. The manager and/or supervisor on the first day, needs to be present to make personal introductions as well as someone identified to act as the mentor or facilitate a new settling in. Preparation of a programme of wider orientation, both within and beyond the immediate team or organisation, including visits and introductions to other teams and resources within the employing organisation, as well as key personnel in other organisations and the local area the social worker should expect to be welcomed by their line manager and to meet their supervisor, if this is going to be someone different. They should be responsible for introducing the new professional to everyone in the team, including senior managers and administrators and lyrical staff, as well as to social work colleagues. Some organisations have adopted the practice of identifying a particular person in the team to act as a mentor to a new member of staff and can be very helpful in the first few weeks to have someone else to whom the new team member may turn for help, information and advice, in addition to the line manager and/or supervisor. This is a particularly effective arrangement because those providing the initial support are able to share the load and the social worker may feel more comfortable because of not having to go to the same person all the time. Depending on where they are practising there may also be an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) program co-ordinator, or other member of the organisation's training respond department with responsibility for NQSW's on whom to call for additional advice and support.

The book provides very practical guidance for social workers in getting started in their new post. These suggestions include: allowing for the learning process to develop. Accepting reports do not all have to be perfect, good enough and on time is often a more realistic combination. The new person is reminded that he or she is not on their own and if they are in doubt to ask for advice.

The authors explain the tremendous pressures from fewer resources, deeper, more entrenched presenting problems, increasing public expectations of services, particularly in terms of limiting risk as well as negative media representations of social work, in an increasingly litigious society and service users and carers turning more

readily to the Courts. Where funding is often closely tied to meeting government performance targets, the workplace culture of many organisations employing social workers routinely prioritises operational efficiency and accountability over the wellbeing and professional development of their staff. This frequently means that the *quantity* of their activities and outputs is deemed to be more important than the *quality* of the work that they do. There are also employers who recognise the value of nurturing and developing their staff, within the overall culture of what is often referred to as a learning organisation.

Writing style

The writing style throughout this book is very personal, speaking directly to the reader in different stages of professional development in social work. It has the tone of a very well informed and sensitive personal tutor. Throughout the book there are tabulated suggestions or boxes, which could usefully be copied and put on the social worker's office space as keys to good practice. These include a reflective journal learning log: the suggestion of interactions, reflections on issues raised and future action.

Developing professional expertise in Chapter 2 offers very thoughtful questions which the reader can consider. One box entitled "Defining an 'expert' asks the reader if they can think of someone who you regard as an 'expert' social worker? What contributes to your understanding of this person as an expert?" Some possible reasons for this judgement are proposed. Another self-assessment proposal is assessing your professional motivation. This offers a scale of 1-10 for several factors inviting readers to identify the number which best describes their current level of satisfaction for each motivator.

The authors are significantly open about the pressures on staff to collect ever more information to meet the needs of regulation and external inspection. Organisational systems of this sort tend to reduce any sense of personal obligation and responsibility and processes which focus on ticking boxes can feel like an attempt to control the work of individuals, limiting their professional autonomy. This guide demonstrates practical wisdom of the authors which has clearly accumulated from their vast experience of social work practice, education and research. It is not just an invaluable guide for newly qualified social workers, but an essential working tool throughout a successful career in the profession.

Other characteristics and considerations

The key learning and support mechanism of supervision throughout a professional career in social work is clarified in Chapter 9 with very thoughtful tables and boxes. A box considering supervision style encourages the reader to think about their experiences of supervision, either in their

present job or from their qualifying training and to identify what they learnt about the following issues: "What supervision means for you? How you want to use supervision? What worries you most about supervision? What sort of supervision seems to suit you best?"

A survey of the expectations, hopes and fears of supervision which both the trainee social worker and the supervisor could consider asks what they are expecting supervision to be, what they expect it to provide. The fears and hopes of supervision could then be addressed. Then there is an open-ended question defining what supervision will be, as well as a identifying about what interests both the student and the supervisor about supervision. The differences in responses to these questions between those of the social worker and the supervisor could be examined with an evaluation of the need for any actions to be taken, either together or separately, to reduce their impact.

As the day-to-day practice becomes more streamlined and the social worker becomes more confident in dealing with the range of tasks allocated, the final part of the book considers the influence of the employing organisation on the social worker and, conversely, how he or she can begin to have some influence on the organisation. This part aims to help the professional to develop a better understanding of their own position, practice and role to 'fit' within the overall organisation, taking account of three primary aspects - structure, culture and climate - which together are likely to have a significant impact on their experience of the organisation and the quality of their working life.

Chapter 10, for example, explores a range of demands, constraints and personal traits affecting workplace stress and job satisfaction, as well as identifying helpful strategies and positive coping mechanisms. In a table about identifying stressors, the social worker is asked to reflect on a challenging situation they have dealt with or work involving service users, managers, colleagues or other professionals. This exercise suggests that the social worker notes some of their thoughts in answer to the following questions: "What happened? What were the most upsetting aspects? What impact did the experience have on you at the time? And what were the longer term effects of the experience? Chapter 11 entitled "Working in a satisfying climate" returns to look again at the team and teamwork by considering the development of the of the social worker as an 'effective operator' within their particular organisational context.

Conclusion

This book is quite appropriately entitled "The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers; Hitting the Ground Running." Career development is fully considered by addressing leadership as well as being led in the final chapter on "Managing increasing complexity" with a table on Leadership Skills as well as boxes on: "Framework for reflection and action" and "Appraising management skills". Not only is this book an invaluable asset to trainee social workers, but it is difficult to imagine how any social

worker could succeed throughout their career without the sensitive, practical questions and guidance which are provided here. Overall, this book is an insightful and informative volume dedicated to the subject of its interest. I have no hesitation in recommending it, with enthusiasm, to its potential readers. We need more volumes of this type, books that adopt the analytical stance that aim to tell the reader 'how it is'.

Overall, I recommend this volume to social workers - those established and particularly those who are training and newly qualified, as a substantial resource.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.