



Careers in

Social Work



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NOTE:
 Wherever you see this icon  please go to www.graduatecareers.com.au>>What Job For You>>Career Profiles>>Social Work>>More Information for continued discussion and/or useful websites on that subject.

Overview

Social Workers assist people, groups and communities address their problems. With its focus on helping people in need, Social Work is a profession committed to social justice and respect for human rights. Social Workers provide a wide range of services to help people who are distressed or overwhelmed by problems such as poverty, substance abuse, homelessness, conflict or parental difficulties.

Services which Social Workers provide include one on one counselling, group mediation, advocacy, social and financial support, legal representation, shelter and referral advice. Some Social Workers contribute to policy development or advise governments on specific welfare issues, such as domestic violence. In this way Social Workers can influence how services are delivered and how society responds to social issues.

Social Workers may perform the following tasks.

- Counsel individuals through a crisis that may be due to death, illness, relationship breakdown or other reasons.
- Provide clients with information on services to assist them.
- Provide letters of referral or reports that will help clients to obtain other services such as crisis accommodation or social security benefits.
- Guide small groups of people to share their experiences, support each other and learn social skills.
- Help community groups plan and carry out programs to help themselves (eg. assist newly arrived immigrants to form an association).
- Research community problems, needs and solutions through client contact and records of welfare and health agencies.
- Analyse statistics and write reports.
- Develop policy and evaluate programs.
- Manage and train staff.
- Attend professional meetings.

//Social Workers advocate for people with disabilities to ensure they have access to...education, accommodation and employment//

- Lobby to change social welfare policies and procedures in the pursuit of social justice for all members of the community.

Social Work has many fields of practice, making it a diverse and rewarding career path with multiple opportunities to make a difference. Social Workers are found in hospitals, welfare departments, either government or private (such as employment services, justice, housing and youth services), women's refuges, city councils, mental health, disability and aged care facilities and schools, to name just a few.

Social Work is one of the professions in the human services industry which is growing and in demand. Graduates are being heavily recruited from both within and outside Australia, especially in areas such as child protection. The skills gained as a Social Worker are portable and Australian graduates are highly sort after in countries such as the UK.

To become a professional Social Worker a Bachelor of Social Work degree from an accredited course is required. Australian qualifications are highly regarded across the world.

Employment conditions are fairly flexible, with part-time work often available to accommodate family and other activities. Salaries depend on whether you work in the public or private sector and the state and territory in which you live. Salaries are competitive with other graduate careers. 

Social Work career pathways provide an incredibly varied choice. Depending on the field of practice chosen, Social Workers utilise skills and experience in management, education, research, policy development, politics and community planning.

Fields of Practice

Australia

The following is a list of the current fields of practice that are available to you on graduation.

Addictions

People can have an addiction to a substance or to an activity such as gambling. Services are provided by specialists in patient and therapeutic communities or outpatient community facilities. They may provide methadone programs, counselling and therapy or self-help programs. Drug education and prevention are also focuses for programs. Many different professionals work in this field, including medical practitioners, psychologists, nurses and Social Workers. Social Work practitioners may be involved in delivering group programs or individual counselling or working with families.

Aged Care

Social Workers care for elderly people in a range of contexts in hospitals, community centres, nursing homes, etc. As older people face declining health, or difficulties in adjusting to their changing lives, and the capacity to care for themselves decreases, Social Workers take on greater roles within their families. Social Workers help with assessments of what kind of care a person needs, such as preventing exploitation. Specialist work in the aged care area consists of dementia care, bereavement issues and managing depression.

Child Protection

The protection of children from abuse, neglect and exploitation is one of the areas of highest employment of Social Workers. It is highly specialised and is conducted by statutory authorities. A worker's task is to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect; conduct risk assessments and, in cases of serious protection issues, remove the children from the family. Practitioners work in partnership with other professionals, such as the police and solicitors. The Social Worker may be required to act as a witness in court, secure alternative placements, such as foster care, and write reports.

Disability Services

People with disabilities and their families sometimes require assistance from Social Workers to ensure they have access to services and other support to live a full life. People with disabilities are often overlooked in society, and are excluded from many activities due to physical barriers. Social Workers advocate for people with disabilities to ensure they have appropriate access to support services, and to areas such as education, accommodation and employment.

Family and Relationship Counselling

Support and help is provided through counselling and education programs and, perhaps, mediation or dispute resolution. Social Workers will provide these services in general counselling agencies, but also in services that assist victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. The clients may be either children or adults.

Income Support

Income security is a large area of service provision, with the main government provider being Centrelink, a department that employs large numbers of Social Workers to assist people to access their entitlements and other support services. People who are struggling on low incomes due to age, disability or unemployment are often in crisis and have difficulties securing accommodation and other basic human needs. Social Workers are employed by government and non-government agencies to provide services such as counselling, information support and referral at these times of crisis. The work in this area consists of advocacy, referral, assessment of need and financial counselling.



Justice

Social Workers are often called in to work with offenders. They seek to address the causes of the behaviours, recommend services for further assistance, write court reports, give advice to courts and prison authorities and support families of offenders. Social Workers are employed by corrections or justice departments to provide supervision and support to people on community corrections programs. Social Workers may be employed by detention facilities and are often involved in suicide risk assessment. Alternatively, Social Workers are employed by victim support, child witness or community legal services.

