

Understanding CSWE Competencies

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For all the competencies discussed within the agency, I spoke to my supervisor Libby Richter, who is the only social worker at this site L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library. She provided me with the information that was needed to better understand how CSWE competencies are practiced within my intern site.

Competency One: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

The professional expectation at my agency the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library around client interaction is having basic levels of respect. The professional relationship with the clients is informal. As there are no contracts, no formal intake procedure. We have an expectation that clients can come and go into the office as they please. Informally we are data tracking what clients we work with, the number of clients a day, and what services/referrals did we provide to the client. We demonstrate ethical and professional behavior by practicing confidentiality and require clients to sign release forms if they need our help to contact other agencies on their behalf. We prioritize client privacy as a core ethic, as we are gathering a great deal of sensitive information, to form an understanding of how to best serve the client. The release of information is the most formal document we use at this site. In addition, we also abide by the National Association Social Work Code of Ethics (NASW) when working with all clients.

Self-determination of clients is an ethical standard of decision-making to guide practice at this agency. We don't chase after people like social workers at the department of human services they do a little more of that chasing after. Whereas, with our service clients do not have to worry about the repercussions of not following through with something. Clients can come to us as they need it, our role is to provide information and resources, what they choose to do with that information and resources is up to them from there. So, it is largely a client-centered focus and a

client-driven focus. Typical professional expectations are required of levels of respect. For instance, clients don't have our phone numbers, we can't accept gifts from clients, we can't favor other clients, etc. Moreover, the NASW code of ethics is our main ethical guide to decision making. There is a fair amount of social justice as well our goal here is to fill that gap and to try identifying and bringing attention to other gaps that exist. One thing that I have noticed when it comes to working with people experiencing homelessness there are some looser ethics at times, but we still abide by the releases of information.

As employees, we are expected to engage in self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations by being professionally upset. It is okay to be upset about things in the appropriate ways. To use the phrase "what hat do you wear?" I can be upset about something and take off the library hat and be Libby the community member that wants to advocate for something. But when we are here in the library, we must be conscious of the fact that we are city employees, we need to be careful to not have biases. So, knowing which hat to wear is a huge part of professionalism in different practice situations. We connect with the clients more loosely by using their language, building a rapport by matching their language in appropriate settings. Supervision and consultation are used to guide professional behavior, Libby has every other week supervision with the deputy director at the library and consultation with other library social workers. So, she gets ongoing support from both the agency and other people in a similar role. As well as outside the library she has a consultation with an individual that she contracts within case she requires direct one-on-one supervision from a social worker.

Competency Two: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

At this agency, we function on all three levels the micro (individual), mezzo (agency and inter-agency), and macro levels (community/national/global) levels. The fact that library social

workers exist we are engaged in diversity and difference in practice is evidence of that. We are expected to meet the population where they are at. We are changing the way we do our work because of it. On a micro-level, we are meeting people where they are at. On the mezzo level, we are attempting to change library culture to make policies to benefit clients. On this level, we have an equity diversity and inclusion committee that has run to help shape our collection to help to be reflective of the demands of our community. We want to reflect our community needs; we do a lot of interagency collaboration we have this consultation group trying to help better address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. To provide that wrap-around care in a non-traditional way so without having to enroll in all the red tape. On a macro level, we do community engagement on a local, state, and national engagement to create policy change that is actively disproportionately affecting diverse populations. Advocacy work to help shape our community to be more inclusive.

We provide training for employees to help them better engage with customers within the library. Some of the training Libby has done is trauma-informed and some de-escalation librarianship. As well as some different role-playing work with our policies and rules on how to enforce them with customers. In addition, to expanding our employee's understanding of the clients we serve. We tend to use the motivational interviewing component to help individuals take command of what is happening next. The premise of our program is to allow individuals to take command of what they want and to us, that is saying that they are the expert of their own life. We are not telling the clients what is next we are supporting the clients with what they want.

Using supervision to reflect on our feelings, on what has been difficult helps us to self-regulate to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients.

