

Profiles in Social Work

Episode 01 – Eileen McKee

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 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 - Eileen McKee

My name is Eileen McKee and I graduated from the University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, in 1986. When I was a student here and took a practicum opportunity at the Addiction Research Foundation, the unit that I worked in was very unique. It was at that time the only methadone clinic in Ontario. It provided a wealth of opportunities to engage with people who were addicted to narcotics in one form or another. It exposed me to such diversity in clientele. It also exposed me to an interesting model which later became known as harm reduction. I found that fascinating. I learned a lot. It certainly gave me the opportunity to hone my assessment and treatment skills, developing very strong concrete treatment plans. We worked closely with the prescribing physicians or psychiatrists who were on the team and with the nurses. It was important for us to communicate well to work inter collaboratively, ultimately for the benefit of the client. I was also involved in some research that was taking place, this was a very unique program in Ontario and so it was well researched and that gave me some tremendous insight into the importance of research. I wanted very much to stay in that unit for my second practicum and do a different kind of a project but also split my time – arrange for a split practicum – the second part of it was working in indirect practice in consultation with other hospitals. At that time, it was not common for hospitals to have an addiction unit. And so I worked on a project called “hospital outreach” where we were piloting

or introducing the concept to hospitals about facilitating being involved in the treatment of people with addiction problems giving them some training skills around that. So that was an interesting indirect component to my practicum which I really never embraced until several years later because immediately upon graduating my full time employment in the largest residential male treatment program in Toronto. That was a very intense setting. At that time, I was the only and first social worker to be working there. And so that was a first for them so there was a lot of piloting going on. I was very grateful for them to give me that opportunity. It was exciting. I was soon supervising all of the counsellors there, being the only MSW. That involved a lot of coordination and training of the existing staff. Team building segue wayed then into a position as Executive Director of an addiction treatment program and I held that position for 13 years. While engaged in that kind of work, I developed an expertise in elder abuse – just because I was working with an older population at the time and abuse can often be an element when there is addiction and that segued into a position as a consultant on Canada's first provincial elder abuse strategy. There was an Ontario elder abuse strategy that ran for 5 years, and so I was a consultant on that program for a period of time because of my expertise in addictions and in elder abuse. Of course that segued into another position. This was working now in a position at the federal realm. Certainly what I learned from that is that there are different stakeholders and different ways of operating at the provincial level versus the federal level and that was a whole other learning curve for me to work with federal stakeholders on a federally funded project.

Being a social worker means being involved with the whole person. Mentors have played an important role in the early part of my career, in my education, even before starting at work. Utilizing mentors, gaining the experience of others who have been doing this kind of work or have their own perspective to offer and are extremely supportive when they do so, makes the job so much more interesting, rewarding, brings other perspectives, and the feeling of being supported is entirely there. So having mentors, for me, has been extremely important, and in turn I realize the importance of the value that I can offer others as a mentor. Early in my career I was encouraged to articulate in a very humble way my interest in doing some international work. I was absolutely blown away when an actual offer within a week was made to me to do some international work. So I encourage now, students and staff, to articulate, perhaps in baby steps, articulate exactly what it is that you want and sharing that with somebody else and getting some direction on who else to share with. This is all part of networking as well and a key, key skill for students and professionals in their careers to do and to learn how to do well.

There's so much scope when one has an MSW. The doors really open up, the opportunities are

there. Currently, I am the Assistant Dean of Field Education here at the University of Toronto, so it's a full circle for me. It's been a very interesting loop back to the place where I did my actual studies. Practicum, I've always felt for me personally was a very rich, rewarding and key, key activity here at the University so to be able to be again working again with the students and facilitating their practicum experience. Field education, practicum experiences, for students when they reflect back years later, are key elements to their education and potentially future employment opportunities are very much related to their practicum experience. One of the challenges is ensuring that our field instructors are current on how best to facilitate the learning of students. We are constantly striving to provide opportunities for graduates of the University of Toronto and of other programs, to consider being field instructors, for the students here at the University of Toronto. Recruitment, support, education, training and responding to the needs of field instructors is a very important part of the responsibilities at the Practicum Office here at the University of Toronto and we take them very, very seriously.

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