Medical and Health Care

In the general health care area Social Workers deal with people who have all kinds of illnesses and conditions at all stages of life. In large hospitals, a Social Worker may be assigned to a ward, such as paediatrics, burns or oncology. Community health workers focus on supporting people with health concerns in their homes, such as frail elderly people or mothers with young children. As illness is often an unexpected and traumatic event, the worker is often dealing with people who are in crisis, and therefore needs to have knowledge of health conditions and their social impacts.

"I work for Health and like the security that this gives me working for the government. I get to meet different sorts of people from all walks of life, many that have been brought to me because of major trauma in their life, experienced either by them or a loved one. The job is hugely challenging but it is great to have so much variety in my job."

– Fiona Noble-Emory, Senior Social Worker Royal Perth Hospital

//Social Work is a values-based profession, and requires a strong commitment to social justice and human rights.//

Psychiatric and General Mental Health Care

Although many Social Workers will deal with people who have a mental illness there are also specialised services in which workers are involved, for example, either in acute care hospitals or community mental health services. Social Workers in these settings can be involved in therapy and counselling as well as support. They address welfare issues such as income, accommodation and employment, and may also act as advocates.

Youth

Working with adolescents is another complex and challenging area of practice where Social Workers are employed. Young people require assistance if they separate from their families, become homeless or addicted to drugs or alcohol. They may need help when transitioning from school to training or the workplace. Social Workers in this area can be found in schools, at youth refuges, counselling services or education and training services.

The fields of practice listed above represent some of the many areas that Social Workers can specialise in after graduation. For example, those working in large hospitals in urban areas may wish to specialise in oncology or palliative care, or accident and emergency. Fields such as mental health and child protection are highly specialised and require specific skills, these may be provided through training in the workplace or through professional development and postgraduate courses.

The demand for Social Workers in all these fields is strong. However, there are some areas where this is especially true – good examples are aged care and gerontological research. As the Australian population ages, the need for services such as community and residential care will increase dramatically.

The vast choice and variety of work environments and contexts that involve Social Work means that there are interesting career paths to suit every person attracted to this profession, with new and challenging areas continuing to unfold in the 21st Century. New fields of practice are developed when society is confronted with new social problems, eg. services for people with HIV/AIDS were unheard of 30 years ago. Social Workers have been at the forefront of service delivery to asylum seekers, victims of the child sex trade and all the major terrorist and disaster responses.

International

Australian Social Workers can practise around the world. There are two main areas for career opportunities overseas which provide different types of experience, but require slightly different specialist skills. Although they share common Social Work values, knowledge and skills, there are different types of employment access processes and procedures.

Firstly, opportunities for practice in developed countries are especially strong in Britain and Ireland and, to slightly lesser degree, in the USA and Canada. To work in these countries Australian graduates have to meet certain professional standards:

- **all countries** – provision of documented evidence of Social Work qualifications
- **Britain and Ireland** – provision of practise competency evidence
- **many states of the USA** – competency assessment.

Opportunities overseas for graduates include such fields as: child protection; children and family services; work in disability, mental health and general health; offending, drug and alcohol services; and aged care. Salaries tend to be higher than in Australia but the cost of living can also be higher.

Secondly, developing countries provide a host of challenges for professionals in this field, and are predominantly focused in the area of development work. Australian graduates tend to work in many of these parts of the world. Social Workers in non-English speaking countries will often find themselves being partnered with translators. You will find that most activities are primarily aimed at child and health services.

Access to positions in this area tends to follow two pathways. The first is through Australian volunteer organisations. This is an effective means for gaining invaluable experience. The second is through international organisations, such as the United Nations (UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR) or through NGOs (Save the Children, ChildFund and Care Australia). This requires extensive specialist education and experience in the area of practice.



Education and Training

At the time of writing this booklet there was no legal registration for Social Workers in any state of Australia. However, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (www.aasw.asn.au) is the standard-setting body for Social Work in Australia, and many jobs require eligibility for membership of the AASW.

To become a Social Worker eligible for membership of the AASW you will need a Bachelor of Social Work degree. Courses are usually a minimum of four years full-time study. Alternatively, you can also undertake a two-year undergraduate degree with prerequisite subjects and an additional two-year Social Work course.

Requirements for university entry may vary between universities, and some institutions also specialise in different fields of Social Work. At the time of writing this booklet there were 25 accredited courses in Australia, three of these courses were offered as distance education.

Many courses require a period of field placement. For example, students must spend a minimum of 140 seven-hour working days (980 hours) in at least two field placements. No placement can be shorter than 40 days. The most usual way of achieving this is via full-time ('block') placements, or by concurrent placements that will be of at least two days per week. Students must undertake placements in at least two fields of practice and demonstrate ability in a diverse range of Social Work interventions.

Choosing a course could be based on location or on the specialist programs offered by the university in your area of interest. It is recommended you research a number of courses to ensure you undertake the option that best suits you.

After graduation many new Social Workers continue to learn through Continuing Professional Development offered by a range of providers.

//The Bachelor of Social Work degree can also be combined with...Law, Criminology, Health or Psychology providing even more possibilities for interesting work and dual careers...//

The AASW encourages and supports this through Continuing Professional Education points. The Bachelor of Social Work degree is just the beginning of professional learning. Once in the workplace, new graduates require supervision and support to integrate their university education with the more practical and specialist demands of the job.