We all are going to have feelings about certain interactions, and it is okay to have those feelings to be self-aware. All feelings are valid, but it's what we do with them and how we release them in the appropriate ways. It is okay to use our emotions to spur advocacy inside and outside of work, but it is also something we must keep in check. For example, not being able to use Narcan in the library we have a lot of feelings about this. Libby has tried to make this change but unfortunately was not able to make the change professionally, so she must stop to not get hung up on it. She needs to have the self-awareness that this policy issue is something she can't let get in the way of her other work. Furthermore, we also all have biases because we live in a society that makes us have those biases. We need to be able to check our biases and be self-aware of those in order to better serve our clients.

Competency Three: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

As social workers, we understand the current social, economic, and environmental injustices that occur in our community. For us, it is trying to apply social work in unique ways to help address the injustices and the disadvantages that are occurring in our community. Part of the advancement is to be continually engaged with other agencies and organizations. As we are a part of the gaps committee that meets weekly to discuss the gaps that exist within our community, we collaborate to help solve these gaps. Our job at the library is to be a resource, a low barrier place for people to access services. We do not deny anyone services, everyone is welcomed compared to some agencies you are required to meet certain criteria. This is justice at work right here by providing this service for all members of the community this is how we are advancing human rights.

To help provide information and understanding of tough topics to the community to advance knowledge on human rights, social, economic, and environmental justice. The library started a program called tough topics it consists of the book club and blog posts. The book club is meant to help foster community change conversations, teaching people to be change agents in the community. So that means we don't have to be the only ones doing the work. The tough topics resources are intended to provide a more depth look at library resources to help individuals as they address things in their lives. Blog posts are used to engage people in hard topics they may have never discussed before.

We are also advancing by having a book collection that is diverse and inclusive. An example of how the library has been advancing is they took a stance on the Black Lives Matter movement when George Floyd was killed. The library has an anti-racism pledge and anti-racism resources, book collections that are specific to people about anti-racism. They took a stand when most of the time libraries tend to be unbiased, but the library decided this was something important to take stance on.

Competency Four: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

This agency supports the use of practice experience to inform scientific inquiry and/or research by keeping data on what individuals come to see us for. Try to look at this position as it is not about the output but trying to meet people's needs in unique ways, data is limited because of that. We keep data on what kind of resources people are looking for, looking at the gaps where we can't meet people's needs to keep track of as well. We also have the gaps committee which is a very research-driven intervention. We did a quantitative and qualitative assessment of individuals who are unhoused and then developed community interventions. We surveyed people

on what they prioritize which led to three different tiers where gaps have been identified.

Evidence-based ways of practicing have been meeting clients where they are at, allowing clients their self-determination. Research-informed by using motivational interviewing with clients as well.

There isn't a lot of research on social workers in the library due to it being somewhat of a new position in the field of social work. There is very little research on this field and not much data to look at or research. As social workers practicing in the field at a library, we do not have a lot of data supporting this role. Libby mentioned it was hard to get this to become a position within the city due to the lack of data.

What we know about the library is that people come here to seek resources and services. Libby has stated, the library is the palace for the people where everyone and anyone is welcomed the library is considered a safe place for all. This is the communities living room this is a place where they are welcomed. We want to utilize our platform within the community to create conversations for change and to create exposure to new things. At the library, we have been working on restructuring library policies to be more reflective and supportive of individuals. Using behavior support type models which are research and evidence-based to try to help change those behavioral and policy dynamics in the library.

Competency Five: Engage in Policy Practice

This social work position is completely dependent upon the city's budget, there was a special process that occurred to get funding for this specific position. This position could get cut at any point in time, supposedly it is locked in position. However, this was a change that has to occur at the local level to make this position possible.

When we think about policies that are impacting the clients that we serve affordable housing policies are the number one issue we are dealing with. With housing, we need to have more rent control and subsidized housing options, need funding going towards supporting those people. Like we have seen clients have housing vouchers, but the landlords refuse to allow them to rent, or the rental market is just too high, so they are not able to utilize their housing voucher. Libby encourages us in this position to engage in policy practice by connecting with local, state, and federal lawmakers about various issues impacting clients we serve. Which is advocating for affordable housing advocating for policies to change that are impacting individuals that are trying to get into housing. For example, decriminalization does directly impact housing because some people are denied housing or housing assistance because of something on their record. So, this is a specific policy change that would directly impact clients.

