

## Profiles in Social Work

Episode 22 – Kate Powadiuk

**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](http://www.socialwork.utoronto.ca) We're glad you could 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 - Kate Powadiuk

My name is Kate Powadiuk and I graduate from the university of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work in 2006.

When I was looking at different programs to apply to, what I wanted to do with my life, I really was interested in social change. And social work really appealed to me because I had had experiences both through summer jobs and also through interactions with family friends and other professionals I had come across who were social workers. And they were in such a broad range of roles, anywhere from child protection to policy work to research to clinical practice and I got really excited at the prospect of entering the field of social work because to be honest I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do in terms of social change, but I knew that social work would provide me with that variety of options.

I had actually done an undergrad in sociology and it really focused more on social problems as opposed to looking at how we could change those issues. It was focused on 'these are the problems' and analyzing them from that sort of distant perspective. Doing volunteering in high school and early university, I had done a student placement with the Children's Aid Society, getting experience and seeing both the side where

social change wasn't happening and also experiences where it was and really wanting to gravitate toward those experiences where I could be a part of social change.

What really stands out for me is my field placement. I had a fabulous placement experience. That's what I really remember, is that hands-on practical experience at a substance use issues centre for women and I had a chance to work closely with my field placement supervisor in developing a new program. And one component of that was a program evaluation. So I had already had some experiences with program evaluation but it really nailed down for me that this is what I'm interested in, this is exciting, this is what I want to do and it really influenced my future career direction.

I have one really solid amazing friend that I have made through this program. We had seventy-five percent of our classes together. We just get each other. If I wasn't in this program I probably wouldn't have established this friendship. She's someone who I could discuss homework related issues with or we could read each other's essays, just that sort of hokey stuff that I really appreciated and she's a great support then and a great support now as well.

I work for a private, for-profit organization and we work with organizations to figure out 'are they meeting their intended goals?' 'Are you doing what you wanted to do?' And this is usually with non-profit organizations and also government funded programs as well. Sometimes it's a really small focused initiative and other times it's across Canada or across Ontario. Questions that we'll help them answer would be things like: "are you meeting your intended overall organizational goals?" or "are your clients having the outcomes that you want them to have?" or "are clients having the outcomes that they desire?", "what is the match there? What does that look like?" "Was your program implemented as you intended?" Things don't go as you plan and looking at the implementation of a program can help you identify what's working really well, what were the challenges and you know those challenges aren't necessarily a bad thing; they're things that are important to recognize and learn from.

I'm a consultant in the firm. There's about ten of us. We're involved throughout various stages of a project. So we work on a project by project basis. So at the start of a project we'll often be involved in intensive planning with our client and other relevant stakeholders to make sure that the project is relevant to their needs, we'll develop a plan that is focused around certain research questions that they want to answer, and also do some research on what's been done before in previous program evaluations. From there we'll do lots of data collection typically, interviews with government officials or policy folks as well as program staff and of course service users as well. Other forms

of data collection could be things like surveys and participant observation, focus groups, it really depends on budget and resources available, but also on matching up what are the appropriate methods for certain populations and, depending on the research questions that we're looking at, we'll pull together all different sources of data and prepare a report or a presentation to share those findings with others.

A recent program evaluation that we did, we had done quite extensive planning with the staff who deliver programs, the people who are working one on one with the youth, they work with the teachers as well to develop programs, to figure out 'what is program evaluation?' first of all and from there "what do you want to know? What is important to you?' So they really wanted to know 'how could we design a system to implement program evaluations?' So we worked with them to design some surveys that they could deliver to the people that participate in their programs. We also helped to analyze some of those surveys; they had an example of different ways of presenting the information. I hope as a result of doing a program evaluation, the ultimate outcome will be that services will be relevant for those that are using them and that they're useful and through program evaluation we're able to identify what's working really well with the program and then they can build on that. And also 'what are things that can be improved?' and that can ultimately down the line impact clients who are receiving those services.

One thing that we actually do that I find really exciting is after we do a project, within a couple of months and then a year later as well we try to do a follow-up interview with the key contact that we were working with to say 'so what did this result in for you? What happened as a result of the evaluation?' It might be even just a small change. It might be 'we changed our intake process in order to be more accommodating for clients'. It could be something really small like that and it also could be something huge. There was a provincial program that we evaluated a pilot in ten hospitals and as a result now the program is implemented across Ontario and it's really exciting to see that. You can be part of a team that is evaluating something and working closely with various committees or people at all different levels; people who are working on policy, people who are providing direct service to people, and just to see how all of those heads can come together.

I did find that my training was very helpful in terms of some specific skills and some general transferrable skills as well. One that I find that I use all the time is communication skills in terms of doing interviews and also in terms of just general interactions with other people in my office, working on committees and just having to have those interpersonal skills. Listening I find is so important to really try to make sure

you understand what people are trying to convey and picking up on points that are tweaking things for me. 'So what were you really getting at there when you, you know I noticed that strain in your voice?' that sort of thing. I had gone to my current job just after leaving school and having some practical experience in the field was really useful.

With every project that I work on I'm pretty excited and interested to be there. I feel still very fresh and new to the field of program evaluation. Every time it's a chance to learn about a new subject area whether it be childhood obesity, or substance use issues or even things like blood safety, it's completely the spice of life, it's all different things that I get to encounter every day. Personally I love doing data collection, I love talking to people and hearing about what they do and hearing their excitement in terms of what they're trying to accomplish. I love that part of my job. And I like at the end of the day, usually a program evaluation that I work on could go on anywhere from a few months or over a few years, but it's really rewarding at the end of the day to be able to roll something up in a useful report to someone and say 'this is what we learned together' and to be able to hear how they used it or how they intend to use it, because sometimes it can take a matter of years for things to actually get implemented.

I think the biggest challenge is converging deadlines. I work for a project based organization so sometimes I could be working on just a few projects, two or three, the deadlines are nicely spaced out, everything's going fine, and then other times it could be everything's due on the same day and you have to work late nights and weekends in order to get everything done because meeting timelines is really important. It means that you have to be super organized. I find it really helpful to have the support of a team. That was something I wasn't expecting because going into the private sector, it wasn't something I saw as a natural career trajectory for me, and it's one of the warmest, most wonderful work environments that I have had a chance to be a part of.

I have the chance to work with fabulous social justice programs. So it's a chance to provide a service to them that they find useful. I'm able to bring that social work perspective, on the ground experience, critical analysis skills to look at a situation and say 'so what's really going on here?' and also in times like when developing an interview guide or a survey to say 'you know I don't really like the way that question is being asked. It sort of seems a bit demeaning'; or 'what are we really trying to get at here and how would someone respond to that?'

For me social justice means positive social change. And I'm not sure if that's the textbook definition but that's how I see it and that's sort of how I bring it into my work on a day-to-day basis is 'how is what we are doing going to impact people in ultimately a

positive way?' Sometimes the results of program evaluations that we do, they might not always be glowing. We always try to provide a balanced report and be constructive but how can, in the long run, this impact people positively and social justice I see is part of that.

It comes down to 'what do you really want to do after you graduate?' And a lot of people, I know myself I didn't fully know the answer to that. Really doing that research and talking to people I found really helpful; And also going to information sessions, just getting as much information as you can in order to make that decision.

**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](http://www.socialwork.utoronto.ca)