The Bachelor of Social Work degree can also be combined with other disciplines like Law, Criminology, Health or Psychology providing even more possibilities for interesting work and dual careers.

Postgraduate options enable Social Workers to specialise in many fields of practice. Graduate Certificate courses are available in a variety of fields including: Death, Dying and Palliative Care; Professional Practice Supervision; Mental Health Policy and Practice; Community Care; Human Rights; Community Development Practice and Social Policy; Counselling; Social Welfare; and Child Protection Practice.

Masters of Social Work and PhD options are available at most universities who offer an undergraduate course. These options for further study allow graduates to pursue research interests and gain further professional research skills.

Personal Attributes Required for Social Work

Anyone who wishes to go into the Social Work profession needs to find fulfilment in helping others and have good communication skills. Social Work is a values-based profession, and requires a strong commitment to social justice and human rights. There is also a need to be able to manage complex human situations in which people are in a great deal of emotional pain. Social Work graduates need to be good at looking at problems objectively, taking initiative, have an ability to question and analyse situations, be comfortable about being part of a team or working alone, be non-judgmental, able to prioritise competing demands and be able to read and communicate in complex organisational environments.

New Graduates and the Search for Work

New Social Workers are generally offered temporary contracts in their first year out, and the majority of roles are picked up by word of mouth. Permanent or longer term positions are advertised and can be quite competitive. Recruitment for large

government departments is often offered through a pool recruitment, where potential employees are selected and are put on a list for when a spot becomes available.

Community service agencies will be interested in your Social Work skills, good academic record, relevant experience and good referees. However, it is often the case that the person who is most proficient at communicating their skills, attributes and experiences to a potential employer is the one that will be successful at securing the position.

Relevant experience is probably the most important attribute a new graduate can have and apart from the fieldwork placements provided by the university, volunteer work is a great way of gaining it. Volunteering provides great networking opportunities and often gains you a foot in the door. Career advisors at your university's Careers Service can help you with information and help in this area.

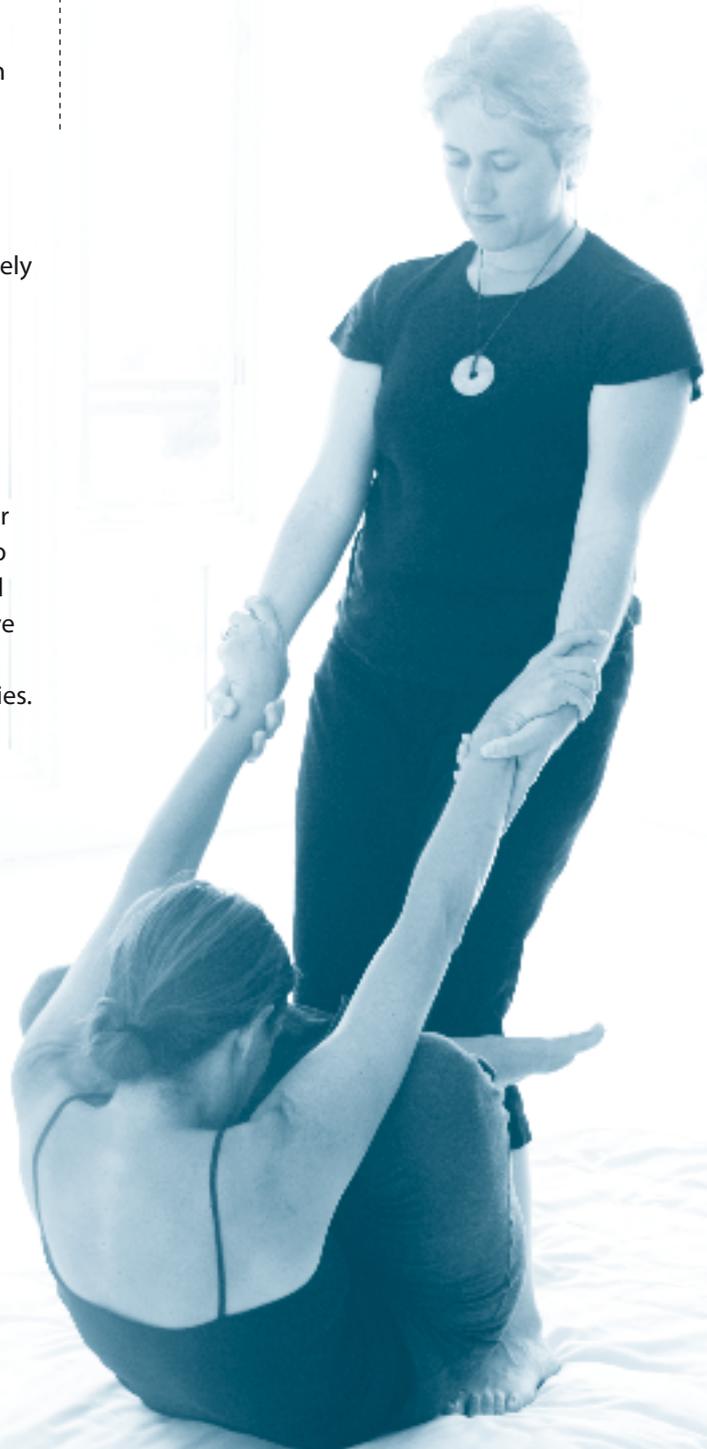
New graduates need to use their fieldwork placement supervisors as referees when they commence looking for work, so a good and ongoing relationship with these people is extremely important.