There are lots of different policies that also try to criminalize people experiencing homelessness. For instance, restricting access to certain areas at certain times, ticketing people for camping, or loitering are policies that directly negatively impact our clients who are experiencing homelessness. Therefore, these policies are impacting these individuals from getting out of homelessness. Making our jobs harder, as it is causing resistance. Our agency utilizes critical thinking by using our gaps assessment as it has played a huge part in the things we are advocating for in our community. As well as collaborating weekly with other agencies about policy changes that are needed. All these changes come down to equitable access, human rights to be able to access these different things to be free from harm.

Competency Six: Engage Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Our agency applies knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients by

practicing the person-in-environment (PIE). The library is the perfect example of a person-in-environment. This framework shines a light on everything in a person's life-including major life events, cultural currents, and personal traits-in order to reveal a complete big picture of who that person is. Through this, we are trained to consider both people and their environment as contributors to problems and solutions. We use this to analyze, describe and assess our clients' behaviors. With this, we are meeting people where they are at and filling the gaps in service. Libraries continue to be a place where people go where they have nowhere else to go. Elbert Einstein said, "the only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of a library". As this is so true people find themselves at libraries for anything, people call the reference desk for anything.

The person-in-environment is a huge component of what we do at the library. We are a part of community-based organizations that are trying to work towards the same issues. In order to effectively engage individuals, we have to be connected with other community providers to provide the best level of care and to avoid silos. As silos can become a very problematic issue, in order to be effective, we all need to be on the same page.

Palaces for the people there are a lot of philosophies around the library that it needs to be a free and open space. Libby has had to adapt a lot of her social work and library frameworks in her practice. Libraries are free and available to everyone; they need to be a low-barrier place. Librarianship there are ethical frameworks for librarianship they have their core values, so we have to function with both in the library environment which can be both good and bad.

Working with individuals experiencing homelessness we need to have huge amounts of empathy. We are constantly dealing with difficult situations, so there is a lot of reflection that has to occur. This is where we use our supervision to be equitable and fair. This position is so

strongly built around the importance of human connection. Using the human connection to help support and serve our clients. Being able to be a consistent presence in this population that is experiencing homelessness is hugely important in their lives.

Competency Seven: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Our agency collects and organizes data and applies critical thinking to interpret information from clients by keeping track of what people come to see us for, how clients are we serving, what gaps need to be filled, etc. The data that is kept is very simple, but the data is used to inform our work and if there needs to be more outreach. For instance, thinking about how we can effectively engage people is what Libby is assessing for in her data. Assessing the data, also informs us what we should be advocating for in the community. Another part of the data that is collected is people's stories/testimonials of their successes and struggles. Looking at what are people telling me about life for them, trying to look for themes to help pull into the data.

Our agency applies knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients in different ways. For instance, the library saw a huge increase in substance use in December. Libby used her professional knowledge from understanding human behavior, that all of this makes sense. She had to use this knowledge to help other staff make sense of why we saw a huge uptake and how to address behavior in different ways. She used her knowledge about human behavior to analyze what interventions would be best for this environment and particular client needs. This also helps inform the policy and procedure within the library as well.

Currently, we are working on changing our client behavioral policy, advocating for it to be renamed the library use policy. As well as, adapting all the language to be more simplified, as we

have understood we need it to be more accessible. By knowing our audience, we are changing this for it to be more accessible to them.

Our agency supports the development of mutually agreed-on goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients. We support this by assessing staff interactions with customers and recognizing when they are only communicating with customers when something negative happens. Trying to educate and inform them of how we need to have the golden ratio of five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. In addition, noticing when staff only talk to Libby about people eating in the library when it is pertaining to an individual experiencing homelessness. Whereas, they never say anything to her about the person studying, eating a meal. This informs us that some biases are occurring within that employee and allows us to reflect on what we can do to address that.

We work on clients' goals based on what they are willing to work on and what they are wanting to work on. There are some worksheets for some goal setting for some extra support. Largely we are providing information to clients on what they want and try not to leave any questions unanswered. If we do not know we will find out for you. We are trying to help honor the client's self-determination when it comes to the goals that they present. We have to set professional goals for ourselves as well on how we can better serve our clients. We use SMART goals to help clients set up their goals to set up realistic expectations. In addition, knowing the client's mental headspace is an important part of goal setting and doing interventions. We have to gauge their ability level and stress level as all of that is factored into their goals. Support clients in different ways depending on their needs. We also are trying to ensure clients aren't creating a dependency and practicing their skills on their own.

