INTRODUCTION

.

How do value differences affect assessments and treatment planning?

Does the Code of Ethics help guide practice?

How can social workers engage with a family whose goals and cultural background differ from the worker's?

How do social workers use tools like genograms and ecomaps in their interviews?

How do organizational and community assessments really work?

How can social workers help a family experiencing a life crisis?

Do evaluation methods really tell us if we're having any effect with clients?

Effective social work practice involves the complex interplay of values, skills, and knowledge. Social work classes teach the theories and processes that guide practice, but sometimes they don't allow the opportunity to put that knowledge into action. This workbook is designed to help overcome that difficulty. Through case examples, individual exercises, group exercises, and discussions, you have the opportunity to "try out" the concepts that you are reading about in other texts. Because you and your classmates are focusing on the same cases and exercises, the workbook has the added advantage of allowing you to explore different perspectives on situations and different approaches to solving difficulties.

Sometimes these exercises can be challenging. They may reveal limits in some of the things you have learned; things that made sense when you read about them may come undone when they are applied to complex client situations. The exercises may also highlight situations where there seem to be no "good" courses of action or where there are many possible choices on how to act. In fact, these experiences mirror what happens in social work practice. Often the analysis of a situation will reveal layers of complexity and various dimensions of things to consider. Learning, in the relative safety of your classroom, how to choose and use various skills will prepare you for those situations when they arise in practice. And the ability to link the concepts from social work knowledge with the demands of practice will serve you well in professional practice throughout your career.

What Does the Book Ask of You?

The book contains 36 exercises, each of which contains an activity or set of activities designed to help you apply a particular set of concepts about social work practice to a particular practice situation. Sometimes, the practice situation is your own class, as with the first exercise on icebreak - ers and the last exercise on termination exercises. Other exercises will offer vignettes and ask you to answer questions or solve problems related to those scenarios. Other exercises will ask you to review written material and critically examine how the things you're learning apply to those readings. Still others ask you to practice your skills, for example, in role plays or in conducting assessments, and others ask you to examine your biases, strengths, and weaknesses as a developing practitioner.

To use the book effectively, you and your classmates must be working in a climate of trust—where people are willing to share their views, risk trying new skills, and give support and constructive feedback to one another. Part of this trust is a respectful atmosphere where people don't fear ridicule and where they can trust that the views they share are treated confidentially by other class members.

To make the best use of the book, you personally must be familiar with the knowledge and values that guide social work practice, attuned to others' perspectives and opinions, willing to share your own views, open to trying new things, and able to critique the results. The exercises in the workbook will be most useful to you if you continually ask yourself, "How might this be used in other practice settings or with different client populations? What are the limits of using this approach? How does what I'm learning build on other things I've learned?" Such questions are part of being an active learner. They help you to generalize what you've learned from the book to parallel situations you might experience in practice.

Of course, learning extends beyond the classroom and beyond your time in school. We hope the book will be a resource for you and that the exercises, cases, and discussion questions will stimulate your thinking and practice whether or not they are assigned as part of your course work!

What Does the Book Offer?

The book looks at social work practice broadly, defining it not only as practice with individuals but also with groups, families, communities, and organizations. It also incorporates social work practice in an array of settings, such as schools, hospitals, child welfare units, mental health centers, and crisis services. The 36 exercises parallel the process of a working relationship with clients. The first unit, "Understanding Social Work," contains introductions and icebreakers—exercises to help you and your classmates (or any group) get to know each other. Other exercises in this section address systems theory, which undergirds social work practice, and exercises that look at values and ethics as they guide or practice with clients.

The next section, "Getting Started," contains five exercises that focus on different strategies for "tuning in" to clients' needs and for building the rapport that is so essential to the helping relationship.

"Gathering Data" includes five exercises offering different tools and techniques for gathering information on your client system, their strengths, and the nature of their difficulties. It is a good lead-in for the next section, "Making Sense of Data Through Assessment." The four exercises in this unit offer opportunities to practice the skills of turning information gathered about a case into a coherent and valid assessment.

The result of a good assessment is covered in the four exercises of the next unit, "Setting Goals." In this section, you will learn about contract-ing with clients and the skills and abilities needed when clients are resistant or when clients' goals differ from the ones we want to pursue. This section leads into intervention skills, where we carry out the goals set in the previous stage of work. Intervention skills are addressed even more directly in the following "Interventions" section where six exercises focus on the skills and insights used in the "change" phase of work.

But how do we know that our interventions are any good? In the sec-tion "Evaluating Effectiveness," you'll find three exercises that help with assessing your own skills and evaluating the progress in cases. Whether our work has been successful or because we or the clients have chosen to end the relationship or move on, all working relationships are charac-terized by termination, the topic of the book's final section. In "Endings and Transitions," four exercises address various strategies for effective termination, including different ways to bring closure to the experiences you've shared with your classmates over the duration of the course.

Because the workbook addresses a variety of practice settings and client populations, the Guide to Exercises grid can be used to direct you to exercises that are of particular areas of interest. Thus, you can use it to find exercises that focus on work with diverse populations, for exercises focused on client systems from individuals to communities or from children and adolescents to elderly persons, or in settings from health care to foster care.

The exercises in this book have been contributed by faculty from all over the country who use them in their own teaching. They reflect tried-and-true methods for developing skills and practicing critical think-ing. Your own instructor may adapt them further for his or her own teaching objectives. The contributing authors and I are interested in the learning that the book stimulates, the ideas you have for improvements, or the exercises you may have created that could be shared with others. Please contact us in care of Pine Forge Press (see About the Publisher at the beginning of this book). We hope that you get joy, inspiration, and growth as a result of your use of this book.

—KIM STROM-GOTTFRIED
kstrom@che2.che.umn.edu