Employment Trends in the Human Services Industry

Social Workers have a history of being employed as counsellors within government departments or community centres. However, this has changed to some degree, allowing graduates to be employed in many and varied roles that may or may not have the title 'Social Worker', both within government and now, increasingly, in non-government agencies. The trend is to create generic positions in which the employer will accept a variety of professional qualifications, eg. a school counsellor position may be filled by either a psychologist or a Social

Worker. The human services industry is also moving towards the employment of professionals in a wide variety of disciplines (including Social Work), recognising the importance of their skills and body of knowledge. A good example of this is mental health, where a team may be made up of many professions including nursing, psychology and occupational therapy.

The non-government sector of the human services industry has expanded since government policy moved to funding services which were once the domain of the public sector. With this increase in funds, accompanied by higher demands for more professional services, Social Workers are now involved in the delivery, coordination and management of services in both the government and non-government sectors.



Social Workers are now being employed in such varied occupations as:

- Community Development Workers
- Cultural Development Officers
- Counsellors
- Disability Services Instructors
- Parole/Probation Officers
- Recreation Officers
- Rehabilitation Officers
- Residential Care Workers
- Welfare Workers
- Youth Workers.

Size of the Industry

- The health and community services industry is made up of a number of professional and para-professional workers, including Social Workers.
- According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the health and community services industry represents six per cent of Australia's Gross Domestic Product. (**Source:** State Accounts 2005)

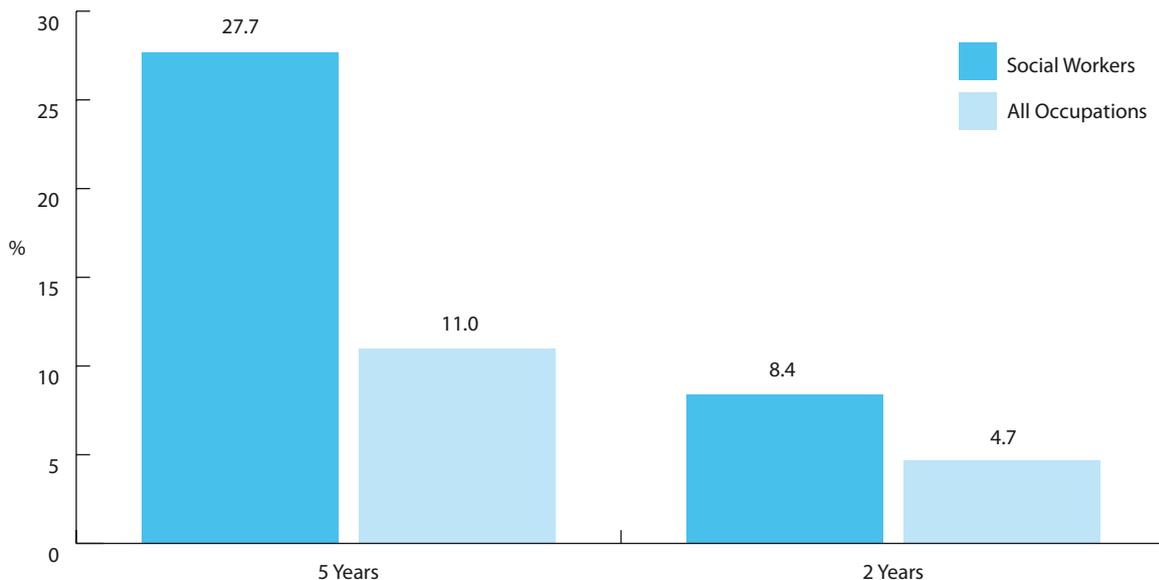
Employers

Social Workers are employed in a wide range of settings, in government as well as the private sector. Roles include:

- working with individual clients, groups or communities
- conducting research
- policy and program development
- management.

The two largest employers of Social Workers are the state departments of child protection services and the health sector, where they take on roles in hospitals, community health centres, mental health and other community health-related facilities.

The federal government employs Social Workers in a variety of policy planning and direct delivery roles, such as income maintenance and support, Commonwealth rehabilitation services, family and community work and health and aged care. At the local government level, professionals in this area contribute to the planning, administration and management of community and welfare services.



//Employment Growth of Social Work//

The graph shows employment growth (per cent) over five years and two years to February 2006 for this occupation, compared with all occupations.

(**Source:** ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia – to February 2006. DEEWR trend data)

Large non-government organisations employ Social Workers to do project, research and policy work and to provide direct services to their clients. Such work includes:

- helping families and groups deal with poverty and depression associated with unemployment
- working with those affected by a mental or physical illness or disability
- counselling individuals and couples facing crises in their family relationships.

Examples of these organisations are:

- Anglicare
- Centacare
- Relationships Australia
- The Smith Family.

There are also many locally driven initiatives and self-help groups that may involve Social Workers in an official capacity as part of their work, or as volunteers on management committees.