Competency Eight: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

By creating the SMART goals with clients our agency supports the process of critically choosing and implementing interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance the capacities of clients. Libby often finds repeating herself, so a lot of repetition, she will write things down and provide paper things as much as possible. Try to help people come up with a game plan before they leave the office, helping the clients think about things that they do not have the capacity to do right now. Our job is to think about the client's ecomap we need to know what kind of support they have or don't have in order to know what extra steps we may need to take to help serve them. When doing interventions, we have to remember who else supports this client what other support systems need to exist, so we are not repeating things. Working with clients we have the ability to work interagency with the other agencies so work or services are not being duplicated. Understanding the different groups and people in someone's support system does inform interventions quite frequently.

Self-determination piece is important, we as social workers know about all the specific regulations that are needed when filling out a housing application. For instance, a client needs a birth certificate, ID, and social security before they can apply even. With us knowing this kind of information we can better support our clients and help them get what they need to fill out that application. We will help choose steps with a client based on what we know how these systems operate. We have a certain order of operations based on clients' goals and what they want to work on.

We provide passive programming in non-face-to-face ways to apply knowledge of human behavior. For instance, putting AA or NA brochures next to a section in the library that has narcotics anonymous books. This is a way to engage with people if they do not want or are not comfortable with coming to see us. Doing passive programming helps support people in different ways, as this helps to reach a bigger audience. There is a lot of in-direct things that we can do to help clients. Moreover, the laundry mat library was another intervention that was implemented by the library. This intervention helped get books and community resources in that setting, trying to be creative in how we reach people. Another simple intervention is the use of the telephone in our office as clients can use it freely. Having access to a phone can be a huge barrier to the clients we serve.

Part of Libby's mission within the library was the tough topics program. As it was implemented for us to create community change, we need to be able to develop more comfort and understanding of the issues within our community. We do not just work with people who need our help we work with others to help create change, knowing that we cannot create change by ourselves. Her hope is the little conversations that she continues to have with people will create community change and passion for these things, this is an intervention with the community.

Furthermore, just Libby's position with itself as a social worker at the library is an intervention, as her position allows low-barrier access to clients. When a client experiences barriers we are here to jump right in to help navigate for them and we can take time with people building relationships. We also practice inter-professional collaboration by collaborating with other library social workers across the United States twice a month. With this, we can discuss what has been working and what has not been working within the library. Connecting with other

agencies that are supporting the same population as well. It is important to never underestimate interagency collaboration because that is truly the way we will help move people forward. There are many ways we can advocate for clients indirectly and directly.

Competency Nine: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Our agency consulted with multiple other library social workers to assess the way they were evaluating and tracking things. This helped determine Libby's method for tracking client interactions based on the assessment of the other library social workers. The city likes to know the total number of interactions she has and what she is working with people on. Now and again, Libby will track how many phone calls she had received or assess the percentage of the clients that she is working with whether they are housed or unhoused. She does not need a full evaluation of the social worker and client's interactions. When needed Libby will provide additional data as requested.

One of the main things she will evaluate is people's success stories of getting housed as most people want to hear this data. To them, this is proof that this job position is working because of the success stories. She has to collect and share those stories as components of the evaluation of the program. Libby mentioned she has collected both qualitative and quantitative data because people think differently. We have to remember that people need the data, the numbers in order to make sense of an evaluation. We know we have good outcomes as the position at the library is still in function and we can see the need within the library. We know it is effective as word-of-mouth spreads and clients keep coming back for services.

Our agency applies knowledge of human behavior as mentioned above we collect different types of data for the sole purpose of people like certain types of data and understanding

data differently. It is hard to evaluate total outcomes, but what we can do is evaluate on a case-by-case basis. Looking at whether clients are meeting their goals, are people making progress is how we know it is working. After interaction with a client, we reflect and process upon the interaction, how could we be better professionals, are we dealing with anything within ourselves, are there any other steps we need to take. All of this helps us be more effective as social work professionals.

References

Richter, Libby. Personal Direct Communication at L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library. March 1, 2022.