

Profiles in Social Work

Episode 11 – Grace Safeer Goldberg

Intro - Hi, I'm Charmaine Williams, Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Academic, for the University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Welcome to Profiles in Social Work. This podcast series is produced by our Faculty and Alumni Association. In 2014 the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work is celebrating 100 years of contributing to Social Work Practice and Education. You can find out more about us by visiting us online at www.socialwork.utoronto.ca We're glad you can join us today. The series Profiles in Social Work highlights how social workers are making a positive difference in our communities by presenting stories of how social work graduates are using their degrees. We hope you will enjoy this series. Especially if you are thinking about a career in social work or interested in hearing about what social workers do.

Profile – Grace Safeer Goldberg

My name is Grace Safeer Goldberg. I graduated from the University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work with my BSW in 1951. I took my training for my MSW in '52-'53 and finally completed my thesis, getting my MSW in 1964.

I was a camp counselor and the head counselor told me that she was going to go into social work and I said "what's that?" and she described it to me and I thought to myself "I want to do that". I never really liked school until I came into social work because everything that I took seemed to me to be relevant to what I hoped to do – at some point. So I just liked it a lot. My first year placement was fabulous – it was a family agency and I had a wonderful supervisor who was very understanding and gave me space to grow. I was only twenty-one years old when I came to social work so I didn't really have too much life experience and my teachers were all good, it was really good. It was just a very satisfying year and I got an "A". I think it probably validated me because then I knew I was in the right field.

My first job was as an adoption worker. I did home studies and placed children for adoption – completed the adoption. My second work experience was with the elderly

and I did that for a number of years and then we moved to the States, and it was there that I was introduced to working with troubled, very troubled children that was really for me. I had the opportunity to create and become the Executive Director of a day treatment program. We used to call troubled children in those days “emotionally disturbed”, this was in the 70’s. It was a mental health program and it served children who had been kicked out of special education. By this time they had mandatory special education. These were kids who couldn’t function in the school setting. So we gave them a very nurturing small school type of an experience with social workers, special ed teachers, a lot of student teachers and helpers in the classroom; So there was a very large ratio of staff to children. We worked with the parents as well as the children. We had a wonderful psychiatrist that worked with us who helped us with a diagnosis. I sat in on all of his assessments and I began to realize that one of the very basic things in being able to help a kid who is troubled is having an accurate diagnosis. A lot of the children we had in the program were learning disabled. Some of them had brain damage at birth and what really our focus was to try and help them understand what the issue was and also for the parents. Because for many parents, they felt they were the cause of the child’s problems and actually it wasn’t. It was a physiological thing, so we helped them also understand so that we worked as a team. The kids stayed in our program usually about 2 years, and then we would integrate them back into public school. I had sort of instinctively developed a way of returning kids to public school that didn’t fail – they didn’t crash and come back to our program. And one of the professors at the University that was in the community where we lived came to me and said “I’d like you to co-author a paper with me on what it is you do - the different steps you take”. I said, well I don’t take any steps she says “yes you do – we’re just going to put them on paper” and it was published. So it was really an eight step program, in terms of returning kids to public school successfully; and the way I knew it worked, is that I trained my staff to do it, and it worked with them too.

When we moved back to Canada I had been working with the children for a long, long time and I decided I wanted a change so I spread myself around. I worked with the elderly for a while, I developed a private practice, I did a number of part time things -I was the Director of social work for the Arthritis Society for a couple of years, I worked at one of the hospitals as part of their Diabetes Education Program and I also consulted with other social workers, younger social workers, around issues - especially in relation to kids. So for me it’s just been a wonderful career, I’ve had a lot of opportunities, and it’s just been good.

I didn't work with children in private practice. Mostly I worked with couples and people that were in troubled relationships. I also worked for an Employee Assistance Program for a number of years which was very interesting for me, because it's only short term counseling and you only have three or four opportunities to meet with somebody. So after having spent, I don't know how many years, in something that was basically chronic, you know you had several years to be able to help a kid to integrate back, this time you had somebody that was sitting in front of you that you could only see three or four times, and you they were very troubled and of course, my own personal philosophy, is your client really doesn't want to be there because if they could figure out whatever it is they need, they wouldn't be asking for help. So what I've always tried to do during my clinical work is to try and help them verbalize what it was they were looking for and how to help them see what their strengths were and their abilities to be able to solve the problem on their own, with help, but for them to be able to deal with what it is they had to deal with. So I've always tried to work with people's strengths. Hopefully by the end of the sessions that I had, you know in my agency work as well as in my private practice, it was so that they, really basically empower them to be able to go on. And then of course if the problem was so over whelming then I would refer them for more therapy. When you're talking about personal relationships, human relationships, you can't pinpoint everything down, sometimes you just have to leave things alone and they sort of settle down and then you work them out, sort of almost back handed. I mean you can sit down and make all kinds of points of things you're gonna do - that doesn't mean they are gonna get done. I think people are much more open now, talking about going for help, using help, any kind counseling or therapy, I think that's very good.

When I was younger, starting in the field, I guess I just felt, that what I was doing was useful, and it was interesting, that I was helping people and I liked what I was doing. Then, later on in the 60's and 70's, when women's issues came to the forefront, I personally realized how fortunate I had been, to have had a mother who thought it was very important for a woman to have a profession and to be able to earn a living so I had all my education by the time the women's lib movement came into effect and so that I was able to do what they were encouraging women of my generation to start doing - get educated, get a profession, etc. So that at that point, at a conscious level, it gave me a sense of identity where I wasn't somebody's wife, mother, sister, daughter, I was me and this is what I was doing. So it was very, very satisfying for me. That was on a personal basis and I think professionally I just always felt that social work was a really important profession and that what it provided and offered was very unique.

I was always very proud to be a social worker. I started at 21, I retired at 72, and so people who are thinking about going into social work should sort of see what it is that social workers do. Find a way to spend some time either at an agency or talk with somebody on the faculty. It's useful to talk to people who are social workers and I guess one of the questions "why do you want to go into social work anyway?" I think it's important to leave yourself open to learning about new fields, acquiring new insights and skills, meeting different kinds of people. Also even though you may specialize in a particular area, you'll have many opportunities to use your training and skills in ways and places that you've yet to discover. It's a very good degree and it opens an awful lot of doors in terms of job opportunities. It's interesting I know a number of people that've gone on through social work and said "you know it's not for me" so sometimes you have to try – and it was for me.

What I'm doing now is I'm volunteering at the ROM I'm in something called an Outreach Program –Outreach Committee. What I did, talk about social work background, I help set up a program where volunteers go to various retirement homes and they do a presentation on artifacts at the ROM so I sort of am the contact person for the retirement homes.

I don't think anything's ever lost. Even if you're involved in something that you can't stand then when you're faced with that, another situation where that same interaction is going on you know how to side step it or avoid it or get the hell out of there, you know.

Outro - This is Charmaine Williams from the University of Toronto Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Thank you for listening to our podcast. In 2014 our school is celebrating 100 years of social work research, teaching and community service. For more information about the faculty and our programs we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.utoronto.ca