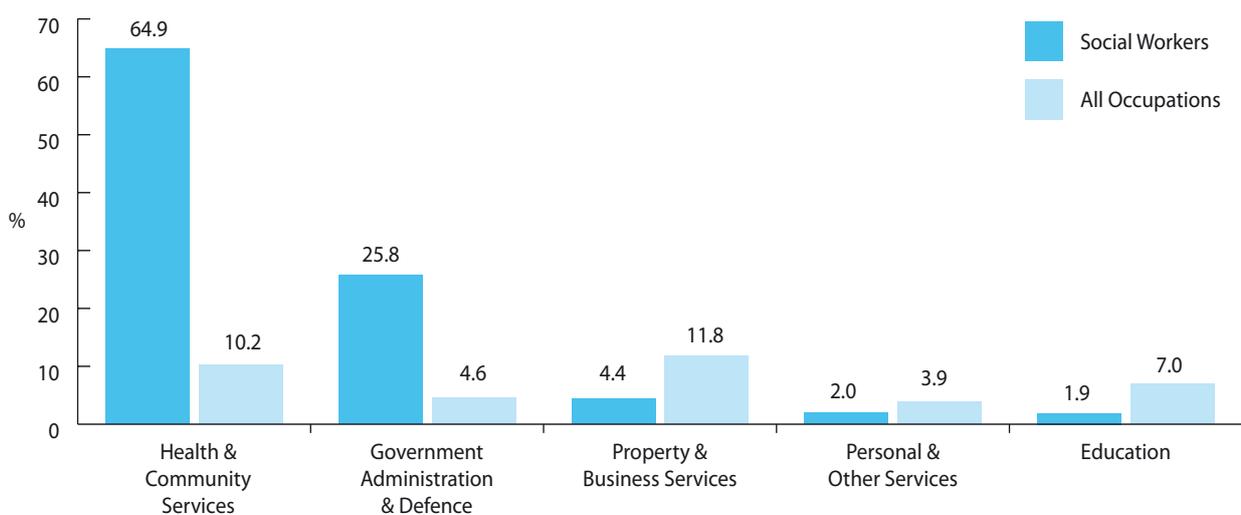
Social Workers may also be employed in smaller community-based organisations to coordinate a range of services. Some enter private practice, in fields such as management or organisational consulting, family therapy or counselling. Corporate organisations may also employ Social Work professionals in a variety of areas to perform roles such as community development work in mining companies or as rehabilitation consultants.

Employment

The federal government's Job Outlook website rates the employment prospects of the Social Work profession (Source: <http://jobsearch.gov.au/joboutlook>

– February 2008) to be:

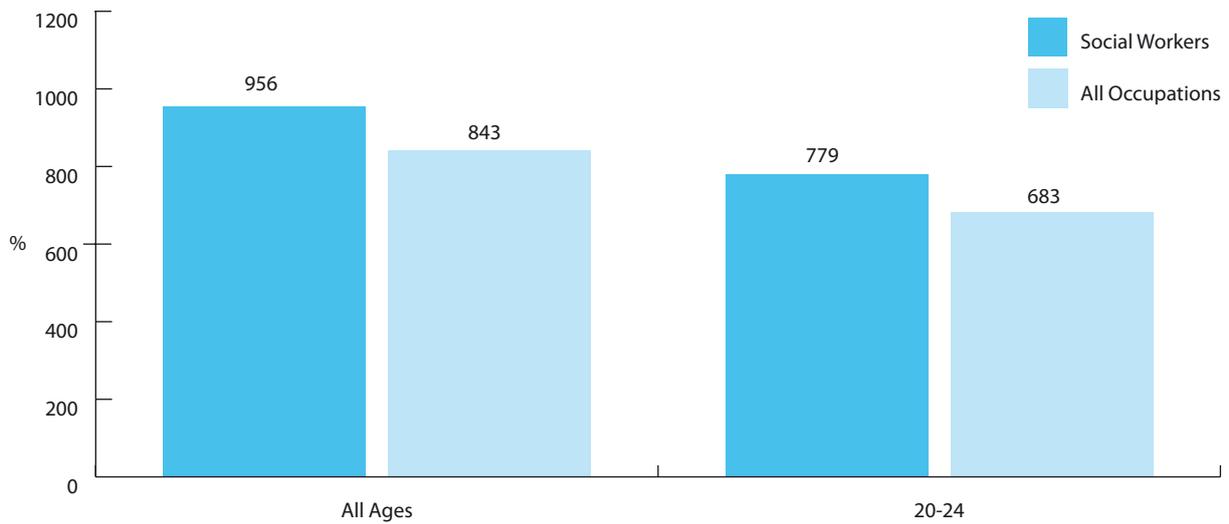
- job prospects – good
- employment to 2011-12 – strong. Employment (14,200 in February 2007) rose strongly in the previous five years, and rose moderately in the long-term (10 years)
- proportion of full-time jobs – above average (78 per cent)
- average weekly hours – 35.1 (compared to 41.8 for all occupations)
- earnings – above average
- unemployment – average
- employing industries:
 - Community Care Services
 - Hospitals and Nursing Homes
 - Government Administration
 - Other Health Services
- vacancy level – moderate:
 - 60 per cent from job changing
 - 27 per cent from job openings
 - 13 per cent from new jobs. 



//Main Employing Industries (per cent share)//

The graph shows, for this occupation, the industries (up to five) with the largest share of employment, compared with the share for all occupations. The industries are based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC).

(Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia – average 2005)

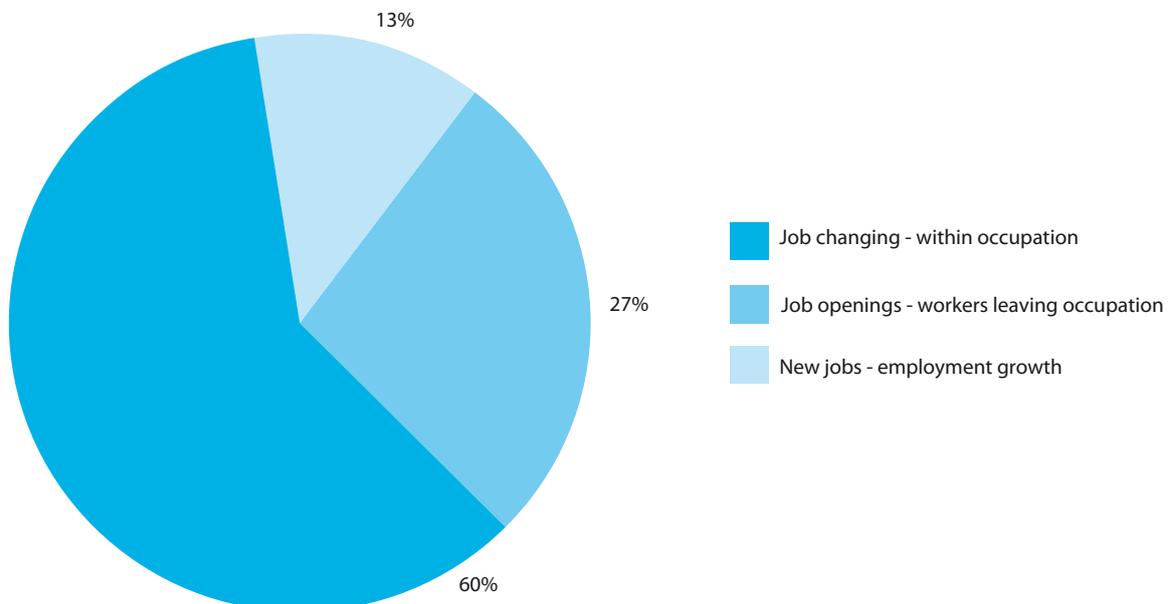


//Weekly Earnings (full-time and before tax)//

The graph shows weekly earnings – for full-time work and before tax – for workers of all ages for this occupation, compared with all occupations. Earnings for 20 to 24 year olds are shown for comparison. These figures cannot be used in determining a particular wage rate or as an indication of what a particular person will earn in that job.

(Source: ABS Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, August 2005)

To find out the latest information on salaries for Social Work graduates go to www.gradsonline.com.au. 



//Sources of Job Openings (%)//

The graph shows, for this occupation, a split of vacancies (share – per cent) into three main sources: new jobs (employment growth); job openings (workers leaving the occupation); and job changing – workers changing jobs but remaining in the same occupation.

(Source: DEEWR estimates of future employment growth, DEEWR consultancy with CEET)

Career Pathways

Social Workers usually commence working in a service delivery role in order to gain skills and experience in dealing with a diverse range of clients and situations and to practise the different methods and interventions. Career paths can take many directions – from a service delivery role Social Workers can move into positions where they are supervising staff, coordinating programs and reporting on outcomes and managing finances. Another pathway may be into policy development, which can influence the delivery of a service in an organisation or whole government department. Education and training may be another; Social Workers can provide professional development to other staff. Social Workers can also be found teaching, for example at TAFE in New Opportunities for Women programs and the Community Services fields. Teaching at university is another option, and after a number of years this could be accompanied by research work. A university career would require postgraduate qualifications, usually at least a Masters, but preferably a PhD is highly desirable.

“There is nothing better than an interactive lecture or tutorial where students are involved and energised. Some of my key learning experiences have come from my discussions with students. I find the job satisfying when students have what we call ‘epiphanic moments’; moments when difficult ideas suddenly make sense and students grow personally and professionally from the learning.”

– Dr Angela Barns, Lecturer

If a Social Worker wants to become more specialised and, perhaps, an expert in their field, further training can assist. Some organisations may wish to offer positions to highly trained and skilled practitioners involving highly complex and difficult cases, and these roles are held to be senior positions in the organisations. These roles may also have a mentoring or staff support dimension. There are more and more Social Workers taking up private practice; some offer counselling services, while others may work in an education, training or research capacity.

Social Work skills are extremely transferable and can be used to enter other industries or professions. For example, there has been a long association between Social Work and politics. Social Workers have been involved in the union movement as well as running for parliament. One of the most famous Social Workers is Margaret Whitlam, who worked at Parramatta Hospital while her husband was Deputy Leader of the Opposition.



//Career Showcase

- Life as a Case Manager at Berry Street Victoria//

Berry Street Victoria (BSV) is the largest independent child welfare organisation in Victoria. It is often the last resort for thousands of children and young people who have been denied the most vital ingredient for human development – a good childhood. These young people often cannot live safely at home because of traumatic family violence, serious abuse and neglect.

BSV never gives up doing whatever it takes for these young people because it believes that all children have the right to grow up in families and communities where they feel safe, nurtured and have hope for the future. When BSV employs staff, it is looking for people with a similar kind of approach.

BSV employs people with Social Work backgrounds in varying roles including: direct service; case management; clinical work; management roles; and education, and the work itself is quite varied.

During an average a day a case manager might:

- **Work with clients:** Joe, a 12 year old who has been with BSV for six months, is having difficulties at school. He has recently been removed from his home and is struggling to maintain a relationship with his mother while fitting in to his new foster family. He has recently demonstrated a great deal of aggression at school and his teachers are not sure they can continue to meet his needs. You, as the case manager, would jump in the car and head off to talk to Joe about his recent suspension. This includes hearing what Joe has to say and providing him with some understanding of how his past is impacting on his behaviour, and developing with Joe some new ways of behaving when he is upset.
- **Advocate for clients' needs:** When you met with Joe earlier he told you that he wanted to go back to the swimming lessons he had been taking while he was at home. He also told you that he was really angry because his mum had told him that her lawyer had said that he might not be able to go back to live with her. Lastly, he mentioned that he has a toothache. As a result you are now setting up swimming lessons, arranging a dental visit, trying to track down past dental records and liaising with mum about the impact of her message regarding reunification.
- **Write up case notes and other documentation:** A large part of case management is about documentation. You will need to document all of the steps you have taken in Joe's interests and the details of your meeting this morning. You may also need to provide an update to the Department of Human Services regarding Joe which means spending a great deal of time trying to track down information on Joe's past to fill in the missing details. Some of this information may end up in court, so you need to be very careful to ensure it is of the best quality possible.
- **Provide advice regarding your clients:** You have previously set up a meeting of professionals to meet with the school to discuss what strategies can be used to ensure Joe can remain at school. The meeting includes a psychologist, the school principal and school counsellor and a drug and alcohol worker. At that meeting you make suggestions on strategies that have worked for you when you are engaging and managing Joe. You assist in uncovering support services and other resources the school might be able to use. You also advise on history and future dates of importance for Joe.
- **Manage conflicting priorities and needs:** While you are in your professionals' meeting two other calls come in. You now need to meet with Joe's foster carers who are also concerned about his behaviour. This is difficult for you because you are trying to represent the interests of everyone involved, but you really need the foster carers to 'hang in there' over this rough period. You have also received a call to say that another of your clients, Mary, needs to see you urgently. She is distressed about the fact that she can't see her brothers and sisters at present. Now you need to try and fit these meetings in to one day – tomorrow.
- **Supervision:** At the end of the day you meet with your supervisor, as you do regularly, to debrief on everything that has been going on in your busy job. Your supervisor spends some time understanding your cases, helping you think through alternatives you might consider in the future and ensuring your planned actions all make sense. This is a really important part of your job because you leave knowing that you are supported by the organisation, that you are improving your skills everyday and that your clients have the best care possible.

GRADUATE PROFILES

Carina Bradbury

– Bachelor of Social Work

...the satisfaction you gain from this work, and the fact that...you get paid for doing things you would happily do voluntarily, make it all worthwhile!

We have been working with young mothers here for two and a half years now, some as young as 14. Many of those who began the program are now confident mothers and have great jobs. One such lady came to us at 19 with a two year old son. She was shy and felt judged about being a teenage parent. She is now a peer support worker in our Young Mums program, and confidently advocates for other young mums. The way that she now believes in herself is what this work is all about – and it feels great being someone who has contributed to that process. This is not about imposing solutions onto people, but listening to the community and working with their wants and needs.

This industry is not highly paid, but the satisfaction you gain from this work, and the fact that in most cases you get paid for doing things you would happily do voluntarily, make it all worthwhile!

Joan Christensen

– Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services),
Bachelor of Social Work (Honours), Postgraduate
Certificate in Counselling and Graduate Certificate in
Systemic Family Therapy (QAFT)



What you need as a Social Worker includes:...the ability to discuss and share information within a multidisciplinary team

During my time in the mental health sector I have enjoyed the challenges of working with people who were experiencing a mental illness – the impact on them, their family and the community. I have always endeavoured to educate people that mental issues are an 'illness' and to try to dispel the stigma and myths. Working rurally I enjoyed the changes of scenery, community involvement with clients, the friendliness of country people and their ability to be flexible and easy going.



I provided counselling, assessment, provisional diagnosis, psycho education and also worked creatively in engaging clients, eg. the implementation of an Art Therapy Group which was well received, with great feedback and has continued despite my having left that service.

The most satisfying part of this job was witnessing the transformation in people's lives from depression and anxiety to being able to live without a black cloud hanging over their lives and their being discharged from the service.

What you need as a Social Worker includes: compassion; practicality; good problem solving skills; creative thinking and the ability to hypothesise; the ability to discuss and share information within a multidisciplinary team; and an openness to consider all possibilities.

Louise Clarkson

– Bachelor of Social Work

The pay is good but popping out at lunchtime is usually not possible (all of those locked doors to go through).

My main duty is to assess for suicide and self harm, and to support prisoners with their adjustment to this stressful environment. I am part of a team of Social Workers and psychologists all working as counsellors on issues which can range from grief and loss to relationships, PTSD symptoms to more practical issues such as liaising with outside agencies on drug problems, child welfare or problems with public housing.

I have been working at the prison (which houses about 650 prisoners) for over three and a half years, and work closely with prison management, medical

//I have lectured to uniformed staff at the training school on vulnerable and difficult prisoners, and their management.//

Louise Clarkson – Bachelor of Social Work

and mental health staff to manage the people in our care. In addition I have lectured to uniformed staff at the training school on vulnerable and difficult prisoners, and their management. I am on a number of committees to improve services to prisoners.

Career advancement and diversity of placements can be through transfers to programs (delivering programs to address offending behaviour in sentenced prisoners) or to country placements or secondments to special projects. At present I am doing a Master of Social Work so that I can qualify for higher level jobs – such as the clinical supervisor of our team.

I enjoy my work very much. It's diverse, fast-paced and challenging as it involves work in a structured system where 'top down' is the norm, however I find that my colleagues and myself can effect change on occasion. The pay is good but popping out at lunchtime is usually not possible (all of those locked doors to go through). Teamwork is essential, as is a sense of humour.

Owen Robinson

– Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Social Work, Graduate Diploma in Management and Master of Arts (Counselling)

People need to consider that frequently clients like to feel confident that you have enough life experience to know about the issues they are facing...

I like seeing clients realise the patterns in their lives and where the behaviour was learned, then becoming aware of it in time to choose differently when they want to. I love seeing clients emerge from trauma responses they have been enduring, having trusted the therapeutic relationship enough to feel it all and then emerge from the emotional freefall they have lived through to find that they can thrive rather than simply survive. I love seeing couples find new hope in the counselling room, when sometimes they considered their relationship to be beyond repair. I love seeing parents who have struggled and agonised over their relationships with their children become assertive, have firmer boundaries and gain new respect for their children and from them. I love seeing women who have lived through domestic violence rediscover a sense of self that was harmed by years of not being allowed to be themselves or to express their own thoughts and preferences. I enjoy seeing former perpetrators of

domestic violence and verbal abuse become kinder to the people they care about, notice the value of doing that and, in turn, treat themselves better.

The job is so varied and challenging it is hugely rewarding to know you have made a significant impact on lives and on relationships, especially in highly challenging cases.

People need to consider that frequently clients like to feel confident that you have enough life experience to know about the issues they are facing, and that you will have enough training to have appropriate interventions for their problems. I would be hesitant to employ someone who had gone straight from high school into a degree and then sought a counselling position. Many people come into counselling from a range of other social service professions, such as: education; nursing; pastoral ministry; Social Work; etc.

Pauline Meemeduma

– Bachelor of Social Science (Social Work), Master of Social Work and PhD



I have worked with children orphaned by the Tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka as well as for UNICEF in Vietnam.

Working in international Social Work has meant I have worked in both general areas as well as in the specific field of child protection in a range of countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, the Seychelles and Singapore. I have found international work to be a wonderful experience and a significant area in which Australian practitioners can contribute. For example, I have worked with children orphaned by the tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka as well as for UNICEF in Vietnam. My work for UNICEF as a Social Worker concerned the development of child protection services in Vietnam. I have been involved in all



levels of practice development from working on the Draft National Child Protection Strategy, the development of training programs for Social Workers and child protection workers and community-based child protection service models to the design of risk assessment and case planning standards. I have also worked in children's homes as a volunteer, when I have free days from my regular work. To watch ideas grow and develop in partnership with the local people in each country gives me a great opportunity to truly see Social Work as an international profession.

Wendy Carter

– Bachelor of Arts (Honours Sociology), Bachelor of Social Work, Postgraduate Diploma in Women's Studies, Postgraduate Certificate Aboriginal Studies, Certificate IV Training & Assessment, Master of Arts (Australian Studies)



if you enjoy working with people and going the extra mile for them then it is a very satisfying job

I have always enjoyed working in rural and remote parts of Australia, where there is a lot of travel involved through some stunning country; visiting Aboriginal communities and outback towns,

//...it is hugely rewarding to know you have made a significant impact on lives and on relationships, especially in highly challenging cases.//

Owen Robinson – Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Social Work, Graduate Diploma in Management and Master of Arts (Counselling)

roadhouses and stations. I enjoy getting to know the people and communities, building up the relationships to a point where customers know you will always do your best for them, treat them with respect and dignity and hopefully be able to achieve some good outcomes with them.

People should be prepared for a demanding job with a lot of variety, so you need to be flexible as things change every day and sometimes many times a day! If you are the sort of person who likes routine or tends to perfectionism, then this is not the job for you as it is often a constant juggling act between priorities. But if you enjoy working with people and going the extra mile for them then it is a very satisfying job where you will never have a dull moment.

Further Information

Professional Associations and Accreditation

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body that provides accreditation for all providers of Social Work education. Only completion of accredited Social Work courses will provide graduates with eligibility for membership of the AASW and many employment opportunities will have eligibility for membership of the AASW among the essential criteria, some employers will also require proof of membership.

Mental Health Social Workers accredited with the AASW can have patients from GPs referred to them and, therefore, be eligible for a Medicare rebate for this service. A Medicare rebate is also available for pregnancy support counselling from Social Workers who are accredited by the AASW and referred by a GP. 

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This booklet is one of a series produced by GCA and intended for use by Careers Advisory Services in Higher Education in Australia. The booklets will also be of interest to secondary students and others considering further study.

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Author: **Heather Walford**

Editor: **Graham Watson, GCA**

Graduate Careers Australia

PO Box 12103

A'Beckett Street VIC 8006

GCA Helpdesk: 03 9670 5860

Facsimile: 03 9670 5752

Email: info@graduatecareers.com.au

Web: www.graduatecareers.com.au

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